MULTISITE CHURCH PLANTING
IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE TEMPLE BAPTIST SEMINARY
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BY

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ABSTRACT

MULTISITE CHURCH PLANTING
IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

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The purpose of this project is research concerning multisite church planting. The author will search out the guiding principles and best practices for planting a multisite church in a rural community as well as the investigation of theological foundations for multisite. The research method is qualitative case studies of established multisite churches in rural areas. The study will establish the strength of multisite church planting while also showing a need for a church planting strategy in the Wilkes County, North Carolina geographic region.
MULTISITE CHURCH PLANTING
IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

Approval
By
The Doctoral Project Committee
Of Temple Baptist Seminary

Accepted by the Doctor of Ministry Committee in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree

Committee Members:

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Committee Chairman

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Committee Member
DEDICATION

To Carla, my wife and love and to my children, Ashley, Whitney, Brooke, Tyler, Paige and Kai.

Carla, you are my best friend and the greatest life partner I could have ever asked for. Your devotion to our family and the Lord is inspiring. I am so blessed because of you.

To all of you, thank you for the many hours of understanding, as I balanced family, ministry and study. I am so proud of each of you and thankful to God for you. You have made my life amazing.

Finally, to Jesus my Savior and Lord, all the glory goes to You.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The focus of this work is the study of multisite church planting in a rural region. The particular location is Northwestern North Carolina. The basis of this research is to discover principles and strategies for multisite church planting by studying current multisite churches in a region similar to Northwestern North Carolina. The search is to find the principles and best practices in effect in existing multisite churches. More specifically, to discover what these pioneer multisite churches have learned based on the understanding of their geographic region and demographic studies. Further, to determine if multisite church planting is within the accepted biblical standards for autonomy and ecclesiology. Finally, to find out if these guiding principles and practices for multisite are transferrable to similar regions.

The need for new churches in Wilkes County, North Carolina is a foundation of the project. The work will also examine the leadership challenges facing the American church. Further, the author will establish both personal and professional goals. While the subject of multisite church planting is a growing topic, there is little existing research concerning multisite churches based in rural communities. The author is aware of no research conducted on multisite churches based in Wilkes County, North Carolina.

The writer of this project is a pastor in Wilkes County. He has observed that there have been no new strategic church plants for more than ten years within the association of Southern
Baptist churches in which he is a member. He also has observed that no church planting initiatives are currently in process as of this writing date. Accentuating the issue is the fact that churches are closing across the country and in North Carolina. The May 2010 issue of the *Biblical Recorder*, a publication of the North Carolina Baptist Convention, featured an article on church closings in North Carolina. One North Carolina Baptist denominational leader, Jim Pollard said, “There are a number of churches that are facing this reality . . . If the ’60s ever comes back I’ve got some churches that are ready.”¹ He went on to say, “It’s very difficult for them . . . Sometimes churches give the keys [to me] and say do something with this. We’ll go in and start a different kind of church. They could have done this all along but they just refused.”²

Mark Gray, the leader of the church planting team of the North Carolina Baptist Convention, estimated that about “5.6 million people, more than half the population of North Carolina, are not Christians.”³ In similar fashion regionally, eighty-three percent of the population of South Carolina does not attend church, according to the South Carolina Baptist Convention.⁴ “Research at the Leavell Center for Evangelism and Church Health has revealed that 70 percent of Southern Baptist churches are plateaued or declining in number, and only about 11 percent of Southern Baptist churches are showing significant, healthy evangelistic

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² Ibid.


growth.”5 “There may be a church on every street corner but many of them are dying, if not dead already, said Tyler Jones, Lead Pastor at Vintage21 Church, in Raleigh, North Carolina.”6

Multisite church planting is a current trend used to address this issue. Multisite takes the proven leadership and resources from an established church and multiples it. “A multi-site church is one church meeting in multiple locations.”7 In just five years, the number of multisite churches has grown from an estimated 1,0008 to over 3,000 churches in 2011,9 and the trend is continuing with more and more churches exploring the possibility of multisite. As of September of 2012, researcher Warren Bird has identified 5,000 American churches employing a multisite strategy.10 One such leader incorporating this strategy is Shannon O’Dell. His book, *Transforming Church in Rural America*, tells his story. O’Dell’s ministry, formerly a church of less than 100 people with an average of thirty-one attendees to Sunday worship services, now transformed into an international ministry reaching thousands. O’Dell says, “In the last nine months, we had 63,933 online visitors, and we ministered to another 40,000 through BNC Global Outreach, and we are rapidly launching satellite churches.”11 A Satellite church represents one


8 Ibid., 9.


model in the multisite phenomenon. Multisite church planting is creating opportunities for leaders and churches who desire to reach farther and with greater impact. “As church leaders begin to see beyond what they once thought possible, they begin to experience the power of revolutionary multiplication.”

**Leadership and the Multisite Option**

Along with the need created by church closures and declining attendance, there is a corresponding leadership challenge in many American churches evidenced by a declining attendance. According to the book, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, there were an estimated 320,000 Christian U.S. churches in 2007 and according to the authors, “Most of them are quite small.”

Author, President and CEO of LifeWay Christian resources, Thom Rainer, expresses concern over the lack of growth and vitality within the American church. He states, “The numerical evidence seems clear. The American Church is dying.” This situation, in order to change, will require courage and leadership on the part of the pastors of American churches. “Only those leaders who act boldly in times of crisis and change are willingly followed.” Rainer’s comments of a dying church, based on his observations as a researcher, seem bleak; still there is hope for the church in America. Pastor Bill Hybels emotionally expresses his belief in the church. “There is nothing like the local church when it’s working right. Its beauty is

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13 Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Mega Church Myths* (San Francisco: Jon Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2007), 5.

14 Ibid.


indescribable. Its power is breathtaking. Its potential unlimited.” To release this potential will require leadership. Pastor Shannon O’Dell, in exhorting pastors not to settle in any area of their lives but to recapture their vision and lead says,

In our homes, in our churches, and even in our personal lives, the vast majority of us are experiencing a lack of leadership. And that’s tragic . . . Why do we settle for average, for the mundane, for the way it’s always been done, for the “same old same old” attitudes? I believe it’s because people are basically “satisfied.” We have become comfortable and complacent, putting our God-given vision on the back burner. I say, “Enough of that!” It’s time to lead again. I have narrowed down “leadership” to this simple definition: LEADERSHIP IS . . . resisting the urge to SETTLE.

Odell’s estimation is that the leadership of pastors has waned and that waning is systemic. Leadership passion is lost in their homes, personal lives, and churches.

Spiritual leadership will play an important role in revitalizing the church. It also plays an important role in multisite church planting. Multisite planting requires courageous leadership. It also requires an understanding of leadership development and reproduction. Leaders who have the spiritual gift of leadership, according to Romans 12:8 must lead with “diligence.” The Greek work for diligence is spoudē (σπουδή) and it means to operate with a sense of urgency, speed. In context, church leadership requires urgent action. Biblical mandates such as reproduction of believers in Mathew 28:19-20, and multiplication of evangelistic efforts in Acts 1:8, find their fulfillment in urgent leaders. Churches that have this multiplying emphasis see great reward from their efforts. Hybels wrote,


18 O’Dell. *Transforming Church In Rural America*, 88.

19 Romans 12:8.
What flourishing churches have in common is that they are led by people who possess and deploy the spiritual gift of leadership . . . It’s not that I believe the gift of leadership is more important than other gifts. It’s simply that people with the gift of leadership are uniquely equipped to come up with strategies and structures that provide opportunities for other people to use their gifts more effectively.\(^\text{20}\)

The common thread in growing churches according to Hybels is gifted leadership developing the necessary support through structures and strategies for growth in the church. This strategy leads to more and more leaders reproduced for ministry and more and more church sites.

The strategy of multisite church planting starts with a commitment of a leader to multiply themselves and their church. This fact is foundational in *The Seven Practices for Effective Ministry*, where a main instruction of the work is an exhortation for pastors to “replace themselves.”\(^\text{21}\) This principle is necessary in a multisite strategy for pastors, church leaders, and churches corporately. Andy Stanley writes, “If you fail to develop a strategy to replace yourself, you will . . . force talented individuals to remain in the wings . . . cause potential leaders to exit the organization . . . stifle needed insight from valuable team members . . . hinder your ability to recruit volunteers . . . [and] limit the growth of your programs and ministries.”\(^\text{22}\) While leaders recognize and release others to greater ministry impact, they must also develop and place people into the teams necessary to accomplish the greater goals of ministry. This leadership development connects through relationship and a desire to serve others. Addressing pastors, the Apostle Peter writes, “Be shepherds of God’s flock, the believers who are under your care. Serve as their leaders. Don’t serve them because you have to. Instead, do it because you want to. That’s what God wants you to do. Don’t do it because you want to get more and more money. Do it

\(^{20}\) Ibid.


\(^{22}\) Ibid.
because you really want to serve.”23 Led by servant leaders with a willing heart, the church reproduces by developing people for ministry. (See chapter two of this work for details concerning team building for multisite).

**Goals**

This project is a research study into multisite church planting in rural communities. The goal is identification of the transferrable guiding principles and best practices for a multisite church and an understanding of its biblical basis. These principles will later be foundational in a subsequent work designed as a manual for establishing a multisite church in North Wilkesboro, North Carolina.

**Personal and Professional Goals of the Author**

In the process of preparing this project, the author hopes to attain these two personal and professional goals:

1. To gain an awareness of the current principles and best practices for effective multisite church planting.
2. To identify a working model of multisite church planting that will best suit the personality style of this author, the vision of his church, and its geographic location.

**Ministry Goals for the Church**

To strengthen the ministry of Celebration Church through research by understanding:

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23 1 Peter 5:2-3 (NIVr).
1. This project will establish the strength of multisite church planting through an understanding of a system of multiplication through a multisite ministry, which reproduces both Celebration Church and the Celebration Church leadership.

2. This project will bring a unity of purpose to Celebration Church based on the principles and best practices of multisite church planting.

Church Dynamics of Wilkes County

The two earliest churches established in Wilkes County were the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches. By the 1850’s, the Southern Baptists had grown to be larger than the Episcopalians and Presbyterians. Since then, the Baptists have remained the dominant denomination in Wilkes County. The county also contains a substantial amount of Methodists, Pentecostals, and Church of the Brethren. In recent years, the Morning Star International Denomination has had a large presence including a church and conference center in Wilkes County. Historically, few Roman Catholics have lived in Wilkes County. In recent years, however, immigration from other U.S. States and the rapid influx of Hispanic immigrants has increased the Catholic population. A Catholic church built in 1988 is located in North Wilkesboro. In contrast, relatively few Jews or members of other non-Christian faiths have settled in Wilkes County. There are, however, a small but growing number of people from India working for the Lowes Corporation.\(^2\)^

Wilkes County is a heavily churched county with three Southern Baptist Associations, Brushy Mountain, Stone Mountain and Yadkin Valley. There are hundreds of denominational and independent churches in Wilkes County. The church this author pastors is a member of the

\(^2\)Ibid.
Brushy Mountain Baptist Association, which consists of thirty-nine churches. These thirty-nine churches have a predominately-traditional approach to ministry. This means they operate much the same way that churches have operated in this region for many decades. Within this region are a few contemporary churches planted in the past five years. The result is typically that these new churches plateau quickly and cease to exist.

In an interview with Dr. Steven Gouge,25 Director of Missions for the Brushy Mountain Baptist Association, several helpful statistics emerged. He shared results from a recent report conducted by the Southern Baptist Convention concerning the churches of the Brushy Mountain Association. This report is the result of a questionnaire given to participating churches in the association. The report also included a personal interview with church leadership from these participating churches. Gouge explained that twenty-eight churches participated in the survey. Exactly one half, (fourteen), said that church planting was very important. Another one fourth, (seven), said that church planting was not important.

Data concerning the readiness aspect for church planting of these churches was gathered. According to each church’s own assessment and based on readiness characteristics, the results are as follows: Five churches were ready for church planting, four were somewhat ready, three were in the middle of the readiness scale, and twelve were not ready.

In the interview, when asked about the spiritual climate of the churches concerning church planting, Dr. Gouge stated that overall there is a “luke-warmness” toward church planting in the Brushy Mountain Baptist Association. He estimates that 4,000 churches will close their doors this year in America. “We’re not keeping up,” he stated. He also said that this geographic area is much like other areas in North Carolina and the United States. In the interview, Gouge

25 Dr. Steven Gouge, interview by author, Wilkesboro, NC, February 27, 2012.
also stated that a state convention study called *The Vision Fulfillment Committee Report* had revealed problems with the existing churches concerning church planting. He expressed that the report showed existing churches feel neglected when church planting is on the front end of the agenda of the state convention. This tension between the balance of assisting older congregations to be healthy and planting new ones is part of the problem of planting convention churches.\(^{26}\)

The actual report stated that,

> We do not need to place church planting in opposition to strengthening existing churches. This is not an either/or proposition, but must be a both/and commitment. We need new churches in our Convention. We need to strengthen those churches who are struggling. Omitting either responsibility will weaken the Convention. We should develop a model that will encourage existing churches to celebrate new church starts.\(^{27}\)

In this report, the North Carolina Baptist Convention recognizes that a new process for helping existing churches and new churches needs to be developed. It also recognizes that existing churches need to be part of the solution.

**Definition of Terms**

Defining eight key terms that may have a variety of definitions is vital to understanding this work. The author will define the key terms of this project to ensure a proper understanding.

**Church**

A church is a local body of believers who gather regularly under the leadership of a pastor or pastors, to carry out both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment of Jesus

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\(^{26}\) Ibid.

Christ. This local body administers the ordinances of communion and baptism and is foundational in the edification of the believers. The church as a body celebrates the presence of the Lord in worship. The church is not a building, it is a body, and it is not an organization. It is an organism.  

(Multisite Church Planting

A multiple site or multisite church plant is a contemporary strategy for a church to reach new people and new communities for Christ. It is a ministry plan that offers identical worship services in multiple locations. This means that no main campus exists, just multiple locations of the same church. These sites are comprised of strategic plants where the church has targeted an area and deemed it as the best site for another church location. This also includes the acquisitions of former church sites where a church has closed its doors.

A church plant is usually a small delegation of people who leave a church to go develop a brand new church. Typically, church plants have their own teaching pastor, their own leaders, and their own budget with some financial help from the “sending” church or denomination; otherwise, they are a new and independent entity. Multiple sites are new, extended, and fully functioning congregations of a sending church, but not independent churches.

A Rural Community

The Federal Census Bureau defines rural as; urban clusters (UCs). “A

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UCs consists of a densely settled territory with at least 2,500 people but fewer than 50,000 people.**30**

Leadership

Leadership in a word is; “influence . . . Leadership is the ability to obtain followers.”**31** Church leaders must lead in accordance to the vision of the church. Vision alignment is when the church as a body understands the church’s vision and supports it through strategic initiatives. A leader navigates this balance of vision alignment and initiatives through godly influence.

Campus Pastor

This person is in charge of a church campus and is typically the primary communicator for a multisite location. The campus pastor also carries the role of pastoral care and oversight. “The campus pastor is the ‘face’ . . . of the church at a regional campus. He or she is a high capacity leader who builds teams to ensure the success of the local campus.”**32**

Multisite

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

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multisite church has more than one worship venue, more than one campus, or a combination of both. Some sites use a live presenter/preacher; some use a video presentation of the message, or even a holographic image. Typically, multisite churches use the same format and planning for worship services in all of their campuses and have a “one-church multiple locations approach.” This project will focus on this model of one-church multiple locations.

Autonomy

Autonomy is the understanding that “each local church, under the authority of Christ, governs itself. For Congregationalists, no ecclesiastical authority exists outside or above the local assembly of believers.” (See Biblical and theological foundations for more information).

A Case Study

Sharan Merriam explains that a case study focuses on a particular situation and is richly descriptive. It illumines the mind of the reader with discoveries and insights into the phenomenon. “Previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insights into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result from case studies.” Case studies are


37 Ibid., 44.
“prominent in advanced levels of pastoral studies” and are useful for a “complete, well-organized picture of the person or group studied.”  

Research Questions

This project will seek to answer these following questions:

1. What principles, best practices, biblical or otherwise, are essential for planting a successful multisite church?
2. Is a multisite ministry biblical in its approach?
3. Would these principles and practices work in the Wilkes County region and other similar geographic and demographic communities?

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations will prohibit the author from an exhaustive search into the topic of multisite church planting. These limitations contain, but are not limited to; a lack of previous scholarly research and information, a period of time that will restrict the scope of the research (it takes years to plant churches whether they be traditional or multiple site), travel constraints, limited finances, and finally the limitation of few examples of multisite planting in rural communities.

The delimitations extend to the geographic scope of the research. This research is delimitated to rural communities similar to and within one hundred miles of the focus church. The focus church is where the author is the lead pastor. Not all multisite churches in this region

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are within the scope and not all denominations are considered.

Summary

In summary, there is an observed lack of church planting in Northwestern North Carolina, particularly in Wilkes County. Regionally, the Baptist Conventions from South and North Carolina have identified a marked drop-off in church growth and attendance with eighty-three percent of South Carolinians identified as not attending church.\(^{39}\) The Baptist Convention of North Carolina has determined that a new strategy is vital for strengthening existing churches while assisting new church plants.\(^{40}\) According to Dr. Steven Gouge, director of the Brushy Mountain Baptist Association in Wilkes County, there is a “luke-warmness” toward church planting by the existing churches.\(^{41}\)

This project will discover the principles and best practices for effective multisite planting in a rural community and a biblical basis for multisite through qualitative case study research. The author will use the case studies of four multisite churches to identify these transferable multisite church-planting principles and best practices. This research will then become the foundation of a manual that will assist in multisite church planting for the Northwestern region of North Carolina and other similar areas.


\(^{41}\) Dr. Steven Gouge, Interview by author, Wilkesboro, NC, (February 27, 2012).
CHAPTER II

THE THEOLOGY AND ECCLESIOLOGY OF MULTISITE

Biblical and Theological Foundations

The idea of multiple sites for congregations is not something new; it started with the birth of the church, demonstrated when the apostle Paul sends his circulatory letters to these early church locations. In Galatians, Paul addresses “the churches in Galatia”\(^\text{42}\) signifying more than one location. In the second letter to the Corinthians he writes; “to the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia.”\(^\text{43}\) In his letter to the Philippians, Paul addresses “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.”\(^\text{44}\) Paul wrote his letters to multiple church gatherings within a region, not one specific location. What comes into question today is the idea of one church being in multiple locations while under the leadership of a single pastor. This is especially true for congregationally governed churches such as Baptists. The issue centers on a lack of a clearly defined biblical structure for the church. “If you start looking in the New Testament for how we should organize as a church, you won’t find a straightforward manual of church government; there is no ideal constitution for a church.”\(^\text{45}\)

The three main approaches to Christian church governance are, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregational. Congregational governance subdivides into single-elder

\(^{42}\)Galatians 1:2 (ESV).
\(^{43}\)2 Corinthians 1:1.
\(^{44}\)Philippians 1:1.
\(^{45}\)Mark Dever, 9 Mark of a Healthy Church (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 221.
congregational and plural-elder congregational governance. In the Episcopalian structure, “Authority resides in the bishop.”\textsuperscript{46} The Presbyterian model “places primary authority in a particular office as well, but there is less emphasis upon the individual office and officeholder than upon a series of representative bodies which exercise that authority.”\textsuperscript{47} Erickson states that the single-elder congregational government style,

stresses the role of the individual Christian and makes the local congregation the seat of authority. Two concepts are basic to the congregational scheme: autonomy and democracy. By autonomy, we mean that the local congregation is independent and self-governing. There is no external power which can dictate courses of action to the local church. By democracy, we mean that every member of the local congregation has a voice in its affairs.\textsuperscript{48}

The single-elder model places a great deal of responsibility into the hands of the congregation. The plural-elder congregational governance combines a plurality of elders with a congregational led element. This plural-elder approach seems to have a recent surge in evangelical churches. Samuel Waldron states, “Many evangelicals have discovered in their New Testament that local churches should have (and, thus, be led by) elders. This renewed interest in elders has created a reaction against the radical, democratic form of government practiced in many evangelical churches.”\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{46} Millard Erickson, \textit{Christian Theology, Vol. 3} (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1070.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 1074.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 1078.

\textsuperscript{49} Peter Toon, L. Ron Taylor, Paige Patterson and Samuel Waldron, \textit{Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Governance} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 188.
Baptists, Congregationalists, and most Lutheran groups practice a congregational structure predominantly.\textsuperscript{50} This structure is more difficult in a multisite model, not because there is no congregational input, but because the congregational input is often not predominant in daily leadership. Episcopalian and Presbyterian forms of church governance may adapt more readily to multisite church planting due to their structure of plural-elders. These forms represent various denominations; however, denominations are not specific in this discussion, just the governmental forms. The plural-elder approach in plural-elder-congregationalism would seem to lend itself more readily to multisite church planting than the single-elder congregational rule. Single-elder denominations would find multiple sites more difficult due to the questions of autonomy and democracy. For the sake of this project, an understanding of the autonomy and democracy of the local Baptist church is vital since this author pastors a single-elder Baptist church that aligns with the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention is a group of cooperating churches who have a high view of missions, church autonomy, and cooperation among other beliefs. Concerning cooperation, Southern Baptists hold that,

\begin{verbatim}
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.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{verbatim}

In regards to the church, the Baptist Faith and Message, a guiding theological document for Southern Baptists states,

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 1079.
\end{verbatim}
A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.\textsuperscript{52}

Baptist tradition is a congregational approach with an autonomic foundation; each church chooses its own policies. In support of pastoral leadership under a final authority of the congregation, Dever points to passages such as Matthew 18:15-17 where conflict is resolved by bringing the matter before the church. He also refers his readers to Acts 6:2-5 in the deacon selection process.\textsuperscript{53} Finally, he points out the prominence of the church in final matters.

Notice to whom one finally appeals in such situations. What court has the final word? It is not a bishop, a pope, or a presbytery; it is not an assembly, a synod, a convention, or a conference. It is not even a pastor or board of elders, a board of deacons or a church committee. It is, quite simply, the church—that is, the assembly of those individual believers who are the church.\textsuperscript{54}

The church is the governing authority but how does the church exercise its authority? Who comprises the church? What is the leadership structure and how does it carry out its mandate? The answers to these questions are foundational for an understanding of a biblical multisite church planting movement.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Dever, \textit{9 Marks of a Healthy Church}, 2004, 221.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
The other essential elements of ecclesiology in connection to a multisite model are the nature of the church, the Great Commission, the historical foundations of the church, and the role and authority of the pastor and or pastors.

The Nature of the Church

The biblical understanding of church is foundational and essential for this project since the church and its expansion is the focus. The concept of church has two categories, the church local and the church universal. The universal church includes all believers everywhere as part of the body of Christ, not a single location but many, that is, all believers everywhere. The local church is the visible church within any given community. “Of the 115 New Testament references to church or churches, nearly one hundred of them refer to the visible church(es).” What is the visible church? It is not the building the church meets in or any other structure, though many today equate a church with a building. Etymologically in English, the word church refers to the Lord’s house; biblically it refers to much more. While the English word comes from the idea of a structure, the Greek word for church in the New Testament does not. Wood and Marshall explain,

The English word ‘church’ is derived from the Gk. adjective kyrialos as used in some such phrase as kyriakon dōma or kyriakē oikia, meaning ‘the Lord’s house’, i.e. a Christian place of worship. ‘Church’ in the NT, however, renders Gk. ekklēsia, which mostly designates a local congregation of Christians and never a building. Although we often speak of these congregations collectively as the NT church or the early church, no NT writer uses ekklēsia in this collective way. An ekklēsia was a meeting or assembly. Its commonest use was for the public assembly of citizens duly summoned, which was a

55 Norman Geisler, Systematic Theology, Vol. 4, Church, Last Things (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2005), 65.

feature of all the cities outside Judaea where the gospel was planted (e.g. Acts 19:39); *ekklēsia* was also used among the Jews (LXX) for the *‘CONGREGATION’* of Israel which was constituted at Sinai and assembled before the Lord at the annual feasts in the persons of its representative males (Acts 7:38).

Lewis Sperry Chafer simply states that the word “church” is two words in the Greek. One word means “out,” and the other, “to call or summon.”

The church is an assembly of people who are “called out” to a higher purpose from God to do His work and will. Geisler says that the word *ekklesia* came to mean, “The Christian church,” in its universal (invisible) or local (visible) sense. The term *ekklesia* became popular among Christians in the early church, “in Greek-speaking areas for chiefly two reasons; to affirm continuity with Israel through the use of a term found in Gk. translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and to allay any suspicions, esp. in political circles, that Christians were a disorderly group.”

The church by definition is a group that is “called out” from the general populous of the people in order to do the will of God. The church local is the visible representation of the church universal. “Like every other work of God, the church is not an afterthought; He ordained the church from all eternity. Since God is immutable, whatever He wills, He unchangeably wills from eternity.”

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57 Ibid.


59 Ibid.


The Bible gives at least five functions of a church. In Acts 2:42-47 we see these characteristics at work in the life of the Jerusalem church.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.63

In this passage, we see the devoted church at Jerusalem submitted to: the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship with each other, worship through communion and prayer, ministering to each other through generosity, and daily additions to the body through salvations. An evaluation of a church should minimally include these five areas: sound doctrinal teaching based on the Word of God, connecting fellowship, worship including the ordinances, generous living toward other believers, regular additions to the body through salvation decisions, and the ordinance of baptism.64

The Calling of the Church

The New Testament church began with great power and authority on the day of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Jesus instructs his followers that his church would grow beyond Jerusalem and that it would prevail. In the first use of the word “church” in the New Testament, Jesus states, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”65 “The rule will usually obtain that, if there is more than one meaning to a biblical term, the

63 Acts 2:42-47.
64 Acts 8:26-38.
first use of it in the Sacred Text will be that of its most important signification.\textsuperscript{66} The significance is that the church belongs to Jesus and he said, “I will build my church.”\textsuperscript{67} Its growth and health are in his hands. The church is not a monument to a dead leader; it is a movement under Jesus’ control continuing today. It has a calling to go into the entire world. What exactly is that calling?

The Great Commission

Prior to the birth of the church, Jesus commissions his disciples to go into the entire world and make disciples. In his Great Commission, he exhorts and instructs, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”\textsuperscript{68} In this charge to his followers, Jesus explains what to do and where to go. They are to make disciples, a process of evangelism with discipleship. He commissions them to go to the ends of the earth. At the time of his command, it was physically impossible to carry out this commission. Today, that limitation is not present.

Jesus further instructed his followers to wait until the Holy Spirit came before they began their mission, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”\textsuperscript{69} Jesus

\textsuperscript{66} Chafer, \textit{Systematic Theology, Vol. IV}, 43.

\textsuperscript{67} Matthew 16:17.

\textsuperscript{68} Matthew 28:19-20.

\textsuperscript{69} Acts 1:8.
informs his followers that they would be his witnesses. In the English, this word witness may have a judicial, court-like feel. In the Greek, the word witness is the word martys, the same word we derive our English word martyr. J. B. Pohill expounds on this verse,

“You will [must] receive power”; “you will be my witnesses.” Luke stressed this commission from the risen Lord at the close of his Gospel (24:47–49). All the same elements are there—the witness, the call to the nations, the power of the Spirit. The power they were to receive was divine power; the word is dynamis, the same word used of Jesus’ miracles in the Gospels. It is the Spirit’s power (2:1–21). The endowment with the Spirit is the prelude to, the equipping for, mission. The role of the apostles is that of “witness” (martys).70

The commission for these early leaders was to give their all for the making of disciples, to give their lives as a “witness,” a martyr for Jesus Christ so the entire world would hear about him.

The Holy Spirit’s Role

Concerning this work and the purpose of the Holy Spirit, Jesus tells his disciples,

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”71 Jesus fulfilled his promise at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came with great power as Jesus predicted.72 After the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the apostles had an ability to cross cultural and linguistic barriers.

The Holy Spirit has an essential role in the individual Christian’s life today. He also has an essential role in the expansion of the church and the accomplishment of the Great Commission. In the New Testament, the apostles received direction from the Holy Spirit and


71 John 16:7.

72 Acts 2.
guidance to the areas in which they were to preach and eventually plant churches. Concerning this leadership by the Holy Spirit, Charles Brock observed that,

From the beginning to the end . . . He leads. Paul knew such intimate leadership. We read of the general direction of the Holy Spirit in Acts 13:4 [sic] Having been sent by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul went... Then we see the leading of the Holy Spirit in the detailed steps: Acts 16:6-8, They traveled through the region of Phrygia and Galatia because the Holy Spirit did not let them preach the message in the province of Asia. When they reached the border of Mysia, they tried to go into the province of Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So they traveled right on through Mysia and went to Troas.73

Luke writes in Acts chapter 9, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”74 An understanding of the Spirit’s role, power, and leadership is vital for the success of a multisite church planting movement. The Holy Spirit’s role is to magnify Jesus Christ and his work. Jesus said concerning the Holy Spirit, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”75 The disciples began their expanding mission76 with the birth and the mandate of the church with the Spirit’s power. Jesus’ Great Commission and the doctrine of salvation called soteriology are foundational to the church’s calling and mission.77


75 John 16:14.

76 Matthew 24:14.

The Hope of the World

The church is “the hope of the world”\(^{78}\) and the dispenser of the gospel, God’s gift of life, and yet according to Thom Rainer, so many churches are dying because of a lack of evangelistic reproduction. “The numerical evidence seems clear. The American Church is dying. We are not reproducing Christians. American Church growth is typically the transfer of members from one congregation to another rather than the conversion of the lost.”\(^{79}\) A characteristic of a dying church is its loss of spiritual vitality and concern for the lost. “Dying churches stop speaking about Christ to the world. Evangelistic fervor becomes apathetic disinterest in a lost world.”\(^{80}\) A renewed passion for the gospel is at the heart of any church that will reach its community for Christ.

Each church must understand its own community and present the truth of Jesus within that context. While the gospel is not “receptor-oriented,”\(^{81}\) that is, relating merely through and for the specific situations of its audience, the gospel does flow through a particular context in each culture. This contextualization is the responsibility of every Christian and every church\(^{82}\) and the Spirit of God will help guide into that understanding.\(^{83}\) Successful multisite church planting takes into account this Spirit-led contextualization. If the church, the people of God, is

\(^{78}\) Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 15.


\(^{82}\) 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

\(^{83}\) John 16:13.
to be the hope of the world, the light of the world, a city on a hill,\textsuperscript{84} it must take seriously the 
Great Commission of reaching people locally and globally. Any church planting sites across a 
region must understand both the contextualization and theological foundations for such a work 
and the corresponding need for the Holy Spirit’s power. Only then will that church be ready to 
fulfill its mandate from Christ.

**The Historical Foundations of the Early Church**

The Expansion of the Church

The early church spread across a region and met in multiple locations. A study of the 
expansion of the early church for growth principles includes a look at the historical foundations 
place an emphasis on understanding the history of the church before understanding growth 
principles. They instruct that,

Church history is filled with lessons for Christians today. This lens enables us to turn the 
spotlight on the church in the later part of the first century and throughout the centuries 
that followed. This gives us insights that enable us to accentuate what Christians have 
done correctly, and hopefully will help us eliminate what we’ve done wrong and correct 
what we have done poorly. This process, like the study of the church in scripture, should 
be an ongoing open-ended activity—enabling us to learn from the past—including our 
own personal history.\textsuperscript{85}

In the first century, churches came under the direction of the apostles such as Peter, 
James, John, and Paul. The early church met in one location at its birth in Jerusalem, and then in

\textsuperscript{84} Matthew 5:14-16.

numerous expanded geographic regions. This was partly due to the apostles’ commission to go, and then because of opposition, as evidenced in Acts chapter 8. “There was a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” In keeping with the mandate to reach the entire world, the church as evidenced by the scriptures, spread even to diverse ethnic communities. Robert Saucy writes concerning these scattered Christ followers, that they were not bound to ethnic prejudices but that “everywhere they went, they preached the word. Particular attention is given to the spread of the church to Samaria (Ac 8). The preaching here was a surprising action, for the Jews normally avoided the Samaritans because of their mixture of Gentile blood.” As the church continued to multiply, its impact became evident throughout the region. In Acts 17, we see the claim by the Thessalonians, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.” Robert Saucy places emphasis on the Apostle Paul’s influence. “The final expansion of the church occurred primarily through God’s “chosen instrument” (Ac 9:15, NASB), the apostle Paul, who was ordained to be “His witness unto all men,” (Ac 22:15, cf. 26:16).” Through these missionary activities, the church spread out through Asia Minor and into Europe, reaching the very capital of the Mediterranean world, Rome. Within a short time of the Apostle Paul’s ministry, the church had grown across the Mediterranean region. The Apostle John refers to these churches in the Asia Province, “To the seven churches in the province of Asia.” He later names them, “To Ephesus, Smyrna,
Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Paul also takes his message on to Macedonia including the town of Philippi, to whom he wrote the book of Philippians. The church spread from town to town and leaders of the early church movement directed each one.

In Paul’s writing to Timothy in II Timothy 2:2, he lays out a process of multiplication and expansion. Was this multiplication for leaders only, or did it include the church locations and new congregations as well? Getz and Wall believe that it included both.

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” This passage is usually applied to person-to-person evangelism and follow-up. However, the primary thrust in the context relates to the multiplication of local-church leadership and, by implication the multiplication of churches.

Church growth has occurred since the beginning of the church. It is not a new or modern phenomenon. Contemporary church growth is rooted in the foundations of the early church as well as Christian missionaries over the past centuries. Built upon the early Christ-followers and apostles, missionaries would continue this expansion to this day. “Even contemporary Church Growth thought had a precursor, in the thought of the Dutch missiologist Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676). Voetius believed that the ‘first goal of mission is the conversion of the heathen; the second, the planting of churches; and the highest, the glory of God.’”

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91 Revelation 1:11.
92 Acts 17:1.
94 Elmer Towns, Craig Van Gelder, Charles Van Engen, Gailyn Van Rheenan and Howard Snyder, Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 9.
The Persecution of the Early Church

In time, the early church would suffer great persecution at the hands of leaders such as Nero. The story of the aged bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp of the second century, is a testament to the devotion of the first Christians. After taking Polycarp into a crowded arena where soon ferocious lions would attack, they asked him to deny Jesus and swear by Caesar.

“Simply swear by Caesar,” the governor pled. “I am a Christian,” said Polycarp. “If you want to know what that is, set a day and listen.” “Persuade the people,” answered the governor. Polycarp said, “I would explain to you, but not to them.” “Then I’ll throw you to the beasts.” “Bring on your beasts,” said Polycarp. “If you scorn the beasts, I’ll have you burned.” “You try to frighten me with the fire that burns for an hour and you forget the fire of hell that never goes out.”

In the end, burned at the stake for his faith, Polycarp prayed that his death would be acceptable. The church continued to grow and by the early second century, Bithynia in Asia Minor experienced unusual Christian growth. The Emperor Trajan received a letter from the governor of the region that expressed his dismay in this rapid expansion of Christ followers. The letter from Pliny, the governor, states concerning Christians, that there are “many in every period of life, on every level of society, of both sexes . . . in towns and villages and scattered throughout the countryside.” Pliny is afraid for the shrines of the pagan gods and their desertion by the people he governs.

The early church faced persecutions from cruel leaders and governments. It also faced heretical teachings such as, Docetism, Gnosticism, Nestorianism, Donatism, Manichaeanism,

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95 Bruce L. Shelley, Church History In Plain Language (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 56.

96 Ibid., 52.

97 Ibid., 45.
Arianism, and Nicolaitanism, trying to force their way in.\textsuperscript{98} Church leaders fought through these numerous battles and are a tribute to the providential hand of God guiding these early faithful believers.

**Autonomy and Authority of the Church**

In the New Testament narrative, as the gospel message spread to regions farther away from Jerusalem, more church locations and pastors were in demand. Was there a connection for these new churches with the Jerusalem church? Did the apostles have apostolic authority over them? Alternatively, were they autonomous elder-led churches? These questions are pertinent for this discussion and are foundational for a biblical basis for multisite church planting.

**Autonomy of the Local Church**

Southern Baptists and Baptists in general hold tightly to the idea of autonomy. Autonomy is the understanding that “each local church, under the authority of Christ, governs itself. For Congregationalists, no ecclesiastical authority exists outside or above the local assembly of believers.”\textsuperscript{99} Growing criticisms of multisite church planting is the loss of autonomy by the church, as well as a loss of a biblical understanding of 	extit{ekklēsia}. In his review of the book, 	extit{Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement's Next Generation}, Bobby Jamieson offers this critique of multisite through unanswered questions.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

\bibitem{98} Jeremy C. Jackson, \textit{No Other Name: The Church Through Twenty Centuries} (Westchester: Cornerstone Books, 1980), 35.

