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DEVELOPING A MULTISITE PLAN FOR MOUNT
ARARAT BAPTIST CHURCH
STAFFORD, VIRGINIA

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DEVELOPING A MULTISITE PLAN FOR MOUNT
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PREFACE

Doctoral projects are attributed to one author, but they are the result of many working together to make it come to fruition. Indeed, if I were to list all those who made this project possible along with their contributions, it would quickly run into a dozen pages. Nevertheless, I will attempt to give kudos where kudos are due.

To the founder and perfecter of our faith, I give all glory. I never intended to enter the ministry. Indeed, I was in my thirties before I came to Christ. If Lewis was the most reluctant convert in England, I was surely among the top ten in the US. God has His plans, and I am eternally thankful that my salvation was always a part of them.

To my family, the most patient and steadfast companions I could ever hope for, thank you for your love, encouragement, and understanding, especially when Dad had to make the trek to Louisville and missed important moments in your lives.

To my fellow students, what a journey! I will treasure the time we spent during our campus visits. You are all so incredibly gifted and loving servants of the Lord. I have no doubt that your ministries will be blessed for the sacrifices you made to pursue your studies.

A special thank to Pastor Andrew Segre. This project dealt with multisite church operations, and you were the multisite campus pastor for much of the time I spent producing this document. Your campus was the lab for this project, and you were every bit the mad scientist I was.

Finally, to Dr. Jamus Edwards and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary faculty for allowing me to study under you. Your instruction, guidance, and encouragement were essential to this endeavor.

Brian Bennett

Stafford, Virginia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The motto of Mount Ararat Baptist Church is “For One More.” We are on a mission of multiplication. Approximately 170,000 souls in the immediate area do not have a church to call home, and The Mount’s goal is to use the multisite multiplication model to connect unbelievers to The Mount.¹ This area is fertile ground for evangelism. The Mount’s desire as a church is not to fill seats; the Great Commission compels the church to go further: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20).² Given the great honor and responsibility of this task, The Mount leadership team set out to locate a community to expand the reach of the 117-year-old church by using the multisite church model. God graciously provided The Mount with an ideal location

Context

Mount Ararat Baptist Church (The Mount) launched in Stafford County, Virginia, in 1907. It has been at its current location, near the original site, since 1955. Since then there have been several expansion projects, driven by numerical growth, resulting in the multi-purpose buildings that house the church ministries on the thirty-five-acre campus. Continued growth, however, caused overcrowding, which led to discussions about further expansion. In 2014, a planning team came together to address

¹ Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, “U.S. Religion Census 1952 to 2020,” accessed September 19, 2020, <http://www.usreligioncensus.org/compare.php>. In 2010, the population of Stafford and Spotsylvania counties was 251,358 of which 81,361 were religious adherents.

² All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

three issues: an immediate need for space to overcome the problem of overcrowding, a long-term solution for overcrowding, and a strategy for ensuring future growth.

Early on, the planning teams confirmed through data analysis that scores of people were commuting to The Mount from neighboring communities, some as far away as forty miles. A heat map, generated from further analysis, revealed that commuters were concentrated in three nearby locations. The planning team believed that a campus situated in proximity to one of these population centers would be an attractive alternative for commuters. It followed then that a fair number of commuters not attending the main campus would relieve the strain of overcrowding and perhaps free up enough space for additional growth. The church decided to launch a new campus using a multi-site model.

Evangelical churches employ many different multisite models, each model with its own best practices.³ The model chosen by The Mount delivered pre-recorded content each Sunday to the multisite (Courthouse) campus. In addition to the “taped” teaching, which presented challenges, the campus offered live worship, and a full kids ministry program, infant through elementary.

The Courthouse campus, although smaller than the Stafford campus, offered a similar experience as the main campus. The Courthouse campus met at a high school; the campus utilized the school theatre for the worship service, which made recreating the contemporary black-box achievable. Additional equipment, projectors, screens, lighting, and a professional system were brought in to augment the permanent, onsite capabilities. The children’s ministry utilized the cafeteria, gymnasium, and library. Every Sunday

³ There exists some agreement as to the various shapes a multisite church can take, but the models are not static. See Vanderbloemen, “The 3 Models of Multisite Ministry,” February 4, 2016, <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/the-3-models-of-multisite-ministry>. Some practitioners define multisite quite narrowly as is the case with Paul Alexander, who claims, “If it’s not on a screen, it’s not a multisite. It may be multi-congregational or even a family of churches, but it’s not a multisite church.” Paul Alexander, “Multisite Models: Which Is Best,” *Tony Morgan Live*, August 24, 2017, <https://tonymorganlive.com/2017/08/24/best-multisite-church-models/>. Many different organizational approaches must be considered when launching a multisite campus. See Jamus Howell Edwards II, “Leadership Structures and Dynamics in Multisite Churches: A Quantitative Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

beginning at 6 a.m., the set-up team transformed the high school into a church campus, complete with branding. This facelift resulted in a campus that felt permanent and resembled the Stafford campus.

Several key staff members were relocated temporarily to Courthouse, along with a core group of Stafford attendees who filled highly visible volunteer positions. By relocating and positioning key staff members and volunteers, leadership hoped to infuse The Mount's DNA into the new campus. The DNA of The Mount is summed up in four values: gather, volunteer, give, and invite. New attendees/members would be inculcated from day one with these four values, facilitating disciple-making and resulting in numerical and spiritual growth at the Courthouse campus.

Initial numbers at the Courthouse campus were good. The campus ran as many as 300 in the first months after opening. However, within twelve months, the initial attendance had peaked and declined by 50 percent. It was later determined that the proximity of the Courthouse site to the main campus was the driving factor behind the drop in attendance. Around the same time, the staff members who were temporarily assigned to the Courthouse campus returned to their permanent positions back in Stafford, causing a leadership void that accelerated the decline in attendance.

Hoping to stem the tide, The Mount assembled an executive team to address the precipitous decline in the health of the Courthouse campus. The Mount then engaged The Unstuck Group, a consultancy firm ran by Tony Morgan to assist in the diagnosis of said decline. The efforts of the executive team and the Unstuck Group resulted in a multi-dimensional plan that addressed the multisite problem as well as some additional systemic issues that demanded attention.

In October 2017, a decision was made to suspend operations at the Courthouse campus at the end of 2017. By that time, attendance had dropped to about 120. The closure of the Courthouse campus was not the end of the multi-site effort at The Mount; instead, it was the beginning of a new era in multi-site operations for the church.

The Mount planned to resume multisite operations in 2018, shooting for launch during December of 2019 or Spring 2020. Leadership assembled a core team of volunteers to seed the new campus. They began to meet, pray, and plan for the future, while another team searched for a venue. The leadership team expected to find a school to serve as an initial location for the new campus. Unsurprisingly, other churches had the same idea. It appeared that multisite operations would have to be put on hold several months in hopes that a school would open up. God had other plans.

A Catholic church located in Fredericksburg long dreamed of having a permanent location for their parish. For seven years they met in a building that had previously been a motorcycle salesroom. Their tenancy ended as their brand-new cathedral opened its doors on July 15, 2018. Leadership's knowledge of the property's vacancy before it became available on the market was nothing short of an act of God. The Mount signed a five-year lease beginning on August 1, 2018 and opened the doors to the public on Easter of 2019.

Barriers to Success

Several problems led to the demise of the Courthouse campus, but none more evident than the location. The site chosen to house the campus sat a mere three miles from the main campus.⁴ At first, leadership did not view this as a potential problem, but instead as a way to reduce overcrowding at the main campus while reaching new people who may not want to drive to the Stafford site. Initially, many took advantage of the smaller crowds at the second venue, but eventually, the majority of those who opted to attend soon returned to the Stafford campus.

⁴ A common refrain heard from leaders at failed multisite campuses is that the main campus was too close to the new campus. Jim Tomberlin and Tim Cool, *Church Locality: New Rules for Church Buildings in a Multisite, Church Planting, and Giga-Church World* (Spring Hill, TN: Ranier, 2014), 119, Kindle; Rich Birch, "4 Painful Mistakes Multisite Churches Make Early On," Unseminary, July 10, 2018, <https://unseminary.com/4-painful-mistakes-multisite-churches-make-early-on>; Tiffany Deluccia, "This Church Experiences a Failed Campus Launch and Wants to Share How You can Learn From It," *Tony Morgan Live*, June 22, 2016, <https://tonymorganlive.com/2016/06/22/church-experienced-failed-campus-launch-wants-share-how-can-learn-from-it>.

Technical challenges with the sermon delivery method plagued the campus from the start.⁵ Insufficient bandwidth made streaming unreliable, so the sermon had to be recorded onto a hard drive and then driven to the Courthouse campus. This too, however, proved a less than ideal solution due to the genuine possibility that the recording would fail to make it to the Courthouse campus in time, or that the recording would itself fail, which it did on several occasions. Attendees, tired of the technical difficulties, stopped coming to the Courthouse site. Fixing technical problems was a priority, but not the only priority.

Staffing issues also required immediate attention. The Mount’s management and staffing structure at the time of the launch was unclear at best. The Executive Pastor, along with a long-time associate pastor, departed. Since they were not “on-board” with the decision to move to a multi-site model, they stepped away from their positions—several other staff members left in their wake, including the Student Pastor. Two campus pastors were hired. They started work on the very day the Courthouse Campus opened.

The Senior Pastor, Family Ministry Director, and Worship Pastor absorbed much of the work the vacancies left behind. The result of this shuffling was an unclear chain of command with a bottleneck at the top—the Senior Pastor found himself with entirely too many direct reports and making too many decisions that should have been made a few rungs lower on the management ladder. The Mount added me as Executive Pastor to help with organizational restructuring and multisite operations.

The newly formed Lead Team—consisting of the Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor, Worship Pastor, and Director of Family Ministries—reconstituted the organization’s structure. The lead team constructed a new management hierarchy, shifted responsibilities, and clarified roles. Despite these positive developments, the organizational structure required more clarity and definition.

⁵ Portable Church Industries, “Multisite Church Challenges: Technology,” August 10, 2015, <https://www.portablechurch.com/2015/portable-church-systems/multisite-church-challenges-technology/>.

Another matter requiring definition and clarity was determining which programs were essential, “tier 1” ministries. One factor contributing to the number of attendees returning to the Stafford campus from the Courthouse campus was the programming disparity between the two sites—the main campus offered more ministry opportunities. The paucity of programming, together with the proximity of the campuses motivated many to return to Stafford.

The pastors and directors spent several days with The Unstuck Group devising a new strategic plan. One unexpected insight from the strategic planning process was the realization that the ministry and programs structure had become unnecessarily complex. The church had a shotgun approach to the ministries and the programs offered to the congregation. Whenever a need arose, no matter how small, the church staff started a program to meet the need.⁶ Dozens of programs resulted. Leadership pared the list down considerably. The church even cut a well-attended program, AWANA, because it was no longer a good fit with The Mount’s ethos.

The church now offers three tiers of programming. Tier 1 and tier 2 are non-negotiable. These include assimilation classes and beginning discipleship curricula. Comprising tier 3 are campus-specific programs based on the needs of the congregants at that site, like *Celebrate Recovery* and *Financial Peace*. All new campuses would launch with tier 1 programs, with tier 2 programs coming online as soon as possible. No new tier 1 or tier 2 programs would be launched at the main campus unless they could be feasibly reproduced at the new campuses

⁶ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 15-18. Willow Creek Community Church performed an in-depth analysis on the state of spiritual health of their congregations. One of the interesting findings was that simply offering programs to meet felt needs has little effect on spiritual development and leads to a glut of programming. Summaries of their analysis can be found here.

Rationale

The Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27) compels Christians to do the Lord's work unceasingly. Each person is given talents, whether material as in treasure or immaterial as in gifts of the Spirit. In this parable, a household master entrusts his servants with a measure of silver: "To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability" (Matt 25:15). The master leaves, and upon his return he enquires how each of the servants has done with their portion. The master showed his pleasure with the effort of the first two servants but dealt harshly with the third who had risked nothing by burying his in the ground.

The parable can be extended to cover a corporate body such as the church. Each church body is blessed with treasure. In other words, every congregation is made up of people who give of their time, talent, and gifts. Some congregations are blessed beyond their needs, while others struggle to make ends meet. Nevertheless, all bodies are called to take what they are given and to evangelize. Evangelism takes on many forms and the one that the Mount chose was the multisite multiplication model.

The Mount elected to use its resources to launch a new campus utilizing the multisite model for three reasons. First, there existed a need to relieve overcrowding at the main campus, and building a new facility was not an option due to fiscal realities and the intransigence of the Stafford Counting Planning Commission. Second, large concentrations of unchurched people existed in nearby communities. Based on the number of people already traveling to the Stafford campus from surrounding towns, leadership believed that a multisite campus could be successful if launched in these communities. Third, the New Testament, specifically the book of Acts, models what might be construed as a multisite approach to evangelism. I will speak in detail about this third reason in chapter 2.

With the decision to move forward with multisite operations came the need to overcome the failings of the previous attempt. The initial efforts of The Mount's multisite operations yielded some positive results and the church retained the physical resources,

AVL equipment, branding, computers, needed for this second iteration. What was lacking was a detailed and intentional plan that mitigated prior failures and built upon previous successes.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to create a multisite campus master plan for The Mount in an effort to reach the people in the communities in and around Stafford, Virginia.

Goals

To achieve the purpose of this project, I directed my efforts to meet the following goals.

1. The first goal was to create a best practices survey to be sent out to multisite churches in an effort to gain insight into their ongoing operations.
2. The second goal was to create an organizational structure for the current multisite campuses of The Mount.
3. The third goal was to develop a scalable organizational plan for future expansion.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a launch plan for future multisite campuses at The Mount.

Meeting these goals would result in a blueprint for current and future multisite operations at The Mount. The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.⁷

Research Methodology

The completion of each goal was dependent on a defined means of measurement and a benchmark of success. The first goal was to create a best practices survey to be sent out to multisite churches in an effort to gain insight into their ongoing operations.

Although the multisite church model is a relatively new method for launching churches,

⁷ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

several best practices have developed. The survey sought to uncover these practices to ensure that The Mount took advantage of the wisdom of other churches with more experience.

The second goal was to create an organizational structure for the current multisite campuses. Since several multisite organizational models exist, choosing the model that best fits the ministry context of The Mount was vital to the long-term success of the campus. The organizational structure must ensure church DNA transference but allow for some autonomy. This goal was measured by a panel of multi-site practitioners who utilized a rubric to evaluate the feasibility of the plan based on its scalability, ability to communicate and inculcate church DNA, and level of flexibility that allows for some campus autonomy.⁸ The goal was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it was met.

The third goal, like the first, involved creating an organizational structure for the future of multisite operations at The Mount. This goal, if successful, would result in a scalable management plan for further expansion. Once multisite organizations reach a certain size, global operations become more complex, resulting in a need for a new organizational structure that takes advantage of economy of scale while balancing central control and local autonomy. As the organization expands geographically away from the central campus, the local context is likely to change. What “speaks” to the people at the central campus may not resonate with the multisite campus due to demographic differences.⁹ The panel of experts reviewed this expanded and reorganized management

⁸ See appendix 2 for rubric. The panel was comprised of multisite practitioners, one from the state convention (BGAV), another who serves as the multisite director for a large church in Virginia, and a lead pastor at a multisite church in Virginia who also served as a campus pastor.

⁹ Paul Alexander describes some of the challenges multisite organization face as they grow: When campus number four launches everything changes. Staff Teams are restructured and a Central Service Team is typically built to support the campuses and allow things to begin to scale. I’ve previously written about Central Service Teams here. At this stage attendance shifts and more than

plan in tandem with the original multisite organization plan to ensure that it had the potential to meet the demands and challenges posed by future campuses. The goal was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it was met.

The fourth goal was to develop a multisite campus launch plan (LP).¹⁰ The purpose of the LP was to ensure that each of the various facets of the campus launch was considered: site selection, renovations, staffing, marketing, etc. The LP was adjudicated by a panel of church planting practitioners using a rubric to determine the LP's thoroughness, functionality, scalability, provisioning, and potential to succeed based on the best multi-site practices. The LP was considered successfully produced when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the plan was revised until it met the standard.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

This section defines terms that will be used throughout this project. Additionally, a delimitation will be described.

Multi-site or multisite. There is no one agreed-upon model for multisite churches. An often-cited and satisfactory definition from Geoff Surrat, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird's early work on the subject is "one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some

50% of the overall attendance of the church is no longer at the original campus. Someone is paid to be on Staff to wake up everyday thinking and leading the multisite initiative. (Paul Alexander, "Three Organization Changes That Multi-Site Churches Experience," May 31, 2015, <http://www.paulalexanderblog.com/leadership/3-organizational-changes-that-multi-site-churches-experience/#.YVh2VYH3a-o>)

¹⁰ See appendix 1 for the LP.

instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multi-site church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and board.”¹¹

This project had one delimitation. The timeframe for this project was twenty-six weeks. The timeframe included enough time to create a launch plan, an organizational structure for current operations, and another for future expansion. It was also enough time to receive feedback and redesign as necessary. It was not, however, enough time to thoroughly test the efficacy of the launch plan since the new campus opened before the completion of the launch plan. The existing second campus provided an opportunity to implement the organizational model, but not the model that contained additional sites. However, a thorough assessment of the organizational structure would take a longer time than is allotted from this project.

Conclusion

The multisite model is an effective, biblically-based multiplication method for starting churches. There are many ways to implement the model and many challenges to address. First, the organizational relationship between the main and multisite campus(es) must be considered before launching the new campus. Second, the decision rights and organizational hierarchy depend, to a large extent, on the model chosen. Finally, a way to

¹¹ Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations, The Leadership Network Innovation Series* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 18. While citing the same source and definition Allison and House offer an update and expansion of the definition:

But this is the bare minimum. There is even more shared among the locations of a multisite church, including all the commonalities listed in our definition of church (gospel-centeredness, preaching and teaching the Word of God, celebrating baptism and the Lord’s Supper) and the commonalities listed in our definition of denomination/network (doctrinal statement, mission focus, core values, and ministry philosophy). These common matters of faith, vision, practice, resources, leadership, and ministry unite a multisite church. To be even more specific, a multisite church is any church that does not limit its gathering to one location and time. When a church broadcasts what is transpiring in its main auditorium to an overflow room, or when it adds a second (or third) service, it has taken the first steps into the realm of multisite. But this is only one type of multisite. Other multisite churches may have multiple venues, multiple sites, or different geographic locations” (Gregg Allison and Brad House, *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017], 15, Kindle).

measure the success and health of the multisite campus must go beyond attendance. The desired result is a new campus of fully engaged disciples, who in turn desire to carry on the mission of multiplication.

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR
THE MULTISITE MULTIPLICATION MODEL

Introduction

Multiplication was always a part of God’s plan. James Hamilton writes,

God is going to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory as he saves and judges. The world was created for this purpose, as the previews in the tabernacle and temple show. God himself announced that he would fill the earth with his glory (Num. 14:21). The seraphim proclaimed the earth full of his glory (Isa. 6:3). David looked to the day when his seed would reign, and the earth be filled with the glory of Yahweh (Ps. 72:18–19). Isaiah said it would come to pass (Isa. 11:9), and Habakkuk echoed him (Hab. 2:14).¹

The Bible opens with God creating a world to reflect His glory. The crowning achievement of His creation was man, whom He made in His image. God created man with the full knowledge that He would have to save him. This salvation scheme would further bring God glory. He created the world knowing it would be corrupted by sin, and despite man’s best effort to derail God’s plan, he would one day restore the world to its Edenic state. The final act of history will be without end, an eternal age replete with God’s glory.

The central character in what Hamilton calls a “cosmic drama” is Christ.² His Great Commission gives the church its mission. His bride, the church, is where believers gather to worship Him and grow as Christians. Since the first century, the church model has adapted to the worldwide Christian community’s growth. The simple house church was replaced by a more prominent centralized worship place meant to accommodate

¹ James M. Hamilton, Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), chap. 4, Kindle.

² Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, chap. 4.

entire communities of believers. While the liturgy, size of the gatherings, and congregational polity has changed, the basic building block of faith remains the local church, at least for Protestants.

This chapter argues for the premise that the local church, as expressed in the multisite model, stands on solid biblical and theological ground. First, I explore the concept of multiplication found in the Old Testament, specifically in Genesis and the New Testament in Acts. Second, I argue that modern multisite models reflect the biblical expressions of the “ideal church” found in Acts. Third, I make a case for a plurality of elders as the biblically-based model for all churches, multisite or otherwise.

Multiplication in Genesis 1-2

Why is there something rather than nothing? Philosophers have wrestled with this enduring question since the fifth century BC.³ Most philosophers find the concept of nothing nonsensical, especially Neo-Platonists, who believe that abstract objects, like colors, propositions, works of art, etc., exist necessarily. In the world of metaphysics, something must exist, even if it is the proposition, “nothing exists.” Of course, that possible world would be an empty one and is thankfully not the one God created. The world we inhabit teems with life, but it was not always that way. At one time, nothing except God existed.

The Old Testament begins, literally, in the beginning, with God breathing the universe into existence. This act is known as *creatio ex nihilo* or creation from nothing.⁴ Yet, while Genesis explains how God created the universe, the question of his motivation

³ Roy Sorenson, “Nothingness,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nothingness/>.

⁴ William Lane Craig, “Creation ex Nihilo: Theology and Science,” Reasonable Faith, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/creation-ex-nihilo-theology-and-science/>.

remains.⁵ Why did he make man? If, as orthodoxy claims, God existed prior to the creation of the universe, eternally in perfect harmony as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, possessing no defects and perfect in every good thing, then why did He need man? Indeed, why did he create anything? Joel White offers this explanation: “The world was created with a specific purpose: to direct the minds and hearts of human beings to their creator so that they might worship and glorify him.”⁶

From the first moments of creation, God had multiplication in mind. Genesis describes God fashioning the world as a place that will sustain His ultimate creation, man. First, God gives every living thing the breath of life, and then He commands each living thing to be fruitful and multiply, first the creatures of the seas (1:20-22) and those on land (1:24-25). God only creates man once He has delivered a suitable environment for him to inhabit (1:25b); God’s plan is for man to thrive. Victor P. Hamilton points out, “What God creates he preserves. What he brings into being he provides for” (1:29-30).⁷ Man will want for nothing in the garden; God has placed man there and spread out a feast for him.

