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6 Mistakes

Churches Launching Multisite Campuses in 2020 Need to Avoid

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Is your church considering launching a multisite campus in the next year?

Do you think a new campus might be the best next step in your church's growth journey?

Have you wondered if this approach could help you reach more people more effectively?

Over the years, I've had the privilege of talking with scores of church leaders who launched campuses that went on to impact so many people with the message of Jesus. **In fact, I've had the honor of being in the driver's seat for the launch of 13 campuses.** During that time, our leadership teams recruited 1,500 volunteers, and somewhere north of 9,000 people attend those campuses today. Since then those churches have gone on to launch a number of other locations. It's been amazing to watch the spread of this movement over the years.

However, I've also spoken with a number of church leaders struggling to resolve problems that have arisen in their multisite churches as they try to unpack exactly what is going wrong. **They are often worried about the future of their multisite and want to diagnose the root cause of these issues.**

As I listened, I learned that churches tend to make at least one of these six mistakes in the early days of launching new campuses. If you are considering launching a new campus in 2020, you need to be aware of and avoid these mistakes!

These errors may not cause problems early on, but they always come to root in the long term and can ultimately create a difficult future for churches pursuing a multisite approach to ministry.

Small Launch Teams

The greatest success factor in determining the strength of your new campus is the size and health of the volunteer core team. Every other factor needs to be considered in light of how it supports the size and health of the launch core team.

Does the campus pastor have a track record of building large volunteer teams?

Is the new location close enough to the other locations to hive off an already existing center of volunteers but far enough away to reach a new community?

Does your program model help or hinder your ability to build strong teams?

Have you left enough time in your launch process to build the launch team?

How are you evaluating if you are building this team fast enough?

Time and again, when I talk with church leaders who are grappling with the dynamics of their campuses, it comes back to this issue. If you fail to build a strong and healthy launch team, your new campus will struggle right out of the gate!

Unclear Responsibility Lines

When launching new campuses, the main question becomes "Who is responsible for what?" People at other locations will feel the need to lead the ministry in a certain way. They want to ensure that areas of particular concern are developed and led excellently. However, the central leadership team will likely have an approach, style, and brand that they're trying to maintain throughout the campuses.

Campus teams are responsible for relationships and execution. They consider how the ministry affects people while the central team members are concerned with systems and curriculum. Regardless of who reports to whom, who has the first move, and who has the responsibility, the real priority is to communicate. Order breaks down when campus teams and central teams stop communicating with each other.

The latest research by [Leadership Network](#) shows that **77% of multisite churches see their model as more centralized than decentralized**, meaning that the decision making authority leans towards the functional areas rather than the local campus leadership. This is understandable because ultimately the multisite movement is about taking programming that works in one area and implementing it in a new region. It's the programming that draws people, not the location.

In order to radically grow your church, you need to communicate your approach clearly. From indicating which leaders are the first movers to who reports to whom, these early discussions about structure will prevent confusion and painful conversations later. In reflecting on my own leadership experience, I would say **this conversation has been the most persistent part of leading.** It's a matter of authority and responsibility that cannot be glossed over or ignored.

At a deeper level, this issue is really about many different things that can cause conflict in people's lives. It could be relational conflict between leaders; it could be an issue of monetary conflict. (Who determines how the church spends money is the root of many problems at so many churches.) This question of responsibility can be a complex situation to wrestle through and requires the church to think clearly about who is responsible for what in a multisite church.

Poor Site Selection

One common problem many churches encounter involves launches that are too close together on the map. Why is this a problem? **When campuses are too near to each other, you're not reaching new markets.** The solution: put distance between the sites to ensure that you're reaching a new community.

Another equally persistent problem emerges with too much distance between campuses. **Too much space discourages volunteers from serving at the new locations.** When this happens, the launch will end up feeling more like a church plant rather than a true multisite.

When choosing locations, it's crucial to find the right balance between being close enough to other campuses to draw on an already existing volunteer base but far enough away to reach a new community of people.