\end{thebibliography}
What does the New Testament word for church mean? How is it used? Does it ever refer to multiple gatherings in different locations? Does the Bible provide a pattern for church government and church structure today? If so, what does it look like? Who has authority in the church? Can a body outside of a local congregation exercise authority over it? What makes the church different from any other gathering of Christians? This conversation is both important and neglected.  

Jamieson raises these questions for discussion. Answering these questions will provide a much-needed foundation for planting multisite churches.

In addition, as a church expands to multiple locations, can the new locations achieve independent autonomy? In typical Baptist church planting models, a new church comes under the care of an existing established planting church for a period. The new church is in “mission status” and governed somewhat by the existing church. In other cases, a church may choose to join the denomination or local association of churches and come under a “watch-care” status. “The association or denomination will have its own procedures to follow in responding to such a petition.”

The goal ultimately in a traditional church plant, is to release the church in mission or watch-care status to full autonomous church status with its own constitution and bylaws. In the multisite model, this release is not the goal. This is where the tension lies. The multisite model is of one pastor and church leadership directing multiple church locations, so the question of autonomy becomes central to the discussion. This author raises three questions for clarity concerning the subject of autonomy.

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1. If an autonomous church decides to plant another location in a multisite model, is that not a decision that an autonomous church could make concerning how they do church in a self-governing, autonomous way?

2. There is a growing trend of microcosmic churches, called small groups, in many church structures. These small groups have numerous responsibilities such as, the teaching of the Word of God, fellowship of the believers, administering the ordinances of baptism and communion, the receiving of tithes and offerings, ministry to each other and the community, as well as evangelistic thrusts. All of these are under the recognized authority of a leader from the church. Many of these groups choose when and where they will meet and some meet online. The leader also in some cases chooses the curriculum for the group. How dissimilar are these groups from a multisite church plant?

3. As churches grow larger, a representative—government approach is effective in dealing with church issues. A church larger than 500 people is often too large to use a standard congregational-led approach and often chooses to use a representative government. These larger churches often face the same issues that churches using multisite have. If a representative government structure were acceptable in larger churches, why would multisite congregations be different?

These questions raise difficult and somewhat complex issues. Regardless of the structure of any given church, there will always be questions as to how the polity and governance of the church is actually interpreted and exercised.
The multisite model, like other structures for churches, has its own difficulties. Thomas White and John Yeats raise some important questions concerning disagreements and non-resolved issues in a multisite plant, such as placement of a new pastor,

What will happen should there not be agreement over the new pastor? Will the sites wither away and die like Montgomery Ward or Kmart in some regions? Will onetime megachurches be constant reminders of a failed religious experiment? Will the sites go through the process of separation from the founding church through court battles and property settlements?\(^{102}\)

These questions and many others must be resolved before the planting process begins. A healthy multisite church should have a written policy in their bylaws concerning such matters. A well-defined structure to ensure harmony and alignment to the vision is essential. Goodwin expresses the need for constitutional clarity for a church for the purpose of any association of churches. “Ideally, all associations should possess as much authority as needed to carry out their responsibilities or their purposes and to lead and direct their members within the limits of their constitutional relationships.”\(^{103}\) This comes back to the point of autonomy, namely the ability to choose and self-govern. If a church chooses to be in more than one location under one pastor as an autonomous entity, it may choose to do so. F. H. Kerfoot, a pastor and denominational leader from the nineteenth century, expresses some interesting comments concerning autonomy,

The New Testament shows also concerning churches of Jesus Christ, that every local church has the right to govern itself. It recognizes no right in civil governments to assume control over any church. . . Churches may, in mere matters of expediency, associate and co-operate in Christian work if they see fit. Yet no association or council can have power or jurisdiction, except what the churches sees fit to allow.\(^{104}\)

\(^{102}\) Thomas White and John M. Yeats, *Franchising McChurch* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 162.


Kerfoot agrees that autonomy extends to the desire of the church in what it “sees fit” to do. “Co-operate,” is more than cooperation. A church may choose to co-operate with other churches as it has the right to do. At the heart of the issue of autonomy is the right for a church to self-govern without the intrusion of denominational or governmental leaders who do not have an affiliation with the church. Harold Rawlings states concerning Baptist polity and autonomy that,

No hierarchical body can dictate to any local church as to how its business is to be conducted. Each church selects its own pastor and staff. The church owns its own buildings – the denomination cannot seize the property – and should a church close its doors, the members dispose of the property as they see fit. The will of the local church is final. At the same time, a congregation manifests its unity by joining with other Baptist churches for fellowships, mutual assistance, and the support of common educational, evangelistic, and missionary goals. 105

Autonomy, according to Rawlings stretches to the extent of outside relationships as long as the church decides on the nature of the relationship. 106 He further expresses that the authority on which Baptists stand, emerges from the Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 28:19-20 he commissions his followers and says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” 107 The church also finds its authority in the living Word of God 108 and the Holy Spirit of God. “We Baptists affirm the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the life of the individual believer, and we confess in our prayers and sermons that we are dependent upon the Spirit’s guidance.” 109

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106 Ibid.
107 Matthew 28:18 (ESV).
108 Hebrews 4:12.
Carl Henry points out that Baptist distinction does not end with autonomy but also extend to the scripture as the final authority, believer’s baptism by immersion, the priesthood of all believers and the separation of church and state.\footnote{Ibid., 210.} None of these other distinctions is in question in a multisite model.

**Pastoral Authority**

One debate is over the biblical, New Testament understanding of the role of the pastors and elders. What role do pastors and elders have in the church? To whom do pastors and elders answer to in terms of authority? These leaders have roles and authority in the church according to scripture; still their first obligation is submission to the Lord under his leadership. Paige Patterson states; “Discussion of ecclesiastical government is doomed from the outset unless it begins with Christ, the head of the church.”\footnote{Peter L. Toon et al., *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Governance*, 134.}

Our understanding of the government of Christ’s church must begin with the Lord himself and his *kingdom authority*. He is the Head of the church; his rule is unique and incomparable. A second principle derives from the first. The church shows the organic life of Christ’s body; it lives as an organism, not an organization. The third principle is no less essential. The church is not like the kingdoms of this world, for it is organized for service, not dominion. All government in the church is *stewardship*: i.e. its leaders are servant managers, who use their authority only to advance the interests of those they represent and serve.\footnote{Ibid.}

As head of the church, Christ leads. After Christ, comes the confusion for many as to who is to lead under his guidance. The scriptures do not give a clearly defined structure. Dever states, “We can understand the confusion. If you start looking in the New Testament for how we should
organize as a church, you won’t find a straightforward manual of church government; there is no ideal constitution for a church.”

While the Bible does not clearly define in one passage the structure of the church and its leaders, the scriptures do give numerous examples through those who did lead. In each church were elders, called pastors or over-seers. God called these leaders with specific functions and responsibilities. In the church, we see men only leading in the roles of pastors and overseers, not woman or committees. Falwell instructs, “God works through men. Committees are to advise, never to dictatate. The Holy Spirit appoints men as bishops, pastors, and elders. God gives the care of the churches to these men, never to groups or committees. God’s pastors are overseers-shepherds.”

Falwell continues with the idea of the church failing in this area and causing great problems for itself.

So who are these leaders? Can leadership be from one person or does it necessarily have to be a group of people? Denominations differ but many see the role of a single male leader as the biblical norm. Catholics derive the word “priest” from the same word that evangelicals and Baptists in particular get their word “elder” and Presbyterians, their word “presbyters” πρεσβύτεροι. Elders in churches served as pastors while a detailed list of responsibilities is incomplete in the scriptures. While there were seven deacons in the original group of deacons, groups within the church did not give over-all leadership for the church. Still, the exact nature of church structures in the New Testament is missing a fully defined organization. The questions as to whether there was a standard structure for the church remains unclear and certainly is not in a remaining written form. Did one pastor-elder hold a position of authority over other pastors? Did

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one pastor lead and give direction to a plurality of pastors/elders? These questions are an issue in the evangelical world and not all leaders or all denominations agree. Jeremy Jackson in his work, *No Other Name*, seems confused on the issue of elder authority. He states,

> In the local congregation itself, even if among the ruling elders one or more might be particularly effective rulers or bear the main teaching responsibilities, there is no suggestion whatever in the New Testament that this granted authority above other elders. . . although the possibility of Timothy’s receiving advice for more than one congregation precludes one from being absolute about this.¹¹⁶

Jackson writes emphatically that the New Testament does not grant authority of one pastor over another and then he states that Timothy’s situation may undermine that very statement.

> What about the apostles, what was their role? Paige Patterson is convinced that a congregational rule is the biblical model. He points out that the apostles did not exercise authority in local church matters or even apostolic succession, he states,

> If anyone had the knowledge, power, and authority to make these decisions about the replacement of Judas and the selection of the seven, surely the twelve apostles could have claimed that authority! Instead, what rather clearly unfolds in this early phase of congregationalism was quite consistent with the theology of the individual believer-priests, each possessing the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 14:17).¹¹⁷

Geisler says that no one bishop oversaw all the churches in the early church and points to the fact that Christ addresses the seven churches in Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and not a ruling bishop. In refuting the Episcopalian approach to church structure, Geisler further says concerning these individual churches, “That they have their own elders who guide the church under Christ demonstrates that they do not have one bishop who rules over a group or over all the

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¹¹⁶ Jackson, *No Other Name, The Church Through Twenty Centuries*, 49.

¹¹⁷ Peter L. Toon et al., *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Governance*, 280.
churches.” Geisler also holds to the single-elder democratic structure for the church. His view is in contrast to Samuel Waldron who holds to a plural-elder congregational approach. In citing the tension between these two views, Waldron writes,

I defend the leadership of a plurality of elders in the church . . . it seems to me that a biblical appreciation of a plurality of elders in the local churches must logically and practically tend to modify and restrain the radical democratic tendencies of many evangelical churches today. Even if we reject the Presbyterian version of elder rule, there is a kind of tension between a democratic view of church government and a plural-elder view of church government.  

In the New Testament, it appears that while the apostles stayed out of local church matters, there is apostolic authority over the churches, yet the pastors placed in their cities governed each church. In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas lay hands on men and ordain them for ministry. They appointed elders (πρεσβύτεροι) in every church. The Bible says, “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

The position of elder in the New Testament was one of dignity, maturity, and sagacity. In the Jewish community, an elder was a position of great authority, “The elders were rulers.” The book of Hebrews exhorts the people to obey those that rule over them. The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary describes an elder as a “prominent member of both Jewish and early

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118 Norman Geisler, Systematic Theology, Vol. 4 Church, Last Things. 67.

119 Peter L. Toon et al., Who Runs the Church? 4 Views On Church Governance, 189.

120 Acts 14:23.


122 Ibid.

123 Hebrews 13:17.
Christian communities. In the OT, “elder” usually translates the Hebrew word zaqen from a root that means “beard” or “chin” signifying someone of age and experience. In the NT, the Greek word is presbuteros, which is transliterated in English as “presbyter” and from which the word “priest” was derived.”124 These experienced individuals were leaders who had a spiritual authority based on their character and maturity.

New Testament pastors had authority over their own congregations yet were subject to instruction from the apostles. The Apostle Paul demonstrated this authority with instruction to the church in Corinth. He prescribes an action that was to put someone out of the church for immorality.125 In I Timothy, he instructs the young Pastor, Timothy, concerning conduct in the church. “If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household.”126 It appears that the apostle Paul was an overseer of pastors. This may be due to his apostolic authority prior to the completion of the New Testament; still a precedence of overseeing pastors is evident. As an over-seer, Paul guides pastors through controversies, (as so much of his work addressed). He directs pastors with prescriptive and descriptive words for leadership in passages such as the letters to Titus and Timothy, yet extols Spirit-led liberty as well.127

This liberty is the ability of a person to discern God’s leadership in their life in matters not clearly prescribed in the scriptures. In II Corinthians 3 verse 17, Paul uses the word “liberty,” to reflect the relationship of leadership from the Lord. The word liberty can also be translated freedom. This freedom is not to act in a way that displeases the Lord, but rather the freedom to

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125 1 Corinthians 5:2-5.

126 1 Timothy 3:15-16.

127 2 Corinthians 3:17, Romans 8:14.
choose to do as God directs. Liberty involves direction through a vibrant relationship with the Lord that allows the Christ follower to make decisions based on that relationship. This relationship is clear in Romans 8:14, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” The decisions for a ministry, as with life in general, obviously should not violate any known directives from the scriptures, but they should also flow out of this liberty to choose as directed by God. That liberty, however, is not a license to govern in a vacuum or beyond what the scriptures clearly state.

It is clear that liberty plays an important role in the governance used by each church. Further, order is a necessary component prescribed by Paul to the churches. In I Corinthians, he writes, “But all things should be done decently and in order.” Since God is not the God of confusion, an orderly way of overseeing the church reduces confusion and promotes harmony. While the scripture does not lay out the exact order for the church to operate within, there are numerous examples of order.

There was what approximated an orderly local church election in Acts 6:1-6. There were local church rolls, at least for the widows who were to receive help (1 Tim. 5:9), and evidence seems to support . . . carefully kept membership records, for all associated with a particular church. [Further,] the numbers were known (Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4); election of officers assumes a roll (Acts 6:2-5); and church discipline assumes a roll (1 Cor. 5:13). There were rules for orderly procedures and practices in the local churches (11:1-34; 14:1-40). There was an orderly system of local churches finances (16:2).

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128 Romans 8:14
129 2 Corinthians 3:17.
130 1 Corinthians 14:40 (ESV).
131 1 Corinthians 14:43.
Geisler shows clearly that the church operates in an orderly manner, however he does not explain exactly how the church achieved order, only that it did. Thus, order, the liberty of the Spirit, and the prescriptive scriptures are undergirding factors of the polity and governance of each church.

**Conclusions of Biblical and Theological Foundations**

The research of this work reveals that there is a biblical foundation for multisite church planting. Built on the foundations of godly pastors and saints who have gone before, the church continues to expand and follow the commands of Christ. The idea of multisite churches is as old as the church itself and planting multiple sites is a growing option for evangelistic churches today. This follows the essence of the biblical mandate as seen in scripture and church history. Jesus himself commissioned the church to reach the entire world.\(^\text{133}\) The Apostles Paul and John modeled multisite planting in Asia Minor and Europe. The early church fathers continued the work of spreading the gospel through new locations in expanded regions despite hardships and persecution.

As far as the leadership of the church, the scriptures present a plurality of elders. This idea of plural leadership is evident and expressed in the choosing of the twelve apostles, the selection of the first seven deacons, and even the Jerusalem counsel. The other obvious structure was that of congregational governance at some level. Matters came before the church; the church voted and kept rolls. Because of these facts with the reality of Spirit led liberty and church order, this author holds to a plural-elder congregational rule with a lead-elder. This lead-elder, much like senior leaders for the early Christian movement, Peter, John and Paul among others, were the mentors giving leadership and direction to the church and its leaders. Ultimately, the goal for

\(^{133}\) Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8.
a church is unity in the decision making process in an orderly manner under godly leaders who follow the Spirit’s direction.

**The History of Multisite Church Planting and Current Models**

Some written works are available that give insight to the understanding of multisite church planting and the leadership of innovative churches. These works include books, seminars, and other teaching materials. Available resources deal with the chronicling of the phenomenon to how-to helps for establishing a multisite ministry. There is, however, relatively little available on the actual subject of multisite church planting in rural communities, and absolutely nothing written for multisite church planting in Wilkes County, North Carolina. The purpose of this project is to discover the guiding principles and best practices of a healthy multisite ministry. Further, to adapt these principles and practices to a rural community through a healthy ministry desiring to expand its gospel influence. Therefore, by necessity a healthy multisite ministry begins with a healthy single site ministry. A church that is unhealthy, lacking in spiritual vitality and growth is not ready to multiply itself. In this discussion of models, the first order is to establish what a healthy first site church plant is. This section will also look at the history of multisite, the literature of multisite (both negative and positive), the understanding of the millennium matrix (a sociological paradigm for information transfer), leadership literature, and finally team building literature.

**Understanding a Healthy First Site Church Plant**

In determining a healthy and productive approach to multisite church planting, an understanding of a successful healthy church plant is imperative. So what is a successful church
plant? Is it merely a church that grows by a minimum number of people each year? Is it a self-governing entity, which grows healthy disciples? The goal of this section is to investigate these issues and the subject of health and growth. While it is obvious that some churches grow and some do not, the question comes concerning church growth, is it manufactured with some formula or a series of steps? In addressing this issue, Robert Logan exhorts that “one of the most hotly disputed ecclesial issues today is whether church growth can be manufactured.” In answer to this, Robert Logan states, “The organizational realm of church ministry can be ‘manufactured’ – the organic level can’t.” Organic spiritual growth is the spiritual growth that occurs naturally within believers who actively seek to follow Jesus Christ. Concerning organic spiritual growth, Getz and Wall state, “Two basic priorities are essential for church planting, growth and renewal. The first priority—expressing the spiritually mature qualities of faith, hope, and love—should drive all our activities and functions.” While it is easy to examine how many locations a multisite church may have, or how many conversions and baptisms, assessing the foundations of faith, hope, and love of individuals requires deeper inspection. “No church can develop spiritual maturity, reflecting faith, hope, and love without vital learning experiences with the Word of God. Like the Christians in Jerusalem following their conversion to Jesus Christ, we too must devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching.” Getz and Wall go back to the Acts 2 passage for other expressions of devotion: fellowship, “they ate together,” prayer, “they prayed together,” ministry, “they shared their material possessions,” worship, “they praised God

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135 Getz and Wall, Effective Church Growth Strategies, 43.

136 Ibid., 46.
The result of these expressions was that the Lord added to the church daily, which is evangelism (Acts 2:47). Explaining this growth, they state, “The rapid growth of the church both numerically and spiritually happened because Christ’s Followers were carrying out the new commandment He gave them in the Upper Room: ‘A new command I give you: Love one another . . . By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’ (John 13:34-35).”

A successful church plant will minimally have members and or participants that exhibit these three vital expressions of Christianity, faith, hope and love. These expressions are in accordance with Acts 2:42-47. There was an obvious attention to God’s Word, fellowship with other believers, a witnessed love for each other, times of prayer, and resultant evangelism. These elements are intangible in many ways, but their evidence is clear by the result of the Lord adding daily to the church among other factors. “Church growth is not something we do to the church; rather, it is the by-product of a proper relationship with Christ, the Head of the church. This growth is not an end in and of itself; it is the result of super-natural empowering.” Church growth is both personal and corporate. Individuals grow in their knowledge and expression of their faith while the church grows in numeric number as a by-product to that personal growth.

Measuring success for a multisite church should never be limited to attendees. The aforementioned aspects of spiritual growth, the biblical foundations, and a proper ecclesiology are all factors in consideration. Hemphill’s definition is helpful, “Church growth occurs when the local

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137 Ibid., 46-50.
138 Ibid., 51-52.
church supernaturally and faithfully fulfills the Great Commission in its unique context and with a vision for the world.”\textsuperscript{140} Therefore, a successful church is people who, under the leadership of Christ, fulfill the Great Commission by positively affecting their culture by openly demonstrating the qualities of faith, hope, and love, while seeing regular additions to the body of believers. Multisite church planting seeks to reproduce in numerous locations, a single autonomous healthy church.

The History of Multisite Church Planting

The roots for the multisite movement date back to the mid 1980’s. Tom Cheney explains, “What started back in 1985 with an idea from Elmer Towns to consider as an option for the expanded geography model, has taken root with a new name and a new vigor! The core idea of multi-site is simple: ‘One church meeting in many locations,’”\textsuperscript{141} Elmer Towns describes this methodology in his book, \textit{Ten of Today’s Most Innovative Churches}.\textsuperscript{142} The method has grown from these beginnings into a phenomenon that is reaching across North America. The trend for multisite churches is fast growing. According to Jim Tomberlin, in 2011, there were 3,000 churches in North America using some portion of the multisite strategy.\textsuperscript{143} Now in 2012, the movement continues to leap forward. Warren Bird reports that some 5,000 churches in North America are multisite.

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\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 13.


\textsuperscript{142} Elmer Towns, \textit{Ten of Today’s Most Innovative Churches}, Regal, 1990.

The new official statistic is that there are more than 5,000 multisite churches in North America. That’s more than 5,000 different churches, each of which has two or more different geographic campuses – one church in two or more locations. This finding was extrapolated from a national survey of churches of all sizes, and validated by Leadership Network’s constantly growing database of multisite churches. What grew in popularity initially among megachurches has now expanded to churches of all sizes, especially those with attendances of 500 and larger. Back in 2001, Leadership Network looked high and low and found fewer than 200 documented examples of multisite -- and we likely found almost all that existed in North America. By 2006, Leadership Network’s database had grown to 1,500 specific examples. As I researched this growing movement, and as Leadership Network created peer networks of the pacesetting churches in this embryo movement, we discovered an incredible level of interest – by church planters, large churches, and many types of churches in between.\footnote{144 Warren Bird, \textit{Multisite Churches Number More Than 5,000}, (September 11, 2012), \url{http://leadnet.org/blog/post/big_news_multisite_churches_now_number_more_than_5000}, (accessed September 12, 2012).}

The growing number of multisite churches has surpassed the mega-church model of one location at an exponential rate. This multiple locations model has several advantages to the traditional one site church. “Leadership Network's research has underscored many of the benefits of being multisite: Multisite churches reach more people than single site churches . . . spread healthy churches to more diverse communities . . . have more volunteers in service as a percentage than single site . . . baptize more people than single site . . . [and], activate more people into ministry than single site.”\footnote{145 Ibid.}

The journey for understanding this phenomenon began for this author in the spring of 2002. The author attended \textit{The National Video Venues Conference} in San Diego, California and became aware of video venues, a precursor to the multisite movement. The conference taught that in the early twenty first century, North Coast Church, in Southern California, stumbled upon something that has now become a phenomenon across the world. As the leaders worked to expand their ministry and make more room for new people, North Coast Church began to offer
different locations for worship using both live music and a video presentation of the pastor’s message. These other locations offered a varied style of worship, as well as other ambient enhancements such as lighting, building décor, casual attire for leaders and attendees, and multi-media technologies. Within a short time, North Coast Church began to see attendance to these venue sites grow. The effect was that the attendance at the venues outgrew the main service attendance creating a reverse flow of traffic. Despite the fact that the main service offered a live preacher, the venues became larger in number because of the convenience they offered and the varied styles of worship.\textsuperscript{146}

Multisite church planting has now become an option for growing churches wanting to reach a larger geographic area. There are numerous variables for multisite, including but not limited to, venues offering differing styles of worship on and off campus, live presenters, video presenters, café’s, and internet campuses.

Literature of Multisite Church Planting

“The revolution has begun” is the statement by Surratt, Ligon and Bird concerning multi-site churches in their book, \textit{The Multi-site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations}.\textsuperscript{147} They go on to say, “We predict that 30,000 American Churches will be multi-site within the next few years, which means one or more multi-site churches will probably be in your area.”\textsuperscript{148} The phenomenon of multisite churches has taken off with an incredible force. Seacoast Church in Charleston, South Carolina, is using this model to reach out to a variety of

\textsuperscript{146} Larry Osborne, \textit{Video Venues Conference} (lecture, San Diego, CA, May 2-4, 2002).

\textsuperscript{147} Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon and Warren Bird, \textit{The Multi-site Church Revolution} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 11.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
communities. At the time of the writing of the book, *The Multi-Site Revolution*, Seacoast had eighteen locations using multiple campus pastors, worship leaders, band members, and technical support people. They state that, “The approach of multiple sites seems to be the beginning of a revolution in how church is done in North America and around the world.”\(^{149}\)

While the multisite phenomenon is largely in metropolitan areas, the model of multisite church planting has now reached into the medium sized and smaller, rural communities. Pastor Shannon O’Dell in his work, *Transforming Church in Rural America*, states concerning multisite,

> This model has worked for our first five campuses. Lots of pieces have come together to make it work, but the essential, indispensible ingredient is the committed volunteers and servant leaders working under a campus pastor who maintains the vision. Together, they continue to build more leaders who can multiply and do the same thing. We could seriously see this thing spreading across the whole country. That’s not necessarily our goal, but there’s nothing that I can see to stop that.\(^{150}\)

With satellite campuses, O’Dell has lead this once obscure church of 30 people to a church of thousands with a ministry reach spanning the globe. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird call multisite the “new normal”\(^{151}\) for ministry in their work, *A Multi-site Church Road Trip*. The authors explore creative ways churches are expanding their impact through multiplication. The book includes multisite options for evangelism, service, outreach, and funding.

Scott McConnell’s work, *Multi-Site Churches*, researches forty churches that have grown through multiple locations. The work includes insights into how to proceed with a multisite plan,

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{150}\) O’Dell, *Transforming Church In Rural America*, 177.

\(^{151}\) Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon and Warren Bird, *A Multi-site Church Road Trip* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 11.
as well as whether a church should choose this ministry path. McConnell states that, “The pattern that so clearly emerges from the multi-site churches interviewed reveals a heart that is focused on the kingdom of God. Their stories show that God first blessed churches with evangelistic effectiveness. Then as they sought to be good stewards of these blessings, God opened doors of opportunity for them to become multi-site.”

Churches that were successful according to McConnell were already passionate for evangelism. Multisite was not a way to become evangelistic, these churches already were.

**Literature in Opposition to Multisite**

Multisite churches are not without opposition. Opposition can be a problem for multisite pastors, but it can also be instructive and helpful in clarifying the vision of the ministry. “The biggest problem with opposition is that it will discourage you and cause you to doubt your vision.”

Therefore understanding the opposition to multisite can reduce issues that may arise. The opposition for a multisite church often comes from within the church itself. In an online article for Mark Dever’s 9Marks Ministries, Thomas White gives nine reasons why he does not like multisite. He states that as a 35 year old tech-savvy person, his “fears of the multi-site church movement are not technological; they are principled.” Of the nine objections, three stand out; objection number two, “Colonization. The multi-site methodology also forms mini-

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153 Dan Southerland, *Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 113. Southerland’s work focuses on the story of Nehemiah and his task of rebuilding the Jerusalem walls in spite of great opposition. He tells the story of the Flamingo Road Church in Ft. Lauderdale, FL and their work to follow this path set by Nehemiah for transition. Southerland’s goal was to change his church from a program-driven church to a purpose-driven church.

dioceses. The head pastor serves as the “virtual” bishop, the founding location as the headquarters, and the locations as the affiliated members.” Objection number four is noteworthy, “Cannibalizing the body of Christ.”

The worst example of this spiritual cannibalization I found occurred when a large multisite church with debt encouraged a smaller church with valuable assets to partner with them. In this “partnership” the larger church replaced the pastor with someone who understood the DNA of the founding location, eventually closed that campus, sold the assets, and encouraged the members of the smaller church to attend another convenient location.

White’s sixth objection is, “Undermining planter and preacher training. An additional pitfall is that multi-site churches undermine church planting and the training of future preachers. The use of video lessens the urgency for our best pastors to replicate themselves.” These objections offer a biased opinion about multisite from one perspective and may be valid in some cases. However, each multisite structure is unique to each team and ministry and generalizations fall short of a complete description of any ministry, multisite or not.

With another perspective of potential opposition, Tom Cheyney of the Church Planting Village online presents other concerns on multisite church planting. He lists four oppositions for churches to consider. These oppositions come from within the church body itself and speak of potential logistical concerns that could become opposition points for multisite.

1. Time. When will you meet? If it breaks us away from one service, how can we remain a unified church?

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155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
2. The day we meet. Are we going to meet on another day besides Sunday? Will a Saturday service be involved?

3. Worship styles. Will we have different worship styles? How can we remain unified if we become more diverse?

4. Location. If we go to multiple campuses, how will we still remain one church?158

Concerning the oppositions Cheyney says, these are important questions; left alone the opposition towards going multisite might derail you before you even get started. “By initially giving attention to these questions, you might save yourself much pain once you lead your church to a multi-site strategy.”159

In a statement of opposition not to multisite itself, but rather to the theology of multiple locations, Jonathan Leeman challenges contemporary thinking among multisite pastors. Concerning the theological assumptions of multisite, he writes,

First, the multi-site church which never gathers all together simply is not a church, because gathering is one element that constitutes a church. Instead, it’s an association of several churches—as many churches as there are campuses and sites . . . If I understand the argument correctly, this means that a group of Christians can cross the tipping point from “not a church” to “a church” only once they have a shared vision, budget, and leadership. No doubt, these writers would say that other elements are essential to be a church as well, like the preaching of the Word and the practice of the ordinances. But in addition to the Word and the ordinances, it appears, one needs leadership, a budget, and a corporate structure generally. That’s the necessary implication of saying that the folks gathered at any one location for preaching and the ordinances are not a church and that all

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158 Tom Cheyney, *Four Opposition Points for Going Multiple Site*, power point presentation. 

159 Ibid.
the locations together constitute “one church.”\textsuperscript{160}

JD Greer, a multiple site Pastor in North Carolina adds, “The multi-site model is messy. As with all large churches, it is easier for important things (like people!) to fall through the cracks in multi-site churches than it is in a single-campus, smaller church. Growth from evangelism always invites chaos and disorder into the church. But it is a wonderful and welcome problem.”\textsuperscript{161}

Other oppositions to multisite include church polity issues, autonomy concerns, pastoral authority issues, and ecclesiastical and theological concerns, as already discussed in the theological foundations section of this work. The multisite church will need to address these concerns in order to gain vision alignment with its leadership and church membership. Like traditional church planting, many factors may arise in opposition to multisite church planting or any evangelistic method notwithstanding the age old, “we tried that before”\textsuperscript{162} or “we don’t do it that way here!”\textsuperscript{163} In response to that statement, Ken Hemphill says, “If we can’t do anything we’ve tried before and we can’t do anything we’ve never done before, WHAT CAN WE DO?”\textsuperscript{164}

In dealing with opposition, Southerland states that,

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  \item \textsuperscript{160} Jonathan Leeman, \textit{The Theological Critique Of A Multi Site Church: “What Exactly is a Church?”} (May/June 2009), http://www.9marks.org/journal/theological-critique-multi-site-what-exactly-%E2%80%9Cchurch%E2%80%9D (accessed February 27, 2012).
  \item \textsuperscript{161} JD Greer, \textit{A Pastor Defends His Multisite Church}, (May/June 2009), http://www.9marks.org/journal/pastor-defends-his-multi-site-church (accessed February 27, 2012).
  \item \textsuperscript{162} Ken Hemphill, \textit{The Antioch Effect}, 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Anyone who is trying to do something for God will face some opposition. There is always opposition when you lead the church through transition. There will be opposition from those who do not understand the change. There will be opposition from those who understand the change but just don’t like it. There will be opposition from those people whom the enemy controls. There will be opposition from those people who just love to be contrary. You have each of these groups in your church.\textsuperscript{165}

Opposition to a work does not automatically mean that God is against the work. If that were the case, Nehemiah would have never re-built the walls. Moses would have never led the nation of Israel out of Egypt and Jesus would have never finished his ministry. The insightful multisite planter will evaluate the opposition for its motives and accuracy. If there is something learned by the criticism, those elements of truth can be a valuable tool. Opposition in itself is never a reason to stop a work. In fact, Southerland, based on the example of Nehemiah, exhorts leaders to “expect opposition”\textsuperscript{166} in any worthwhile cause.

Leadership Literature

Numerous works on Christian ministry leadership are available and these works are useful for multisite. The undertaking of multisite church planting will require an understanding of the dynamics of leadership, particularly in team building and vision casting, since reproduction is the goal. Still, the leader who can articulate the various aspects of leadership technically will be at a disadvantage if he cannot communicate interpersonally with those he leads. An understanding of the modern mindset for communication is vital. In addition, the multisite planter must be able to convey his dream in a compelling fashion and build his team.

\textsuperscript{165} Southerland, Transitioning, 112.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 113.
The Matrix of a Whole New World

Understanding how people receive information, whether it is in a sermon, a one-on-one meeting, or in team meetings, is vital for the church planter. The modern generation is a digitally connected age through such tools as Facebook, Myspace, personal websites, blogs, chat rooms, and numerous other social media outlets. Facebook users now number one billion people and the trend is growing. The online publication, PC User reports concerning Facebook that, “One seventh of the world's population may soon be sharing photos, status updates, and pokes via the social network.”167 There are now more Facebook members than cell users in China.168 The social media phenomenon participants include church members, non-church members, pastors, parents, children, the elderly, and especially teenagers. Virtually every facet of the population is included in the demographic of internet users. Email has become a digital staple for the quick delivery of information, while text messaging and twitter now make instant communication part of people’s daily lives. “15% of online adults in the U.S. now say that they have used Twitter in the past and 8% told Pew that they do so on a typical day.”169 This is up from four percent daily use just a year ago. “Young adults use Twitter at twice the rate of those between 30 and 49 (26% vs. 14%) and urban and suburban residents are more likely to use Twitter than Internet users in rural areas.”170 The digital age is an ever-evolving territory and the church must be able to understand and use it to its ministerial advantage. In gaining an understanding of the modern

167 Ibid.


170 Ibid.
culture driving the phenomenon of the digital age, Rex Miller, in his book *The Millennium Matrix*, lays out a timeline concerning eras in the communication of information. This timeline takes the reader from the ancient oral tradition period to the contemporary digital age.

Concerning the progression of information reception, Miller explains that the digital age is a combination of these four distinct periods. The periods are, the oral culture, the print culture, the broadcast culture, and the digital culture. He explains that the current digital culture is a convergence of all four periods explaining why people of three differing generations see the world so differently. An understanding of this convergence is necessary for delivering information and for the formation of leadership systems. Still, new technologies can be sterile and lifeless; a connection to the heart and soul require meaningful personal interaction to stimulate true relationship. Multisite churches that utilize effective video-driven messages and other video elements are aware of this gap. These churches employ social media options and live in-person meetings. Miller’s research may reveal why opposition to multisite planting often comes from people who are in the broadcast mindset of information reception since they do not receive communication the same way that those in the digital age do. An understanding of these divergent generational differences will prove helpful to a ministry in modern times.

*Simple Church*, the work by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger correlates. *Simple Church* is a church health model that removes ministry complexity while offering a simple strategic ministry plan. While not multisite in its emphasis, the principles of *Simple Church* are applicable to any ministry model, including a multisite model. In the simple church approach to vision

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171 Rex Miller, *The Millennium Matrix* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 94. Miller’s research shows that 50 percent of households in the US and 70 percent of households with children have computers and expect easily accessible digital information. This trend is growing and that digital transference of information is becoming the primary source of information. He explains that, “institutions and organizations are forced to no longer just accommodate but to adapt.” Miller calls this shift a “series of revolutions.”

alignment and strategy, the organizational complexity of a ministry is still present, but not obvious to the newcomer to the ministry. The method enables congregants to understand the ministry’s vision and direction and participate rapidly in that ministry direction. People in the digital age expect organizations to utilize simplifying digital advancements. This lends an explanation to why Rainer and Geiger state,

Simple is in. Complexity is out. Out of style at least. Ironically people are hungry for simple because the world has become much more complex. The amount of information accessible to us is continually increasing. The ability to interact with the entire world is now possible. Technology is consistently advancing at a rapid pace.” Further they state; “The result is a complicated world with complex and busy lives. And, in the midst of complexity, people want to find simplicity. Simple works. People respond to simple. The simple revolution has begun.

Rainer and Geiger contend that churches must take the current complex model for ministry, created in the broadcast age, and simplify it. They explain, “A simple church is a congregation designed around a straight-forward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth.” Discipleship in a simple church moves people through stages of spiritual growth dynamically in place of a static, one-size-fits-all approach. Rainer and Geiger call this an “extreme makeover” for the church. For years, discipleship was a programmed event in a lectured, sit-still-while-someone-instills approach. Sunday school, discipleship training classes, and seminars were the preferred method of the delivery of information. This approach is proving less affective in the current age.

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173 Miller, Millennium Matrix, 78.
174 Ibid., 8.
175 Rainer and Geiger, Simple Church, 60.
176 Ibid., 59.
In digital-age fashion, Andy Stanley, a multisite Pastor who has left the programmed format, states, “We adopted the phrase ‘think steps, not programs’” because many of us were aware of the complexity that can develop during years of adding new programs to a church. We all had seen firsthand how competing programs can fight for budgets, calendars, and volunteers.”¹⁷⁷ Thinking steps moves a ministry beyond the required ineffective programs often found in the traditional church. The progression in a steps-oriented church is toward an organic discipleship model, often in a small group setting. The small group setting carries an interpersonal connection not often found in the traditional class format for discipleship training. Relationships are the catalyst, not information transfer. “People stick with churches where they have healthy interpersonal relationships, and those relationships often form in the context of small groups.”¹⁷⁸ The Simple Church model addresses this and focuses on three main components, connection to God, connection to others, and connection to ministry involvement.¹⁷⁹

Culture has shifted away from buildings, programs and the former religious educational systems. Because of this, Miller asks the obvious question, “What will happen when the digital culture says, as it will, we don’t need or want your colossal buildings? We will have to make major adjustments if we want to reach the next wave.”¹⁸⁰ That wave of change is already upon the twenty-first century church. The focus must now be on growing individuals, not building

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¹⁷⁸ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 145.