There are two accounts of God creating man in Genesis. The shorter but more lyrical narrative in chapter 1 is concerned with pointing out the significance of God’s ultimate creation. K. A. Mathews states,

⁵ Joel White writes,

The modern understanding of cosmology as a sort of ‘anatomy and physiology’ of the universe reflects the naturalistic paradigm of the post-Enlightenment West. From the perspective of the ancient world, however, questions concerning the structure and workings of the cosmos cannot be separated from questions concerning its origin, and within an early Jewish world view the question of purpose of the cosmos must be considered paramount. (Joel White, “Paul’s Cosmology: The Witness of Romans 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, Library of New Testament Studies [New York: T&T Clark, 2008], 91)

⁶ White, “Paul’s Cosmology,” 95.

⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on The Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 96.

The crown of God's handiwork is human life, The narrative marks the prominence of this creative act in several ways: (1) the creation account shows an ascending order of significance with human life as the final, this pinnacle, create act; (2) of the creative acts, this is the only one preceded by divine deliberation ("Let us make" in v. 26); (3) this expression replaces the impersonal words spoke in the previous creation acts (e.g., "Let there be," "Let the earth"); (4) human life alone is created in the 'image' of God and has the special assignment to rule of the created order.⁸

That God chose to create man in his image is of paramount importance. It is through a man, albeit a perfect one, that God will be most glorified.

After God blesses the couple, he immediately gives them two commands. The first command sets up a creation hierarchy. Man is given dominion over "every living thing that moves on the earth" (1:28b).⁹ Russell Reno remarks, "The capacity for dominion is an aspect of the *imago dei* (1:26a). Our 'crown' of 'glory and honor' is found in our 'dominion over the works' of God's own hand."¹⁰ Man was created to rule from the outset—to be God's representative on earth. God prepared the kingdom for man to utilize, manage, and nurture. Reno goes on to say that dominion is not meant to be viewed as a dictatorship, "Instead, dominion is a natural vocation of headship that guides and governs so that things can flourish according to their proper purposes."¹¹

One of these proper purposes is the second of the two commands given by God to Adam and Eve: be fruitful and multiply. Reno expounds on the role that sexual intercourse plays in the world: "The power of 'begetting' serves as the engine of history in Genesis and in scripture as a whole. The generations are the streams of forward movement. Procreation gives us a future. It is the human power that realizes the capacity

⁸ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 160.

⁹ Mathews explains, "The mandate to subjugate the world includes the major zoological groups: fish, bird, and land animals. The lists of the animals are only general classifications and vary in details within the account. (1:26, 28, 30). The appointment by God gave the human family privilege but also responsibility as "caretakers." Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 175.

¹⁰ Russell R. Reno, *Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 66.

¹¹ Reno, *Genesis*, 66.

of creation to have time and history.”¹² With the command to multiply, God set in motion the human phase of his plan to bring glory to himself through filling the world with his ultimate creation. Adam and Eve are the progenitures of every living human being who has ever or ever will walk the earth.

Genesis 2 retells the story of man’s creation with greater emphasis placed on the “mechanics” of God’s creative act. In verse 7, God creates man, not *ex nihilo* as he has the rest of the universe, but instead, God uses dust from the ground, which he forms into a man and animates directly by breathing into his nostrils. Hamilton lays out the vital difference between the creation of every other living thing, plants, creatures, and that of man: “In contrast to 1:26ff., here we are told that mankind was made from something already in existence. The word of God (1:26ff.) is now augmented by the work of God (2:7), a work that includes both formation and animation.”¹³ God gives all creatures the breath of life, but with man, “The breath comes directly from God, and this signals that the ‘man of dust’ is to live in a special way, according to the image of the ‘man of heaven.’”¹⁴

It is important to note that the word for *breath* used in this account differs from other instances. Hamilton explains, “Instead of using *rûa* for ‘breath’ (a word appearing nearly 400 times in the OT), Gen. 2:7 uses *něšmá* (25 times in the OT). Unlike *rûa*, which is applied to God, man, animals, and even false gods, *něšmá* is applied only to Yahweh and to man.”¹⁵ The relationship between man and God is obviously a special one.

¹² Reno, *Genesis*, 69.

¹³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 104.

¹⁴ Reno, *Genesis*, 83.

¹⁵ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 105.

Mathews writes, “The correspondence between man and his Maker is expressed both by the language of ‘image’ (1:26–27) and by the metaphor of a shared ‘breath.’”¹⁶

This imagery of intimacy between man and Maker is reinforced by the care God takes in forming an ideal environment for Adam, intentionally placing him in the domain that would afford him every necessity needed to survive and thrive (2:15), and then commanding him to take care of what he has been given. In this account, however, the emphasis is not only on dominion over the creatures (2:19) but also over the physical environment. Hamilton explains, “The point is made clear here that physical labor is not a consequence of sin. Work enters the picture before sin does, and if man had never sinned, he still would be working. Eden certainly is not a paradise in which man passes his time in idyllic and uninterrupted bliss with absolutely no demands on his daily schedule”¹⁷ God’s plan is clear: Adam is to rule over and actively care for creation so future generations can depend on it for their sustenance.

Of course, for future generations to exist, God will have to provide Adam with a suitable helper (2:18). So God makes the statement, “It is not good that man should be alone” (2:18). Adam seems to be aware that something is missing in his life as well. He has surveyed and cataloged creation, given names to all the creatures, and concluded that no other living thing is like him. God, it seems, has created a desire in Adam with no suitable partner to satisfy that desire. Only Adam was created out of pre-existing material, namely dust, and the same thing is true of Eve, but instead of forming her from the “dust of the ground,” God fashions her from another pre-existing material, Adam.

Adam recognizes that Eve is the partner he longed for; she is the suitable mate who will join him in multiplication. Reno writes,

The emotional and physical bond between male and female reaches toward new life in children. This drive toward new life reflects the divine intention in creation. Just

¹⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 196.

¹⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 110.

as the original man feels a lonely longing that reaches forward, we all exist for the sake of something more, something fuller, something that evokes the “at last” of our spiritual desire.¹⁸

Human beings are meant to multiply. Therefore, what happens in this first act found in Genesis is merely the beginning of a much grander dramatic ark that plays out over the course of the Bible. Mathews sums it up nicely:

God’s promissory blessings of land and seed had their inception at creation (1:10, 22, 28) and hence are universal promises bestowed upon all those created in the “image of God” (1:26-27). Genesis 1–11 shows how the universal blessing is realized only through a particular lineage, namely, through the progeny of Seth and his descendant Shem (chaps. 5; 11). Even more so, the genealogies narrow on the one man Abraham (11:26), who is deemed the recipient of divine blessing par excellence (12:1-3). Creation, therefore, entails the beneficent intentions of God, sets the course for their outworkings in human history, and prepares us for the ensuing account (2:4-11:26) of how God, despite recurring human disobedience, preserves his promises through the appointed seed of Abraham (11:27-50:26).

There is, as explained next, a particular type of multiplication that God intends. It seems He desires to bring glory to Himself by filling the world with humans who will freely choose to follow Him.

Multiplication in Acts 1:8

The plot of the New Testament revolves around multiplication. Jesus is clear as to what he expects of believers. Robert Wells of the International Mission Board writes, “Perhaps the clearest statements of God’s plan for the nations are found in the Gospels and Acts. In the Great Commission passages, Jesus called his followers to make disciples among all nations (Matt 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). These aren’t mere suggestions, they are royal edicts from the king of the cosmos.”¹⁹ The following sections exegetes Acts 1:8, argue how the Great Commission remains applicable, and demonstrate how the multisite church is a legitimate model for carrying out multiplication in a modern context.

¹⁸ Reno, *Genesis*, 94.

¹⁹ Robert V. Wells, “Teaching God’s Mission in the New Testament,” IMB, December 12, 2017, <https://www.imb.org/2017/12/12/teaching-gods-mission-in-the-new-testament/>.

Acts 1:8 gives the context for the rest of Luke’s story. It is a starting pistol of sorts for the mission of multiplication that plays out over the rest of the New Testament. Jesus tells the gathered, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The similarity this verse shares with the creation accounts in Genesis is remarkable. Recall there that God breathed into man, animating him, and then gave him the mission to multiply. Here too, God shares his animating power, this time through the Holy Spirit, and in the same breath recasts the multiplication vision. Genesis is partly an account of man’s first birth; Acts is an account of how man is born again. In both cases, God is the power that brings man to life.

John B. Polhill points out, “The word used in Acts 1:8 for power is *dynamis*, the same word used of Jesus’ miracles in the Gospels. It is the Spirit’s power (2:1-21).”²⁰ Jesus announces that each of the twelve would receive power from the Holy Spirit, enabling them to carry out their assigned duties. The apostles did not realize that all believers would be in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit, giving each Christian access to the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 6:10-11). Most scholars hold that the power given here is specifically for the task of witnessing, although the apostles would go on to do miracles using the *dynamis* of the Holy Spirit.”²¹ Craig S. Keener believes, “The promise of empowerment for mission is given directly to the apostles (1:8), but that the same power is promised to all the church at Pentecost (2:38–39) implies that all Spirit-empowered believers will contribute to the same task (albeit in diverse ways).”²² Just as the power was never meant to be limited to the twelve, the power given at Pentecost was never meant to be limited to the people present that day in Jerusalem. Believers today are

²⁰ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 76.

²¹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1:689.

²² Keener, *Acts*, 1:689.

filled with the Holy Spirit the moment they are born again (Rom 8:11). At that moment, they are drafted into God's army and tasked with bearing witness.

In the strictest sense, witnessing is giving direct testimony of one's observation and experiences. Keener explains the importance Jews placed on testimony: "In Judaism, one who was able to testify firsthand yet withheld the testimony could be viewed as liable before God. In the LXX, the term indicates an appeal to objective evidence, and it frequently appears in law, court or controversy imagery."²³ The apostles would be called to testify to their observations in various settings, but it was not the law that drove them to testify. Instead, they felt compelled to testify because the risen Jesus gave them the command. The Holy Spirit gave their testimony force, empowering them to speak out even under dire circumstances (Acts 7:54–8:2). Darrell Bock writes of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit: "The disciples' direct and real experiences of Jesus and his resurrection qualifies them as witnesses, but the Spirit will give them the capability to articulate their experiences with boldness. Acts 2 will show the initial enablement in Peter, who is transformed from the person who denied Jesus three times."²⁴

The power to provide testimony was never meant to remain restricted to the apostles and other eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus. Today, the church is called on to witness differently. That is to say that believers today need not make the same sacrifices the original twelve were called to make, but the substance of the witness has not changed, nor has the scope of the charge.

Jesus tells the disciples that they are tasked with carrying the message of his resurrection and their salvation to the people of Jerusalem first and eventually to the "end of the earth." There is some debate over the geographic boundaries of the phrase. Indeed, the saying was familiar to the apostles. Polhill argues, "The phrase is often found in the

²³ Keener, *Acts*, 1:694.

²⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 64.

prophets, however, as an expression for distant lands; and such is the meaning in Isa 49:6, which may well lie behind Acts 1:8.”²⁵ Rome, Spain, Thule, and other “distant” lands stood in for the end of the earth. The disciple’s context of the phrase was much different than even that of their contemporary, Paul. Keener writes, “The disciples may have understood this witness ‘to the ends of the earth’ as part of their mission in the Jewish Diaspora since in Isaiah it was scattered Jews who would be witnesses for far-flung places when God saved and vindicated them.”²⁶ That understanding would change with the inclusion of the Gentiles into the mission.

Perhaps the disciples understood the phrase simultaneously as both a metaphor and a concrete boundary, as Bock suggests: “Thus the difference between interpreting ‘end of the earth’ as specifying Rome or as looking at the broader edges of the world is not great. If Isa 49:6 is in the background, as is possible (see Acts 13:47), then the point is that the message is going out to the world (but its reaching Rome is an important part of that task).”²⁷ Whatever position one holds regarding the disciple’s original understanding, it soon became clear to them and remains so for believers today, that the “end of the earth” is less about geography and more about demographics. “The kingdom message will move out gradually and encompass all. The church’s call is to be missionary in direction and eschatological in focus. The world is the end goal, pointing to complete deliverance that drives the present mission and gives it focus.”²⁸

Clearly, the call to witness is a call to multiply. Looking at Matthew 28:19, another well known Great Commission verse, one learns exactly what believers are told to multiply: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name

²⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, 77.

²⁶ Keener, *Acts*, 1:694.

²⁷ Bock, *Acts*, 65.

²⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 66.

of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This call is more specific than that given to Adam and Eve. Instead of being simply the progenitors of the species, Christians are directed to be ambassadors for Christ so that the world may be filled with disciples (2 Cor 5:20; Luke 14:23; Eph 6:20). As ambassadors, Christ’s followers are not called on to make merely believers, but disciples. It will take churches to accomplish this feat. In this next section, I argue that the church described in Acts 2 is a great template for modern churches to follow. It is one that multisite churches can and should emulate if they are to be biblically and theologically sound arenas for creating disciples.

The Ideal Church

In the Old Testament, temple polity, rituals, and ceremonies were helpfully defined in detail by Scripture. When God came to earth as a man, he radically changed the way church was done forever because he changed the relationship between God, man, and the priestly caste (1 Pet 2:9-10). Unfortunately, Jesus left his followers with few details concerning “temple” practices moving forward. Scripture gives guidance concerning elders and deacons, but there is a paucity of detail about governance, liturgy, or, more importantly, what constitutes a church.

It is clear that the early church met in houses and the temple (Acts 5:42).²⁹ What is also apparent is that the size of these meetings varied greatly. Furthermore, the gatherings were less structured than what the Jewish converts were used to in the temple—Christian liturgy had yet to develop. The emphasis was on fellowship and sharing the gospel (Acts 2:42), not on rituals and ceremonies; that would come later.

For centuries, the Christian church has grappled with the question, “Which church model best reflects the New Testament writings?” As various church models developed, church leaders returned to the scriptures to determine if the models were

²⁹ It is unclear if we can draw a straight line comparison from this text to the modern multisite, but it at least shows that the Christian community no longer sees the temple building as the one place where people must gather to worship.

biblically and theological defensible. The same litmus test can be applied to the modern multisite model. In this section, I argue that the model is not only theologically sound but also biblically so, and in many fundamental ways, resembles what Keener calls the “ideal church” portrayed in Acts 2:42-47.³⁰

Acts 2:42-47

While the New Testament says little about how Christians should organize a church, and what is found in Scripture is generally descriptive and not prescriptive, a few best practices are outlined in the text.³¹ The final six verses of Acts 2, for instance, paint a picture of early church life in Jerusalem. The critical elements of a biblically sound church are portrayed in this short section. These foundational features delineated in Acts 2 are teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.³²

Luke tells the reader that the believers in Jerusalem “devoted themselves” to the practices listed above. This devotion suggests that a strongly bonded community formed early on after Pentecost. Bock believes, “The expression ‘devoting themselves’ has the idea of persistence or persevering in something.”³³ The “something” Bock speaks of was Jesus Christ and the gospel’s message, which the apostles began to spread in earnest following Pentecost.

³⁰ Keener writes,

The goal of the Pentecost experience, with its empowerment for mission. Includes a community modeling the ideal, proleptically eschatological lifestyle of the kingdom (cf, comment on Acts 1:3–8; 2:1–4). The community is now much larger than the earlier united nucleus in Acts 1:12–14: the Holy Spirit’s activity has brought about church growth. The ideal church offers a pivotal climax and goal of Luke’s larger story, though, for Luke, this ideal church cannot be complete until it includes representatives of all nations (1:8). (Keener, *Acts*, 1:991)

³¹ First Cor 14 appears to go into the weeds to address a few issues and offer some precepts, but by no means comes close to codifying a liturgy for the church to follow.

³² Keener explains, “Most scholars recognize four elements in the community life (the apostle’s teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers); some see two elements (with breaking bread and prayer together as part of fellowship); grammatically, one could also divide it into three elements.” Keener, *Acts*, 1:1000.

³³ Bock, *Acts*, 149.

As with any church, a multisite church must persistently keep Jesus as the focus of its worship. Moreover, just as the apostles remained faithful to their calling of spreading the gospel, the modern church, multisite or otherwise, is expected to pick up the call and carry the good news forward with teaching and preaching. It will take more than just evangelism to bond a group of people together. Keener explains, “As comparisons of evangelistic claims and church growth reports reveal today, it is possible to have many ‘converts’ in meetings yet lack a lack of social reinforcement for, and perseverance in, their new faith afterward.”³⁴ Had the church in Acts failed to cultivate a community that resulted in discipleship and unity of purpose, there is little reason to believe that it could have sustained the growth it saw after Pentecost or matured into the church experienced today. Therefore, the multisite church must be inclined to generate a community life that mirrors that found in Acts; the same is true, of course, for any church model. Nothing in the multisite model, that is to say, the church model, promulgates the concept of one church in many locations that would prevent the multisite church from cultivating community and promoting discipleship. Indeed, multisite churches put great emphasis on the community and unity. Any multisite church that fails to promote unity will soon find itself not one church in many locations but many separate churches.

Teaching and Preaching the Gospel

Teaching and preaching about Jesus was the priority of the apostles, and the community eagerly listened and sought to apply the precepts they learned from the gospel stories. It was, after all, the reason the community came together. Although a theology clearly articulated in confessions of faith was several centuries in the future, kerygma had developed, and the oral teachings of the apostles gave the community members a basic understanding from which to launch personal evangelistic endeavors. Bock says this about the need for teaching and preaching, “Instruction is an important part of the new

³⁴ Keener, *Acts*, 1:1000.

community. The centrality of Jesus and the preparation of members to share in the new life and witness are key community concerns.”³⁵ Therefore, the multisite church would do well to maintain consistent, fully orbbed biblical teaching as the cornerstone and priority of the church. Again, nothing inherent to the multisite model would prevent evangelizing through the preaching of God’s Word. On the contrary, one of the strengths of the multisite model is the desire of its practitioners to spread the gospel using sound preaching at each of its campuses, just as the early church in Acts taught in the temple and in the believers’ homes.

Coming Together in Fellowship

Fellowship is tantamount to biblical preaching in the hierarchy of priorities for churches. Verse 42 speaks of the community’s devotion to one another. Polhill describes this devotion, “Verses 43-46 give an ideal portrait of the young Christian community, witnessing the Spirit’s presence in the miracles of the apostles, sharing their possessions with the needy among them, sharing the witness in the temple, sharing themselves in the intimacy of their table fellowship.”³⁶ The sense of sharing and covenant is palpable in this section. While there is no doubt, as Bock states, that there is a material element to the fellowship, it is much more than merely sharing physical goods.³⁷ The community sincerely cares for one another. Bock writes, “Luke points to a fellowship to underscore the personal interactive character of relationships in the early church at all levels. There is a real sense of connection to, between, and for each other.”³⁸ Another strength of the multisite model is that it promotes the coming together in fellowship. Indeed, there is a strong emphasis on promoting the idea that although the campuses may be geographically

³⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 150.

³⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, 101.

³⁷ Bock, *Acts*, 150.

³⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 150.

distant, they are all part of one community. Many multisite churches make an effort to bring all the campuses together periodically to emphasize the importance of fellowship further.

Breaking Bread

Luke next mentions that the ideal church breaks bread. It is easy to see why some scholars conflate sharing a meal with fellowship, as it is hard to imagine sharing a meal without fellowshiping. Other scholars suggest that breaking bread refers to the practice of communion.³⁹ In either case, the breaking of bread further illustrates the close bonds formed in the community. The meals were probably accompanied, at times, by the apostle's teaching, demonstrating that the temple was not the only place (cf. Acts 2:42; Acts 5:42) where worship was prevalent.

Corporate Prayer

The final element Luke mentions is prayer. Jewish communities prayed in the temple and in their homes, with the corporate gatherings for larger groups occurring at the temple. The Acts communities continued this tradition, knowing all too well the importance of this practice. Luke and the other New Testament authors make it clear that prayer is the method by which believers seek and learn God's direction in their lives. Bock agrees, writing, "A community at prayer is something Luke emphasizes about community life. It seeks God's direction and is dependent upon God because God's family of people do not work by feelings or intuition but by actively submitting themselves to the Lord's direction."⁴⁰ Scripture is clear that both individuals and communities (churches) must rely upon prayer. Therefore, prayer is an essential element in both settings.

³⁹ Bock, *Acts*, 150.

⁴⁰ Bock, *Acts*, 151.

Luke continues to detail the intimate bond formed in the ideal church. Such was their love for one another that they shared their bread and their financial burdens (2:44). Polhill interprets this verse accordingly: “It seems to depict the gathered community, with a strong emphasis on their unity. This unity is further expressed by their holding ‘everything in common’ (which is described in v. 45 as selling their goods for the benefit of others whenever a need arose).”⁴¹ Benevolence in the twenty-first-century church rarely extends this far. Nevertheless, modern churches should emulate the ideal church’s generosity within their community’s context.

Unity is the theme of verse 46. The word ἀφελότητι stands out here as it is the only time the term is found in the New Testament or the Septuagint. Keener suggests, “Given the context, emphasizing both worship and activity together, perhaps it could imply singleness of heart to the Lord as well as being in unity.”⁴² Jesus was the object of the early church’s adoration and the hub for their unification. No matter where they were, whether, in their homes or the temple, they remained bound together in the Lord.

The temple remained a central place of worship for the community, with many believers making frequent visits each week to praise God. Regarding the continued importance of the temple to the developing community, Marshall writes, “The religious devotion of the early Christians was a daily affair. They met together in a spirit of unanimity in the temple. This could simply mean that they used the courtyard of the temple as a meeting place (cf. 5:12), but it is also implied that they took part in the daily worship of the temple (3:1).”⁴³ The enormous temple space allowed the church to come together in numbers that would swamp the house meetings that were the model for the early church. Luke implies that the temple services served as a reminder of the

⁴¹ Polhill, *Acts*, 100.

⁴² Keener, *Acts*, 1:1029.

⁴³ Marshall, *Acts*, 68.

community's ethnic and religious roots. Keener asserts, however, that the Christian community moved away from the temple as a symbol of their faith even as it continued to serve as public space for their congregation: "Acts moves from heritage to mission . . . but without despising that heritage in which Luke has so carefully grounded it."⁴⁴

The multiple site element of early Christian worship marked it as a departure from the temple-centric worship of the Jews. House meetings served as alternate campuses for the faithful. Keener offers the following observation:

Some scholars suggest that early Christians used public meeting places to evangelize in seeking converts, but houses to disciple the converts (cf. Acts 5:42, 20:20). The meetings from house to house follow Jesus's instructions for expansion (Luke 10:5-7) and form the basis for the later house church, which became the dominant meeting places for early Christians.⁴⁵

Marshall says something similar when he argues that Christians met in large religious gatherings and smaller groups in homes.⁴⁶ Polhill adds, "Verse 46 sets forth the dual locale of their life together."⁴⁷ No longer was God confined to the temple. More and more, the church was beginning to reflect the spirit found in Jesus' words: "For where two or three gather in my name, there I am among them" (Matt 18:20).

