

# Why Multisite?

grace church position papers

We regularly refer to Grace Church as “one church, (with) multiple locations.” For many members in our body, this structure for our services has become normative. For a number of years now, Grace Church has existed as one church on various campuses, ministering in different communities. However, the concept of a multisite church remains unfamiliar to many people. For our church to continue to grow, we believe it is important to discuss the philosophy of ministry we use to operate our multisite model. Additionally, we want the reasons we are a multisite church to be clear and accessible for members and attendees. The goal of Grace Church is to produce mature followers of Jesus Christ, and we believe our multisite model helps us to accomplish this primary goal. We hope this information provides clarity to the concept of Grace Church’s multisite and connects you to the broader mission of our church.

## WHAT IS A MULTISITE CHURCH?

There are many kinds of multisite models. Without explaining the difference between all of them, one can safely say that our multisite church model primarily means that we share a unified Elder Board, a common budget, an identical doctrinal position, and the same teaching (whether live or via video). There are a number of other carryovers, such as music repertoire, resources, events, and leader training; however, these are somewhat more flexible.<sup>1</sup> For more information on multisite models see resources provided by the Leadership Network.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT ARE SOME COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MULTISITE CAMPUS MODEL?

1. Does the multisite model used by Grace encourage evangelism?
2. Does Grace’s multisite model encourage sharing of resources?
3. How does Grace manage the distinct ministry opportunities of varied campuses?
4. How does Grace’s multisite model handle pastoral oversight of its many members and attendees?
5. How does Grace Church counteract a “celebrity status” mentality for its teaching team?

6. How can I accustom myself to receive teaching ministry via video?

In addressing each of these concerns, we want to simply affirm that there are many valid critical questions to ask. Nevertheless, we’ve found these six to be generally at the heart of most people’s curiosity. What we include here is by no means an exhaustive answer, but if you are interested in further conversation, we recommend reading this material and talking with your local Campus Pastor.

## 1. DOES THE MULTISITE MODEL HELP SPREAD THE NEWS ABOUT JESUS?

*We have found that the multisite model has helped us to further the fame of Jesus through personal evangelism and closer proximity to the target community. However, no single model can ever do for the church what only she can accomplish in obedience to Jesus.*

The message of the Gospel (in Greek *euangelion*) is central to the mission of the church and the advance of Christ’s Kingdom on the earth. Therefore, communicating the message about Jesus Messiah is an essential consideration regarding a multisite model.<sup>3</sup> Launching the message of the Gospel across the globe is not only a biblical mandate, but also an identifying marker of **what it means to be the church**.<sup>4</sup> Multisite has allowed us to engage the culture of Greenville, and the surrounding areas of the Upstate, in ways we simply could not have done prior to the existence of these campuses.

Our campuses have created opportunities for new relationships, ministries, dialogue, and yes – conversions. A campus promotes personal evangelism because the church by nature starts small and requires the equipping of members to evangelize their neighbors in order for their community to grow. Geographic proximity is clearly an accelerant to this process.

Members at our campuses bear the new workload without the full risk and responsibility of an independent church plant. Our first multisite campus in Powdersville



is a great example of this. The campus grew numerically from 40 to 400 people in just four years. The members were motivated to invite their neighbors and friends to a church that was conveniently located in their own community. Conversions and baptisms at this particular campus also demonstrated a strong evangelistic trend in the Grace Powdersville community. Powdersville embodies a new level of zeal for sharing the message of Christ, which has continued to be a hallmark of their campus culture.

## 2. DOES THE MULTISITE MODEL HELP MANAGE THE CHURCH'S RESOURCES?

*The multisite model has afforded us the opportunity to change locations with incremental growth according to our need. Instead of beginning with a large building project and seeking to fill the space, we have waited for the numerical growth before committing to permanent facilities. We believe this reflects a wiser approach to managing the resources entrusted to us.*

God made Adam and Eve to be managers of His resources, not owners. The Biblical story can be summarized as a narrative of a God who restores His world-managers to be good caretakers of His creation once again. This is what the Scripture means when it speaks of stewardship.<sup>5</sup> As God's people, all of our resources are actually owned by God Himself. Our job is to steward those resources to the best of our ability, so that our management reflects His wisdom, beauty, and goodness.