¹⁷⁹ Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 93.

buildings or growing large ministries. As Dever states, “A healthy church has a pervasive concern with church growth-not simply growing numbers but growing members.”

**Godly Visionary Leadership Literature**

In the *Multi-site Church Revolution*, Surrat, Ligon, and Bird state that when it came to successful multisite plants from their research, that the bottom-line for success was leaders who followed God. “Every successful multi-site church would say the same: technology, creativity, and excellence are all window dressing compared to discovering, developing, and deploying effective leaders.”

Today’s leadership training for pastors and church leaders has trended toward structures and strategies for church growth while glossing over an emphasis on character. In speaking to men who want to be used by God, Henry and Tom Blackaby write, “The development of a strong Christian character is the development of a man after God’s own heart. Your character is who you are when no one is looking. Character is who you are striving to be and what you can be trusted with.” Effective spiritual leaders are leaders who have spent time with God discerning his will and plan for their own personal lives before seeking a plan for their ministry. Godly character flows through the person and into the ministry. Spirituality is necessary in the life of the leader, without it, leadership becomes a personal ambition as opposed to a godly pursuit. Staying power is in a godly pursuit, never in a personal ambition. God’s Word is the source for instruction; the Spirit of God gives the power. This model of godly character with a strong biblical base is the foundation for godly leaders. Henry and Richard Blackaby warn of

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garnering leadership principles for the church from worldly practices that emphasize a lack of character instead of flowing from the Word of God. They write, “The trend towards a CEO model of ministry has changed the churches’ evaluations of effective leadership.” Further, they write, it is not biblical to measure the pastor’s success in merely externals such as numbers of people, dollars, and buildings. Pastoral success now rests solely on these measurements in many cases. This achievement trend has created pastors with goals, dreams, and plans all conceived and carried out apart from the power of God. Recognizing this as an issue, Pastor Shannon O’Dell has built a strong ministry team with an emphasis on the spiritual.

Let’s face it, the vast majority of man-made Christian religion can survive just fine on a superficial level. Put on a Sunday smile, throw in a couple of Christian clichés, and we can navigate through our churches just fine. But God’s not into the superficial; He’s into what’s real. He doesn’t love what we do, he loves us, the real us. Part of the responsibility of leadership is being real about who we are in the Body (both the positive and the negative) and who we are as God’s kids before the Father.

This idea of identity is a foundational element for godly leaders. “Leaders who are secure in Jesus Christ have nothing to protect,” they simply find their source and strength in a relationship with God. The fact that God accepts the leader with all of their imperfections speaks to the goodness of God and his ability to love the unlovely. Authenticity in ministry comes with an embracing of weaknesses, which allows the power of God to work within the leader.

No place shows imperfections more clearly than in the home of the leader; this is where godly leadership begins. A godly leader will prioritize godly relationships with their family. H.B.

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185 O’Dell, Transforming Church In Rural America, 120.


London states that, “It is in the home where our true success or failure will be measured. The home is the primary arena in which we must succeed if we are to be successful in any of the others . . . The process can be uncomplicated, even simple. The key to effectiveness—it takes a great deal of trust to say to another person, ‘I believe in you enough that I will allow you to really know who I am in Christ.’”

Godly leaders lead from this type of open relationship with God, starting at home, it is godly actions, not godly words that demonstrate godly leadership. Concerning the qualifications of a pastor/leader, Anderson writes that a pastor needs qualifications but he stresses observable actions. “Qualifications, yes, but qualifications based on actions. When this person could have lost his temper, he was self-controlled. When he could have gotten drunk, he stayed sober. When he could have picked a quarrel, he worked for peace and harmony. Conclusion? He is qualified to lead the church. Church leadership is based on what a person has done in the past.”

The example of a godly life is what is evidenced, not a list of achieved goals. Living by the commands of Christ in a demonstrable way shows qualification. Godly men must take the lead in this. This is the mandate of God’s Word. Falwell writes, “The Bible emphasizes men. If our nation is to be evangelized, it will be through godly men. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joshua, Moses—these were God’s men.”

Multisite church planting will require men of courage and character to accomplish this work. As with other great pioneers, they will face criticism, opposition, and hardship. Their character must be intact. Effective leadership in the digital age will require a leader who has demonstrated this godly character in their home and their ministry through observable godly actions. “We are moving at light speed toward what I

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190 Jerry Falwell, *Capturing a Town for Christ*, 176.
call the impartational leader of the digital culture. An impartational leader teaches not by exhortation but by example.”  

A pastor can no longer simply challenge people to be godly; he must demonstrate what it means to be godly.

**Literature on Building the Team**

While this work is not an exhaustive work on leadership or team building, the basics of team building are within the scope. Numerous works are available on the subject of team ministry; their titles alone are a notable shift from ministry resources that focus on a single pastor CEO model. Titles include: *Doing Church as a Team*, Wayne Cordeiro, *The Power of Team Leadership*, George Barna, *Transforming a Church With Ministry Teams*, E. Stanley Ott, *The Unity Factor*, Larry Osborne, *Leadership Coaching*, Tony Stoltzfus, *The Other 80 Percent*, Warren Bird, and John Maxwell’s classic, *Developing The Leaders Around You*. A detailed look at team building includes the areas of selection of team members and their gifting, strategy, and vision. For the sake of this work, the author will give a cursory look at literature and principles concerning building a ministry team.

A cohesive team with the full support of the entire congregation and alignment to the vision is foundational for ministry success. It is imperative to maintain, revisit, and have ownership of the vision with the entire team. Having a person in the wrong place can cause issues within the organization and may derail the vision. Stetzer warns concerning vision hijacking that, “In nearly every new church, a portion of the core group make the attempt to redirect-to hijack-the original vision shared by the church planter and the core group.”


challenge reveals why Kouzes and Posner in the book, *The Leadership Challenge*, stress the need to inspire a shared vision\(^{193}\) as one of their five leadership foundations. A shared vision while addressing concerns openly will help the team understand what the ministry is doing and why. It will also allow for buy-in and ownership of both the vision and the challenges the team will face together.

Team building involves a growing trust among the members. In bringing members to the team, Hybels looks for three “C’s”, character, competency, and chemistry in any team member.\(^{194}\) He explains that, “almost seventy percent of our leaders have come out of Willow [Willow Creek Church, Chicago]. These are the people who have proven their character, competency, and chemistry fit while serving in volunteer positions within our ministry.”\(^{195}\) Character refers to the integrity and spiritual maturity a person possesses. Competency refers to a person’s skills in a ministry area. Chemistry speaks of their fit on the team among the other members. Effective team members will view themselves as gifted for a non-selfish purpose. “A team-based ministry pursues with passion the principle that while gifts are given to individuals, they are given for a corporate purpose.”\(^{196}\)

Patrick Lencioni gives important information concerning the building of a healthy team in his book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. This work focuses on the inability of a team to deal aggressively and professionally with issues without losing relationships. His five dysfunctions are, “Absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of


\(^{194}\) Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 80-84.

\(^{195}\) Ibid., 85-86.

\(^{196}\) Sue Mallory, *The Equipping Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 138.
accountability and inattention to results.”\textsuperscript{197} The dysfunctions are typical in teams that are ineffective. Particularly noticeable to this author is the fear of conflict in church members and team members within churches. In a desire to be lowly and meek, church members will avoid any type of conflict. In time, unaddressed issues lead to the destruction of the team, which leads to the failure of the vision. Many people either underestimate, or do not comprehend the value of conflict within teams. “Any time a leader avoids a confrontation, he should ask himself whether he is holding back for his own good or for the good of the organization. If it is for himself, he is acting under selfish motives.”\textsuperscript{198} Healthy conflict is one of the most productive activities a team can practice. Healthy conflict leaves personality styles intact while achieving common goals. Malphurs states that it is “spiritually healthy for team members to disagree at times and challenge one another.”\textsuperscript{199}

Wrenn lays out an informative structure for ministry planning in his work, \textit{Innovative Planning}.\textsuperscript{200} His work is useful for team building with a focus on placing people in the right areas for ministry based on their abilities and gifting. Churches are accustomed to asking the general populous of the church to participate in any facet of ministry whether or not they are qualified or gifted in that area. “The danger of the open invitation is the possibility of having people involved in types of planning that they are not comfortable with, or equipped to

\textsuperscript{197} Patrick Lencioni, \textit{The Five Dysfunctions Of A Team} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 2002), 194.


\textsuperscript{199} Aubrey Malphurs, \textit{Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders} (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 62. Malphurs’ work focuses on the strategy for aging churches that need to transition and restart their “life-cycle” with a “new sigmoid curve.” Chapter 10 deals with the building of what he calls the ministry dream team.

\textsuperscript{200} Bud Wrenn, \textit{Innovative Planning: Your Church In 4 D} (Danvers: Chalis Press, 2008). Wrenn’s work seeks to bring a unified corporate language for the planning terms; visionary, missional, strategic, and tactical.
participate in.” Improper placement of good people can be damaging to a ministry and utterly devastating to a new church. “One of the challenges in any organization is the issue of getting the right people involved at the right level, in the right job.”

At the beginning of any ministry, there is a dream. In multisite church planting, that dream is to reach people in an expanded region with the Good News of Jesus Christ. A planter or a ministry team shares a vision for this work with those involved but not all of them will serve in the same area. Maxwell exhorts that, “It’s not enough to have a dream. You must also have a dream team. People recognize this in sports. They understand that they cannot win without the right players.” These players in church planting must own the vision as much as the leader and make it their dream, too. “Vision casting can be done by good communicators. Dream casting can be done only by people who live and breathe their dream.” When this dream echoes what the team already believes the Spirit of God has told them, it has great power. Dreaming as a team is foundational for an effective ministry team and it brings the necessary element of vision-alignment, yet without the right chemistry among the team, dreaming will be stifled. The right combination of character, competency, and chemistry will ensure the right team. Alignment to the vision and dreaming together will advance the plan.

In instruction for understanding expectations within a team, Malphurs emphasizes prayer, enthusiastic support from members, and a consensus approach with all members supporting majority decisions regardless of their personal views. In building standards and morale, he also

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201 Ibid., 16.
202 Ibid., 103.
204 Ibid., 124.
205 Ibid., 125.
stresses faithfulness to meetings, commitment to the process through implementation, preparation, and promotion by all team members.206

The abbreviated information presented here helps explain the importance of learning leadership and team building principles before beginning multisite church planting. The successful leader knows the elements required for a team and assembles them based on this knowledge. These elements include godly character, chemistry with team members, competency in the area of ministry, a right fit for the ministry, the ability to disagree with team members, dreaming together, and prayer.

Summary

The history of multisite church planting began with the early church under the authority and leadership of the apostles. As the gospel message spread, due to persecution and because of the church’s mandate to go into the entire world, the church expanded into regions away from Jerusalem. The Apostle John wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor in Revelation. The Apostle Paul addressed numerous churches through his writings in particular cities such as Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, and Colossi among others. These circulatory letters made their way from house to house for public reading. The houses represented churches that met in these homes in that city. While explicit instructions for church governance are not contained in the New Testament, principles exist for multisite church planting based on the apostles’ examples.

Observing that churches were connected by cities and overseen by apostles gives the initial biblical foundations for multisite. Understanding that Paul, Peter, and John all gave oversight to churches, as opposed to a single church, shows that authority was not limited to a

single location. The word “local” does not appear in the New Testament when referring to the church, only the concept. A biblical thought of church centers on people and not buildings or locations. These people are those called out by God from the world to a greater purpose.\textsuperscript{207} Multisite is the expansion of the church through people in different sites under the authority of a lead pastor. This is similar to the apostolic role the apostles had in the early church. While pastors today do not possess the office of apostle, they can exhibit the role by sending others forth to advance the gospel through multisite and other methods.

Recently, church planting has returned to this first century model through the planting of multisite churches. Started as an idea from professor Elmer Towns\textsuperscript{208} of Liberty University, it has become a church-planting movement. Consultants such as Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird assist churches in their multisite strategy. Churches such as, North Coast in Oceanside, California, and Seacoast Church in Charleston, South Carolina, offer conferences and training in multisite.

Multisite church planting is not without opposition. The greatest concerns center on leadership structures, questions of autonomy, and pastoral authority. As stated previously, the Bible does not give complete and explicit instructions on structures or church polity. However, it gives guidelines for offices\textsuperscript{209} and principles of leadership with examples of the apostles’ actions. In the New Testament, a leader such as Timothy or Titus takes responsibility over a region to appoint elders.\textsuperscript{210} The leaders have authority only after they have met the qualifications in God’s


\textsuperscript{209} 1 Timothy 3:1.

\textsuperscript{210} 1 Timothy 5:21-22, Titus 1:5.
Word. Other leaders then place them in their role as the scripture instructs in I Timothy chapter three and Titus chapter one.

A pastor who leads his congregation to plant multiple sites may do so as an autonomous entity without loss of autonomy since autonomy inherently gives the church the ability to choose its own structure. Autonomy, historically, extends to the restriction of denominations and governments from controlling the church. A multisite church may exist within the bounds of autonomy and biblical standards in a one-church-model with a lead pastor.

While sources are limited on the mechanics of multisite church planting in rural communities, there are some proven resources for leadership development for a multisite ministry. Christian authors agree on the importance of biblical principles concerning leadership and vision alignment. These principles, when applied to the problem of multisite church planting, can be useful. Visionary leadership, team building, and addressing potential problem areas prior to beginning the work of multisite planting are vital. The successful pastor will assemble a dream team looking for character, chemistry, and competency among the team members.

Multisite church planting is a growing phenomenon with more than 5,000 churches employing this method through strategic site planning, acquisition of older congregations or facilities, and mergers with existing churches. A pastor thinking of beginning the work of planting a multisite ministry would do well to gain all the knowledge possible.

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CHAPTER III

The Methodology

The purpose of this project is the research of multisite church planting in order to find the guiding principles and best practices for planting churches in a rural community. Additionally, this work seeks to establish the biblical and theological foundations for multisite church planting. This discovery will come through identifying the transferrable principles and practices that are in effect in existing multisite churches in a similar geographic region. Also, identifying the particular biblical foundations on which these churches stand theologically, and finally, to learn what pioneer multisite churches have learned about their communities. These guiding principles and best practices will later be the foundation of a manual for planting a multisite church in a rural community. To obtain an accurate accounting of what is transferrable from other ministries, the author will use scholarly and scientific research. A qualitative case study is conducted on four multisite church plants including Foothills Church where the author pastors. The research begins with the consideration of Foothills Church.

Four practicing multisite churches representing a geographical location similar to Wilkes County, North Carolina, are the focus of the research. Each of these churches is already involved in implementing a multisite strategy. They each have a similar worship style, and each church is associated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Like Foothills Church, two use a live presenter model with campus pastors preaching live sermons each weekend. One church uses a model that incorporates a video of the pastor’s message. Interviews will consist of five open-ended case study discussion starters and questions with directed follow-up questions. The open-ended
discussion starters and questions allow the researcher to avoid preconceived ideas. The discussion starters and questions:

1. What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?
2. What are some examples of the benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?
3. Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church, what would you say to them?
4. What advice would you offer a church wanting to become multisite?
5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

Follow-up questions include, but are not limited to, vision alignment, processes of establishing multisite, ecclesiastical issues such as style and polity of church governance, manuals, and research the church has conducted or used. In addition, any timelines for multisite planting that the church has developed as well as exploring unknown variables of multisite planting. (See APPENDIX A for more information on the interviews). Interviews are by phone or in person. The interviews consist of senior staff members who have been instrumental in the structure and strategy of the church’s multisite plan. The author will record the interviews for future retrieval. In subsequent writings, the author will employ the use of pseudonyms for churches and people as prior agreed upon with interviewees. (See APPENDIX B for interview consent).

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212 Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 96-98. Chapter five of Merriam’s work, deals with the conducting of effective interviews. In this chapter, she details three types of questions, highly structure/standardized, semi-structured and unstructured/informal questions. Merriam shares six types of questions and shares examples of four types of “good” open-ended questions; Hypothetical, Devil’s advocate, Ideal and Interpretive questions.
Research Design

Research for this project is a qualitative case study that focuses on the collection and analysis of data from four selected multisite churches in rural communities. This project seeks a practical approach to multisite church planting and more than mere statistical information found in a quantitative study. For that reason, this project employs a qualitative case study in the research with open-ended, unstructured questions. Unstructured questions are more informal and flexible than semi-structured and highly structured/standardized questions. The unstructured method takes on a conversational feel which leads the researcher to formulate still more questions.213

A Case Study

Research through a qualitative case study is a search for meaning and understanding of a particular phenomenon. Merriam explains that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher uses an inductive investigation strategy and the product is richly descriptive.214 A case study is, “An in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system.”215 Merriam explains that a case study focuses on a particular situation, that they are abundantly descriptive, and that they illumine the mind of the reader with discoveries and insights into the phenomenon.216 “Previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insights into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result from case

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214 Ibid., 39.
215 Ibid., 40.
216 Ibid., 43-44.
The case-study method is used in pastoral education to enable pastors to enhance their critical and creative ability for doing theology. The process includes observation, along with additional clarifying questions through analysis that seeks to understand without judgments, along with interpretation concerning the theology of the project, and the appropriate action or ministry strategy to take. In the end, the work uses pseudonyms to ensure harm to no one by the report. The work is a story that weaves in the research.

For the purpose of this work, productions of case studies come through on-site and phone investigation by the author. Observations by the interviewer of the church facilities, written structures for church governance, strategies, and organization are noted. These factors play an important role in understanding the phenomenon and the capturing of the essence of multisite ministry. The descriptions of the individual ministry as it relates to the greater multisite phenomenon bring clarity to the dynamics that affect the church. Insights gleaned become part of the final analysis.

Participants

Merriam states that, “Multisite case studies can be challenging to manage.” Merriam recommends that fieldwork is to be accomplished one site at a time. “The reason for this is

217 Ibid., 44.
218 Vyhlmeister, Your Guide To Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students Of Religion And Theology, 173.
219 Davies, 35.
220 Vyhlmeister, 176.
221 Vyhlmeister, 177.
222 Ibid.
223 Merriam, Qualitative Research, 49.
mainly that doing more than one site at a time can get confusing. There are too many names to remember, too much diverse data to manage." For that reason, this project will focus on one site at a time.

The targeted participants for the research will include these four churches, Foothills Church, where the researcher serves as pastor in Wilkesboro, NC, Cross Point Church, Hickory, NC, The Rock Church, Salisbury, NC, and High View Church, Abingdon, VA. Analyzed first is Foothills Church, to ensure an unbiased examination. The author will also assign fictitious names to each person in the case study narrative. All four churches represent churches in a similar geographic area. Each church is within a one-hundred mile radius of Foothills Church. Cross Point Church, a three-year-old plant has two campuses. The Rock Church is a seven-year-old plant with six campuses. High View Church is twenty-years-old and is a six-campus church. Foothills Church, a nine-year-old church has two local campuses and collaborates with churches nationally and internationally.

Instruments

The interview consists of five open-ended case study questions with follow-up questions. The open-ended questions allow the researcher to avoid preconceived ideas. The interviews are on-site of these ministries when able. They consist of senior staff members instrumental in the structure and strategy of the church’s multisite plan. Recorded interviews are available for future retrieval. (See APPENDIX A for the questions and potential follow up questions).

\[224\] Ibid.
Summary

There is a multisite revolution occurring which includes an estimated 5,000 churches throughout North America.\footnote{Warren Bird, Multisite Churches Number More Than 5,000, (September 11, 2012), http://leadnet.org/blog/post/big_news_multisite_churches_now_number_more_than_5000, (accessed September 12, 2012).} This trend is growing as more churches share a passion for their communities and seek to expand their influence and effectiveness for the gospel. This phenomenon is now reaching into the rural communities of North America. Northwestern North Carolina is a region that is experiencing a lack of vibrant churches and church plants. An implementable multisite church planting plan will assist in a process of reaching these smaller communities for Christ. This project will accomplish the necessary foundational research for that plan.

The methodology employed for this study is a qualitative study of four multisite churches. Each of these churches is located in a similar geographic region representing rural communities. Through individual case study questions, the documented transferrable principles and best practices become the foundation of a plan for multisite. The churches selected are within the same geographic region and are inside a one hundred mile radius of the focus church. Three of the churches in this study use a live presenter model for the delivery of preaching, while one church uses a video of the preacher at extension sites. Each church has more than one location, while two churches have five or more. Each church is of a similar theological background and aligns with the Southern Baptist Convention.

The final goal of the research is an understanding of the principles and best practices for a healthy multisite ministry. A healthy approach to church planting and biblically sound multisite ministry results in both numeric and spiritual growth. “Two basic priorities are essential for
church planting, growth and renewal. The first priority—expressing the spiritually mature qualities of faith, hope, and love—should drive all our activities and functions.”\footnote{Getz and Wall, \textit{Effective Church Growth Strategies}, 43.} The foundational purposes of the church are fellowship, prayer, ministry, worship, and evangelism. These purposes are present in a balanced and growing ministry flowing out of a relationship with Jesus Christ. “Church growth is not something we do to the church; rather, it is the by-product of a proper relationship with Christ.”\footnote{Hemphill, \textit{The Antioch Effect}, 18.} Growing Christians will result into growing churches. Believers are to grow and multiply; in like manner, multisite churches grow and multiply.
Chapter IV
THE CASE STUDIES

The Pioneers of Rural Multisite
The researcher interviewed thirteen people from four multisite churches within a region similar to his own. The questions posed asked for the motivations to be a multisite church, the benefits and challenges, the question of autonomy, the theological foundation of such a ministry, and advice from those interviewed concerning multisite. (For a complete narrative version of the interviews, see APPENDIX C).

Case Study One - Foothills Church
Foothills Church is a nine-year-old restart church in Northwestern, North Carolina, based on the Purpose Driven model developed by Pastor Rick Warren. The church has grown into a regional ministry with five pastors and mission work around the globe. The author of this case study is the lead pastor of the church and is responsible for the restart of the church in December of 2003.

Dr. Richards – A forty-year-old Dentist and Foothills Associate Pastor

1. **What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?**

   Dr. Richards, a smart and insightful man explained, “That the motivation for a multisite ministry was to help people meet Jesus Christ.” He said there were some 66,000 people in the county where the church is located and that “many of them do not know Jesus.” He explained that because of the strength of one campus, the logical move was to offer more options.
2. **What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?**

   “While there were some tremendous benefits for becoming multisite, our church had failed to prepare for multisite properly.” The main challenge, he stated, “Was that we failed to gain proper vision buy-in from the congregation.” “The church faced opposition to multisite,” but people would never state the reason why. “It has been a financial strain. We didn’t estimate the cost well enough. There were the added costs of a new campus, as well as the loss of support at the first site.”

   With a slight bit of irritation seemingly coming upon him he said, “It bothers me that people who I thought were mature believers have left over this issue.” This led to the obvious question, “What is the problem with multisite for this community? What’s the deeper issue if people left over multisite?” He said, “Traditional thinking. Most of the people who have left are not the new believers we’ve reached. The new ones have bought in; they know that they were reached by new methods.”

3. **Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church, what would you say to them?**

   “There’s no violation of scripture for multisite. No one has ever shown me a scripture [that expresses that]. [As far as autonomy], God is the head of the church. Paul was a planter, probably the first multisite pastor. No one complains about how he did his ministry.”

4. **Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.**

   “Any church wanting to be multisite should put as much effort as they could into the demographic research of their community. They would need to be able to locate the place that fit
the style of their ministry most effectively.” He continued, “Find the right area.” He stated further that the church had failed to enlist the help of a church that was already successful at multisite and that anyone desiring to be multisite needed that kind of guidance. Along with total buy-in from the leadership and congregation, he said a church must “pray this though.”

5. **Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?**

“We should have been mentored through the process. There’s a learning curve.” He went on to say that, the next site would be a lot easier by the sheer fact that we know better now how to prepare for it. He said, “We don’t know everything to do, but we are now aware of some things that we do not need to do.” He then suggested that a ministry should take the process slow.

Tim Bartel – Senior Pastor at Foothills Church for nine years, with 24 years of ministry experience (interviewed by Dr. Richards)

1. **What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?**

“The power of reproduction is obvious in this strategy. The motivation is to see people’s lives change by the power of God. To see the Good News of Jesus Christ spread everyone. Multisite reproduces the same church service and ministries in multiple places. It is the same sermon, the same worship, and the same graphic design. The location is the only difference. The church design for the buildings often looks similar. If someone attends a church that is multisite, the other locations will have the same feel, look and ministry.”
2. **What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?**

   “In order to raise and develop leaders, there needs to be a logical ministry path. Our strategy has shown the need for changed organizational structures in the church. It has exposed the need for vision alignment and buy-in by the entire staff, leadership team, and congregation.” He asked about the reaction from leaders. “The initial reaction when these ideas were being discussed was that they did not understand what multisite was. It became obvious that the explanations of multisite fell short. Initially, many thought that on the surface it was a good idea. Some also showed skepticism. Since that time, we have come to a better understanding of what multisite is. Now people are having to look at it for what it is, which is uncomfortable for those who are complacent, comfortable with the status quo, or unwilling to sacrifice.” Dr. Richards asked for clarification concerning the challenges faced. “The biggest challenges for the church are lack of unity over the desire to be multisite, a lack of clarity to the congregation as to the church’s direction, and selfishness in some individuals. Financially it has been a challenge too. The ministry did not raise enough funds on the front end. A well thought-out process of raising funds would have helped with buy-in by the congregation. A complete explanation of the model would have clarified any ambiguity and helped people understand what their money was going to.”

3. **Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church, what would you say to them?**

   “Autonomy means that any church can choose how it ministers and runs its affairs with no limitation from a denomination or a government. Multisite is not many churches under one pastor, it is one church under a lead pastor. The pastors and leaders, with input from the congregation, are to direct the church.” The researcher further explained that, “The lead elder has
more of an apostolic type role and works along with the other elders/pastors as they lead the church.”

4. Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.

“First, they should make sure there is complete buy-in from the body and leadership. Buy-in cannot be mere words; there must be action and participation. Additionally, the church’s identity and strategy needs to be implanted in the first location people. Those who go in missionary mode to plant the next site have the DNA within them.” The interviewee also suggested that the church leadership “ask for objections and then address them fully with all leaders and the congregation.”

Next, the interviewee advised to, “Identify the core group of people who are gifted and have a proven record of faithfulness for ministry then make them a cohesive team that prepares and prays together for the upcoming site. Beyond that, the ministry should raise funds between $25,000 and $50,000 up front; this is imperative.” Finally, “The location is important and that the right place is worth waiting for. It must be highly visible and large enough to accommodate the ministry for several years and be in the target area that the church wants to reach.”

5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

“Hold longer discussions with leaders for buy-in. Stress the need for a church at a [particular] location and why we would go there. Advise the leadership on how to better articulate and argue for the multisite model from their personal vision and conviction about it. Additionally, alignment, raising funds, and getting people on the same page are a priority.”
Ryan McMann – Youth Minister at Foothills Church for five years.

1. **What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?**

   “Many motivations, the main is to plant Foothills locations across the area. Each of these sites, like the first, is to be strong in presenting the gospel. We also were motivated out of a heart of wanting to be aggressive and effective for the gospel of Jesus Christ.” “Why a rural multisite movement, is that good stewardship of resources compared to larger urban areas?” He responded, “This is good stewardship by being more accountable with resources than just sending money with no accountability to plant other churches in this region.” “Are you committed to multisite regardless of size?” “Yes, determining success for a smaller community has to be very different from say that of a large metropolis. A church that is baptizing regularly and reaching a weekly attendance above the seventy-five mark is a healthy church in this community.” He expressed that Foothills wanted to plant many of these type churches across the region.

2. **What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?**

   “We have had to minimize our focus to fewer things. This model has forced us to choose the few things that we can do well. We are giving up good things to do the best things. We have determined that if something we are trying to do is not reproducible, we cut it. We want to offer as close as possible, the same ministry in each location, small groups, weekend worship, and ministry to the community. Multisite has given [us] clarity for the vision and an opportunity for better alignment. It has unified the pastoral team.”
“There are a lot of challenges. Division has come to those who were comfortable and complacent. They liked the church the way it was. People have left because of it. Multisite has exposed the structure of the church. Many things have become evident such as lack of support for certain things like children’s ministry etc. It has exposed that there is not a lot of information out there concerning multisite in a rural community; that not many are doing this in the rural areas. There are very little resources to guide us, we have to write and figure this out as we go.”

3. Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church, what would you say to them?

“It doesn’t violate scripture, it upholds it. It takes the DNA of a church and multiplies it out. It’s not about one campus controlling another; it’s all one church in multiple campuses.” “Acts 2 is the scriptural basis. Churches were also established all over the region from Jerusalem.”

4. Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.

“Make sure God spoke to you. You have to contextualize [ multisite] in your setting.” He expressed that there are things that do not work in the rural areas that will work in a metropolis. “It seems that video-driven preaching is not as easily accepted, for instance” [ in the rural areas].

5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

“Go back within the leadership to make sure there was lifestyle buy-in as opposed to merely verbal buy-in. The team must be unified behind the vision. The DNA has to be implanted in the leadership.” Adding to this in a somewhat frustrated tone, he said, “Make sure the things we do are already reproducible from the beginning, work on fewer things; get up a campus [ all vital elements] 100% from the start. Make sure the lead pastor is clear on what the vision is. We
needed to get the basics of reproducing down. The next question asked of him was if Foothills had any statements used to help people grab these concepts. He replied, “We exist to help people experience life change through Christ.”

**Case Study Two – Cross Point Church**

Cross Point church is a three-year-old multisite church in Hickory and Taylorsville, North Carolina. Cross Point is an innovative church with two sites and a desire to develop pastors through its own system of leadership development. This ministry started out of a longing for a new expression of worship in rural communities for church. The church now has three part-time pastors. The ultimate goal for Cross Point extends beyond locations and is to become a network of planters associated with the ministry.

Ron Black – Pastor of the Taylorsville site and thirty-two-year old native of Taylorsville, NC

1. **What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?**

   “From the beginning the vision God gave Shane [the Senior Pastor], was a church that plants churches. A core value is to grow exponentially through multisite. If you’re making disciples you will grow. [We were] trying to reach people from all walks of life.” “Have you done that?” “Yes in the two churches we’re reaching different people. The people in Taylorsville are way different from the people in Hickory.”
2. **What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?**

   “Reaching a different type of people in a different area [and to] be more convenient; people not having to drive as far.” “What is the vision statement for the church?” He answered without hesitation, “To reach people far from God and lead them into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.”

3. **Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church. What would you say to them?**

   “I’ve heard that, I don’t like to be critical of different styles. My belief is that if you have one guy doing all the preaching, you are limiting yourself to discipleship in raising pastors. We’re a mixture of autonomous and freedom. We try to train a pastor more so now, than when planting a new church. Some say that’s unbiblical, I would say that’s not unbiblical.” “What scriptures do you stand on for multiple locations?” “In my own personal understanding of the book of Acts, Paul established the elders [in the churches].”

4. **Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.**

   “Spend a lot of time deciding whether you’re going to do multisite, with a speaker piped in [live video] or establishing preachers in each location. I wasn’t a preacher, wish I had known that I was going to be preaching before we started.” “What would you have changed?” After a chuckle, he said, “I would have prepared a whole lot more. At that time [before the second site], we took turns in writing sermons. It was easy for me to accept a message and make it my own. Now that I’m writing my own, way more work is involved.”
5. **Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?**

Shane, [the Lead Pastor] got Hickory going then he put Johnny [another pastor] over that. He’ll go to start the next one.” “Do you have any written manuals or documents for this process?” “Yes, this is all brand new stuff, even as new as yesterday we were writing this stuff down. We’re getting all that typed up and ready to go.” It was apparent that the planning was in process, but it was not in place.

The researcher noted in Ron’s vision statements, there were no comments about planting other churches.

**Johnny Copeland – a young Pastor and part of the founding team for Cross Point Church**

1. **What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?**

“The main motivation was a group of forty-five people driving from Taylorsville to Hickory [to attend church]. We knew all along that when it was time to go multisite, that’s where we would go first. Our founding pastor lived there.” “So you knew you would be multisite before you started?” “Yes.” “The first motivation was that other churches in the area were not reaching pre and slightly post college age people, they were dropping out of church.” We wanted to reach them.”
2. **What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?**

“Looking back, I was thinking about a statistic concerning the loss of the core church planting team after year one. We hadn’t prepared for that. We didn’t have older, wiser counsel; no one guiding us. This was the biggest issue. Our main challenge is that we did not know what to do. The vision was always there. The casting [of vision] and getting it from a concept then to real life is a challenge. [This is where] we struggled. Also in crisis management dealing with decisions we didn’t see coming. While everyone would vote [if asked] for discipleship and a process [thinking this is a good idea], two years later we’re just coming to an understanding of how that happens. If we had developed that earlier, it would have saved us some heartache. We had leaders in roles where they didn’t fit.” Further, he explained, “I hear stories of people being put into roles because they [the church] have a need, not because they are a good fit. [We had] team leaders investing in people, hoping for them to develop, when they weren’t a good fit to begin with.

“Can you share any challenges that you’ve already overcome?” “In our vision casting, getting everyone on the same page, we’re still working on this. The past two years has taught us what not to do.” “What didn’t work?” “We say campuses, we have two locations, our model is different. We are two locations that have the characteristics of a campus. You can’t have, in our experience and our area, a solid lead pastor leading in all capacities. The example is that of leading in the air and on the ground. Our services feel the same, same music, same web site. We think the pastor who pastors in the air needs to pastor on the ground. We are in transition right now.” “Shane has been preaching in Hickory but not leading day to day. He’s in the air but not on the ground. I’ve stepped up to preach more and more. I was leading on the ground all except
for preaching Sunday morning.” “Are you modeling this after another ministry?” “This is trial and error, we’ve looked at other models from the outside, reading articles.”

3. **Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church.**
   
   what would you say to them?
   
   “Well I think that we see a little of that. I’m not to the point where I think campuses are bad; I think that statement is what has driven us to call our campuses church plants. We have a pastor and a team leader who are from that area. They have the freedom to know what the spiritual food needs to be for his congregation. A pastor who is not [from that community] does not know what the teaching needs to be. We’re providing basic content.” The answers Johnny gave were instructive on the workings of the ministry, but never covered the idea of being a self-governing, autonomous church. The structure the lead pastor was working on appeared to address the concerns of autonomy.

4. **Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.**

   “I would warn or caution to ask what the purpose is behind it. If there is a desire for multisite, it means that you’ve outgrown [your space] or have people from another area. Make sure it’s not just to grow your church bigger, know why. [See] if God has raised up leaders who are called and equipped. That’s what I would look for.”

5. **Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?**

   “We always could ask [ourselves] did we do the Taylorsville site too early? I think we did, but at that time we felt like we either had to wait and do more homework, or go forward.” “We
went with going forward so as to get church planting into our DNA. We knew people would struggle.” Further, he stated, “We may have let that vision come across better, giving time, taking time, or using the time to convey the vision to the people better. Maybe another six months to prepare our people in understanding and getting people to buy in.”

Shane Cunningham – A thirty-three-year old Lead Pastor of Cross Point Church

1. **What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?**

   “[We are] continuing to do what God has called us to do. Called to reach people far away from God and lead them to a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Multisite has pushed us to extend our reach. We didn’t start out with this [idea]; we planted like any other church. We hoped to be successful by reaching our vision. As we grew, we reached people and met new people. We began wondering about those outside our little area. We realized we had a greater responsibility than to plant in just one area. The Great Commission says go into all the world. We understood that what God had given us was a vision, and that we were to take it everywhere. We decided we would be a church that plants churches. We prayed about it, there were struggles and challenges, but God called us to it.”

2. **What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?**

   “There’s been more challenges in our young age than benefits; the benefits will come [we believe]. One of the biggest challenges we’ve faced has to do with the communication of the purpose and the vision for the church. Explaining that to someone who has a traditional approach, [that is] one pastor, one location is almost impossible to help them understand. We’re
telling them we’re supposed to be one church in many areas, that this is how it is supposed to be.
When they understand the purpose behind it all, they start to see a greater purpose and take
ownership.”

