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# Built to Last: An In-Depth Look at the Multisite Church and Ministry Succession

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

BUILT TO LAST:

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE MULTISITE CHURCH AND MINISTRY SUCCESSION



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

SCOTT R. JONES

PROJECT FACULTY:

DR. GREGG BORROR

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023



## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Scott Jones

has been approved by  
the Evaluation Committee on March 9, 2023  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

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# Dedication

I dedicate this work to the memory of three men of God whose impact on my life is immeasurable. Franklin, Ira, and Tom are figures as large as the faces carved into the side of Mt. Rushmore. All three are mingling with the movers and shakers referenced in Hebrews 12 as the great cloud of witnesses. I honor their memory.

My father – Reverend Franklin G. Jones. Dad, you always believed in me and always pressed me to do my best and be my best. Your greatest joy was to see your children flourish and grow. I sit under your shade, and I know you are cheering me on. There has only been, and will only be, one Franklin Jones. Everything I know about manhood, pastoring, fatherhood, and being a husband, I learned from you.

My grandfather – Reverend Ira H. Jones. I never met you in person, but your motivated and committed spirit that inspired you to hop that freight train in Paris, Texas and ride all the way to Houston to look for work to care for your family, settled the Joneses into a city that would become home. You embraced the call of God for ministry late in your life, and yet your impact is vast. Your sincere love of God and His people has impacted many.

My mentor – Reverend Tom F. Tenney. You taught me to love God’s Word and to be a lifelong student of all things. You were the master craftsman, a preacher’s preacher, but you were willing to let me study under you and for you and share thoughts and ideas that I found along the way. I have learned so much from you about sermon crafting and leadership.

# Acknowledgments

While it is my name on the project, I did not arrive here on my own. There are so many to whom I am indebted and grateful.

First and foremost is my soulmate and best friend – Melanie. Thank you for always getting behind me and encouraging me as I have walked this academic adventure in my 50s. You never complained; you always encouraged. You never doubted; you always believed. Your patience and support made this possible. You make me a better man in every sense of the word.

To my beautiful Savannah, my handsome and gifted son Spencer, and your wonderful wife Ashtyn: Thank you all for cheering me on and celebrating with me. I know there have been times I have been disconnected or unavailable, and yet you always seemed to understand. I am proud of each of you and consider *you* my greatest accomplishment.

To my brother and ministry partner: Brett, you've been my editor through every bit of graduate school. Your thoughts, edits, and critiques have made my efforts better. I also appreciate your encouragement and support. I am grateful.

Dr. Gregg Borrer, you were exactly what I needed in an advisor through this doctoral process. You challenged me, stretched me, and affirmed me at the same time. I conclude this journey with a broadened understanding and a new, solid friend.

Terry, Donna, and Jeremy, little did we realize what we were getting into when we started graduate school together and thought a Master's degree would be enough. I can sincerely say that you are as much a reason why I have made this journey as is my drive to learn. I come to the end of this quest with friends for life. It's a joy to be a part of the Four Horsemen.

And finally, to Dr. Leonard Sweet: Thank you for whatever it was that you saw in me. Thank you for the kind prods and encouragements to keep me moving forward. Thank you for reminding me that all work and no play makes Scott a dull theologian who has missed the point of what God had in mind. Thank you for letting me in to your world and the world of semiotics. Your love for Jesus and the greatest story ever told has forever impacted me. I really do trust the story.

# Epigraph

Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.  
Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.  
Psalm 127:1 (NKJV)

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# Glossary

Multisite Church - A church with at least two locations, often operating under one vision and singular leadership.

Succession - One pastor replacing another in a transactional manner.

Transition - A relational process over time in which one pastor is equipped and empowered to assume the pastorate.

## Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called “Collaborative Design for Ministry” and “Nonprofit Contexts.” In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a need, problem, or opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using just enough feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

# Abstract

The multisite church model is a movement that, by all indications, is here to stay. According to Portable Church Industries, there are only twelve single-campus churches listed among the top 100 largest churches in the United States. If multi-site churches were a Protestant denomination, they'd be the fourth largest.<sup>1</sup> The NPO addressed is: *Multisite churches are predominantly first generation with personality centric leadership, needing intentionality for sustainability and succession.*

I serve as lead pastor of Grace Church - a non-denominational church with four campuses in the Houston area. I am in my 28th year of tenure. We transitioned to the multisite church model fifteen years ago. I have experienced phenomenal highs and a few very disappointing lows in those fifteen years. The lows always trace to an ambitious staff pastor with a personal agenda who countered the vision and culture of the church at large. Thus, the need for identifying the most sustainable multisite model and one that is transferrable to other generations of leadership.

The final project is a book. The first section presents a look back at the biblical and historical origins of the multisite church, along with the logic and motivation behind this church model. This section offers an overview of the four most popular multisite models utilized today. The second section delves into pastoral succession and the need for a thought out, intentional plan. Focus is given to the difference in raising up followers versus raising up leaders, as well as juxtaposing the difference between succession and transition. Finally, suggested steps and elements for successful pastoral transition will be presented. The working title of the book is *Built to Last: An In-Depth Look at Multisite Church and Ministry Succession.*

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<sup>1</sup> "8 Statistics Every Multisite Church Leader Should Know," *Portable Church Industries* (blog), July 25, 2016, <https://www.portablechurch.com/2016/church-planting/multisite-church-statistics/>.

## Introduction

It was in the spring of 2008 when a pastor friend of mine, a man who is my elder in age and experience, asked me what was in my heart when I considered the future of Grace Church. At that point the church I pastored was a wonderful single-site church that was in a phenomenal season of growth and harvest. Every weekend we would hold five service experiences to accommodate the growing crowd. We had a strong church staff and pastoral team. I told my friend, "I believe we are supposed to be multisite. Houston is a very large city, and it makes more sense to duplicate ourselves in key, strategic areas than to just keep adding more service times at our current location." Little did I realize that the opportunity to become multisite was just 24-hours away from that conversation.

A pastor in town was about to accept the invitation to join the pastoral staff of another church in the state of Arizona. He did not have a successor in place, nor did he have any type of a succession plan. He called approximately 24 hours after I had shared my vision with my friend. He proposed that Grace Church absorb his congregation, assume ownership of the building, and make that site our second campus. The rest is, as they say, history.

When our second campus came into being, I came to realize the need for a solid and strategic multisite church plan that would ensure singleness of culture and vision. We needed a model that would endure the test of time. We have learned so much through trial and error. Since that first venture in 2008, Grace Church has now welcomed two more churches into our family, and we now gather in four locations all over the greater Houston as one church in many locations.

During this 15-year journey, we have survived two campus pastor mutinies in which the entrusted pastor at the campus undermined our vision and leadership with their own agenda and then split that campus as they went just a few miles down the road to launch their own church. On the first occasion, the pastor took approximately 600 people with him. On the second occasion, the pastor took every key ministry and church department leader of that campus. All except the soundman. On both of these occasions, the congregants were cluelessly the innocent party being swayed by the leader that had closest proximity to them and the greatest influence. I guess I could have done an NPO on overcoming staff-hurt and bitterness.

All of these experiences, as well as acknowledging I am now in my late fifties and most of my pastoring is behind me, brings me to the need, problem, and opportunity to discover and define the most sustainable multisite church model that can stand the test of time and truly meet the needs of its congregants and community. This model must also be so structured that the pastorate can be transferred to another lead pastor when the current pastor's tenure is done.

As I observe the landscape of the multisite church in North America, most of the pastors are in their fifties as well. The most common multisite church approach has the lead pastor as the teaching pastor, who is broadcasted on a large screen for all campuses.

In a similar dissertation focused on pastoral succession in a multisite church, Hans Googer astutely observes:

Many multisite churches are still led by their founding pastors (or the pastors that led them to a multisite model), and Leadership Network found that “the typical multisite church is just 4 years into the process.” With thousands of multisite churches and millions in attendance, understanding the nature of pastoral transitions within the structure becomes incredibly important.<sup>2</sup>

It is my contention that multisite churches are often personality centric. The pastor is most often streamed or played on a screen that makes him larger than life. Campus pastors keep the day-to-day needs of the campus functioning, but the church is equated to the lead pastor. The name of the church and the pastor of that church go hand in hand. What happens when these gifted and charismatic leaders come to the end of their leadership? What are the implications for the flock in such instances?<sup>3</sup>

It is my own personal journey and experiences, melded with the felt need of many others, that has led me to focus on the NPO that multisite churches are predominantly first generation with personality centric leadership, needing intentionality for sustainability and succession.

## Research and Design

### STAKE HOLDERS

I have often stated that I do some of my best thinking through others. Indeed, that is the case with this project.

While delving into several deep and rich books, journals, and dissertation material on various parts of my NPO scope, I recruited a capable and thought-provoking team to serve as my project stakeholders. Embracing the challenge by seminary faculty to think outside of the vocational scope I am most accustomed with, my stakeholders consisted of the following:

- Four lead pastors of multi-campus churches
- A campus pastor of a multi-campus church
- A recently retired senior vice president of sales for a multisite, PEO (professional employer organization) company rated 597 on the Fortune 500
- An entrepreneur who owns a multi-site business

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Christopher Googer, “Senior Pastor Succession in Multisite Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (DMin diss, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

- A 30-year-old pastor who is succeeding his father in ministry
- My son, a young minister and master's degree graduate who aspires to serving as pastor
- My executive assistant

My project launch coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic emergence and all the restrictions that ensued. Thus, we were never able to come together physically in one location. While technology and the internet have made a big world feel small, the synergy and chemistry that often comes when being onsite together was challenging to foster. We did the best we could as we journeyed through the design phase.

Our first Stake Holders' meeting was via Zoom on October 26, 2020. After making brief introductions and laying the ground rules, we commenced with the meeting. Utilizing the Game Storming tools shared by the Portland Seminary faculty as best we could in an online setting, we began with the NPO Definition. Once all felt well-oriented with the NPO, we transitioned to the Pain and Gain exercise. That was followed with the Blindsight exercise.

As is always the case when a diverse group comes together around one cause, differences of ideas and philosophical approaches surfaced. While I had been fully committed to go into the process without any preconceived notions as to the outcome, this first meeting revealed my biases, and also presented new light with which to view my project.

The conclusion of this first meeting was the following discovery statement:

When considering the multisite phenomenon, it is obvious that there are varying models of structure and leadership. Most multisite churches are currently operating within their first generation of leadership, are personality-centric, and lack a clear plan for succession. Ultimately, it was concluded that the right structure brings sustainability which will in turn ensure successful succession.

The team concluded that the video-venue model is perhaps the most sustainable, with sustainability pertaining to oneness of culture and vision. In this model, people relate to one primary voice and face seen week in and week out in a larger-than-life format on media screens.

On the other hand, they also noted that there is a high turnover rate of campus pastors in the video venue model. It is challenging to keep A-level team members in a culture that seems stifling and limiting in the possibilities to grow. The speaking campus pastor model was deemed more successful in keeping team members over a longer period of time but brings with it the challenge of multiple voices speaking into the culture. Sustaining culture was paramount in the meeting. The stake holders concluded that, if the culture is sustained, then succession of leadership would most likely follow with greater ease.

Another key insight that surfaced through discovery and discussion is the challenging role of the campus pastor. He/she is given great responsibility to see to the health and rise of the campus

assigned, as well as tend to the needs of the congregants, and yet has very little autonomy or authority within which to work. It is a high yield and high constraint position in which to serve.

## ONE ON ONE INTERVIEWS

It is difficult to express the insights and ideas that resulted from the one-on-one meetings. Each interviewee brought unique and fresh thought to the multisite church model and also to the idea of pastoral succession.

The details of my first four interviews are as follows:

- October 30, 2020 – the founding pastor of a multisite church that is now in its second generation of pastoral leadership. This interview was done via phone.
- November 2, 2020 – the executive director of the largest church planting network in North America. This interview was done via Zoom.
- November 17, 2020 – the founding pastor of a multisite church that currently has 14 campuses. This pastor has successfully transitioned a new lead pastor into place. This interview was done via Zoom.
- November 18, 2020 – the founding pastor of a multisite church with 8 campuses, including one in Chile and one in Italy. This interview was done via Zoom.

Each interviewee was assured of privacy and anonymity in any matter that would be deemed privileged or sensitive. Each session was recorded for further review and posterity.

The interviewees had much to say about maintaining culture. Church culture may be established by the lead pastor, but it cannot be built solely upon him/her. The culture must be Christ-centered, easy to grasp, and clearly seen. Peter Drucker is quoted as saying, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”<sup>4</sup> Time and again my interviewees affirmed this idea. When a culture is strong and established, it overrides rogue staff members desiring to take a campus in a different direction and keeps the church moving toward its truth north.

The interviewees each respectively placed high value on a solid and intentional succession plan. Raising up leaders from within, setting the heir-apparent up for success, and then walking out a deliberate plan is paramount. The overall take away is that healthy churches have a better chance of sustainability and thereby often have healthy leadership succession when those moments arise.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2016), 101.

<sup>5</sup> Transcripts of the one-on-one interviews can be found in the appendices.

## MOST VIABLE PROJECT

As research and discovery progressed, it was time to follow up with the stake holders again. The focus this time would be to hone down on the NPO and also identify the most durable and impactful project that would birth out of this process. The meeting was held on November 30, 2021 via Zoom. The stake holders' meeting involved:

- Four lead pastors of multi-campus churches
- A campus pastor of a multi-campus church
- A recently retired senior vice president of sales for a multisite, PEO (professional employer organization) company rated 597 on the Fortune 500.
- An entrepreneur who owns a multi-site business
- A 30-year-old pastor who is succeeding his father in ministry
- My son, a young minister and master's degree graduate who aspires to serving as pastor
- My executive assistant

The original NPO statement read as: *Most multi-campus churches are predominantly first generation and personality centric with no strategic plan for succession or sustainability.* As a result of the fine-tuning with the stake holders, the final NPO statement is as follows: *Multisite churches are predominantly first generation with personality centric leadership, needing intentionality for sustainability and succession.* Discussion then turned toward the most viable project to present the finding of this research.

Three big ideas ruminated throughout the meeting. The first idea was a website that offers insights and discoveries about multisite and pastoral succession, is kept current with articles and interviews, and accessible to all. The second idea was a one-day workshop in which attendees would register to learn the ins and outs of multisite church, strategic steps to launch such, and then a focus on pastoral succession strategies. But the final idea, which did become the MVP, is a book that covers multisite church and pastoral succession. In fact, it was agreed upon that the book would most likely spark the need for the website and give opportunity for workshops.

Benchmarks were also put into place as measurables to see where I am, the impact the project has, and how we might improve moving forward.

### **Benchmark 1 – The book is near completion and a manuscript has been shopped among publishers.**

At the time of this submission, I am behind on this goal. The book is outlined and in a workable form, and I know where I intend on landing. However, balancing the demands of my pastorate, graduate school, and family commitments has spread me thin and hindered progress beyond. It will require the time I have invested in my education for me to be able to fully focus on completing the book. There are also nuanced changes that have come as I continue to make new discoveries and glean greater insight. This especially pertains to the second part of the book focused on pastoral succession. At the time of this writing, there have been a couple of pastoral transitions taking place



within multisite churches. Regretfully, these were due to moral failure and were mandatory. One transition made public headlines, and all did not go well. In the months to come, a deeper look into what worked and what did not would bring great insight to this book.

- Research – 66 hours
- Writing, Editing, and Assignments – 135 hours
- Review Consultations and Interviews – 15 hours
- Meetings with Advisor, Faculty, and Focus Group – 13 Hours

**Benchmark 2 – The material I offer is utilized by a parachurch organization such as the Association of Related Churches or Destiny Leaders, as a template for churches contemplating the multisite model or for the church moving towards pastoral succession.**

I do have traction on this with both above-mentioned organizations. The directors of both organizations have respectively expressed a sincere interest to utilize this book as a resource. Every church, no matter what its model, has to think about the inevitable need for a pastoral succession plan. When it comes to multisite, settling upon the most sustainable model that stands the test of time has also piqued interest. Note this observation from the director of Destiny Leaders, a ministerial network that offers credentialing and resources for pastors and ministers and an NPO stake holder:

I left the chapter, at its current point in completion, with the sense that *the message is timeless, and successful methods have always been and should always remain timely*. In addition, you made the point that multisite in some form has been the norm in church development historically from the first century forward.

Another observation by a young pastor of a multisite church who is in the middle of leadership transition and an NPO stake holder:

I think the entire direction of the paper is most useful. I personally have struggled with some of the multisite “culture,” but I think this paper goes back to the heart of multisite. On top of that, to see how we can ensure a successful transition of multisite churches to be very vital to our own success here at our church as well.

**Benchmark 3 – A clear and concise conclusion would be derived as to which of the four most common multisite church models is most sustainable.**

To iterate for the reader, the four most common models would be as follows:

- The video-driven model. This is the commonly embraced model. The lead pastor is also the teaching pastor. His/her image is broadcast to each campus on large screens for the sermon delivery. This model tends to make the church personality-centric to the lead pastor on the large screens.
- The teaching team model. In this model there is a lead pastor, and he/she is most often a part of a teaching team. The same sermons are shared at each campus through the various teachers.
- The multi-church model. This model varies in approach to sermon delivery and affords each church a bit more polity. Each campus has more input on respective budgets and church culture.
- The family of churches model. Each church is autonomous and yet unified with the others within the "family." Usually there is a pastor of one of the churches who gives apostolic oversight and counsel to the others.

I submit this project with mixed reviews on this particular benchmark. While I have a personal opinion, I have come to the conclusion that there is no one particular way to do multisite church.<sup>6</sup> As I move forward in this work, I will likely tender the pros and cons of each model and let the reader determine for themselves which direction is right for their situation. For the sake of full disclosure, I currently lead a multisite church that would be seen as a hybrid between the teaching team model and the multi-church model.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that terminology on the various multisite models can vary. For example, Brad House and Gregg Allison define four distinct models utilizing this verbiage and descriptives:

The Gallery Model. One church that expresses itself in multiple settings or styles at the same location.

The Franchise Model. One church cloned to multiple sites, each of which is granted the responsibility and authority to express the church's "brand," that is, its vision, worship, preaching, discipleship, care, and mission. Two distinguishing features of this model are the centralization of control and the management of the church's brand. In most cases, there is a third distinctive: the use of video or streaming to broadcast the sermons of the lead pastor.

The Federation Model. One church that is contextualized in multiple locations. A key difference between the federation and the franchise models is that federation models employ live preaching at every (or almost every) location, and the different locations have local elders and staff. This enhances the church's ability to contextualize the gospel and provide more effective leadership at the local level.

The Multichurch Model. This consists of one church that expresses itself in multiple churches that have a form of polity that provides the responsibility and authority to make decisions about budget, contextualization of ministries, and more. See Brad House and Gregg Allison, *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 50-65, Kindle.

#### **Benchmark 4 – The conclusions of my work are useful and implemented in my own ministry scope.**

This goal is being realized and is altogether in the works. Grace Church has fully embraced a hybrid of the teaching team and multi-church model. I serve as lead pastor, and we have a teaching team in place that is a mix of central team members and campus pastors. Grace shares the same message at every campus but through different voices and personalities. We are currently establishing more polity among the campuses and yet the campus pastors are accountable to me, and we function as one church.

I am currently 57 years old and recognize that most of my pastorate at Grace Church is behind me. Thus, ministry transition is at the front of my mind and a long-term game plan is being implemented now. The discoveries and lessons learned while on this academic journey have proven to be self-serving while prayerfully serving the body of Christ at large as well.

#### **Benchmark 5 – A marketable niche is found for the Built to Last workshops.**

It is my desire to utilize the book as an introduction in which denominations and parachurch organizations invite us in to share roundtables and/or seminars concerning multisite churches and pastoral succession. To look back at the end of 2025 and have led 100 leaders/pastors through the material is an attainable and yet ambitious goal.

I would also like to introduce the book as a reference in my teaching for ministry students in undergraduate and perhaps graduate level work. An opportunity is currently presenting itself with Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida.