Luke's depiction of the ideal church in Acts 2:42-47 aptly ends with a church growth report. In addition to the increase in believers, there is heightened awareness among the outsiders of this new religious group's positive impact on the broader community. These final verses echo verse 43, where Luke wrote, "Awe came upon every soul." Whereas awe sometimes denotes apprehension, the phrase "glad and generous hearts, praising God" indicates the contrary. Certainly, the apostles' wonders and signs, coupled

⁴⁴ Keener, *Acts*, 1:1032.

⁴⁵ Keener, *Acts*, 1:1030.

⁴⁶ Marshall, *Acts*, 68.

⁴⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 100.

with the community's gladness and generous spirit, were tools used by the Holy Spirit to continuously grow and strengthen the ideal church.

As illustrated by the community's fellowship, the devotion to one another, breaking of bread, prayer, and assembly in their homes and the temple where they gathered to listen *en mass* to the apostles' teaching, speaks of the early church's unity of mind and purpose. This covenanting is the hallmark of a healthy church. Indeed, it is what constitutes a church. This unity displayed in the "ideal church" is the benchmark for modern churches.

Criticisms of Multisite Models

Perhaps it goes without saying that churches are not buildings. Churches are not merely assemblies of people gathered in one spot or over several campuses.⁴⁸ Instead, a church is a body of individuals whose unity of mind and purpose is such that they feel compelled to enter into a formal covenant. In defense of the multisite model, Summit Church pastor and current SBC President J. D. Greear asserts,

There are many functions that churches perform besides assembly, as important as that one is—like participating in the ordinance and preaching the gospel—that we don't want to obscure by putting *all* the emphasis on assembly. Furthermore, other Christian bodies assemble weekly, and they aren't churches, like campus ministries. The essence of a church is a covenanted body that covenant to do several things—follow Jesus, practice the ordinance, exercise discipline, and yes assemble. Each of these is indispensable, not just assembly.⁴⁹

Greear's description of the church mirrors that of Luke's depiction of the ideal church in Acts.

Grant Gaines and others have argued that multisite churches run afoul of the proper church structure guidelines found in the New Testament. He believes the church

⁴⁸ Grant Gaines, "Exegetical Critique of Multi-Site: Disassembling the Church," *9Marks Journal*, February 2, 2010, <https://www.9marks.org/article/exegetical-critique-multi-site-disassembling-church>.

⁴⁹ J. D. Greear, "Is Multi-Site a Biblically Sound Model?" J. D. Greear Ministries, October 23, 2014, <https://jdgrear.com/blog/multi-site-a-biblically-sound-model/>.

must assemble in one place and at one time to be considered a single church. Gaines does not appear to think that a multisite church is engaging in heresy or some other untoward worship form. Instead, like Jonathan Leeman, he argues that it constitutes a distinct church each time a church assembles. For instance, a church that holds two services on a Sunday is, in fact, two churches. Likewise, a church meeting in two or more locations is, in actuality, two or more churches.

I agree with Greear, Gaines, and Leeman that assembly is a necessary function of the church. Moreover, like Greear, I believe multisite churches should make some effort to gather periodically in one place. That being said, I do not think that a church meeting at different locations or different times constitutes multiple and distinct churches. As I outlined, the church in Acts assembled in various places (temple and homes), but at no time did they cease being a church or suggest that the church in Jerusalem had multiplied.

Gaines has argued that “The word *ekklesia* denotes a literal assembly. Therefore, it should not be used to designate a body of Christians who are not characterized by literally assembling together in the same place.” The thrust of Gaines’s argument is that the phrase *epi to auto* means come together in the same place; therefore, any congregation that meets in more than one site cannot be considered a single church.

First, it is not clear that *ekklesia* “denotes a literal assembly.” The word is often used more broadly in the New Testament. For example, when Paul claims that prior to his conversion, he persecuted the church (Acts 8:3; 1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6), neither Luke nor Paul appear to be speaking of a literal assembly. Luke describes the persecutors’ actions in Acts: “But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison” (8:3). In Greek, it is rendered Σαῦλος δὲ ἐλυμαίνετο τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κατὰ τοὺς οἴκους εἰσπορευόμενος, σύρων τε ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας παρεδίδου εἰς φυλακὴν. This example makes clear that *ekklesia* does not always denote a single gathering of individuals. If that were the case, then Saul would have been going to a single location where all were gathered.

Leeman asserts that not only do churches have to meet at one location to be considered one church, but they must also meet at one time. If, for instance, a church holds services at 9:00 a.m. and another at 11:00 a.m., then “the 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. service are both churches.”⁵⁰ Presumably, each instance of Paul’s persecution of the church did not occur simultaneously.

Second, Gaines’s case for the phrase *epi to auto*, restricting a church to a single service may not be as strong as he believes. Polhill explains, “The phrase *epi to auto* is notoriously difficult to translate. . . . It seems to depict the gathered community with a strong emphasis on unity.”⁵¹ It is hard to imagine anyone arguing that unity is not a true mark of the church. The church unifies around Jesus. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them” (18:20). Strangely, Leeman thinks this verse is a proof text for his thesis that a church must meet in a single service. He appears to believe that any time two or three people gather together in Christ’s name, a church mysteriously comes into existence.

Third, both men have argued for a spatio-temporal definition for the church; a church is a gathering of people at one time at one address. It should be said that both believe a church does more than gather in assembly, but the boundaries of what constitutes any particular church are defined by the location and time of said assembly. If this theory is correct, then it leads to some strange consequences when cashed out.

If place is one of the defining attributes of a church, then how is the perimeter drawn? Does it mean the sanctuary or the entire building? Could a congregation be divided into two, designating the left side of a room as Church A and the right side as Church B? Mark Dever, a colleague of Leeman and antagonist of the multisite church model, is the pastor at Capital Hill Baptist Church. The sanctuary there is oddly arranged,

⁵⁰ Jonathan Leeman, *One Assembly: Rethinking the Multisite and Multiservice Church Modes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 17.

⁵¹ Polhill, *Acts*, 100.

resulting in what looks like two rooms joined at right angles and partially separated by a proscenium. Why not count Capital Hill as two churches?

Perhaps then, time is the more critical factor in defining a single service church. A *reductio ad absurdum* example exposes the problem here as well. Take a population of believers, place them in a church at 9:00 a.m., and call them Church A. If what Gaines and Leeman's claim is valid, then that same group of people meeting in the same building, even sitting in the same seats at 11:00 a.m., would then become an entirely different congregation, Church B. In reflection, the spatio-temporal definition appears to be ad hoc at best.

Biblical and Theological Support for the Multisite Model

The early church resembled the modern multisite church in some important ways—I offered Acts 2, especially verse 46, as a proof text. In this chapter, Luke describes the church as meeting in many locations, in the temple and from house to house. At no time does Luke suggest that the various settings constituted separate churches. Gregg Allison states plainly, “Such distributed churches were still the church of Jerusalem.”⁵² Besides the reference found in Acts, Allison points out,

Three times in the Pauline corpus (Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2) the apostle, as he sends his greetings, employs the expression ἡ κατ'οἶκον . . . ἐκκλησία (hē kat' οικον ekklēsia), or “the church that particularly meets in the house” (of Prisca and Aquila, Rom. 16:5; of Nympha, Col. 4:15; of Philemon, Philem. 2). The same expression is found a fourth time in a Pauline greeting, but on this occasion it is “the church that particularly meets in the house” (of Aquila and Prisca, 1 Cor. 16:19) that sends the greetings.⁵³

Allison claims the letters are written to particular household gatherings operating as worship sites under the umbrella of the larger church. In other words, the home of

⁵² Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 311-12, Kindle.

⁵³ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 311.

Nymphas is a legitimate worship site of the larger church in Laodicea. It is not, however, a separate church.

In addition to the biblical support just mentioned, there also exists theological support. I wrote previously about the importance of church unity, which the multisite church embodies by sharing resources, vision, and other vital aspects of the church. The congregants, Allison writes, “also experience this unity as they have a well-developed sense of a common presence of their church throughout the various venues, all of which are focused on the same worship, the same mission, and the same community, undergirded by shared resources.”⁵⁴ Church unity is a hallmark of every theologically sound church. Multisite church structure supports and encourages unity over the “various venues” of the church.⁵⁵

Theologically sound churches are missionally minded. The multisite church is built upon the principle of mission. By opening campuses, they expand the church’s ability to reach the unconverted for Christ. The single-site church, which finds itself at capacity, is hampered in its mission to attract new believers. Many churches are financially incapable of enlarging the church facility to accommodate growth, while other churches may not be equipped to reach out to unbelievers through church planting. Multisite models may offer an effective and cost-efficient way forward for churches that wish to exhibit a missional attitude. Allison summarizes, “The multisite approach is a theologically supported response to significant God-given growth of churches that embrace their missional identity.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 313.

⁵⁵ Multisite churches stress unity because they are geographically isolated. The structures are arranged in a matrix format with the central campus and multisite campuses sharing management responsibilities. This is not only a pragmatic management consideration but also one that helps the campuses remain unified. Thus the rally cry of multisite churches “One church in many locations!”

⁵⁶ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 313.

Chapter 3 will address the strengths of the multisite model in more detail when it comes to carrying out the Great Commission. The goal of this chapter is to give a biblical and theological description of the ideal church. As there are no hard and fast rules outlined for church structures in the New Testament, inferences from Scripture must be made. One can attempt to extract a proscription of sorts from the descriptions.⁵⁷ In many meaningful ways, the multisite model fits the ideal church description given in Acts. That is not to claim that all multisite churches, or that only multisite churches, resemble the Acts 2 church, but instead that nothing inherent in the model prevents them from emulating the Acts 2 church. More importantly, the multisite model does not appear to fall outside the bounds biblically or theologically, and, as I shall outline in chapter 3, the multisite model has several key advantages over the single-site model.

Leadership Structure in the Multisite Model

At this point, it is necessary to examine the organizational structure of the multisite church, and more specifically, the key aspect of shared leadership. To state it upfront and flatly, a plurality of elders is the most biblically sound organizational structure for the church. It happens to be the structure that is practically necessary for the multisite model, but praxis runs second to scriptural authority. Therefore, I will address the scriptural basis for elders and leave practical matters for chapter 3.

Throughout the New Testament, the various churches are led by a plurality of elders. The Greek word *πρεσβύτερος* first appears in Acts 11:30 referring to Christian elders, and Merkle adds that, “apparently as the officials who deal with financial (and doubtless also) other matters.”⁵⁸ While that may be the first time the Bible mentions

⁵⁷ Dever writes, “If you start looking in the New Testament for how we should organize a church, you won’t find a straightforward manual of church government there is no ideal constitution for a church.” Mark Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 221.

⁵⁸ C. K. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, A Shorter Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 171; Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 63, Kindle.

elders in relation to a Christian community, the Scriptures are replete with communities led by a plurality of elders. Benjamin Merkle writes, “The concept of shared leadership is a common theme in the Bible. In the Old Testament, leadership was shared by the elders of Israel. In the New Testament, Jesus chose twelve apostles to lead the church. . . . This pattern of plurality was continued with the establishment of the Christian eldership.”⁵⁹ Joshua Remy agrees, “The New Testament Church demonstrates a consistent pattern of plural eldership at each local church.”⁶⁰ Wayne Grudem is even more adamant in his opinion: “First, no passage suggests that any church, no matter how small, had only one elder. The consistent New Testament pattern is a plurality of elders in every church’ (Acts 14:23) and ‘in every town’ (Titus 1:5).”⁶¹ The widely accepted opinion among scholars is that the earliest Christian churches were characterized by shared leadership that invariably included a plurality of elders.⁶²

Several passages in the New Testament support the premise that the New Testament consistently describes a pattern of shared leadership. One such passage is Acts 11:30, as previously mentioned: “And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” There are several more occasions in Acts where elders are mentioned: “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church” (14:19); “Some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders” (15:2); “Now for Miletus he sent to Ephesus and the elders of the church to come to him” (20:17). There

⁵⁹ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 161; Jamus Howell Edwards II, “Leadership Structures and Dynamics in Multisite Churches: A Quantitative Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 26.

⁶⁰ Joshua Alan Remy, “Church Transition to Plurality of Elder” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 11.

⁶¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 913.

⁶² Daniel Wallace writes, “The argument for scripture is in fact so strong that most commentators today assume it.” Daniel B. Wallace, “Who Should Run the Church? A Case for the Plurality of Elders,” Bible.org, accessed March 26, 2020, <https://bible.org/article/who-should-run-church-case-plurality-elders>.

are no less than twelve instances of elders mentioned in Acts.⁶³ The Pastoral Letters speak of shared leadership as well, most notably, “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5), but also Philemon 1:1 and 1 Timothy 5:17. Peter, the “first among equals,” also speaks of “the elders among you” (1 Pet 5:1-2).⁶⁴ Multiple leaders appear as well in 1 Thessalonians, Hebrews, and James, leading George Knight to state categorically, “An analysis of the data seems, therefore to indicate the existence of oversight by a plurality of church leaders through the NT church in virtually every known area and acknowledged by virtually every NT writer who writes about church leadership.”⁶⁵

Obviously, the case for a plurality of elders in the New Testament is strong, but is it prescriptive for modern churches? Perhaps not, but theological inferences can be made to bolster the case for shared leadership as well. Daniel Wallace is on the right track when he writes, “The emphasis in scripture on doing the work of the ministry in company with other believers: e.g., Paul never went on a missionary journey by himself. . . . Jesus sent out his disciples two-by-two.”⁶⁶ Indeed, part of the reason for doing ministry in the company of others is practical. After all, the essence of ministry is service not to oneself but to others. But, practical matters aside, ministry work should be done in the company of others because believers are fallen creatures. Man’s sinful nature opens him up to various attacks that can be mitigated when leadership is shared.

⁶³ Wallace, “Who Should Run the Church?”

⁶⁴ Merkle states, “Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, edge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication. This distinction is often referred to as ‘first among equals’ (primus inter pares). Jesus Himself practiced this concept.” Merkle, *40 Questions*, 174.

⁶⁵ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 176-77.

⁶⁶ Wallace, “Who Should Run the Church?”

Most importantly, however, is that the Christian can only truly experience Jesus when in a community. Wallace gives John 13:35 as evidence that “knowledge of Jesus comes through his disciples in a community effort, that is, in their love for one another.”⁶⁷

Historical and practical arguments for shared leadership will help build a case, and I will make them in chapter 3; though, the biblical and theological case is compelling even if not prescriptive. However, this project seeks to make a case for a plurality of elders in multisite churches, so is there an additional question to ask. Can one apply a shared leadership model in a multisite setting? I believe the answer is yes. First, however, the issue of elder hierarchy must be addressed.

Primus Inter Pares

Should churches appoint a “first among equals,” resulting in a pastoral hierarchy? Jamus Edwards thinks so: “The biblical teaching of shared leadership among a plurality of pastors does not negate the need of a “senior leader” among the plurality.”⁶⁸ The biblical evidence lends itself to the idea that senior leadership is an essential element in effective ministry. Jesus chose Peter over James and John to lead the church, becoming the “first among equals.” Merkle adds, “The concept also is illustrated in the relationship of Philip and Stephen to the Seven and in the relationship between Paul and Barnabus (Acts 6:8; 8:5–8, 26–40; 13:13; 14:12).”⁶⁹

In general, the concept of a senior leader has biblical support, but does that biblical support extend to a multisite setting? There is a New Testament precedent for a plurality of elders acting as shepherds for an entire city with many worship locations but one church. The church in Jerusalem, for example, met in what might be considered

⁶⁷ Wallace, “Who Should Run the Church?”

⁶⁸ Edwards, “Leadership Structures,” 34.

⁶⁹ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 174.

multiple campuses (Acts 5:42), and yet only one group of elders was appointed to oversee the church there. As I demonstrated, this plurality of elders model was used without exception by the early church. Presumably, each city's elders also recognized a "first among equals." This biblical evidence leads me to believe that, at the very least, the senior leader, plurality of elders, multisite church model does not run contrary to Scripture and may be the best modern representation of the first-century church found in Acts.

Conclusion

This chapter evaluated the multisite church model in light of biblical and theological evidence. Additionally, a case was made for a plurality of elders as the biblically supported leadership structure, with a "first among equals" as the preferred version of this plurality model. In addition to the positive arguments for multisite church multiplication, this chapter addressed recent literature which cast doubt on the primary claim made in this chapter; namely, that the multisite church stands on firm biblical and theological ground. The premise of these critical writings is that a multisite church is not one church but multiple churches. That premise has been considered and rejected. In the final analysis, the multisite church can model the early Christian church as portrayed in Acts.

In chapter 3, the multisite model evaluation continues; theoretical, practical, and historical matters remain to consider. As the project moves forward, the practical aspects of building a multisite plan become the focus, but always in light of historical best practices of the denomination.

CHAPTER 3

MODERN MULTISITE CONSIDERATIONS

As Christianity grew and spread throughout the Roman Empire, a more defined church structure arose, which included a hierarchy with bishops and various other church officers. Liturgy began to take shape, and assembly rules soon followed. Ostensibly, this structure came into being to ensure theological integrity. Eventually, the episcopal polity came to dominate Christian worship for fourteen centuries until the Reformation. The Reformation challenged church teaching and practices like indulgences and questioned the accepted polity and rules for assembly.

For the Catholic Church, the church's altar was, and still is, the most sacred place in the church building. Clayton Bower writes, "The altar (and in modern times the tabernacle with it) is the focal point of the church building. It is the material expression of the Church's worship. The church building is literally built around and over the altar."¹ There was, and still is today, a very elaborate dedication ceremony before an altar is placed into service as the place of the Eucharist. Because of the altar's importance as the central place of worship for Christians in the sixteenth century, the building that housed the altar was the one place that the faithful could gather to worship and receive the sacraments. In many ways, the Catholic Church's new cathedrals resembled the old Jewish temples in Jesus' time.

The Reformation did not immediately sweep away the Catholic Church's liturgy; some rites and practices remain today. It did, however, break abruptly from the Holy See in a move away from centralized governance. In time, denominationalism

¹ Clayton F. Bower Jr., "The Altar," Catholic Answers, February 1, 1992, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-altar>.

would gain momentum, further fractionalizing the church along the lines of doctrine and polity.

The Reformation leaders fought to return the church to its first-century biblical and theological roots, emphasizing the five *Solas* and communal gatherings of like-minded believers. The movement toward smaller groups and away from episcopal governance gave rise to new church polity forms: Presbyterian, Moravian, connexional, and congregational.

Baptists are historically Congregationalists. An apt definition of this type of polity is offered by James Garrett, who writes,

It is a form of church government in which final authority rests with the local or particular congregation when it gathers for decision making. This means that decisions about membership, leadership, doctrine, worship, conduct, missions, finances, property, relationships, and the like are to be made by the gathered congregations except, when such decisions have been delegated by the congregation to individual members or groups of members.²

The implementation of congregational polity varies from church to church. In some churches, the congregation weighs in on even the most trivial matters. In others, only matters relating to foundational issues, like doctrine or appointing elders, are decided upon by the gathered congregation. Moreover, the level of congregational involvement tends to follow church size—with smaller congregations come a higher level of participation. In contrast, large churches find that decision-making is severely hampered by congregational micro-managing.³

For a denomination that values independence so highly, Baptists almost always belong to an association or convention. The Mount is part of the NorthStar Network of

² James Leo Garrett Jr., “An Affirmation of Congregational Polity,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 38.

³ Alban at Duke Divinity School states, The larger a congregation is, the more of its behavior is explained by formal documents like bylaws, books of order, job descriptions, and budgets. A small congregation may have all of these documents (though it may not know where they are), but it makes most of its decisions based on an informal pecking order based on seniority, relationship, and trust. Who happens to be a board member at the moment means little; who happens to be pastor, even less. (Alban at Duke Divinity School, “A Discerner’s Guide to Congregational Governance,” April 12, 2007, <https://alban.org/archive/a-discerners-guide-to-congregational-governance/>).

churches, which is a local association that belongs to the Baptist General Association of Virginia, which in turn belongs to the Southern Baptist Convention. The Mount is not beholding to these associations in so far as local church affairs are concerned. In Baptist congregationalism, the local church is not inextricably bound to the larger entity. A local Baptist congregation could decide to leave the “parent” association or convention and become independent or join another association or convention. The connection is purely voluntary. John S. Hammett offers the following observation regarding the unusual relationship between the local churches and conventions in his work *Biblical Foundation for Baptist Churches*: “In fact, the degree of denominational unity achieved by various Baptist groups is remarkable in view of the fact that participation in such groups is totally voluntary and that local church autonomy is so zealously guarded.”⁴

For Baptists and other congregationally minded denominations, is the multisite church a compatible church expansion and planting method? Gregg Allison, writing about the multisite explosion among various denominations in North America, believes so: “Furthermore, this phenomenon is verified among churches that are structured according to episcopalian, presbyterian, and congregational polities.”⁵ Some polities lend themselves more easily to multisite replication than others, and particular models, which will be explored next, fit more neatly with particular denominations.

Multisite Models

A multisite model taxonomy has been attempted several times both in academic literature and by multisite practitioners writing about their real-life implementation experiences. On the academic front, Brian Frye surveyed the various taxonomies offered by researchers and practitioners and presented them along with a taxonomy of his own

⁴ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundation for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 144.

⁵ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 310.

devising in his dissertation.⁶ Jamus Edwards also analyzed various models while discussing their significance regarding leadership structures.⁷ Edwards' work was especially helpful to this project as designing and implementing an organizational hierarchy was one of the project goals.

The earliest attempt at cataloging the various multisite approaches was, according to Frye, by Lyle Schaller in *Innovations in Ministry*. All told, Schaller identified seven multisite models (see table 1). Multisite was in its infancy in 1994 when *Innovations* was published, so his taxonomy bears little resemblance to more recent attempts. However, Frye defends Schaller's work as pioneering, saying his "work unlocked a broader understanding of the multi-site church concept" and that "Schaller identified at least two types of multi-site church arrangements that remain primary to multi-site categorization today."⁸ It is worth noting that Schaller recognized early on that multisite churches find it challenging to balance empowering satellite campuses with a desire to retain campus homogeneity through central control.

Two decades after Schaller, in 2006, Geoff Surrat, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird published *The Multi-Site Revolution*. Their book offered a taxonomy of models built on the experiences of hundreds of churches who attempted to "multisite" in the twenty-plus years since Schaller's *Innovations*. They admitted, "There are as many models, seemingly almost as many as there are conversations about multi-site churches."⁹ Nevertheless, they believed most of them fit into one of the five models shown in table 2.