Without any prompting, Shane dove into the next challenge. “Another challenge is
helping people to always have trust. When you get to two sites, people [at both sites] have all
these questions in comparing between both locations.” As Shane talked more about the issues
between the two locations, he revealed that most issues were over things like who gets what and
why one site has something that the other does not. “We need to always show this solid trust
between leaders and people in both sites. We met the challenge by creating a principle. We say,
always choose trust over suspicion. We say, regardless of the circumstances, our people are
always going to choose trust before they choose to think [that] something is wrong.” “Shane, can
you think of a time when you made a mistake and people chose to trust you through it?” “Yes,
you know I’ve always said to the leaders that God will grow his church in spite of me.”

“What about other challenges?” “Leadership challenges, we’re a young leadership. We
planted with the idea of reaching the un-churched. It’s what every church planter says they want
to do. Be careful, God will send you what you ask for. We received people who had no church
background and no spiritual base. The challenge for us has been leadership. If you focus on the
un-churched and planting new churches, you’re always looking for that next leader. It’s a process
of reproducing.”

3. Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church.
what would you say to them?

“We need to understand that the church is not four walls and a roof. It is me, Pastor Johnny,
the people. It is everywhere. You can still have autonomy that leads and guides. It doesn’t have
to be broken up. It’s there, just not in one specific area. If we fully understand that, the Holy Spirit is within me, then as the church I am able to be here [while there is] another pastor in another county. We have a unity that brings us together.” “Is there a scriptural basis you stand on?” “We’ve been studying Acts 2 a lot. That’s our basis. The people came from all over and they broke bread and were together. They prayed together and sold possessions.”

4. Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.

“Always choose trust over suspicion. The devil is a liar and the father of lies. When you have a church decide to plant multisite churches, the devil is going to use that against the pastor and the leadership. He’s going to draw division from any place he can to stop this great vision. Your leadership has to come together and make sure [about the vision], knowing the devil is a liar and confuses people. We need to make sure that we choose trust over suspicion. Although I may not understand or I question, or if people are leaving and people may say, this is not what God wants. People need to hear that while they may not know all the details or see it all clearly, that they will still choose to trust the pastors as God leads them.”

Continuing with advice, “It’s going to be tough, some days will be better than others. There will be times when you’re going to question if this is what God wants. Knowing that God has called you to this, that we’re supposed to raise leaders, not stay in one area, to build His church until He returns, loving Him with all your heart, soul and mind.”

Shane moved to the next area of advice based on a recent study of the book of Nehemiah concerning completion. “In our society we take completion as making a lot of money or seeing some sort of apparent success. We base it on money and people. Success is completion, doing what God calls you to do until Jesus returns; not giving up until that day. I could sit back and worry about the money or the fact that someone didn’t get saved. I could feel like a failure, but
I’m not, Jesus Christ died for me. I’m a success story waiting to happen. Looking to His words, ‘Well done’ is the completion, the reward.”

With another thought he added, “Also, to those who are considering multisite, I would tell you to be with your family. Pray together, spend time with the kids. I help my kids understand what we’re doing, too. Let them experience and see the fun that it is and all that God is doing. Don’t short-change your family because of the circumstances of the day. It’s a great adventure and a great calling.”

5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

“The answer to this is to go slow. I look back with all the zeal I’ve had as a younger person. I wanted to run through hell with a water pistol. I realize that I hurt my family and people more by not explaining the vision. We all need vision, it’s great, but if we don’t take time and explain the vision we’re just going to run over people. You need people who question the vision for balance. In times past, when people did this I thought these people wouldn’t follow [me]. That wasn’t the case, they needed to know. In explaining, you’re going to gain more warriors for Christ. If you don’t, you’re going to leave people behind. Ministry for the long haul takes time. Do it right, not just flying through it. Another is to make sure that it’s God’s will. I’ve often done things that I was not sure if it was God’s will. However, God is gracious and He understands that we’re going to mess up. We get back up and continue the mission of the gospel.”

Case Study Three – The Rock Church

The Rock Church is an eight-year-old church with six locations in North Carolina. The Rock church uses a live speaking model for their weekend worship services with the campus
pastors being the primary communicators. The lead pastor started as a campus pastor at the first location and is now serving as the primary overseer for the ministry. Global pastors oversee each area of ministry such as worship, children, and youth. Their dream is to double the amount of campuses within the next eighteen months.

Dan Iverson – The Executive Pastor of The Rock Church with 25 years of ministry experience

1. What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?

   Dan replied with some simple words to begin with, “People need to experience life change through Jesus in every community. We had a lot of people driving a long distance to the first campus and thought there would be a core group in that location. We start new campuses to put churches in each community instead of expecting everyone to come to us. We’ve repurposed buildings and made them into campuses, adding value to the community. We’re after people who don’t go to church and they are more apt to go to [a] church in their community instead of driving a long distance to get to church.”

2. What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?

   “The best benefit allows people to use their giftedness in ministry. New campuses open new opportunities and new roles: elders, pastors, teachers, worship leaders, children’s ministry. In addition, to bring a church to a community versus [people] having to drive a distance to the church. There’s a great sense of team in multisite.” In stressing that there are many ways to operate and run a church ministry, Dan expressed that, “Multisite is a way to do church as a
team; it’s not the only way just a way. We feel like we can do much more together than separately.”

He then talked about the leap from three campuses to four and the difficulty they had, particularly with communication. “Structurally, going from three to four got real complicated and as we add more campuses, it gets more complicated. Being able to reproduce ministries and getting materials into the hands of the site [leaders,] it got more difficult in some areas. Also, [another issue is] how to maintain a distinction we have. We are driven by quality with a spiritual base.” Then, almost in a tone of confession, “We’re struggling [with] how to maintain excellence in each site. There needs to be a lot of training on the front end to make sure that happens.”

3. Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church, what would you say to them?

“In understanding one church in multiple locations, every person comes in to a church [location] that is part of the other [locations]. People are very much aware of this up front. The things that happen at one campus happen at the others campuses. There’s a piece that comes to understanding the idea of local, when referring to the church. If you look into the New Testament, you’ll not find the word local, [it] is not there in referring to the church. We are not individual churches governed by a hierarchical position. We are one church; we have a lead pastor [and] each campus has individuality. From a scriptural perspective, it’s not as clear cut in the New Testament. You’ve got outsiders appointing elders in the New Testament. You have Titus appointing elders, Paul going from community to community, [to] places he was not from, appointing elders. The person [he] appointed was from the community, but governed by someone outside [of the community].”
4. **Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.**

Lightening the mood after the more aggressive tone of the last question, he said, “Don’t”. We both laughed as he continued. “It is very hard, multisite is hard. It’s a way to do church. Your church could give $10,000 a month to start a new church, $120,000 a year. You give it and walk away. Going multisite puts you hands-on in the process. If you are going to go to multisite, you need to go to school on multisite. Equally, you need to pray and seek God. It is very taxing and [it is] not the easiest thing to do. It’s [also] expensive to start campuses, sometimes more expensive than planting a single church. “If you’re going to do a mobile site, you have technical needs, lighting, sound, video, all this needs to be considered up front. When asked about the cost, he responded, “In my past experience I would say anywhere from $70,000 to $120,000 depending on where you’re going and what you need.” “What do you base that on?” “Well, that depends on whether you’re going to be mobile or not. A school gym or auditorium will not be as much [financially] as repurposing an old grocery store with the up-fit.” Continuing, “You have three phases, there’s the pre-launch budget, start up [budget] for staffing, purchase of equipment, rental agreements and such. Then you have the launch budget, everything you need to start that campus, then a post launch budget that sustains the operations of the church. It depends on where and how you do it and what you need. If you’re in an auditorium, you don’t have to buy chairs. In a gym, you may have to provide chairs. [Also, you need to know if] the demographic audience will receive video. The campus pastor becomes the face but not the communicator in a video-driven site. On the flip side, if [you are using] live [preaching], you need a communicator that can speak week in and week out.”

“Is there a certain gift set that you are looking for in a multisite campus pastor?” “We look for people with the ability to preach, and from a personality perspective, we also use a
DISC profile. Our campus pastors are high “I”s. There are individual challenges [in this style with live communicators], and that is a good thing. It [the diversity] brings strengths to the team across the board.”

5. **Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?**

“There’s a tension when you look back, we wouldn’t change anything, we learned from them and felt God was leading us.” Rethinking his answer, he continued with a slight pause, “On the other side of that equation, we should have had some sort of business model to help us. Another thing, as we found [new] people and began rapidly growing, some people have gotten into leadership roles that have fallen and we’ve had to let people go. What we didn’t have in place was some of that support role and [a] vetting process, accountability partners, [and] clear communications.” “How has communication been kept open?” “E-mails and things like that. We’ve gone to The City, an online resource tool for churches, a social media tool. Being intentional with what we’re trying to communicate, we’ve also decentralized some of this and the campus pastor is responsible for that [communication] locally.”

Dan concluded with some thoughts concerning the unique nature of The Rock Church. “We, in terms of doing multisite, [must] understand the culture and we work hard to find like cultures. That’s why we’ve been successful so far. God has been in this. We are going to places that are like us, blue collar, suburban; I don’t know that we would do well in urban or very affluent areas. We know who we are and who we are trying to reach.”
Jay Jackson – The founding and Lead Pastor of The Rock Church and former real estate agent

1. What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?

“[We] stumbled into it. We started near a lake and the way it’s [situated] became a natural land barrier to people who wanted to attend. Thirty to forty people were driving over thirty minutes to get to church [because of the lake]. We realized that God wanted to do something that was bigger than what we could do in this one location. We decided to take the church to them. We purchased a car dealership that went out of business. We told those who were traveling to meet there and [to] invite their friends. Those forty people became one hundred in the first year. The motivation for that was breaking down geographic and mental barriers to church.”

2. What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?

“The primary benefit is that multisite will help a church of any size be able to grow their ministry numerically, financially, and [to] take the gospel to more areas around them. Multisite allows them to do that. Many older churches have issues with parking or obsolete buildings keeping them from expanding. Multisite helps to overcome that by not having to relocate, but by adding new locations. The shoe should not determine the size of the foot,” he said. He then began to share some of the challenges concerning multisite that The Rock Church had encountered along the way. “First is cost, it’s the most expensive way to do church. You have buildings, utilities, staffing issues [to fund]. You have to staff each position. Next, in a live speaking model it’s harder to maintain unity and consistency across the campuses. You don’t have that one [single] pastor that everyone connects with.”
The researcher then asked him about opposition to this model. “Not tremendous, miniscule, but [there was] one obstacle to overcome. Our first site campus was in a town of 900 people, it didn’t have the same success as the original site. [Initially] there was push back from that community complaining that this large church has come to town to take over. We had to go to the pastors of that area and communicate that we were not there to take over or take people from their church.” “How did you communicate with them?” “I called them and just told them we are coming but we’re not coming to take over or take people from your church. For most, they appreciated the phone call, others probably didn’t believe it.”

3. **Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church.**

   what would you say to them?

   “The Rock Church is totally autonomous, one church in multiple locations; we are self governing. Each location chooses their [own] pastor. We vote on land, change of by-laws, and budgets. We are just one church in many locations. Whether we meet at the local high school, the YMCA, or a building we own, we are one church. The church shouldn’t be tied to a location anyway; the church is the body of Christ.” “Do all the campuses vote on land purchases?” “Yes, anytime we buy buildings or land we come together in a church-wide meeting and every member has a chance to voice their opinion.” “Who chooses the pastor for these sites?” “They [the site] do not [choose the pastor when a new site is planted. The site chooses when there is a pastoral vacancy]. That comes more out of a practicality. Every time we launch there’s not an existing campus, we start with a pastor and a core team of preferably 70-100, usually 50-60 is what we send. That core team supports the new campus pastor. These campus pastors are someone that we raised up from within [the church].”
4. Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.

“The first thing is to make sure that the church is outwardly focused. So many congregations today are inwardly focused. I would say that it’s almost impossible for an inwardly focused church to become multisite. We don’t launch a new campus for our members. We’re launching for people we don’t even know. It’s not what the church can do for them; it’s what they can do to reach new people.” “How do you lead a congregation to be outwardly focused?” “You have to teach evangelism, the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. If you truly love your neighbor, you’ll want to tell them about Christ.”

5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

“If I had to do it today, I would try to be more intentional about having more visibility at the campuses [as the senior leader]. In the early days, I was a campus pastor and a lead pastor. Each campus [we added] pulled me away from the campus I pastored. [By the time we hit] site six, I was spending 80% of my time away. I under-estimated the amount of the emotional toll it would take to launch each year. I would have left the campus pastor role after year three to give more oversight and visibility to all the campuses. It becomes more complex between four and five campuses. This is true, particularly in the live speaking model. Unity is harder with geographic barriers and communication issues.”

Jay concluded his comments concerning multisite by saying, “I believe multisite is the wave of the future. There are well over 3,000 churches now in America doing multisite. Of the top one hundred fastest growing churches in America, a vast majority are multisite. It’s a great tool to help a church grow beyond the walls of where they’ve been.”
1. What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?

“The simple answer is that we wanted to take what we were doing to a new community. We had people traveling over a natural barrier, a lake, to come [to church]. We went to them and started the first site. We feel very strongly that our responsibility is to share the Good News with as many people as we can. Being multisite has helped us do that.”

2. What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?

“One of the biggest benefits is in the area of resources. We are able to provide resources to a new plant that most churches don’t have access to [when they start]. Things like systems, discipleship, assimilation, sermons, media, videos, graphics, print material. We’ve already developed those things and have done the leg work. Another [benefit] is the value of teamwork. Nobody who is a pastor or ministry leader is on their own. There is instantly a team around them, making us stronger. In addition, the sheer size of the church allows us to do things together that alone we could not. If we had a campus that is not receiving enough in offerings to cover [its] costs, the other campuses make up the difference.”

“Tell me more about the benefit to a campus pastor.” “One of the first things is fellowship and accountability. Having other guys who are doing the same things. That he [a pastor] can go to them for advice and encouragement is great. While other staff members can’t relate, others pastors can relate to the pressures and demands pastors face. On a practical level, in message preparation, having another communicator that is getting ready for the same message, it brings in more input on the front end. Everyone’s product is better, more complete.”
“One of the biggest challenges was simply explaining to the church what multisite is, most of the people had never heard of such a thing; it was totally new to them. We had to explain a lot before we launched. We needed them to have confidence for buy-in. We had to ask people to give in a way that didn’t directly affect them or their location. We had to get them to see the big picture. It was hard starting and even continues now [to be hard].”

“Another challenge is unity with campus pastors and people seeing this as one church. We keep asking, how we keep our campuses unified when we don’t have that one person to rally behind. We think the answer is to rally people behind the vision and the mission. We’re still working on that. Multisite is a huge financial challenge,” he added.

3. Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church. What would you say to them?

“We are one church in multiple locations. We may meet in many locations, but still we are one church. I tell people that if you had a church with services meeting in different locations on the same campus, it would be the same, we just have more distance. Each church has a level of autonomy in reaching their community.” “Is there a scriptural basis you stand on for this?” “The church in Acts, they met in homes and temple courts, they were all the body of Christ yet in different locations.”

4. Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.

“Up front, the church needs to understand why they want to do multisite. If the motivation is to have large numbers or a large church, ultimately you’re going to have a lot of difficulty. If you want to see more people come to Christ, this is a way to do that. Secondly, don’t do it if you can’t afford it [or don’t have enough faith]. We chose by faith to do it. Decide what it will look
like as you go into a community. Make sure the original location is already doing these things well. The [new] site can’t be less than the first, people sense that. It looks like an afterthought [when you allow that]. Some of the best advice is don’t let multisite church be something that you try. It has to be who you are.”

5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

“Even if we changed anything, I’m not sure it could have improved how it turned out. Looking back when we started the first campus, we started with video but that didn’t work; we went to a live communicator. We didn’t use a high enough quality of video and we lost the ability to go back to that as we moved forward. The community [we started in] was small and rural and didn’t accept a video pastor. We lost many people that may have stayed. We should have analyzed better to know this up front.” “What analysis would you have done?” “[We think] video will be more successful with people who are tech savvy and digitally connected. They were rural and not as technical.”

“The jump from three to four [campuses] was the hardest for us to manage. Now we’re getting that ironed out. If we could go back, we would have better systems in place. Communication is a big challenge.” “How do you get communication to all your staff, volunteers?” “It’s easy when you can call a meeting, but when you have four plus campuses you can’t just call a meeting. Software [has] helped us. The City, a social media program, has been the biggest help to us. We can now communicate on many different levels, [across] campuses, [people to] people, etc. Also out of this came an answer to the unity question. People can see a post from Pastor Jay and feel connected to the lead pastor. We have thirty people on staff and communicating is much easier now with The City.” “Will you ever do video-driven services
“We have not ruled that out; we want to use live [presenters], but video is on the table, we just have to do it well.”

With final comments Don said, “We’re still learning as a church; you need to know who you are and what God has called you to be, not what others are called to. Our model of multisite is not like any other church’s model. We don’t go to metropolitan areas; we’re not designed for that, that’s not us.” Don shared how The Rock Church seems to fit in the smaller, rural communities and that being aware of that has helped them in targeting new communities.

Case Study Four – High View Church

High View Church is a twenty-year-old church plant in Abingdon, Virginia. The church, based upon the Purpose Driven model for ministry, is involved in international missions in numerous countries. With a video-driven approach, the church has five regional campuses and fifteen worship sites nationally and internationally.

John Michelson – Founder and twenty-year Pastor of High View Church

1. What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?

“The driving desire in my life and the church is that people need Jesus. That’s why we do what we do. People here and everywhere need Jesus. That is what has driven us, Jesus died for them. A problem today is that our modern definitions [of church] exclude what the Lord is doing in parts of the world through the internet and [other] technologies. People need the Lord; we want to share with as many as possible.” “Is your first site in a rural community?” “Yes, our café venue is our first site. That was not any different for us than going 600 miles from here. We took baby steps and then bigger and bigger risks. Bristol was our first off-site campus. One-third of
our people, those on our database, were driving from there. We wrestled with whether that would hurt the Abingdon campus. We decided that God wanted us to do this.

2. **What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?**

“Changed lives. When I visit these campuses, it’s a steady stream of people who tell me about their life change. They tell me, ‘God has changed my life.’ Seeing the transformation, hearing the life change stories is what it’s all about. We’re tearing the walls down. Too long we’ve kept the church inside the walls.” “Has multisite helped you to break down barriers?”

“Yes, because it’s presented challenges. One of them is that we see obstacles as opportunities. Another one of them was that we had to change our leadership structure in order to be multisite. You can do one, two, or three [campuses], but after three, you have to change the structure of your church; you have to give up more control. Pastors have to let go of the ministry, let the people do it. The people have to let go of the leadership. As High View has grown, I’ve had to give up control over the years. You see, the biggest barrier to the growth for our church has been me. It is true that everything rises and falls on leadership. [As of late], I’ve given up more control than I’ve ever given up and am scared to death.”

3. **Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church.**

   **what would you say to them?**

   “That’s a flawed view of the church. I go back to Jesus saying, ‘Where two or three are gathered in My Name, I’m with them.’ Paul gave instructions to leaders to lead churches; he wasn’t violating the autonomy of the local church or the local leaders. [I would ask] what’s the view of leadership? If you’re a dictator, yes, you’re in violation. If you’re there to love and care,
there’s no issue. All we’re doing in this big church, [the church] all over the world, is to seek the
Lord and follow Him. The old school idea that the church is the building down the road just
doesn’t work.”

“Do you have a particular ecclesiastical style or approach, where you say we are
congregational, single elder, plural elder?” His answer was simple but not simplistic, “The
pastors are administers, and the people are the ministers. We’re a kingdom of priests. Not
everyone is called to be a pastor, but all are called to serve. The pastors are the leaders. A group
of pastors are the elders, biblically.” “How about the congregation, do they vote?” “Yes, if we
borrow money, or on the annual budget and those sorts of things. We want to keep the ministry
out of the realm of what we can do, and turn control loose to God. They vote on the senior pastor
as well. The directors, the elders, would be the search team, but the congregation would have to
say yes, this is God’s man. One of the things that is important to know is that when God tells you
something, He [also] whispers in the ears of His people confirming God’s will.

4. Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.

“Make sure you’re healthy, not perfect, healthy. You don’t want to reproduce sickness. If
you have issues, if you’re not carrying out God’s purposes, the Great Commandment and the
Great Commission, ask yourself, are we doing that? Are you developing people into Christ-
likeness, are people worshipping God with their lives? Don’t replicate disease, get your house in
order. Also, think through the structure before you do multisite. I would challenge them to think
through the structure, structure for multi-campus [ministry]. Learn from the mistakes from all of
us. We’ve learned from others. Have a strong team at the model campus. Also, leadership
development in multisite, this has to be ramped up. There needs to be a system to raise up the
next generation. We’re working on that.”
5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

“I would have started earlier in going multisite. [I would] have a system to identify and raise up the leadership. I would have done more, as I did when I came to Abingdon, like planting the original campus. Change our structure. [Also], I would have done the internet campus sooner. We have an internet pastor. People visit our church online for weeks and months; it’s the new front door of the church. We have people all over the world watching our services. They represent the potential new campuses for us.”

William Eastman – High View’s Executive Pastor and a former real estate agent and franchisee of a fast food restaurant

1. What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?

“The first thing is there was a need to resolve a space and facility issue and a desire to see different styles of music and environments. We realized that because people were sitting in a tent in the parking lot [The Country Venue] of our main campus. Well, we thought, if they watched a video here, why not from 60 miles away? That Country Venue on campus still runs 350 people a week. Obviously we were motivated to reach as many people as we could, using different styles and locations.”

2. What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?

“The benefits are obvious, a greater draw demographically, to reach out to a larger base, more people. In addition, you don’t have to reinvent the wheel every time. We are different from
some multisite churches in that we say we are one church, multiple locations. Streaming the messages to each site, setting the worship up, all the preparation is reproduced in each site. As far as the flaws, there have been a few fatal flaws.” “Like what?” “Well, like simply for example getting the weekly bulletins out to each campus; we’re learning they will need to do their own. The further away campuses are, the more difficulty in getting certain resources to them. In multisite, you can draw your circle larger and use your energy in more ways. The negatives don’t outweigh the positives, but there are a lot of them.”

“The biggest problem we face is cannibalizing leadership. We tap everyone that has done anything to be a leader, in a new campus. We take people from the main campus and strip it of people and leaders. It’s the biggest negative and the biggest obstacle to growth. Also, the physical challenges, more campuses adds more burden to the central team. There are also the financial challenges. The Country and online venues are self-sustaining. In Marion, we were given a building. In Bristol, I was able to write the lease on the building when I worked for the company that owned the property, so that lease was very advantageous. As we’ve gotten away from the base to smaller campuses farther away, the challenge is to build [in those areas] without having the DNA of the main campus. Without the base of people that we have had in other locations, that has put a strain on us financially. We’re seeing fruit from people being saved and baptized, so we’re in a dilemma; at what point does the financial challenge outweigh the spiritual? We need to have those conversations about when to pull the plug.”

3. Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church, what would you say to them?

“Well my first reaction is it’s no different than what Peter and the rest of the disciples were doing planting churches. They were under Peter’s leadership. Each of our campuses has
autonomy, just under Abingdon’s authority. It’s no different than a church having an overflow
service in its fellowship hall on campus, we’re just doing it in locations farther out. I don’t see a
disconnect from scripture; I don’t see an issue. Pastor John is our Lead Pastor and the campuses
have their pastors.”

4. Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.

“That could take a lot of time. First, I would advise, make sure they have identified the
leader for that campus. You need a pastor who is a team player. Next, you have to make sure you
transfer the vision at the new campus just as it is at the first campus. I’d also tell them, make sure
the structure matches the first campus. We use the PD [Purpose Driven] model. I think it’s
practical, it’s biblical. Place the right ministry leaders. There [are] a few leaders that are
necessary for any new campus we start; we would never start another campus without a campus
pastor, worship pastor, children’s pastor, and youth person.” “How did you determine that you
would need those positions?” “We’ve done it without and it doesn’t work. In Marion, we tried
without live music, [that did not work]. Now we’re not saying these people are full-time [in
ministry], just responsible for their ministry areas. Other concerns logistically are facilities,
seating, parking ratios, the square footage in the worship area. These things are important. We hit
that lid at the Bristol campus. We outgrew that space with 850-900 people in a 15,000 square
foot building, so we started a Saturday night service. In that setting, it was not what worked
there. No one had ever done that in that area. We offered a different worship style for that service
for another hook in the water. It’s a long process, there’s lots of homework needed.”
5. **Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?**

“Maybe in some instance where our financial commitment is so great we should have moved slower.”

Denise Wells – Long time Pastor’s Assistant and key leader for youth ministry

1. **What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?**

“Well, that’s pretty simple, to reach more people. We were in a smaller community and we said we’d love to reach more people and [we] thought it wasn’t possible [to reach farther out].

“Has multisite helped you to attain your goal of reaching new people?” “Definitely.”

“When you look at these new people, are they post-churched, lost, de-churched? What is their spiritual condition?” “Most people in America today will say they are a Christian, I’d say most of them are lost. Many have a church background, but are lost. These people are accepting Christ and they are following in baptism. I think that people think differently about video until they see it for themselves. Even now when I’m in the room with a live presenter, I still watch the screen instead of the actual presenter.”

2. **What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?**

“It accomplished what we set out for it to do. This is the number one benefit. It also helps to raise up more leaders. It makes it simpler to invite more friends to church by breaking down the distance barriers.”
Further, she states, “As far as challenges, they’re the same thing. We’ve had to find creative leaders and role models to lead these sites. We would start a campus without all the leaders in place. We made mistakes in the finances. Also, [we fell short in] determining who is in charge of the areas of ministry, the people at each campus, or those at the main campus?” “How have you dealt with people who rebel against that leadership structure?” “We teach that change is inevitable. If you don’t like something, hang on it will probably change. We also cast vision and say look, if this worked at Abingdon, it will probably work there, too. It’s been field tested. When they know it’s a proven thing, they’re more likely to follow.”

As she continued with the challenges, she addressed the financial issues of multisite.

“Financially, multisite is a challenge. You have to ask, when can a campus hold its own financially?” “Are you considering campuses that need structural change?” “We’re always considering that. Our Marion campus is way beyond what we thought we would have there, while our Kingsport campus has struggled.”

3. Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church, what would you say to them?

“I would say I don’t have a scripture verse off the top of my head. For us, we are one church, we are governed by one body, we are all under one financial umbrella. We’re not a lot of churches, we are one church under Christ. Pastor John follows that. We all have said that if God spoke to Pastor John and said we all needed to move to Africa, we’d all move to Africa. We are God-led. We’re following Christ more than any church I’ve ever seen.”
4. Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.

“I think from what we’ve learned, [you need to] decide the issue of centralization up front. Ask yourself, are we going to have a team that calls all the shots? Who gets to decide the non-negotiable items? Then you come up with a list. For example, these are basic but this gives you an idea, in children’s ministry, everyone is background checked. Everyone fills out an application, etc.; these are non-negotiable for us. Another [non-negotiable is that] every leader must be a church member. Is all our music and curriculum coming from the mother church? Will it be video-based or live speakers? We didn’t do these up front, [that was a] big mistake. There’s also the financial piece, you need to determine how long before the campus is self-supporting.” “Could you see High View closing a campus?” “Oh yeah, we’re big on ending ministries that do not work. Pastor John says, ‘If the horse is dead, dismount!’ Lastly, if there’s a big campus too close to a new campus, these two may have to compete for the same people. People may choose the main campus over the smaller campus if the quality is not there. The new campus must be able to compete.”

5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

“I would think about the growth in those locations [more holistically]. We considered seating and didn’t consider the children’s and parking areas. The support ministries need to have adequate space. Without a kids’ ministry and parking, it’s difficult to have a main service. If people can’t park or leave their children in a well-staffed, spacious environment, they’re not coming back.”
Bud Edwards – Campus Pastor for the Country Venue, a senior member of the executive team for High View, and a founding member of the church

1. **What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?**

   “There are different kinds of people and it takes something different for each group to reach. We found multisite could reach different aspects of the population. Not every church appeals to all, but if you change a little you can reach them. “What’s the driving motivator?” “It’s the atmosphere, being able to connect with like-minded people. That gave rise to the first venue. The motivation is to reach more people; see more changed lives.”

2. **What are some examples of benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?**

   “Benefits, well growth is always beneficial, there’s something about large numbers of people. As more people hear about our church, it affects the other campuses, there’s brand recognition.”

   “The difficulties are, and this changes from step to step, you can operate under one structure with one church [site]. As you add campuses, you must change your structure. It becomes a strain [to remain the same]. You must change the structure of the ministry. The success of the service is contingent on taking care of the people, and change is necessary.”

3. **Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church, what would you say to them?**

   “Jesus said where there’s two or three, I’m there. If there is twenty campuses and Jesus is in each one then it’s okay. “Do you have any scripture that supports multisite?” “Acts 2:42 to the
end of that chapter describes the early church. We know that 3,000 were added and groups met in homes and were campuses if you will.”

4. Please share advice you would offer a church wanting to become multisite.

“Based on what we’ve done, there is one thing that we should have done differently. That is, to shut down a church that we took over. If we had to do it again, we would wait two months, rebrand, and then start over with a reopening of the church. The Pastor left and we took it [the church]. It would have been better to have closed it and started over fresh.”

5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

“Pastors should look for people like himself. I got this from an executive from Food City, a grocery chain. He was describing the chain and their stores. Some were much farther away than others were. I asked why they didn’t go to particular towns that were closer. He said, “They are not like us. We know our brand and our people. We have to look for people like us. In a town where people don’t share your viewpoints, you’re going to have a difficult time. Ask, do I see these people at my church each Sunday? It will be easier to start there. Reach who you are. There’s so many things, but I would encourage that any church can be multisite, simply look around for the area with the greatest need for the gospel. God provides. Listen to God’s Word; He wants no one left out.”
CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The Results

The major gleanings from this research have profound implications for multisite in all communities, especially rural communities. The goal of this work is to determine the principles, best practices, biblical or otherwise that are essential for planting a successful multisite church. Further, to understand whether a multisite ministry is biblical in its approach and to explore whether or not these principles and practices work in the Wilkes County region and other similar geographic and demographic communities.

In this chapter, the author will analyze five distinct areas of learning gleaned from the ministries studied. He will then synthesize major factors from the four ministries. The first area of consideration is a brief look at the unique make-up of each of the four ministries. The next is to examine the guiding principles and best practices for multisite ministry. Thirdly, this work will establish the working biblical and theological foundations for multisite. Lastly, the author will pass along advice given from the actual practitioners of the churches studied.

Unique Features and Comparisons

Studying multisite churches is much like studying individual people. Each person has a unique make-up of emotions, skills, desires, and dreams. The same is true of each multisite ministry. It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for a multisite ministry. Understanding that each ministry is unique will underscore that idea. However, similarities do overlap in each of these multisite ministries. From the churches studied, all were in smaller
communities at their start. These communities were generally 50,000 people or less. Each ministry had a desire for exponential growth and a strong calling to fulfill the Great Commission. Each of the ministries identified a strong vision-minded leader, and many of the people interviewed referenced the team atmosphere and the tremendous need for reproduction of leaders. The author observed that all four of the churches specifically stated or referenced their need of a process for leadership development.

Through observation among the four ministries, a clear divide became evident. Distinguishable patterns were seen that were similar to the larger ministries, while other patterns overlapped the smaller multisite ministries. The comparisons between the larger and the smaller are worth mentioning.

**Smaller Ministries Compared**

In comparing Foothills Church and Cross Point Church, notable similarities arose.

1. Both churches began their ministries with the idea of being a multisite ministry.

2. The geographic area that these churches are in had not had a new church plant in more than sixteen years, (16 years for Cross Point and over 20 years for Foothills).

3. Both churches sought minimal outside assistance for their multisite strategy when they began.

4. Each church had a strong vision-minded leader.

5. Both churches lacked strong buy-in from the entire leadership and congregation at first.
6. Neither church had an experienced real estate person at work in their multisite effort.

7. Each church’s first site failed to reach 100 people by year two.

8. Neither church had a defined plan for future sites.

Larger Ministries Compared

Similarities also arose between the larger multisite churches.

1. Both High View and The Rock churches have experienced rapid growth through campus expansion.

2. They both came into the concept and saw it as a means to reach their goal of exponential growth.

3. Each church had a veteran real estate person on staff guiding the church in its decisions concerning sites and acquisitions.

4. Both ministries developed a large vision with defined target areas for expansion as opposed to thinking of one site at a time only.

5. Each ministry had a capable executive pastor who worked to design the systems necessary to sustain growth. In High View Church, the executive pastor had a franchise background with a major fast food chain.

6. Each ministry obtained buy-in across the board from the leadership and congregation for their multisite ministry before beginning.

7. Each church has at least five sites.

8. A strategic plan of additional sites was present in each of these ministries.
These comparisons show, from a human perspective, a glimpse into some necessary components for an effective multisite ministry. These components include, but are not limited to the following: the need for leadership and church-wide buy-in to the multisite vision, the need for an executive pastor who can develop and guide the systems for structural support, an identified plan for expansion with sites in view, and preparation and forethought for rapid growth. The multisite site church must think in terms of multiple locations from the start. While the church is planting one location, it must be thinking of other sites at the same time.

The Motivational Foundations for Multisite

After interviewing each of the leaders of these four multisite churches, it became clear that the resounding reason for multisite was to reach people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Some used similar words, but generally their words were, “To see people experience life change” or some version of that statement. Some referenced the Great Commission while others explained it in simple terms such as, “To reach out to more people.” In the middle of the answers, the author observed that individuals with specific roles outside of the lead pastoral role tended to also mention the logistical issues of space for children and other ministries, driving distances, and the ability to reach out with differing styles.

The consensus among those surveyed was clear for the church, either change or die. One Senior Pastor exhorted the very words, “We must keep changing.” Another senior leader summed it up by saying, “God is bigger than one location.” One final motivation for multisite

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mentioned was the aspect of good stewardship of resources.\footnote{Ryan McMann, interviewed by author, May 17, 2012.} A multisite church multiplies its resources numerous times, utilizing the creative energies of its planners, worship designers, graphics, and preachers, to a greater level than a one shot approach to weekend worship.

### The Theology of Multisite

It would seem logical that a multisite pastor would defend his theological position for multisite, and that is just what the pastors and leaders of these multisite churches did. Not one leader questioned the validity or legitimacy of a multisite model biblically, instead they defended it. The pastors interviewed typically referred back to the example of the Apostle Paul and his oversight of churches and his appointing of elders. One mentioned the fact that the word “local”\footnote{Dan Iverson, phone interview by author, May 30, 2012.} does not appear in the New Testament when referring to the church. This same leader, an executive pastor, said that we even see outsiders such a Titus also appointing elders in a city that he did not come from. Another Pastor stated that the church “should not be defined by a location,”\footnote{John Michelson, interviewed by author, May 29, 2012.} meaning that the biblical concept of church focuses on people and not facilities. The argument against multisite at times focuses on facilities and locations while the biblical norm is that of a focus on people in a location. In further defense, another leader stated that multisite is no different theologically from having an overflow service on a campus apart from the main service.\footnote{William Eastman, interviewed by author, May 29, 2012.} Concerning the idea of location and church being synonymous, a senior leader simply stated that the “old-school idea of church simply doesn’t work anymore; the church is not a
building.” Those that used scripture in defense of their multisite church referred to the book of Acts, and particularly Acts chapter two and the birth of the church and its expansion.

The issue in multisite theologically is in the governance forms it uses. There is a basic divide between two structures for multisite churches. One side views multisite from a hierarchical perspective with church sites being subservient to the main and first campus. The other view sees the multisite church as a one church in multiple locations entity. The foundation for a one-church model for multisite is sound theologically, while the hierarchal structure lacks biblical support. It comes down to following the example of the early church. It is not one church controlling another church. There is no example of that in scripture; it is one church working through many locations to extend the love of Christ and carry out Christ’s commission. Churches that take the stance that their ministry is one church in many locations have a truly solid biblical precedence. This precedence builds on the example of the early church and its growth from location to location. Those who view their ministry sites as subservient to the main campus are on weak theological footing with no biblical precedence. As the authors of *Who Runs The Church* state, “The church is not like the kingdoms of this world, for it is organized for service, not dominion. All government in the church is *stewardship:* i.e. its leaders are servant managers, who use their authority only to advance the interests of those they represent and serve.”

By their structure, hierarchical ministries create systems that the scriptures do not support, whereas in the one-church model, there is a single lead pastor and the people from all sites have a chance

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238 Dan Iverson, interviewed by author, May 30, 2012. Dan stated that, “If you look into the New Testament, you’ll not find the word local; [it] is not there in referring to the church. We are not individual churches governed by a hierarchical position. We are one church, we have a lead pastor [and] each campus has individuality.”