### **ONE ON ONE INTERVIEWS**

Three additional interviews were done with the following people at the designated times:

- December 2, 2021 - A lead pastor of a church in the Midwest who has recently launched a second and third campus
- April 11, 2022 - A lead pastor of a multisite church in Louisiana
- December 2, 2021 - An executive lead pastor of one of the largest international multisite churches in the world

Each interviewee was assessed of the status of the NPO and MVP. Probing questions were submitted as to church culture, philosophical approaches to multisite churches, current hindsight on things that would be done differently, and any other wisdom they would share. Due to the explicit and vulnerable candor shared by each interviewee, transcripts of those interviews will not be shared in this document. Each interview was done via Zoom and recorded for future reference.

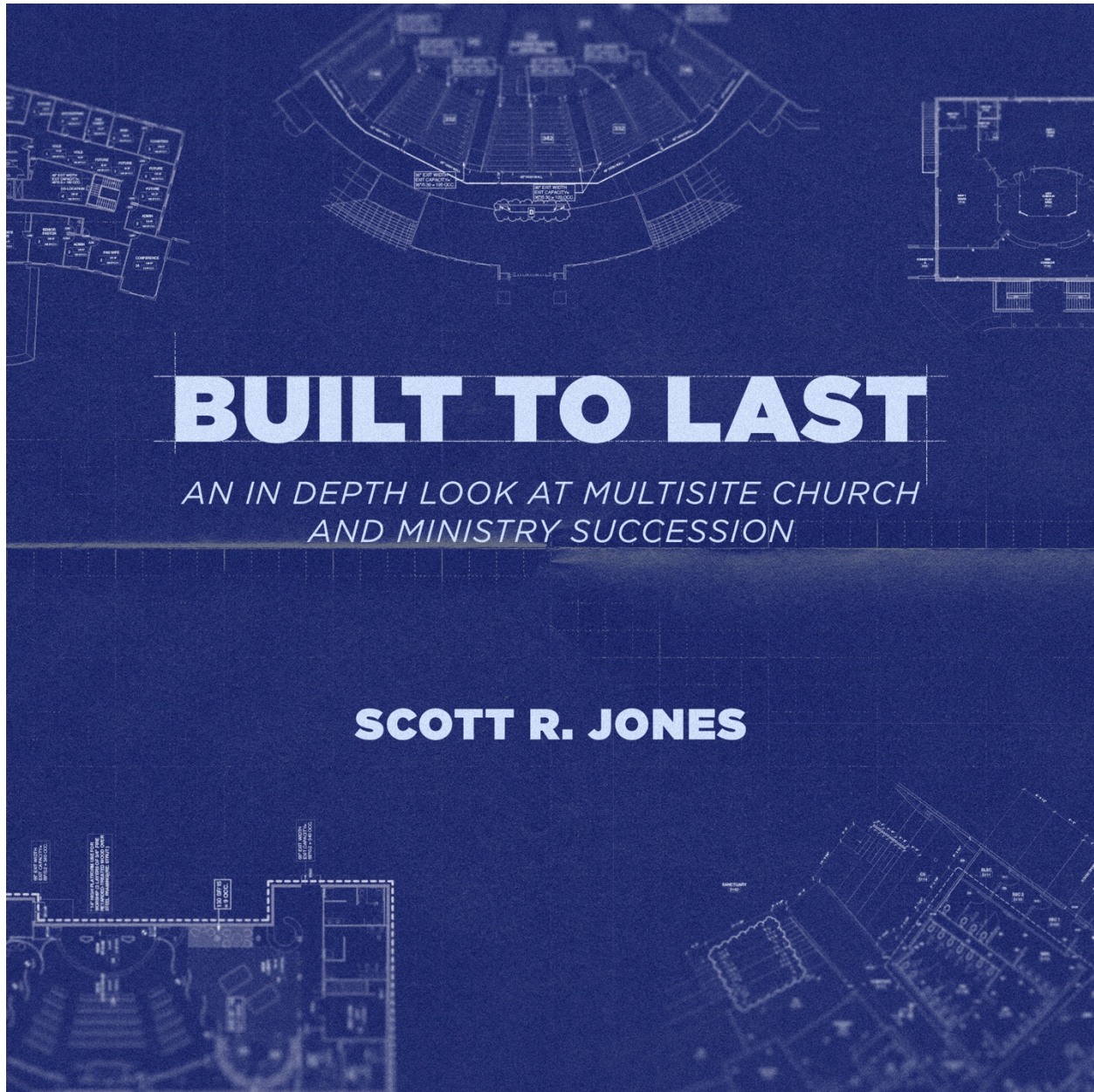
## Looking Ahead

There have been times along the way that I have questioned myself and the focus of my NPO. Perhaps there was another focus or another topic that might bring greater impact personally and for the body of Christ at large. And yet, every pastor or church leader with whom I have shared my current focus has responded with a resounding interest in the outcome. In fact, within the past two weeks, I have noted a handful of others in parachurch ministries, or on their own academic journey, who are addressing something similar in one way or another. And I can truly say I do not know of any other topic that would have greater impact on my context of ministry than understanding sustainable multisite churches and operating with a clearly defined pastoral succession plan.

As I look forward and strategize on necessary next steps, the path seems clear.

- Writing resumes to complete the project.
- Sample chapters are shopped with publishing companies to determine if there is interest or if the book will be self-published.
- Marketing plan is in place and marketing support is secured.
- Sample chapters are shared with key influencers in order to secure book endorsements.
- Sample chapters are shared with select lead pastors and ministry staff to solicit feedback.
- A website domain is secured for the future online roll-out.

# Doctoral Project



Current working cover of the book. Created by Jon Newcomb, Creative Director at Grace Church. Each blueprint scheme is an actual representation of one of the campuses I serve as lead pastor.

## A Look Inside the Book

The current layout of the book presents the sections and chapters of the book to be as follows:

- Dedication
- Introduction

### Section One

- Chapter One – It Started in Acts

Drawing from birth of the New Testament church in Acts, we compare multisite with the early believers going house-to-house, and also propose that the scattering of saints (Acts 8:4) was actually the *seeding* of the church in sites all over the known world.

- Chapter Two – The Multisite Church in North America

The DNA of multisite church can be traced through the Roman Catholic Church's first millennia of existence, John Wesley's circuit riders and various other examples, to where it is today; and there is no sign of it slowing down.

- Chapter Three – Anchors, Chains, Minutes and Miles

This chapter bears out that the twenty-first century has brought great advances in transportation and conveniences, yet people are still home-based and community centered. Most live daily life within a 15.4 mile radius.

- Chapter Four – Four Multisite Models

The four most common multisite church models are presented in an unbiased way so that the read may arrive at their own conclusion as to which may be most preferred and most sustainable over time. Each paradigm has positive and negative attributes to be considered.

### Section Two

- Chapter Five – Pastoral Succession

Jesus himself sets an example of the purpose and intent of succession in ministry. Yet, we are all too familiar with examples of pastoral successions disasters. A multisite church may find pastoral change an even greater challenge for many reasons.

- Chapter Six – Success with No Successor

Under Charles Spurgeon's leadership, the Metropolitan Church was a juggernaut of influence and impact in its day. And yet sadly, because there was no plan in place, this great

church suffered great loss in many facets after his untimely passing. True success necessitates having a successor.

- Chapter Seven – Fathers Raising Fathers

Inspired by a one-on-one interview conducted during this academic journey, this chapter juxtaposes pastoral leadership styles and the difference in raising up followers versus raising up leaders. By key strategic choices, a father can raise up another who is ready to father as well.

- Chapter Eight – Succession Versus Transition

In this chapter we contemplate the differences in working towards pastoral succession versus a pastoral transition. One is abrupt and almost isolating, while the other brings two generations of leadership together like relay runners in a race. It can be said that Elisha did not succeed Elijah, but rather the mantle transitioned to another generation.

## Conclusion



## Sample:

### Introduction

I have been on a journey... a quest really. I am on a quest to discover the most sustainable multisite church model. I guess I should start by stating that I have been serving as lead pastor of a multisite church for close to fifteen years. At the time of this writing, the church is 57 years old, and I have served as lead pastor here at Grace Church for a total of 28 years. It was fifteen years ago that we launched our second campus. We have four campuses to date.

We have had ups and downs. We have enjoyed the fruit of multisite labor, and we have also dealt with the sharp pain of multisite mutinies. I want to be sure that, with God's help, we are building something that will last.

The intent of this book is not catharsis. I don't want to air out my frustrations and share another "somebody done somebody wrong song." I want to know the church I serve is *built to last*, that it can stand the test of time and talent, and that it will flourish long after I am gone.

Most multisite churches are still in their first generation. From what I have seen, most are personality centric. To say you're a multisite pastor is hip and sexy today; but it is also one of the most challenging things a pastor can do. You had best know that you really are called to lead a multisite work. The questions I have been pondering are these:

- Since most multisite works are in their first generation, how do we know which model will stand the test of time? On this quest together, we will look at the various current models and delve into the ins and outs.
- Since most multisite works are personality-driven, what happens to that church when that pastor leaves the scene? It is believed that King Solomon is the one who wisely observed, "Time and chance happens to them all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11). In other words, this wise guy is saying the best laid plans and intent does not necessarily ensure success. Sometimes it is timing and planning, and then sometimes it's just chance or luck as we would say. And if that is the case, then the opposite is true. Sometimes it doesn't matter how well you plan or what kind of luck you have, things can and will go wrong. Well, if Pastor Wonderful experiences and untimely death, or should something else happen and he and his dynamic personality are no longer there to lead that multisite congregation, what happens to the sheep? What happens to the campuses?
- Finally, how do we successfully transfer the multisite work to another generation of leadership? The art of successful pastoral transition is paramount for *any* model of church, but we have only a handful of examples within the multisite world.

There are other things to delve into. These are just a few of the questions that have circled in my mind and caused me to begin this quest.

It is my prayer that you and I complete this quest with better clarity on whether or not our ministry call is to do multisite church, to have identified which model seems most sustainable over the test of time, to have truly considered pastoral succession, and start today with the end in mind.

Jesus was very clear about the church He was building. He was clear that when it was built correctly, nothing would prevail against it. It was built to last.

## Chapter 1

### A Biblical Background of the Multisite Church

While there are many variants in church models and styles, the multisite model is one that has been widely embraced in the latter half of the twentieth century and onward. The deeply held belief that one church can multiply and magnify its reach by expanding beyond one site permeates North America and other parts of the world. My desire is not to argue that one model is better than another. But as a pastor of a multisite church, I want to ensure I that am building something that will outlast me.

The most common model of church in North America is the single-site church, a single location, focused on reaching the community around it. Most churches within a denomination, or even those that are independent, follow the single-site model. Then there are churches that plant “daughter works” out of their campus that are autonomous single-site churches as well.

The key to understanding the multisite movement is to remember that fulfilling the Great Commission drives these congregations, not a growth strategy.<sup>7</sup> Jesus’ words, as recorded in Mark 16:14, push this effort forward: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”<sup>8</sup> The multisite model takes the church to the greater concentration of the populace of the people rather than asking the people to come to the single location church.

It is the strongly held belief of the multisite church that they are walking out a current version of the early New Testament church in which Acts 2 records that the new believers went house to house. Traditional, single-site churches are not frowned upon, but the multisite church believes it can better fulfill Jesus’ commissioning by replicating itself over a city, a region or state, or even a nation. In fact, there are some anomalies that reach out globally as one church with many locations. Hillsong Church, originating in Sydney, Australia, has sites in Asia Pacific, Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. While this church has taken many hits in recent months

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<sup>7</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), [https://digital.library.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/2854/Frye\\_sbts\\_0207D\\_10033.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://digital.library.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/2854/Frye_sbts_0207D_10033.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), 389.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®, Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a Publishing Ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by Permission. All Rights Reserved.

with scandals and trials among some of its top leadership, the self-descriptive of their multisite model still resonates: “one house with many rooms.”<sup>9</sup>

The church I serve moved from being a single-site church to multisite in 2008. A local church pastor reached out and asked if we would consider assuming leadership of his church, as he was transitioning out of state to another ministry. Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States and has a land mass of about 600 square miles.<sup>10</sup> As we contemplated the future of our church, multisite made sense. My very dear friend and neighbor pastor, Joel Osteen at Lakewood Church, has opted to offer one massive campus as an epicenter to which people could come. I appreciate that, but since I am *not* Joel Osteen and do not have that kind of drawing power, it made more sense for us to multiply ourselves and go where the people are. As of this writing, we now have four campuses, and I envision a few more being planted while I am lead pastor. I feel I should state here that every time we have added another location, it has not been a church plant, but rather we have assumed the pastorate and governance of an existing church. In each circumstance, the pastor was in some type of life transition, and the church did not have a succession plan. We do intend to plant church sites in areas that are currently under-served by the Body of Christ, but that has not been our path so far.

The multisite church is not a new concept that entered onto the scene in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, I believe it can be traced all the way back to that historic day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out and the New Testament church was born. The church Jesus had talked about and pointed his followers to was birthed in one place at one time (Acts 2:1) and quickly spread out from there beginning on that very day. Howard Marshall makes this observation from Acts 2:5 in which we know people from every nation under heaven witnessed the phenomenon of the birth of the New Testament church.

We must assume that at some point the disciples moved outside from the upper room and came in contact with the crowds assembled in Jerusalem for the feast; dwelling need not necessarily imply permanent residence, although many Jews did return to Jerusalem from the Dispersion to end their days there. Their presence and participation in what happened constituted an indication of the worldwide significance of the event. True, they were all Jews

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<sup>9</sup> Gerardo Martí, “The Global Phenomenon of Hillsong Church: An Initial Assessment1,” *Sociology of Religion* 78, no. 4 (January 8, 2018): 377–386, accessed September 9, 2018, <http://academic.oup.com/socrel/article/78/4/377/4731531>.

<sup>10</sup> Marian White, “Top 300 Largest Cities in the United States by Population 2022,” *Moving.com*, July 26, 2022, <https://www.moving.com/tips/largest-cities-in-us/>.

or proselytes and not pagans, but they acted as a symbol of the universal need of mankind for the gospel and of the church's consequent responsibility for mission.<sup>11</sup>

That responsibility for mission and the drive to reach people is what sparks the multisite church movement. Acts 8:1, 8:4, and 11:19 state that the Church scattered everywhere due to persecution. The fact that all the Jerusalem believers except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria was God's method of fulfilling the mandate of Acts 1:8 in which Jesus declared, "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."

The word "scattered" (*diesparēsan*), also used in 8:4, comes from the verb *speirō*, used to refer to sowing seed (Matt. 6:26; 13:3-4, 18; 25:24, 26; Luke 8:5; 12:24; etc.)<sup>12</sup> As Stanley Toussaint points out, the scattering was actually *seeding* the church in sites all over the known world. Isn't that amazing? What the enemy of the church considered as mission accomplished when the people were scattered, God considered as his ultimate mission accomplished in that his church was now seeded and ready to grow in many places. It was that scattering to multiple locations, or sites, that made the Church multiply out of an upper room in Jerusalem, and on to sites all over the known world. The scattering of the Christians led to the most significant step forward in the mission of the church. One might say that it required persecution to make them fulfil the implicit command in Acts 1:8.<sup>13</sup> The multisite church model is a Book of Acts model in which campuses are *seeded* to further the growth of the Kingdom of God.

It may also be said that the original church exemplified the multisite model as recorded in Acts 2:46, in which the church continued "house to house." The Pulpit Commentary observes that the meaning is not that every disciple broke bread in his own house, but that they broke bread at the house where the Christian assemblies were held, whether one or more.<sup>14</sup>

In his doctoral dissertation, Brian Nathaniel Frye proffers six key biblical and theological realities that lead me to accept the multisite structure as a valid expression of church:<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 26.

<sup>12</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 372.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall, 161.

<sup>14</sup> H.D.M. Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 1, Acts of the Apostles (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 55.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Nathaniel Frye, "The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon in North America" (DMin diss, The

1. When surveying the New Testament beginning with Jesus' birth and ending with the completion of the canon, one must realize that ecclesiology was in a state of evolution. It was not fixed upon Jesus' departure nor Paul's death.
2. During the NT era the concept of ekklesia was fluid from location to location and situation to situation. Variation existed in terms of where, how often, in what numbers, in what groups, and for what purposes the New Testament ekklesias met. There was no set pattern.
3. Jesus speaks minimally about church structure (Matt. 16:18; 18:7) and Paul gives relatively little attention to the subject. It would seem that if ecclesiological form were of great importance to these two individuals in particular, the scriptures would reveal far more specific details about the topic. In reality, the scriptures demonstrate that God did not choose to provide a specific formula for church structure.
4. The structure and nomenclature of NT churches borrowed from contemporary secular and religious structures of the NT era. For example, Paul's use of ekklesia, a secular (Hellenistic) word for "gathering," over sunagoge [sic] displays an intentional effort on Paul's part to develop a theologically correct and contextually relevant understanding of "church."
5. Throughout church history, there has been great variance in how believers apply NT teachings to create ecclesiological structures.
6. Multisite church arrangements are validated by the design of the gospel message. The focus of the New Testament and the entire redemption story is God's reconciliation of man to Himself for His glory. Thus, any contextualized ecclesiological structure that does not contradict or violate Scripture should be available for use in order to expand God's kingdom and increase His glory.

As stated earlier, it is not the purpose nor intent of this work to clarify the multisite church model over any other model of ministry. The more common and traditional single-site model is alive and well. In fact, a deep dive into the form and function of the twenty-first century church would reveal various vibrant models of *doing* church that are flourishing in the world today. In the book *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, the authors refer to mega-churches, multi-site churches,

micro-churches (also known as house-churches), and your standard traditional church.<sup>16</sup> All models of church work and have impact. The intent of this project is to spotlight the multisite movement and burrow down on the most effective and sustainable model that may be transferred to another generation of leadership. Now let's look at the history of multisite in our times.

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<sup>16</sup> Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *And: The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), accessed April 8, 2021.

## Chapter 2

### A Look Back at the Multisite Church in North America

There is no one personality or team identified as the originator of the multisite idea. Multisite churches seeped on to the map of Christianity with little fanfare or bold entry. The multisite prototype, though simple in many respects, developed via a more complex evolutionary process. The multisite church model emerged progressively through the convergence of ideas, beliefs, social constructs, and technological advancements.<sup>17</sup>

As he quotes Michael Horton and his work entitled, *Popes, Populism, or Presbyteries? Evaluating the Multisite Church*, Kenneth Nash observes that even the Roman Catholic Church carried on the Apostle Paul's pattern of one church in many locations through the first millennia of its existence:

There is one supreme pastor and thus, one church, headquartered in Rome, with branch offices, as it were, throughout the world. This polity is explicitly and dogmatically committed to hierarchical ministry, with a charismatically gifted head who is accountable only to the Spirit who endows him with at least the potential for infallible interpretations of God's Word for the many churches under his authority.<sup>18</sup>

The history of Christianity in North America involved circuit riders, who would go from place to place, preaching and holding services. This concept of the circuit rider was built on the regular habit of John Wesley to visit various societies all over England, but it was in America that this practice took on new life. In his research on John Wesley, Adam Hilderbrandt draws from Frederick Norwood's historical account of the Methodist Church: "Norwood points out that, tying the whole together was the network of circuits served by Wesley's lay preachers. The basic grid was the sturdy triangle which marked the leader's own regular itineration: London, Bristol, Newcastle-on-Tyne." The societies in these areas functioned much like a church would and were spread out under Wesley's consolidating leadership.<sup>19</sup> Revival was in the air, and John Wesley had an insatiable desire to reach as many as he could in any way possible.

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<sup>17</sup> Frye.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Jeffrey Nash, "The Identifying, Equipping, and Sending of Laypersons to Lead a Multi-Site Church" (DMin diss, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2014), [https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1805&context=ecommonsatsdissertations&seid=1&referer=https%253A%252F%252Fscholar.google.com%252Fscholar%253Fhl%253Den%2526as\\_sdt%253D0%25252C44%2526q%253Djohn%252Bwesley%252Bmultisite%252Bchurch%2526btnG%253D#search=%22john%20wesley%20multisite%20church%22](https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1805&context=ecommonsatsdissertations&seid=1&referer=https%253A%252F%252Fscholar.google.com%252Fscholar%253Fhl%253Den%2526as_sdt%253D0%25252C44%2526q%253Djohn%252Bwesley%252Bmultisite%252Bchurch%2526btnG%253D#search=%22john%20wesley%20multisite%20church%22).