⁶ Brian Nathaniel Frye, "The Multi-Site Phenomenon in North America: 1950-2010" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 121-36.

⁷ Jamus Howell Edwards II, "Leadership Structures and Dynamics in Multisite Churches" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 36-37.

⁸ Frye, "The Multisite Phenomenon in North America," 137.

⁹ Geoff Surrat, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Revolution: Being One Church in many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 29.

Table 1. Lyle Schaller’s “multisite expressions”

Multi-Site Expression	Description	Examples Given
Downtown church with Satellite	“the downtown church with the satellite is little more than a preaching point, not a seven-day-a-week ministry center”	First United Methodist Church, Houston, TX
Urban Church	“the urban church with two or three or four off-campus meeting places”	None given
Relocation	“the use of this option as one step in an extended relation process”	First Community Christian Church, Columbus, OH
Multi-ethnic Urban-Suburban	“the predominately black central-city congregation and predominately Anglo suburban congregation”	None given
Key Church Strategy	“as a product of the Key Church Strategy”	First Baptist Church, Dallas, TX; Gambrell Street BC, Fort Worth, TX; First Baptist Church, Arlington, TX
Wounded Bird	“as an expression of the large congregation caring for the wounded birds”	First Baptist Church, Houston, TX
“Mothering Strategy”	“as a typical strategy for ‘mothering’ new missions ¹⁰ ”	Perimeter Church, Atlanta, GA

Table 2. Five models for multi-site churches

Model	Theme
Video-Venue Model	Creating one or more on-campus environments that use video cast sermons (live or recorded), often varying the worship style
Regional-Campus Model	Replicating the experience of the original campus at additional campuses in order to make church more accessible to other geographical communities.
Teaching-Team Model	Leveraging a strong teaching team across multiple locations at the original campus or an off-site campus
Partnership Model	Partnering with a local business or nonprofit organization to use its facility beyond a mere “renter” arrangement
Low-Risk Model	Experimenting with new locations that have a low level of risk because of the simplicity of programming and low financial investment involved but that have the potential for high returns in terms of evangelism and growth ¹¹

¹⁰ Frye, “The Multisite Phenomenon in North America,” 137.

¹¹ Surrat, Ligonon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 30.

Surrat, Ligon, and Bird presented a taxonomy that concentrated mainly on the sermon delivery method. In contrast, Schaller appeared more concerned with the relationship between the home church and the new campus.

A leap in internet technology between the early 1990s and mid-2000s undoubtedly played a significant role in how the multisite campus operated. Teaching was no longer necessarily handled at the campus level; it could be fed to the multisite campus location from the central campus. Still, many multisite churches continued the practice of having a local communicator. Tony Morgan explains why some churches continue to send out pastors from their central location to teach at their multisite campuses:

There are certainly short-term advantages to using live teachers at your first multisite location. Initially, it's cheaper because you don't have to invest in equipment for video capture and delivery. It also opens up more opportunities to broaden the teaching team. It also saves time because it's easier to send a person to teach than it is to acquire the equipment and build and train teams to operate it.¹²

The point Morgan makes is a good one; however, the short-term advantages may become disadvantages if they are allowed to play a part in the church's long-term strategy.

Churches that have live teaching at each campus often diverge over time becoming separate churches with distinct cultures and not one church in many locations. Moreover, unless a church already has a staff member it can send out to do the live teaching, it may find hiring another pastor more expensive than acquiring streaming equipment and training people to run it.

Morgan asserts that multisite churches fit into one of three broad models: the Franchise Approach, the Local Expression, and the Church Plant.¹³ The main difference

¹² Tony Morgan, "Multisite Messages: Why Churches Should Choose Video over Multiple Live Teachers," *Tony Morgan Live*, October 3, 2016, <https://tonymorganlive.com/2016/10/03/multisite-churches-video-over-multiple-live-teachers/>.

¹³ The Unstuck Group, "Multisite Toolkit: Resources and Tools to Help You Lead an Effective Multisite Church," 2018, https://theunstuckgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2019/03/Complete_MultisiteToolkit.pdf, 1-2.

between these three expressions lies in decision rights (see table 3). In the “franchise model,” the goal is to create copies of the original campus. Walking into any one of the campuses, an attendee will encounter the same experience. Campus pastors are similar to store managers in a retail franchise setting. The central or main campus dictates the calendar, programming, and ministry planning, while the campus pastors “implement plans, focusing as much time as possible on caring for people and developing leaders.”¹⁴ The “local expression” model affords campus leaders more latitude to make programming decisions, but the look and feel remain consistent across campuses.

The “church planting model” provides the most autonomy. These campuses are more akin to network churches than multisite campuses in that they share the same name and branding. However, campuses can alter their programming and ministries independent of the main campus to suit the campus locality’s needs. This multisite model is problematic. The “satellite” campus tends to drift away from the primary campus’s mission, values, and vision due to the lack of central control.

Table 3. Tony Morgan multisite models

	Franchise Approach	Local Expression	Church Planting
Teaching	Shared content, video	Shared content, different speakers	Different content, speakers
Worship	Same songs, creative elements	Same style, creative elements similar	Different styles, creative elements
Ministries	Same discipleship models	Same core programs	Different models, programs
Calendar	Same events, dates	Same events, different days	Sets own calendar
Culture/DNA	Same mission, vision, values	Same mission, values	Different mission, vision, values
Planning	Central planning ¹⁵	Mostly central planning	Very little central planning

¹⁴ The Unstuck Group, “Multisite Toolkit,” 1.

¹⁵ The Unstuck Group, “Multisite Toolkit,” 2.

Three Big Questions

Before adopting a multisite model, the church must answer three big questions, the answers to which help push the church towards a model. Likewise, denominational concerns may force the church to adopt one method despite its desire to lean toward another. The questions are, how will the teaching occur, what will the campus look like, and who makes the decisions?

How Will the Teaching Occur?

Video. Paul Alexander, who serves as the Executive Pastor for Sun Valley Community Church and as a consultant for The Unstuck Group, asserts that the sermon's delivery method determines whether a church should even be considered a multisite church. He writes, "If it's not on a screen, it's not multisite. It may be multi-congregational or even a family of churches, but it's not a multi-site church."¹⁶ His argument stems from the importance of leadership in teaching and maintaining church culture.

Alexander believes that a true multisite church should include two or more campuses that have the same culture. The only way to ensure that culture is reproduced is to have the same leader delivering the sermon on Sunday. While it is true that churches often take on the pastor's personality, it is less clear that delivering the sermon via video to multisite campuses is effective at transmitting culture. Nevertheless, his assertion, though hyperbolic, highlights how interrelated the three big questions are.

As Alexander points out, video teaching does have the advantage of ensuring that all campuses receive the same teaching. If each campus pastor delivers the sermon at

¹⁶ Paul Alexander writes,

The simple reason why is teaching. Nothing else in your church has the power to build the unique culture of your church in so much as teaching does. This is why people say the organization always takes on the characteristics and personality (culture) of the leader. When you have different people preaching at different locations, no matter how similar they are, no matter how good of friends they are, no matter how hard they work to be on the same page with the presentation, you're going to get a different culture. You're going to get a different church. (Paul Alexander, "If It's Not on a Screen It's Not Multisite," *Paul Alexander Blog*, June 26, 2016, <http://www.paulalexanderblog.com/leadership/if-its-not-on-a-screen-its-not-multisite/#.X-tAmdhKiUm>)

his site, global consistency becomes an issue. It is possible to have live instruction at each campus and avoid inconsistency, but those who advocate for the video method argue that the risk of diluting the culture is not worth the trouble.¹⁷

Another strength of this model is scalability. Due to budgetary concerns, multisite churches that employ the video rather than the live teaching model are more likely to grow past two campuses. Even the single-site church requires at least two communicators to prevent overtaxing the senior leader.¹⁸ In a live teaching model, as additional campuses are added, the need for communicators grows. Additionally, if the campus pastor is called on to preach, he is less likely to spend time building teams and shepherding the flock. Very few churches have the resources to augment the staff at the multisite campus to take over these critical duties.

Team teaching (parallel). Another method of sermon delivery that is gaining popularity among churches is team teaching. Team teaching may take place via video or live. The basic idea is that a group of leaders share the teaching. More than rotating pastors through the various campuses, team teaching requires that all of the teaching pastors assist during each phase of sermon preparation, from setting the calendar to writing the messages. As mentioned, the sermons may be recorded in advance, or the team's pastors may deliver them live.

Pastoral teams hold a distinct advantage over the single communicator in that team benefits from synergy. Craig Oliver implemented a team approach at his multisite church in Atlanta, and he argues, "Working together expands a team's scope because it is

¹⁷ As Edwards points out in his dissertation, "The senior leadership in multisite churches should be mindful of the need of their campus pastors and campuses to be able to mature and 'differentiate.'" Edwards, "Leadership Structures and Dynamics," 203. Employee fulfillment is crucial to retention. A campus pastor who feels like a company spokesman instead of a spiritual leader may seek greener pastures.

¹⁸ Vanderbloemen, "Why Pastors Shouldn't Preach More Than 40 Weekends Year," October 26, 2016, <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/pastors-preach-40-times-year>.

not limited to what individuals can do on their own. Rather, team members make their knowledge, experiences, and skill available to one another, which is part of the promise of sharing and working in collaboration.”¹⁹ Sermon preparation is often a lonely endeavor where the pastor may feel cut off from the rest of the staff. Team teaching allows the leader to engage his fellows, mitigating the sense of isolation.

Not every church is blessed with the resources necessary for team teaching. Creating teams of pastors who can work in harmony and with love and humility toward one another is never easy. After all, we see examples in the early church where strong wills led to clashes even among the disciples. Building teams is always a delicate matter, but even more so when the teams are comprised of equals. Imagine a war room filled with generals all trying to agree on a battle plan. A boardroom full of pastors trying to come up with a single sermon is analogous.

Live teaching (autonomous). Autonomous preaching differs from team teaching in that the individual pastor constructs his own version of the sermon. Sometimes the local pastor elects to teach based on the local congregation’s needs regardless of what the main campus is doing. There are several reasons to go with live autonomous teaching at the multisite campus. In fact, it may be the only option for churches when they first begin multisite operations due to the technical requirements of video streaming. In contrast, most churches have multiple staff pastors with the necessary skills who can be called on to teach, making live teaching the convenient option.

Besides the barrier to entry erected by technological demands, the church has to overcome the comfortability factor. Some congregations, especially those with a sizable older demographic, may balk at the idea of watching their pastor on a screen. However,

¹⁹ Craig L. Oliver, Sr., “Developing a Collaborative Preaching Team in a Multisite Ministry Context” (DMin thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2013), vii.

even younger demographics prefer live teaching to video.²⁰ Lifeway surveyed 1,001 American adults in 2013 to determine the preferences of church attendees. Sixty-five percent of respondents indicated a preference for live teaching, with less than 1 percent indicating a video preference. However, only 30 percent indicated that they would only attend church if the sermon were live. Interestingly, 47 percent of the unchurched persons surveyed said the delivery method would not matter.

One major caveat church leaders must be mindful of should they elect to go with autonomous live preaching is that it is much more challenging to keep the experience and, more importantly, the message consistent across multiple venues. There is a real danger of mixed messaging and missional drift when campuses set their own preaching agenda. Morgan offers a warning for churches who go this route: “Don’t be surprised if rather than being one church in multiple locations, you end up becoming multiple, stand-alone churches.”²¹

What Will the Campus Look Like?

The answer to “what will the campus look like?” involves much more than interior decorating, although fixtures, furnishings, and equipment constitute part of the solution. The attendee experience varies depending on the model of multisiting chosen by the church. Will all the campuses be identical? Will branding be consistent across the organization? How much freedom will the individual campuses have to make changes to reflect a local context? All these questions must be answered in advance. Using Morgan’s three multisite models from table 3, one can explore how the different models might address these concerns.

²⁰ Lifeway Research, “Research: Americans Prefer In-Person Preaching to Video,” December 17, 2013, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2013/12/17/research-americans-prefer-in-person-preaching-to-video/>.

²¹ Morgan, “Multisite Messages.”

Franchise. Branding is the keyword in the franchise model and successfully franchised multisites expend great effort designing, implementing, and protecting the brand. Branding involves much more than just developing a logo. Everything about the campus, the venue, paint schemes, and worship style is intentionally consistent across the sites.

Nick Kofahl, who heads up sales and marketing for Summit Integrated Services—the branding team behind Lifechurch.tv—sums up the importance of intentional branding:

It’s not enough to depend solely on the look and feel of the service itself. With branding, signage, and wayfinding, we have an opportunity to set expectations of what visitors are getting themselves into, how they should navigate the space, and to offer them a level of experience and excellence that triggers and establishes a degree of comfort.²²

In this model, it is evident that very few, if any, decisions are left to the individual campuses. Instead, the entire site is planned down to the doorknobs before the ground is broken on a new campus. Then, once the site is up and running, the branding team at the central campus dictates the look, feel, and substance of everything across the entire organization.

Returning to the statement regarding how the three big questions are interrelated, it becomes clear that the franchise model fits best with the video model of sermon delivery. In the franchise arrangement, the organizational goal is for the attendee to experience a comfort level that results only from familiarity. Consequently, the worship, the message, and even the furniture remain consistent.

Local expression. The local expression is sometimes referred to as the multi-congregational model. Whereas the franchise multisite feels like one organism existing in

²² Erica Cottrill, “Designing a Campus Master-Brand,” January 28, 2019, https://church.design/cover_stories/designing-a-campus-master-brand/. As of the date of this writing, Lifechurch operates thirty-six campuses using the franchise model.

different locations, the local expression feels like different parts of one body working symbiotically to function as a whole.

For example, the sites share creative elements and worship styles but are permitted to choose different songs. Much of the branding is duplicated, but the campuses may have their version of the branded material. Likewise, the central campus creates some communication content, but the local site is allowed to fill in the details to make it site-specific. In short, there is an effort to link the sites through branding and feel—programming and worship style—while allowing the campuses to experiment with communications content within a prescribed framework.

Church planting. Church plants can reap the benefits of brand recognition but often elect not to because the initial intent was to create a campus that will become a stand-alone entity. One particular version of this model that is becoming increasingly popular is the family or network church. These individual churches are not necessarily connected to the main site, but they can be, at least for a while. More often than not, churches will merge or join the network and begin to take on aspects of the main church.²³

Just how much the individual church looks and feels like the main church depends on the network. Some churches associate so closely sharing branding, communication, and programming that they resemble a franchise campus. In contrast, other network churches share missional or theological goals but minimal branding other than a brief mention on their website’s footer indicating that they associate themselves with a particular network.²⁴

²³ An example of a network church is Celebration Church. See Celebration Church, “About Us,” accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.celebration.org/about/>.

²⁴ Not all network church sites fit neatly into a single category. For the purposes of their study, Stetzer and Bird use two major types, “Intra-denominational networks operate as a sodality to assist denomination/movement churches, helping them partner together for best practice and resources. . . . Inter-denominational networks often form around a common ministry paradigm.” Edward Stetzer and Warren Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States: Research Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities,” *Christianity Today*, accessed March 28, 2021,

Who Makes the Decisions?

As with teaching and branding, decision-making differs across the multisite spectrum. Just as teaching and branding questions are interrelated, so too is the question of who makes decisions. One multisite church might centralize decision making, some lean on a matrix structure of straight and dotted lines, and others offer nearly autonomous decision making. Getting the answer to the decision-making question correct is critical in multisite operations. Perhaps Alexander said it best:

Starting new multisite campuses is actually the easy part. Starting something new is usually exciting, attracts new people, and typically has some kind of momentum associated with it. Those are all things that make church leaders salivate. However, managing all of the complexities of inter-campus relationships, communication, decision making, reporting, influence, and building an effective central service team that serves the campuses is the more difficult part.²⁵

Before exploring the different approaches to decision-making various multisite organizations take, some space must be given to a discussion of matrix management.

Excursus on matrix management. Matrix management structures began appearing in corporate entities in the 1950s as an alternative to the traditional hierarchical structures that dominated American businesses. Linn C. Stuckenbruck describes the matrix organization:

One in which there is dual or multiple managerial accountability and responsibility. However, the term matrix means quite different things to different people and in different industries. In a matrix there are usually two chains of command, one along functional lines and the other along project, product, or client lines. Other chains of command such as geographic location are also possible.²⁶

The growing complexities of private and public sector management, caused by shortened product life cycles, distributed manufacturing, and multinational management and

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/assets/10228.pdf>, 27. Still others are more like local expressions in that “they are birthed out of the heat of the lead pastor and have been adopted by the congregation” (28).

²⁵ Paul Alexander, “6 Lessons I Have Learned from 6 Years of Multisite Leadership,” November 21, 2017, http://www.paulalexanderblog.com/leadership/6-lessons-ive-learned-from-6-years-of-multisite-church-leadership/#.X_OrV9hKiUk.

²⁶ Linn C. Stuckenbruck, “The Matix Organization,” *Project Management Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (September 1979), <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/matrix-organization-structure-reason-evolution-1837>.

production teams, rendered the traditional hierarchical structure obsolete. Consequently, the matrix structure became the dominant arrangement in corporate entities around the Western world.

Today, the matrix structure has become “ubiquitous and unexceptional” with nearly “Eighty-four percent of US employees Gallup surveyed . . . matrixed to some extent.”²⁷ With the proliferation of matrix organizations in both business and governmental sectors, it comes as little surprise that churches, especially multisite churches, would co-opt and attempt implementation.

Since matrix organizations attempt to solve complex problems and no two problems are exactly the same, no two matrix structures will be identical. Still, there are similarities to be found in matrixed organizations. Figure 1 represents a simple matrix structure. As in a traditional hierarchy, the company leader rests at the top. Unlike a conventional chain of command, however, the matrix structure organizes around projects.

Sometimes the project is temporary, and the management structure for the project dissolves upon the project termination. Other times, the project management structure remains, but the project changes or takes on a new focus. Notice how the straight reporting line travels down from the top to the departmental level and the projects. This indicates that the leader has ultimate control over the departmental and project levels, although their day-to-day involvement is limited.

The second level resembles the traditional hierarchy. Figure 1 depicts three typical lanes or channels: production, marketing, and finance. Management lines continue down into each of the respective channels as they would in a standard corporate structure. However, these vertical lines are now dotted and not straight, indicating that the direct control of these business units is shared.

²⁷ Michael Bazigos and Jim Harter, “Revisiting the Matrix Organization,” January 1, 2016, <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/revisiting-the-matrix-organization#>.

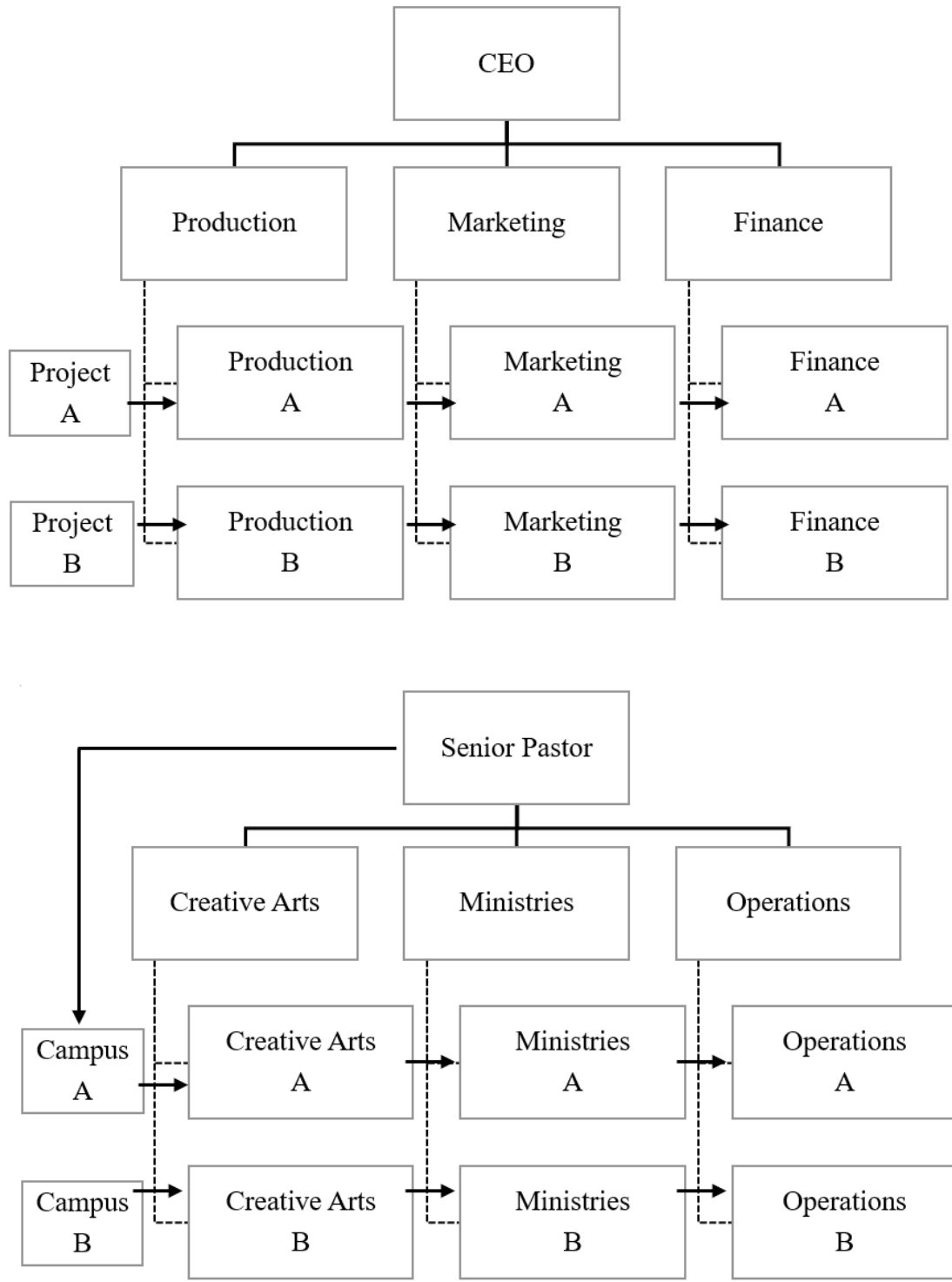


Figure 1. Matrix management structures

Straight lines of control cross from the left of the chart, forming a matrix. This model indicates that it is the head of the project who exercises direct control over the

production, marketing, and finance of his project. However, the vertical managers still wield considerable influence by setting global policies and procedures for their lane. For example, a VP of Marketing decides, with some input from the product level managers, the global marketing plan for the entire company. The individual project managers are, by and large, not free to change the plan once it has been implemented. The marketing staff within each project reports directly to the project manager and indirectly back up to the VP of Marketing.