One of the major factors in deciding to move toward a multisite model was its cost-effectiveness. For example, creating the Powdersville campus cost less than half of what it would have cost us to expand the Pelham campus worship center. When we launched our fourth campus in Fountain Inn (Harrison Bridge), we found that it would be even more cost efficient than the Powdersville launch. The amount of money saved on that particular campus is even greater in comparison to the option of expanding the existing Pelham campus. Additionally, by creating multiple sites, we are able to share and combine a majority of resources including staff, programming processes, and teaching.<sup>6</sup>

## 3. HAS THE MULTISITE MODEL OF GRACE CHURCH PRODUCED MORE LEADERS?

*Our use of this multisite model has produced more leaders by providing additional positions for leadership as well as new environments to nurture aspiring leaders.*

One of the big surprises of multisite is the increase in serving opportunities provided for our church body. Launching new campuses has opened up new ways for people to serve and lead. Through this door, more people are discovering their unique gifts and strengths in fresh ways. Many of these new leaders' gifts were not being utilized in their full capacity while we were a one-campus church. Likewise, starting new campuses provided additional contexts for ministry opportunities in their specific communities. For example, the Miracle Hill Children's Home in Powdersville, Powdersville High School, One-to-One tutoring, the Kroc Center, and the thousands of conversations generated by the statement, "Yeah, I attend services just down the road at..." are all results of our multiple campus expression.

The geographic proximity to a members' place of residence facilitates a statement about the commitment of Grace Church to the community where it is located. This simple fact supports a campus as it catalyzes its members and attendees to think and act locally.<sup>7</sup> The multisite model creates a greater awareness of particular needs in other communities, and consequently creates opportunities for our membership to innovate how they minister to their neighbors. Campus specific pastors and constant evaluation of the campus' needs, enable diversity at each local campus. Nevertheless, the strength and unity of our church has been enhanced for the whole body as well.<sup>8</sup>

## 4. HOW DOES GRACE'S MULTISITE MODEL HANDLE PASTORAL OVERSIGHT?

*Pastoral oversight has not only been sustained through our multisite model, but also enhanced through campus-specific leadership and shared communal space.*

The common presumption is that when a church spreads its resources out, it becomes thinner too. Members lose connection to a pastor and people who are introduced to the church during a time of weakness go unnoticed or are ignored as the church advances with a new site. However, we have found that the opposite is true. The multisite model has increased our ability to shepherd and counsel people. Given the inherent local focus to the campuses, no single pastor would be able to provide the personal leadership needed by all our people. For this reason, the bulk of our pastoral staff is employed to pastor, shepherd, counsel, and manage individual members of the church. Furthermore, these men have grown in their abilities through the process of launching new campuses. Nevertheless, when

thousands of people gather in one location it produces an environment with the potential to hide from biblical community. The service itself is insufficient to stimulate the personal growth necessary for healthy Christian faith. Consequently, when newer campuses are launched in closer proximity to congregants, it reduces the size of the gathering community and facilitates a more intimate environment. This proximity enables a campus pastor or group-life pastor to focus more specifically on that smaller community.

Remember, too, that the members in attendance are living in closer community with each other. Since the campus is specific to a given area, those in attendance are more likely to have sports teams, neighborhoods, and schools, which overlap with those of other families. Such venues are more natural pathways for ministry between members. This fact can be heightened by an awareness of other congregants due to the church's reduced size. Not only are pastors given opportunity for ministry to their people, but also the members themselves are able to notice people around them in need. It's our desire to continue the ministry philosophy of Paul in Ephesians 4 in which his robust theology of the Holy Spirit empowers the leaders to equip the rest of the body to do ministry themselves. We believe that our multisite model is a 21st expression of a first century essential: equipping the members of the local church.<sup>9</sup>

## 5. HOW DOES GRACE COUNTERACT A "CELEBRITY STATUS" MENTALITY FOR ITS TEACHING TEAM?

*The technology used in multiple campuses, and the plurality of teachers used at the various campuses, work in conjunction to diminish the status of any one teacher.*

Grace Church is considered to be a mega church and consequently there are some trends that we have to counterbalance. Even in the 1st century church at Corinth, Paul had to diminish Peter's, Apollos', and his own role in ministry because factions had arisen within the church.<sup>10</sup> Multisite has in reality enabled a diminishing effect on the emphasis of any one teacher. Before we began using a multisite model, Grace practiced team teaching, wherein various teachers from within our church would be used throughout the year to instruct the congregation. We still use a plurality of teachers to this day.