<sup>19</sup> Adam S. Hilderbrandt, "Transitioning to Multisite: A Model for Transitioning Wesley United



John Wesley called on the practice of the early church as justification for his organizing followers into societies, classes and bands. 'Upon reflection, I could not but observe, this is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity.' In the earliest times, those whom God had sent forth preached the gospel to every creature. ...But as soon as any of *these were so convinced of the truth, as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they* immediately joined them together, took an account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met these 'catechumens' ...apart from the great congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, and for them, according to their several necessities.<sup>20</sup>

As the burgeoning nation expanded at a rapid pace, the Methodist movement was there, reaching people in their new contexts.<sup>21</sup> Across the United States in 1784, "there were 84 preachers, 46 circuits and 14,988 members in the Methodist societies."<sup>22</sup> The purpose and intent behind the circuit riders then was the same derivative of the multisite church today. Get the Gospel to where the people are. The reason for this growth was described as "local amateur lay pastors" who fulfilled the duties of the pastor in lieu of the absent circuit riders.<sup>23</sup>

As observed by Kenneth Nash, the early Methodists clearly embraced the priesthood of all believers by starting up new churches with lay leadership.

When the circuit rider was not available during the week, the local church had a class leader (layperson) who pastored until the circuit rider could return. Methodists used that approach to become one of the largest religious groups in the United States, moving from less than 2.5 percent of church adherents in 1776 to more than 34.2 percent in 1850, which was a growth from sixty-five congregations to 13,302 in just seventy years. The reason for this

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Methodist Church to a Multisite Church" (DMin diss, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2018), <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2246&context=ecommonsatsdissertations>.

<sup>20</sup> Frederick Abbott Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Hilderbrandt.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Ludwig, *Francis Asbury: God's Circuit Rider*, 1st ed. (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1984), 142.

<sup>23</sup> Nash, 28.

growth was described as local amateur lay pastors who fulfilled the duty of the pastor in lieu of the absent circuit riders.<sup>24</sup>

For the sake of the gospel, and fulfillment of the Great Commission in which Jesus commanded his disciples to go, “and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19, Mark 16:15), John Wesley in England and the Methodist leaders in North America willingly allowed laypersons to lead the local churches. My graduate school mentor and professor Leonard Sweet writes, “The phrase *The Great Commission* was first coined in 1910 at the Edinburgh Conference where eight ‘commissions’ by missionary leaders were gathered up and reported on. The first word of the Great Commission is ‘Go.’ A little less than two hundred times does the Bible instruct us to ‘go.’”<sup>25</sup> The Methodist movement acknowledged that the laypersons working at a local church may not be fully equipped or educated, but the task at hand required all hands on-deck. The mission required a co-missioned effort so that everyone could go. Thus, they were empowered to lead. Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini describe empowerment as “the intentional transfer of authority to an emerging leader within specified boundaries from an established leader who maintains responsibility for the ministry.”<sup>26</sup>

Scott McConnell suggests that the multisite model, much like Wesley’s movement, embraces the strengths and weaknesses of those who lead: “Any pastor has three primary roles: teacher, shepherd, and leader. Most pastors tend to excel at one or two and they get by with the other—or worse, it may be a liability. The role of campus pastor is, in fact, an opportunity to avoid such liabilities.”<sup>27</sup> In short, we are better together. The multisite effort is a team effort.

It can be argued that modern day multisite models are merely adaptations of the Book of Acts church and even the Methodist circuit riders. Craig Groeschel, pastor of Life Church based in Oklahoma City and the reputed largest multisite church in the United States, likes to comment that

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<sup>24</sup> Nash, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Leonard I Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church : Missional, Relational, Incarnational* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), accessed November 2, 2019, <http://public.ebilib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4088758>, 69.

<sup>26</sup> Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub. Group, 2004), accessed February 26, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Scott McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement’s Next Generation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), Kindle, 95.

the move from horseback preacher to satellite broadcast is simply a shift from circuit rider to closed-circuit rider.<sup>28</sup>

Some critics may retort against the circuit rider scenario stating that the Methodists embraced that model because of a shortage of qualified preachers. Gregg R. Allison, a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, makes such an argument and suggests a better historical voice setting precedent for multisite churches would be found in other historical statements of faith.

In 1644, the First London Confession of Faith, representing the seven Particular or Calvinistic Baptist churches in that city, was quite explicit about the cooperation that should characterize the churches:

And although the particular congregations are distinct and several bodies, everyone a compact and knit city in itself; yet they are all to walk by one and the same rule, and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needful affairs of the church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head.<sup>29</sup>

This emphasis continued fairly steadily throughout Baptist history and appeared in the latest version of the Baptist Faith and Message (2000). Section 14 on cooperation affirms,

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary *and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another* in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom.

Multi-site churches embody this emphasis on strong connectionalism [sic]. Certainly, the documents cited above call for unity between separate churches. But is it not possible to achieve that strong connectionalism more readily through the multi-site approach?<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, location 1490.

<sup>29</sup> Allison is referencing William L. Lumpkin, "London Confession, 1644," in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 168-169.

<sup>30</sup> Gregg R. Allison, "Theological Defense of Multisite," *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (February 26, 2010), <https://www.9marks.org/article/theological-defense-multi-site/>.

The quest and drive to reach souls and to grow the church has not waned since its birth on the day of Pentecost. The passion to do whatever possible, by any means possible, has always been. It would seem amnesia has set in and past quests to press the church forward are all but forgotten. In the *Journal of Social History*, David E. Eagle reaches back in time and reminds the reader of other voices trumpeting church growth in days past:

The influential Christian social commentator Josiah Strong gives voice to a vision of the church whose marching orders are to “save souls” and to reverse the moral decay of America through the healthy spiritual and physical growth of adults, children and families. In 1893, Strong wrote what could easily have come from a modern church marketing manual,

The question then becomes this: Will the church enlarge her conceptions and activities to the wide measure of her mission and apply the principles of the Gospel to the entire life of each community? Here is the opportunity of the ages for her to gain a commanding influence over the lives of the multitude and fashion the unfolding civilization of the future.<sup>31</sup>

In 2006, Lisa B. Deaderick presented an article with a brief history of multisite churches. Here is an attempt at an encapsulated timeline of multisite churches:

1800s -- Methodist circuit riders were pastors for multiple satellite churches. Sites were set up as soon and as cheaply as possible. When the circuit rider wasn't at the satellite church during the week, a class leader or other member would keep things running until the circuit rider could stop through again and kick things up.

1942 -- Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, started opening satellite locations.

1970 -- Highland Park had 70 off-campus sites.

1980s -- Highland Park began letting go of the multiple sites.

1990 -- There were 10 multisite churches in the United States, according to numbers Todd Rhoades, of Monday Morning Insight, got from a multisite church conference.

1998 -- That group of churches grew from 10 to about 100.

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<sup>31</sup> David E. Eagle, “Historicizing the Megachurch,” *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 589-604, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shu109>.

2006 -- There are now at least 1,500 such churches in the database of Leadership Network, an organization that hosts an annual multisite church conference.<sup>32</sup>

Successful multisite churches do more than launch a new location. They plan ahead to operate as a multisite church. They do not just function as a church with additional campuses. This is an important distinction with significant consequences.<sup>33</sup>

With that quest and drive to reach souls, and understanding the aforementioned geographical and demographic challenges, multisite churches make sense as a strategic, evangelistic approach. Noted evangelical researcher Ed Stetzer has predicted, "Multisite churches are on the rise. This is not a fad; this is not some sort of temporary trend - multisite churches are here to stay. It's like the megachurch now - just a part of our church landscape - the new normal."<sup>34</sup> The authors of *The Multisite Revolution* tender the following statistics:

Among Protestant churches in the United States well over 1,500 churches are already multisite. One out of four megachurches is holding services at multiple locations. One out of three churches says that it is thinking about developing a new service in a new location. Seven out of the country's ten fastest-growing churches offer worship in multiple locations, as do nine of the ten largest churches.<sup>35</sup>

It is vital to note that all multisite churches are *not* megachurches. This is an often-overused misconception. History bears out, and current times affirm, that churches of varying sizes have moved to the multisite model as a strategic approach to being more effective. Multisite churches are here to stay. The rapid growth of multisite has outpaced the megachurch movement by fivefold over a fifteen-year time span.<sup>36</sup> Multisite is taking the church to the people. In short, the multi-site phenomenon is growing dramatically among churches of all sizes, bringing it soon enough to every city, every denomination, and every style of ministry.<sup>37</sup>

Over 5 million people worship in one of the more than 8,000 multisite churches today, making up nine percent of American Protestant churchgoers and three percent of American Protestant

<sup>32</sup> Lisa B. Deaderick, "Brief History of Multisite Churches," *Daily Press*, December 23, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> David D'Angelo and Ryan Stigile, *Multisite Church Pitfalls: 7 Dangers You Cannot Afford to Ignore* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace, 2016), 2, Kindle.

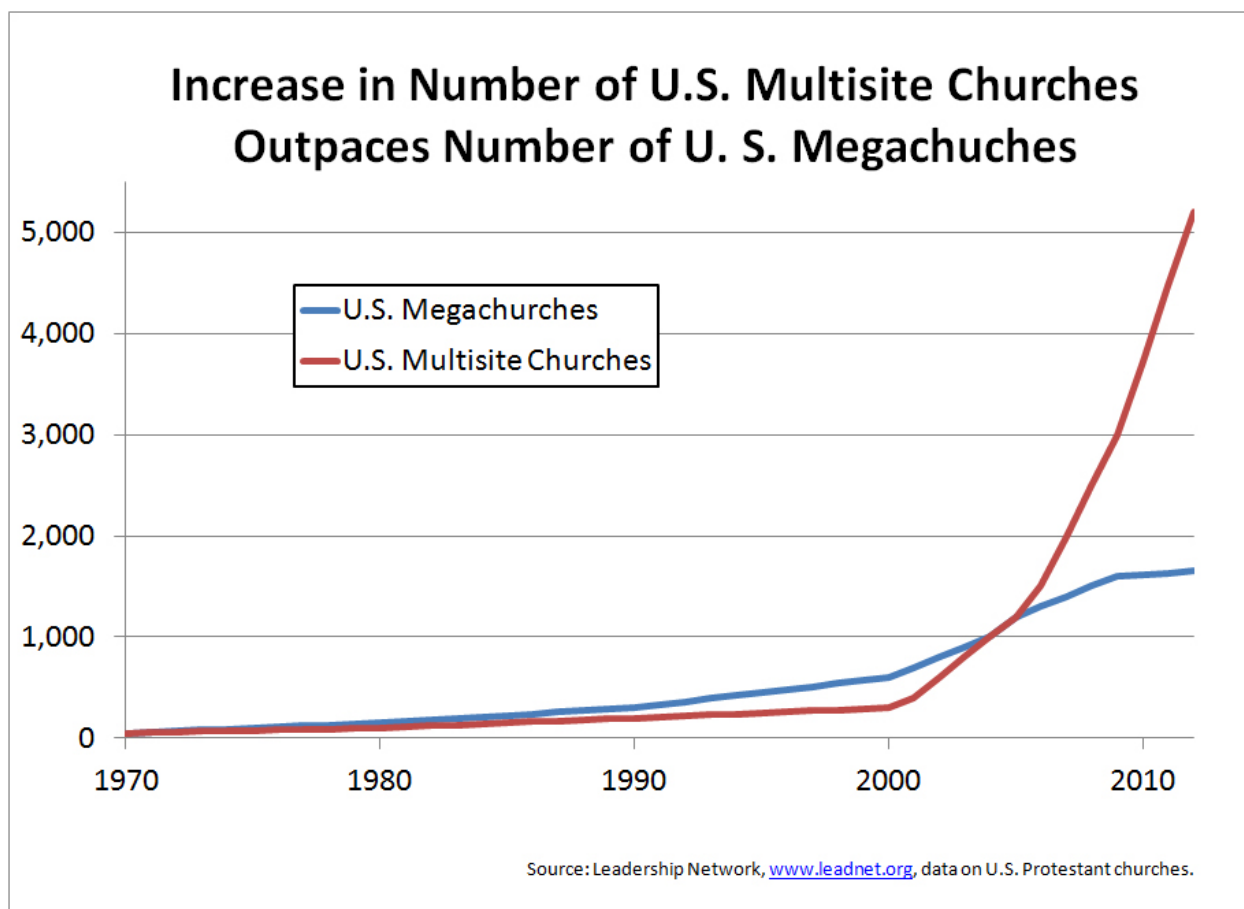
<sup>34</sup> House and Allison, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, 15.

<sup>36</sup> House and Allison, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, 15.

churches. In the last quarter of a century, the multisite revolution has gone from an experiment to a widespread phenomenon. It has been adopted by all types of churches, denominationally, theologically, and geographically, and the trend shows no sign of slowing down.<sup>38</sup> Note the following multisite church growth chart:



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It is not my intent to argue that single-site churches are not fulfilling their missional mandate or are irrelevant. But rather this historical look shows the motive and drive that lies under the multisite movement. The idea of "mega," as in *megachurch*, should not be misconstrued as integral or elemental in a multisite church. Pastor John Siebeling, pastor of Life Church, a multisite church located in Memphis, Tennessee wisely stated, "It used to be, 'How many people are you running?' And then it became, 'How many services do you have?' And now it's, 'How many campuses do you have?' It should actually be, 'What are you called to do and are you doing it?'"<sup>40</sup> History bears out,

<sup>38</sup> Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, 10. Note: these statistics are as of 2018.

<sup>39</sup> <https://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/megachurchesVSmultisite.jpg>

and it is my contention, that the multisite church is not motivated by the numbers of the crowds as much as by the effectiveness of its ministry in reaching the people. A church need not be *mega* in order to be *multi*. In his descriptive of Seacoast Church based in South Carolina, Geoff Surratt described the varying sizes of the campuses and their community impact this way:

Being one church with multiple locations has allowed Seacoast to grow larger and smaller at the same time. In the past seven years, Seacoast has seen its overall weekend attendance grow from three thousand to over ten thousand. At the same time, people are attending Seacoast campuses of eighty, one hundred, three hundred, eight hundred, one thousand, and five thousand people.<sup>41</sup>

The current setting is a post-pandemic church. Covid-19 has impacted the world as we know it. Long established businesses and institutions have been rocked to their core, and a reassessment of operations and structure has been necessary for survival. Large and small entities that were not prepared or willing and able to change, are no more. The Church and how to do church has not been exempt. Wolfgang Simson astutely observes, "God is changing the Church, and that, in turn, will change the world. Millions of Christians around the world are aware of an imminent reformation of global proportions. They say, in effect: 'Church as we know it is preventing Church as God wants it.'"<sup>42</sup>

For one to champion a certain church modality as the right way, or the only way, is shortsighted and presumptuous to say the least. Ray Hollenbach writes, "Jesus didn't go to the cross for nation-states, social institutions, or corporations: he bled, died, and rose again for people. And the church is made up of people—that's the why God set the whole thing up! In a strange way, the Covid changes have helped bring us back to the foundational truth that we need each other."<sup>43</sup> There is no one right way in which to do church. We need single-site churches. We need house churches. We need mega-churches. And we need multisite churches. If we are going to push back darkness and bring the hope of Jesus to this world, we need each other.

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<sup>40</sup> John Siebeling, "NPO Stakeholder Interview with Pastor John Siebeling," interview by author via Zoom, November 18, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Wolfgang Simson, "Wolfgang Simson's 15 Theses," *House Church Network*, March 13, 2021, <https://housechurch.org/page/view-article?id=1>.

<sup>43</sup> Ray Hollenbach, "How the Pandemic Has Changed Church," *Church Leaders*, last modified September 30, 2020, <https://churchleaders.com/ministry-tech-leaders/383149-how-the-pandemic-has-changed-church.html>.

Wolfgang Simson goes on to observe man's attempts through the centuries to patent and own what is really God's.

In aligning itself to the religious patterns of the day, the historic Orthodox Church after Constantine in the 4th century AD adopted a religious system which was in essence Old Testament, complete with priests, altar, a Christian temple (cathedral), frankincense and a Jewish, synagogue-style worship pattern. The Roman Catholic Church went on to canonize the system. Luther did reform the content of the gospel but left the outer forms of "church" remarkably untouched; the Free-Churches freed the system from the State, the Baptists then baptized it, the Quakers dry-cleaned it, the Salvation Army put it into a uniform, the Pentecostals anointed it and the Charismatics renewed it, but until today nobody has really changed the superstructure.<sup>44</sup>

My deep dive into research and analysis of church models confirms that there is no one way in which church should be done. Surely, history has borne this out over the years. The multisite church has seen success, and the preponderance of evidence states it will continue to do so.

The same can be said of single-site churches, mega-churches, and house churches. The paramount key is each body following its God-designed assignment. Each model serves a greater purpose; each model has its origins in scripture. The true matter at hand is what are we doing to get the Good News to everyone and reach people for Jesus?

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<sup>44</sup> Simson.



### Chapter 3

#### Anchors, Chains, Minutes, and Miles

In Wesley's era the challenge was lack of transportation and the impact even five miles could have from community to community. With most travel done by foot or carried by beast, travel of any significant distance from home was an undertaking. In the twenty-first century, though advances in transportation have made life so much more convenient, people are still home-based and community centered. While we may not focus as much on miles, we do determine our travel boundaries by anchors, chains, minutes, and miles.

A study done on the carbon footprint of cellular phone use concluded that people live and commute within a sphere of important places. An *important place* is a geographic location where a person spends a significant amount of time and/or which she visits frequently. Examples of important places include home, work, gym, grocery store, and a house of worship.<sup>45</sup>

For example, Karen Hamrick and David Hopkins conducted a study on behalf of the United States Department of Agriculture. The purpose and intent were to study and map the importance of locale and drive time to grocery stores, based on income level. Hamrick and Hopkins present well-defined transportation concepts for a household as these:

1. Anchor: A primary or substantial trip destination.
2. Direct trip: A trip that travels directly between two anchor destinations, such as a trip from home to work.
3. Chain: A series of short trips linked together between anchor destinations, such as a trip that leaves home, stops to drop a passenger, stops for coffee and continues to work.
4. Intervening stop: The stops associated with chained trips.
5. Tour: Total travel between two anchor destinations. Note that it is possible to have the two anchor destinations be the same location, as in a home-to-home or work-to-work tour.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Kent Lyons, et al., eds., "Proceedings: Lecture Notes in Computer Science" (presented at the Pervasive Computing: 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference 2011, San Francisco, CA, June 12-15, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Karen S. Hamrick and David Hopkins, "The Time Cost of Access to Food - Distance to the Grocery Store as Measured in Minutes," *International Journal of Time Use Research* 9, no. 1 (November 2012): 28-58, [dx.doi.org/10.13085/eIJTUR.9.1.28-58](http://dx.doi.org/10.13085/eIJTUR.9.1.28-58).

Hamrick and Hopkins assert that “time distance” is key for the average American household; stating, “travel time is the true indicator of access, for which distance attempts to account.”<sup>47</sup> The authors proffer 15.4 miles as the maximum for distance and time distance allowed. Let that sink in. In fact, let me say it again. *Most people live and function within a 15.4-mile radius of their home.*

Over the years, we have had individuals from out of state join our team. Inevitably, they will come to the big city and venture out and about to discover culinary treasures, hotspot coffee dives, and so forth that my wife Melanie and I have never heard of. Why? Because we are creatures of habit, and most of our day-to-day lives are spent within a 15-mile radius. I will certainly go with someone to experience a local coffee roaster’s expert blend, but that’s the exception not the rule. Melanie and I live in a city known for its food and hotspots, and yet we eat at the same places and haunt the same spots because that’s the way of anchors, chains, minutes, and miles.

One’s house of worship would fall in line with Hamrick’s and Hopkins’ descriptive as an *anchor* and/or *direct trip*. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the same principles of this study apply to church location. The 15.4-mile maximum distance can be logically applied to the commute a person/family will make to and from their home church. Thus, another key reason for multisite churches. As our communities spread out, churches should consider doing the same. Go to where the people are.