Translating this structure to a church environment is a relatively straightforward exercise. Taking the place of production, marketing, and finance in figure 1 are creative arts, ministries, and operations. Instead of Project A and Project B, there is now a Campus A and a Campus B. The dotted and straight-line relationships remain intact. The vertical manager sets policies, chooses global programming, and decides on matters concerning worship and communications. While the campus pastors manage the implementation of creative arts, ministries, and operations in their local context.

Striking a balance. Matrix structures and multisite churches seem to be a good fit for one another. The same concerns that motivated corporations to adopt matrix structures likewise motivate the multisite church; namely, maintaining a consistent global mission and vision while promoting innovation and empowering managers at the campus level. Getting the balance of power right is no easy task. Edwards explains the tension to be managed between upper and middle management:

The senior leadership team has the arduous task of being closely enough involved in the operations of each campus to ensure that campuses rightly embody the DNA of the overall church. At the same time, this senior leadership team must empower and legitimize campus leadership in such a way that they do not feel unnecessarily restricted and compromised of their unique calling and giftedness.²⁸

The surest way to shorten a campus pastor's tenure is to make him feel that his God-given gifts are being underutilized. Turnover in campus leadership can sink a campus.

²⁸ Edwards, "Leadership Structures and Dynamics," 4.

As the face and primary inculcator of organizational DNA, the campus pastor's role is crucial to the multisite campus's long-term viability. When asked about the importance of the multisite leader, Glenn Akins of The Baptist General Association of Virginia argues, "You simply cannot underestimate the importance of the site pastor. The wrong leader can tank all the good preparations. And, of course, that has implications for the connectedness between campuses."²⁹

Decision-making: franchise. The franchise and local expression models often both employ a matrix model of management. With the former, the central campus maintains stricter controls. There will be some dotted and straight-line arrangements, but so much of the central planning comes from the main campus that multisite campus leaders function more like store managers. They exist to ensure that the central policies are carried out but have little say in what those policies are. Sometimes, in these structures, the central ministry leaders directly control the campus ministries bypassing the campus pastor altogether. If not handled carefully, campus staff may feel as if they answer to two masters. Additionally, campus pastors can be quickly marginalized, leading to disenchantment.

Still, the franchise approach is popular and effective, especially when care is taken to detail the decision-making processes. The key is to decide early on where the decision-making power lies. Figure 2 represents a decision-making continuum. The three general types of multisite lie at discrete points along the line. The autonomous and identical points lie on the far ends, with the middle point representing a balanced approach. The franchise approach trends toward the autonomous point, whereas the local expression occupies the middle ground.

²⁹ Glenn Akins, e-mail to author, January 25, 2021.

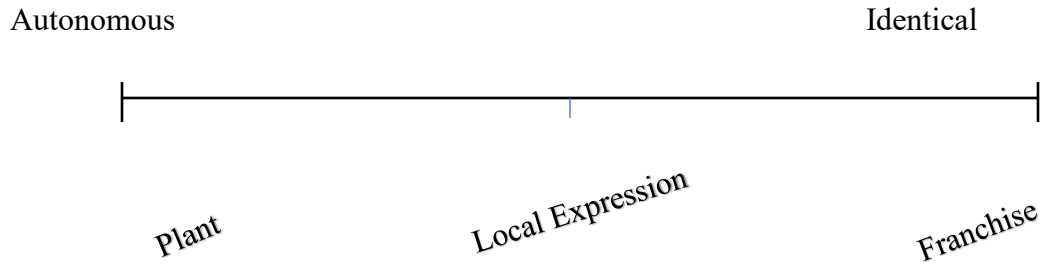


Figure 2. Decision-making continuum

The local expression. As mentioned, the local and franchise approach both employ a matrix management model. The latter seeks to create clones of the original campus. Everything is exactly the same, down to the brand of juice used in communion. However, the former gives the campus leader more freedom to choose. For instance, the worship style will be the same as the main campus, but the song choices on any given Sunday are left up to the campus worship leaders. Likewise, although each campus mirrors the central campus in its programming, the scheduling is left up to the campuses to decide based on the congregation’s demands.

Perhaps the most significant difference between these first two models is their approach to sermon delivery; the sermon may or may not be presented via video. If the campus pastor has the freedom to preach live—this is often ad hoc and is not a fixture of this model—he will nevertheless preach from the same material. Rarely will the campuses preach an entirely different sermon or series of sermons than the central campus. When that happens, churches begin to behave more like autonomous plants than local expressions of the same church.

Plant. In the plant version of the multisite church, the bulk of the decision-making is done at the campus level. More often than not, the campus plant will eventually end up as a separate church entity. If they stay attached in some manner, then it is as an affiliated network church sharing little more than an affinity for one another and a shared vision of what the universal church should be.

The multisite plant campus will receive guidance and resources during its launch and infancy.³⁰ It is not uncommon for the central campus to send a pastor to the multisite plant trained and explicitly groomed for its leadership position. Consequently, the campus pastor's way of thinking will be indirectly influenced by that experience. So, these campuses will, for a time at least, resemble the central campus. However, the campuses will begin to diverge after some time, winding up as two distinct entities.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the various ways churches have attempted to multisite over the past thirty years. Much has changed since the earliest days, but one thing remains constant: growth. In 2001, fewer than 200 multisite churches existed in North America. In 2019, that number exceeded 5,000.³¹ Churches of all sizes are attempting multisite, and for good reasons. According to Warren Bird, multisite churches reach more people, have more volunteers in service as a percentage, baptize more people, and activate more people into ministry than their single-site counterparts.

Moreover, "One out of three multisite church campuses come as a result of a merger."³² Presumably, many of these churches that have surrendered and became campuses of other congregations would have closed their doors permanently had it not been for this alternative. Perhaps Ed Stetzer sums the success of multisite the best: "Multisite churches are on the rise. This is not a fad, this is not some sort of temporary

³⁰ Stetzer and Bird, "The State of Church Planting," 28.

³¹ Warren Bird, "Big News: Multisite Churches Now Number More Than 5000," *Leadership Network Blog*, January 9, 2019, <https://leadnet.org/big-news-multisite-churches-more-than-5000/>.

³² Bird, "Big News."

trend—multisite churches are here to stay. It’s like the megachurch now—just a part of our church landscape—the new normal.”³³

³³ Ed Stetzer, “Multisite Churches Are Here, and Here to Stay,” *The Exchange with Ed Stetzer*, February 21, 2014, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/february/multisite-churches-are-here-to-stay.html>.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the preparation and implementation of the project described in chapter 1. The purpose of this project was to create a multisite campus master plan for The Mount in an effort to reach the people in the communities in and around Stafford, Virginia. More specifically, because of the importance of organizational clarity, the project aimed to build an organizational structure that adequately served the current multisite ministry as well as the future ministry once additional campuses were added. To these ends, four project goals were enumerated. The first goal was to create a best practices survey to be sent out to multisite churches in an effort to gain insight into their ongoing operations. The second goal was to revamp the current organizational structure for the existing multisite campuses. The third goal was to design a scalable structure from the revamped plan for the future of multisite ministry at The Mount. The fourth and final goal was to create a launch plan for future campuses that utilized the proposed management hierarchy. The project implementation commenced July 1, 2021, and continued through September 30, 2021.

Introduction

The past two decades in the United States have seen an explosion in the number of multisite churches. Unfortunately, too many of these sites have closed prematurely due to poor launch planning and execution.¹ Although the multisite church concept is relatively new, enough of these ventures have launched for best practices to emerge. This

¹ Jim Tomberlin, "16 Ways Multisite Churches Fail," *OutreachMagazine.Com* (blog), April 23, 2019, <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/megachurch/42206-16-ways-multisite-churches-fail.html>.

project sought to understand the many challenges of launching a new multisite campus and avoid the mistakes of the churches that failed to overcome these challenges.

To better understand the challenges inherent in launching a successful multisite campus, it was necessary to seek out leaders at churches with thriving multisite ministries. Their wisdom, gleaned from success and failure, helps the attentive multisite leader avoid common pitfalls. For example, many multisite launches have failed because the main campus was located too close to the multisite campus. The Mount made this easily avoided mistake.

In addition to avoiding costly errors, the church must navigate critical issues to have the best possible chance at success. Namely, the multisite church must (1) determine the sermon delivery method that will work best for their demographic; (2) decide the level of contextualization each campus will be allowed; and (3) decide where decision-making authority lies. This final consideration could be the most critical to the long-term health of the entire organization.

Project Research

It was always the intention of this project to build upon the best practices found in healthy multisite churches. Therefore, I designed a survey to provide insight into the organizations whose structures successfully supported their operations.² Initially, the survey was sent out to Baptist churches in Virginia with active multisite ministries. The Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV) provided a list of churches, having compiled them from an earlier study on multisite churches performed by the BGAV. Unfortunately, the list proved to be dated and woefully incomplete. Many of the churches no longer maintained multisite campuses or had closed their doors altogether. Others had temporarily consolidated their campuses due to operational challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the survey was expanded to include churches from five

² See appendix 6.

states in the eastern United States. The churches selected had kept their multisite operations running throughout the pandemic, which was a sign that their multisite operations were strong. In total, forty-three surveys were sent out, and twenty-two were returned. However, only twenty were completed in full.

For this project, a mixed-method approach was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data.³ In the survey, quantitative data was collected using a Likert scale with anchor points of 1 and 6, 1 being “strongly disagree” and 6 being “strongly agree.” In addition, qualitative data was collected using short-answer items that added texture and clarified the qualitative items. In total, three sections divided the survey.

Section 1

Ministry insights. The first section, “Ministry Insights,” collected qualitative data. The purpose of this section was fourfold. First, it ascertained whether the church was still engaged in multisite ministry. As mentioned, many churches closed their multisite campuses in response to the pandemic. The second was to determine the role of the person responding to the survey to ensure they were in a position to speak insightfully and authoritatively. The third was to gauge the size of the church. Finally, this section identified the sermon delivery method.

The churches ranged in size from 1,100 to 17,000, with a median of 3250—both physical and online attendance were included in the tallies. The number of campuses the respondents operated varied from 3 to 19, with a median of 5.5. Table 4 represents the wide variety of multisite ministries who responded. Table 5 illustrates the median calculations. One takeaway from the tables is the fact that multisite churches are often large churches. Of the 300,000 protestant churches in the US, only 2.5 percent have weekly

³ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 215.

attendance in excess of 1,000.⁴ Larger churches, whether multisite or not, require larger staff. Hiring staffing levels lead to increased complexity and the need for organizational clarity. Multisite operations add further complexity, expanding the demand for a management structure that ensures clarity and accountability and promotes a growth mindset.

Table 4. Ministry insights: attendance and number of campuses

Church	Question 6. What is the average total Sunday worship attendance across all of your campuses?	Question 5. How many campuses (including online) does your church have?
1	1100	4
2	1300	3
3	1400	3
4	1500	5
5	1900	7
6	2000	4
7	2000	6
8	2000	6
9	2500	6
10	3000	3
11	3500	4
12	3500	4
13	4000	3
14	4000	3
15	4000	6
16	6000	10
17	8000	7
18	8500	11
19	10500	7
20	17000	19

Campus sizes ranged from 275 to 1500, resulting in a median campus attendance of 633.

⁴ Hartford Institute for Religion Research, “Fast Facts about American Religion,” accessed October, 4, 2021, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong.

Table 5. Ministry insights medians

Church	Campuses	Attendance	Attendance per Campus	Sermon Live (1), Live and Video (2), Video only (3)
1	4	1100	275	2
2	3	1300	433	1
3	3	1400	467	1
4	5	1500	300	1
5	7	1900	271	2
6	4	2000	500	2
7	6	2000	333	1
8	6	2000	333	2
9	6	2500	417	2
10	3	3000	1000	1
11	4	3500	875	2
12	4	3500	875	2
13	3	4000	1333	2
14	3	4000	1333	2
15	6	4000	667	3
16	10	6000	600	3
17	7	8000	1143	2
18	11	8500	773	2
19	7	10500	1500	2
20	19	17000	895	2
Median	5.5	3250	633	

The final question in this section of the survey concerned sermon delivery. As table 6 shows, “live and video” are the most frequently used method, with 65 percent, “live” at 25 percent, and “video only” at 10 percent. The “live and video” option requires the highest levels of staffing and a broader scope of expertise. Churches that deliver live teaching at each campus may not need the video support staff, but they will need to ensure that each campus has competent teachers. Moreover, having multiple live teachers comes with its own challenges, as outlined in chapter 3. Churches that use the video model have the advantage of producing the content ahead of time and then pushing it out to the campuses. On the surface, this model would seem to require the least amount of staff, but pre-producing Sunday services and then delivering them to various locations demands specialized staffing resulting in an organization structure every bit as complex as the other two models.⁵

⁵ LifeChurch, “Life.church Locations,” accessed October 4, 2021, https://www.life.church/locations/?utm_source=life.church&utm_medium=website&utm_content=Header-Locations&utm

Table 6. Sermon delivery

Survey Statement	Live	Live and Video	Video Only
7. How are sermons delivered at your church	5	13	2

Section 2

Decision making. In this second section of the survey, the goal was to gain insight into how multisite churches make decisions. For example, who is responsible for the vision and direction of the church? Who makes ministry-level decisions for the multisite campus? What types of decisions should the Campus Pastor be empowered to make? What organizational structures best accommodate multisite church ventures?

The first two questions dealt with vision and direction. I wanted to know if determining vision and direction was solely the domain of senior leadership or if the input of campus leaders was considered.⁶ Some churches allow for heavy contextualization—the adaptation of plans to reflect the local needs and demographics of the satellite campus. Others promote a strict franchise model where each campus marches in lockstep with the main campus.

A Likert scale was again used to quantify responses, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 6 “strongly agree.” Table 7 shows that the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that senior leadership is responsible for vision and direction, but also that consideration for the satellite must be taken into account when determining the overall church vision.

[campaign=Life.Church](#). LifeChurch, based in Edmond, OK, has thirty-eight campuses across the US, all of which get their sermons on demand via internet. The sermons are shot on Thursday and produced for consumption later in the week using a “simulated live” experience. Needless to say they have a very complicated management structure, but they manage to keep mission clarity and brand identity. Churches of this size tend to become a network rather than one organization with multiple campuses. As mentioned in chap. 3, network churches have decentralized structures because they are a voluntary association of churches that share some resources and a general vision, but otherwise do business as separate churches.

⁶ *Senior leadership*, for the purposes of this project, was defined as the top-level leadership team. It may be one person (senior pastor) or a group of pastors and directors, or even lay-leaders and elders. Later in the survey they were asked to describe this structure in more detail.

Table 7. Vision and direction

Survey Statement	Average (N=20)
8. Senior Leadership has the final say when it comes to the vision and direction of the church.	5.65
9. Senior Leadership believes local context must be considered when determining the direction of ministry at the campus level.	5.05

Statements 10-12 sought to ascertain to what extent campus leadership was empowered to make ministry decisions at their respective campuses. The survey supports the conclusion that these multisite churches tend to utilize a hybrid approach to decision-making, although the overall balance of power favors central control. Interestingly, neither the overall attendance nor number of campuses correlate to a particular locus of control. For example, the smallest church in the survey scored this statement as a 4, as did the second largest.

Table 8. Ministry decisions

Survey Statement	Average (N=20)
10. Senior ministry leaders make decisions for every campus.	2.7
11. Campus leaders make some ministry decisions for their campus.	5
12. Campus leaders make all ministry decisions for their campus.	2.25

It has been said that if you want to know where the power lies, follow the money. While this might be a bit of a crass overstatement, at least we hope it is when it comes to churches, there is truth in the idea that those who direct the spending wield a considerable amount of power. Statement 13 asked respondents, the majority of who were executive pastors, about budgeting and spending authority. Only one church indicated “strongly disagree” to statement 13. The majority of churches selected either “strongly agree” (9) or “agree” (8). So, while the senior leadership may ultimately decide the direction and control the spending, the campus leader’s input on budget allocations is considered.

Table 9. Budgets

Survey Statement	Average N=20
13. Senior Leadership seeks campus leader input in budgeting and allocation of resources.	5.15

In chapter 3, the concept of matrix organization was explored in-depth. Statement 14 sought to uncover how pervasive matrix structures are in the surveyed churches. A plurality of respondents agreed that a matrix management structure is present in their church. The Mount operates as a matrix organization as well, but we lack the necessary clarity to ensure smooth operations; the ownership of specific processes is murky. As a result, territorial disputes too often erupt, and resources are wasted resolving them. Moreover, these disputes have a negative effect on staff morale, even for those not directly involved. By taking the time to define and redefine decision-making trees, leadership at The Mount can avoid resource wasting and morale-killing disputes over territory.

Table 10. Matrix structures

Survey Statement	Average (N=19)
14. The organizational structure for multisite operations includes straight and dotted line reporting. For example, the campus worship leader reports to the central worship leader and to the campus pastor.	5.05

One church. It is easy to feel insignificant or disconnected at large churches like those surveyed, especially when the staff numbers in the hundreds and the campuses are geographically distant. To mitigate against disconnectedness, leadership must make every effort to unite the organization under one mission and one set of values. Statements 15–18 asked respondents to rate how well they think the church is doing uniting the church under one banner.

Statements 16 and 17 returned nearly perfect consent (strongly agree). The 3.25 average on statement 18 may appear to undercut the 5.8 average from the previous two statements, but I think not. It merely illustrates that senior leadership understands that campus leaders desire their campus to be one part of a larger body and have the ability to adapt to the local context.

Statment 15 may seem out of place since it is the only one that directly addresses the relationship between the central and multisite campus. However, campus ministries should operate as training grounds where junior leaders can get experience and seasoning, eventually earning an internal promotion to a more senior role. Bringing in new talent to take over senior positions has advantages, but there is always the risk of a bad hire. When designed and operated effectively, a leadership pipeline within the church can mitigate the risk of external hiring. Moreover, the concept of one church body is strengthened by the practice of training junior leaders for eventual promotion to senior positions within the body.

Table 11. One church

Survey Statement	Average (N=20)
15. The church has a leadership development process for campus leaders with the goal of preparing them for a larger role within the church.	3.7
16. Our campuses come together for global staff meetings.	5.8
17. Senior Leadership believes that all campuses should feel like they are a part of one church.	5.8
18. Senior Leadership believes that each campus should feel connected but remain independent.	3.25

Question 20 may not seem related to staff unity as it deals with interior design and branding. However, the appearance of church campuses speaks to unity of a sort. The survey inquired to what extent an effort was made to make the campuses physically similar.

The survey responses indicate that multisite churches understand the importance of brand consistency. A church brand should reflect its identity, mission, and how it wants

to be perceived. Additionally, consistent interior design creates familiarity. A congregation knows that whichever campus they choose, they can expect a similar experience. Finally, consistency helps tie the body together across campuses, promoting a feeling of unity—one church in many locations.

Table 12. Brand consistency

Survey Statement	Average (N=20)
20. An effort is made to keep branding and interior design consistent across our campuses.	5.4

The big question. Statment 19 asked the churches to rate how well the multisite management structures were performing. This question was intentionally left until the end of this section with the hope that the previous questions would prompt them to spend some time thinking about the overall effectiveness of their organizational structure. respondents indicated they were mostly in agreement.

Perhaps the responses do not appear as a ringing endorsement, but they show that despite being satisfied with what they have created, these churches understand that additional tweaks to their structures could make the overall structure more efficient..

Table 13. Management structure efficacy

Survey Statement	Average (N=30)
19. Our management structure works well for our multisite church.	4.6

Section 3

Church polity and structure. The final section of the survey required short answers. The first requested information regarding the role of elders. The second asked respondents to describe their church organizational hierarchy. Because of the qualitative

nature of the questions, the answers are summarized here and appear in full in appendix 6.

Respondents were tasked to “briefly describe the role of elders in your church.” The results were both expected and surprising. Due to the size and complexity of these organizations, I expected that most churches would respond that they utilized elders as guardrails for the organization’s overarching mission and direction, which turned out to be the case. I did not expect that 25 percent of the churches would have no elders (3) or skipped the question (2), presumably because they do not have elders and therefore could not provide a short answer. One church responded that they were not sure what role the elders played. Only 1 church indicated that it was elder-led. Another appeared to give the elders more than an advisory role but less than complete control, stating that the elders were the “primary vision/direction setters in the church with the vision/teaching pastor and executive pastor as part of that board.” Overall, the churches tended to lean toward a staff-led, elder-protected governance model.

Statement 22 asked respondents to describe the organizational hierarchy beginning with the senior pastor. Below are three examples that broadly represent the responses to, “Starting with the Senior Pastor, please describe the organizational hierarchy at your church (for example, Elder, Senior Pastor, Pastor, Directors). Please include your Campus Pastor in the hierarchy.”

Church A. “Lead Pastor reports to Directional Elders/Executive Pastor reports to Lead Pastor/ XP of Campuses reports to Lead Pastor/ Campus Pastors report [*sic*] to XP of Campuses/ Multi-Campus Directors report to the Executive Pastor.”

In figure 3, the elders occupy the top position in the hierarchy, indicating an elder-led church. In some cases, the high-level leaders, including the senior pastor and the executive pastor, sit on the elder board. Still, other churches indicated that no staff sits on the elder board. The degree of control the elders wielded varied from church to church. Leadership teams, sometimes referred to as senior leadership teams, appear in at least 11

church hierarchies. Nearly every church in the survey (N=20) stated that dotted and straight-line reporting occurred in their organization. Typically, the ministry leaders (adult, family, worship) have straight lines to the staff in their ministry, but the direct control will shift on Sunday to the campus pastor. Of the 17 churches responding to statement 22, 6 utilize something similar to that described in figure 3.

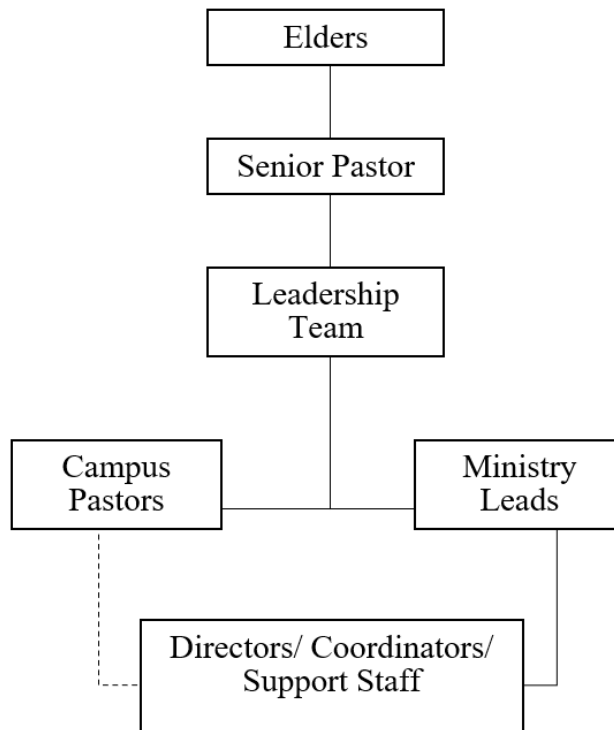


Figure 3. Elder led multisites

Church B. “Senior Pastor, Senior Leadership Team, Department Heads and Campus Pastors, Staff.”