239 Peter L. Toon et al., *Who Runs The Church?* 134.
to voice their opinions by attending at least annual meetings. The people vote on major items such as selection of the senior pastor, the purchase of land, and the change in by-laws. The churches that are a one-church in multiple locations model are self-governing. They have determined their own form of government, polity, and appropriate organizational structures. Because of this, they are autonomous and are in agreement with the plain teachings of the scriptures. A hierarchical form would cause churches to be lesser than an autonomous part of the body of Christ.

**The Principle Lessons of Multisite**

The balance of this chapter will address the major lessons from this project. Each lesson is a principle learned from the experience of planting a multisite church. These lessons are foundational to any multisite undertaking since the data is observable and empirical. The pastors and church leaders interviewed in this study have shared what they have discovered in their multisite journey. The following section is a collection of ten principles from these leaders.

**A Guide is Necessary**

A guide is necessary when walking through difficult and unfamiliar territory; multisite is exactly that for most pastors. Starting a multisite process with no prior experience and with no outside guidance will prove to be an uphill battle even for the most gifted leaders. Today, numerous consultants such as Jim Tomberlin of MultiSite Solutions work with churches in order to develop their multisite process. Consultation includes analysis of the church’s health and readiness, all the way to developing an action plan for launching a site. A pastor or church thinking of multisite would do well to seek the advice of an experienced guide. Of the four
churches studied, two mentioned the lack of guidance in the beginning, while the other two mentioned the fact that they had pastors other than their senior leader who designed the systems needed for the development of multisite. One of these pastors began as a consultant for the ministry and stayed as an executive pastor of that church. The churches with these designated leaders were growing at an explosive rate while the other two lagged behind in numeric growth.

**Vision Casting is Both Art and Science**

The vision of the future for any ministry is the guiding force that points in the direction in which the organization wants to move. In multisite churches, the vision of numerous campuses drives the church to raise people for leadership, funds for ministry, and aspirations for what can be. While vision is a preferred picture of the future, that picture is never as perfect as one would hope. Helping others to see that vision is often difficult. Therefore, while vision casting contains several technical aspects that touch both the heart and the mind, the vision owners must be able to find creative ways to express it. Presenting the vision for multisite in a church-wide conference meeting without the process of key leadership buy-in is a recipe for disaster. This is particularly true since many congregants do not even understand what multisite ministry is. Much work in educating the church on the particulars of multisite will prove beneficial. The art of vision casting knows how to win the heart; the science knows how to deliver the vision to diverse groups and individuals. A guide assisting the church will help build a vision-casting plan.

When it comes to buy-in, a non-verbal response from key leaders is not enough. The leaders must discuss and agree verbally on this direction for the ministry.\(^\text{240}\) In addition, it is

\(^{240}\) Ryan McMann, interviewed by author, May 17, 2012.
imperative that the leaders within the ministry be so well versed in the vision that they could argue compellingly for it and articulate the details to others.\textsuperscript{241}

Cost is a Factor

Of the leaders interviewed, five of the thirteen mentioned that cost was a factor in multisite ministry. These five people represented all four of the ministries examined. The main learning was in understanding both the cost to starting up a campus and the ongoing accounting of it financially. A new campus site should include a three-phase budget, a pre-launch budget, a launch budget, and a post-launch budget. A pre-launch budget will focus on the costs for upfitting the new site, salaries of paid leaders, and equipment purchases in preparation for the launch. The launch budget would include the promotion and special features associated with the first services or series of services. The post-launch budget accounts for the ongoing funds necessary to maintain the campus.\textsuperscript{242}

It was pointed out by two leaders interviewed that, while multisite is one of the most effective ways to do ministry, it is also the most expensive way to do ministry. Purchasing properties, hiring pastors, and repurposing older buildings all bring the cost of ministry much higher than conventional one-site ministries. It is advisable to move slowly when dealing with finances, yet not wait for perfect conditions.\textsuperscript{243}

\textsuperscript{241} Tim Bartel, interviewed by Dr. Richards, May 16, 2012.

\textsuperscript{242} Dan Iverson, interviewed by author, May 30, 2012.

\textsuperscript{243} John Michelson, interviewed by author, May 29, 2012.
Do More by Doing Less

It would seem that more activity would mean more fruit for a ministry. Of the four churches studied, three of them stressed the need for a streamlined ministry focus with fewer activities church-wide. One church, the largest, had recently entered a new structural phase for their ministry and was adding in more and more ministry options. This was after years of a streamlined approach during expansive growth years. The idea of a streamlined approach focuses the ministry on doing a few things well. Since multisite requires reproducibility, this simplified approach makes that possible. What a church does at one campus, it does at all the others, typically. The areas of focus characteristically center on outreach, worship, and discipleship. Focusing on these three areas allows the church to say no to almost everything, causing the church to have a better focus and execution of few things. In essence, the church will do more by doing less.

Reproduce Leaders

A multisite church by necessity is a church that reproduces every aspect of the ministry. To reproduce a church site, the ministry must reproduce leaders, teams, and ministries. The leaders of the ministry must have the vision well implanted within them. Before a church can reproduce another site, the ministry must be healthy and have a well-structured system. It is advisable to have a model campus to guide the other campuses. This campus sets the standard and becomes the blueprint for the others. All four of the churches examined have attempted to use this model approach to begin their multisite ministry.

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The systems that sustain the work should have a well-written manual with job descriptions for each leadership position, ministry descriptions, and the leadership structure for the ministry. This will ensure the ability to reproduce after the model campus and its leaders. A healthy first site is essential before planting a second site. The standard within each campus is that leaders work their way out of a job by bringing up their replacement. The ministry also needs a leadership development process for these up-and-coming leaders. These leaders are gifted individuals who have a proven, faithful record of ministry involvement within that particular church. They support the church financially and have the vision for multisite. They are willing to serve in new ministries and locations.

Communication is Vital

Language shapes culture and if the culture is multisite, communication is foundational. Of the churches surveyed, two of the four mentioned the issue of communication; both of these churches had more than five campuses. These churches also expressed compounded communication problems once a church reached four campus sites. Communication between all involved becomes more important and yet more difficult as the church expands. The flow of information is vital for ongoing vision casting and weekly emphases within the churches. Two tools are advisable to investigate; both of these tools are online social media networks. One is “The City” and the other is “The Table Project.” Within these networks, churches can set up groups and sub-groups for communication. These tools make connecting with other team members and the transfer of information and resources immediately available to all upon posting of that information.

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Team Ministry is Essential

Today’s era of ministry involves teams of gifted people who accomplish more together then they could apart. Of the four churches surveyed, each of them stressed the importance of team ministry. Each leader must be able to bring up and maintain a ministry that supports the overall vision of the church. The ability to choose trust over suspicion is a vital component necessary for unity on any team and congregation.\textsuperscript{247} The team approach moves away from a committee approach where people make decisions for others who do the ministry. The team approach places the people who do the ministry in a position where they make the decisions for that ministry. Leaders that cannot build teams will find it difficult in today’s ministry environment.

The Internet the New Front Door

Church leaders that understand the power of the internet will use it to their advantage. The new front door for ministry is the World Wide Web.\textsuperscript{248} Many people will watch an online service for up to four months before attending a live service.\textsuperscript{249} An online campus consists of a campus pastor and a live feed of actual services later converted into videos for ongoing viewing. The campus pastor gives a weekly video greeting to those worshiping online and seeks to engage viewers through online chats and other forms of communication. The pastor directs viewers to their online community such as The City or The Table Project, where these people can be more involved in the ministry. The online community offers discipleship tools and small groups with

\textsuperscript{247} Shane Cunningham, phone interview by author, May 31, 2012.

\textsuperscript{248} John Michelson, interviewed by author, May 29, 2012.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid.
live, face-to-face meetings, all facilitated through the online campus. The online module offers giving opportunities through the internet as well. While the up-fit of cameras and digital equipment may seem daunting, an online campus is the quickest and least expensive way to start a new campus. Of the churches in this study, only one of them had an online campus, yet two others had expressed an interest in beginning online campuses.

Flexibility is Necessary

Today’s multisite ministry is certainly a change from the standard ministry approach used by churches for many years. Adding locations, moving staff and altering styles requires the ability to be flexible as a staff and as a church. The new norm is change.250 Things cannot stay the same way and bring different results. Those involved in leading a multisite ministry and those who serve in one understand that things will not stay the same for long.251 This requires a certain personality style for leadership.252 Those who enjoy the status quo will not do well in an evolving multisite ministry.

Know When a Campus is Self-sustaining

In the end, each campus will need to be self-sufficient. Knowing when a campus is viable is a difficult question to answer since, in the spiritual realm, baptisms and salvation decisions add to the idea of success for a ministry. With that said, like any business, if a ministry spends more money than it brings in, eventually that ministry will close its doors. Determining viability up

250 Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon and Warren Bird, A Multi-site Church Road Trip (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 11.

251 Denise Wells, interviewed by author, May 29, 2012.

front for a campus will include how many people attend, what the offerings are, what the overhead costs are, and what spiritual impact the site has made on the community. It is advisable to think through these factors before the launch of a site. The planting ministry should have a timeline for viability, typically two to three years. If a site lags behind, the leaders will be able to look back at the viability plan and determine if resources are better suited for another location or ministry.

**Final Advice for Best Practice and Implementation**

The leaders interviewed for this project were not short on advice for practice and implementation. Stemming from their own mistakes and failures through a trial and error process in some cases, they gave advice that this author has categorized into six distinct sections. This advice, directed to pastors and leaders, is in preparation for multisite. The six areas are the importance of studying multisite upfront, knowing the cost for multisite, leadership buy-in, assembling the right team, moving slowly with large purchases, and involving the planter’s family with the process. We will consider each of these areas.

**Go to School on Multisite**

One Executive Pastor said that “anyone wanting to do multisite needs to become a student of the multisite model.” This study would include the variations and approaches used currently throughout the country, such as at Sea Coast Church in Charleston, South Carolina. It would involve attending conferences on multisite and talking to current multisite pastors, preferably those within a similar geographic region. The study would extend to feasibility and

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253 Ibid.
demographic work within the pastor’s own region. “It is important to contextualize multisite for your particular community,” one leader said. The exhortation by the same leader was to ask yourself, “What kind of research have you done and is it led by the Holy Spirit?” The importance of prayer through this process is foundational and emphasized by several leaders. After going to school on the general specifics of multisite, three main categories emerged to consider, vision casting preparation for multisite, determining the model (live or video, one-church or hierarchical), and knowing the space needed for a site.

In vision casting preparation for multisite, the pastor and leadership need an internalized understanding of the multisite ministry model. Until this group can articulate the need for and purpose of multisite, any vision casting will be less than clear. The team also needs to be able to defend the idea and claim it as if it were their own.

In determining the model for a multisite effort, the leadership needs to understand the differing models used today. How would the church approach multisite? Would the church use a live presenter or video? Would the church use a venue-type format that employed different styles of worship in each site; would they use a hierarchical approach, or a true one-church model? With so many options, this is why education concerning multisite is vital.

As far as the need for space requirements, any consideration of a new site should include the discussion on ministries offered. Questions such as, would the church offer nursery for babies, children’s ministries or student ministries? What would the parking space requirements

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255 Ibid.

256 Tim Bartel, interviewed by Dr. Richards, May 16, 2012.


258 Denise Wells, interviewed by author, May 29, 2012.
be, as well as any heating and air conditioning requirements for a re-purposed building according to building codes? What building codes and zoning restrictions for the local community exist? One Pastor told the story of relocation to a new facility. He said that only after spending in excess of $50,000 did the church find out that the zoning and building requirements did not meet a public gathering permit. 259 The ministry eventually had to walk away from the site with a major loss of funds and church-wide momentum. The factors to be aware of include a variety of data about the location, zoning, building codes, adequate space, and more. 260 The recommendation is that parking spaces be in a ratio of 1.75 to every one seat within a church auditorium, and that each car would require 400 square feet of parking space. As one leader jokingly said, “People tend to like to bring their cars to church.” 261 Therefore, just proclaiming the desire to be a multisite church is not enough, much planning and consideration must take place. The more work the team can do on these items before looking at land or buildings, the better for the church and its opportunity to be a successful multisite ministry.

Know the Cost of Multisite

The cost of multisite will include more than mere dollars. There are many unknowns for those embarking on a multisite model for ministry. The leaders must answer many questions, such as will the church buy in to the vision, and will it work in this community? A pastor, who leads his congregation to become multisite, particularly in a community where multisite has not ventured before, must be willing to be open for scrutiny and even ridicule from other pastors,"

259 Greg Wall, conversation with author, Fall of 2009.
church members, and community leaders.\textsuperscript{262} One church leader said, “We didn’t count the cost. We lost people and thereby lost those who gave to the ministry. This hurt our multisite effort.”\textsuperscript{263}

Another aspect of multisite is the actual financial costs. Several leaders expressed a varying amount of needed available funds before beginning the project.\textsuperscript{264} The amounts ranged from between $25,000 to $100,000 depending on the location of the site. An Executive Pastor gave helpful details to the budgeting process. You have three phases; there is the pre-launch budget, start-up budget for staffing, purchase of equipment, rental agreements and such. The church then has the launch budget, which includes everything it needs to start that campus. Finally, a post launch budget that sustains the operations of the church. It depends on where and how you do it. If you are in an auditorium, you do not have to buy chairs, in a gym you may have to provide chairs.\textsuperscript{265} As can be easily seen, the variables for multisite would mount up quickly and cause each site to be unique in its funding. The church needs to do its homework and understand these variables.

\textbf{Obtain Leadership and Church-wide Buy-in}

While this category may be better suited for the section on going to school for multisite, an added dimension makes it different. Obviously, any pastor would want to learn all he could about multisite before bringing the idea to his leaders and church.\textsuperscript{266} When a pastor is ready to

\textsuperscript{262} Tim Bartel, interviewed by Dr. Richards, May 16, 2012.

\textsuperscript{263} Dr. Richards, interviewed by author, May 16, 2012.


\textsuperscript{265} Dan Iverson, interviewed by author, May 30, 2012.

\textsuperscript{266} Ron Black, interviewed by author, May 30, 2012.
investigate more fully, his leadership should be able to handle and inspect his idea. They must then be able to ask questions and seek to understand the “why” concerning multisite before seeking the “how.” In order to be successful, the leadership will fully express the concepts of multisite and give verbal buy-in. One Associate Pastor mentioned, “We thought we had buy-in, but what we really had was a lack of objections. We moved from a non-verbal response from leadership members as being okay to a not-in-favor response; they must respond verbally. This has helped our team. No one can sit there and not respond.”

After there is complete agreement from the leadership, the church at large must have an opportunity to be involved. One Pastor interviewed said, “What God shouts in the ear of the pastor, He whispers in the heart of the congregation.” Before the process can start, the congregation must be able to understand what the church is trying to accomplish, and this takes time. Open forum discussions and church-wide meetings are an excellent tool. The pastor should cast vision through his sermons. The church may wish to embark on a biblical exploration concerning multisite through their small groups, Sunday classes, and other groups.

Assemble the Team

Further advice came from multiple interviews that stressed the need of a well-organized launch team prior to the start of any site. Careful selection of the team members is in order. These mission-minded individuals should be able to minimally express the vision of the church and have the church’s make-up or DNA firmly implanted in them. One Pastor said, “The

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267 Ryan McMann, interviewed by author, May 17, 2012.
269 Tim Bartel, interviewed by Dr. Richards, May 16, 2012.
church’s identity and strategy needs to be firmly implanted in the first location [members] so that the people who go in missionary mode to plant the next site have the DNA within them already.”270 Another leader said, referring to the importance of the team, that they would “never plant a site without a campus pastor, worship pastor, children’s pastor, and youth person.”271 The most important person in that team is the lead pastor for the site. One church advised using a DISC personality profile to identify a campus pastor. Concerning that, a church’s Executive Pastor stated, “We look for people with the ability to preach, and from a personality perspective, we use a DISC profile. Our campus pastors are high I’s.”272 This means they are relational, extremely friendly, and people oriented. It also means they have to work at organizational elements.

Many of the leaders advised the importance of unity on the team. The term “team players”273 came up often as a necessary component. One leader said, “Campus pastors have to be team players, submit to authority, and still have the drive to run things. It takes a special person.”274 Ideally, under the leadership of the campus pastor, the team members would form a small group in preparation for their site launch, build strong relationships with each other, and be well trained for ministry. Further, these members should demonstrate competency in their area.


271 Ibid.


Take Big Purchases Slowly

Advice that came from the interviews concerning finances was generally to move slowly, especially on big items such as land and buildings. One Pastor shared how he had moved too fast and obligated the church for millions of dollars only to regret it later. Still an admonition from others was to move cautiously but not so cautiously that you miss what God may be orchestrating. The balance for this comes in knowing at what speed to move. This involves time in prayer, available finances, church-wide buy-in, and available properties. One Pastor spoke with regret, “In one instance where our financial commitment [was] so great we should have moved slower.” Another Pastor said, “The right place is worth waiting for.”

Do Not Forget Your Family

While this advice specifically came up in one interview, the strain of ministry on family was a point referred to several times in other interviews. One Pastor exhorted in advice, “To those who are considering multisite, I would tell you to be with your family, pray together, and spend time with the kids. I help my kids understand what we [are] doing. [I] let them experience and see the fun that it is and all that God is doing. Don’t short-change your family because of the circumstances of the day.”

The Conclusion of Principles and Best Practices for Multisite

In conclusion, multisite ministry is fundamentally transforming the idea of church and church associations by connecting multiple church sites within a region and in some cases without geographical barriers. A single pastor and his team lead these interconnected sites. As seen with High View Church and The Rock Church to date, a proven record of accomplishment for a successful multisite church enables ministries to keep expanding with new campuses. The Rock Church is planning to open five more campuses in 2013, and has grown by an average of 782 people in the last two years.\textsuperscript{279} High View Church has a long-range plan for seventeen more locations along the Appalachian Mountain range.\textsuperscript{280} In the summer of 2012, this church has experienced all-time high attendances for general services, and now averages over 3,500 attendees per week. The power of multisite is the ability to reproduce everything from graphics to people and property. This reproduction follows the Lord’s command to “Go into all the world and make disciples.”\textsuperscript{281} A disciple is a reproduced Christian; a multisite church is a reproducing church. Theologically, the one-church in multiple locations fits the biblical model set by the apostles in the early church. These early leaders, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, set out to accomplish the Great Commission given by Jesus to go into the entire world.\textsuperscript{282}

Today more than five thousand churches are employing a multisite model and many more are investigating the prospects of multisite.\textsuperscript{283} Consultants are available to help churches and

\textsuperscript{279} Jay Jackson, interviewed by author, May 30, 2012.

\textsuperscript{280} John Michelson, interviewed by author, May 29, 2012.

\textsuperscript{281} Matthew 28:19

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid.

many articles are accessible on this phenomenon. The method is ever evolving with new approaches and nuances coming forth with each new site. Multisite is spreading from the larger markets and metropolitan areas to the medium and smaller markets within the United States. “As the growth has now mushroomed to 5,000 and beyond, multisite is *truly* a ‘new normal’ in cities large and small, urban and suburban, and even rural. Today it's hard to find a church leadership conference that doesn't deal with some aspect of multisite.”

Communities with fewer than fifty thousand people in size are seeing multisite churches spring up with exponential growth, while at the same time older established churches in these areas continue to decline in attendance. Pastors and leaders who desire to reach a large geographic area with the gospel of Jesus Christ, regardless of the size of their community, would do well to consider multisite church planting, using a one-church, multiple locations approach. Any church desiring to take this approach would be wise to investigate the method and seek guidance in its implementation.

This project sought to answer these following questions concerning multisite: What principles, practices, biblical or otherwise are essential for planting a successful individual multisite church? Is a multisite ministry biblical in its approach? Would these principles and strategies work in the Wilkes County region and other similar geographic and demographic communities? In answer to these questions, the data suggests that multisite is a phenomenon that is already effective in rural communities within a similar region to Wilkes County, North Carolina. The principles and best practices learned from the churches studied are demonstrable and certainly implementable.

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284 Ibid.
The Principles for Multisite Restated

1. It is necessary to have an experienced guide when starting a multisite ministry.
2. A leader must know both the art and science to casting vision.
3. Financial costs can prohibit a multisite movement.
4. A streamlined approach allows the ministry to do more by doing less with greater excellence.
5. A system to reproduce leaders is vital.
6. A communication plan is critical to success.
7. Multisite ministry is team ministry; no one person can do it alone.
8. The internet is the new first touch for prospective attendees.
9. Flexibility and change is a constant part of a growing ministry.
10. Reallocate resources and tools as needed. These include people, campuses, and equipment.

The Best Practices of Multisite Restated

1. Practice the study of multisite.
2. Perform gain and loss evaluations. (Evaluate financial and other potential losses).
3. Observe leadership and church-wide buy-in before implementation.
4. Achieve and maintain strong multisite teams before you start.
5. Carry out big purchases slowly.
6. Incorporate your family into the journey.
The Conclusion for the Question of Scriptural Support for Multisite

Not all multisite ministry approaches are biblically sound. A hierarchical structure with a subservient attitude toward sites under the original location violates the autonomy of the church by subdividing and making a location less than it should be biblically, a self-governing, autonomous entity. A biblical approach to multisite ministry includes a lead pastor, with congregational input, overseeing the sites of the ministry as one church, not many. Churches choosing the one-church model may do so without fear of scriptural violation. The one-church form follows the biblical model of a lead pastor directing the entire ministry with under-shepherds leading various ministries and locations with church-wide input for major decisions. In this model, there is no segmentation by locations, status, or hierarchical structure. It is the church, operating together to advance the gospel message in numerous locations with a defined focus and structure. This model follows the example of the early church. Pastors in various regions oversaw several churches in that region and directed these first century churches.

The Conclusion for the Question of Adaptability of Multisite for Wilkes County

The author has both observed and documented successful multisite ministry in a region similar to that of Wilkes County. High View Church is located in Abingdon, Virginia, some sixty miles Northwest of Foothills Church and has a successful multisite ministry. High View Church rests in a city and a county that are similar in size, demography, and geography, to Wilkes County. Both are rural and depend on a core of people to support the ministry regionally. Further, the author has also observed The Rock Church in a similar community as Foothills Church. The Rock Church is located in Salisbury, North Carolina, some seventy-five miles Southwest of Wilkes County in a rural community. A population that is similar to Wilkes County
also supports this church. The Rock Church has successfully established six locations and plans to expand to five more in the coming year.

Since both The Rock and High View Church are expanding and reaching their stated goals through multisite in a similar region to that of Wilkes County, it is the view of this author that multisite is a viable option for Wilkes County.

The Conclusion for Goals

Personal and Professional Goals Achieved

This project has served to help the author accomplish his goals of identifying the particular method of multisite suitable to his theology, personality, and geographic location. The conclusion of the theological study in this report resulted in an understanding of the church’s need for a single, lead pastor. The study concluded that an autonomous church could choose to meet in multiple locations. Autonomy gives the church the authority to determine how it will best carry out the Great Commission in its context. The study also revealed that modern multisite is similar to the early church approach to expansion. These findings have led this author to identify an ecclesiastical form best described as a “one-church-multiple-locations” model. Combined with the biblical method of utilizing a plural-elder approach with a lead elder is the best approach for his ministry.

Church Goals Achieved

Finally, this project also served to assist the local ministry in which the author is a pastor, to accomplish its vision for multisite. The report has shown the viability of multisite and has
determined ten principles and six best practices that are transferrable to the church in which the author pastors. These principles and best practices will become the base for a multisite strategy manual. The next phase is to develop the written manual based on the information contained in this report.
Tentative Schedule

Fall Graduation

4. Oral Project Defense - First two weeks of November 2012
APPENDIX A

Case Study

Five open-ended discussion starters and questions give information concerning each multisite church studied. These open-ended discussion starters and questions will allow the research to flow free from preconceived suppositions the author may have.

Questions:

1. What motivated your church to go to a multisite model?
2. What are some examples of the benefits and challenges that have arisen because of your decision to be multisite?
3. Some might say that multisite violates scripture and the autonomy of the local church, what would you say to them?
4. What advice would you offer a church wanting to become multisite?
5. Let us suppose you could do anything different concerning multisite, what would it be?

For clarity, subsequent follow-up questions will focus on multiple areas. These follow-up question address; vision alignment, processes of establishing multisite, ecclesiastical issues such as style and polity of church governance, manuals and research the church has conducted or used and, any timelines for multisite planting the church has developed as well as exploring unknown variables of multisite planting that may arise from the interviews. Visual observations and verbal answers are part of the research.
The case study analyzes four churches including Foothills Church where the researcher serves as pastor. The churches: High View Church, Abingdon, VA, Cross Point Church, Hickory, NC, and The Rock Church, Salisbury, NC. Analyzed first is Foothills Church to ensure unbiased examination.
APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A CASE STUDY OF
MULTISITE CHURCHES

Title of Research Study: Multisite church planting in a rural community

Project Director: Thomas F. Bartlett

Email: tombartlett22@gmail.com

Purpose of the Research
The purpose of this project is to understand transferrable principles and best practices for multisite churches with a focus on smaller communities. The method of study will be to conduct a case study on four separate multisite ministries. The research includes interviews by the researcher. The research will be synthesized and written into the completed written body of the work. Your participation would be in the interviews.

Procedures for this Research
The research will be in the form of five survey questions with follow-up questions and will be recorded for future retrieval.

Potential Risks of Discomforts
There is the possibility that aspects to your ministry that are deficient may be exposed. This may be the cause of some discomfort to you and your ministry.

Potential Benefits to You and Others
The potential benefits for your ministry include access to the final research, and personal evaluation of your ministry by you and others involved in the ministry, leading to a more effective execution of your ministry initiatives.

Alternative Procedures
The researcher may also observe your ministry beyond the interview. Such observation might include;
worship services and ministries from the church.

**Protection of Confidentiality**

The researcher chooses not to include names of those interviewed in his work by using pseudonyms for people and their churches.

**Signatures**

If you agree to participate in this research project, please read the following statement:

I have been fully informed of the above-described project with its possible benefits and risks and I have given permission of participation in this study. Please sign below.

________________________________    _____________________________    ____________
Signature of Participant               Name of Participant (Print)            Date

________________________________    _____________________________    ____________
Signature of Person                    Name of Person                          Date

Obtaining Consent                      Obtaining Consent (Print)
APPENDIX C

NARRATIVE FORM OF CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS

Foothills Church is a 9-year-old restart church in Northwestern North Carolina based on the Purpose Driven model developed by Pastor Rick Warren. This case study will focus on Foothill’s story as they have moved to become a multisite church. The author of this case study is the lead pastor of the church and is responsible for the restart of the church in December of 2003.

Dr. Richards

It was May 16, 2012, late afternoon; his office was situated on the Yadkin River and housed in a beautiful wood-framed building that is not too much unlike a barn in its shape. I entered the dental office and readied myself for the interview. The office now stilled as the patients and staff had left for the day. While many dental offices feel sterile and cold this one is different. It has the warmth of a country home, soft lighting, beautiful pictures and décor, warm and friendly, much like a beautiful mountain lodge. It is the kind of place that makes you feel relaxed and settled. Dr. Richards came out, adjusted the background music and then sat at the high-top table to talk about the topic at hand, planting multisite churches.

Multisite church planting had become the focus of the church where I am the Lead Pastor and Dr. Richards is a Teaching Pastor. The desire was to know more about healthy multisite church planting, so after a period of research that raised several questions, I began investigating by asking these questions to actual practitioners.
We began our conversation by talking about the motivations to become a multisite church. Dr. Richards, a smart and insightful man, explained that the motivation for a multisite ministry was to help people meet Jesus Christ. He said, There were some 66,000 people in the county,” where our church is located and that, “Many of them do not know Jesus.” He explained that because of the strength of one campus, the logical move was to offer more options for people with more campuses. As the discussion went on, I sensed more and more freedom by Dr. Richards.

A polite man who speaks well of others, he was starting to open up about some of the challenges our church had faced since moving to a multisite model. His first comments were very positive about the strength of the first campus, but as the discussion went on, he opened up to reveal that, “While there were some tremendous benefits for becoming multisite, our church had failed to prepare for multisite properly.” The main challenge, he stated, “Was that we failed to gain proper vision buy-in from the congregation.” With an emphatic voice, Dr. Richards said, “People ask me all the time why would mess up a good thing at one campus by trying to start more campuses.” He said, “These questions revealed the lack of vision buy-in.” He said that, “The church faced opposition to multisite,” but that people would never state the reason why. His frustration was obvious as he spoke these words. Was he disappointed in the church for a lack of leadership? Was there a sense of frustration with the people who just could not see the need? The answer was a little of both. He went on to explain that multiple people had left the church over this issue not being able to see the need or benefit of multisite. “It has been a financial strain even with financial help from the North Carolina Baptist Convention. We didn’t estimate the cost well enough. There were the added costs of a new campus as well as the loss of support at the first site,” he said.
With a slight bit of irritation seemingly coming upon him, Dr. Richards sits back in his seat and speaks concerning the loss of people. “It bothers me that people who I thought were mature believers have left over this issue. Multisite is a tool, he said, it’s hard to see friends leave. Stressful to see people I love leave.” The let down on his face was obvious. People who he loved and had deep relationships with had left the ministry due to the churches desire to plant more sites. So I asked him, “what’s the problem with multisite for this community? What’s the deeper issue if people left over multisite?” He said, “Traditional thinking. Most of the people who have left are not the new believers we’ve reached. The new ones have bought in; they know that they were reached by new methods. The people who left were from a traditional background. They liked the worship and the approach to ministries but got rattled when it meant sacrifice for them.”

As the conversation went on we talked about the theological foundations for multisite and he expressed that multisite is biblically sound. “There’s no violation of scripture for multisite. No one has ever shown me a scripture [that expresses that]. [As far as autonomy], God is the head of the church. Paul was a planter, probably the first multisite Pastor. No one complains about how he did his ministry.”

By this time in the interview, we were both relaxed and I thought to myself, good, the last two questions will hold some very useful information. I wanted Dr. Richards to be fully free to share. Still, it was one of those moments where you want the truth, but you are not sure if you are ready to hear it. Maybe it’s the way a patient feels when they are waiting on medical results, regardless, there were some things I wanted to know from his perspective.
The last two questions dealt with any advice Dr. Richards would give to someone else who was thinking about implementing a multisite model and anything he would do differently if he could start another site.

In answer to the first question, Dr. Richards was now being more direct with his comments than when we began our conversation. Dr. Richards said that any church wanting to be multisite should put as much effort as they could into the demographic research of their community. They would need to be able to locate the place that fit the style of their ministry most effectively. “Find the right area,” he insisted. He stated further that we had failed to enlist the help of a church that was already successful at multisite and that anyone desiring to be multisite needed that kind of guidance. Along with total buy-in from the leadership and congregation, he said a church must “Pray this though.” I could sense the frustration of now knowing certain steps to take that we had not taken fully, yet wishing that we had.

The conversation moved to the final question. I had a sense that I wanted to hear more but at the same time, there was a sense of pain over the fact that things had not gone as well at the first site as we had hoped for. When asked what our church would do differently now he replied, “We should have been mentored through the process. There’s a learning curve.” He went on to say that, the next site would be a lot easier by the sheer fact that we know better now how to prepare for it. He said, “We don’t know everything to do, but we do know some things that we don’t need not do.” He then suggested that we take the process slow, something that passionate people with lots of dreams and vision have a hard time doing. His assessment of the first site was that, “We haven’t met the goal for critical mass yet, although we have seen people saved and baptized out there.”
The first site continues to meet while the church leadership is praying and seeking wisdom on how to attain the critical mass of about 75 people weekly. The site has been close numerous times, but has failed to gain the momentum on its own. There is a core of committed people and there is a growing energy in this tiny community where this first site is located.

**Tim Bartel**

(Interviewed by Dr. Richards)

It's kind of strange writing about myself based on an interview by one of the pastors I oversee. The process is, however, helpful for the discovery of multisite principles and learning for future planting. As I sat and talked with Dr. Richards, I began getting excited about what God could do through what we were uncovering by way of analysis of the current situation and all the things I was learning through reading and meeting with other multisite pastors. I expressed that the original intent of multisite for me has always been to see people experience life change through Jesus Christ, but that my understanding of how to implement such a thing has been altered dramatically. Dr. Richards asked where this idea came from. I explained that this model is borne out of a church in the San Diego area; (Oceanside, CA) called North Coast Church. This church used multiple venues at their worship complex. Imagine driving onto the campus of a church and parking your car. There are people there to assist you to the worship area. Along the way, they begin to offer you options as to the style of worship you would prefer. They begin to explain that there were several choices all on one campus. One service was geared toward the twenty something generation with its music, dark walls and lighting effects. Another was a beach feel with worship that was lighter in a Jimmy Buffett style. Still another had a modern contemporary style in a standard large box building. Each service unique in its style, yet the
message is shown via video screen by one presenting pastor. This idea not only intrigued me but also sent me on a decade long journey to prepare for multiple venues. As time went along, I began to see how multisite was being used in an even greater fashion. Multisite reproduces the same service in multiple places. It is the same sermon, the same worship, the same graphic design, the same everything except location. Even the church buildings look similar. If someone attends a church that is multisite, the other locations will have the same feel, look and ministry. The power of reproduction is obvious in this strategy.

As our conversation continued, I was still pumped as I relived the experience of visiting North Coast Church and seeing all the possibilities. Dr. Richards directed the conversation toward Foothills Church where I pastor. He asked me about the main benefits and challenges that have come from deciding to be a multisite church. I expressed that multisite has forced us to think with a reproductive mindset. We must be raising up leaders developing people for ministry. This mindset has directed our strategy and has influenced our structures as a church. It has exposed the need for vision alignment and buy-in by the entire staff, leadership team and congregation. I stated further that when I first brought this to the church, the initial reaction was that they did not understand what multisite was. Maybe I did not fully understand multisite at that point either. It became obvious that my explanation of multisite was not clear. Many thought that on the surface it was a good idea. Some thought it would not work. Since that time, we have come to a better understanding of what multisite is. Now people are having to look at it for what it is, which is uncomfortable for those who are complacent, comfortable with the status quo or unwilling to sacrifice. The biggest challenges for our church are; lack of unity over the desire to be multisite, a lack of clarity to the congregation as to the churches direction and selfishness in some individuals. Financially it has been a challenge too. We did not raise enough funds on the
front end. A well thought out process of raising funds would have helped with buy-in by the congregation. A complete explanation of the model would have clarified any ambiguity and helped people understand what their money was going.

Dr. Richards turned the questions to the theological foundations for the church. He asked why multisite did not violate the accepted norms of church autonomy. I wrestled with this very question for months, wanting to get it right. After more than seventy hours of study, I concluded that autonomy means that any church can choose how it ministers and runs its affairs with no limitation from a denomination or a government. Multisite is not many churches under one pastor, it is one church under a lead pastor. The pastors and leaders, with input from the congregation are to direct the church. The lead elder has more of an apostolic type role and works along with the other elders/pastors as they lead the church. Historically, autonomy has not dealt with multiple locations for churches, just protection from denominations and governments limiting a church’s ability to determine its own polity and governance. I felt like there was so much more that I could say concerning the theological foundations of the church but the biggest question centered on autonomy and I had finally come to a biblical understanding. Gaining the understanding that multisite is not many churches, but one, is much like a single elder/pastor leading a large congregation with numerous associate ministers leading their particular ministries under his guidance.

Dr. Richards asked what advice I would give someone wanting to establish a multisite church. As you can imagine, this was the very thing I should have done before starting the first site for Foothills. Since the answer to this question is now so profoundly obvious, it was embarrassing having to answer this question and relive my own mistakes at the same time. It is a weird feeling of hope and despair all at once. Despair for what should have been done and hope
for the future based on what I now know. I answered, “First they should make sure there is complete buy-in from the body and leadership.” The mistake I made was a lack of this in the beginning. Buy-in cannot be mere words; there must be action and participation. I also said that the church’s identity and strategy need to be firmly implanted in the first location so that the people who go in missionary mode to plant the next site have the DNA within them. I have also learned that it would be very helpful to work through every possible objection to multisite up front. Ask for objections, seek them out and then address them fully with all leaders and the congregation. Next, identify the core group of people who are gifted and have a proven record of faithfulness for ministry then make them a cohesive team that prepares and prays together for the upcoming site. Beyond that, the ministry should raise funds between $25,000 and $50,000 up front; this is imperative. Larger communities will require the raising of more than $100,000 up front. Finally, I would suggest that the location is important and that the right place is worth waiting for. It must be highly visible and large enough to accommodate the ministry for several years and be in the target area that the church wants to reach. These answers are fresh because I have thought this process through numerous times. I answered with the desire to redo what we have already done, although sad that this simply is not possible.