It should be noted that single-site churches, house churches, small groups, or any other form of gathering would also be impacted by this rule of thumb. If you were to study the membership of your current church, I feel safe in saying that you would find the vast majority of your membership live within that 15.4-mile distance or less to the church.

In addition to real geographical barriers like distance, there are imagined geographical barriers like rivers, interstates, and a community’s municipal limits.<sup>48</sup> It is within our nature to be territorial and creatures of habit – even geographical habit. While making his statement as to why his church made a move to the multisite model, Bryan Collier made this keen observation:

People from one side of the tracks might not cross over the tracks for goods and services, preferring to stay in their community to connect to these services. When you add that churches are often geographical centerpieces in these communities, then you have to begin to address the challenge of getting people to drive thirty minutes to your church when they won’t drive three to the one down the street!<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Bryan D. Collier, *The Go-to Church: Post Megachurch Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 16.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 16.

With the same evangelistic drive as the great John Wesley, multisite churches are driven by the motivation of getting the church closer to where the people are, rather than pressing the people to get to where the lone church location is.

## Chapter 5

### Pastoral Succession

If you are in ministry, you know a story of a pastoral succession gone bad. Perhaps you even have the scars to prove it. It's tragic but true that countless churches have been rocked to their core because the transition in leadership did not go well. Church splits, church closures, or failed ministries are often tied to one party or both handling transition in the wrong way.

The history of succession in ministry is vast and challenging to encapsulate. Every church that has survived or thrived beyond one generation has had succession. Whether it was done successfully and without fallout is another thing altogether. William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird stress, "You want to get succession right, not just for yourself but for the legacy you leave behind."<sup>50</sup> Willie George is the founding pastor of Church on the Move in Tulsa, Oklahoma and a very dear friend of mine. He has successfully passed the pastoral baton to his son, Whitney, and claims, "I am still on the team, but I am no longer the starting quarterback." He observes, "There are strong leaders who built weak churches because they dominated everything and did not raise up another generation of leaders. The elder leader has to give the next generation a voice."<sup>51</sup> I believe Willie is so correct.

Shortly before his untimely death in a small airplane crash, Dr. Myles Munroe, a renowned pastor and author from the Bahamas (who for some reason liked to call me "Jonesy" when we would converse), stated, "'True leaders don't invest in buildings. Jesus never built a building. They invest in people. Why? Because success without a successor is failure. So, your legacy should not be in buildings, programs, or projects; your legacy must be in people."<sup>52</sup> Church history is rife with examples of success with no successor, and thus an ultimate failure. Some have deemed Munroe's last message as a prophetic foretelling of his soon to be tragic and accidental death. He said, "'The greatest act of leadership is what happens in your absence. If everything you've done died with you, you are a failure. True leadership is measured by what happens after you die."<sup>53</sup> It's not just in the case of death of a senior leader; there are other causes of transition. But in any case, a

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<sup>50</sup> William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 18.

<sup>51</sup> Willie George, "NPO Stakeholder Interview with Willie George," Interview by author via Zoom, October 30, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> "Did Myles Munroe Prophecy His Death? Last Message," YouTube, 2020, <https://youtu.be/YPskKBwyz1Q>.

<sup>53</sup> Leonardo Blair, "Myles Munroe Talked About Dying Accidentally, and of Legacy in Ominous Message to Leaders Shortly Before Fatal Jet Crash," *The Christian Post*, November 14, 2014, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/myles-munroe-talked-about-dying-accidentally-and-of-legacy-in-ominous-message-to-leaders-shortly-before-fatal-jet-crash.html>.

succession plan is needed for every church. The multisite church model can make pastoral succession even more daunting. In fact, that's a large part of this quest I am on.

As has been stated, most multisite churches are in their first generation. What leadership succession looks like is still in its formulative stages. Granted, and we have already borne this out in an earlier chapter, multisite has been around for a very long time; but you would have to agree with me, it is a burgeoning church model today. In fact, I would argue that it is trendy. There's a cool factor in some circles when one is able to state, "I am pastor of a multisite church." Speaking as one who has led a multisite work since 2008, you had better know that you know that you know you are called to this and not just attempting to get in on the latest sexy trend in church ministry. The challenges are too great and the stakes too high.

It is my contention that most multisite works today are in their first generation of leadership. There are exceptions to this, but the explosive upswing in the number of multisite works makes my position fairly solid. I would also argue that most multisite churches today are personality centric. Let me explain what I mean by that.

In today's climate, ministry and celebrity seem to run closely together. I have experienced a bit of that myself. When my wife and I are out and about town, it often happens that we will meet a member of our church who attends one of our four campuses. The reaction to seeing us in person and up close often entails a request to take a selfie with us to share with their family or on social media. I know I am just a Jones and just a guy, but our culture today allows for a bit of celebrity to come with ministry. I think it is interesting that society calls someone with a strong, active social media audience an "influencer." The smaller and more plenteous our screens have become, the more celebrities and influencers we have among us. Melanie and I have marveled many times when we see an ad on a television network for a new celebrity variety show. Inevitably, they will go through the list of featured celebrity guests, and there will be a couple we do not know. The person isn't an athlete or Olympian, not a recording artist, and has never starred in a movie. His or her claim to fame comes from having a lot of social media followers.

My mentor and graduate school professor, Leonard Sweet observed, "We are living in a screen culture. We might as well embrace that. Most every pastor is on a screen, whether it is on a phone, a tablet, or a massive wall in the church. It was our screen presence that got most churches through the Covid-19 pandemic. When our nation shut down, the churches stayed open via the screen. And, even if only on a subconscious level, people equate celebrity with screens."<sup>54</sup>

Associating celebrity with ministry is not a new idea. There were those years ago who leveraged their celebrity for all it was worth to further their ministry effort. If you disagree, then consider John Wesley, George Whitefield, or even Martin Luther King, Jr. These are just a few examples of

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<sup>54</sup> Leonard Sweet, "Semiotics Lecture" (lecture, Portland Seminary, Eastsound, WA, 2022).

ministers who embraced their celebrated status for the sake of their cause. Leonard Sweet admonished me and my cohort to, “allow yourself to be seen; the people need to see us. But be an icon, not an idol. We cannot breathe in what is being said about us.”<sup>55</sup> I agree with Dr. Sweet. An icon is a symbol or representative for something else. Your smart phone has multiple icons that represent programs you utilize. We don’t worship icons; we use icons. But idols want to be worshipped. Pastor, be more like Bill Clinton...don’t inhale! Work the celebrity for God’s glory, not yours. Now let me get back to my point.

The most prominent and popular multisite model shows the lead pastor preaching on the big screens at every campus. Thus, that pastor on the screen is the common denominator that makes the church personality centric. So, what does a successful pastoral transition look like in a twenty-first century church, especially if that church has been personality-centric in its design?

Melanie and I were invited to be a part of a multisite pastors’ roundtable in Atlanta in 2014. We had somehow made the list of fifty pastors who were invited and were excited to attend. Andy Stanley and Craig Groeschel were the facilitators. It was a phenomenal event. One of the things I most appreciated was that Andy and Craig were sincere and open, not only in areas in which they agreed, but also in areas in which they had different ministry philosophies. It was during a question-and-answer session that I asked both about the succession plan of their multisite churches. As a point of reference, *Outreach Magazine* listed Andy Stanley’s church, Northpoint Community Church, as the largest church in North America in 2020.<sup>56</sup> Craig Groeschel has the largest multisite church with 37 locations at the time of this writing.<sup>57</sup> Andy Stanley replied, “Our campuses would most likely spin off and become autonomous. We have structured ourselves with enough individuality now, so that that would probably work.”<sup>58</sup> When it came time for Craig to answer the same question about his current plan for succession should anything happen to him as senior pastor, he answered, “I don’t know. We have never discussed that. But the next time you see me, ask me that question and I *will* know.”<sup>59</sup> I really appreciated Craig’s transparency, and I am quite sure he has a totally different answer today. But by all appearances, most multisite churches are operating with the same mindset as a young Craig Groeschel in 2014. The momentum of *now* is keeping leaders from planning for *then*.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Outreach Magazine lists Stanley’s church as having 38,589 people. See <https://outreach100.com/largest-churches-in-america/2020>.

<sup>57</sup> See <https://www.life.church/locations/>.

<sup>58</sup> Craig Groeschel and Andy Stanley, “Multisite Church Workshop” (NorthPoint Church, Atlanta, GA, July 10, 2014).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Jesus himself sets an example of the purpose and intent of succession in ministry. William Atkinson journals that in calling his followers to engage in the same mission he had been advancing (preaching good news, healing the sick, casting out demons), Jesus also expected them to follow his example in how to do this.<sup>60</sup> Before ascending to the Father, Jesus spoke to his disciples and told them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:12-14). It was Jesus' intent that his successors pick up from where he left off and exceed what he had accomplished; and so, it should be in any ministry succession as well.

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<sup>60</sup> William P. Atkinson, "Succession-Management, Jesus-Style," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 36, no. 2 (May 26, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/18124461.2016.1180498>.

## Chapter 6

### Success With No Successor

One historical account of struggle and delay in transition is the historic Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England. At its prime, the world-renowned Charles Spurgeon would speak to over 10,000 people in one gathering. Growing up as a preacher's kid and having launched into my own ministry at the age of 19, I have had the privilege of being in many pastors' studies all over the United States. It is safe to say that most pastors who were born in the 1960s or earlier have some or all of Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermon Series on their bookshelves. Charles Spurgeon was a preacher's preacher and true gift to the Body of Christ in his era and today. Metropolitan Tabernacle was truly impacting the world to the glory of God.

In a 1934 article in the Moody Bible Institute Monthly commemorating the centenary of Spurgeon's birth, Rev. W.H. Hockmann extolled the ministry of the Metropolitan Tabernacle,

The Tabernacle has been a beehive of activity. Overflowing in all directions, not less than thirty centers of Christian ministry were established in different parts of the London area, with some eight thousand children enrolled in various Sunday Schools. A colportage association was formed [for the distribution of tracts and religious materials], alms houses sustained, orphanages for both boys and girls established and the world renowned Pastors College brought into being. Never did the crowds of eager listeners cease to gather at the Tabernacle doors long before the hours for Sunday services.<sup>61</sup>

Note that W.H. Hockmann observed that Spurgeon's church was, "Overflowing in all directions," and, "Not less than thirty centers of Christian ministry were established in different parts of the London area." That is multisite ministry. And let me add, that his multisite ministry was indeed personality centric. Everything hinged on Charles Spurgeon.

In the late spring of 1891, Spurgeon took ill. Poor health had been an ongoing issue for the pastor-preacher extraordinaire, but this time he was unable to fulfill his duties in the pulpit and needed to retreat to his home in Menton, France for respite. He solicited the help of another well-known preacher who was from America, A.T. Pierson. Pierson had ministered in Spurgeon's pulpit in recent times and had done so successfully. So, he agreed to fill the pulpit while Spurgeon recovered. Unfortunately, Spurgeon not only did not recover, but he died there in his home on the French Rivera on January 31, 1892. Charles Spurgeon was only fifty-seven years old.<sup>62</sup> What would become of this great church and who would be the next pastor? No one was sure because Charles

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<sup>61</sup> David E. Eagle, "Historicizing the Megachurch" *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 589-604.

<sup>62</sup> Lewis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992), 836.



Spurgeon, in all of his writings, articles, and musings, never laid out a pastoral succession plan for the Metropolitan Church after his tenure.

A year went by, and it was apparent to all that A.T. Pierson was the obvious choice to assume the pastorate. However, Pierson needed to return to the States for a few months, and that required another interim preacher to cover Metropolitan's pulpit while he was gone. Thomas Spurgeon, one of Charles' twin sons, was asked to step in and handle the preaching and ministry for three months.<sup>63</sup> Those three months were a great success, and many people were endeared to Spurgeon's offspring. Many in the congregation saw similarities between Thomas and his late father and it drew them to him. At the conclusion of the appointed time, young Spurgeon and family left, and Pierson made his way back to London to resume the interim duties.<sup>64</sup> W.Y. Fullerton writes about A.T. Pierson's return and the fact that he found a different church than the one he had left. "Without a pilot it had drifted. It was impossible, perhaps, for those inside the church to estimate or to avoid the danger; equally impossible for those outside to warn or to guide it, lest they should have been suspected of interested motives."<sup>65</sup> This church that had been "a beehive of activity" had lost its queen bee.

Division began to develop in the great church. "Considerable agitation ensued as people started dividing over the possible candidates, especially Pierson and Thomas."<sup>66</sup> Sadly, this juggernaut church, with its worldwide impact, went through a three-year dive of division, digression, and confusion because its great leader did not have a solid succession plan in place.

The church was not split, for it was impossible for any party to inaugurate a new assembly worthy of the Spurgeon tradition, but the rift in the ranks of the membership went deep, even to the severing of family relationships and the sundering of lifelong ties. Alas! The great mind that had for so long controlled such diverse forces was missing, and for some months there was much unrest, freely spoken of as "The Tabernacle Tempest."<sup>67</sup>

In the end, Thomas Spurgeon assumed the pastorate for fifteen years. Metropolitan Tabernacle lost its momentum, many members, and its community status as a result of three years of confusion and

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<sup>63</sup> William Young Fullerton, *Thomas Spurgeon: A Biography* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 152.

<sup>64</sup> Many historical accounts make it clear that it was assumed and accepted that A.T. Pierson would be the next pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle.

<sup>65</sup> Fullerton, 155.

<sup>66</sup> Drummond, 777.

<sup>67</sup> Fullerton, 156.

turmoil due to the lack of a succession plan. Sadly, the words I shared earlier by Myles Munroe haunts the back of our minds in this tragic story of the Metropolitan Church after Spurgeon's passing: "The greatest act of leadership is what happens in your absence. If everything you've done died with you, you are a failure. True leadership is measured by what happens after you die. Success without a successor is a failure."

# Project Launch Plan

## Doctoral Project Description

My NPO statement is as follows: Multisite churches are predominantly first generation with personality centric leadership, needing intentionality for sustainability and succession.

My project to address this is a book that looks back at the biblical and historical origins of multisite churches, lays out the various models with the pros and cons of each, and then addresses the need for a well thought out pastoral succession plan. The dynamics of a multisite church behooves us to give pause and contemplate the *what* and the *how* for pastoral succession. Will each campus spin off with autonomy? Or is the church so structured that another pastor/personality can step in and lead?

## Audience

This book primarily targets pastors and church staff. I have been excited to discover three distinct sub-groups within that target audience that have expressed interest in the outcome and the insights of this project. One audience is the pastor contemplating transitioning into a multisite model. There is enough detail shared that allows one to weigh the pros and cons and make an informed decision. The other audience is the current pastor who is leading a multisite church. And finally, pastors of traditional single-site churches as well as pastors of multisite churches are deeply interested in succession planning.

Upon completion of the book, I intend to engage this target audience utilizing social media, word of mouth, and linking with parachurch organizations and some denominational organizations, to market the product. Should I go with a publisher, they too would market the book.

## Development Plan

### Fall 2022

- Writing began on the introduction and sample chapters.
- Cover design was initiated with two separate graphic designers.
- Graphic designer was chosen and artwork for the book cover began.
- Sample chapters and an introduction were shared with NPO stakeholders and select pastoral-peers for feedback.
- Changes were made in accordance to feedback given.

### **Spring 2023**

- Focus is on completion of the three key assignments from Portland Seminary to complete the doctoral project. This includes the doctoral project, project launch plan, and the final project portfolio.

### **Summer 2023**

- Writing resumes to complete the project.
- Sample chapters are shopped with publishing companies to determine if there is interest or if the book will be self-published.
- Marketing plan is in place and marketing support is secured.
- Sample chapters are shared with key influencers in order to secure book endorsements.
- Sample chapters are shared with select lead pastors and ministry staff to solicit feedback.
- A website domain is secured for the future online roll-out.

### **Winter 2023**

- All solicited feedback is parsed through and changes are made to the book.
- The book is submitted to the publisher for editing and publication.
- Marketing begins on social media, and with ARC – The Association of Related Churches and Destiny Leaders.
- Close ministry friends who are social media influencers will be solicited to promote the book on their social media platforms.
- Web designer is secured to design and build out the Built To Last website.
- Workshop material is developed and further solidified. This will include a printed syllabus, promotional materials, screen media to be utilized in the presentation, and the workshop schedule and agenda.

### **Spring 2024**

- The book is published and presented to the public.
- Two Built To Last workshops are scheduled with host churches for the fall of 2024. One in the Houston area and another in Chicago.
- Promotion for the fall workshops begins.

## **Development Process**

Evaluation of this project will be determined by interest shown by the target audience. How many units have sold? What type of reception and demand are we receiving? Have we sparked dialog

among our peers? Are people reaching out via social media or the website to inquire further or even push back on any of the ideas presented? How much foot-traffic has the website generated?

One of the quality measures will be my ability to effectively apply the concepts and processes of this project to my work and church context. The primary goal of this project from the start was to enhance the cultural sustainability at Grace Church and lay the groundwork for a seamless leadership transition when I eventually step down as lead pastor.

Another key marker of success and impact will be to see the information I provide used by parachurch organizations or denominations as a guide for churches exploring the multisite model or for those transitioning in pastoral succession. My aim has always been to make this work beneficial to others and serve as a valuable reference in crucial moments for pastors and churches.

I view this project as a living, breathing thing that is impacted by the context of the time and the current happenings within the body of Christ. Thus, staying current with multisite transitions and happenings, along with feedback and critique from the targeted audience, will impact adaptations and tweaks in the workshop and on the website.

# Appendix A— Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

## **PERSONAL RESEARCH MANIFESTO**

I commit to step outside my comfort zone and preconceived notions and truly dive deep in research for my NPO. With multiple perspectives and unexpected discoveries along the way, it is my sincere belief that churches and ministry beyond my own will benefit from this project.

## **NPO STATEMENT**

Most multi-campus churches are in their first generation and personality centric with no strategic plan for sustainability nor succession.

## **NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS**

When this doctoral program is completed, a concise understanding of varying multi-campus church models will be presented with an indication as to which model, or models, are most sustainable over time and also transferrable to another generation of leadership.

To date \$1,900 in appreciation gifts to the Stake Holders and One-On-One Interviewees has been invested in this project. It is difficult to estimate the exact scope and cost associated with the project as it moves forward, but it is anticipated that there will expenditures for research materials, honorariums, administrative expenses, and possible travel.

## **NPO CONTEXT**

My NPO ministry context includes non-denominational and denominational, evangelical churches that are, or were, built on a multi-campus platform. This means any church studied will have at least two campuses. Membership size or attendance numbers is not a qualifying factor. The primary geographical focus will be in North America.

## **ROOT CAUSES**

The root cause and motivation behind this endeavor is the observation that the multi-campus church model has gained strong momentum within the past ten years and is still in its first generation in most cases. The types and strategies in which these churches are built vary greatly. For example, the most popular and predominant model is campus services consisting of live worship, an assigned campus pastor to shepherd and lead the local congregation, and a lead/senior pastor who communicates the weekly sermons at every campus via livestream or video. This makes that particular church personality centric. It also results in a biproduct of a high campus pastor turnover rate as strong, talented personnel move on searching for better opportunities. Thus, the challenge arises when it comes to sustainability and succession.



## **DISCOVERY WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS**

The stake holders in my discovery session included a leader of a non-denominational ministerial network, lead pastors of multi-campus churches, a campus pastor of a multi-campus church, a multi-site business owner, and a young minister/graduate student who aspires to assume the pastorate of a multi-campus church.

## **ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS**

My one-on-one interviewees included a lead pastor of a multi-campus church, two founding pastors of multi-campus churches that are now in their second generation of leadership, and a former lead pastor of a multi-campus church who is now the executive director of the largest church planting organization in North America.

## **3-5 KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS**

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

So, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:46-47 (NKJV)

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26-28 (NKJV)

From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:16 (NKJV)

## **ACADEMIC RESOURCES**

Within my field of research, primary voices will include Dino Rizzo, Executive Director of the Association of Related Churches; Dr. Leonard Sweet, professor, theologian, and author; and Terry Crist and Jeremy DeWeerd, multisite church pastors. Other areas of research will be statistical in nature as pertaining to church growth, geographical location, and demographics. Onsite investigative visits and interviews at churches will be a key source of learning as well.

# Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

## INTRODUCTION

While there are many variants in church models and styles, the multisite model is one that has been widely embraced in the latter half of the twentieth century and on. The deeply held belief that one church can multiply and magnify its reach by expanding beyond one site permeates North America and other parts of the world.

The most common model of church in North America is the single-site church. This is actually the most embraced model worldwide. A single location, focused on reaching the community around it. Most churches within a denomination, or even independent, follow the single-site model. And then there are those who plant “daughter works” out of their campus that are autonomous single-site churches as well.

The key to understanding the multi-site movement is to remember that fulfilling the Great Commission drives these congregations, not a growth strategy.<sup>68</sup> Jesus’ words, as recorded in Mark 16:15, push this effort forward to: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”<sup>69</sup> The multisite model takes the church to the greater concentration of the populace of the people rather than asking the people to come to the single location church.

It is the strongly held belief of the multisite church that they are walking out a current version of the early New Testament church in which Acts 2 records the new believers went house to house. Traditional, single-site churches are not frowned upon, but the multisite church believes it can better fulfill Jesus’ commissioning by replicating itself over a city, a region, a state, or even a nation. In fact, there are some anomalies that reach out globally as one church with many locations. Hillsong Church, originating in Sydney, Australia, has sites in Asia Pacific, Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. Their self-descriptive is, “one house with many rooms.”<sup>70</sup>

Whether a multisite model, more traditional single-site model, or even the house church model, all churches should also be so structured so as to be sustainable in its leadership structure and transferrable to another generation. Sustainability necessitates a leadership structure and financial structure that endures the unpredictable highs and lows every church body faces. Sustainability

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<sup>68</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations*, Kindle. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), [https://digital.library.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/2854/Frye\\_sbts\\_0207D\\_10033.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://digital.library.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/2854/Frye_sbts_0207D_10033.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), location 380-390.

<sup>69</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®*, Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a Publishing Ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by Permission. All Rights Reserved., n.d.

<sup>70</sup> Gerardo Martí, “The Global Phenomenon of Hillsong Church: An Initial Assessment1,” *Sociology of Religion* 78, no. 4 (January 8, 2018): 377-386, accessed September 9, 2018, <http://academic.oup.com/socrel/article/78/4/377/4731531>.

also pertains to the durability and longevity of each particular church. It should be built and governed in such a way so that it prevails beyond any one generation of leadership. Within the multisite model, to be transferrable pertains to the church and its campuses being so structured that it may be handed off to another generation of leadership should the lead pastor retire, die, or resign for any other reason.

For the most part the multisite model is still in its first generation of livelihood and sustainability and longevity is still being walked out. This study seeks to establish the theology, history, and purpose for the multisite model as well as note the same three-fold approach to sustainability and transference in leadership.

## **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

### **The Multisite Church in the Biblical World**

The New Testament church was birthed in one place at one time (Acts 2:1) and quickly spread out there. In fact, the spread of the church began on that inaugural day. Howard Marshall makes this observation from Acts 2:5 in which we know people from every nation under heaven witnessed the phenomenon of the birth of the New Testament church.

We must assume that at some point the disciples moved outside from the upper room and came in contact with the crowds assembled in Jerusalem for the feast; *dwelling* need not necessarily imply permanent residence, although many Jews did return to Jerusalem from the Dispersion to end their days there. Their presence and participation in what happened constituted an indication of the worldwide significance of the event. True, they were all Jews or proselytes and not pagans, but they acted as a symbol of the universal need of mankind for the gospel and of the church's consequent responsibility for mission.<sup>71</sup>

That responsibility for mission, and the drive to reach people, is what sparks the multisite church movement. Acts 8:1, 8:4, and 11:19 state that the Church scattered everywhere due to persecution. The fact that all the Jerusalem believers except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria was God's method of fulfilling the mandate of Acts 1:8 in which Jesus declared, "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."

The word "scattered" (*diesparēsan*), also used in Acts 8:4, comes from the verb *speirō*, used to refer to sowing seed (Matt. 6:26; 13:3-4, 18; 25:24, 26; Luke 8:5; 12:24; etc.).<sup>72</sup> As Stanley Toussaint

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<sup>71</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament commentaries v. 5 (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2008), 26.

<sup>72</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, Ill: Victor Books, 1983), 372.

points out, the scattering was actually *seeding* the church in sites all over the known world. The church that was birthed in an upper room in Jerusalem was now replicating itself in sites all over the known world. The scattering of the Christians led to the most significant step forward in the mission of the church. One might say that it required persecution to make them fulfill the implicit command in 1:8.<sup>73</sup> The multisite church model is a Book of Acts model in which campuses are *seeded* to further the growth of the Kingdom of God.

It may also be said that the original church exemplified the multisite model as recorded in Acts 2:46, in which the church continued “house to house.” The Pulpit Commentary observes that the meaning is not that every disciple broke bread in his own house, but that they broke bread at the house where the Christian assemblies were held, whether one or more.<sup>74</sup>

In his doctoral dissertation, Brian Nathaniel Frye proffers six key biblical and theological realities that lead the author to accept the multisite structure as a valid expression of church.<sup>75</sup>

- When surveying the New Testament beginning with Jesus’ birth and ending with the completion of the canon, one must realize that ecclesiology was in a state of evolution. It was not fixed upon Jesus’ departure nor Paul’s death.
- During the NT era the concept of *ekklesia* was fluid from location to location and situation to situation. Variation existed in terms of where, how often, in what numbers, in what groups, and for what purposes the New Testament *ekklesias* met. There was no set pattern.
- Jesus speaks minimally about church structure (Matt. 16:18; 18:7) and Paul gives relatively little attention to the subject. It would seem that if ecclesiological form were of great importance to these two individuals in particular, the Scriptures would reveal far more specific details about the topic. In reality, Scriptures demonstrate that God did not choose to provide a specific formula for church structure.
- The structure and nomenclature of NT churches borrowed from contemporary secular and religious structures of the NT era. For example, Paul’s use of *ekklesia*, a secular (Hellenistic) word for “gathering,” over *sunagoge* displays an intentional effort on Paul’s part to

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<sup>73</sup> Marshall, *Acts.*, 161.

<sup>74</sup> H.D.M. Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 1, Acts of the Apostles (London: New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 55.

<sup>75</sup> Brian Nathaniel Frye, “The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon in North America” (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), [https://digital.library.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/2854/Frye\\_sbts\\_0207D\\_10033.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://digital.library.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/2854/Frye_sbts_0207D_10033.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

develop a theologically correct and contextually relevant understanding of “church.”

- Throughout church history, there has been great variance in how believers apply NT teachings to create ecclesiological structures.
- Multisite church arrangements are validated by the design of the gospel message. The focus of the New Testament and the entire redemption story is God’s reconciliation of man to Himself for His glory. Thus, any contextualized ecclesiological structure that does not contradict or violate Scripture should be available for use in order to expand God’s kingdom and increase His glory.

### **Biblical Foundations for Pastoral Succession**

#### **Joshua Succeeds Moses**

The LORD said to Moses, “Go up into this mountain of Abarim and see the land that I have given to the people of Israel. When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, because you rebelled against my word in the wilderness of Zin when the congregation quarreled, failing to uphold me as holy at the waters before their eyes.” (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.) Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.” So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation.” And Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation, and he laid his hands on him and commissioned him as the LORD directed through Moses.<sup>76</sup>

In this particular scriptural setting it may be said that succession was necessitated because of rebellion on the part of the original leader. God’s judgement on Moses was that he would not enter into the Promised Land. The heir apparent was already in place. Albeit the wording of the text shows Moses asking God to reveal who the successor may be. R. Dennis Cole observes:

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<sup>76</sup> Numbers 27:12-23

The pericope adheres to an orderly progression, outlining the transition of leadership:

- 1) Moses' sin recapitulated (27:12-14)
- 2) Moses' entreaty for a new leader (27:15-17)
- 3) Moses' instruction from the Lord (27:18-21)
- 4) Moses commissions Joshua (27:22-23)<sup>77</sup>

The text is also clear that, though Joshua is God's choice to take up the reins and assume leadership, it will be different than it was with Moses. Or as Gordon Wenham posits:

Joshua is therefore commissioned as Moses' successor. He was ideally suited to the job, having been for many years Moses' assistant (11:28; Exod. 17:9ff.; 24:13; 32:17) and one of the spies who had actually visited Canaan (13:8; 14:6). But the narrative makes clear that his leadership will not be of the same type as that of Moses: *You shall invest him with some of your authority* (20).<sup>78</sup>

Same God. Same people. A different style of leadership. God's will is made known directly through Moses, a prophetic mediator; later generations had to rely on the priests - the authoritative teachers of the law (Lev. 10:10-11). When guidance was required on political or military questions not covered by the law, the priests could use the Urim and Thummim as a sort of oracle.<sup>79</sup> And yet, though there were differences, there was a sameness in the leadership of God's people.

It is also most noteworthy that Moses publicly signals the transfer of authority and leadership to all the people. Everyone is clear that a transition has taken place. Moses symbolically transfers his authority to Joshua by laying his hands on him in front of the high priest Eleazar and the entire Israelite congregation. In this way God makes continued provision for a shepherd of his sheep as he prepares the Israelites to enter Canaan.<sup>80</sup>

It should also be noted that there was a distinctive sign of the changing of the guard brought on by Moses' death. Most often effective succession in leadership requires the previous leader to separate themselves from the body so that the people see a clear distinction on who is now leading.

<sup>77</sup> R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, The New American commentary v. 3B (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 2000).

<sup>78</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament commentaries v. 4 (Nottingham, England : Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press ; Intervarsity Press, 2008), 217.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 217-218.

<sup>80</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Robert L. Hubbard, eds., *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich. ; Cambridge, U.K: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2011), 150.

This also allows the new leader to move forward without the need to look over his or her shoulder at their predecessor as they press on. It also causes the followers to look to the new leader since the previous one is no longer there. In the case of Moses and Joshua, God speaks to Joshua and declares, "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel."<sup>81</sup>

### **Jesus and His Successors**

Jesus himself sets an example of the purpose and intent of succession in ministry. William Atkinson journals that in calling his followers to engage in the same mission he had been advancing (preaching good news; healing the sick; casting out demons), Jesus also expected them to follow his example in how to do this.<sup>82</sup> Before ascending to the Father, Jesus speaks to his disciples and tells them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."<sup>83</sup> It is Jesus' intent that his successors pick up from where he left off and exceed what he has accomplished. Thus it should be in any ministry succession as well. Note also, just as stated in the Old Testament example of Moses, the predecessor makes a notable move, or exit, so that the new leadership is unfettered in their approach.

William Atkinson notes Jesus' initiative and intentionality on choosing leadership for his succession team.

Jesus always took the initiative: he called disciples to participate in his people-fishing mission; he picked twelve of them for particular purposes; and he chose just three to accompany him on certain occasions. When these people sought to take initiative in 'team development,' Jesus' response was equivocal: I refer again to James' and John's request for thrones beside Jesus, and his words in reply: 'to sit on my right or left is not for me to grant' (Mark 10:40). When other people sought to join the traveling team of their own accord, Jesus could be resistant to the idea (e.g. Mark 5:18-19; Luke 9:57-58).<sup>84</sup>

After his resurrection, and before his ascension to the right hand of the Father, Jesus appeared to his disciples on several occasions. He spoke to them about his departure and their leadership of

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<sup>81</sup> Joshua 1:2

<sup>82</sup> William P. Atkinson, "Succession-Management, Jesus-Style," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 36, no. 2 (May 26, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/18124461.2016.1180498>.

<sup>83</sup> John 14:12-14

<sup>84</sup> William P. Atkinson, "Succession-Management, Jesus-Style."



the ministry he started. On the first occasion he told the disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>85</sup> This was the empowerment that followed the assignment to continue the ministry Jesus had started. Yet again there is a clear demarcation of a change in leadership and the release of the new leaders to step up and step out.

## TOPIC HISTORY AND KEY VOICES

### The Multisite Church Model

The birth of the New Testament church is time-stamped and dated by the Bible. We are clear that it was on the Day of Pentecost, just fifty days after Jesus' death, that the church was born (Acts 2). Pentecost was one of the special feasts observed by the Jewish people, as described by Howard Marshall in his commentary on Acts.

*Pentecost* is the New Testament name for the Feast of Weeks, when the wheat harvest was celebrated by a one-day festival during which special sacrifices were offered (Exod. 23:16; Lev. 23:15-21; Deut. 16:9-12). Just as other festivals were associated with important events in Israel's history (e.g. Passover with the exodus from Egypt), so in Judaism the festival was associated with the renewal of the covenant made with Noah and then with Moses.<sup>86</sup>

There were 120 people gathered together when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Acts 2:2 states, "And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting." Man was first birthed when God formed him from the dust of the earth and breathed wind into him (Gen. 2:7); and now the church is birthed with God's wind as well.<sup>87</sup> The multisite church cannot, however, be marked with a specific date and time. Slowly, over time, it has simply come to be.

It is not the purpose nor intent of this paper to amplify the multisite church model over any other model of ministry. The more common and traditional single-site model is alive and well. In fact, a deep dive into the form and function of the twenty-first century church would reveal various vibrant models of *doing* church that are flourishing in the world today. In the book *AND: The Gathered and*

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<sup>85</sup> John 20:21-22

<sup>86</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 73.

<sup>87</sup> It is interesting to note that wind is also used as an empowerment for ministry when Jesus commissioned his disciples and breathed on them, post resurrection, in John 20:21-22.

*Scattered Church*, the authors refer to mega-churches, multi-site churches, micro-churches (also known as house-churches), and your standard traditional church.<sup>88</sup> All models of church work and have impact.

There is no one personality or team identified as the originator of the multisite idea. Multisite churches seeped on to the map of Christianity with little fanfare or bold entry. The multisite prototype, though simple in many respects, developed via a more complex evolutionary process. The multisite church model emerged progressively through the convergence of ideas, beliefs, social constructs, and technological advancements.<sup>89</sup>

As he quotes Michael Horton and his work entitled, *Popes, Populism, or Presbyteries? Evaluating the Multisite Church*, Kenneth Nash observes that even the Roman Catholic Church carried on the Apostle Paul's pattern of one church in many locations through the first millennia of its existence:

There is one supreme pastor and thus, one church, headquartered in Rome, with branch offices, as it were, throughout the world. This polity is explicitly and dogmatically committed to hierarchical ministry, with a charismatically-gifted head who is accountable only to the Spirit who endows him with at least the potential for infallible interpretations of God's Word for the many churches under his authority.<sup>90</sup>

The history of Christianity in North America involves circuit riders, who would go from place to place, preaching and holding services. This concept of the circuit rider was built on the regular habit of John Wesley visiting these different societies all over England, but it was in America that this practice took on new life. In his research on John Wesley, Adam Hilderbrandt draws from Frederick Norwood's historical account of the Methodist Church: "Norwood points out that, tying the whole together was the network of circuits served by Wesley's lay preachers. The basic grid was the sturdy triangle which marked the leader's own regular itineration: London, Bristol, Newcastle-on-Tyne." The societies in these areas functioned much like a church would and were

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<sup>88</sup> Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *And: The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010), accessed April 8, 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Brian Nathaniel Frye, "The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon in North America: 1950-2010," n.d.

<sup>90</sup> Kenneth Jeffrey Nash, "The Identifying, Equipping, and Sending of Laypersons to Lead a Multi-Site Church" (Asbury Theological Seminary, 2014), [https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1805&context=ecommonsatsdissertations&sei-redir=1&referer=https%253A%252F%252Fscholar.google.com%252Fscholar%253Fhl%253Den%2526as\\_sdt%253D0%25252C44%2526q%253Djohn%252Bwesley%252Bmultisite%252Bchurch%2526btnG%253D#search=%22john%20wesley%20multisite%20church%22](https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1805&context=ecommonsatsdissertations&sei-redir=1&referer=https%253A%252F%252Fscholar.google.com%252Fscholar%253Fhl%253Den%2526as_sdt%253D0%25252C44%2526q%253Djohn%252Bwesley%252Bmultisite%252Bchurch%2526btnG%253D#search=%22john%20wesley%20multisite%20church%22).

spread out under Wesley's consolidating leadership.<sup>91</sup> Revival was in the air and John Wesley had an insatiable desire to reach as many as he could in any way possible.

John Wesley called on the practice of the early church as justification for his organizing followers into societies, classes and bands. 'Upon reflection, I could not but observe, this is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity.' In the earliest times, those whom God had sent forth preached the gospel to every creature. ...But as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth, as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took an account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met these 'catechumens' ...apart from the great congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, and for them, according to their several necessities.<sup>92</sup>

As the burgeoning nation expanded at a rapid pace, the Methodist movement was there, reaching people in their new contexts.<sup>93</sup> Across the United States in 1784, "there were 84 preachers, 46 circuits and 14,988 members in the Methodist societies."<sup>94</sup> The purpose and intent behind the circuit riders is the same derivative of the multisite church. Get the Gospel to where the people are. The reason for this growth was described as "local amateur lay pastors" who fulfilled the duties of the pastor in lieu of the absent circuit riders.<sup>95</sup>

In Wesley's era the challenge was lack of transportation and the impact even five miles could have from community to community. With most travel done by foot or carried by beast, travel of any significant distance from home was an undertaking. In the twenty-first century, though advances in transportation have made life so much more convenient, people are still home-based and community centered. While we may not focus as much on miles, we do determine our travel boundaries by minutes.

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<sup>91</sup> Adam S. Hilderbrandt, "Transitioning to Multisite: A Model for Transitioning Wesley United Methodist Church to a Multisite Church" (Asbury Theological Seminary, 2018), <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2246&context=ecommonsatsdissertations>.

<sup>92</sup> Frederick Abbott Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 53.

<sup>93</sup> Adam S. Hilderbrandt, "Transitioning to Multisite: A Model for Transitioning Wesley United Methodist Church to a Multisite Church."

<sup>94</sup> Charles Ludwig, *Francis Asbury: God's Circuit Rider*, 1st ed. (Milford, Mich: Mott Media, 1984), 142.

<sup>95</sup> Kenneth Jeffrey Nash, "The Identifying, Equipping, and Sending of Laypersons to Lead a Multi-Site Church, 28."

A study done on the carbon footprint of cellular phone use concluded people live and commute within a sphere of important places. An *important place* is a geographic location where a person spends a significant amount of time and/or which she visits frequently. Examples of important places include: home, work, gym, grocery store, and a house of worship.<sup>96</sup> For example, Karen Hamrick and David Hopkins conducted a study on behalf of the United States Department of Agriculture. The purpose and intent was to study and map the importance of locale and drive time to grocery stores, based on income level. Hamrick and Hopkins present well-defined transportation concepts for a household as:

1. Anchor: A primary or substantial trip destination.
2. Direct trip: A trip that travels directly between two anchor destinations, such as a trip from home to work.
3. Chain: A series of short trips linked together between anchor destinations, such as a trip that leaves home, stops to drop a passenger, stops for coffee and continues to work.
4. Intervening stop: The stops associated with chained trips.
5. Tour: Total travel between two anchor destinations....Note that it is possible to have the two anchor destinations be the same location, as in a home-to-home or work-to-work tour.<sup>97</sup>

Hamrick and Hopkins assert that “time distance” is key for the average American household; stating, “travel time is the true indicator of access, for which distance attempts to account.”<sup>98</sup> The authors proffer 15.4 miles as the maximum for distance and time distance allowed. One’s house of worship would fall in line with Hamrick’s and Hopkins’ descriptive as an *anchor* and/or *direct trip*. It is therefore reasonable to assume the same principles of this study applies to church location. The 15.4 mile maximum can be logically applied to the commute a person/family will make to and from their home church. Thus, another key reason for multisite churches. As our communities spread out, churches should consider doing the same. Go to where the people are.

It should be noted that single-site churches, house churches, small groups, or any other form of gathering, would also be impacted by this rule of thumb. In addition to real geographical barriers like distance, there are imagined geographical barriers like rivers, interstates, and a community’s

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<sup>96</sup> Kent Lyons et al., eds., *Pervasive Computing: 9th International Conference, Pervasive 2011, San Francisco, USA, June 12-15, 2011; Proceedings*, Lecture notes in computer science 6696 (Presented at the Pervasive, Heidelberg: Springer, 2011).