Figure 4 illustrates a staff-led, elder-protected model. Elders fill an advisory role in this model, with the senior or lead pastor occupying the top of the hierarchy. However, the remainder of the structure closely resembles the elder led model. In addition to filling the top role, the senior pastor will usually sit on the senior leadership team. In some cases, the senior pastor will be responsible for teaching and vision while leaving the

operations to the other leadership team members. However, in one instance, a church indicated that the campus pastors reported directly to the senior pastor while the other staff and pastors reported to various members of the senior leadership team.

In this instance, the ministry staff still report to their lead as well as to the campus pastor. The importance of clearly defining the relationship of ministry staff to the person above them in the hierarchy was described in detail in chapter 3, but it is worth mentioning again. It behooves the senior leaders to spell out the nature of these relationships and determine, in advance, who takes the lead in the various matters facing the ministries and campus leaders, and staff. Eight of the 17 churches who responded to this statement utilize something similar to that described in figure 4.

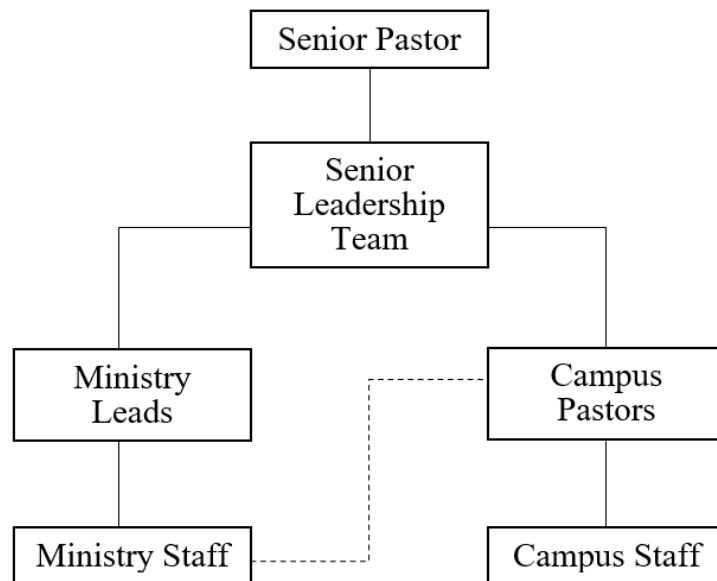


Figure 4. Elder protected, staff led multisites

Only three of the churches (N=17) indicated that their church had no elders. More concerning than the fact these churches operated without elders was that only 1 of the 3 had a leadership team. In that church, the lead pastor still occupied the top spot, but he also sat on a leadership team that included the executive pastor, discipleship and ministry director, and network director. The other two churches had neither a leadership

team nor elders. This structure can be problematic due to a perceived or actual lack of accountability for those at the top. Churches that elect to implement a steep hierarchy, similar to the one represented in figure 5, operate more like a sole proprietorship than a New Testament church.

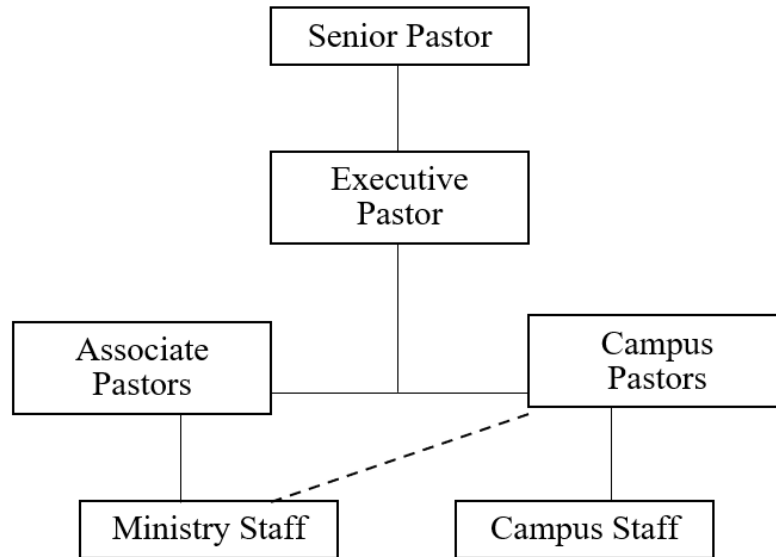


Figure 5. No elders, staff led

Building the Organization

The survey supplied only some of the information that The Mount needed to revamp the organizational hierarchy. The survey information was used in conjunction with some of the church's ongoing work to address the inefficiencies of the existing structure. This pre-project work included a season of strategic planning that was used, in part, help the church gain the necessary situational awareness to make informed decisions.

An area of concern routinely uncovered during strategic planning was organizational clarity, especially as the church expanded through multisite operations. Adding more complexity by multiplying campuses before addressing issues with the church structure would be foolhardy. Two immediate obstacles to clarity to overcome were

departmental reporting at the campus level and the span of control for senior leadership. Both issues presented unique difficulties and required different approaches.

Span of Control

Within the challenge of span of control were nested two sub-challenges—one easily solved if the second was first resolved. The Mount is, unfortunately, no stranger to management turmoil. One leader assumed control over a department that arguably was unrelated to the department he already lead. Another leader found himself in the unenviable position of taking over an additional department because the leader in charge struggled in that role. Both cases resulted in an increased span of control for these senior leaders. Each of these pastors now controlled two departments. The first pastor led worship and communications, while the second led operations and adult ministry. In a church of The Mount’s size, each of these departments should have a separate leader.

Solving the span of control problem proved to be a difficult task. It was by no means insoluble, but it required adding two positions and convincing the pastors to give up control of a department so that new leaders could take over. The elders and personnel committee approved a plan to create and hire a digital strategist to lead the communications department and a discipleship pastor to lead adult ministries.

The discipleship pastor was an internal hire, and he quickly transitioned into that role. However, the creative arts pastor resisted hiring a digital strategist and remained the head of worship and communications.⁷ Therefore, splitting these departments had to wait until a later date.

Departmental Reporting- Matrixed

The Mount struggled with determining decision-making rights. The campus pastor felt that he needed more control over the staff than the sending campus leaders

⁷ See appendix 2 and 3 for an expanded org chart.

currently controlled. The panel of experts who adjudicated the current organizational chart appeared to agree that a matrix structure was warranted.⁸ They rated the chart found in appendix 3 as requiring more attention. Therefore, some control was granted to the campus pastor as indicated by the dotted lines from the campus pastor to the worship leader and family leader. My preference was that the campus pastor has a straight line rather than a dotted line reporting relationship.⁹ As The Mount adds new sites, God willing, the need for matrixed reporting structures increases. The organizational charts representing this expansion illustrate how this would play out.¹⁰

The Launch Plan

When this project commenced, the hope was that a new campus could be launched before its culmination. The desire was to ascertain if the Launch Plan (LP) would perform as designed. Unfortunately, timing was not on my side. However, The Mount has opened two campuses in the past, so the LP used for this project was built on the successes and failures of earlier efforts.¹¹ The LP was sent to a panel of experts for evaluation. Their responses were positive and can be found in appendix 8.

⁸ See appendix 8. In a follow-up email to his rubric submission, Glenn Akins writes, “Another way to think about it (and you already have) is using a matrix defined by site/location and then the shared function that cut across and support each of these sites.”

⁹ Andrew Segre in a text message regarding matrix reporting, agrees: “Also, your org char [sic] needs to have all straight lines to CP (Campus Pastor).” At a later date the Family Ministry senior leader, ceded direct control of her staff member to the campus pastor, resulting in much clearer communication.

¹⁰ See appendix 4 and appendix 5.

¹¹ See appendix 9. This LP has gone through several revisions over the past few years. Pastor Andy LaValley led the charge for our first launch. His plans were revised by pastor Andrew Segre before he moved on to another multisite church. I created a LP for the launch of our Fredericksburg Campus that concentrated on the renovation and build-out. The LP for this project is the latest iteration. As our experience with multisite launches increases, I suspect it will be furthered tweaked. Also, our internal procedures for various departments have changed. For example, communications now requires six week lead time for production. Working with some county building officials proves to be hit or miss as well depending on the county. Their cooperation can drastically affect the timing of a launch.

It was beyond this project's scope, but it would be helpful for the leaders responsible for the various ministries found within the LP to create a LP of their own that granularizes the church-wide plan. These plans could be added to an electronic document available for future launches. The LP should be updated yearly or prior to the launch of each additional campus.

Conclusion

Overall the project ran smoothly. The survey responses from the twenty church leaders who completed them were filled with wisdom and insight, which informed the construction of the organizational charts contained herein. The feedback on the charts and LP was mixed but unsurprising. The negative responses, which I thought were entirely on point, will be discussed in chapter 5. Moving forward, The Mount has some organizational challenges to confront but should be in a good position to attempt launching additional campuses if it is God's will.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATING THE MINISTRY PROJECT

Introduction

At the initiation of this project, the world was a much different place. No one could have predicted the effects a global pandemic would have on the church. However, any student of history is aware that the church has endured repeated earth-shattering challenges over the past two millennia. Indeed, pandemics, racial strife, and contentious politics are hallmarks of history. The church has seen it before and, through God’s will, has prevailed.

Nevertheless, doing ministry during times such as these is new for most church leaders. After all, the western wing of the church has enjoyed a relatively quiet and comfortable period for the past fifty years, perhaps lulling the church into a sense of security and complacency. Meanwhile, the pandemic raged on, and global disruptions continued. Churches were forced, quite literally, to close their doors. As the storms subsided, the hope was that the “business” of the church would return to normal, but that did not happen.¹

Church leaders discovered that the attendance habits of their congregants have changed.² Is this the new normal? No one can say for sure. However, The Mount’s attendance numbers track with data from the Barna survey. If this trend holds, The Mount’s

¹ Kate Shellnutt, “Why Church Can’t Be the Same after the Pandemic,” *Christianity Today*, June 21, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/july-august/church-after-covid-pandemic-trauma-tension-healing-together.html>.

² Barna Group, “One in Three Practicing Christians Has Stopped Attending Church During COVID-19,” accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/new-sunday-morning-part-2/>.

multisite strategy will need to adapt. That being said, much of the work performed as part of this project can be scaled and modified to support any strategic changes.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to create a multisite campus master plan for The Mount in an effort to reach the people in the communities in and around Stafford, Virginia. To fulfill this project's purpose, I directed my efforts to meet the following goals. The first goal was to create a best practices survey to be sent out to multisite churches in an effort to gain insight into their ongoing operations. The second goal was to create an organizational structure for the current multisite campuses of The Mount. The third goal was to develop a scalable organizational plan for future expansion. The fourth goal was to create a launch plan for future multisite campuses at The Mount. Once these goals were met, The Mount was prepared to expand multisite operations in Northern Virginia.

The purpose of the project—if I were to phrase it differently—was to help The Mount develop a plan for spreading the gospel into areas in Northern Virginia. That purpose will always be valid. It should be noted that planting multisite campuses is not the only method The Mount uses to help expand the kingdom of God. It is, however, the method in which The Mount has seen success. Therefore, we will continue to move forward with multisite operations.

Evaluation of the Projects Goals

For the most part, the goals were successfully achieved, but at least one result was less than satisfactory. I discovered that the project's second goal could only be fully realized if the senior staff members who comprised the Lead Team agreed to implement the changes recommended by the research. Moreover, I would need to have the requisite authority to ensure that the changes were implemented. Although these conditions were secured prior to the project's initiation, circumstances beyond my control intervened once

again. The Senior Pastor resigned, giving only thirty days' notice. His departure coincided with the sabbatical of one of the other members of the Lead Team. To further complicate matters, the newly appointed Discipleship Pastor accepted a post with another church. These vacancies made it challenging to implement change and caused a fair amount of chaos on the Lead Team.

Once the Lead Team member on sabbatical returned to work, we began to assess the situation and make plans to fill the vacancies. Thankfully, the elders recognized that the Lead Team needed support and stepped in to quiet the fractious environment. If that intervention had not occurred, the goal relating to the organizational structure would have been in jeopardy.

Evaluating the Current Organizational Chart (OCC)

The project's first goal was to build a new organizational chart that would support current multisite operations. Chapter 1 detailed some of the problems with the current model; namely, the reporting structure was unclear and was not scalable. Some changes were made to the existing organizational chart and submitted to the expert panel for review. Not surprisingly, their responses were mostly critical.

Table 14. Current organizational chart review

Organizational Chart Current (OCC)				
1=insufficient 2= requires attention 3= sufficient 4= exemplary	Resp.1	Resp.2	Resp.3	AVG.
OCC addresses reporting hierarchy	2	3	4	3.33
OCC clearly organized	2	2	3	2.33
OCC scalable	1	1	1	2.00
OCC appropriate for current organization size	1	1	1	2.00

The panel responded positively to the question regarding whether the OCC addressed the reporting hierarchy, but at the same time rated the OCC unclear, unscalable, and inappropriate for the church's size. The panel was highly suspect of the

span of control issue and warned that investing leaders with too much responsibility was likely to cause challenges to the organization and the individual.³

One panel member was especially critical of the OCC's organization clarity, calling it "way too convoluted."⁴ Another panel member who addressed the same issue mentioned that the Campus Pastor needed to control his campus staff directly. The third panel member rated the OC clarity slightly higher but was not as optimistic regarding scalability.

Clearly, none of the experts thought the OCC could support further expansion and would need to be reworked. They also seemed to agree about the OCC's ability to support the current organization, rating it "requires attention." One panel member commented colorfully and aptly, "You've gotten bigger than your britches." None of these responses were surprising; I was aware of the issues when I sent out the OCC for review.

If the OCC's inadequacies were known ahead of time, why were they not corrected before sending it out to the panel? Because you go to war, as it were, with the army you have and not necessarily the one you need. I corrected some of the span of control and campus reporting issues, but some corrections remained out of reach due to a lack of resources.⁵ The OCF addresses these issues, but it remains to be seen if the resources will materialize.

³ See appendix 8. In regard to scalability, the panel member responded, "Expansion to multiple campuses will put strain on the Lead Pastor, until a designated campus pastor can be established at the original/sending campus." And to the question regarding if the OC was appropriate for the current organization size she answered, "The Creative Pastor has a lot of oversight in the current chart. This could also put a strain on the organization."

⁴ See appendix 8.

⁵ In the org chart prior to the OCC there was no Discipleship Pastor. This meant that the Executive Pastor (me) was responsible for the Operations department and, what was called at that time, Adult Ministries, which also included multisite operations. We created and hired the Discipleship Pastor position and shifted the responsibilities to that pastor. Unfortunately, he has since moved on to another church and his replacement has not been hired. The responsibility of the ministry has shifted back to the Executive Pastor. As has already been stated, this is unsustainable even if further expansion were to stall.

Evaluating the Future Organization Chart (OCF)

The second goal of this project looked to a future when multisite operations have expanded and an entirely new way of managing operations would be needed. The OCF is actually two organizational charts representing how The Mount would scale to deal with the complexities incurred as additional campuses are added. The OCF would also eliminate the shortcomings of the OCC.

Table 15 represents the responses from the expert panel, which they rated highly. The lowest score on the rubric comes from respondent 1 in his answer to the question of scalability. Other than that outlier, the ratings landed in the 3 to 4 range, indicating that they see the charts for the future expansion as sufficient to exemplary. It is perhaps not appropriate to compare the OCC and the OCF directly since they illustrate two separate stages of development. But based on the scores, it is clear that the expert panel sees the OCF as an improvement on the OCC and that it is likely to serve the organization better when it is implemented.

Table 15. Future organization chart review

Organizational Chart Future (OCF) 1=insufficient 2= requires attention 3= sufficient 4= exemplary	Resp.1	Resp.2	Resp.3	AVG.
OCF addresses reporting hierarchy	3	3	4	3.33
OCF clearly organized	3	4	4	3.67
OCF scalable	3	4	4	3.67
OCF appropriate for future expansion	2	4	4	3.00

It should be noted that the OCF illustrates a much larger organization. Making the jump from three to four campuses necessitates a radical restructuring. While the campuses can continue to take full advantage of an economy of scale, the restructuring comes at a cost. The labor budget increases dramatically at this stage as the multisite campuses can no longer expect the sending campuses to share human resources. Each campus requires a Campus Pastor, Family Ministries leader, Adult Ministries leaders, and

so on. Many churches will revisit their sermon delivery models at this stage, which may result in additional staff if they move away from a video model.

Evaluating the Launch Plan (LP)

The final goal of this project was to create a LP to serve as the template for future campuses. This iteration of the LP was several years in the making, going through several revisions as we learned from success and failure. The version created for this project sought to balance flexibility with standardization. While there are bound to be unique challenges encountered when launching a new campus, most of the process will remain the same so this version will serve as the final template.

The LP is designed for an Easter campus launch. The plan can be adapted for a Christmas launch as well. It focuses on ten lanes over the course of twelve months leading up to the launch date. Although the plan is very detailed, many of these lanes will have a leader who will further granularize the plans for his lane. For example, the leader in charge of site selection and renovation will have a plan in the form of a Gant chart that will be hundreds of items deep.⁶

The expert panel agreed that the LP met or exceeded sufficiency for all six evaluative categories, with the question statement “LP timeline is sufficient for project” tied for the highest rating at 3.67 out of 4.0. The lowest score was assigned to the statement “LP addresses internal launch promotion” 3.0 out of 4.0, which is still within the sufficiency range. The next lowest score was in response to the statement regarding site selection. Like the internal launch promotions task, the site selection task is one that requires a separate detailed plan of execution. The expert panel understands that internal promotion is an essential component for a successful launch and seems to indicate this

⁶ I recommend using project management software although it can get expensive depending on the size of the organization. Microsoft Teams has some functionality and is a cheaper option. It integrates seamlessly with Office 365 and Sharepoint. It does not have all the bells and whistles of Asana, Monday, or Smartsheet. Excel has some good Gant construction timeline templates which I have found useful.

with its rating. No doubt they would like its importance to be reflected in future iterations of the LP.

The two statements that received a rating of 3.37 were in response to issues related to human resources and team culture. For any launch to succeed, the campus needs strong leaders. Some will be paid staff members, while others will be volunteers sent from existing campuses or explicitly recruited for the launch. Whatever their status, they need to be in place early on in the launch cycle, and once brought onto the team, they must be well-trained, cared for, and disciplined.⁷

Table 16. Launch plan review

Launch Plan (LP)	Resp.1	Resp.2	Resp.3	AVG.
1=insufficient 2= requires attention 3= sufficient 4= exemplary				
LP addresses site selection	3	3	4	3.33
LP addresses staffing requirements	3	4	4	3.37
LP addresses core team building prior to launch	3	4	4	3.37
LP addresses internal launch promotion	2	3	4	3.00
LP addresses community engagement	3	4	4	3.67
LP timeline is sufficient for project	3	4	4	3.67

The other statement receiving top marks was in regard to community engagement. As a church, The Mount is decidedly outward focused. Ten percent of our giving is directed back out into the mission field, most of it locally. We spend a great deal of time choosing a host community for our next campus. Once a location is selected, the

⁷ More than any other topic covered in the LP, the issue of staffing (paid and volunteer) received the most comments. One panelist commented on the hiring of the Campus Pastor near the beginning of the LP: “The early campus role [hire] is critical, so the early transmission of DNA is a great plan.” And in regard to bringing the core team together she writes, “Consistent core team meetings is great for team building.” Glenn Akins has sent me several emails over the years as I have consulted with him about multisite staffing. He adds, “I can’t over emphasize the character/role of the site pastor. It’s always about the leader. Some campus pastors build the site around themselves, perhaps due to lack of support from the original campus. Some campus pastors implode due to lack of supervision and accountability. Some internal staff are promoted to primary leader role but can’t break the 100 attendance barrier.” Glenn Akins, email to author, January 25, 2021.

church seeks to become integrated into that community. We have block parties, meet with local officials, get to know the schools, and perform prayer walks. The desire to saturate the neighborhood with our presence is reflected in the LP, and the panel noted that with their scores.

The LP, although not perfect, was a success with an aggregate average of 3.4 out of 4.0. The church hoped to get a chance to live test the LP by launching a campus during this project. However, Covid-19 and staff turnover presented insurmountable challenges. God willing, the climate will be hospitable in the near future, and The Mount will be able to add an additional campus using this LP as the template.

Strengths of the Project

The most successful element of the project was the LP. It is likely the element that will be used most extensively by the church as we expand operations. Again, that is not to claim it is without fault. Indeed, it has gone through several iterations over the past seven years, and it is likely to be further refined, amended, and adjusted to meet future challenges.

The LP balances detail with flexibility. Because The Mount chose the franchise model, its campuses, by design, deliver a consistent experience. The rigidity of the franchise model appears to constrict the multisite campuses leaders somewhat by removing their freedom to adapt elements to the local context. Therefore, the LP was designed to allow the campus leadership to control certain aspects, such as the details of the community engagement. In other words, the LP dictates that all campus launchers must include a prolonged and intense period of community engagement leading up to and following the campus launch. However, how the campuses decide to carry out that engagement is left primarily up to them.

Another strength of the project was the OCF. Organizations must adapt to changing conditions. The OCF addresses the structural challenge awaiting The Mount as it adds additional campuses. As stated above, the organizational structure that is adequate

for the multisite church with two to three campuses is unable to effectively operate as the church adds its fourth, fifth, and so on. The OCF is scalable and sufficient to support the church as it crosses the threshold of three campuses, but as the feedback suggests, some questions still need to be addressed. The most pressing of these will continue to be the span of control—how flat or vertical the organization should be. Directly related to this question are the issues of dotted and straight-line reporting and freedom for the campus leaders to contextualize.

Weaknesses of the Project

Our current organizational chart is not sustainable. Several leaders have a span of control that exceeds their capabilities or is stretching them to the point that burnout is a concern. Additionally, the reporting structure for campus staff remains unclear. These issues have to be corrected even if the corrections amount to temporary measures.