Leading into that very thought, he asked what I would do differently now. I responded with, “Hold longer discussions with leaders for buy-in.” I’d stress the need for a church at a location and why we would go there. I’d make sure that the leadership can articulate and argue for the multisite model from their own personal vision and conviction about it. I would make vision alignment, raising funds, and getting people on the same page a priority.

He asked if we have made any course corrections and I responded, “Yes.” We have moved staff putting Dave into the lead role of the first site while moving the planting pastor
Noah, into the worship role over both campuses. Further, we moved Timothy into the worship role at that site. I explained that we are looking to see what other corrections can be made helping to move this site toward greater health.

**Ryan McMann**

Once a thriving elementary and middle school, now a campus site for a church, Foothills Church uses its campus for numerous daily and weekly ministries. As you drive on the campus, you will notice the large stucco building with a raised roof and tower with lights and crosses. This construction is unlike any traditional form for a church, particularly in the foothills. It has spacious parking with several other buildings attached to this main area. In your mind picture directional signs pointing to ministry meeting areas for children, teens, adults, a medical clinic, a kitchen providing food for the needy, a counseling center, and more. Foothills is a unique ministry; reclaiming lives much in the way the church reclaimed the old school building it purchased just seven years earlier.

As I walked into my office where I would meet Pastor Ryan McMann, I selected the area where we would meet to discuss the multisite planting effort that Foothills Church is doing. Pastor Ryan entered and placed his computer and his signature backpack on the table. Ryan is a young man with passion and zeal, unlike many. His enthusiasm for life and ministry are contagious and his passion for people is unequaled. Ryan has been a part of the Foothills ministry for five years and has been one of the architects of the multisite effort. He’s tech savvy, trendy, athletic and a big Atlanta Braves fan.

As we began our conversation, I asked what he liked best about serving at Foothills Church and he said, “Team ministry. We have a model that puts the pastors working as a team
and making decisions as a team. Teams are formed across the ministry to carry out the ministry and our staff team, along with the leadership team oversees them. It is however clear that Tim is the lead guy.” “Are you comfortable in this model,” I asked. “Yes, it helps everyone be better, open and more effective. This model is more effective than a previous model I was in.” Ryan had served in an older traditional church for seven years prior to coming to Foothills. The structure was such that a board of deacons made the decisions and not the pastors. He had confided more than once that a deacon-led system did not suit him well.

“What is the main motivation for Foothills being multisite,” I asked. “Many motivations, the main is to plant Foothills locations across the area. Each of these sites, like the first, is to be strong in presenting the gospel. We also were motivated out of a heart of wanting to be aggressive and effective for the gospel of Jesus Christ.” He went on to explain the nature of the county in which we serve. He described the community as a rural community that has a “Large land area and is extremely spread out.” The county is actually the largest county by land size and one of the smaller by population. He said, “We asked ourselves, how we can reach them effectively? Multisite allows us to spread the DNA of Foothills across this region. Multisite is stronger than a single plant with greater resources [available].” I asked, “Why a rural multisite movement, is that good stewardship of resources compared to larger urban areas?” He responded, “This is good stewardship by being more accountable with resources than just sending money with no accountability to plant other churches in this region.” I followed up with asking if Foothills is committed to multisite regardless of size. “Yes, that’s something that we’re trying to figure out. We are trying to determine when we are being good stewards in a particular community. We believe that every community needs a gospel witness.” He went on to say that determining success for a smaller community has to be very different from say that of a large
metropolis. Ryan and I serve in a smaller area with declining church attendance. Imagine a community with hundreds of already established churches. Many of these churches are decaying and in decline numerically. The average size congregation is under fifty in weekly attendance. A church that is baptizing regularly and reaching a weekly attendance above the seventy-five mark is considered a healthy church in this community. He expressed that Foothills wanted to plant many of these type churches across the region.

It is my observation that Ryan is a deep thinker, still his answers are quick. He has obviously thought through the strategy of multisite. His engaging way brings synergy to a conversation. The next phase of our conversation took us into the benefits of multisite and the challenges that Foothills has had to overcome. Ryan expounded on the perceived benefits for the ministry. “We have had to minimize our focus to fewer things. This model has forced us to choose the few things that we can do well. We are giving up good things to do the best things. We have determined that if something we are trying to do is not reproducible, we cut it. We want to offer as close as possible, the same ministry in each location; small groups, weekend worship and ministry to the community. Multisite has given [us] clarity for the vision and an opportunity for better alignment. It has unified the pastoral team. It [the team,] has always been great but we now have a better unity than we’ve ever had.”

Ryan moved right into the challenges that the church has faced. With an emphatic almost preachy tone, he stated that, “There are a lot of challenges. Division has come to those who were comfortable and complacent. They liked the church the way it was. People have left because of it. Multisite has exposed the structure of the church. Many things have become evident such as lack of support for certain things like children’s ministry etc. It has exposed that there is not a lot of information out there concerning multisite in a rural community; that not many are doing this
in the rural areas. There are very little resources to guide us, we have to write and figure this out as we go.”

I asked him if the benefits outweighed the challenges. He responded, “Yes, we’re sacrificing everything to see this work. The idea of not having to think about how to get all the teens of this county into one place, but to actually go out to them is good. Raising up leaders to replace themselves for the sake of actually leading new ministries because they are desperately needed, keeps us focused on reproduction.”

“What about the autonomy of the local church,” I asked. From Ryan’s pause, I realized that I had hit on a subject that this quick thinker had not considered. He pondered the questions for a moment. I offered to move on from that question and he declined, saying, “I don’t think it violates scripture, it upholds it. It takes the DNA of a church and multiplies it out. Doing live preaching, musicians, we are raising up people for ministry in each campus. It recreates something healthy. It’s not about one campus controlling another; it’s all one church in multiple campuses.” His answer seemed very practical yet less weight on the theological side, however, at the heart of his response was the unity of a single church site, offering ministry across a large area. I asked if he stood on a scriptural basis for multisite. Again, it seemed that this was not an area that he had spent much time considering. “Acts two is the scriptural basis. Churches were also established all over the region from Jerusalem.” With that statement, he stopped talking signaling that it was time to move to the next series of questions.

The last segment of our conversation was the most productive. The questions of advice and do-over’s seem to reveal much concerning next steps for a church in multisite and first steps for those heading in that direction. I asked Ryan what advice he would give to a ministry wanting to be multisite. Back to his seemingly prepared self, these answers shot out without a
break. “Make sure God spoke to you. Have you done your research, are you led by the Holy Spirit? In a smaller community, this model is not easily embraced; there is not a lack of churches just a lack of vision. Do you have a team? How big is your faith? You have to be willing to risk it all. What is your leadership style, vision, how is your evangelism? Do you have a heart for the gospel?” He went on to say that, he would tell them, “You have to contextualize [ multisite] in your setting.” He expressed that there are things that do not work in the rural areas that does work in a metropolis. I asked, such as what? “It seems that video-driven preaching is not as easily accepted, for instance.”

In the final area of discussion, Ryan shared passionately about what he would do over if he had the chance. It was obvious that the matter of church health and growth is personal to Ryan. His first comments were revealing concerning the leadership’s lack of buy-in at Foothills. He stated that if he could change, he would go back within the leadership to make sure there was lifestyle buy-in as opposed to merely verbal buy-in. “The team must be unified behind the vision. The DNA has to be implanted in the leadership.” It was obvious that Ryan was frustrated that leaders had not bought in to the idea of multisite. Some of the leaders had never attended the first site and others had been there very minimally. Ryan is a regular speaker at this site along with Dave the Campus Pastor. He knows firsthand the potential this site has and he has been frustrated at the apparent lack of support. He also expressed that he wished we had understood the context of the first site in the beginning and had figured out how to reach the people of that community better. Adding to this in a somewhat frustrated tone, he said, “Make sure the things we do are already reproducible from the beginning, work on fewer things; get up a campus [all vital elements] 100% from the start. Make sure the lead pastor is clear on what the vision is. We needed to get the basics of reproducing down. People need the idea that they worship and serve
on Sunday. The most important ministries for success are children’s ministry, first impressions, interactive services, small groups and student ministry. I then asked him if Foothills had any statement used to help people grab these concepts. He replied, “We exist to help people experience life change through Christ. We ask people to attend a cGroup [small group] and a worship service. This needs to be driven into our volunteers.”

**Case Study Two – Cross Point Church**

Cross Point church is a three-year-old multisite church in Hickory and Taylorsville, North Carolina. An innovative church with two sites and a desire develop pastors through its own system of leadership development. This ministry started out of a desire for a new expression of worship in rural communities for church. The church now has three part-time pastors with a dream of planting another campus by leaving the original pastor at the first site and starting a new location. The ultimate goal for Cross Point extends beyond locations and is to become a network of planters associated with the ministry.

**Ron Black**

It was a quaint little coffee shop obviously Christian, with little quips often found on the walls in a coffee shop. One such sign caught my attention, it read, “All children found unattended will be given a double shot of espresso and a puppy.” I like pithy statements like that! I had arrived early to a meeting with young church planters and had set apart some time before my meeting to talk with Ron Black from Cross Point Church. When I got there, Ron was already waiting and some of the other pastors were already present for their meeting that was almost an
hour away still. Pastors of new churches often hang out in places like this so I did not find it too strange, but I wondered if we would be interrupted or prohibited from our conversation. We found a little private area in the shop and we began our conversation. The room, with its dim lighting and décor, reminded me of the Moroccan room at the Liberace mansion in Vegas where I officiated my brother’s wedding some ten years ago. Eclectic, small and somewhat secluded from the rest of the shop.

Ron is a young, vibrant individual with an obvious passion for the ministry. His dark hair and short cut gave him the appearance of a clean-cut person, neat and orderly. His clothes and tattoos aligned him with a younger generation. He is not a throwback to an older generation, probably just a person trying to fit into two cultures, that of being a pastor and the accepted norms for that role and that of being himself, living in his culture. I think all pastors face this challenge early on. It’s not the question of who am I, but rather who am I supposed to be? Ron, I think is figuring that out. He’s determined to do a good work and is preparing himself through theological training, conferences and strategic relationships with other pastors.

“Ron, how long have you been involved as a pastor at Cross Point?” “We launched in January of 2012, but I’ve been involved in leading the Taylorsville campus since September of 2011.” Ron had started under the tutelage of Shane, the Senior Pastor. Ron was involved in ministry at an entry level. Little did he know that God had some bigger plans for him just around the corner from when he began at The Cross Point Church.

“Help me understand the motivation for Cross Point Church in becoming multisite.” “From the beginning the vision God gave Shane [the Senior Pastor], was a church that plants churches. A core value is to grow exponentially through multisite. If you’re making disciples you will grow. [We were] trying to reach people from all walks of life.” “Have you done that?”
“Yes in the two churches we’re reaching different people. The people in Taylorsville are way different from the people in Hickory.”

“Did you know up front who you would reach or did you have to figure this out later? Was there any demographic work done prior to launching?” Ron’s answer gave an insight to a less-than-thought-out approach to church planting. “Yes, but we still thought we would reach people that were different than the results we received as the main demographic.” This made me wonder if the church was operating more out of zeal than a studied approach. “So Ron, what did you learn?” With a chuckle that sounded somewhat like a confession he said, “You can’t go based on who you think you’re going to reach, the people are going to be the people. We made adjustments.”

The church began to target its approach by working to understand the community better. If you could image a missionary going to a foreign land, they would not expect those living in that land to take on the customs of the missionary. Every missionary knows the importance of understanding the culture and adapting to it. The Cross Point Church was learning this truth.

“So what are the benefits for being multisite?” “Reaching a different type of people in a different area [and to] be more convenient; people not having to drive as far.” Being five months into this site, the benefits seemed to be minimal as far as our conversation. I wondered what he might say in one or two years since the church was so new, I had this idea that perspective over a long period would reveal so much.

As we continued, he shared what he thought some of the negatives were to multisite planting, having obviously already become acquainted with them in his short tenure at his site. From his own experience, Ron began, “If you haven’t planned correctly with the beginning group, there will be problems. Part of our membership class was [us] telling people that we
would be a church that planted churches.” Ron’s emphasis on *us telling them*, reminded me of leadership mistakes I had made. When you are in a pastoral position, it is easy to think that everyone will follow; they just need to know where we are headed and hear the all charge signal. How naïve, still it seems there is this learning curve for all leaders. Ron was revealing the fact that he was still on this curve. I could feel for him, I think most are still there in many respects too. He continued, “They [people in the class] acknowledged [this] but didn’t fully understand [the vision]. They heard the vision but didn’t own it.” “Are you talking about vision alignment?” “Yes, in part of our membership class we teach, we told people but as far as buy-in, they didn’t fully understand it.” Vision casting is like throwing a net out, if nothing is in the water you will come up with an empty net. The task of a great leader is to put in the water or in this case, in the minds of key leaders what you hope to catch. Visions statement, conversation and time with key leaders explaining the vision on a personal level are all vital. The meetings before the meetings, the times of prayer and seeking God all are part of seeding what will come into that vision cast when you cast it. It appeared to me that Ron was getting the idea that casting vision was not the answer, it was not enough.

Ron and Cross Point Church were now struggling with the issue of people adopting a vision that they did not conceive or have time to think through. It was noticeable to me that Ron’s passion and excitement over his new ministry had kept his determination intact. I asked him how the church dealt with this lack of buy-in. “We started in small ways like casting vision each week. We started using almost mini-sermons each week, scriptures, and vision statements weekly.” This is a new approach for Cross Point so the details on its success are not available. The church has identified vision miss-fire as an issue and is working on it.
This made me wonder how in-tune and sold-out to the vision Ron was? I asked him what the vision statement for the church is. He answered without hesitation, “To reach people far from God and lead them into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.” Now, I realize that every church has a purpose statement and that there is much confusion over what a mission statement and purpose and vision statement is, still I pressed in. “That’s sounds like a mission, something you do? I rephrased the question, in vision sense, what will Cross Point Church look like in five years?” After a long pause, realizing that I was not asking for their purpose but more their production, not who they are but what they will actually do, he admitted, “I have no idea.” Ron’s next statements revealed a lack of thought and or delivery from the team to him of a clear picture of what they hoped Cross Point would become. He shared what seemed more like a wish list than a plan. “I hope that we would be, uh . . . we’re two churches, I would hope there would be another church in another area . . . Work place ministry where people are intentional about the gospel. . . We want to partner with other missions around the world, training leaders. I would hope in five years we would be doing all those things.” It has been said of preacher that when there is a mist in the pulpit, there is a fog in the pew. I think this saying could be applied could to the vision of a church as well. The clearer the church is concerning its vision; the more definite about the future as God has revealed the better response from people. While the church may have these statements and an understanding of what the next five years brings, I was not getting that from Ron.

I was further intrigued that he mentioned that they were two churches. Did he mean they were separate churches or separate sites? Was he referring to a partnership, an association or an actual multisite one church model? I said, “Let’s dig deeper. When you say you’re two churches, what does that mean to you?” Not understanding the question in mind about the model as one
church verses multiple churches he answered, “I guess this goes into the whole multisite idea. Whenever we approached this idea, we decided this is what we can do. Looking over options, we didn’t have the money or equipment for video so we decided that we would have a live presenter at each church. We saw that a pastor at each location can address specific needs to the people there, as opposed to a guy who’s not there. We saw that it worked so much better when the pastor knew the people.” I was not sure what this statement was based on, still, wanting to understand if both sites considered themselves as part of the other I asked, “would the people of the Taylorsville church say they are part of the Hickory church?” “They would probably say they are affiliated or partnered with, sort of. A lot have never been there.” Now we were getting somewhere. He was revealing that the model was not a one church, multiple locations model but some sort of hybrid model. I asked another question. “Are the finances under one roof?” “Yes.” “Are the preaching topics the same at both places?” “Right now they are, yes. We go off the same scriptures.” In my mind, I was trying to put Cross Point Church in a working category for multisite, I could not think of one that they would fit into. Maybe the questions of autonomy and self-governance would reveal more about Cross Point.

“Let’s move into another discussion about multisite. Some people say that multisite violates the autonomy of a church. What would you say?” Ron’s answer did not clear things up for me about their structure, but I could tell that this exuberant young man with obvious gifts was just getting his feet wet in the theological world. It seemed that he did not have a working definition for autonomy. I probably would not have at his age or experience. He responded with an answer better suited for a question about eldership and preaching. He said, “I’ve heard that, I don’t like to be critical of different styles. My belief is that if you have one guy doing all the preaching, you are limiting yourself to discipleship in raising pastors. We’re a mixture of
autonomous and freedom. We try to train a pastor more so now, than when planting a new church. Some say that’s unbiblical, I would say that’s not unbiblical.” I followed up with, “What scriptures do you stand on for multiple locations?” After a pause, “In my own personal understanding of the book of Acts, Paul established the elders [in the churches].”

“Ron, what advice would you offer another church wanting to be multisite?” “Spend a lot of time deciding whether you’re going to do multisite, with a speaker piped in [live video] or establishing preachers in each location. We had the mindset that we were going to do video but we couldn’t get that up and running. I wasn’t a preacher, wish I had known that I was going to be preaching before we started.” “What would you have done differently?” After a chuckle, he said, “I would have prepared a whole lot more. At that time [before the second site], we took turns in writing sermons. It was easy for me to accept a message and make it my own. Now that I’m writing my own, way more work is involved.”

“Well let’s say you were going to start another site, what would you do differently?” With another hesitant response, similar to others I had heard throughout the discussion, he replied, “We sort of have a plan.” I had heard, “we sort of,” and “we try to” a lot in Ron’s comments, I think they are revealing as to a leadership plan and church structure still in the works. He continued, “We use Porterbrook, [a theological training tool] and stuff that we’ve written, assessments, and internships and a residency where they [campus pastors] would go with another pastor. Shane got Hickory going then he’s putting Johnny [another Pastor] over that. He’ll go to start the next one. Residency would have someone sit under him.” I thought well, there is more thought than I realized here. I followed up, “Do you have any written manuals or documents for this process?” The answer was exciting for me, then a little disappointing. “Yes, this is all brand new stuff, even as new as yesterday we were writing this stuff down. We’re
getting all that typed up and ready to go.” I was disappointed because I could see that the planning was getting done, but it was not in place. It is kind of like having to write a map after your hike, and while I realize that Cross Point is forging new territory, much of this sort of thing is already mapped out in other ministries. I also wondered how much buy-in would come from the rest of the church on something typed up and handed out, if that is how it is presented. You see the people of this region are very independent, they will not be told what to do. However, once they know what they are supposed to do, they are some of the most tenacious people on the planet.

Adding to his response Ron said, “I would [also] spend a lot more time and effort putting the vision out there for people to understand, that the plan is to plant churches. The only reason people leave a church to start another one, is that they are mad. We need to change that. Drive the vision. Make sure people are on board with it; otherwise, this might not be the place for you.”

Now, it has been my experience that people rarely leave over theological issues, they often leave over style issues and many of those style issues could be overcome if the people just knew “why.” Saying, “this may not be the place for you,” is like saying, “this is how I want it done and you can take it or leave it.” Some will take it and some will leave it. I could not help but think of the same mistakes I had made using those same words thinking that I was leading with them. “We saw people that just didn’t get it [the vision].” As I heard these words, I thought to myself, maybe they are not supposed to get the vision, maybe they are supposed to get you. Very few people are visionary-type people; they need someone to see for them. If a leader does not give the why along with the what, it will look like vision miss-fire. We will say things like, “They didn’t get it”. We never say, “We failed to understand what they needed to be able to receive it,” just, “They didn’t get it.” I also noticed in Ron’s vision statements, there were no comments
about planting other churches. Granted this was a short interview, but it made me wonder what the true goal is for Cross Point Church.

**Johnny Copeland**

I first met Johnny Copeland at a conference about two hours away from my town. My team had gone to hear a nationally known speaker. The church we went to was meeting in a mall. At the lunch break, we made our way to the food court. Johnny, a friend of one of my staff members, had joined us to eat in the food court. The mall was one of those dying mega-shopping sites that was losing stores and starving for vendors to fill open slots. The food court businesses seemed pleased to have so many come to them for lunch. The area was at least alive with some activity and commerce. I asked Johnny about the church he was serving in and it was there that I learned about Cross Point Church. It is always refreshing to see young men passionately explaining what God is doing in their life. It is also motivating to see them release their zeal verbally through what they are feeling. Cross Point Church has a big vision it seems, I thought to myself. A year later, I would be coming to Johnny and the team from Cross Point for this interview to understand their multisite approach.

After working out schedules for an uninterrupted conversation, I was able to talk with Johnny over the phone. He told me about his tenure at the church and how he was involved since the very beginning of the church. Not only was Johnny now the Lead Teaching Pastor for the Hickory campus, he had been with the church since it started two years prior as part of the core team.

“Johnny, help me understand the motivation behind Cross Point’s multisite ministry.”

“The main motivation was a group of forty-five people driving from Taylorsville to Hickory [to
attend church]. We knew all along that when it was time to go multisite, that’s where we would go first. Our founding pastor lived there. “So you knew you would be multisite before you started?” “Yes, it’s a little watery, but my idea of multisite has evolved. Shane was pouring this in us. We were all at a previous church together and Shane was teaching us. Shane was a Children’s Pastor before we started Cross Point. It started out of a Saturday night service of that former church. We knew that to move to another level we had to move to a church plant instead of just a [Saturday night] service. The first motivation was that other churches in the area were not reaching pre and slightly post college age people, they were dropping out of church.” As if pointing to himself he said, “We wanted to reach them. Continuing he expounded, “Our methods are different from the church we attended. We pursue growth and learning, [it is] a core value.”

Wondering about this segment of the population they had settled on, I was curious as to what led them to that population group. Where was this focus for their church from; an observed phenomenon, was it national surveys about the younger generation or was it hard-earned demographic work conducted by their church? I asked, “How did you know there was a segment of the population not being reached?” “Personal experience; my friends I went to school with are not in church today even though they went to a Christian school. [Also] statistics that Shane had brought to us from different surveys, [pausing] uh, I don’t remember specific numbers; we could see it happening.” I have read reports too but was wondering how deep their research went. I followed up with, “Were these specific demographic studies or regional studies that reflected your area?” With an honest answer Johnny replied, “I’m not sure, Shane brought this to us, you’d have to ask him for that. I don’t remember.” With that, we pressed on.

“Johnny, can you help me understand some of the benefits that have come from multisite as well as some of the challenges Cross Point has faced? I want to hear the benefits, but truly the
challenges will be more instructive.” He opted to start with the challenges. “Looking back, I was thinking about a statistic concerning the loss of the core church planting team after year one. We hadn’t prepared for that. We didn’t have older, wiser counsel; no one guiding us. This was the biggest issue. Our main challenge was not knowing [what to do]. The vision was always there. The casting [of vision] and getting it from a concept then to real life is a challenge. [This is where] we struggled. In crisis management dealing with decisions, we didn’t see coming. While everyone would vote [if asked] for discipleship and a process [thinking this is a good idea], two years later we’re just coming to an understanding of how that happens. If we had developed that earlier it would have saved us some heartache. We had leaders in roles where they didn’t fit.”

Further he explained, “I hear stories of people being put into roles because they [the church] have a need, not because they are a good fit. [We had] team leaders investing in people, hoping for them to develop, when they weren’t a good fit to begin with. It is never a pleasant feeling to verbalize something negative that you have been holding in, yet immediately after you verbalize a struggle, a sense of peace seems to come. It may be because we at least now have a clearer picture of what we’re dealing with.” I sensed that Johnny was coming to some conclusions both before and during our conversation concerning leadership development and church structures for multisite.

“Can you share any challenges that you’ve already overcome?” “In our vision casting, getting everyone on the same page, we’re still working on this. The past two years has taught us what not to do.” I followed up with, “What didn’t work?” “We say campuses, we have two locations, our model is different. We are two locations that have the characteristics of a campus. You can’t have, in our experience and our area, a solid lead pastor leading in all capacities. The example is that of leading in the air and on the ground. What you have in most multisites is the
piping in of a sermon on a screen. We thought it was a good idea, but we had no money to do this. We quickly saw that that is not what’s needed, we need pastors leading.” Johnny’s comments revealed a lack of in-depth looking at multisite. Many multisite churches use a variety of delivery systems. Some live and some electronic. I was wondering if Johnny’s comments were based purely on his experience. It is easy to look at a large multisite church and assume their success is the ability to use video, I think that would be a mistake. Many factors go into a successful multisite church beyond their delivery systems. I could see all the learning that was taking place for Johnny and the Cross Point Church but I wondered if they were going to have to learn everything by trial and error. It seems that researching what God is already blessing would be in order, but for some that may not seem as spiritual, I suppose.

Johnny continued with words that again seemed unsure. Words like, “We think” or “Transition” were the flavor of his tone. “Our services feel the same, same music, same web-site. We think the pastor who pastors in the air needs to pastor on the ground. We are in transition right now” [indicating another structural move]. “Shane has been preaching in Hickory but not leading day to day. He’s in the air but not on the ground. I’ve stepped up to preach more and more. I was leading on the ground all except for preaching Sunday AM.” The strategy seems sound, the man who preaches is the man who nurtures. The only problem is, what do you do when the church is larger than one person can lead? This goes back to the idea that the problem was with the pastor. I wondered how long it would take to realize that the problem may be deeper than that?

Expounding on the vision, Johnny shared, “We are a church that plants churches that looks and smell like Cross Point, but is lead by a pastor. The benefit is that, with people from all over, we have two locations to send people to. The goal is a live pastor at each location. Video
services have worked in some areas, but for us, a live presenter is the goal. That person speaks, leads, and develops others.”

I followed up with a question and the answer I received confirmed some of my thoughts concerning the approach of Cross Point Church. “Are you modeling this after another ministry?” This next phrase cleared much up for me in understanding. Johnny replied, “This is trial and error, we’ve looked at other models from the outside, reading articles.”

Trying to learn and understand in light of just hearing that their biggest challenge was not knowing what to do, I asked, “How is this different than when you started with a, ‘I think this might work approach?’” “Yes, I think when we started we learned from mistakes. Actually playing it out has changed. It is trial and error right now. Certain models have worked but we don’t know what will work in this area. There’s a caution in me that has come out since starting location two. Before we do a third campus, we need more investigation. Finding a place that is doing it as we’re doing it. I haven’t found that yet. In our case we’re trying to merge the two concepts of campuses and live presenters and resources, graphics, music etc.” Johnny was referring to an approach that places the campuses as partners in ministry but not actually multisite. It would be more of an association of churches than merely a one church model.

He went on to say that, “We’re looking for people to be part of our network. The pastor can translate the content to the needs of the community. I have no first-hand experience [in other communities] but a pastor from there would.”

We shifted our discussion to the autonomy of the local church. Concerning autonomy Johnny responded, “Well I think that, we see a little of that. I’m not to the point where I think campuses are bad; I think that statement is what has driven us to call our campuses church plants. We have a pastor and team leader who are from that area. They have the freedom to know what
the spiritual food needs to be for his congregation. A pastor who is not [from that community] does not know what the teaching needs to be. We’re providing basic content. Our pastoral team pulls out the main message of the text and each lead pastor has the authority to know how to bend that message for those who need to hear it.” Johnny went on to give some examples. “If we’re going to hit on small groups, Taylorville has a 90% rate of attendance. In Hickory, it has at 30% rate. Therefore, the emphasis will be different based on the situation at the campus. Hickory needs to know why small groups are important while Taylorsville can work on deepening relationships and growing the groups with the lost.” Johnny’s answers were instructive on the workings of the ministry, but never covered the idea of being a self-governing, autonomous church. The structure the lead pastor was working on appeared to address the concerns of autonomy. Maybe Johnny did not fully understand this issue.

I asked Johnny what advice he would give another church wanting to do multisite? “I would warn or caution to ask what the purpose is behind it. If there is a desire for multisite, it means that you’ve outgrown or have people from another area. Make sure it’s not just to grow your church bigger, know why. [See] if God has raised up leaders who are called and equipped. That’s what I would look for.”

“Johnny, you’re now two years into this process. If you could go back to the beginning and modify what you’ve done, what would you change?” “We always could ask [ourselves], did we do the Taylorsville site too early? I think we did, but at that time we felt like we either had to wait and do more homework, or go forward.” The choice to these two options made me think of youthful zeal. When you are young and there is an obstacle, you just push harder. If it is a mountain, you might think it will move, but in time, you will understand that it moves you. Sometimes the obstacle moves, not by more muscle power but by more mental power. Cross
Point chose sheer determination. “We went with going forward so as to get church planting into our DNA. We knew people would struggle. We took away thinking that church is a club. We wanted people to get that from the beginning. We weeded out people who didn’t understand or get that concept.” “Any regrets,” I asked. “We may have let that vision come across better, giving time, taking time, or using the time to convey the vision to the people better. Maybe another six months to prepare our people in understanding and getting people to buy in.”

Wanting to understand this model of ministry, I dug into some of the mechanics of their structure with some quick questions that would reveal the level of autonomy and connection. “Are you financially under one umbrella?” “Yes.” “What was the cost for starting the Taylorsville campus?” “We did a giving campaign, we had a goal, big, but we didn’t reach it. We got 20% of the goal pledged and then only 40% reached of that which was pledged.” This made me wonder what approach was taken for the campaign. I wondered what drove them to start the campus after receiving around 7% of the stated goal needed financially.

I shot out a few more questions. “Are you successful and why?” “Yes, lives are being changed. I have names of people I could give you. We’ve moved too fast [but] we are learning, but lives have been changed. It’s made it all worth it. Some [of these people] were under-discipled or already churched but not living it [Christianity] out. Marriages changed. I’m happy with this.” “Have you broken the 75-100 barrier?” “No, collectively were right around 100 now in both places. We’ve dropped from last summer, maybe because we started Taylorsville too soon. We have a little more than 100 collectively.”

With that, we ended our conversation. Honestly, I was frustrated by the end of this interview. I wanted to tell Johnny and Cross Point Church to stop! I wanted to say, “Wait!” You have an awesome opportunity, talented young men, two locations, passion and drive, but without
some knowledge, these locations will not reach their potential. I thought to myself, though, who am I to tell them this? I am trying to learn from them. I considered the fact that after my research, I would share all of my conclusions with them.

Shane Cunningham

The Spilled Bean is an eclectic coffee shop in Taylorsville, North Carolina. It’s strategically located on the corner of two main intersections. Shane, the owner is also the Planting Pastor of Cross Point Church. After securing a time to meet in person, our schedules changed and we were forced to talk via the phone. As we started our conversation, I could hear the chatter of people in the coffee house and while I listened, my mind was working to picture where Shane might be. Was he near the cash drawer checking customers out or was he behind the counter near someone washing cups and making coffee? All the sounds ran together. It was hard to tell, yet none of that had anything to do with my call. Strange how the mind can cause someone to focus on things that are insignificant while at the same time being asked to focus on something very important.

I asked Shane about his role at the church and he told me that he was the Lead Pastor. He then described himself in a way I’ve never heard before. He said, “I’m the Vision Pastor for Cross Point Church.” That was an interesting way of telling me that he was the primary vision caster and holder. I immediately could tell that Shane was an articulate and compelling communicator. As we talked, I sensed the urgency and passion in his voice. There are some people that make you want to follow them; I got that nudge from Shane in my own heart.

As our conversation went on, I could hear what sounded like a car’s electronic signal for an open door. My mind told me he was now getting in his car and the distractions around him
would dwindle. Obviously ready for our conversation, Shane jumped right into the church’s statements and dream for multisite. “[We are] continuing to do what God has called us to do. Called to reach people far away from God and lead them to a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Multisite has pushed us to extend our reach.”

“Shane tell me about this vision to be multisite, what drove this, was it your dream from the start?” “We didn’t start out with this [idea]; we planted like any other church. We hoped to be successful by reaching our vision. As we grew, we reached people and met new people. We began wondering about those outside our little area. We knew we had a great opportunity in Hickory; many of the leaders were from there. I lived in Alexander Country, thirty minutes away. The cultures were different. As we looked at the missions of Paul and the scriptures, we realized we had a greater responsibility than to plant in just one area.” I was thinking as he continued, about how the church was one year old when it decided to plant another site, “Extraordinary,” I thought to myself. I was curious to learn about the driving factors in that plant. He continued, “The Great Commission says go into all the world. We understood that what God had given us as a vision, and that we were to take it everywhere. You see, regardless of numeric growth, we wanted to be spiritually mature. We wanted leaders who reproduce, who go back to where they are from and reach their community. We determined that God had not called us to reach only this one area. We decided we would be a church that plants churches. We prayed about it, there were struggles and challenges, but God called us to it.” There was no doubt concerning the passion of this young planter. Determination was certainly not a short-falling for Shane.

I decided to probe a little deeper, “Why multisite as opposed to sending a planter to a new area?” “Multisite accomplishes the vision God has given us in other places. We saw a greater
response through multisite. New areas mean new people.” Shane continued to talk about how a church planter who goes out on his own does not have the same support for ministry; there is a connection and resources they would not otherwise have.

“What benefits and challenges have you faced? What can others learn from you?” I explained that I was particularly interested in the challenges their church had faced to become multisite. “There’s been more challenges in our young age than benefits; the benefits will come [we believe]. One of the biggest challenges we’ve faced has to do with the communication of the purpose and the vision for the church. Explaining that to someone who has a traditional approach, [that is] one pastor, one location, it is almost impossible to help them understand. We’re telling them we’re supposed to be one church in many areas, that this is how it is supposed to be. When they understand the purpose behind it all, they start to see a greater purpose and take ownership.”

Without any prompting, Shane dove into the next challenge. “Another challenge is helping people to always have trust. When you get to two sites, people [at both sites] have all these questions in comparing between both locations.” As Shane talked more about the issues between the two locations, he revealed that most were over things like who gets what and why one site has something that the other does not. It reminded me of children fighting over the unwritten universal law of fairness. When a family has more than one child, at some point, one of them is going to pull the fairness card and cry foul over some issue, whether it is a toy, the front seat or really anything. Shane was experiencing that in the birthing of a new church location. “We need to always show this solid trust between leaders and people in both sites. We met the challenge by creating a principle that we picked up from North Point Church in Atlanta. We say, always choose trust over suspicion. We say, regardless of the circumstances, our people
are always going to choose trust before they choose to think [that] something is wrong. Trust always falls apart when people start to question leadership and authority.” This statement was a pause for thought for me. People will always question leadership. Was Shane saying that he allowed no one to question him? Was he insecure about his leadership or maybe not confident of the direction? How far would people follow?

“Shane, can you think of a time when you made a mistake and people chose to trust you through it?” “Yes, you know, I’ve always said to the leaders that God will grow his church in spite of me. The thing to know is that the people who love you will love you on good days and your bad days. This principle has given us the opportunity to fail more. Our people choose to trust and work through it.” Now, I know that Shane was not trying to fail, but it is true that if you are afraid to fail you will never attempt anything. I liked his passion and his risk-taking nature, but I had to wonder if this was an advantage or a liability for his ministry. He continued, “We planted in Taylorsville in an area that had not seen a church plant in sixteen years. The community was only accustomed to a single pastor leadership in churches. When we started Taylorsville, we explained that some of our church was going to go from Hickory to that site. It caused our church to move from a larger size group to a smaller group in Hickory overnight. Some had a problem with that and they left our ministry. Those who stuck by this were able to see a natural growth from both sides. It actually pulled us together. It didn’t work out as we thought, but God is in it and people have seen God’s hand on it.”

Wondering about structures and systems, I asked if he had any documents and written strategies. “We have a detailed description of what it takes to plant a church. It’s called our Cross Point Network. It’s a step by step process that states, here is the person that we’re looking for, what we require, what we seek, and then a step-by-step process to support this church plant. It’s
a detailed description. We’re always defining this. Every church is different because cultures are
different. We give flexibility in how we play this out. We know that some things may not work
in some areas. This document is an evolving document.”

I asked about other challenges. “Leadership challenges, we’re a young leadership. We
planted with the idea of reaching the un-churched. It’s what every church planter says they want
to do. Be careful, God will send you what you ask for. We received people who had no church
background and no spiritual base. The challenge for us has been leadership. If you focus on the
un-churched and planting new churches, you’re always looking for that next leader. It’s a process
of reproducing. Our average age is twenty-seven, making it a struggle to find great leaders who
can be readied for leadership and reproducing themselves. This is hard and takes time. Still this
is why we got into this.” “What leadership development do you have?” “We are working on a
process called Cross Point Leadership that includes; leadership training through Porterbrook,
basics of church planting and Christianity. Next, we ask people to apprentice, sitting under a
leader. Then they are assessed by a pastor and are mentored by an area pastor where they
consider planting. After that we release them to pastor a church.” I knew this was a plan that they
were working on and learning as they went. Most of this training seemed to be borne out of the
needs they found by their second site Pastor, Ron.