Lack of Clarity on What to Multiply

There is an interesting dynamic that develops over time as churches continue to launch multiple campuses. Often when the church goes beyond the first few locations, the campuses resemble each other less and less. Early on, leadership teams are often convinced that there is a long list of items that need to be replicated exactly the same in all locations. Over time, however, we become wiser and understand there's actually a smaller list of necessities that will ensure the best for our campuses.
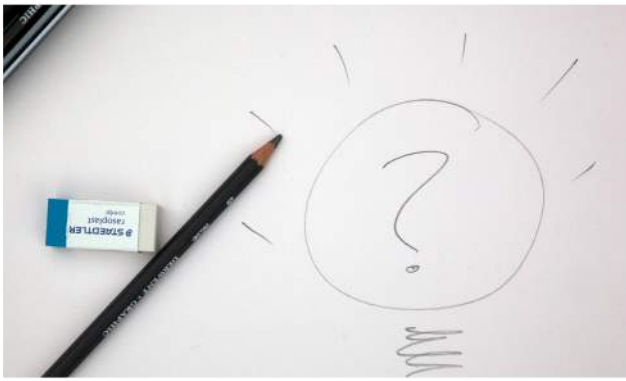
I was involved in the launch of a campus where we created a near-direct replica of our first location. While that campus looked amazing, we ended up finding ourselves in a situation where we were losing $10,000 a week at that site because of location and staff costs.

Early on, a multisite church needs to ask, **"What reasons do our people give their friends about why they should come to the church?"** Those items are the things that need to be replicated well in the new location. Outside of that, there should be some flexibility on features in order to help the church effectively launch new locations.

Failure to Build a Launch System

According to the latest research from Leadership Network, **just under half of multisite congregations reported having just two or three campuses.**

We see this interesting statistic frequently. It tells us that churches seem to be stuck at becoming a two- or three-location multisite church. Why is that? No one sets out to launch multisite thinking that they'll only launch one or two other campuses. **Typically, we envision at least half a dozen locations.** However, that's the radical minority. What are the reasons behind small-scale launches?

• **Churches have not built a reliable system for launching campuses.** They have empowered a leader to launch the first location only to discover that leader has become enamored with his or her current location and won't move beyond it, demonstrating both an unwillingness to move and to help launch new campuses. Your system for launching should not rely on one person.

• **The church didn't document the first launch process.** Churches should always document that first launch. You want to replicate that first successful launch process in order to launch more campuses more easily over time.

• **Churches often don't analyze the total dynamics of a launch.** A more complex and costly set-up inhibits the church from launching long-term. Pushing towards a simpler set-up—including staff requirements, start-up and ongoing costs, etc.— will allow the church to launch more locations down the road.

Forgetting the Vision

Recently, I was visiting some leaders of a multisite church who are now sitting back and wondering, "Why are we doing multisite?" **Your church needs to have a clear reason for doing multisite, and that reason can't be "We want to go multisite." Multisite is a tool by which we accomplish our mission; it's not the mission itself.** Too many churches forget why they exist as a church and get caught up in the process of planning instead.

For me, creating additional sites has been an amazing way to reach people who don't attend church. Our church is trying to create churches that unchurched people love to join, and this approach gives us the opportunity to do that in new, accessible locations.

You and your team need to come back to your reason for doing multisite. If you can't clearly state why you're doing this work, it will atrophy. **The more locations you develop, the more important it is to ensure that your mission is strong and clear.** A vision that's already unclear will only become muddier over time and drag the system down. As your church grows from one location to two or three, the transferring of the vision needs to move from the key leaders to staff and volunteers in order to carry it forward in a strong manner.

The multisite approach to church growth is an incredible way to reach more people.

I'm a fan of this movement, and my bias is towards encouraging growing churches to explore this approach. However, as the multisite movement matures and enters its second decade of popular understanding, we need to be wary of churches who jump into doing multisite too quickly. I hope that this list of six mistakes will help your church avoid some of them as you consider next steps for your community.

Get the FREE three-part video series designed to help your church launch more multisite campuses.

Is your church thinking about launching new multisite campuses? **Have you already launched a campus or two but are stuck getting the next locations launched?** Are you ready to take the next steps in your multisite expansion but aren't sure where to start?

I'm releasing a FREE three-part video series designed to help your church reach more people through multisite church expansion. **The lessons in this series come from my practical experience of being in the driver's seat for 13 launches and from helping other churches like yours!** Here is what we'll be covering in the free video series:

● **Video #1: The Biggest Mistake Churches Make When Launching Campuses.** Build an approach to launching locations that avoids this mistake, and your church will scale up to reach more people!

● **Video #2: Keys to Picking a Great Location for Your Next Campus.** Apply the lessons in this video and you'll find effective locations that will aid your church's growth for years to come!

● **Video #3: 5 Dirty Secrets of the Multisite Church Movement.** Finally, get an insider's look at the underbelly of this movement to better inform your leadership as you move forward!

[**Click here to sign up for the free three-part video series today.**]

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