



When a New Church Plant Fails by Mike Ruhl

Of all the new mission plants in the United States each year, how many end up in failure—closed? “Far too many!” most of us would say. It’s a fact of life that all human bodies die sooner or later, with the exception of saints like Enoch and Elijah. But is there an “infant mortality rate” for new church plants? Some denominations have reported infant mortality rates up to 70% (only 3 of every 10 new churches survive). But that percentage appears to be exceptionally high. Research suggests that infant mortality rates among new churches in the U.S. is more typically in the range of 25-33% (6-7 of 10 new church plants survive).

Church planting is not a guaranteed endeavor.

No baseball player bats 1000 and no quarterback completes every pass.

Even the Apostle Paul did not succeed in every city in which he attempted to plant a church. In fact, in some cases, not only was he unsuccessful, he was literally run out of town!

Research by Jim Griffith and Don Nations, of the Griffith Coaching Network, reveals these factors common in the rubble of a failed church plant.

1. **Premature birth.** A very high percentage of failed church plants

start public worship too soon.

Launching with a tiny group of people often leads to disappointing results. Many church planters underestimate the time needed to gather a sufficient number of people for sustained public worship.

2. **Unclear goals.** Lack of a defined time-line and clear, measurable goals eliminate the capacity to assess the development of the new church start.

3. **Lack of training and coaching.** Planting a church is hard work. Most leaders have little preparation for such an endeavor.

4. **Too much spending, too fast.** New church plants face the temptation to assemble the “tools and trappings” of a “real” church too quickly.

Too many material enhancements strain financial resources which detracts from missional activities that reach the lost.

5. **Lack of focus.** Every new church plant faces fundamental questions: Whom are we trying to reach? What strategies will be used to reach them? What is the time-line for new church development? What essential steps must be taken, in what order?

6. **Monistic ministry.** New church plants develop best when “waves” of new people respond to

a variety of events, approaches or ministries—a pluralistic approach. Less effective is having only a single event, method or gospel delivery system.

7. **Mismatch between planter and community.** Church planters must have an affinity for the target audience the new church is attempting to reach. Church planting success diminishes when there is dislike for the community the new church is attempting to reach.

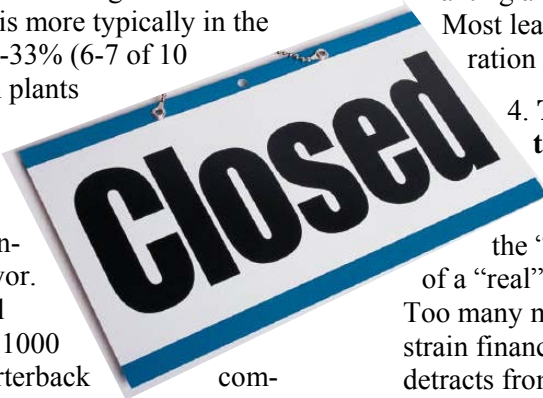
8. **Inability to recruit new people.** New church plants almost always attract people who have been attending other churches. But that should never be the target. Planters who can’t or won’t recruit new people may be headed toward disappointing results.

Little wonder that Jesus gave this counsel to people He sent into mission: *Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.* (Matthew 10:16)

Reaching unreached people in the U.S. depends largely on the planting of new, Word-based, healthy, relevant, mission-focused congregations.

The LCMS *Ablaze!* movement has the goal of planting 2,000 such new congregations in the U.S. by 2017. Pray that the Holy Spirit uses all of us to turn this dream into reality! ■

Mike Ruhl is Executive Director of the Center for U.S. Missions.



Daughter Church Planting: The Multi-Site Approach *by Glenn Lucas*

Several years ago Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Santa Clarita, California, north of Los Angeles, considered planting a daughter church in a fast-growing area nearby. But Rev. Marty Brauer, Bethlehem's pastor, soon realized the church could not afford to buy land and build a new structure. "At this point," Brauer says, "we realized we had to think outside the box. We were landlocked, but our ministry was growing and there were still a lot of people in our valley who needed the good news of our Savior. So we wondered: what if we started a church without walls?" This thinking led Bethlehem's leadership to the multi-site church model. They leased space in a school in the area they wanted to serve, and Bethlehem opened its second site, the east campus, in November 2003.



As they planned this second site, the leadership was committed to what Brauer calls "Sunday best"—a high quality worship experience in a comfortable setting. They invested \$80,000 in equipment and a portable storage trailer. Professional musicians lead the music ministry. Greeters are in place before and after the service. A host couple starts worship with a warm welcome and closes it

with a sending out. Coffee and doughnuts can be enjoyed on small café-style tables. Trained caregivers staff a Nursery. An age-appropriate worship experience is offered for children. Currently, the same message is proclaimed by whoever is preaching that weekend in Bethlehem's four services.



Brauer sees Bethlehem's multi-site ministry expanding in the future, with preaching done via video in each venue. His vision is that the Saturday evening service will nurture and equip believers for Sunday morning service in seeker oriented satellite services.

Bethlehem's multi-site ministry experience is not unique. More congregations of all sizes are starting multi-site daughter churches. Interestingly, many such churches did not originally plan it that way. Like Bethlehem, they often were landlocked and wanted to move to a new location or were planning a traditional daughter church plant. But as they explored options, a multi-site ministry seemed the most practical.

Should your church develop a multi-site ministry? Consider these factors.

Property/Site: Leasing or renting is often more practical than purchasing land and building. The new site may be in a specialized setting or context—near hospital cancer units, at nightclubs where 20-something's and singles gather, or across town in a school or theater. The deciding factor for location is often whom the congregation is trying to reach.