Moving into the theological foundations for the church, I asked Shane his thoughts on
autonomy and multisite. In an instructive voice as if speaking to a class he said, “We need to
understand that the church is not four walls and a roof. It is me, Pastor Johnny, the people. It is
everywhere. You can still have autonomy that leads and guides. It doesn’t have to be broken up.
It’s there, just not in one specific area. If we understand fully that, the Holy Spirit is within me,
then as the church I am able to be here and another pastor in another county. We have a unity
that brings us together.” “Is there a scriptural basis you stand on?” Thinking and chuckling, Shane’s comments came to a halt “You caught me off guard. We’ve been studying Acts two a lot. That’s our basis. The people come from all over and they broke bread and were together. They prayed together and sold possessions.” Shane was inferring that church is far more than the location. He went on to say, many of these people in Acts chapter two went back to their homes in other communities taking the church concept with them.

“What advice would you give to another church or pastor wanting to do what you’re doing?” In his answers, I sensed the fire of a preacher who has already had first hand contact with Satan’s attempt to destroy his ministry. With emphasis Shane spoke, “Always choose trust over suspicion.” This must have been a topic near to his heart since he spoke it many times. I wondered who had betrayed him or accused him. Who did he trust that turned on him with suspicion? He continued, “The devil is a liar and the father of lies. When you have a church decide to plant multisite churches, the devil is going to use that against the pastor and the leadership. He’s going to draw division from any place he can to stop this great vision. Your leadership has to come together and make sure [about the vision], knowing the devil is a liar and confuses people. We need to make sure that we choose trust over suspicion. Although I may not understand or I question, or if people are leaving and people may say, this is not what God wants. People need to hear that while they may not know all the details or see it all clearly, that they will still choose to trust the pastors as God leads them.” Continuing with advice while seeming to be personally reminded he said, “It’s going to be tough. Some days will be better than others [will]. There will be times when you’re going to question if this is what God wants. Knowing that God has called you to this, that we’re supposed to raise leaders, not stay in one area, to build His church till He returns, loving Him with all your heart, soul and mind.” As
Shane spoke these words, it felt like his own determination was being rekindled in some way. He truly believed the words he was speaking and I sensed they were not just for others.

Shane moved to the next area of advice based on a recent study of the book of Nehemiah concerning completion. “In our society we take completion as making a lot of money or seeing some sort of apparent success. We base it on money and people. Success is completion, doing what God calls you to do until Jesus returns; not giving up until that day.” Addressing his own fears he continued, “I could sit back and worry about the money or the fact that someone didn’t get saved. I could feel like a failure, but I’m not, Jesus Christ died for me. I’m a success story waiting to happen. Looking to His words, ‘well done’ is the completion, the reward.”

With another thought he added, “Also, to those who are considering multisite, I would tell you to be with your family. Pray together, spend time with the kids. I help my kids understand what we’re doing, too. Let them experience and see the fun that it is and all that God is doing. Don’t short-change your family because of the circumstances of the day. It’s a great adventure and a great calling.”

“So, Shane, what would you do differently if you could?” “I just turned thirty-three a couple of weeks ago and recently had this conversation. The answer to this is to go slow. I look back with all the zeal I’ve had as a younger person. I wanted to run through hell with a water pistol. I realize that I hurt my family and people more by not explaining the vision. We all need vision, it’s great, but if we don’t take time and explain the vision we’re just going to run over people. You need people who question the vision for balance. In times past, when people did this I thought these people wouldn’t follow [me]. That wasn’t the case, they needed to know. In explaining, you’re going to gain more warriors for Christ. If you don’t, you’re going to leave people behind. Ministry for the long haul takes time. Do it right, not just flying through it.
Another is to make sure that it’s God’s will. I’ve often done things that I was not sure if it was God’s will. But God is gracious and He understands that we’re going to mess up. We get back up and continue the mission of the gospel.”

In the end, Shane closed with a request for prayer and these words, “I think we are in the beginning stages of something great for God; it’s going to be really cool.”

Case Study Three – The Rock Church

The Rock Church is an eight-year-old church with six locations in North Carolina. They use a live speaking model for their weekend worship services with the campus pastors being the primary communicators. The Lead Pastor started as a Campus Pastor at the first location and is now serving as the primary overseer for the ministry. They use global pastors to oversee each area of ministry such as worship, children, and youth. Their dream is to double the amount of campuses within the next eighteen months.

Dan Iverson

With six locations after eight years of ministry, The Rock Church is an amazing place. It’s not that it’s so large or so different that makes them amazing it’s that the consistency of ministry across all six campuses is obvious. At the original campus, called “East,” the church transformed an old boat dealership into a worship complex. Yet across a lake, that divides the county and access to this campus, there is another campus that looks and feels the same. The “Denton campus,” so named for its community is an old car dealership. The décor, colors,
staging, banners, and graphics are identical to the East campus. This is true for the other four locations as well; repurposed grocery stores and dealerships now used for a higher purpose.

I have spent many personal hours with the team from The Rock Church and while we have discussed multisite many times, I have never had a lengthy conversation that was solely focused on their multisite model. Dan Iverson is the Executive Pastor for the church. His presence on the staff has been impactful. He came to the church as a consultant and stayed on as a staff member. His experience in the “Nuts and bolts” of the inner working of church life is rich. A former Senior Pastor and Multisite Pastor, he is now an Executive Pastor with The Rock. His detailed mind is well suited for the type of work that he is doing and has made him a great candidate for this discussion.

Our conversation took place over the phone, due to tight schedules. This particular evening, Dan is driving home with about one hour in heavy traffic to get there. To make the best use of his time, we planned this conversation to happen then. I placed my digital recorder on top of my phone’s speaker and sat back in my chair as we began our discussion. After pleasantries, I asked Dan to help me understand the motivation behind a successful first site church to go to a multisite model. Dan is a former wrestler and wrestling coach; his answers often remind me of someone who is optimistically facing an opponent. There is this, “We can win” in his voice at all times, even if it is cleverly mixed with sarcasm. Dan replied with some simple words to begin with, “People need to experience life change through Jesus in every community.” I expected this answer from him since this phrase is the mantra of The Rock Church. As we dug deeper into the question, other factors began to emerge. “We had a lot of people driving a long distance to the first campus and thought there would be a core group in that location. We start new campuses to put churches in each community instead of expecting everyone to come to us. We’ve repurposed
buildings and made them into campuses, adding value to the community. We’re after people who
don’t go to church and they are more apt to go to [a] church in their community instead of
driving a long distance to get to church.” Dan’s answer began to reveal a strategy for their church
to reach new people outside of one geographic location. Yes, they want people to experience life change, but they also know that they must go to these communities.

I asked Dan to explain the benefits and challenges that The Rock Church has gained from being a multisite church. “The best benefit allows people to use their giftedness in ministry. New campuses open new opportunities and new roles. Elders, pastors, teachers, worship leaders, children’s ministry. In addition, to bring a church to a community versus [people] having to drive a distance to the church. There’s a great sense of team in multisite.” In stressing that there are many ways to operate and run a church ministry, Dan expressed that, “Multisite is a way to do church as a team; it’s not the only way just a way. We feel like we can do much more together than separately.”

It is easy to see how multisite is working to make The Rock Church more effective in their outreach, but I was curious about oppositions and obstacles the ministry has faced in the way of doing ministry. Since The Rock Church is into this journey for more than six years, there is some rich perspective concerning what they have experienced. This richness is borne out of practice and not theory. This rich understanding might be likened to the difference of what an engaged couple believes about marriage as opposed to a couple who has been married for six years. The engaged couple has theories about what it will be like, the married couple has real experiences that are not caught up in the emotional waves of idealism. Dan’s comments concerning obstacles were fresh and honest. His words centered on more recent struggles than earlier for their church. He talked about the leap from three campuses to four and the difficulty
they had, particularly with communication. “Structurally, going from three to four got real complicated and as we add more campuses, it gets more complicated.” I asked him to expound on this complication. “Being able to reproduce ministries and getting material into the hands of the site [leaders,] it got more difficult in some areas. Also, how to maintain a distinction we have. We are driven by quality with a spiritual base.” Then, almost in a tone of confession, “we’re struggling [with] how to maintain excellence in each site. There needs to be a lot of training on the front end to make sure that happens.”

Our conversation moved to the theological side of multisite church. I asked Dan to help me understand why a multisite church was scriptural. “[In] understanding one church in multiple locations, every person comes in to a church [location] that is part of the other [locations]. People are very much aware of this up front. The things that happen at one campus happen at the others campuses. There’s a piece that comes to understanding the idea of local, when referring to the church. If you look into the New Testament, you’ll not find the word local, [it] is not there in referring to the church. We are not individual churches governed by a hierarchical position. We are one church, we have a lead pastor [and] each campus has individuality. From a scriptural perspective, it’s not as clear cut in the New Testament. You’ve got outsiders appointing elders in the New Testament.” I stopped him like a traffic officer pushing back charging cars from entering an intersection. I asked him to clarify what he meant by “outsiders”. “You have Titus appointing elders, Paul going from community to community, [to] places he was not from, appointing elders. The person [he] appointed was from the community, but governed by someone outside [of the community]. Dan’s answers were clear and confident. I could see the wrestler coming out of him as he worked to defend this model. It was apparent that he had dealt with this issue before and his answers were tightly focused on the topic.
We moved our discussion away from the theological and back on the pragmatic. “Dan, what advice would you give to a ministry wanting to become multisite?” Lightening the mood after the more aggressive tone of the last question, he said, “Don’t”. We both laughed as he continued. “It is very hard, multisite is hard. It’s a way to do church. Your church could give $10,000 a month to start a new church, $120,000 a year. You give it and walk away. Going multisite puts you hands-on in the process. If you are going to go to multisite, you need to go to school on multisite. Equally, you need to pray and seek God. It is very taxing and it is not the easiest thing to do. It’s also expensive to start campuses, sometimes more expensive than planting a single church. Then there’s the unity piece. How do you get unity across two campuses? You’re always working on that as well. Read all you can; talk to multisite pastors. You also need resources to do it.” As Dan spoke, I could sense his thoughts moving to the logistics of multisite. He dug further in, “If you’re going to do a mobile site, you have technical needs, lighting, sound, video, all this needs to be considered up front.”

“What kind of money are we talking about for a good first site,” I asked. “In my past experience I would say anywhere from $70,000 to $120,000 depending on where you’re going and what you need.” “What do you base that on?” “Well, that depends on whether you’re going to be mobile or not. A school gym or auditorium will not be as much financially as repurposing an old grocery store with the up-fit.” His next comments seemed very insightful and gave a glimpse into some of the deeper learning that Dan and The Rock Church had discovered concerning financing a site. “You have three phases, there’s the pre-launch budget, start up [budget] for staffing, purchase of equipment, rental agreements and such. Then you have the launch budget; everything you need to start that campus, then a post launch budget that sustains the operations of the church. It depends on where and how you do it and what you need. If
you’re in an auditorium, you don’t have to buy chairs. In a gym you may have to provide chairs.”

“Do you have any documentation on all this?” “Yes, I do. One addresses the profile of a campus pastor. You need to address if you’re going to be video or live and if video, how does that main communicator come across on video? [Also you need to know if] video [will] be received by the demographic audience? The campus pastor becomes the face but not the communicator in a video driven site. On the flip side, if live [preaching], you need a communicator that can speak week in and week out.”

I asked if there was a certain gift set that, he was looking for. “We look for people with the ability to preach and from a personality perceptive, we use a DISC profile. Our campus pastors are high “I”s. There are individual challenges [in this style with live communicators] and that is a good thing. It [the diversity] brings strengths to the team across the board.

I began to be curious about the shepherding role Dan would play. It seems that most executive pastor’s crunch numbers and make decisions for hires and mortgages but Dan’s role seemed different. I asked, “As an executive pastor are you shepherding the pastors?” “Our Lead Pastor and I do. We share that. My role at The Rock is unique. It doesn’t match to a lot of models.” Wanting to dig deeper I asked specially about correcting a pastor that is out of line. “We go directly to them and deal with them as the Matthew passage instructs us. That’s how we deal with anyone that’s out of line.” “Have you ever had a pastor go rogue,” I asked. “Yes we did, prior to my coming. This pastor decided that this was his church and Jay [the Lead Pastor] pulled that trigger and said no, it’s not your church, it’s our resources, and we’re The Rock Church.” The Rock went on to open this campus just three weeks later with a new campus pastor. Dan explained that since the core group was from other campuses and that they had not
opened the doors yet, people from the community outside of their ministry were not yet involved. This campus is now one of their strongest campuses.

Heading toward the last topics, I asked Dan to tell me what The Rock would do differently if they could go back and change what they have done. “There’s a tension when you look back, we wouldn’t change anything, we learned from them and felt God was leading us.” Rethinking his answer, he continued with a slight pause, “On the other side of that equation, we should have had some sort of business model to help us. Another thing, as we found [new] people and began rapidly growing, some people have gotten into leadership roles that have fallen and we’ve had to let people go. What we didn’t have in place was some of that support role and vetting processes, accountability partners [and] clear communications.

“How has communication been kept open?” “E-mails and things like that. We’ve gone to The City, an online resource tool for churches, a social media tool. Being intentional with what we’re trying to communicate, we’ve also decentralized some of this and the campus pastor is responsible for that [communication] locally.

Dan concluded with some thoughts concerning the unique nature of The Rock Church. “There’s a piece that we, in terms of doing multisite, [that] we understand the culture and we work hard to find like cultures. That’s why we’ve been successful so far. God has been in this. We are going to places that are like us, blue collar, suburban; I don’t know that we would do well in urban or very affluent areas. We know who we are and who we are trying to reach.”

With that, we ended our conversation. I had much to think about.
Jay Jackson

Jay Jackson is a very interesting individual. He is a former real estate agent with an incredible eye for property and acquisition. Formerly a business owner with the trappings of success, several homes and sports cars, he is now a preacher and the Lead Pastor of one of the fastest growing multisite churches in North Carolina. His ability to find, negotiate and up-fit a property as a church site is nothing short of amazing. Imagine an old car dealership, now abandoned and for sale. To the average person it’s not useful for anything but a similar business. That is not how Jay sees a building like that. In his mind, he is already seeing where the people park, gather for fellowship, and worship. He can see a new facade on the building, signage and a vibrant spiritual community. Now, The Rock Church did not start out that way. Just eight years ago, Jay was a start-up preacher in a start-up church. His dream was to reach the community around him. Jay is the kind of person who has two speeds, fast and faster. His mind is focused on the success of the gospel and everything he does centers around this mission he has been called to.

I asked Jay how he decided on a multisite strategy for his ministry. “[We] stumbled into it. We started near a lake and the way it’s built it became a natural land barrier to people who wanted to attend. Thirty to forty people were driving over thirty minutes to get to church [because of the lake]. We realized that God wanted to do something that was bigger than what we could do in this one location. We decided to take the church to them. We purchased a car dealership that went out of business. We told those who were traveling to meet there and [to] invite their friends. Those forty people became one hundred in the first year. The motivation for that was breaking down geographic and mental barriers to church.”
“Jay, what benefits and challenges have arisen because of this strategy?” “The primary benefit is that multisite will help a church of any size be able to grow their ministry numerically, financially and take the gospel to more areas around them. Multisite allows them to do that. Many older churches have issues with parking or obsolete buildings keeping them from expanding. Multisite helps to overcome that by not having to relocate, but by adding new locations. The shoe should not determine the size of the foot,” he said. He then began to share some of the challenges concerning multisite that The Rock Church had encountered along the way. “First is cost, it’s the most expensive way to do church. You have buildings, utilities, staffing issues [to fund]. You have to staff each position. Next, in a live speaking model it’s harder to maintain unity and consistency across the campuses. You don’t have that one [single] pastor that everyone connects with.” Jay’s answers were quick. His personality is such that when he has done answering a question, it seems there is nothing more to explore on the topic. Maybe it is his passion or the gravitas that he carries, or maybe it is just that Jay is always in fast forward.

I asked him about opposition to this model and what they have faced as a church. “Not tremendous”, he responded. “Miniscule, but [there was] one obstacle to overcome. Our first site campus was in a town of 900 people, it didn’t have the same success as the original site. [Initially] there was push back from that community complaining that this large church has come to town to take over. We had to go to the pastors of that area and communicate that we were not there to take over or take people from their church.” “How did you communicate with them?” “I called them and just told them we are coming but we’re not coming to take over or take people from your church. For most, they appreciated the phone call, others probably didn’t believe it.” Again, it seemed that the topic at hand was complete so we moved on again.
“Jay, what are your thoughts on the autonomy of the local church?” Answering in an emphatic fashion and reiterating the one church multiple locations phrase Jay said, “The Rock Church is total autonomous, one church in multiple locations, we are self governing. Each location chooses their pastor; we vote on land. We are just one church in many locations. Whether we meet at the local high school, the YMCA, or a building we own, we are one church. The church shouldn’t be tied to a location anyway; the church is the body of Christ.” I wanted to go deeper with this so I asked, “do all the campuses vote on land purchases?” “Yes, anytime we buy buildings or land we come together in a church-wide meeting and every member has a chance to voice their opinion.” “Who chooses the pastor for these sites?” “They [the site] does not [choose]. That comes more out of a practicality.” I was thinking this might get interesting, I was all ears. “Every time we launch there’s not an existing campus, we start with a pastor and a core team of preferably 70-100, usually 50-60 is what we send. That core team supports the new campus pastor. These campus pastors are someone that we raised up from within [the church].” His answer immediately made sense to me. They were starting a new church with already established people in their ministry. The new church site would bring new people to the ministry after the launch. The new church site truly is The Rock Church seeded from other locations.

“Jay what advice would you offer other churches interested in this model?” For the first time in our conversation, Jay had to stop, pause and gather his thoughts. “The first thing is to make sure that the church is outwardly focused. So many congregations today are inwardly focused. I would say that it’s almost impossible for an inwardly focused [church] to become multisite. We don’t launch a new campus for our members. We’re launching for people we don’t even know. It’s not what the church can do for them; it’s what they can do to reach new people.” I followed up with the obvious question, “How do you lead a congregation to be outwardly
focused?” At this point, I could tell that our conversation was winding down a little and Jay’s answers were coming slower. Maybe he was tired after a long day or maybe his mind was drifting to a myriad of other responsibilities he had. His response was short but to the point, “You have to teach evangelism, the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. If you truly love your neighbor you’ll want to tell them about Christ.” With that, again I sensed that this series of questions was complete and we moved on to the next.

“Jay, if you were to go back and change anything in your approach to multisite, what would it be?” He responded quickly, once again, as if he had the answer on his lips before I even asked. “If I had to do it today, I would try to be more intentional about having more visibility at the campuses [as the senior leader]. In the early days, I was a Campus Pastor and a Lead Pastor [at the same time]. Each campus [we added] pulled me away from the campus I pastored. [By the time we hit] site six, I was spending 80% of my time away.” I could tell that Jay was mulling over in his mind the situations that he felt he missed or could not give care for by sheer virtue of his time away. Jay’s ability in real estate and construction forced him to oversee the up-fit of the new campuses one by one. This is his passion, but it is hard on a pastor when he feels that other responsibilities are left undone. I could sense this frustration. He continued with another rethinking statement, “I under-estimated the amount the emotional toll it would take to launch each year. I would have left the campus pastor role after year three to give more oversight and visibility to all the campuses.” The additional load of campuses and the unexpected challenge that is unique to more than three sites presented Jay with a decision to be made. “Tell me about the shift of moving from three campuses?” “It becomes more complex between four and five campuses. This is true, particularly in the live speaking model. Unity is harder with geographic barriers and communication issues.”
Jay concluded his comments concerning multisite by saying, “I believe multisite is the wave of the future. There are well over 3,000 churches now in America doing multisite. Of the top one hundred fastest growing churches in America, a vast majority are multisite. It’s a great tool to help a church grow beyond the walls of where they’ve been.”

**Don Fallon**

Growing up in a Pastor’s home, Don knew first-hand the pressures of ministry. Still the ability to rely upon his dad must have been comforting when beginning his own ministry. Don became part of The Rock Church more than seven years ago as a congregant. He could have never foreseen the path that God had him on, from sitting in the pew to being the Lead Teaching Pastor over six campuses just seven years later. A gifted communicator and a capable pastor and leader, Don adds a youthful perspective to communication, multiplication and strategy. The fact that he is a master at graphic design also speaks to his eye for detail and creativity. Don is a valued member of The Rock Church preaching core and ministry lead team.

After some polite conversation, we started what would become a lengthy discussion on The Rock Church’s multisite strategy and inward workings. With Don’s unique perspective as a church member when the first site started to now being a Lead Pastor, Don’s insight was valuable to my research. “Don, please tell me about the motivations for The Rock Church becoming multisite.” A calculating person Don answered questions with more pauses and thoughtful interaction than the other pastors did from The Rock Church. “The simple answer is that we wanted to take what we were doing to a new community. We had people traveling over a natural barrier, a lake to come [to church]. We went to them and started the first site. We feel very strongly that our responsibility is to share the Good News with as many people as we can.”
Being multisite has helped us do that. “Has this worked out,” I asked. “Yes, the first site is in a small community, there’s only so many people there. Reaching beyond that [location] we started more [campuses]. “How many campuses will you start?” With a chuckle in his voice and air of expectation he replied, “We have plans to start as many as the Lord will lead us to.”

“Tell me about the benefits and challenges your church faced in moving this direction. I’m particularly interested in the challenges you faced.” “One of the biggest benefits is in the area of resources. We are able to provide resources to a new plant that most churches don’t have access to [when they start]. Things like systems, discipleship, assimilation, sermons, media, videos, graphics, print material. We’ve already developed those things and have done the leg work. Another [benefit] is the value of teamwork. Nobody who is a pastor or ministry leader is on their own. There is instantly a team around them, making us stronger. In addition, the sheer size of the church allows us to do things together that alone we could not. If we had a campus that is not receiving enough in offerings to cover [its] costs, the other campuses make up the difference.”

“Tell me more about the benefit to a campus pastor?” “One of the first things is fellowship and accountability. Having other guys who are doing the same things. That he [a pastor] can go to them for advice and encouragement is great. While other staff members can’t relate, others pastors can relate to the pressures and demands pastors face. On a practical level, in message preparation, having another communicator that is getting ready for the same message, it brings in more input on the front end. Everyone’s product is better, more complete.”

“One of the biggest challenges was simply explaining to the church what multisite is, most of the people had never heard of such a thing; it was totally new to them. We had to explain a lot before we launched. We needed them to have confidence for buy-in. We had to ask
people to give in a way that didn’t directly affect them or their location. We had to get them to see the big picture. It was hard starting and even continues now [to be hard].”

“Another challenge is unity with campus pastors and people seeing this as one church. We keep asking, how we keep our campuses unified when we don’t have that one person to rally behind. We think the answer is to rally people behind the vision and the mission. We’re still working on that. Multisite is a huge financial challenge”, he added.

Shifting gears and redirecting the focus I asked, “Don, what about the autonomy of the local church?” After a long pause, I offered to move on to another question. Don spoke and said, “We are one church in multiple locations. We may meet in many locations, but still we are one church. I tell people that if you had a church with services meeting in different locations on the same campus it would be the same, we just have more distance. Each church has a level of autonomy in reaching their community.” “Is there a scriptural basis you stand on for this?” “The church in Acts, they met in homes and temple courts, they were all the body of Christ yet in different locations.” I could tell that Don’s focus has been on shepherding and writing sermons and leading his staff. Maybe this was a question that he had considered, but not dealt with fully.

“Don, please share any advice you would give a church desiring to be multisite.” Giving advice as if from a checklist Don began to rattle off in a more confident fashion than when addressing the theological foundations. “Up front the church needs to understand why they want to do multisite. If the motivation is to have large numbers or a large church, ultimately you’re going to have a lot of difficulty. If you want to see more people come to Christ, this is a way to for that. Secondly, don’t do it if you can’t afford it. We chose by faith to do it. Decide what it will look like as you go into a community. Make sure the original location is already doing these things well. The [new] site can’t be less than the first, people sense that. It looks like an
afterthought [when you allow that].” Don continued diving into the structure of the ministry, “We don’t call the [sites] satellites, they are campuses [all] equal, not a central campus. Some of the best advice is don’t let multisite church be something that you try. It has to be who you are.”

Knowing that campus pastors can sometimes be an issue for churches with numerous sites, I asked if they have ever had a rouge pastor. “Every campus we’ve opened has stayed opened. We had a pastor try to go rogue. He went through the training we offer and three weeks before the launch he wanted to go his own way with all the equipment and people that we had set him up with.” This story caught my attention and like a good mystery novel, I wanted to know what happened in this situation. Don continued, “He opened his own church and had mild success then after three years it closed.” Whatever happened to your campus?” “We launched our campus without him and now it is four years old and have recently moved into a new facility with a pastor that came from that community. They’ve reached 400-500 in worship attendance.”

Don shared that some of the people from The Rock Church stayed with this rogue pastor but others stayed with The Rock and worked with the new pastor from their ministry to open the doors of this church on time and begin a ministry in that community. This situation led me to ask if there was an indication of the first pastor not being a good fit for their system. “We had concerns but thought he was teachable. We were, however, so glad it happened before launch and not after.” “How did that direct your future campus pastor selection?” “Character qualities were highlighted. In order to be a campus pastor, pride was a big thing to look for. There are other factors like that.” Don went on to tell me that Dan, the Executive Pastor, had a profile he had developed to assist in selecting campus pastors. “Campus pastors have to be team players, submit to authority and still have the drive to run things. It takes a pretty special person to be a campus pastor.”
“What would you do differently if you were starting to plant multisite all over again?”

Again, another long pause as to ponder such a thing, “Even if we changed anything I’m not sure it could have improved how it turned out. Looking back when we started the first campus, we started with video but that didn’t work; we went to a live communicator. We didn’t use a high enough quality of video and we lost the ability to go back to that as we moved forward. The community [we started in] was small and rural and didn’t accept a video pastor. We lost many people that may have stayed. We should have analyzed better to know this up front.” “What analysis would you have done?” “Video will be more successful with people who are tech savvy and digitally connected. They were rural and not as technical.” Don did not answer the question directly, but it was apparent that he was saying to know the people well enough to understand what connects with them. “What structures have changed?” “The jump from three to four was the hardest for us to manage. Now we’re getting that ironed out. If we could go back, we would have better systems in place. Communication is a big challenge. “How do you get communication to all your staff, volunteers?” “It’s easy when you can call a meeting but when you have four plus campuses you can’t just call a meeting. Software helped us. The City, a social media program, has been the biggest help to us. We can now communicate on many different levels, [across] campuses, [people to] people etc. Also out of this came an answer to the unity question. People can see a post from Pastor Jay and feel connected to the Lead Pastor. We have thirty people on staff and communicating is much easier now with The City. “Will you ever do video driven services again?” “We have not ruled that out; we want to use live but video is on the table, we just have to do it well.”

Thinking of how The City has helped for social networking with just church members, I asked about an internet campus. Internet campuses are springing up in churches all across the
nation, reaching out to people all over the world. “Yes we’re looking into that too. That would be for people that are out of this area. We have people who have moved or are serving overseas and they could still be part of the church.”

I asked Don for any final comments or anything I should be aware of for my research. “We’re still learning as a church; you need to know who you are and what God has called you to be, not what others are called to. Our model of multisite is not like any other church’s model. We don’t go to metropolitan areas; we’re not designed for that, that’s not us.” Don shared how The Rock Church seems to fit in the smaller, rural communities and that being aware of that has helped them in targeting new communities.

Case Study Four – High View Church

John Michelson

I had about a two-hour drive to get to Abingdon Virginia. It was a beautiful summer day through the Foothills into the mountains of Southern Virginia. I had decided to take my drive through these winding mountains instead of the straight and monotonous interstate path. The route through the mountains from upper Northwestern to Virginia’s Southwestern region may be one of the most beautiful drives in the Eastern part of the United States. I saw beautiful lakes and streams, roadside markets, little village hamlets with church steeples rising through the trees visible before I came across other signs of community life. I noticed family residences that have probably stood for generations.

I made my way to Pastor John Michelson’s home through the guidance of my GPS. Pastor John had been working from his home that day and was waiting for my arrival. A
spacious neighborhood, upper-middle class homes and a country flare one would expect in this part of Virginia. I parked and walked to the house where Pastor John greeted me. After some welcoming comments, we sat at his dining room table for our conversation. Pastor John is a gracious man with a clear and comforting voice. He is successful, but well grounded and humble; a model of Christian leadership. He is the kind of man who brings a sense of hope and purpose through what he says. I knew that I would enjoy my time with him.

I asked John to give me some background on his ministry. He started with, “I pastor the High View Church in Abingdon, VA, in the tri-cities region. God used me to start the church nineteen years ago. God had revealed that He was going to plant a church and I happened to be the one who was called, not the first to get the call, but the one who accepted it.” Then in a genuinely humble fashion, Pastor John said, “That’s usually how it happens. I’m not the first to get the call, but since others wouldn’t accept it, God calls me to do it.” He continued, “We’ve seen lots of neat things happen in this ministry. Early on, I found out about Rick Warren and his Purpose Driven method for church development. It spoke to me and we became a Purpose Driven church. We’ve grown to over 3,200 in weekend attendance with about 11,000 at Christmas services this past year. It has been our greatest year to date and God did it. Our prayer is that people would see this and say that only God could do this. God has been faithful to us.” John’s introduction was a brief look into a life of a man who truly has a love and appreciation for God’s work and God’s choice of using him in it. There is no sense of pretense or self-adulation, just awe for God at work.

I was interested in knowing more about the expanse of this ministry so I asked how many campuses High View Church had. As John answered, it seemed as though he realized that there were more campuses than he originally thought. “Let’s see, we have the internet campus, venues,
five regional campuses, three sites in Afghanistan with our armed forces . . . uh. . .” As if
counting in his head he continued to spout out the sites. “Let’s see there’s the country venue,
cafés in several sites such as Abingdon, Kingsport, Bristol, six café sites in all.” By the time he
walked through in his mind how many location options there were, the best number I could come
up with was that High View Church had around fifteen different sites nationally, internationally
and online, not counting the informal groups that gather to watch the services.

I asked John what motivated them to extend their church into multisite. His answer was
to the heart and simple, “The driving desire in my life and the church is that people need Jesus.
That’s why we do what we do. People here and everywhere need Jesus. That is what has driven
us, Jesus died for them. A problem today is that our modern definitions exclude what the Lord is
doing in parts of the world through the internet and [other] technologies. People need the Lord;
we want to share with as many as possible.”

We talked a little about how multisite churches often start new campuses not to be
evangelistic but because they already are evangelistic. John said, “We’ve always been
evangelistic. Coming out of the overflow of what we’re already doing, we’ve been trying to keep
up with what the Holy Spirit is doing, how He’s leading.” As if in a mode of confession John
said concerning multisite, “I think I started a little late in multisite. I felt the urge before I began
to talk about it [among our church]. It took me years, since I hadn’t heard others talking about it
[multisite], maybe God wanted to do it sooner, I don’t know.”

Looking for specifics concerning High View’s approach and the community in which
they minister, I asked, “Is your first site in a rural community?” “Yes, our café venue is our first
site. That was not any different for us than going 600 miles from here. We took baby steps and
then bigger and bigger risks. Bristol was our first off-site campus. One third of our people, those
on our database, were driving from there. We wrestled with whether that would hurt the Abingdon campus. We decided that God wanted us to do this. I talked about it and cast vision for so long, they were so ready, I prepared the ground even after some mistakes.” As a researcher, my antennae goes up when I hear the word “Mistakes,” realizing that much can be learned from these mistakes. “Can you share with me some of the mistakes that you feel you’ve made?” John continued, “Pastors have big vision; I had a big one for the new campus. I raised up 125 people, our 82nd airborne division if you will, they were ready to go. We started to meet in colleges in Bristol to cast vision for a new church. When it came time to find a location, we called a local real estate person. He showed us the old Wal-Mart property; it had beautiful parking, tons of space, a great location. They were asking $10,000 a month. I walked in and after 10 minutes, I told the realtor, we’ll take it. My team was bewildered, with jaws dropped as if to say, ‘What’? We drew up contracts and found out it would be 1.2 million to build-out this facility. That didn’t sit well with me. The closer we got to that day, I began to get sick thinking of taking this huge risk. [Finally], I thought I needed some advice and wanted to talk to my mentor Rick Warren. I tried to contact him but he was out of the country. The very next day, I received a weekly teaching tape from Rick Warren in the mail with a title on the message, How To Take Wise Risks. I opened and listened to it immediately. I called a special meeting of my team together to listen to it also. We knew after listening to that, this was an unwise risk. We called the developer and told him we couldn’t do this deal. We had other offers of help to make this happen, but we felt that God was leading in a different direction. We promised to pay the one-year lease that we had signed, it was $120,000, but we couldn’t move forward with this. As we left that site and drove away, the realtor called us and said ‘we have another property can you turn around?’ We drove right over there and met them at that site. [The result is] we are now using the second property
we looked at as our current space for our Bristol campus. It was a perfect spot, ready to go with minimal up-fit. [On top of that], a man in our church who started a business in his garage later purchased the space that we passed on. His business was a multi-million dollar company with 800-900 employees. After he sold his company to someone else, he became a multimillionaire and gave an enormous amount of money to the church. This wouldn’t have happened had we not swallowed our pride and followed the Lord. Yet, another blessing was that we were shown land that was available by the interstate in a prime location; we bought the 50 acres there. That is the future site of the Bristol campus. None of that would have happened without us humbling ourselves.” I listened with such intent to John’s story that I almost forgot I was interviewing him. This group listened to God’s leadership and the outcome was so far beyond what they could have planned. Was this what the Israelites experienced when they faced Jericho? Maybe this was the same feeling Peter had at Pentecost when so many came to Christ? Success because of God’s leadership is an amazing and life-changing event! I wondered to what degree God used these events to solidify the team at High View.

I was intrigued about their choice for the Bristol campus. “Was it a heart for evangelism or some demographics research that lead you to Bristol,” I asked. “We went with who we had and where they lived. [We asked], who needed a contemporary witness? We realized that we would reach people that no one else will reach. Who we had and where they lived formed a beach head for that campus.” “You had your core team right?” “Yes, about 120 people who launched with us in December, 2005. We ran preview services before the official launch and even now, we’ve outgrown the facilities.”

Knowing that every ministry faces challenges that often result into enormous benefits for that ministry, I asked John about the benefits and challenges for High View since becoming
multisite. John answered with two words initially, “Changed lives.” After a pause, he continued, “When I visit these campuses, it’s a steady stream of people who tell me about their life change. They tell me, ‘God has changed my life’. Seeing the transformation, hearing the life change stories is what it’s all about. We’re tearing the walls down. Too long we’ve kept the church inside the walls. In my first full-time church, I had barriers in my mind placed there by the traditions of my church upbringing. We’ve made these barriers equal to scripture, that’s wrong.”

“Has multisite helped you to break down barriers?” “Yes, because it’s presented challenges. One of them is that we see obstacles as opportunities. Another one of them was that we had to change our leadership structure in order to be multisite. You can do one, two, or three [campuses] but after three, you have to change the structure of your church; you have to give up more control. Pastors have to let go of the ministry, let the people do it. The people have to let go of the leadership. As High View has grown, I’ve had to give up control over the years. *Death By Planning Growth By Accident* was a book that helped me tremendously. When I stopped trying to figure it out and went back to being the visionary, then God took over again. You see, the biggest barrier to the growth for our church has been me. It is true that everything rises and falls on leadership. [As of late], I’ve given up more control than I’ve ever given up and am scared to death.”