In 2012 Matt Williams did the majority of the teaching on the weekends. However, Bill White carried a significant amount of teaching as well. The teaching schedule

was interspersed with no less than 10 teachers in the course of the year who filled in, supplemented, and gained teaching experience within our church body. The various campuses gave us as a church the flexibility to have a teacher exposit scripture at a single location or teach at two of the four sites. For example, the teacher can be recorded and their material sent to the other campuses, or we can have multiple teachers at different campuses simultaneously. When we put various faces in front of people, we are able to help diminish what might become an overemphasis on any single teacher. If celebrity mindsets persist in the minds of congregants it can't be attributed to a multisite model. On the contrary, multisite and video provide useful tools to offset our tendency to elevate individuals over others.

## 6. HOW CAN I ADAPT TO RECEIVE TEACHING MINISTRY VIA VIDEO?

*Consider the ability of the Holy Spirit to use various means, the credibility of the teachers, and the other positions within the church to minister the Word in community.*

"For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power."<sup>11</sup> For millennia God has used various mediums of communication, but His greatest strength of communication came in the person of Jesus the Son.<sup>12</sup> God has employed an oxen's yoke, pots of clay, a talking donkey, and a few slabs of stone within His communication arsenal; nevertheless, He most consistently uses His Spirit to gift His people with the ability to minister His word.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the emphasis of the Apostle Paul was not on who was doing the ministering, but on the force of the content. Video is a medium that we have found to be significantly more expressive than what the 1st century church had in communication through letters. Nevertheless, for those of us who are more accustomed to listening to a teacher in-person, video teaching can come as a surprise. You may have a strong sense of connection to the teacher or simply desire to experience the preaching of the Bible at the same moment the teacher delivers the message. We would encourage both of these motivations; we're glad there are so many people who want to have a deep and transformative experience in the Word of God. In fact, both of these desires are driving forces behind our use of multisite.

First, we have found that while there is an unhealthy dependence on individual teachers, the desire for any given teacher to be a credible source of instruction is

absolutely essential.<sup>14</sup> The church body needs to feel the power of a teacher's character. Paul teaches Timothy that this will be a means of his own hearer's salvation. So too, we believe that Matt Williams or Bill White's credibility as a pastor and teacher is not diminished in its strength when conveyed through a recording. Their lives are in the truest sense "three-dimensional". Their faithful conduct and behavior in public and private credits their teaching. If the Apostle Paul's doctrine was not diminished despite the weakness of a hand written scroll, then neither should the force of our pastor's teaching despite a two-dimensional screen.

Second, video teaching facilitates reciprocity between the campuses. The "give and take" with video vs. live teaching at a campus enables ministry to happen not only at the campus where there is live teaching, but also at the other campuses where video is being used. Each service centers on the ministry of the Gospel through scripture. Teaching is only one aspect of this word-centered ministry. However, the exhortation, the prayers, the music, and the post-service counseling are all ministering to the people in that particular room, using servants who are in that exact location. Each one is an aspect of experiencing the ministry of God's word. Similarly, Community Groups are the most effective means of biblically oriented ministry at Grace, due to their personal dynamic. It is important for us to recognize that each campus assists in the ministry of all the other campuses by their use of video teaching. Grace's ministry is broader and more varied precisely because of our use of video teaching.

God's Spirit has been transcending the norms of culture, language, and technology for years. Each generation faces new challenges and opportunities to embody the life of the Lord within their unique time and place. For Grace Church, we believe that God has provided our elders and leaders with the wisdom to translate the unchanging essence of the Gospel into a practical vision for ministry. Our multisite expression is the result of our prayerful and sober evaluation of how to be faithful to our generation with the Gospel that has been entrusted to us.

<sup>1</sup> Warren Bird and Kristin Walters, *Multisite is Multiplying: Leadership Network* (September 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Greg Ligon, [http://leadnet.org/resources/page/multisite\\_concept\\_papers](http://leadnet.org/resources/page/multisite_concept_papers). Leadership Network.

<sup>3</sup> Sojourn Elders: *Why we believe our Multi-Campus Approach is a Biblical Model*.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 16: 18, 28:29; Mark 16:15; 2 Corinthian 5: 11

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25: 15-30; Luke 16

<sup>6</sup> Dave Ferguson & Jon Ferguson, *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start a Missional Church Movement*, pp. 135-148.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church: Timeless Truths and Timely Methods* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> J.D. Greear, *Is the multi-campus concept biblical?* (November 23, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Greg R. Allison, *Theological Defense of Multi-Site*, (9 Marks eJournal May/June 2009).

<sup>10</sup> I Corinthians 1: 10-31; 3-4

<sup>11</sup> I Corinthians 4:20

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 1: 1-3

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 4: 11-16; Romans 12: 1-8; I Corinthians 14: 1

<sup>14</sup> I Timothy 3: 1-7; 4: 16