

5 Reason for Embracing the Multi-Site Opportunity

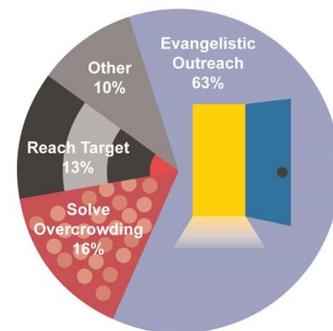
By Gary Rohrmayer

“If Starbucks can start four stores a day, why can’t churches?”
 - John Bishop *Wall Street Journal* [1]

What is a Multi-site Church? The book *The Multi-site Revolution* offers the following definition:

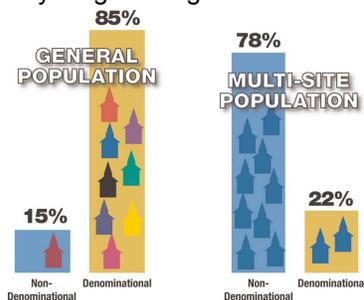
A multi-site church is one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states or nations. A multi-site church shares a common vision, budget, leadership and board. [2]

Multi-site churches are among the most rapidly growing churches in America. Outreach Magazine reports that of the 103 largest churches in America they have a combined total of 242 sites or campuses. [3] The number one motivation of these rapidly expanding churches is evangelism. They have a passion to reach their community and their region with the gospel which is expressed through a variety of multi-site models. Leadership Network, who has been tracking the movement through their writings and research, offers the following. They discovered in their 2003 survey, that 63% of respondents listed “evangelistic outreach” as their “primary motivation for doing multi-site.” That number rises to 76% if you include those churches that selected “bring our church closer to a target area.” [4]



Why are these churches so evangelistically driven? These churches are relatively young and led by young leaders willing to think outside the box of denominationalism. According to the National Congregations Survey, the average Protestant church in America was founded in 1940, whereas the average multi-site church has a founding date of 2003. [5]

In light of the age of these churches they have developed a culture that says we are willing to try anything as long as it reaches people with the gospel. According to the Leadership Network 2008 survey, 78% of the four-plus campus churches are non-denominational. While this is disproportionate to the overall church population where, according to Scott Thumma, roughly 85% percent are denominational and only 15% are nondenominational, it is representative of the multi-site population in general. “Historically speaking, non-denominational churches have been a bit more free to innovate than denominational congregations,” explains Warren Bird. “With less hierarchy, they often find it easier or quicker to try new things.” [6]



Multi-site churches are not only motivated by reaching their community but they are also driven to raise up leaders out of the harvest. This model lives or dies on its leadership development system. When asked the question, “Where are you finding your leaders?” research has revealed that they are home grown leaders.

- 80% have home grown staff.
- 79% build leadership from a small group training system.
- 70% build leadership with an apprentice model.
- 70% build leadership with a one-on-one mentoring model.
- 58% teach leaders how to raise other leaders.
- 25% use a formal leadership curriculum. [7]

To my surprise, I discovered that the majority of these churches were not built around one strong communicator or visionary leader but at its root was multiplication DNA. This internal wiring drives the church towards the rapid reproduction of disciples and leaders through every level of the church. I also discovered that these multi-site churches come in all shapes and models:

- **Video Venue** – Creating one or more on campus environments that use video cast sermons, often varying in worship styles. NorthCoast Church in Vista, CA and Saddleback Church are examples of this model.
- **Regional Campus** – Replicating the experience of the original campus in order to make the church more accessible to other geographical communities. Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, IL., Eastern Star Church in Indianapolis, IN., New Hope Community Church in Loudonville, OH., are examples of this model.
- **Teaching Team Model** – Leveraging a strong team across multiple locations – live and video. Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL., The Journey Church in St. Louis MO. and Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA are examples of this model.
- **Partnership Model** – Partnering with a local business or nonprofit organization to use a facility beyond a mere renter arrangement. Stillwater United Methodist Church, Dayton, OH has developed a partnership with their local YMCA.
- **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. Christ the King, Bellingham WA is an example of this model. [8]

The multiplication DNA of these churches is having a revolutionary effect across America:

- In 1990, there were 10 multi-site churches.
- In 1998, that number had expanded to about 100.
- In late 2005, there were more than 1,500 multi-site churches in the United States.[9]
- In mid-2008, there are an estimated 2,000 multi-site churches across America. Multi-site church pioneer Jim Tomberlin of Third Quarter Consulting predicts that every major city and large community in America will have multiple multi-campus churches by 2010.