<sup>97</sup> Karen S. Hamrick, David Hopkins, “The Time Cost of Access to Food - Distance to the Grocery Store as Measured in Minutes,” *International Journal of Time Use Research* 9, no. No. 1 (November 2012): 28-58, [dx.doi.org/10.13085/eIJTUR.9.1.28-58](https://doi.org/10.13085/eIJTUR.9.1.28-58).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

municipal limits.<sup>99</sup> It is within our nature to be territorial and creatures of habit – even geographical habit. While making his statement as to why his church made a move to the multisite model, Bryan Collier made this keen observation:

People from one side of the tracks might not cross over the tracks for goods and services, preferring to stay in their community to connect to these services. When you add that churches are often geographical centerpieces in these communities, then you have to begin to address the challenge of getting people to drive thirty minutes to your church when they won't drive three to the one down the street!<sup>100</sup>

With the same evangelistic drive as the great John Wesley, multisite churches are driven by the motivation of getting the church closer to where the people are, rather than pressing the people to get to where the lone church location is. As observed by Kenneth Nash, the early Methodists clearly embraced the priesthood of all believers by starting up new churches with lay leadership.

When the circuit rider was not available during the week, the local church had a class leader (layperson) who pastored until the circuit rider could return. Methodists used that approach to become one of the largest religious groups in the United States, moving from less than 2.5 percent of church adherents in 1776 to more than 34.2 percent in 1850, which was a growth from sixty-five congregations to 13,302 in just seventy years. The reason for this growth was described as local amateur lay pastors who fulfilled the duty of the pastor in lieu of the absent circuit riders.<sup>101</sup>

For the sake of the gospel, and fulfillment of the Great Commission in which Jesus commanded his disciples to go, “and make disciples of all nations,” (Matt 28:19, Mark 16:15) John Wesley in England, and the Methodist leaders in North America, willingly allowed laypersons to lead the local churches. Leonard Sweet writes, “The phrase *The Great Commission* was first coined in 1910 at the Edinburgh Conference where eight ‘commissions’ by missionary leaders were gathered up and reported on. The first word of the Great Commission is ‘Go.’ A little less than two hundred times

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<sup>99</sup> Bryan D. Collier, *The Go-to Church: Post Megachurch Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 16.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>101</sup> Kenneth Jeffrey Nash, “The Identifying, Equipping, and Sending of Laypersons to Lead a Multi-Site Church”, [https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1805&context=ecommonsatdisserations&seiredir=1&referer=https%253A%252F%252Fscholar.google.com%252Fscholar%253Fhl%253Den%2526as\\_sdt%253D0%25252C44%2526q%253Djohn%252Bwesley%252Bmultisite%252Bchurch%2526btnG%253D#search=%22john%20wesley%20multisite%20church%22](https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1805&context=ecommonsatdisserations&seiredir=1&referer=https%253A%252F%252Fscholar.google.com%252Fscholar%253Fhl%253Den%2526as_sdt%253D0%25252C44%2526q%253Djohn%252Bwesley%252Bmultisite%252Bchurch%2526btnG%253D#search=%22john%20wesley%20multisite%20church%22).

does the Bible instruct us to 'go.'"<sup>102</sup> The Methodist movement acknowledged the laypersons working at a local church may not be fully equipped or educated, but the task at hand required all hands on deck. The mission required a co-missioned effort so that everyone could go. Thus, they were empowered to lead. Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini describe empowerment as "the intentional transfer of authority to an emerging leader within specified boundaries from an established leader who maintains responsibility for the ministry."<sup>103</sup>

Scott McConnell suggests that the multisite model, much like Wesley, embraces the strengths and weaknesses of those who lead: "Any pastor has three primary roles: teacher, shepherd, and leader. Most pastors tend to excel at one or two and they get by with the other—or worse, it may be a liability. The role of campus pastor is, in fact, an opportunity to avoid such liabilities."<sup>104</sup> In short, we are better together. The multisite effort is a team effort.

It can be argued that modern day multisite models are merely adaptations of the Book of Acts church and even the Methodist circuit riders. Craig Groeschel, pastor of Life Church based in Oklahoma City and the reputed largest multisite church in the United States, likes to comment that the move from horseback preacher to satellite broadcast is simply a shift from circuit rider to closed-circuit rider.<sup>105</sup>

Some critics may retort against the circuit rider scenario stating that the Methodists embraced that model because of a shortage of qualified preachers. Gregg R. Allison, a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, makes such an argument and suggests a better historical voice setting precedent for multisite churches would be found in other historical statements of faith.

In 1644, the *First London Confession of Faith*, representing the seven Particular or Calvinistic Baptist churches in that city, was quite explicit about the cooperation that should characterize the churches:

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<sup>102</sup> Leonard I Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church : Missional, Relational, Incarnational* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), accessed November 2, 2019, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4088758>, 68.

<sup>103</sup> Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Pub. Group, 2004), accessed February 26, 2019.

<sup>104</sup> Scott McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement's Next Generation*, Kindle. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 95.

<sup>105</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations*, Location 1491.

And although the particular congregations are distinct and several bodies, everyone a compact and knit city in itself; yet they are all to walk by one and the same rule, and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needful affairs of the church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head.<sup>106</sup>

This emphasis continued fairly steadily throughout Baptist history and appears in the latest version of the Baptist Faith and Message (2000). Section 14 on cooperation affirms,

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom.

Multi-site churches embody this emphasis on strong connectionalism [sic]. Certainly, the documents cited above call for unity between separate churches. But is it not possible to achieve that strong connectionalism more readily through the multi-site approach?<sup>107</sup>

The quest and drive to reach souls and to grow the church has not waned since its birth on the day of Pentecost. The passion to do whatever possible, by any means possible, has always been at the core of those wanting to fulfill Jesus' commission. In the *Journal of Social History*, David E. Eagle reaches back in time and reminds the reader of other voices trumpeting church growth in days past:

The influential Christian social commentator Josiah Strong gives voice to a vision of the church whose marching orders are to "save souls" and to reverse the moral decay of America through the healthy spiritual and physical growth of adults, children and families. In 1893, Strong wrote what could easily have come from a modern church marketing manual,

The question then becomes this: Will the church enlarge her conceptions and activities to the wide measure of her mission and apply the principles of the Gospel to the entire life of each community? Here is the opportunity of the ages for her to gain a

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<sup>106</sup> Allison is referencing William L. Lumpkin, "London Confession, 1644," in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson, 1969), 168-169.

<sup>107</sup> Gregg R. Allison, "Theological Defense of Multisite," *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (February 26, 2010), <https://www.9marks.org/article/theological-defense-multi-site/>.

commanding influence over the lives of the multitude and fashion the unfolding civilization of the future.<sup>108</sup>

The term *mega-church* has recently been used as if it were a four-letter word. In this post-Christian season in North America, churches that are aggressively pursuing growth for the sake of the Kingdom may sometimes be looked upon with cynicism by others – questioning their motive. And yet, on the Day of Pentecost about 3,000 souls were saved (Acts 2:41). We know this because the apostles deemed it worthwhile to record. Every soul matters and any means necessary to reach that soul does as well.

In 2006, Lisa B. Deaderick presented an article with a brief history of multisite churches. Here is an attempt at an encapsulated timeline of multisite churches:

1800s -- Methodist circuit riders were pastors for multiple satellite churches. Sites were set up as soon and as cheaply as possible. When the circuit rider wasn't at the satellite church during the week, a class leader or other member would keep things running until the circuit rider could stop through again and kick things up.

1942 -- Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn., started opening satellite locations.

1970 -- Highland Park had 70 off-campus sites.

1980s -- Highland Park began letting go of the multiple sites.

1990 -- There were 10 multisite churches in the United States, according to numbers Todd Rhoades, of Monday Morning Insight, got from a multisite church conference last year.

1998 -- That group of churches grew from 10 to about 100.

2006 -- There are now at least 1,500 such churches in the database of Leadership Network, an organization that hosts an annual multisite church conference.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> David E. Eagle, "Historicizing the Megachurch," *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 589-604, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shu109>.

<sup>109</sup> Lisa B. Deaderick, "Brief History of Multisite Churches: [Final Edition]," *Daily Press* (Newport News, VA., December 23, 2006), sec. Life.



Revivalists of the past had that same drive to reach beyond their four walls and better reach the people in their vineyard. David E. Eagles' article, *Historicizing the Megachurch*, recounts the passionate drive of legends such as Charles Spurgeon and Dwight L. Moody:

Dwight L. Moody spent several years in London where he attended the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Spurgeon's church left a deep impression on Moody and exerted an important influence on fundamentalist ecclesiology. In a 1934 article in the Moody Bible Institute Monthly commemorating the centenary of Spurgeon's birth, Rev. W.H. Hockmann extols the ministry of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, "The Tabernacle has been a bee-hive of activity. Overflowing in all directions, not less than thirty centers of Christian ministry were established in different parts of the London area, with some eight thousand children enrolled in various Sunday Schools. A colportage association was formed [for the distribution of tracts and religious materials], alms houses sustained, orphanages for both boys and girls established and the world renowned Pastors College brought into being. Never did the crowds of eager listeners cease to gather at the Tabernacle doors long before the hours for Sunday services."<sup>110</sup>

Note that W.H. Hockmann observed that Spurgeon's church was, "Overflowing in all directions," and, "Not less than thirty centers of Christian ministry were established in different parts of the London area." That is multisite ministry. Successful multisite churches do more than launch a new location. They plan ahead to operate as a multisite church, not just function as a church with additional campuses. This is an important distinction with significant consequences.<sup>111</sup>

With that quest and drive to reach souls, and understanding the aforementioned geographical and demographic challenges, the multisite church make sense as a strategic, evangelistic approach. Noted evangelical researcher Ed Stetzer has predicted, "Multisite churches are on the rise. This is not a fad; this is not some sort of temporary trend - multisite churches are here to stay. It's like the megachurch now - just a part of our church landscape - the new normal."<sup>112</sup> The authors of *The Multisite Revolution* tender the following statistics:

Among Protestant churches in the United States well over 1,500 churches are already multisite. One out of four megachurches is holding services at multiple locations. One out of three churches says it is thinking about developing a new service in a new location. Seven

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<sup>110</sup> David E. Eagle, "Historicizing the Megachurch."

<sup>111</sup> David D'Angelo, Ryan Stigile, *Multisite Church Pitfalls: 7 Dangers You Cannot Afford to Ignor*, Kindle., 2016, 2.

<sup>112</sup> Brad House, Gregg Allison, *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite*, Kindle. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 10.

out of the country's ten fastest-growing churches offer worship in multiple locations, as do nine of the ten largest churches.<sup>113</sup>

It is vital to note that all multisite churches are *not* megachurches. This is an often overused misconception. History bears out, and current times affirm, that churches of varying sizes have moved to the multisite model as a strategic approach to being more effective. Multisite churches are here to stay. The rapid growth of multisite has outpaced the megachurch movement by fivefold over a fifteen-year time span.<sup>114</sup> Multisite is taking the church to the people. In short, the multi-site phenomenon is growing dramatically among churches of all sizes, bringing it soon enough to every city, every denomination, and every style of ministry.<sup>115</sup>

Over 5 million people worship in one of the more than 8,000 multisite churches today, making up nine percent of American Protestant churchgoers and three percent of American Protestant churches. In the last quarter of a century, the multisite revolution has gone from an experiment to a widespread phenomenon. It has been adopted by all types of churches - denominationally, theologically, and geographically - and the trend shows no sign of slowing down.<sup>116</sup> Note the following multisite church growth chart:

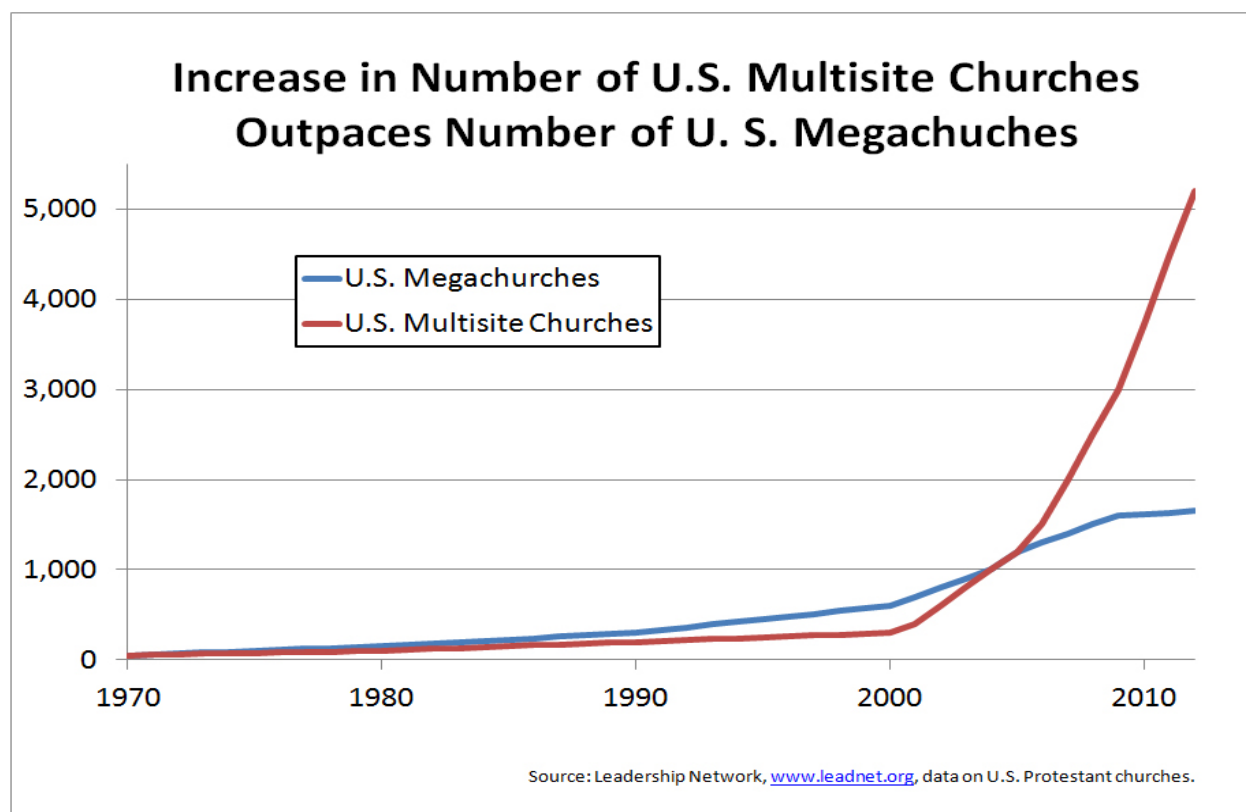
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<sup>113</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations*, location 1484.

<sup>114</sup> Brad House, Gregg Allison, *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite*.

<sup>115</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, Warren Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip: Exploring the New Normal*, Kindle. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>116</sup> Brad House, Gregg Allison, *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite*, 10. Note: these statistics are as of 2018.



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It is not our intent to argue that single-site churches are not fulfilling their missional mandate or are irrelevant. But rather this historical look shows the motive and drive that lies under the multisite movement. The idea of “mega”, as in *megachurch*, should not be misconstrued as integral or elemental in a multisite church. Pastor John Siebeling, pastor of Life Church, a multisite church based in Memphis, Tennessee wisely stated, “It used to be, ‘How many people are you running?’ And then it became, ‘How many services do you have?’ And now it’s, ‘How many campuses do you have?’ It should be, ‘What are you called to do and are you doing it?’”<sup>118</sup>

History bears out, and it is this author’s contention, that the multisite church is not motivated by the numbers of the crowds as much as by the effectiveness of the ministry in reaching the people. A church need not be *mega* in order to be *multi*. In his descriptive of Seacoast Church, based in South Carolina, Geoff Surratt described the varying sizes of the campuses and their community impact this way:

<sup>117</sup> <https://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/megachurchesVSmultisite.jpg>

<sup>118</sup> John Siebeling, “NPO Stakeholder Interview with Pastor John Siebeling,” Interviewed by author via Zoom, November 18, 2020.

Being one church with multiple locations has allowed Seacoast to grow larger and smaller at the same time. In the past seven years, Seacoast has seen its overall weekend attendance grow from three thousand to over ten thousand. At the same time, people are attending Seacoast campuses of eighty, one hundred, three hundred, eight hundred, one thousand, and five thousand people.<sup>119</sup>

Just as Seacoast Church exemplifies, campuses may vary in size but the driving force is to effectively reach people for Jesus.

### **Pastoral Succession**

The history of succession in ministry is vast and challenging to encapsulate. Every church that has survived or thrived beyond one generation has had succession. Whether it was done successfully and without fallout is another thing all together. William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird stress, "You want to get succession right, not just for yourself but for the legacy you leave behind."<sup>120</sup> Willie George is the founding pastor of Church on the Move in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He has successfully passed the pastoral baton to his son and claims, "I am still on the team but I am no longer the starting quarterback." He observed, "There are strong leaders who built weak churches because they dominated everything and did not raise up another generation of leaders. The elder leader has to give the next generation a voice."<sup>121</sup>

One historical account of struggle and delay in transition is the historic Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England. At its prime, the world renowned Charles Spurgeon would speak to over 10,000 people in one gathering. In the late spring of 1891, Spurgeon took ill. Poor health had been an ongoing issue for the pastor-preacher extraordinaire but this time he was unable to fulfill his duties in the pulpit and needed to retreat to his home in Menton, France for respite. He solicited the help of another well-known preacher who was from America - A.T. Pierson. Pierson had ministered there in recent times and had done so successfully and agreed to fill the pulpit while Spurgeon recovered. Unfortunately, Spurgeon not only did not recover but actually died there in his home on the French Rivera on January 31, 1892, at the age of fifty-seven.<sup>122</sup> What would become of this great church and who would be the next pastor?

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<sup>119</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, Warren Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip: Exploring the New Normal*, 24.

<sup>120</sup> William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*, 2015, accessed January 16, 2021, <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781441246578>.

<sup>121</sup> Willie George, "NPO Stakeholder Interview With Willie George," Interviewed by author via Zoom, October 30, 2020.

After about a year of covering the pulpit, it was apparent to all that A.T. Pierson was the obvious choice to assume the pastorate. However, Pierson needed to return to the States for a few months and that required another interim preacher to cover Metropolitan's pulpit while he was gone. Thomas Spurgeon, one of Charles' twin sons, was asked to step in and handle the preaching and ministry for three months.<sup>123</sup> Those three months were a great success and many people were endeared to Spurgeon's offspring. Many in the congregation saw similarities between Thomas and his late father and it endeared them to him. At the conclusion of the appointed time, young Spurgeon and family left and Pierson made his way back to London to resume the interim duties.<sup>124</sup> W.Y. Fullerton writes about A.T. Pierson's return and the fact that he found a different church than the one he had left. "Without a pilot it had drifted. It was impossible, perhaps, for those inside the church to estimate or to avoid the danger; equally impossible for those outside to warn or to guide it, lest they should have been suspected of interested motives."<sup>125</sup>

Division began to develop in the great church. "Considerable agitation ensued as people started dividing over the possible candidates, especially Pierson and Thomas."<sup>126</sup> Sadly, this juggernaut church, with its worldwide impact, went through a three-year dive of division, digression, and confusion because its great leader did not have a solid succession plan in place.

The church was not split, for it was impossible for any party to inaugurate a new assembly worthy of the Spurgeon tradition, but the rift in the ranks of the membership went deep, even to the severing of family relationships and the sundering of lifelong ties. Alas! The great mind that had for so long controlled such diverse forces was missing, and for some months there was much unrest, freely spoken of as "The Tabernacle Tempest."<sup>127</sup>

In the end, Thomas Spurgeon assumed the pastorate for fifteen years. Metropolitan Tabernacle lost its momentum, many members, and its community status as a result of three years of confusion and turmoil due to the lack of a succession plan.

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<sup>122</sup> Lewis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992), 836.

<sup>123</sup> William Young Fullerton, *Thomas Spurgeon: A Biography* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 152.

<sup>124</sup> Many historical accounts make it clear that it was assumed and accepted that A.T. Pierson would be the next pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle.