Staffing: The ability to leverage staff and resources for effective ministry across multiple sites is significant. Many multi-site ministries have a senior pastor, with other pastors and staff who serve the various sites. The campus pastor might not be the preacher but, as the one who creates and builds relationships with those who experience that site's ministry, he is key in bringing credibility and stability. He must be someone that others will follow.

Administration/Organization: Administration is often centralized in a multi-site ministry. One church office in a central location reduces costs and improves staff communication and networking. As to organization, there are various approaches.

Some have unified budgets and boards; others have individual budgets and boards. Some expect the satellite to eventually spin off as a separate congregation, while others expect the ministry to continue as a part of the whole.

Leadership: Congregations in multi-site ministry list leadership as the most significant factor in healthy multi-site ministry. Paid staff need the support of trained, well-placed leaders. The challenge of a multi-site ministry provides an incubator for raising new leaders in a congregation.



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The Center, a partnership of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Mission Services, Concordia University, Irvine, California, and the LCMS North America Mission Executives, exists to provide research and training for mission work among unevangelized people in the U.S.

Mission: Moving to a multi-site ministry usually enhances the congregation's vision and mission. At Bethlehem, members became excited as they explored the church's mission in the context of starting a satellite ministry. In the midst of the conversation, someone stated in wonderment, "If we can do that kind of outreach over there, we can do it right here, too!" The focus on a new mission ministry expanded the congregation's overall sense of reaching new people with the gospel of Jesus.

A congregation may move to the multi-site church model because it allows them to reach cultural, ethnic or generational audiences it is not currently reaching. Bethlehem saw members who worshiped irregularly become active and regular in their worship attendance at the new site.

A church's values are reaffirmed as it explores planting a new site. Research consistently shows that multi-site churches emphasize the value of excellence in their ministries. They



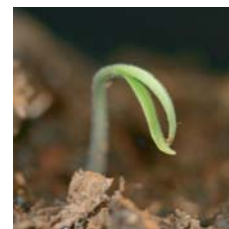
ensure the ministry is well executed with the highest quality, as Bethlehem did with their concept of "Sunday Best."

Multi-site ministry is exciting and challenging. As congregations seek to reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ, there will always be a place for traditional daughter church planting. But multi-site ministry is an important alternative when the timing and circumstance are right. A healthy church focused on the Great Commission, with strong supportive leadership, may very well find that multi-site ministry is the best way to reproduce itself. ■

Glenn Lucas is Director of Training at the Center for U.S. Missions.

Is it time for your congregation to think about having children?

Church consultants tell us the best way to reach the unchurched is by planting new churches. That's why the Center for U.S. Missions, together with Dynamic Church Planting International, has developed the Daughter Church Planting seminar. Congregations of all sizes will benefit from this refreshing and hope-filled seminar that approaches churches planting churches from a biblical and practical point of view.



Explore planting strategies, the advantage of planting, when to plant, the process of daughtering, mother-daughter relationships and more!

Join pastors, congregation leaders, mission executives and district presidents who have taken this seminar and developed a contagious spirit and become advocates for churches planting churches. For more information, or to host this seminar, contact the Center.

Daughter Church Planting a 2-day seminar for pastors and key leaders

12 Insights:

Avoiding Detours in Multi-Site Ministry

1. Remember that multi-site isn't a vision by itself, but a vehicle to achieve the vision.
2. As you look for staff, remember that multi-site leaders need strong relational skills.
3. Make sure each site has a "face with the place" – a campus pastor or venue director.
4. Expect your most successful multi-site leaders to be home grown.
5. Don't underestimate people's willingness to experience portions of the service by video.
6. When experimenting, try a low-regret, high-return strategy. Look for what you can do with maximum impact and minimum regret.
7. Avoid adopting a mature organizational structure when you're smaller.
8. Don't view multi-site as merely an add-on; it will change who you are.
9. Whatever small groups did for you as a single campus still needs to happen on each new site.
10. Avoid the term main campus because it implies that everything else is second-class.
11. Learn the difference between replicating a site and replicating impact.
12. Don't underestimate the many contexts in which a multi-site approach can significantly help fulfill your church's mission.

From *Avoiding Detours: Insights from Multi-Site Pioneers Who are Leading the Way* by Warren Bird, pub. by Leadership Network, www.leadnet.org.

On the Net

Three questions to ask when considering multi-site ministry:

1. How healthy is your church?
2. Is there a driving impetus behind your desire to go multi-site?
3. Are the key leaders behind the decision?

Source: <http://www.pursuantgroup.com/leadnet/advance/aug05s1a.htm>

See also: Daughter Church Planting International; <http://www.dcp.org>

North Coast Training Network Starting A Video Venue; http://www.northcoastchurch.com/videocafe_startup/index.htm

Quotes of Note

"Several ... multi-site congregations have discovered that their off-campus ministries are the most effective channels for reaching skeptics, agnostics, non-believers and inquirers at the very earliest stage of their faith journey." -- Lyle Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future*

"There are now at least 1,500 multi-site churches in the United States. No longer does a church have to have only one branch, one location, or one campus." -- Dave Ferguson, "The Multi-Site Movement: A New and Effective Way to Reach More People for Christ" at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bcl/areas/vision-strategy/articles/102605.html>.

Update: Winter Mission Planter Training

New Name: Basic Mission Planter Training is the new name for Mission Planters Institute. The name change reflects the expanded training.

New Location: T Bar M Ranch and Conference Center in New Braunfels, Texas, 30 minutes north of San Antonio.

New Dates: Monday to Friday, Feb. 13-17. Moved back a week; and starts on Monday rather than Sunday evening.

Registration deadline remains January 8!

For more information, visit our newly-designed website, www.centerforusmissions.org and click on Seminars.

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