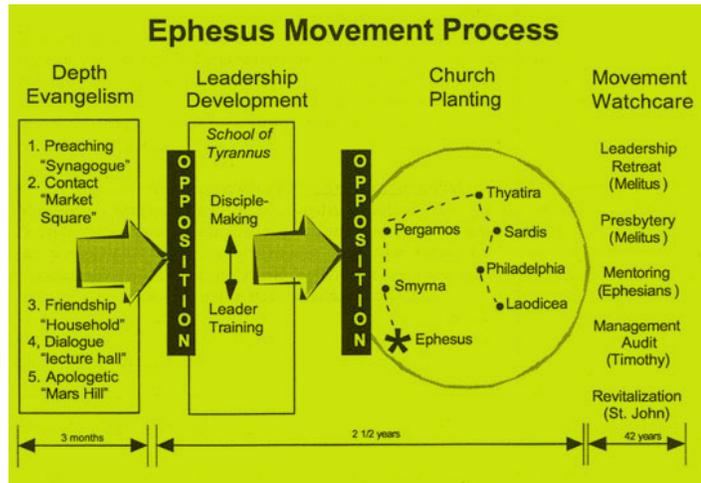
Why is it time for Converge to proactively get into the game of using the multi-site model as part of its church planting strategy?

- 1) It is biblical.

There is no “proof text” for the multi-site model. As the above research has revealed these are churches that are seeking to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8) and that they are doing it in the same spirit as the Apostle Paul when he wrote, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” (1 Corinthians 9:20-23)

It is largely accepted that many of the letters written by the Apostle Paul were written to networks of churches within a city (2 Corinthians 1:1) or region (Galatians 1:1). The Apostles Peter and James letters were also written to a group of churches scattered across a geographical region. (James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1) Also widely accepted by commentators is that Paul’s personal letters to Titus and Timothy were not only for young pastors of a local church but they were written to regional leaders who were establishing the churches within their given geographical area Titus, the island of Crete and Timothy, the region around the city of Ephesus. J. Allen Thompson offers the following diagram to illustrate the Church Planting Movement that took place through the church in Ephesus. [10] These churches were connected by leveraging the communication tool of their day – “hand written letters delivered in person.” Today, multi-site churches leverage a variety of technological advances to connect with each other and to keep these churches

focused on achieving God's missional purposes. Using technology is one of the "by all possible means" that missional movements use to be a part of God's redemptive work.



2) It resonates with our value of church multiplication.

The mission of Converge is to glorify God through a catalytic movement of reproducing churches.

- We believe that local churches are God's primary vehicle for spiritual vitality and redemptive activity in the world. (Matthew 6:18)
- We believe that unchurched people matter to God and are valuable to us. (Luke 15:11-32)
- We believe that partnership and mutual accountability are God's design for churches and church leaders. We are independent, yet interdependent. (Acts 15:1-35)
- We believe that new churches are a primary part of God's plan for reaching unchurched people and communities with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (Acts 13:1-3) [11]

Multi-site does nothing to detract from our vision, mission or values; it enhances them. The Apostle James said at the Jerusalem council, "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." (Acts 15:19) If people can be reached through a multi-site strategy we should embrace it, encourage it and fuel it as a viable evangelistic option.

3) It builds on the strengths of our stronger churches.

As a regional ministry we are doing an exceptional job of taking care of the churches that are struggling, in conflict, and in transition. But many believe that the future of our association rests in our ability to foster stronger partnerships with our stronger churches through encouraging, equipping and providing appropriate funding for these churches to expand their effectiveness and penetrate the harvest. Our desire is to see these stronger churches become Church Multiplication Centers: Churches that will multiply at least one church or regional campus per year. These churches will become training centers for potential church planters and regional leaders. Churches that will have staff dedicated to regional multiplication. Churches that will form regional networks and strategic alliances in their areas to see saturation church planting explode in their area.

There are strong examples of these within Converge and outside our fellowship: Grace Fellowship led by Dave Reno in Brooklyn Park, MN. , along with North Shore Baptist Church, Seattle, WA, New Heights Church, Vancouver, WA and Cross Pointe Church in Orlando, FL are on the leading edge of this movement in our fellowship. Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, NorthWood Church in Keller, TX and Mars Hill Church in Seattle have all reached the 100 mark in church multiplication and are leading the country. [12] They all are providing a laboratory of learning for us to glean from and lean on.

- 4) It offers high impact results while lowering the risk level.

Church Planting is a risky and messy venture. We have made great strides at lowering the risk through assessing church planters, training, coaching and funding, but even with all our sophisticated systems there is still a risk in empowering young leaders. Just as LEAD Teams and Parent Church Networks have reduced the risk, multi-site will lower the risk even farther by providing a stronger supervisory relationship with these inexperienced campus pastors through weekly staff meetings and mentoring by senior leaders. It will lower the risk by leveraging all financial, legal, and leadership structures already in place. It will reduce the risk by using proven and established church health systems such as communication, assimilation, leadership development, children and youth ministries. It will lessen the risks in building on a proven brand that the main campus has already built in that community and region. All this to say, that in reducing the risks and leveraging the strengths of these multiplying churches, will produce stronger kingdom results.