<sup>125</sup> William Young Fullerton, *Thomas Spurgeon: A Biography*, 155.

<sup>126</sup> Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 777.

<sup>127</sup> William Young Fullerton, *Thomas Spurgeon: A Biography*, 156.

## SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

Multisite church is not a new, twenty-first century idea. It has been around in some form and fashion since the sound of a rushing, mighty wind filled the house where the 120 disciples of Christ were tarrying (Acts 2), and the New Testament church was born. In man's attempts to be effective in ministry and build community, the concept of one church in more than one location has been and is a viable option.

The current setting is a post-pandemic church. Covid-19 has impacted the world as we know it. Long established businesses and institutions have been rocked to their core and a reassessment of operations and structure has been necessary for survival. Large and small entities, that were not prepared or willing and able to change, are no more. The Church and how to do church has not been exempt. Wolfgang Simson astutely observes, "God is changing the Church, and that, in turn, will change the world. Millions of Christians around the world are aware of an imminent reformation of global proportions. They say, in effect: "Church as we know it is preventing Church as God wants it."<sup>128</sup>

For one to champion a certain church modality as the right way or the only way is shortsighted and presumptuous to say the least. Ray Hollenbach writes, "Jesus didn't go to the cross for nation-states, social institutions, or corporations: he bled, died, and rose again for people. And the church is made up of people—that's the why God set the whole thing up! In a strange way, the Covid changes have helped bring us back to the foundational truth that we need each other."<sup>129</sup> There is no one right way in which to do church. We need single-site churches. We need house churches. We need mega-churches. And we need multisite churches. If we are going to push back darkness and bring the hope of Jesus to this world, we need each other.

Wolfgang Simson goes on to observe man's attempts through the centuries to patent and own what is really God's.

In aligning itself to the religious patterns of the day, the historic Orthodox Church after Constantine in the 4th century AD adopted a religious system which was in essence Old Testament, complete with priests, altar, a Christian temple (cathedral), frankincense and a Jewish, synagogue-style worship pattern. The Roman Catholic Church went on to canonize the system. Luther did reform the content of the gospel, but left the outer forms of "church" remarkably untouched; the Free-Churches freed the system from the State, the Baptists then baptized it, the Quakers dry-cleaned it, the Salvation Army put it into a uniform, the

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<sup>128</sup> Simson.

<sup>129</sup> Hollenbach.

Pentecostals anointed it and the Charismatics renewed it, but until today nobody has really changed the superstructure.<sup>130</sup>

This research and analysis have confirmed that there is no one way in which church should be done. Surely, history has borne this out over the years. The multisite church has seen success and the preponderance of evidence states it will continue to do so. However, the same can be said of single-site churches, mega-churches, and house churches. The paramount key is each body following its God-designed assignment. Each model serves a greater purpose; each model has its origins in scripture.

This current research and analysis have also confirmed that well-planned and correctly done leadership succession in the local church is key and vital. This applies to any and all modalities of church. The Old Testament and New Testament both bear out multiple examples of ministry succession. Even Jesus, who is the head of Church (Eph 5:23, Col 1:8), exemplified succession planning and implementation with the apostles. His intent was that those following him would exceed and surpass that which he accomplished while on earth.

Shortly before his untimely death in an aircraft crash, Dr. Myles Munroe, a renowned pastor and author, stated, "'True leaders don't invest in buildings. Jesus never built a building. They invest in people. Why? Because success without a successor is failure. So, your legacy should not be in buildings, programs, or projects; your legacy must be in people.'"<sup>131</sup> Church history is rife with examples of success with no successor, and thus an ultimate failure. Some have deemed Munroe's last message as a prophetic foretelling of his soon to be tragic and accidental death. He said, "'The greatest act of leadership is what happens in your absence. If everything you've done died with you, you are a failure. True leadership is measured by what happens after you die.'"<sup>132</sup> It's not just in the case of death of a senior leader; there are other causes of transition. But in any case, a succession plan is needed for every church.

As has been stated, most multisite churches are in their first generation. What leadership succession looks like is still in its formulative stages. While attending a select roundtable event for fifty pastors of multisite churches, Andy Stanley and Craig Groeschel were both asked about the succession plan of their multisite churches. As a point of reference, Outreach Magazine lists Andy Stanley's church, Northpoint Community Church, as the largest church in North America.<sup>133</sup> Craig Groeschel

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<sup>130</sup> Simson.

<sup>131</sup> "Did Myles Munroe Prophesy His Death? Last Message."

<sup>132</sup> Blair.

<sup>133</sup> Outreach Magazine lists Stanley's church as having 38,589 people. See <https://outreach100.com/largest-churches-in-america/2020>.

has the largest multisite church with 37 locations.<sup>134</sup> Andy Stanley replied, "Our campuses would most likely spin off and become autonomous. We have structured ourselves with enough individuality now, so that that would probably work."<sup>135</sup> When asked the same question about their current plan for succession should anything happen to him as senior pastor, Craig Groeschel answered, "I don't know. We have never discussed that. But the next time you see me, ask me that question and I *will* know."<sup>136</sup> By all appearances, most multisite churches are operating with the same mindset as Craig Groeschel in 2014. The momentum of *now* is keeping leaders from planning for *then*.

It has been said that the Church is God's Plan A and there is no Plan B. That means we must get it right. Drawing from the deep well of lessons from the past and looking to the models of the present, we must strive to optimize and mobilize our churches so that we are effectively reaching lost souls and discipling the saved. A multisite church, built upon a solid and sustainable model that is transferrable to another generation, has the potential to be a powerful beacon of hope in dark and bewildered world.

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<sup>134</sup> See <https://www.life.church/locations/>.

<sup>135</sup> Groeschel and Stanley.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.



# Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

## **DESIGN WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION**

My discovery session was held on October 26, 2020, from 4:15pm to 6:30pm. Due to travel challenges and the Covid-19 pandemic, it was necessary to hold the meeting via Zoom. The following were in attendance:

- A leader of a non-denominational ministerial network of over 500 members
- Two lead pastors of multi-campus churches
- A campus pastor of a multi-campus church
- An entrepreneur who owns a multi-site business
- My son, a young minister and graduate school student, who aspires to pastor
- My executive assistant

The session followed the predetermined format as given in our DMIN 750 syllabus assignments. The session was recorded and photographed for future reference. The questions they came ready to discuss were "What is the most sustainable multisite church model, and what are the pros and cons of said models?"

## **DISCOVERY STATEMENT**

After greeting one another and inquiring on the wellbeing of each Stake Holder's family and business or ministry, I explained the process flow and desired outcome for the evening. Focus then turned to the NPO by examining the challenge, the need, and why this project is significant. Desired outcomes were discussed, and discovery exercises were implemented on our cyber-whiteboard. The following Discovery Statement is the result:

When considering the multisite phenomenon, it is obvious that there are varying models of structure and leadership. Most multisite churches are currently operating within their first generation of leadership, are personality-centric, and lack a clear plan for succession. Ultimately, it was concluded that the right structure brings sustainability, which will in turn ensure successful succession.

## **CRITICAL INSIGHTS FROM DISCOVERY WORKSHOP**

Participants were engaged and interested in the forthcoming results of the NPO. Focus turned to the various models of multisite churches and whether or not one model could be deemed more successful or sustainable than any other. It was the conclusion of the Stake Holders that the video venue model is perhaps most sustainable.

Deeper discussion ensued as to why that might be the case. The conclusion was that it is one personality and one voice speaking to and through all campuses. On the other hand, it was also noted that the video venue model has a high turnover rate of campus pastors. It is challenging to keep A-level team members in a culture that seems stifling and limiting in their possibilities to grow.

The speaking campus pastor model was deemed more successful in keeping team members over a longer period of time but brings with it the challenge of multiple voices speaking into the culture.

### **ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW DISCOVERIES**

Four leaders were interviewed in the one-on-one process. All have been or are senior pastors in a multisite model. An overarching theme was the challenge for successful transition from one generation to another. Much of the responsibility for a winning transition falls upon the exiting senior leader. He/she must have something to move to that occupies his/her focus and passion. These interviewees vary in the types of church models they have or lead. One has branched beyond his city into a national model of campuses. New horizons bring new challenges, but the possibilities are also exciting.

The bulk of the focus with these interviewees went to culture. If the church culture is healthy, the multisite church will also be healthy. If the church culture is healthy, transition to another generation of leadership stands a better chance of taking place with less hiccups or drama.

### **SYNTHESIS**

The Stake Holders meeting seemed to focus primarily on culture and the need to make it healthy and then sustain it. In fact, sustainability was paramount within this meeting. The Stake Holders concluded that if the model and sustainability is established, the succession should follow suit with greater ease.

Another key insight is the challenging role of the campus pastor. He/she is given great responsibility to see to the health and rise of the campus assigned, as well as tend to the needs of the congregants, and yet has very little autonomy or authority within which to work. It is a high yield and high constraint position in which to serve.

The interviewees had much to say about culture as well. In fact, church culture and the leadership structure would be the over-arching focus of the entire NPO discovery process. But the interviewees placed high value on a solid and intentional succession plan. Raising up leaders from within, setting the heir-apparent up for success, and then walking out a deliberate plan was paramount.

The overall take away is that healthy churches have a better chance of sustainability and thereby often have healthy leadership succession when those moments arise.

### **NEXT STEPS**

It has become obvious to me that time and research needs to be given to two areas that were not mentioned in my NPO statement: church culture and leadership structure. The key to any successful church, whether multisite or conventional, is a healthy culture and a well thought-out and workable leadership structure.

Church culture may be established by the lead pastor, but it cannot be built solely upon him/her. Church culture needs to be Christ-centered, easy to grasp, and clearly seen. Peter Drucker is quoted as saying, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."<sup>137</sup> Time and again my interviewees affirmed this idea. When a culture is strong and established, it overrides rogue staff members desiring to take a campus in a different direction and keeps the church moving toward its truth north. Likewise, the leadership structure does not need to be complicated but it does need to be functional and clear. Each team member must be aware of his/her role, to whom he/she is accountable, what is expected of him/her, and who and what he/she is responsible for.

I will need to carve out time to research and discover the more workable and successful church leadership models that ensure healthy culture and create a pipeline of ongoing up-and-coming leadership development.

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<sup>137</sup> Geiger and Peck, 101.

## **DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION**

The NPO discovery session was held on October 26, 2020 from 4:15pm to 6:30pm. Due to travel challenges and the Covid-19 pandemic, it was necessary to hold the meeting via Zoom. The following were in attendance:

- A leader of a non-denominational ministerial network of over 500 members
- Two lead pastors of multi-campus churches
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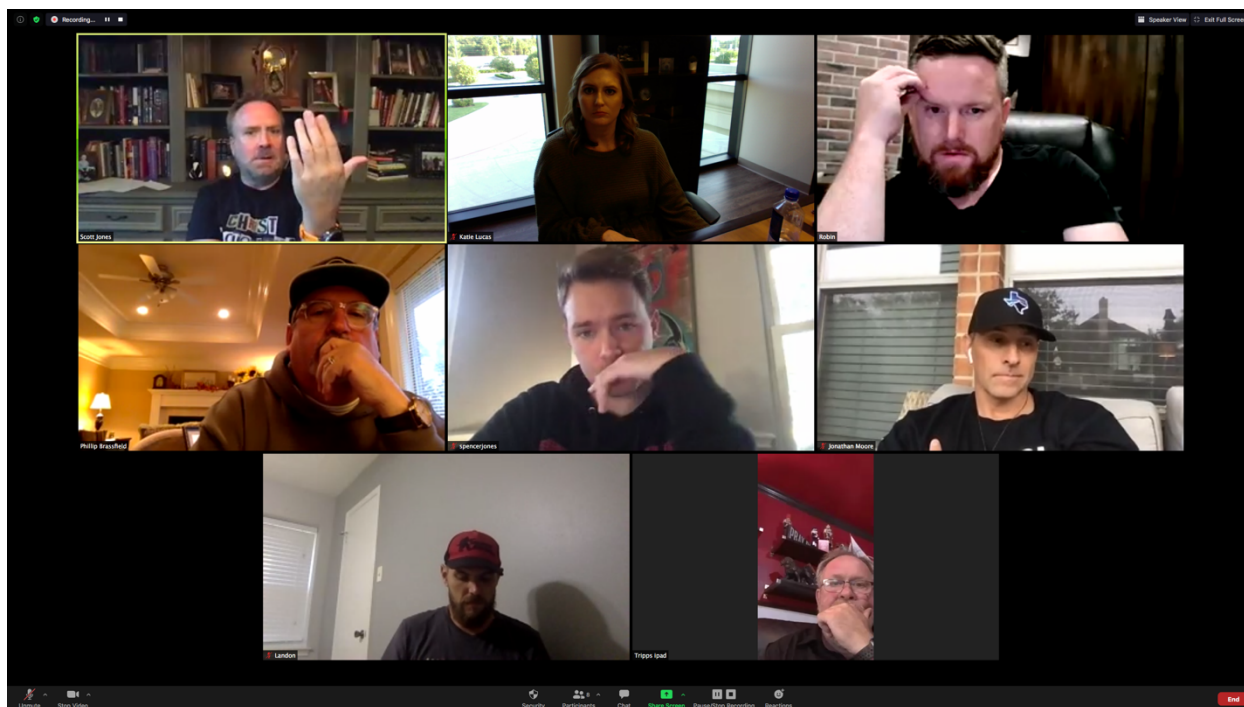
The session followed the predetermined format as given in our DMIN 750 syllabus assignments. The questions they came ready to discuss were "What is the most sustainable multisite church model, and what are the pros and cons of said models?"

NPO discovery exercises used:

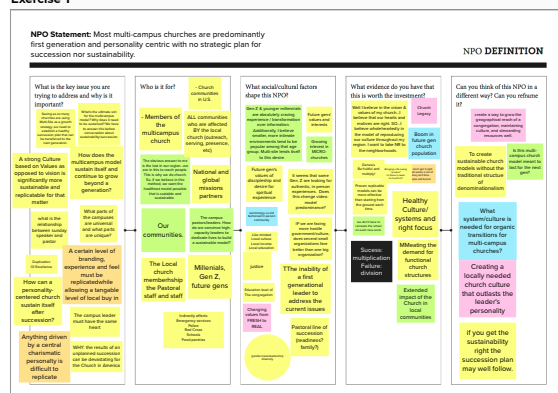
- NPO Discovery
- Pains and Gains
- The Blindside

## **DISCOVERY STATEMENT**

When considering the multisite phenomenon, it is obvious that there are varying models of structure and leadership. Most multisite churches are currently operating within their first generation of leadership, are personality-centric, and lack a clear plan for succession. Ultimately, it was concluded that the right structure brings sustainability which will in turn ensure successful succession.



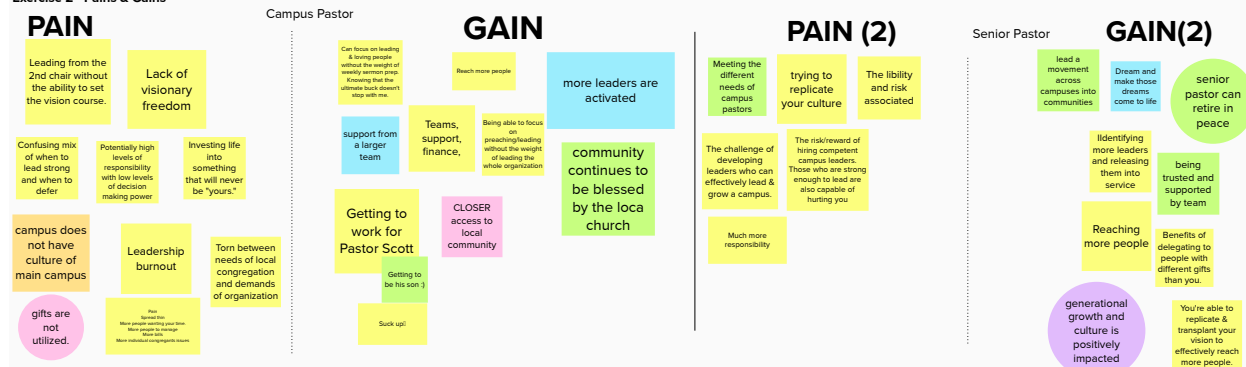
### Exercise 1



### Exercise 3 - The Blindside



### Exercise 2 - Pains & Gains



## **ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS**

Dear Stake Holder:

I want to take a moment to thank you again for your investment of time, experience, and wisdom shared on October 26 during my NPO Stake Holder's meeting. You have helped me tremendously with the inaugural event that launched my doctoral dissertation project.

As you are now well aware, I am very interested in multisite church models and am committed to discovering the most sustainable and transferrable model that can endure from generation to generation. It is my prayer that we will have done something significant to move the needle forward in this endeavor and that many churches will benefit from the part you and I have played together. We began with me sharing my NPO definition which stated:

Most multi-campus churches are predominantly first generation and personality centric with no strategic plan for succession nor sustainability.

Thanks to your help and insight, we have adjusted and tweaked and now have a greater understanding that brings us to this statement:

When considering the multisite phenomenon, it is obvious that there are varying models of structure and leadership. Most multisite churches are currently operating within their first generation of leadership, are personality-centric, and lack a clear plan for succession. Ultimately, it was concluded that the right structure brings sustainability which will in turn ensure successful succession.

I see a great work in progress! You have made that possible, and I am truly grateful. I would ask that if you have any further ideas or suggestions that come to mind, please reach out and let me know. Finally, as a token of my deep appreciation, I have gifted you each an Amazon gift card for \$150.

For the Kingdom,

Scott R. Jones

## ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW DOCUMENTATION

### Interview One:

**Former senior pastor of multisite church  
October 30, 2020, via Phone**

Q: If you were starting a multi-campus church today, what would you advise as a model and in general?

A: Great multi-campus churches don't do well if they don't start with a base. You've got to have a core. Good parenting and development in a first generation naturally establishes a better flowerbed to pull from.

The challenge with a strong father is that he may well raise up other strong fathers. At some point that can cause tension. Fathers struggle following fathers, but brothers cannot raise sons.

Observed strong leaders who built weak churches because they dominated everything and did not raise up leaders.

The elder leader has to give the next generation a voice. A developmental leader is creating a team for his/her second campus indirectly.

The generation before Interviewee were incredible leaders, very charismatic, but they sucked all the oxygen out of the room. Therefore, any up-and-coming leader had no place to go or grow, except to go away.

Q: What are your napkin scribbles you'd share with someone wanting to transfer his church:

1. The key element is not their preaching ability or even greatest leadership skill, but their love for that local church. HEART. Speaking and leadership can grow and be developed.
2. "Is it fair of me to make him wait another 5 years before I let him take the lead?"

Q: How long should you allow for transference in leadership?

Do it right and they ask, "What transition?"

Bollinger commentary on "co-regents" in the OT kingdoms: "Co-regency" was a big deal.

Q: With what do you disagree in the NPO?



Key word - STRATEGIC. Most have a plan and idea, but they do not know how to do it. No strategy. No true thought given to development.

The problem with releasing people is that when you give too much slack, it's very hard to pull it back. Most successful transitions of authority happen slowly, and a little at a time.

Senior Guy - you have to live with the idea of not being your son's hero forever.

Sons will always look for other voices, but that does not mean it's a rejection of you.

Key - He put successor in charge of the staff. If they don't win the staff over, they'll never win the church over.

Every generation has a gift. One generation may give doctrine. One may gift may give vision. But the third generation brings culture.

This is key. Culture is key. It overrides so much else.

Doctrine - Foundation

Vision - Walls and structure going up

Culture - Furnishes the house

Some today have rugs on dirt, and are hanging pictures on walls, but the whole thing will fall because there is no doctrine.

Must have all three.

Make it better.

Must develop a vocabulary.

It was failing when he was holding guys accountable to him and not an idea.

Ideas are bigger than people. Sustainability is passing on your ideas, not your personality.

Interviewee value: Investigate smoke. Anyone can run to a fire, but you'd better investigate the smoke. Most church tragedies don't happen without signs and warnings. Someone saw it.

## **Interview Two:**

**Executive Director of largest church planting network in U.S. and former senior pastor of a multisite church**  
**November 2, 2020, via Zoom**

Q: If you were starting a multisite church today, what would be the model?