The first weakness requires the church to make further investments in staffing. The only way to cut the workload and thus decrease the span of control is to add staff. Unfortunately, the current level of giving will not support an expanded payroll. The church will either have to find additional sources of income or make sacrifices in other areas to increase staffing.

The second weakness requires senior leadership to define decision rights. Drawing lines on an organizational chart and then distributing the chart to the staff is not enough. Leadership must work out the exact details of who and how decisions are made at the campus and central levels. As it turns out, this is a common problem for multisite churches. Knowing the potential hazards of unclear reporting, I prioritized consulting with other churches to find out how they dealt with this issue.

The third weakness was a faulty presumption regarding authority to implement the necessary changes discovered during the research. I believed I had secured said authority, but when it came time for implementation, I discovered that this was not the

case. Turn over at the top of the org chart did not help. I will ensure that the stakeholders agree to and put in writing their agreement in the future.

The fourth weakness was that some portions of the project were initially designed to be implemented during the launch of a new campus. Once the plan was implemented and some time had elapsed I could have evaluated the efficacy of these time-sensitive components of the project, namely, the LP and the OCF. I am reasonably confident that both of the LP and the OCF will work once an opportunity to implement them occurs. This confidence is based on the opinions of the expert panel that evaluated the instruments.

What I Would Do Differently

Surprisingly, I found the data gathering element of this project to be more challenging than I imagined. Crafting the surveys in such a way as to get the information I needed without making it so long that no one would complete it was difficult. My respect for data collection professionals grew over the past twelve months. Parts of the survey were well crafted and yielded good data, but that data lacked granularity, especially in the area of decision making. Follow-up interviews with the churches I surveyed would have led to a better understanding of the survey data.

For the surveys, I used Survey Monkey. The site helps the user build research instruments that avoid the common errors researchers make during data collection. It also collects and helps interpret certain types of data. It is not a free resource, but it was worth the expense. One issue I encountered with the site was that the church leaders I contacted did not complete the survey if I used Survey Monkey as the sender. In fact, when I first sent it out using Survey Monkey as the sender, I received only one response. Follow-up reminders yielded no additional responses. Yet, when I used my church email server as the sender, recipients responded almost immediately. If those church leaders are anything like me, they skipped right over the email Survey Monkey generated, thinking it to be

spam. I would still use the site for building surveys and collecting the results, but I know now to send the link to the survey using a personal or church email.

Theological Reflections

This project ran during the most trying time the church, and indeed global society, has endured since WWII. For several months, The Mount was unable to gather due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. Like many churches, we relied on technology to spread the Word through online services. Like other churches, we learned that virtual gatherings are no substitute for in-person services.

God desires community with us, and He has placed a need for community in us. Human beings are not meant to alone and isolated. It might be argued that any social interaction is better than none, but God wants us to come together as His church to meet in His name so that He may convene with us.

This is not the only time in the modern era where churches have been forced to close their doors and forgo gathering, nor is it likely to be the last time. God's love endures, and so shall His church. In times like these, the church must remember the promises of Scripture. Indeed, Scripture is replete with examples of God's children suffering and enduring. Paul's trials and tribulations are prime examples.

Doing ministry during the pandemic as our western society slides further down the slope of moral relativism can be a soul trying experience. However, if we remember His promises while keeping our present trying circumstances in historical perspective, then we will persevere and, God willing, thrive.

Personal Reflections

I have often wondered how I am still alive, given my history of disastrous life choices. So how does a homeless thirty-year-old atheist find himself doing doctoral work at Southern Seminary two decades later? The quick and accurate answer is grace.

I know just how bad life can be. I know what it is like to deal with addiction and mental illness. I know what it is like to sleep on trains and park benches. Constant physical and psychological anguish were once the hallmarks of my existence. Gratitude and humility, I hope, are the marks I bear now. I am not afraid of a pandemic, and I am not afraid of death. I believe He saved me so that I would courageously lead His church during times such as these.

Thoughts on the Future of the Multisite Church

Going into 2020, the Christian church in the United States was already declining. The number of Americans who identified as Christians had fallen from 78 percent to 63 percent.⁸ The latest numbers from the Pew Research Center paint a bleak picture not only for the Christian church but for all religious organizations. Pew Research claims that “the religiously affiliated share of the public is 6 percentage points higher than it was five years ago and 10 points higher than a decade ago. . . . Christians continue to make up a majority of the U.S. populace, but their share of the adult population is 12 points lower than it was in 2011.”⁹

It is still too early to determine the long-term effects of the pandemic on the religious life of Americans, but we do know that currently 33 percent of practicing Christians are opting out of in-person gatherings.¹⁰ In addition, Pew Research from 2021 shows that 68 percent of religiously affiliated people attend a service either seldom,

⁸ Gregory A. Smith, “About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated,” Pew Research Center, December 14, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

⁹ Smith, “About Three-in-Ten.”

¹⁰ Barna Group, “One in Three Practicing Christians.”

never, or a few per year, while only 31 percent gather monthly or more.¹¹ So, while they may be attending, it is not regularly.

Among US churches, only the largest congregations experienced sustained growth over the past five years.¹² Forty-nine percent of churches with at least 501 but less than 1,500 in total attendance experienced at least 5 percent growth since 2015. The numbers are even better for the churches of more than 1500, with 71 percent of those congregations experiencing at least 5 percent growth over the same period. The statistics compiled for the FACT Survey “indicates a significant concentration of the majority of attendees in larger congregations and reflects a dynamic shift that is increasing rapidly over time.”¹³ Should these trends hold, the largest congregations will have to carry the lion’s share of the burden if the church is to gain back ground.

According to the FACT survey, larger congregations have distinct advantages over smaller churches in areas that affect church growth and vitality:

While certain obvious characteristics are linked to increased size such as size and fullness of the sanctuary and greater annual income and expenditures, other traits are also strongly related to larger numbers of participants. Other less overt qualities, such as a desire for greater diversity of the membership, a greater willingness to change, a clearer sense of mission and purpose, and a greater sense of spiritual vitality contribute greatly to the flourishing of the religious community. . . . Larger congregations are also much more likely to have increased use of technology, greater percentage of participants engaged in recruitment, and a great number and wider variety of programs for their members and for the community at large. A greater percentage of congregations over 250 are actively involved in community service and engaged in both ecumenical and interfaith worship, fellowship and community

¹¹ Smith, “About Three-in-Ten.” Born again Evangelicals are much more likely than their non-evangelical counterparts to attend services monthly, 63 percent versus 32 percent. Moreover,

Eight-in-ten born-again evangelical Protestand pray daily, say [sic] religion is very important in their lives. This is cause for some celebration, but the rejoicing is tempered by the fact that the born-again evangelical is not the demographic the church is trying to move into a relationship with God. Our mission field has grown substantially in the U.S. over the past ten years with 20% of adults no claiming that their religion as “nothing in particular.”

This represents an increase of 6 percent.

¹² Faith Communities Today, “FACT 2020 Survey Results,” October 25, 2019, <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/fact-2020-survey/>.

¹³ Faith Communities Today, “FACT 2020 Survey Results.”

service activities. They also tend to have a more diverse and representative balance of all races and ages including more young persons and a smaller percentage of older adults.¹⁴

It is not surprising that larger churches have the edge, given their larger budgets and larger staff. Larger churches can hire staff to specialize, whereas smaller churches need pastors to cover multiple ministries. Multisite churches, the majority of which are connected to megachurches, can further specialize by opening campuses in neighborhoods in order to further diversify the church's demographic.

The church must use every tool at its disposal to advance the kingdom. It must adapt its strategies to meet the challenges of each generation. If multisite churches are to be a part of the future, then the multisite strategy will also have to adapt. Tony Morgan opines that COVID-19 has changed how multisite churches approach launching new campuses saying, “And given what we’ve experienced over the last year, I don’t think any large churches are going to invest in building bigger and bigger buildings.”¹⁵ Even though giving has remained strong in the US throughout the epidemic, there are still concerns about whether it will remain so. Large-scale construction is risky in the best of times, and multi-million dollar expansions during a time when many churches, including The Mount, sit half-empty on Sunday extend that risk further than what wisdom dictates.

Morgan goes on to make an important point about the critical role multisite churches may play in the future of the kingdom:

Large churches with multiple smaller venues—that are closer to where people live and that offer multiple options for service times—will be better positioned for a post-COVID world than trying to gather larger crowds in the same space at the same time. Multisite strategies could actually be a huge opportunity for an increase in kingdom impact.¹⁶

The Mount's current attendance patterns appear to support Morgan's conjecture.

¹⁴ Faith Communities Today, “FACT 2020 Survey Results.”

¹⁵ Tony Morgan, “The Future of Multisite Strategy— Episode 182 | The Unstuck Church Podcast,” *TonyMorganLive.Com* (blog), February 24, 2021, <https://tonymorganlive.com/2021/02/24/the-future-of-multisite-strategy-episode-182-the-unstuck-church-podcast/>.

¹⁶ Morgan, *The Future of Multisite Strategy*.”

Table 17. Attendance pre-covid versus current (November 2021)

	Stafford	Fredericksburg	El Monte
February 2020	1635	179	44
November 2021	829	133	51
Increase/Decrease	-49%	-26%	+16

The Stafford campus has experienced the most significant drop in attendance. Moreover, this number has remained flat for several months, indicating that those who would come back to in-person services at the Stafford campus have already done so. The Fredericksburg campus and El Monte (the Hispanic church plant that operates like a multisite venue) have seen steady gains since reopening in July of 2020. So, perhaps, Morgan is correct that people feel more comfortable sitting in smaller venues with fewer people. Although no survey has been run on attendees, anecdotal evidence supports this conclusion.

Conclusion

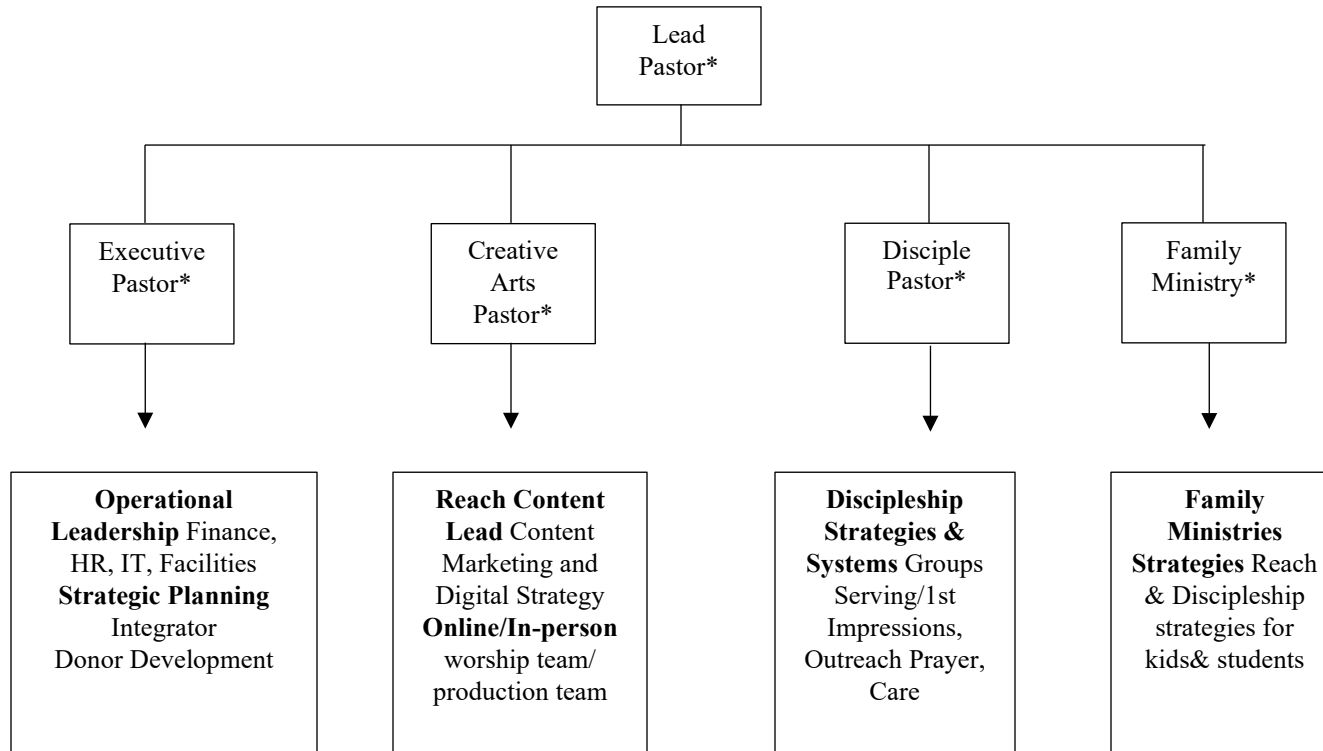
There is little doubt that the church in the US is facing a litany of challenges. Spreading the gospel in an increasingly secular and perhaps apathetic society will require bold solutions and creative approaches. Leaders will need to be flexible and adaptable to meet these challenges. Large churches appear to have the edge when it comes to the willingness to change, but they face the challenge of a society perhaps wary of crowds. Smaller multisite venues, like The Mount, has already launched and, God willing, will launch in the near future, may be the best option for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ in this frightened and lost world.

APPENDIX 1

MULTISITE EVALUATION TOOL

Multisite Plan Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Launch Plan (LP)					
LP addresses site selection.					
LP addresses staffing requirements.					
LP addresses core team building prior to launch.					
LP addresses internal launch promotion.					
LP addresses community engagement.					
LP timeline is sufficient for project.					
Organizational Chart Current (OCC)					
OC addresses reporting hierarchy.					
OC clearly organized					
OC scalable					
OC appropriate for current organization size					
Organizational Chart Future (OCF)					
OCF addresses reporting hierarchy.					
OCF clearly organized					
OCF scalable					
OCF appropriate for future expansion					

APPENDIX 2
TOP-LEVEL STRUCTURE: CURRENT



* Denotes member of the Senior Leadership Team

Figure A1. Top level structure: current

APPENDIX 3
EXPANDED ORGANIZATIONAL CHART: CURRENT

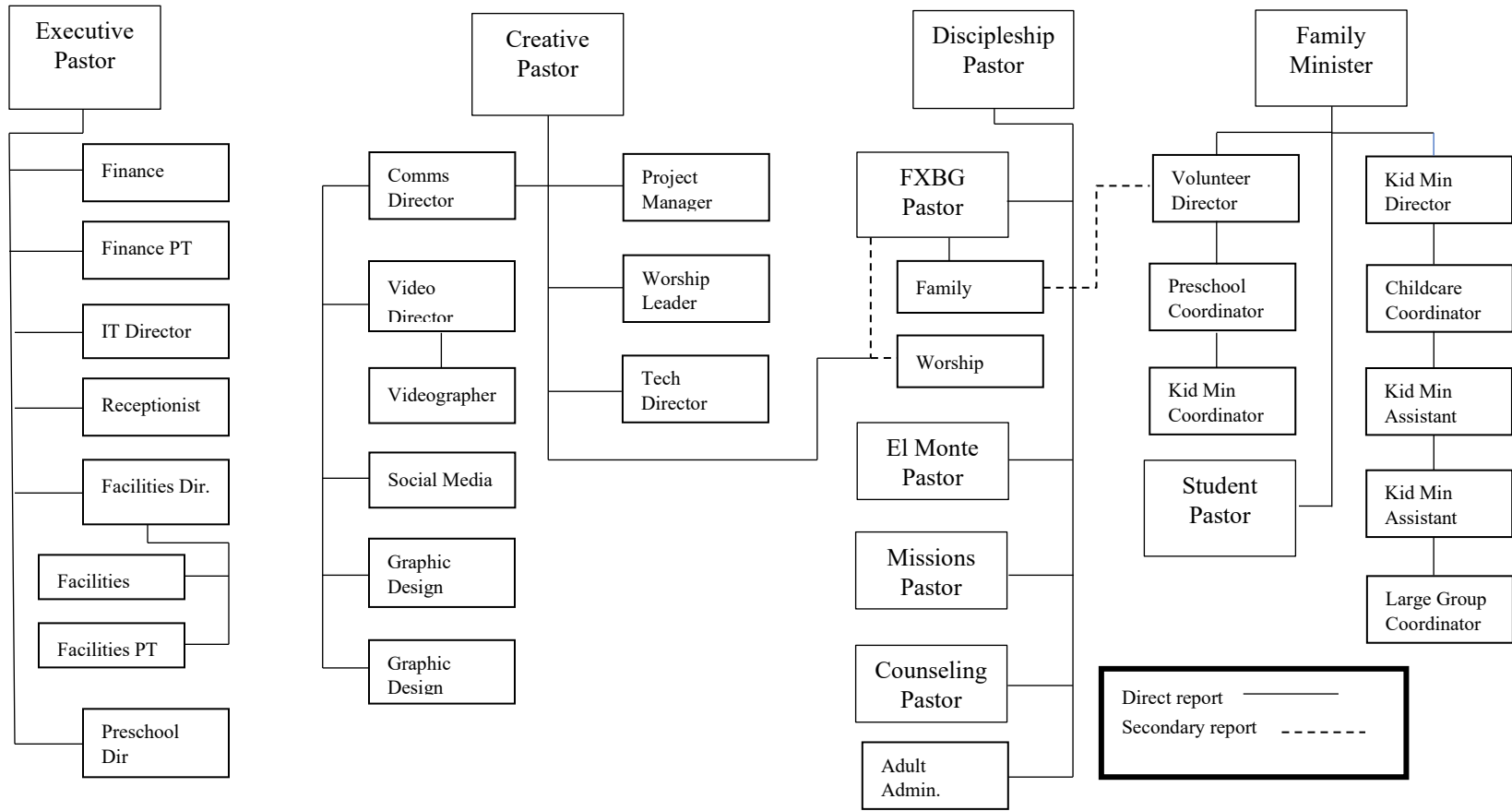


Figure A2. Expanded organizational chart: current

APPENDIX 4
EXPANSION PHASE 1

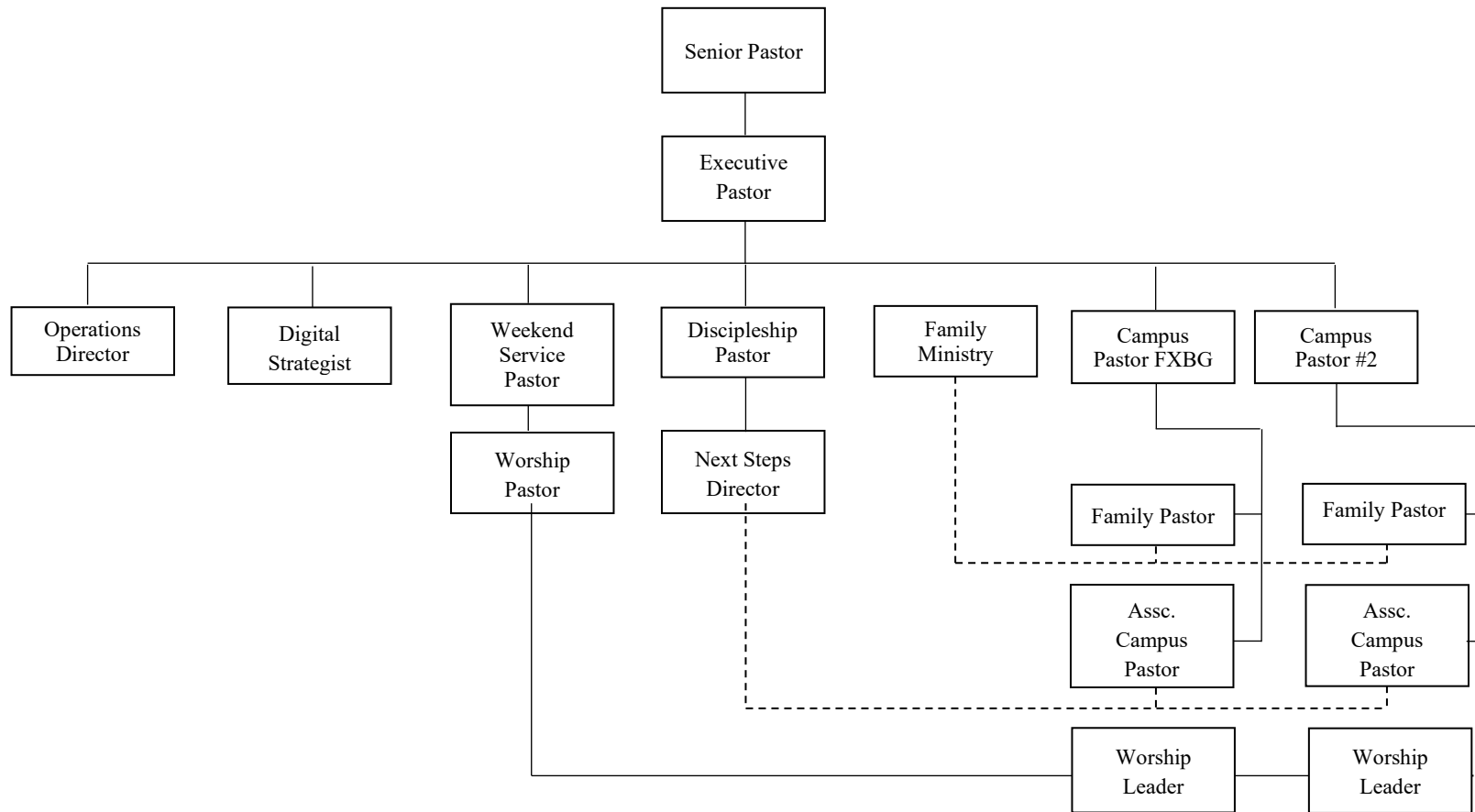


Figure A3. Expansion phase 1

APPENDIX 5
EXPANSION PHASE 2

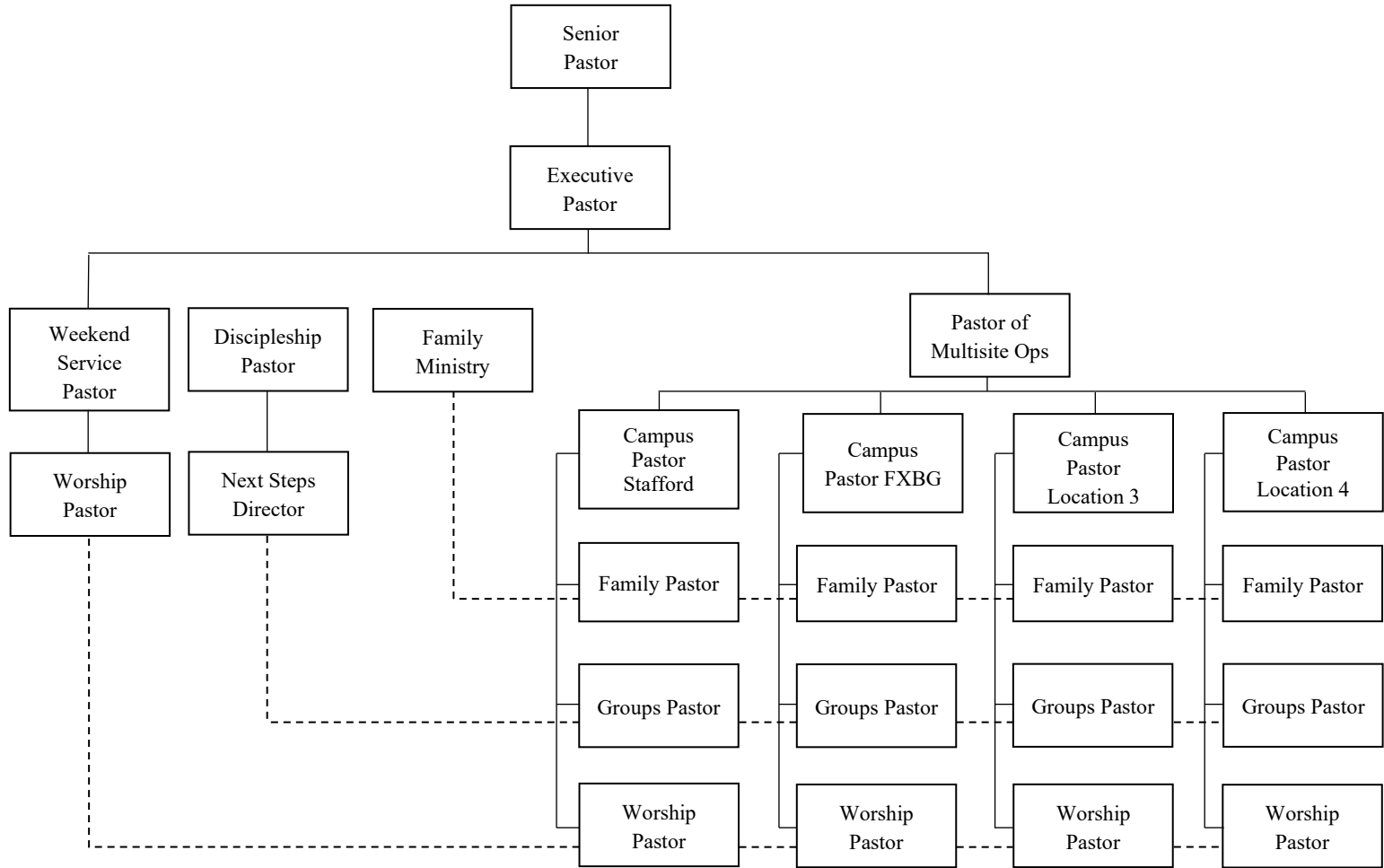


Figure A4. Expansion phase 2

APPENDIX 6

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 22

Q22: Starting with the Senior Pastor, please describe the organizational hierarchy at your church (for example Elders, Senior Pastor, Pastors, Directors). Please include your Campus Pastor in the hierarchy.