- 5) It becomes a farm system for next generation leaders.

Where will our future leaders come from? At this point in the life of Converge, our movement is primarily built on a recruiting model not a multiplication model. Meaning, we are recruiting people outside our fellowship to partner with us. This is a biblical model - Barnabas recruited Saul to come to Antioch in Acts 11:25. Paul recruited Timothy in Acts 16:1-5. But ultimately it is a model built on addition and the skills of a few gifted recruiters.

We are convinced that the future of our movement will be found in our youth, college students and converts of today. Providing leadership pathways that involve spiritual formation and missional engagement is a critical piece in the multiplication puzzle. Darrin Patrick of Journey Church in St. Louis is using his smaller campus as a training ground for pastors, ministry leaders, worship leaders, musicians, tech personnel and a host of interns who would never get a chance in a larger setting. A similar strategy used to train lay pastors, seminary students and missionaries was called "Preaching Points." The concept of the "Preaching Point" is simple: these gatherings utilize the people and financial resources of an existing church to provide "on-location" ministry for people in small communities, prisons, beaches, camping parks, missions, etc. Multi-site is an expression of the preaching point strategy that missionaries and churches have used for years which is being rediscovered by a new generation.

Finally, I have to confess that I was not a fully engaged proponent of the multi-site model because I had one nagging question: What happens when the senior leader leaves? In the book the *Multi-site Church Revolution*, I read the following story of Bobby Hill and New Life Christian Fellowship Chesapeake, Virginia. This congregation moved from a one-site model in 1994, and chose the multi-site approach as an alternative to a building program. Their model is "one church, one vision, one mission and the same core values." Their structure was one Senior Pastor and Board with one Treasury and one Central Administration. New congregations were reproduced by a planter and a core of members from the other congregations. The new congregations all had a

unique “lead pastor” that serves as the primary shepherd for the individual congregations. They had a Senior Leadership Team comprised of the Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor and the Lead Pastor of each congregation. By the year 2000 they had 6 campuses totaling 2200 people. The largest was 700 and the main campus was running 500. In 2001 Bobby Hill resigned to become the Director of Vanguard Ministries, a network of leaders and church planting churches. So what happened after Bobby Hill left? The new senior leader, Joseph Umidi, modified the vision to allow these churches to become an autonomous but connected family of churches who are now seeking to double their impact within the region over the next 10 years. [13]

After reading this story I thought to myself, if the worst thing that can happen is that all of these campuses become strong autonomous churches with a deep connection to each other - then I'm in! If one church using the multi-site approach can achieve 100% success rate in establishing six autonomous churches in seven years – again, then I'm in! I affectionately call this my multi-site conversion moment. In the last 18 months I have been fully engaged in learning all I could about this multi-site model, its strengths, its weaknesses and its possibilities. Do I feel that every church should follow the multi-site path? No, but every church needs to discover its multiplication path if it is going to be in the midst of God's redemptive flow.

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1. *Inspired by Starbucks*, June 13, 2008 (<http://www.wsj.com/article/SB121331198629268975.html>).
 2. Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon and Warren Bird, *The Multi-site Church Revolution*, Zondervan, 2006, pg 18
 3. *Outreach 100: Largest and Fastest-Growing Churches in America*, September 27, 2008 (<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20080927/outreach-100-largest-and-fastest-growing-churches-in-america.htm>).
 4. Leadership Network's "2007 Survey of 1,000 Multi-Site Churches." (<http://www.leadnet.org/downloads/2007%20Multi%20Site%20Survey%20Report.pdf>)
 5. Colleen Pepper, *Multiply Everything: Insights from Churches with Four or More Campuses*, Leadership Network (<http://www.leadnet.org/downloads/Multiple%20Everything.pdf>)
 6. Colleen Pepper, *Multiply Everything: Insights from Churches with Four or More Campuses*, Leadership Network (<http://www.leadnet.org/downloads/Multiple%20Everything.pdf>)
 7. Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon and Warren Bird, *The Multi-site Church Revolution*, Zondervan, 2006, pg 150
 8. Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon and Warren Bird, *The Multi-site Church Revolution*, Zondervan, 2006, pg 30
 9. Todd Rhodes, Multi-Site Conference—Session 1, Monday Morning Insight, (http://mondaymorninginsight.com/index.php/site/comments/multi_site_conference_session_1/)
 10. J. Allan Thompson, WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO START A MOVEMENT? The Movement - Redeemer Urban Church Planting Center e-Newsletter October 2003
 11. Converge MidAmerica By-Laws, Adapted October 2007.
 12. *Outreach: America's Top 25 Multiplying Churches, January 2007* (http://outreachmagazine.com/docs/25innov_JA07.pdf)
 13. 1 Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon and Warren Bird, *The Multi-site Church Revolution*, Zondervan, 2006, pg 178
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