What John was saying seemed to be a little theoretical; I wanted to know what that “giving up” looked like. “From 30,000 feet to the ground level, let’s say someone wants at your church to start a ministry at a campus that doesn’t fit well, how do you handle that?” With an honest answer he responded, “It’s probably messy. The campus pastors would go to that person. If they have an issue, they cannot resolve, they take it to Peter Joshua, who is over the pastors. He’s a twenty-year veteran of ministry.”
The thought of dealing with differing views must have triggered John’s mind concerning this releasing of the people to ministry. He went on to say, “We’re allowing more ministries to happen at those locations. We had gone to less ministries and now [we’ve changed], any felt-need ministry is an open door to reach new people.” Curious about this shift I asked, “Is that due to the different areas and size of the church?” “We’ve experimented. The structure has to develop.” John shared that they had tried several approaches to ministry at different points of their growth. On a trip to Nigeria, he learned a lesson from a leading Pastor who has more than 20,000 people in his church. Through the Pastor, John said, “God told me to focus on the purposes. We made the purposes [of the church] the focus. They [the purposes] are not second or a third layer, they are the foundation of our ministry. They keep bringing us back. For the last two years, we’ve made the purpose lead team the working group that leads the ministry. This campus is the model for the other campuses and the other campuses are putting purpose pastors on their teams. That person can get sideways coaching from people at the Abingdon campus. This makes it ever expandable.” John went right into a vision statement that was so impressive it caught my attention and caused me to take note. Following on the statement that this system was ever expandable he said, “One of our visions is the Appalachian Mountains, twenty-six million people. We’re working with others including the Baptist State Convention of Virginia on how to do that. We’re asking ourselves, ‘how do we plant a church within an hour’s drive of all twenty-six million people?’ We’ve determined that it would take around seventeen churches along this range and we’re there.” Imagine that, a High View Church within reach of twenty-six million people up and down the Appalachian Mountain range. I thought to myself, this church has an incredible vision for the gospel!
Seeing how multisite had expanded the vision of this already visionary pastor, I asked if multisite had been the catalyst to bring that vision clarity back? “Yes, the coolest thing is that we’ve not been on our own. He’s been right there, He’s giving wisdom. You really can’t kill it [the church]; God dusts us off and sustains us when we mess up. Watching the church over the eighteen to nineteen years, I’ve seen God holding it up. Now, if a church was not willing to continue, [move forward with its vision.] but is one who withdraws, God doesn’t honor that. You must change when you follow Christ. He’ll come through [but] God requires sacrifices. He has asked High View to sacrifice in ways that would choke a lot of churches [who are unwilling]. He’s required it, [because we’ve responded to His call in the past)]. God doesn’t give you a story to sit on. He’s asked you to follow Him and required you to be uncomfortable. You have to keep changing.”

As John was talking, I kept wondering about the structural changes and his leadership. I asked this question, “Is there ever, in your mind, an issue at a local church site level that would require you as the lead to step in and handle?” “At the level that we’re at, I say that as a servant leader, there are decisions that have to be made by that team. We’re like the carriers of the Ark of the Covenant. The Lord told his people that they were to follow a thousand feet back; it’s hard to follow that far back, difficult to see. Those carrying the Ark had to make decisions, to lead as they carried it. As leaders, we don’t make a lot of decisions because the vision is set, but there are decisions we do have to make.” Pressing in to see how far this reached I asked, “Would you have to make a decision that would affect a local campus at some point?” Sensing I wanted a more direct answer, he responded with, “Yes, if a campus pastor decided to close a campus, I’d have to say no. There’s just some things that will not happen.”
Moving into the theological foundations for multisite, I brought up the question of autonomy. “Some say that multisite is just one church telling another church what to do and that it is a violation of autonomy. What would you say to that?” “That’s a flawed view of the church. I go back to Jesus saying where ‘Two or three are gathered in My Name, I’m with them.’ Paul gave instructions to leaders to lead churches; he wasn’t violating the autonomy of the local church or the local leaders. [I would ask] what’s the view of leadership? If you’re a dictator, yes you’re in violation. If you’re there to love and care, there’s no issue. All we’re doing in this big church [the church] all over the world, is to seek the Lord and follow Him. The old school idea that the church is the building down the road just doesn’t work.”

“What about those who claim multisite is an Episcopalian model or Catholic model with the Pope at the top, bishops regionally and priests locally. How would you respond to that?” “If you take that line of thinking, then you’re saying the same thing about a pastor in the New Testament who brings the declarative Word of God, [such as] Hebrews thirteen. He’s instructed to obey the rule over him. God doesn’t give a lot of clear structure in the New Testament for pastors, He does give us the aspects of the pastoral role; shepherd, bishop, leader. If you’re going to say that about multisite, then you’re throwing the same rocks at the New Testament church where the pastor at the church is there to care [for] and lead the people. It applies to any church. The church is a dictatorship; we follow the Lord’s lead. It is a theocracy, a rule of God. The congregational [rule] idea came about after World War II, I think.” John’s argument was sound, if you take the adverse line of thinking to its end; no one can have say over anyone. Still I was interested in knowing what the governing style of this church was.

“Do you have a particular ecclesiastical style or approach; where you say we are congregational, single elder, plural elder?” His answer was simple but not simplistic, “The
pastors are administers, and the people are the ministers. We’re a kingdom of priests. Not everyone is called to be a pastor, but all are called to serve. The pastors are the leaders. A group of pastors are the elders, biblically.” “How about the congregation, do they vote?” “Yes, if we borrow money, or on the annual budget and those sorts of things. We want to keep the ministry out of the realm of what we can do, and turn control loose to God. They vote on the senior pastor as well. The directors, the elders, would be the search team, but the congregation would have to say yes, this is God’s man. One of the things that is important to know is that when God tells you something, He [also] whispers in the ears of His people confirming God’s will. My leadership style is to hash it out. Our pastors get loud and animated; we work through things as a team. Our team is a collaboration regardless of whose idea it is, we want the truth. We love each other even though we are loud with each other. I happen to be the chief elder, which carries a lot of weight. God used me to start the church, which gives credibility along with God’s hand on the leader.”

John’s next statement gave me a better insight to the decision-making process we talked about earlier, he said, “I could trump decisions because of my position, but we lead as a group of people. You can have some stupid ideas and the bigger it gets the more people that can be hurt. Our pastors, the elder leaders are fulltime and we work as a team.”

Wanting to move our conversation into the practical mode for ministry, I asked what advice John would give to a church wanting to become multisite. “Make sure you’re healthy, not perfect, healthy. You don’t want to reproduce sickness. If you have issues, if you’re not carry out God’s purposes, The Great Commandment and The Great Commission, ask yourself, are we doing that? Are you developing people into Christ likeness, are people worshipping God with their lives? Don’t replicate disease, get your house in order. Also, think through the structure before you do multisite. We made adjustments.” Curious as to what modifications High View
had made, I asked, “What were some of those adjustments?” “As a leader with some wins under your belt, you can think that you’re better than you are. We had huge success with a launch of our first café. Then the country styled service where we knocked it out of the park, then Bristol with 700-800 in attendance, I thought ‘this is easy.’ Then we went to Johnson City, Tennessee and ran into trouble, we didn’t have the core to sustain.” John shared that there was a lack of buy-in and DNA with the people and the leaders there. In the Abingdon area they could send people who knew the vision and had lived it, in Johnson City, [however,] it was different, they didn’t have that. Switching back and forth between a conversation with me and one with himself at times, he continued, “Because I was so focused on reaching more people, and I was sending folks to these sites without proper leadership development. You don’t have to wait for perfect conditions just be wise and go slow. The very thing that caused you to be successful can lead to your demise. I would challenge them to think through the structure, structure for multi-campus [ministry]. Learn from the mistakes from all of us. We’ve learned from others. Have a strong team at the model campus. Also, leadership development in multisite, this has to be ramped up. There needs to be a system to raise up the next generation. We’re working on that.”

I was now wondering if the Johnson City campus was thriving, “Did Johnson City make it or fail,” I asked. “No, they’re making it. They had 270 last week. It would have been so much better if we did it right. We’ve never had a campus fail. It is so important that the first or second make it. It could really be a setback to have a failure early on. Get some wins. The Lord is for this to work, but pay attention to all the gauges, signs of health. God will tell you how and He will tell you when. He didn’t tell Noah to build without instructions.”

Working to a conclusion, I asked Pastor John what he would do differently if he had to do it all over again. “I would have started earlier in going multisite. [I would] have a system to
identify and raise up the leadership. I would have done more, as I did when I came to Abingdon, like planting the original campus. Change our structure. We’re still in a learning phase. Our Marion campus, a low cost, low risk campus, launched with 300 people in our first weekend. It attracted others who were at a church that closed and we were given the property of that church as a site. A small dying town with 250 people present for worship. [Also], I would have done the internet campus sooner. We have an Internet Pastor. People visit our church online for weeks and months, it’s the new front door of the church. We have people all over the world watching our services. They represent the potential new campuses for us.”

With that, we concluded our discussion. I had much to think about concerning what I had learned from Pastor John.

William Eastman

As I finished my conversation with Pastor John from High View, I sat in his kitchen as he made warm chocolate chip cookies and tart lemonade and waited for the next staff member to come and talk. By this time I was relaxed and feeling quite comfortable. Sometimes it is not easy to be in a new environment, especially someone else’s home. This was not one of those times. The doorbell chimed loudly and in walked a familiar face, William Eastman. William is the Executive Pastor at High View Church and I had met him on a couple of other occasions. He came in and Pastor John offered him some cookies and lemonade, then Pastor John went outside to sit on his back deck.

After some introductory comments, I asked William to tell me about his role with the church. He told me that he had been serving in a staff capacity for six years. He was an attendee, then a member and eventually a staff member. William confided in me that he had come to High
View to take a break from ministry for a little bit. Having served in his previous church as the youngest deacon ever ordained, he had served in numerous capacities and was ready for a respite. That rest was short and soon he was “Tapped” as he says, for ministry.

I asked William to share a little about the church’s multisite mission. I understood that William had a unique perspective as a former franchise owner of businesses and as a former member. He began, “I observed our multisite [process] from the beginning. The country tent was the first experiment. It’s how I started attending the church. I was involved in real estate; I was contacted to help with some property and became aware of High View. I had a feel that God was moving me from my former church ministry. I later became part of the first off-campus site in Bristol. First, they tapped me to lead youth, and then I helped plant Bristol and was the Campus Pastor for Johnson City where I helped get that started. I did this while still working a secular job.”

William’s background intrigued me. While he is a Pastor now, he had spent most of his life in the secular world in business. I thought to myself, this interview is going to be rich with useful information. I pressed into the motivations from his perspective for multisite. “William, please tell me from your perspective, what motivated High View to be a multisite ministry?” “The first thing is there was a need to resolve a space and facility issue. . .” I expected that a former real estate agent might start with these logistical needs for space. He continued, “. . .And a desire to see different styles of music and environments. We realized that because people were sitting in a tent in the parking lot [The Country Venue] of our main campus. Well, we thought, if they watched a video here, why not from 60 miles away? That Country Venue on campus still runs 350 people a week. Obviously we were motivated to reach as many people as we could, using different styles and locations.”
Knowing that William would see things differently from someone with no business experience, I asked about his franchising background. I was curious to hear his perspective on this multisite or “Franchising” of the church. “Didn’t you tell me you had a franchising background?” “Yes, I was the Bojangles franchisee for the tri-cities region, 5 locations.” Now, if you are not from North Carolina or Virginia you may not be familiar with Bojangles. In these parts of the country, Bojangles is akin to “Made in America, baseball and apple pie.” Their southern fried chicken, sweet iced tea and dirty rice are legendary. These franchises seem to do well in this part of the country. He continued, “I retired and kept some of the property that I had and got into real estate by default. Later, I was asked to help manage a large real estate office with over 100 million dollars in business.”

I wanted to relay to him how unique his perspective is when talking about multisite because of his franchising background. I also wanted to glean all I could from him concerning the overlap with multisite. I told him, “Your position is unique since you have a business background and franchise background. Do you see any overlap in multisite for churches, anything that has helped you here at High View?” With an emphatic response he said, “No question, the same things that would apply to any franchise location would be the same for the church. Things such as, be in the middle of the population, be accessible. It’s not as important to be on the ‘A’ corner as we say in real estate, but you need accessibility. Demographics are important and matching your target [a must]. In the business world, we would do a ‘pro forma,’ it’s a written business model. We take into account the traffic counts, accessibility and demographics. You get points for those pieces and based on these points you could determine what your volume would be in a location [for a restaurant]. Match that with your costs and you’ll find your potential volume.” This was so rich and interesting to me, he was talking about research that I was not familiar with. Sure, I assumed that businesses did this sort
of thing, but a church, then again why not? Why would a church not know everything it could about a culture and a community? Why not be well-equipped with as much information.” He had my attention.

He went on to draw some distinctions from the business world and the church. “It’s different in a church.” His thoughts must have been drawn to the finances as he started to talk about the data they had collected from within the church concerning giving. “We know what our average giving is, over $25 per person.” This intrigued me knowing that the national average the last time I checked was around $19 per person attending. I asked him, “Why is High View over the national average?” “There’s a spiritual maturity taught [here]. The fact that we’re Purpose Driven and that maturity is taught in the classes.” The classes he referred to are a series of discipleship training that Purpose Driven churches use to develop their members spiritually. CLASS stands for Christian Life And Service Seminars. “We let people know right up front what the commitment is. Where I came from, membership had no meaning, here it does. We partner with the people, each have a responsibility both the church and the people. We also noticed that the level of giving increases according to the number of classes people take. After the fourth class that we call ‘401’ the giving goes up.” I immediately took note that they knew the numbers were going up after graduating from the core CLASS system. I was interested in their tracking process. I asked, “Do you track people through all the classes?” “Yes, the whole vision will be understood more fully after getting through those classes.” While William did not elaborate on how they tracked these people, he shared that they had a system that worked for them and that they paid close attention to this information.

Knowing that we had to move on to other areas, I turned the conversation toward the learning that has come from being multisite. I asked William about any benefits to multisite as
well as the challenges they have faced because of multisite. From what I’ve seen so far, these benefits and challenges seem to go hand in hand. He began, “The benefits are obvious, a greater draw demographically, to reach out to a larger base, more people. Also, you don’t have to reinvent the wheel every time. We are different from some multisite churches in that we say we are one church, multiple locations. Streaming the messages to each site, setting the worship up, all the preparation is reproduced in each site. As far as the flaws, there have been a few fatal flaws.” “Like what?” “Well like simply for example getting the weekly bulletins out to each campus; we’re learning they will need to do their own. The further away campuses are the more difficulty in getting certain resources to them. Also, we were going live with a satellite feed to broadcast to each campus. That will keep us from having to do a recording and the logistics of delivering that.” I thought to myself, these things do not sound like fatal flaws, but then again when you have one shot once a week with that many of the people, these things sure are important. Going back and forth from benefits to challenges he said, “In multisite you can draw your circle larger and use your energy in more ways. The negatives don’t outweigh the positives, but there are a lot of them.”

As William was working through in his mind some of the challenges they had faced, the top issues began to surface. Continuing he said, “The biggest problem we face is cannibalizing leadership.” I knew that he was on to something that could be a “Fatal flaw” and I wanted to hear about this. “We tap everyone that has done anything to be a leader in a new campus. We take people from the main campus and strip it of people and leaders. It’s the biggest negative and the biggest obstacle to growth. Also, the physical challenges, the more campuses adds more burden to the central team. There are also the financial challenges. The country and online venues are self-sustaining. In Marion, we were given a building. In Bristol, I was able to write the lease on
the building when I worked for the company that owned the property, so that lease was very advantageous. As we’ve gotten away from the base to smaller campuses further away, the challenge is to build [in those areas] without having the DNA of the main campus. Without the base of people that we have had in other locations, that has put a strain on us financially. We’re seeing fruit from people being saved and baptized so we’re in a dilemma, at what point does the financial challenge outweigh the spiritual? We need to have those conversations about when to pull the plug.”

Hearing his frustration over the constant stripping of leadership, I wondered what other problems came from poor hires or putting the wrong people in place. I explored that with this question, “Have you put people in leadership too quickly?” William’s answer surprised me. Drawing on his vast business experience he said, “I’ve found in dealing in business, that you’re always going to have issues with people, it’s never a bullet-proof or flawless situation. Have we put people in who didn’t work out? Yes. Have we put people in too quickly and that’s the reason they didn’t work out? I don’t think so. I think our problem is that we are too slow to pull the trigger. At our pace, we have to be willing to take risks. Risk it on people, some [who will] work out and some who will not. In six years, we’ve had just as many leadership failures among those who we spent a lot of time with and those we hired quickly.”

I asked William about any documentation that they have developed for multisite and the systems that they are employing for ministry. He told me of the systems that they had written and went into a lengthy and detailed description of their hiring process. This conversation was off the scope of my study but interesting to me. Ultimately, he said, we’re looking for chemistry with a candidate for a leadership position. We do all the hiring for all campuses at the main office in Abingdon.”
Leaving this topic, we moved to the theological arena and the issues with autonomy. Seeing that High View is a church that uses a video-driven messages and a strong local leadership at its Abingdon campus, I wondered if William ever had pushback over this issue personally. “William, people have said that multisite violates the autonomy of the local church. How would you respond to that statement?” “Well my first reaction is, it’s no different than what Peter and the rest of the disciples were doing planting churches. They were under Peter’s leadership. Each of our campuses has autonomy, just under Abingdon’s authority. It’s no different than a church having an overflow service in its fellowship hall on campus, we’re just doing it in locations further out. From my doctrinal standpoint, I would feel like our responsibility is to lead and feed the congregation and pray for them. We are just as effective at each campus; they each have their own pastor. I don’t know of anything that can’t happen at any site that doesn’t happen at each campus, such as salvations, marital counseling, whatever, pastors are available. I don’t see a disconnect from scripture, I don’t see an issue. Pastor John is our Lead Pastor and the campuses have their pastors.” William’s answer seemed more pragmatic than theological but he made his point.

Heading back into the practical aspects of multisite and what High View has learned, I asked about any advice William would give another church or pastor wanting to become a multisite ministry. “That could take a lot of time. First, I would advise, make sure they have identified the leader for that campus. You need a pastor who is a team player. Next, you have to make sure you transfer the vision at the new campus just as it is at the first campus. I’d also tell them, make sure the structure matches the first campus. We use the PD [Purpose Driven] model I think it’s practical, it’s biblical. Place the right ministry leaders. There [are] a few leaders that are necessary for any new campus we start. We would never start another campus without a campus
pastor, worship pastor, children’s pastor, and youth person.” For clarification I asked, “How did you determine that you would need those positions?” “We’ve done it without and it doesn’t work. In Marion, we tried without live music, [that did not work]. Now, we’re not saying these people are full-time [in ministry,] just responsible for their ministry areas. Other concerns logistically are facilities, seating, parking ratios, the square footage in the worship area. These things are important. We hit that lid at the Bristol campus. We outgrew that space with 850-900 people in a 15,000 square foot building, so we started a Saturday night service. In that setting, it was not what worked there. No one had ever done that in that area. We offered a different worship style for that service, for another hook in the water. It’s a long process, there’s lots of homework needed.”

As William wandered through his advice, he seemed to be reliving those experiences both positive and negative. I concluded our time together with a question about a redo. “What would you do differently if you could go back and change anything?” This question almost seemed to catch William off guard. “Um…” [Long pause…] “Maybe in some instance where our financial commitment is so great we should have moved slower. We moved too fast on some. In Kingsport, we move very fast, we should have moved slowly. It has taxed us too much financially. On the other hand…” William’s face lit up as he went into a description of an opportunity to start a new campus in the Bristol downtown area. “…on State street in Bristol, a happening place, worldly, music, food, a cool hang out, there are storefronts that are low cost and easily accessible and could accommodate from 100-150 people. We could put a pastor there and a coffee shop, [to create] a place where people can connect and talk with a pastor.” I could sense a little frustration in William’s voice as he thought of the possibilities of this site verses the struggle in other sites. He continued. “We were approached with the takeover in Kingsport and it
seemed right. The building, the people, the debt, we’re losing about $10,000 to $12,000 a month in Kingsport right now, that’s hard. If I had my choice to be in Kingsport with losses like that or Bristol with a low cost, I’m not so sure that I wouldn’t pick Bristol with a cafe during the week. We have to determine what’s right. When people are making decisions for Christ and being baptized, it’s a tough call to say when you pull the plug on something. It can’t only be all about finances. In this work you’re always learning. Kingsport could have grown, we didn’t know. One thing we did learn in a takeover like that is if we ever had to do it again, we’d shut it down and start it over with a clean break from the former ministry. It’s been a battle every week.”

William’s irritation was evident in his words. He is a get up and get it done kind of person and the Kingsport campus seemed to be holding him back from advancing the mission. This can be a frustrating place for a man like William. He was battling with his business experience and his new career as a pastor. In business, the decisions were simple, if the business was losing money you close it, in church, the product is new believers and when that’s happening, even if there’s a loss financially, you have to consider that element as a paramount factor. With the final words concerning the Kingsport campus, we concluded our discussion.

**Denise Wells**

As my time with the High View staff went on, I was presented with a rare opportunity. I was introduced to Denise Wells currently the Pastor’s executive assistant at High View Church. I asked how long she had been with High View and she told me that she had been at the church for seventeen years and then on staff for the past thirteen years. My immediate thought was “Great, I can get a woman’s perspective and the perspective of someone who was involved long before multisite.” Another dynamic to Denise’s ministry is the fact that she gives global
oversight to all youth ministries. I said, “You’ve seen a lot changes haven’t you?” In a simple, yet profound understatement, she looked at me and simply said, “Yes.” I told Denise that I wanted to hear from her perspective about High View’s multisite model and the things that they have learned. I wasn’t sure if she just liked talking about this subject or was eager to be heard, but she seemed very happy to be part of this conversation.

“Denise, tell me what motivated High View to be a multisite church.” “Well, that’s pretty simple, to reach more people. We were in a smaller community and we said we’d love to reach more people and [we] thought it wasn’t possible [to reach farther out]. We considered multisite and asked [ourselves] if it would work if we did a video message? Would people come? We tried it in a café on campus and then in a bigger setting with a country tent on campus. The country tent is like a big circus tent and the style of the music is contemporary country. There was no air or heat, it was on gravel and in a circus tent. People ate peanuts and threw them on the floor.”

“How did you know to use a country style?” “We bought a demographic study of our community and found that the number one radio station for people who didn’t go to church in our area was country.” I was interested in this since the church is located in a rural community of about 8,000 people. They had found success but I was still curious about how well-received the video-driven message was. I asked, “What were the comments from the people about a video sermon?” “They said it wouldn’t work before they saw it.” This was intriguing. People told them from their church and their community that it wouldn’t work. This would seem to be the consensus of pastors in rural communities. She continued, “The very first day we opened our café we couldn’t even seat everyone in there. People were in line to get in. People attended there since it wasn’t church-like.” The church had found success in their first offering of a service other than their main sanctuary. She then told me about the success of the country venue on campus, “Country
sealed the deal. It was hot, moldy and not comfortable, yet people came. We now have about 350 people that attend that site weekly.”

“Has multisite helped you to attain your goal of reaching new people?” “Definitely.”

Pressing in, I asked about the people who were coming. “When you look at these new people, are they post-churched, lost, de-churched? What is their spiritual condition?” “Most people in America today will say they are a Christian, I’d say most of them are lost. Many have a church background, but are lost. These people are accepting Christ and they are following in baptism. I think that people think differently about video until they see it for themselves. Even now when I’m in the room with a live presenter, I still watch the screen instead of the actual presenter.”

I realized that Denise had a good grasp on what was happening through multisite. I asked her to help me understand what the benefits and challenges had been for High View Church since deciding to be multisite. “It accomplished what we set out for it to do. This is the number one benefit. It also helps to raise up more leaders. It makes it simpler to invite more friends to church by breaking down the distance barriers. As far as challenges, they’re the same thing. We’ve had to find creative leaders and role models to lead these sites.” She then expressed that the church had made some mistakes along the way. I quickly said, “What mistakes?” “We would start a campus without all the leaders in place. We made mistakes in the finances. Also, [we fell short in] determining who is in charge of the areas of ministry, the people at each campus or those at the main campus?” When Denise used the words “Main campus”, it caused me to wonder what system or model they were using. I asked, “What do you mean by main campus?” “We call Abingdon the mother ship. It is the model for the other campuses. The question for us is how much of Abingdon needs to be at each campus. We’re struggling with that right now.” “Do you mean leadership and style?” “Yes, for instance, does Abingdon decide who leads each
ministry; do we send people to do those roles?” Denise began using the word Abingdon to be synonymous with the church’s top leadership. She went on, “Does Abingdon select the curriculum? Does it decide if parkers would have shorts or what’s in the first time guest bag or what clothes do those who are being baptized wear?” Denise gave me several items that seemed fresh as if their team were discussing these very things at that time. My thoughts were racing to loyalty issues and other personnel problems that could arise if leaders at their distant campuses were being told what to do without input. At first, people who have personally been involved and have caught the vision would follow without question, but I was wondering how that would translate farther down the multisite road this church was traveling. It is impossible to know, still I thought this would be interesting to track over time and see how the church navigated those issues. Denise shared her leadership journey and some of the conclusions their team was coming to. She said, “When I first started in youth ministry, we started out with me on video with a message to all the campuses. The campus pastors were leading the ministry, but I was overseeing the youth ministry.” Denise’s next statement confirmed what I foresaw as a potential problem with subordinates in the ministry. In a moment of vulnerability she said, “There were issues which were difficult to resolve because of competing authorities.” Sensing that tensions had arisen I asked, “What have you learned from this about control?” “We’ve bounced back and forth. We had decided that the campus pastor would have all control and make Abingdon a mentoring center where leaders could call for help. We’ve now decided that that doesn’t work well for us. We’ve moved back to Abingdon being the model for all the campuses. We set the curriculum and figure out [the details] for all the campuses.” Once again, my thoughts went to loyalties and vision buy-in, I wondered would the campus leaders feel like robots or could they actually accept this kind of direction willingly and serve whole-heartedly? I suppose the answer
would be found in the personality style of the leaders at those campuses. I followed up with a question about the response from these leaders. “How have you dealt with people who rebel against that leadership structure?” Denise’s answer seemed plausible in theory but emotions and loyalties are not always as easily established. She explained that, “We teach that change is inevitable. If you don’t like something hang on it will probably change. We also cast vision and say look, if this worked at Abingdon, it will probably work there too. It’s been field tested. When they know it’s a proven thing they’re more likely to follow.” I guess I could have explored so much more on this topic with Denise, her comments were from a perspective that I could get nowhere else. While pastors will be honest with what is happening, they share from their vantage point. Hers seemed rich and from the trenches. It was more of a management level perspective. Still, if the system of centralization is what they tried before and it didn’t suit them well, I wondered what would be different this time? How would bringing everything back to a central location for decision making be effective the farther they went out from the Abingdon site? The answer to that question remains to be seen.

As she continued with the challenges, she addressed the financial issues of multisite. “Financially, multisite is a challenge. You have to ask, when can a campus hold its own financially?” This made me wonder if she was referring to a particular campus that was currently in trouble financially. “Are you considering campuses that need structural change?” “We’re always considering that. Our Marion campus is way beyond what we thought we would have there, while our Kingsport campus has struggled.” Switching to specific ministries, Denise mentioned the problems that can arise in worship ministry over such things as song selection, musicians and people on stage. In order to have a one church feel, these areas would need to be thought-out fully. She said that they had developed what she called “Church in a box.” This tool
spells out the parameters for each ministry and gives direction to those who lead at the local level. A tool like this would be very key for uniformity, but my thoughts were still wandering to individualistic expressions and the gifting that each person at the local level possesses. The same issues of buy-in kept confronting my thoughts. Obviously, the right personality and the right training with ongoing communication is vital to a centralized flow of leadership.

I moved the conversation into the theological realm and we discussed the issues of autonomy. I told her that some people view multisite as an intrusion upon that autonomy. I asked her what her thoughts were on this subject. Denise has a special way of looking at things. She speaks with a strategic mindset. I’ve not often heard many who have this style of thought. Her view of the ministry seems to take into account the visionary side of things as well as the practical outworking, that is the details of ministry. The question of autonomy may have taken her off guard a little but after she considered it she gave me a well reasoned rebuttal. “I would say, I don’t have a scripture verse off the top of my head. For us, we are one church, we are governed by one body, we are all under one financial umbrella. We’re not a lot of churches we are one church under Christ. Pastor John follows that. We all have said that if God spoke to Pastor John and said if we all needed to move to Africa, we’d all move to Africa. We are God-led. We’re following Christ more than any church I’ve ever seen.” Her answer concerning the one church model made it clear to me that the leadership had done an excellent job of conveying this theological idea. They probably didn’t state that this was their theological position in ecclesiastical words of church dogma, but they simply made it clear that all locations were part of one church. The statement concerning loyalty to the Senior Pastor was impressive; it revealed the buy-in by her to the vision and the person at the head of this ministry.
“Denise, what advice would you give someone wanting to become a multisite ministry?”

“I think from what we’ve learned, [you need to] decide the issue of centralization up front. Ask yourself, are we going to have a team that calls all the shots? Who gets to decide the non-negotiable items? Then you come up with a list. For example, these are basic but this gives you an idea in children’s ministry, everyone is background checked. Everyone fills out an application etc. these are non-negotiable for us. Other things such as every leader must be a church member. Is all our music and curriculum coming from the mother church? Will it be video-based or live speakers? We didn’t do these up front, [that was a] big mistake. There’s also the financial piece, you need to determine how long before the campus is self-supporting?” Wondering about this line of thinking, I was wondering if High View was considering closing a campus. I asked, “Could you see High View closing a campus?” “Oh yeah, we’re big on ending ministries that do not work. Pastor John says, ‘If the horse is dead, dismount!’ For instance, we closed down an event that attracted 10,000 people annually since there was no growth from it. I would also advise the church to determine where people are coming from already. If it’s a good distance from the main campus, plant a campus there. Lastly, if there’s a big campus too close to a new campus, these two may have to compete for the same people. People may choose the main campus over the smaller campus if the quality is not there. The new campus must be able to compete.”

“Wow, thank you Denise, this is really great advice,” I said. Looking back on your experience in multisite, if there was one thing you wish your church could go back and do over, what would that be?” “I would think about the growth in those locations [more holistically]. We considered seating and didn’t consider the children’s and parking areas. The support ministries need to have adequate space. Without a kids’ ministry and parking, it’s difficult to have a main
service. If people can’t park or leave their children in a well-staffed, spacious environment, they’re not coming back. If anything, we’ve proven that facilities are not everything, but that space is.” “That’s interesting; you’re talking about support ministries first where as a senior pastor would be thinking about seating space in the main worship area first.” “Yes, it’s not essential to have the most beautiful space, but there must be enough room.” Listening to her explain that aesthetics play a secondary role in attraction, I wondered about the location dynamics. “What about location?” “Well I’d hate to say anything about that, because we prayed about where these locations should be. Just let God lead you. Consider the Marion site verses the Johnson City site. Most pastors would choose Johnson City because it’s a bigger city. However, our Marion campus is probably more successful in some ways. I think that our heart is that all can know Christ. Our church is particularly focused on the Appalachian area. We’ll go where others won’t. We’ll go wherever there needs to be a contemporary witness.” With these words, we concluded our conversation.

Bud Edwards

My final interview with the High View leaders was with Bud Edwards, the eldest member of the High View team. Bud, a country gentleman, warm and friendly, speaks with a slight whistle. His warm style is reminiscent of a grandfather figure, the kind of man who seems to have a simple yet profound insight into most matters. Bud told me that he was one of the directors for the church and that he had been a part of the church since within six months of its inception. Being from the area he also told me, “I’ve known Pastor John most of his life.” At this point I was unaware that Bud was one of the Pastors of the church. As I dug into some preliminary questions, I became aware that he was the Campus Pastor of the highly successful
country venue at the church. This was exciting to me since I had already heard so much about the country venue. I was hoping to learn a lot more.

After getting to know each other for a few moments, I asked Bud to help me understand the motivations behind the multisite work at High View. His answers came from a somewhat different perspective from the others I talked with. He focused on why the church had a country tent. This was surely in line with his experience since he is the Pastor of that venue. He said, “There are different kinds of people and it takes something different for each group to reach. We found multisite could reach different aspects of the population. Not every church appeals to all, but if you change a little you can reach them. We did a test run with our café. An intimate setting that gave the people something different.” It is obvious to me that different styles would attract different people, but I wanted to hear about the driving forces that would lead a church to offer these styles. It’s hard in an interview format to uncover the specific areas of interest since my goal was to not lead to any particular conclusion or answer. I wanted those I surveyed to take the lead and answer from their own perspective. I asked the same question a little differently, “What’s the driving motivator?” Again, Bud answered with more about the style. “It’s the atmosphere, being able to connect with like-minded people. That gave rise to the first venue. We took a survey and asked people about the kind of music they would like. The last style they selected was country. Our thinking was, if that’s the least desired style we can tell if this will be successful, we’ll offer that as a venue.” The interesting part concerning the in-house survey was that it diametrically opposed the demographic study the church purchased. The local un-churched people listened to country music while the churched crowd apparently did not want that style. He continued, “We offer country music with a country flare atmosphere, it’s simply a venue. They could see it [the sermon] live if they want to, or they can watch a live screen in the
Country Venue. We put up a tent with gravel underneath and cheap white chairs. We had two temperatures when we started, really hot and really cold. The people flocked in. We had peanuts and cokes to give away. People attended because of the music. We drew a different group of people. We thought they might attend here first and then migrate to the main service. Some did and some didn’t. Some remained faithful to the country music venue.” “Bud, help me understand what the country venue is like. Are you talking about just Christian lyrics?” “We do many country songs; you do have to be careful because of the words. We also do many hymns with a country sound. Then Bud gave me the answer I was hoping to hear earlier when we began this conversation about motivations. “The motivation is to reach more people. See more changed lives. People will only drive so far, you have to go to them.” His sincere words helped me understand that his interest was in helping people to make a life change. It was obvious to me that Bud felt fulfilled in this ministry he has been devoting his life to and the results are evident.

“Bud, tell about the benefits and challenges you see with this multisite model” “Benefits, well growth is always beneficial, there’s something about large numbers of people. As more people hear about our church it affects the other campuses, there’s brand recognition.” Bud’s reference to brand recognition seemed a little out of place for this seemingly less sophisticated yet gracious and humble man, but brand recognition is what it is. “The difficulties are, and this changes from step to step, you can operate under one structure with one church [site]. “As you add campuses, you must change your structure. It becomes a strain [to remain the same]. You must change the structure of the ministry. The success of the service is contingent on taking care of the people, and change is necessary.” Bud was sharing both a challenge and a benefit. The challenge is change and the benefit was better care for the congregation. I wanted to know more, “I’ve heard that around three campuses changes have to be made. Can you identify any of the
changes that needed to be or have been made after three campuses?” “Sure, look at small groups for instance; you have eight to ten people and a leader. When you get to five groups, they need a leader over them. This continues with more groups. We follow the Jethro principle. At two campuses, that leader over groups is in good shape; at three campuses it gets difficult training and identifying leaders.” “How well do people receive the training from someone that may not be from their campus?” “They want it. They have the vision. The campus pastor leads the church to support these leaders.” “Have you seen a campus pastor that wasn’t loyal to the vision or their leader?” “No” was his reply. “Remarkable,” I thought to myself.

Bud in moving to a new area of discussion, what are your thoughts concerning autonomy and multisite? Some say multisite violates scripture” After a chuckle, Bud responded with, “Jesus said where there’s two or three, I’m there. If there is twenty campuses and Jesus is in each one then it’s okay. The way Bud smiled and said these words seemed as if he were scoffing at the mere thought. We both laughed when he finished. “Do you have any scripture that supports multisite?” “Acts 2:42 to the end of that chapter describes the early church. We know that 3,000 were added and groups met in homes and were campuses if you will.”

“You have a unique perspective as a Pastor and as someone who has watched High View grow from its beginning. What advice would you offer other ministries wanting to follow what you have done here?” “Based on what we’ve done, there is one thing that we should have done differently. That is, to shut down a church that we took over. If we had to do it again we would wait two months, rebrand and then start over with a reopening of the church. The pastor left and we took it [the church]. It would have been better to have closed it and started over fresh.” I had heard these same words from the others I had interviewed so this thinking seemed firmly planted into the minds of the leaders. Bud’s advice, like the others, is sound and demonstrated the need
for firmly implanting the DNA of the ministry into any location. Much can be gleaned from these words. The church has struggled with a take-over. The same energy could have been maximized in a neutral site without the added financial burden. They, as all multisite churches, are learning as they go. Something tells me this would not be the last congregation and building offered to them.

“Bud, as we close our conversation, is there anything you can think of that you wish the church could go back and do over again? What is the big learning for you?” “Pastor’s should look for people like himself. I got this from an executive from Food City, a grocery chain. He was describing the chain and their stores. Some were much farther away than others were. I asked why they didn’t go to particular towns that were closer. He said, “They are not like us. We know our brand and our people. We have to look for people like us. In a town where people don’t share your viewpoint’s you’re going to have a difficult time. Ask, do I see these people at my church each Sunday? It will be easier to start there. Reach who you are.” “Anything else,” I asked. “There’s so many things, but I would encourage that any church can be multisite simply look around for the area with the greatest need for the gospel. God provides. Listen to God’s Word; He wants no one left out.”
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