Table A1. Responses to question 22

Church ID#	Response
1	Strategy team (made up of elder/pastors), campus pastors, directors, coordinators. We have a board with fiduciary responsibilities.
2	Elders (non staff), Sr Pastor, Executive Team lead by Executive Pastor. Dept Heads report to members of Ex Team. (all campus pastors report to Sr Pastor directly)
3	Senior Pastor, Executive Team, Pastors, Directors
4	Pastors lead the efforts of the ministry while having accountability to the lay Deacons. Lead Pastor Direct reports include Campus Pastor, Executive Pastor and Head of School. Non english speaking campus pastors report to Missions Pastor.
5	Elders // Teaching Pastor & Executive Pastor // Campus Pastors & Directors
6	All staff reports (eventually) to the senior pastor. Executive Pastor Campus Pastor
7	Senior Pastors Senior Leadership Team Department heads and Campus Pastors Staff
8	Steering Team (like elders), Strategic Leadership Team (includes Sr Pastor and his appointees), Strategists and Directors, Campus Pastors, campus Coordinators
9	Lead pastor reports to Elders, Executive Pastors report to Lead. all others report to one of the two Exec.
10	
11	Senior Pastor, Elders Leadership Team Campus Pastors Ministry Directors
12	Lead Pastor, Executive Pastor, Discipleship and Ministries Director (the Executive Pastor and Discipleship and Ministries Director sit on the same level), Campus Pastors, Assistant Campus Pastors, Ministry Pastors/Directors, Ministry Coordinators, Ministry Leaders and volunteers. We also have a Network staff that provide relational connection and resourcing for network churches. The Network Director role also sits on the ELT.

Table A1 continued

Church ID#	Response
13	Senior Pastor Exec. Pastor Associate Pastor Pastoral Staff (incl. Campus Pastors) Office & Support Staff
14	Elders, Senior Pastor, Chief Team (COO and CFO), COO - Campus Pastor, Director of Communications and Ministry Support, Ministry Leaders/Pastors CFO - Pastor of Building Stewardship and Logistics, Finance Team, Creative Arts Pastor/Leader
15	Lead Pastor reports to Directional Elders / Executive Pastor reports to Lead Pastor / XP of Campuses reports to Lead Pastor / Campus Pastors report to XP of Campuses / Multi-Campus Directors report to Executive Pastor
16	We are an elder-led church with no senior pastor The leadership team makes day-to-day operational decisions largely by consensus Campus pastors and staff implement the strategy in their context
17	
18	
19	Senior Pastor, Executive Team, Strategic Leadership Team, Campus/Global Pastors.
20	Elders - Senior Pastor - Strategic Leadership Team - made up of 11 individuals from both the Ministry Leadership Team and Expansion team - Management Team - campus pastors sit on the MT and report directly into SLT through me

APPENDIX 7

MULTISITE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES SURVEY

1. Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to ascertain the various management structures of multisite churches. This research is being conducted by Brian Bennett at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for inclusion in a doctoral project on the topic mentioned above.

For the purposes of the research, you will be asked to fill out a survey. Your time is valuable, and as such, the survey is brief. The survey will take approximately fifteen to twenty minutes to complete.

Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of the survey, and checking the appropriate box below you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Ministry Insights

2. Is your church engaged in multisite ministry?

Yes

No

3. What is the name of your church? _____

4. What is your current position? _____

5. How many campuses (including online) does your church have? _____

6. What is the average total adult Sunday worship service attendance across all of your campuses? _____

7. How are sermons delivered at your church?

Live preaching.

Live preaching and video.

Video only.

Decision Making

Directions: Please respond to the statements using the following scale:

SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, DS= Disagree Somewhat,

AS= Agree Somewhat, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

8. Senior Leadership has the final say when it comes to the vision and direction of the church. (Senior Leadership is defined as your top-level leadership team. It may be one person, the Senior Pastor, or group of pastors and directors, or even lay-leaders and elders. Later in the survey you will be asked to describe your structure in more detail.)
SD D DS AS A SA
9. Senior Leadership recognizes that local context must be considered when determining the direction of ministries at the campus level.
SD D DS AS A SA
10. Senior ministry leaders make all ministry decisions for every campus.
SD D DS AS A SA
11. Campus leaders make some ministry decisions for their campus.
SD D DS AS A SA
12. Campus leaders make all ministry decisions for their campus.
SD D DS AS A SA
13. Senior Leadership seeks campus leader input in budgeting and allocation of resources.
SD D DS AS A SA
14. The organizational structure for multisite operations includes straight and dotted line reporting. For example, the campus worship leader reports to a central worship leader and to the campus pastor.
SD D DS AS A SA
15. The church has a leadership development process for campus leaders with the goal of preparing them for a larger role within the church.
SD D DS AS A SA
16. Our campuses come together for global staff meetings.
SD D DS AS A SA
17. Senior Leadership believes that all campuses should feel like they are a part of one church.
SD D DS AS A SA
18. Senior Leadership believes that each campus should feel connected but remain independent.
SD D DS AS A SA
19. Our management structure works well for our multisite church.
SD D DS AS A SA
20. An effort is made to keep branding and interior design consistent across our campuses.
SD D DS AS A SA

Church Polity and Structure

21. Briefly describe the role of elders in your church. _____
22. Starting with the Senior Pastor, please describe the organizational hierarchy at your church (for example Elders, Senior Pastor, Directors). Please include your Campus Pastor in the hierarchy. _____

APPENDIX 8

EVALUATION TOOL RESULTS

Glenn Akins

Multisite Plan Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Launch Plan (LP)			x		Thoroughly thought through, but many of these will be driven by current situation/site considerations. This is well thought out but needs to held lightly. Suggestive, but determinative. Consider identifying “go/no go” decision points.
LP addresses site selection.			x		
LP addresses staffing requirements.			x		
LP addresses core team building prior to launch.			x		
LP addresses internal launch promotion.			x		
LP addresses community engagement.			x		
LP timeline is sufficient for project.			x		
Organizational Chart Current (OCC)					
OC addresses reporting hierarchy.		x			Span of control may be an issue depending on individual’s capacity
OC clearly organized		x			Includes some positions vs functions
OC scalable	x				Way too convoluted
OC appropriate for current organization size	x				“You’ve gotten bigger than your britches”
Organizational Chart Future (OCF) PHASE 2/3					
OCF addresses reporting hierarchy.				x	
OCF clearly organized			x		Include functional roles identified on current org chart
OCF scalable				x	
OCF appropriate for future expansion				x	

Andrew Segre

Multisite Plan Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Launch Plan (LP)					
LP addresses site selection.				X	
LP addresses staffing requirements.				X	
LP addresses core team building prior to launch.				X	
LP addresses internal launch promotion.				X	
LP addresses community engagement.				X	
LP timeline is sufficient for project.				X	
Organizational Chart Current (OCC)					
OC addresses reporting hierarchy.			X		
OC clearly organized		X			
OC scalable		X			
OC appropriate for current organization size		X			
Organizational Chart Future (OCF)					
OCF addresses reporting hierarchy.			X		
OCF clearly organized				X	
OCF scalable			X		
OCF appropriate for future expansion		X			

Susan Hughes

Multisite Plan Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Launch Plan (LP)				x	Excellent and well thought out plan!
LP addresses site selection.			X		The site selection ideas along with research/prayer seem right on target. The budget decision may need to come sooner if leases get signed before the budget is finalized/approved.
LP addresses staffing requirements.				X	The early Campus Pastor role is critical, so the early transmission of DNA is a great plan.
LP addresses core team building prior to launch.				X	Consistent core team weekly meetings is great for team building!
LP addresses internal launch promotion.		x			The timeline looks sufficient. Much of the promotion looks like broad announcements from one platform or another to sign-up. In my experience, the best recruitment is one-on-one. I would encourage core staff and team to make personal asks as well.
LP addresses community engagement.				X	The consistent outreach events are sure to gain some attention and engagement!
LP timeline is sufficient for project.				x	If you have central staff, their presence at launch is always helpful as well as continued checking-in as new people are added. Central staff are often helpful too in helping prioritize challenges that were not anticipated, but need to be addressed.
Organizational Chart Current (OCC)					
OC addresses reporting hierarchy.				x	The chart is very clear on reporting.
OC clearly organized				x	

OC scalable			x	Expansion to multiple campuses will put strain on the Lead Pastor, until a designated campus pastor can be established at the original/sending campus.
OC appropriate for current organization size			x	The Creative Pastor has a lot of oversight in the current chart. This could also put a strain on the organization.
Organizational Chart Future (OCF)				
OCF addresses reporting hierarchy.			x	Yes the chart addresses hierarchy. The terminology of direct report & secondary report was a little confusing to me, but that may just be me.
OCF clearly organized			x	
OCF scalable			x	
OCF appropriate for future expansion			x	The future chart is appropriate. The reporting may need some clarification. It's helpful to establish what decisions get made at a central level, and what ones gets made at a campus level, and if any of those decisions are shared by both Are there any ministry constants that are required or encouraged? What can be adapted, and what is discouraged?

APPENDIX 9

LAUNCH PLAN—EASTER

Core/Launch Team

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to Launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
Campus Pastor potentials and continual search for next campus pastor or associate campus pastor. Ideally, the associate pastor of the multisite campus becomes the pastor for the new Campus	Campus Pastor hired and onboarded.	Core Team, Other Staff Needed roles identified (consists of 3-10 people) Staff plus high-level volunteer directors. Central staff recruit to fill these roles.

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21 weeks prior to launch	15-18 weeks prior to launch	12-14 weeks prior to launch
Core Team weekly meetings begin. (2 hours each) heavy on vision and purpose.	Core Team Meeting continues. The emphasis continues to be on vision and purpose. Core team begins recruiting.	Reach out to all Mount attendees that live in/near the prospective area to share news about new campus launching, invite to night of prayer and vision	Gathering for Launch team (Core team, plus new recruits), potential attendees and attendees from sending campus, prayer, worship, vision

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
Follow up with prospective new volunteers from night of prayer and vision Personally email and call each. Push launch team to meet face to face with as many as possible.	Continue meeting face to face, calling, email. Sending encouraging updates.	Cast vision with all volunteers. Write personal note of vision and encouragement about joining team.	Launch team meetings continue. First Launch preview practice. Full run through of service

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
Launch team meetings continue. Second Launch preview practice. Full run through of service	Launch team meetings continue. Third Launch preview service. Full run through of service	Launch team meetings continue. Fourth Launch preview service. Full run through of service	All team leaders contact every volunteer. Reminding them of official launch and to pray!

Staff Development

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
Search begins for Campus Pastor (CP) if not and internal candidate from existing campus (PIPELINE)	New CP works with existing Campus Pastor to learn DNA of The Mount. Serves at Other Campuses. Becomes familiar with Launch Plan	Continue serving alongside existing Campus Pastor or Trains new Associate Pastor replacement. (PIPELINE)

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21 weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
First Staff meetings for new Campus are held. Teaches staff the pupose for new campus. CP takes over all aspects of executing Launch	Weekly Staff meetings begin 50% of meetings are on vision and purpose.	Visit other churches doing multisite and/or attend conference together.	Campus staff meetings begin. Check that milestones being met.

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
campus staff meeting	campus staff meeting	campus staff meeting	campus staff meeting

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
campus staff meeting	campus staff meeting	campus staff meeting	campus staff meeting

Location Selection and Prayer

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
Every 2-3 Months check heat maps averages from Online Campus and Ministry Platform Active Participants; pray for the needs and seeds of communities	Continual prayer for future locations. Once new location is chosen, research the community in-depth. Identify prayer needs of the community.	Concentrated prayer for Launch team and surrounding communities of new location.

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21 weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
Prayer walks arranged around community with staff and core volunteer team	Concentrate on becoming a visible part of the community.	Be intentional on letting the community know that you are praying.	Campus Pastor Begins Hump Day prayer on FB or Instagram Live

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
Prayer walk around campus neighborhood(s) continue	Vision & prayer night at site if available or in community	21 Day Fasting and Prayer. Encourage team, staff, volunteers to fast something for 21 Days and pray	Every Volunteer team walks campus and prays around building

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
	Prayer lists distributed to every life group with specific needs for campus	Campus Team (staff and core volunteers) prayed for at broadcast site	24-hour prayer for campus and teams.

Marketing/Outreach/Communications

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
Remember all comms requests require 6-week lead. Must be submitted through mount.digital	Give MP contact a weeks lead to build signup in MP. Signups for new campus up on web/social.	Announce campus & CP to whole church. Video tease showing new area. Web launch with sign up links promoted. Drone shot if possible. (6-weeks prior).

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
Market via email to church to recruit volunteers to fill areas needed for new campus.	Social media reminders. Request for all signage submitted. Monthly meetings with Comms/CP	Social media reminders. Email newsletters, slides on all campuses. Social media group for campus begins	Video tease #2 of campus coming to whole church. Create Social media page just for new campus

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
Request for door hangers made. Request for mailer to community made. Weekly meetings Comms/CP	First time guests' gifts ordered. Outreach event (block party, city clean up, feed teachers, etc.)	Outreach event (block party, city clean up, feed teachers, etc.)	Outreach event (block party, city clean up, feed teachers, etc.)

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
Neighborhood blitzing begins with mailer to community. Movie Theater and/or Radio Ads	Neighborhood blitzing continues with door hangers	Neighborhood blitzing continues with social media ads and voicemail marketing. Outreach event (block party, city clean up, feed teachers, etc.)	Social media marketing continues.

Family Ministry (staffing needs change as sites added, refer to Org Chart)

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
Determine FM staffing.	FM staff recruiting begins.	ID Kid Min Director by September

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21 weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
Kid Min Director spends time with other directors. Learns DNA of program. Begins recruiting volunteers to build launch team	Kid Min Director spends time with other directors Learns DNA of program	Kid Min Director spends time with other directors. Learns DNA of program	Make sure Kid Min will have all necessary equipment and supplies for preview service

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
Begin training. Meeting with Kid Min volunteers' leaders	Finalize purchase of all supplies, signage, needs for Kid Min area	have volunteer leaders train volunteers.	Fam Min leads 1st Kid Min run through

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
Fam Min leads 2nd Kid Min run through	Fam Min leads 3rd Kid Min run through	Fam Min leads 4th Kid Min run through	

Groups (staffing needs change as sites added, refer to Org Chart)

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
		ID Groups Director (Volunteer). September. Central Groups director might fill role early on

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21 weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
	Begin Life Group Leader screening	Life Group Leader training	Launch Life Groups (goal 7-10 groups)

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
Groups meet	Groups meet	Groups meet	Groups meet

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
Groups meet	Groups meet	Groups meet	Groups push during preview services

Guest Services (staffing needs change as sites added, refer to Org Chart)

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to Launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
		ID Guest Services Director (GSD) Volunteer. September, Central director might fill in early on.

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21 weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
GSD Begins recruiting volunteers to build Launch team		GSD spends time with other GSD and team	GSD spends time with other GSD and team

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
GSD trains other guest services team volunteers (parking, greeting, ushers, etc.)	GSD builds relationships with other GS volunteers	GSD builds relationships with other GS volunteers	GSD builds relationships with other GS volunteers

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
GSD leads run through with other guest services team volunteers (parking, greeting, ushers, etc.)	GSD leads run through with other guest services team volunteers (parking, greeting, ushers, etc.)	GSD leads run through with other guest services team volunteers (parking, greeting, ushers, etc.)	GSD calls all team members encourages them, reminds them to be there for Launch!

Production

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to Launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
Perhaps more than any other area, Tech/Worship will lean on Central Campus		If TD is a new staff member, then begin recruitment. If transfer staff, then involve this person early on during the build out/renovations

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21 weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
Monthly meetings with CP		If new, TD trains with Central	Continue

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
TD begins contacting other AVL potential volunteers. Weekly meetings with CP.	TD continues contacting other AVL potential volunteers.	TD builds relationships with teams . TD helps AVL team get training at other location.	TD does full run through with worship and AVL. If occupancy granted.

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
TD does full run through with worship and AVL	TD does full run through with worship and AVL	TD does full run through with worship and AVL	

Finance (timetable dependant upon site selection)

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to Launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
Estimated Cost to Launch Campus \$500,000-\$3,000,000 depending on portable, merger, or reno.	Establish Budget dollars for initial hires, Down payments on spaces, Pre-Launch events, Volunteer gatherings, Community Relations, ID codes for Campus	Finance Office builds chart of accounts for new campus.

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21 weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
Finance works with Campus staff to establish operating budget for new campus	Budget revisited and updated	Operating Budget approved	

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
		Finance team trains CP/ACP Intaact and Martus, and other procedures.	CP/ACP begin entering expenses into Intaact .

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
CP/ACP take over financial training and operations for campus			

Facilities/Site Development

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to Launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
Ongoing search for next location based on need and seed .Utilize heat maps from MP and Online Campus. Process depends on site specifics (portable, heavy reno, merger, etc.)	Facility identified . Lease signed . Equipment Specifications Process Begins . Prep and Renovations begin if leased site . Deadline April 1. Renovation Plan submitted to	Facility Specifications and equipment finalized . orders begin . Renovations begin

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
Site development continues. Careful attention to ongoing inspections and completion dates.	Site development continues. Careful attention to ongoing inspections and completion dates.	Site development continues. Careful attention to ongoing inspections and completion dates.	Site development continues. Careful attention to ongoing inspections and completion dates.

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch
Cleaning company engaged and familiarized. Supplies ordered. IT up and running.	IT and Facilities team from Central site inspections.	*Hopeful deadline for occupancy*	All run-throughs depend on occupancy deadline. IT installs and test completed

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
Facilities maintenance and Cleaning begin	Daily punch list update	Daily punch list update	Daily punch list update

Worship (staffing needs change as sites added, refer to Org Chart)

12 Months or More Prior to Launch or Ongoing	9-12 Months Prior to Launch April-June	6-9 months Prior to Launch (July-September)
		ID Worship Leader (WL) new staff or transfer

22-24 Weeks prior to Launch	19-21 weeks prior to Launch	15-18 weeks prior to Launch	12-14 weeks prior to Launch
		If new, WL trains at Central	Continue

8-12 Weeks Prior to Launch	6-7 Weeks Prior to Launch	4-5 Weeks Prior to Launch	4 Weeks Prior to Launch*
Recruit and train	Build out teams		

3 Weeks Prior to Launch	2 Weeks Prior to Launch	1 Week Prior to Launch	1 Day Prior to Launch
		Campus Band executes full run through	Full Dress x 2

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A MULTISITE PLAN FOR MOUNT ARARAT BAPTIST CHURCH STAFFORD, VIRGINIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
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The project was designed to create a plan to launch future multisite campuses for Mount Ararat Baptist Church. In addition to detailing the required steps and milestones for a successful church launch, the project lays out a proposed organizational structure to ensure management efficiency and cultural transference. As with any multisite venture, the motivating factor is the growth of the kingdom through spreading the gospel. Because of this, scalability is integral to organizational structure. With that in mind, the project's final goal is to sketch out a structure that supports growth for the years to come.

Chapter 1 outlines the context, goals, rationale, research methodologies, definitions, and delimitations for the project. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological basis for church planting, extensively utilizing passages in Acts as a foundation for the basis. This chapter also gives a biblical basis for organizational structure, as well as for measuring church health. Chapter 3 explores the praxis of multisite planting, the current literature on organizational clarity, and the importance to the church of gathering and interpreting data. Chapter 4 covers the details and descriptions of the project. Finally, chapter 5 evaluates the project and suggests improvements.

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