A: I would want to make sure that the first generation, the first campus, was healthy. "Base camp" needs organizational health and is scalable. Thus, when I am ready to launch the second campus, I already have health and good depth chart. I have done this before where we did not have organizational health in place.

S: This is good. We have experienced this. We have had healthy staff but not a strong process or duplicatable model.

D: You cannot launch a second campus only because you love people. You are setting yourself up for failure.

S: It comes down to what is allowed as autonomous, what is centralized, and what is localized.

D: If it's too cookie-cutter, you will not get entrepreneurial leaders. You need someone who can be really good, a "best man." The "groom" must be very secure and not have a messianic complex. Reference to Lee Iacocca in "Good to Great," who almost took pride in the company not doing well when he left (research).

Q: I am noticing guys going more to live preaching at campuses versus video. What do you see?

A: The way it works well is if the key communicators are working on the calendar sermon series.

The guys who are not doing well are guys whose campus leaders do not have the same target.

On the other hand, Hillsong does very well with a very autonomous and organic flow. The jury is out though, because it has not had to go through succession yet.

Vision and Value are concrete - fundamental. To change this requires an act of team. But how to do small groups is up for adaptation.

Q: If a guy says, "I want to set up a succession plan for my multisite model," what would you say?

A: If it's father and son passing it, it has its own challenges and own set of advantages. If it's a spiritual son, it has a different set of challenges and advantages.

Not a lot of scenarios in which bringing in an outsider has worked. You have to be very intentional about the ramp up. Finite intentional. Every meeting, every service, every staff member. "Nick Saban" intentional.

You also must be very fluid. Flexibility is a must.

Consider it like bringing in the young heir as a player on the scout team, then a freshman, etc., etc. Massively intentional.

And of course, the person who is passing the board must have something to go to. He needs a new scoreboard. He also needs to know the financial scenario is secure.

### **Interview Three:**

#### **Former senior pastor of a multisite church of 20,000 members November 17, 2020**

Q: Biggest challenge of the multisite model?

A: Thinking "globally" within the culture of that particular church. "How will this play out everywhere?" Larry Osborne said, "You can be a Starbucks franchise, or you can be, 'We serve Starbucks coffee here.'" Every Starbucks is the same; but even a Marriott hotel serves Starbucks.

I tend to see my campus where I am at and forget that it is only 1/14<sup>th</sup> of our membership.

Q: I recall hearing that you guys had an outbreak of miracles happen at your church. It was a special season of grace and people were being healed, and there were notable miracles. Did that happen at all of your campuses or was it at one?

A: It started at one campus. And it happened on a Wednesday night in which we had a Night of Worship. On Wednesdays, our campuses are not linked together. It did spread a bit to another site, but it was predominantly at the one campus.

Q: What was the greatest challenge when you transitioned the pastorate to your son?

A: It's tricky. It's as if I had 14 guys who were with me and signed up to follow me. So we debated spinning off as autonomous campuses. But only one guy who was with me left. The others followed along with the new pastor.

The key thing we did was transition the heir from being over a campus to being over all campuses as campus director. That was strategic. That meant he had a closer relationship with all of the campus pastors than I did. Thus, when he became lead pastor, they were already vested in following him.

Q: Did you do an intentional timeline and handing off of the baton?

A: No. 60 to 65% of your people are opposed to change; they see it as pain. So, we never change anything; we "tweak" a lot but we don't change.

We did not and have not ever done a public passing of the baton. We did change my title from Senior Pastor to Founding Pastor. His title as Lead Pastor did not change. That's what he was doing when he was over all campuses.

Here's a little secret for your research. The most strategic thing that must be considered in transition is the spouse. The founding pastor's wife is just as vested as is her husband. The other key strategy is that the transitioning pastor must have something to do. He must have something to go to, or they will start meddling with the church again.

Q: Are there any specific steps that must be taken for a successful transition?

A: A clearly defined process is a must. Getting everyone in on your idea. People will support a world they helped create.

I was told by the transition team: "We need you to preach a certain number of times per year and stay in contact with high-capacity givers (we were in a building program)." I asked, "What do you not want me to do?" They said, "Don't come to meetings. You're welcome to all, but not obligated at any. And you don't have to be a part of the hiring process."

Q: What have I not thought of?

A: The founding pastor will go through a grieving process. If you attend an Easter weekend and you're not preaching, you are no longer the man! Ego is definitely involved. Fear too. I was afraid that we had built a platform that the younger generation could not sustain. However, I had to acknowledge that the church was growing older with me.

We define success at our church if it grows spiritually and grows numerically no matter who is preaching or leading. Our teaching is plug and play. The lead pastor currently only preaches once per month. It is video venue, but it is not personality centric.

## **Interview Four**

### **Pastor of multisite church November 18, 2020**

Q: The unique thing about your multisite model is that you have now launched out of your city and state. Can you speak to that?

A: Three years ago, I felt my "next" involved branching beyond my city. I enjoy raising up other leaders /communicators and hearing them speak instead of myself. I get more fulfillment from that.

For me it's a divine flow and relationship thing, not key cities I want to plant in. It used to be, "How many people are you running?" And then it became, "How many services do you have?" And now it's, "How many campuses do you have?" It should be, "What are you called to do, and are you doing it?"

It is requiring a lot of retooling on our organizational chart and all. I look at a department as either dysfunctional or functional, fruitful, or multiplying. Functional is okay; multiplying is great. But what we want is multiplying, and we do not want dysfunctional.

Interestingly, three years ago I asked a few key people to give me the top three things I do that are strategic and move the church forward. They all said, "Leadership development, organizational flow, and then preaching." I am finding that my preaching is not as important to the people as my leadership is. So, I am shifting.

Q: You're a future thinker; so, what are your thoughts on succession?

A: In twenty-four years, we have gone through two big waves of transition. When guys get to be around their late 30s and early 40s, they get an itch to go do their own thing. I'm in a sweet spot in which I have a few years before another transition. But I think our out-of-state campuses will probably spin off and become autonomous.

But you need young up-and-comers who can step in or have the potential to do so. And you also have to be able to hold to it.

I am doing less and being leaned on less, so that the church can wean off of me.

One of the greatest issues for the elder minister is an unhealthy financial situation in which he/she cannot let go because they are not financially able. That cannot be.

Q: With campuses that are multi-state, how do you oversee or handle the finances to make it one church?

A: We are actually bringing all the finances together now. But the money that comes into a campus, stays at that campus. I actually view our campuses in four tiers:

Tier 4) Churches that we support financially and always will. For example, we have one in South America like this.

Tier 3) Perhaps they are breaking even.

Tier 2) They are paying a fee.

Tier 1) They are paying back to Central something like 10% to help Central.

You have to know that you've got three levels of teams: Central (running the entire entity), Regional, and Local. The campuses not only need money to run the campus but also need to help run the regional and central teams as well.

Q: So, does central work the budget and campus pastors' salaries?

A: Yes. The executive pastor at Central will work with the campuses to establish their budgets, salaries, etc.

We are also working to do some preaching series together. Same time, same calendar. We are trying not to be like McDonalds in which everyone serves the exact same thing. But we do want to be one church.

My personality is throughout the organization and the leadership. I don't have to be in the pulpit to have my values and personality presented.

Personality drives the culture. So, you could say churches are personality driven but it is the personality that drives the culture.

Q: Any other thoughts or strategic steps?

A: To stay fresh, you've got to stay in a place where you're always thinking "what's next?"

# Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report presents my findings and conclusions on the matter of multisite church models and succession in pastoral leadership. These two streams of thought run concurrently with one another: which multisite model is most sustainable over time, and what does pastoral succession of a multisite work look like? The journey has been interesting and the findings very thought-provoking.

## **PROTOTYPE SUMMARY AND FINDINGS**

Originally, three prototypes were presented: a book, a website, and a workshop. At the time of this writing, I believe two of these three would work together succinctly and complement one another.

### **Prototype 1**

A published book on successful multisite models and leadership structures. This would be targeted to pastors and leaders who are contemplating the multisite model and are looking for insights and how-to's. The uniqueness of the book would be that it gives a biblical and historical account of multisite and offers the pros and cons of varying models. The book would also delve into sustainability and best practices that would enable the multisite church to live on beyond one generation. Key strategies for successful pastoral succession would be covered. The response of the public will determine if this is a success or not. The uniqueness of this approach is the look beyond one generation of pastoral leadership for multisite models and operating with an intentional and active game plan for succession. A proposed outline and book cover is included in the appendices.

### **Prototype 2**

Workshops offered for pastors and church leaders covering multisite models and pastoral succession. This would be an actual event that pastors and leaders could attend that may meet a true felt need.

In an environment like this, attendees could ask questions, interact with others, and be a part of the process as they seek to define the right plan for their local congregation and for their own ministry. The uniqueness of this approach is there very few known entities offering this. There is no known workshop offered in the U.S. in which pastors and teams can go and do a deep dive into multisite churches.

## **NPO Statement**

Multisite churches are predominantly first generation with personality centric leadership, needing intentionality for sustainability and succession.

### Research Question

The pressing question is, which multisite model is deemed most sustainable and what would succession look like? Even very recent headlines concerning multisite churches argue that the secular and corporate leadership model adopted by most churches does not suffice. Yes, a church is a non-profit entity and must conduct its business with all due-diligence and keen execution. But a church is also a living organism, a part of the Body of Christ in which curt business practices may not always apply. The New Testament church however does give precedent and example for multisite and for ministry succession, true, apostolic ministry.

Often a traditional single-site church may be able to forge through succession in a way that resembles a business succession. But a multisite church should be viewed more like a movement. Leadership change requires finesse, and intentional strategy. It is more of a transition over time than it is a succession at a set time.<sup>138</sup>

Participants in this focus consisted of fellow focus-group members who are also in the Portland Seminary program: my advisor, Dr. Gregg Borrer, and stakeholders from previous activities. The makeup of the stakeholders is as follows:

- Four lead pastors of multi-campus churches.
- A campus pastor of a multi-campus church.
- A recently retired senior vice president of sales for a multisite, PEO (professional employer organization) company rated 597 on the Fortune 500.
- An entrepreneur who owns a multi-site business.
- A 30-year-old pastor who is succeeding his father in ministry.
- My son, a young minister and master's degree graduate who aspires to serving as a pastor.

### BACKGROUND RESEARCH ESSAY ON THE EMERGING SOLUTION

While there are many variants in church models and styles, the multisite model is one that has been widely embraced in the latter half of the twentieth century and onward. The deeply held belief that one church can multiply and magnify its reach by expanding beyond one site permeates North America and other parts of the world.

The key to understanding the multi-site movement is to remember that fulfilling the Great Commission drives these congregations, not a growth strategy.<sup>139</sup> Jesus' words, as recorded in

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<sup>138</sup> The very idea of succession is more secular or corporate. It also holds a finality in which one generation of leader exits the scene while the new leader steps in. However, within a multisite movement, a more apostolic model would be one generation of leader transitioning slowly while the other generation also slowly transitions in. There is time and space for both to work together.

<sup>139</sup> Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, 389.



Mark 16:15, push this effort forward to: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." The multisite model takes the church to the greater concentration of the populace of the people rather than asking the people to come to the single location church.

While researching for this project, it was discovered that most North American citizens live the bulk of their lives within certain boundaries. One study asserts 15.4 miles as the maximum for distance and time distance allowed.<sup>140</sup> One's house of worship would fall in line with Karen Hamrick's and David Hopkins' descriptive as an *anchor* and/or *direct trip*. It is therefore reasonable to assume the same principles of this study applies to church location. The 15.4-mile maximum can be logically applied to the commute a person/family will make to and from their home church. Thus, another key reason for multisite churches. As our communities spread out, churches should consider doing the same. Go to where the people are.

It is the strongly held belief of the multisite church that they are walking out a current version of the early New Testament church in which Acts 2 records the new believers went house to house. Traditional, single-site churches are not frowned upon, but the multisite church believes it can better fulfill Jesus' commissioning by replicating itself over a city, a region, a state, or even a nation. In fact, there are some anomalies that reach out globally as one church with many locations. Hillsong Church, originating in Sydney, Australia, has sites in Asia Pacific, Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. Their self-descriptive is, "one house with many rooms."<sup>141</sup>

Whether a multisite model, a more traditional single-site model, or even the house church model, all churches should be so structured as to be sustainable in its leadership structure and transferrable to another generation. Sustainability necessitates a leadership structure and financial structure that endures the unpredictable highs and lows every church body faces. Sustainability also pertains to the durability and longevity of each church. It should be built and governed in such a way so that it prevails beyond any one generation of leadership.

For the most part, the multisite model is still in its first generation of livelihood and sustainability and longevity is still being walked out. We are living in a day and age in which even those churches deemed most established, and durable are being shaken. The previously mentioned Hillsong Church is currently going through such a shaking from the top down. Whether that institution was built to last or built upon a personality will soon be known.<sup>142</sup> Sadly, scenarios such as this with

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<sup>140</sup> Hamrick and Hopkins.

<sup>141</sup> Marti.

<sup>142</sup> There are multiple accounts concerning two separate accusations against founding pastor Brian Houston. This is an active story in which events and circumstances seem to change by the day.

Pastor Brian Houston and the far-reaching Hillsong church also denote severely toxic work environments with unhealthy teams. Concerning Hillsong Church, and particularly the New York location, the Christian Post reports, "It was not uncommon for volunteers and staff who had frequent interaction with Carl Lentz [the Hillsong New York pastor] to report that such interaction had 'caused' them to suffer from mental illness."<sup>143</sup>

Noted author, Patrick Lencioni, astutely observes:

An organization has integrity—is healthy—when it is whole, consistent, and complete, that is, when its management, operations, strategy, and culture fit together and make sense.<sup>144</sup>

We have concluded that successful and sustainable churches are those focused more on organizational health than anything else. One of the multisite pastors I interviewed in a one-on-one interview stated it this way:

If we can keep the leadership supply chain going, we will keep planting campuses. Everyone on our team has been raised up from within. What we are doing is putting third-tier leaders in as campus pastors and campus leaders, believing there are actually second-tier people who have not had an opportunity to grow or expand yet.

Sustainability and succession require thinking beyond here and now and more about *there and then*. Shortly before his untimely death in an aircraft crash, Dr. Myles Munroe, a renowned pastor and author, stated, ""True leaders don't invest in buildings. Jesus never built a building. They invest in people. Why? Because success without a successor is failure. So, your legacy should not be in buildings, programs, or projects; your legacy must be in people."<sup>145</sup> Church history is rife with examples of success with no successor, and thus an ultimate failure. Some have deemed Munroe's last message as a prophetic foretelling of his soon to be tragic and accidental death. He said, ""The greatest act of leadership is what happens in your absence. If everything you've done died with you, you are a failure. True leadership is measured by what happens after you die."<sup>146</sup>

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One such report on his resignation can be found here: <https://religionnews.com/2022/03/23/senior-pastor-brian-houston-resigns-from-hillsong-after-revelations-of-indiscretions-with-women/>.

<sup>143</sup> Blair.

<sup>144</sup> Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), location 388, Kindle.

<sup>145</sup> "Did Myles Munroe Prophesy His Death? Last Message."

<sup>146</sup> Blair.

### **Assessment Benchmarks**

This study seeks to establish the theology, history, and purpose for the multisite model, as well as note the same three-fold approach to sustainability and transference in leadership.

I will feel empowered and released to move forward when I have come to a conclusion on the following matters:

- The history and theology of the multisite church.

I do feel I have made progress on this. Further research and theological study will be needed to shore up this point of view.

- A current overview of the varying multisite models.

This would present real-case examples of most of the varying models, along with some of the present pros and cons discovered.

- Presentation of the preferred multisite model.

Upon presenting my findings, a case will need to be made on why I opted for such and what makes that model optimal for sustainability and transferability.

- Finally, a clearly defined approach to leadership transition in a local church needs to be settled on, so that it may be presented.

### **Learning Summary**

I have learned that there is no one way in which multisite church is to be done. I have also noted that many are interested in the outcome of said study for their own personal use. Two of our early-onset theories have proven to be true: 1) the multisite church is still mostly within its first generation of leadership, and there are only a handful of examples of successful pastoral succession; 2) most multisite models are personality-centric and, if not addressed, many will experience major challenges when transition comes.

Recent national and international headlines within the Body of Christ are showing a glaring issue with personality-centric multisite leadership and the need for this study. The negligence by many leaders to look beyond their current setting and status is surfacing as a true weakness within the multisite model.

The second part of our focus, pastoral succession, is also relevant and current to our times. When interviewing those involved, or talking with peers, pastoral succession is in the forefront of the mind of many.

Perhaps the most important discovery for me is the point of view of the oft overlooked: the church members. A churchgoer does not leave his/her home on Sunday morning to, "attend my *campus*." No. Churchgoers are going to *their church*. It is our conclusion that the "family of churches" model may be the most desirable and attainable.

Along with that discovery is the idea that succession is more of a corporate phrase, and transition has more of a biblical undertone to it. The apostolic model of transition is what we need.<sup>147</sup> In a successful pastoral transition, there are three key elements that the current pastor must pass to the next: sermon communication, leadership, and visioning. These can be phased over a period of time.

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<sup>147</sup> As I have stated in previous submissions, most multisite churches are in their first generation of leadership. Ironically, most of those leaders are in their fifties. Transition is inevitable. It could be compared to the coming ineluctable wealth transfer of the Baby Boomer generation. <https://www.city-journal.org/the-boomer-wealth-boom>.

# Appendix E—Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation

## Doctoral Project Description

My NPO statement is as follows: Multisite churches are predominantly first generation with personality centric leadership, needing intentionality for sustainability and succession.

My project to address this is a book that looks back at the biblical and historical origins of multisite churches, lays out the various models with the pros and cons of each, and then addresses the need for a well thought-out pastoral succession plan. The dynamics of a multisite church behooves us to give pause and contemplate the *what* and the *how* for pastoral succession. Will each campus spin off with autonomy? Or is the church so structured that another pastor/personality can step in and lead?

## Audience

This book primarily targets pastors and church staff. I have been excited to discover three distinct sub-groups within that target audience that have expressed interest in the outcome and the insights of this project. One audience is the pastor contemplating transitioning into a multisite model. There is enough detail shared that allows one to weigh the pros and cons and make an informed decision. The other audience is the current pastor who is leading a multisite church. And finally, pastors of traditional single-site churches as well as pastors of multisite churches are deeply interested in succession planning.

Upon completion of the book, I intend to engage this target audience utilizing social media, word of mouth, and linking with parachurch organizations and some denominational organizations, to market the product. Should I go with a publisher, they too would market the book.

## Development Plan

### Fall 2022

- Writing began on the introduction and sample chapters.
- Cover design was initiated with two separate graphic designers.
- Graphic designer was chosen and artwork for the book cover began.
- Sample chapters and an introduction were shared with NPO stakeholders and select pastoral-peers for feedback.
- Changes were made in accordance to feedback given.

## Fall 2023

- Writing resumes to complete the project.
- Sample chapters are shopped with publishing companies to determine if there is interest or if the book will be self-published.
- Marketing plan is in place and marketing support is secured.
- Sample chapters are shared with key influencers in order to secure book endorsements.
- Sample chapters are shared with select lead pastors and ministry staff to solicit feedback.
- A website domain is secured for the future online roll-out.

## Spring 2024

- All solicited feedback is parsed through and changes are made to the book.
- The book is edited and published.
- Marketing begins on social media, and with ARC – The Association of Related Churches and Destiny Leaders.
- Close ministry friends who are social media influencers will be solicited to promote the book on their social media platforms.
- Web designer is secured to design and build out the Built To Last website.
- Workshop material is developed and further solidified.

# Development Process

Evaluation of this project will be determined by interest shown by the target audience. How many units have sold? What type of reception and demand are we receiving? Have we sparked dialog among our peers? Are people reaching out via social media or the website to inquire further or even push back on any of the ideas presented? How much foot-traffic has the website generated?

I view this project as a living, breathing thing that is impacted by the context of the time and the current happenings within the body of Christ. Thus, staying current with multisite transitions and happenings, along with feedback and critique from the targeted audience, will impact adaptations and tweaks in the workshop and on the website.

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