

Should Faith Church Open a Satellite Campus?

Q&A with Pastor Kurt

May 22, 2011

Where did the idea of a Satellite campus come from?

Three years ago, God placed it on our hearts to pay off our mortgage and release funds for ministry. This fall, we completed our mortgage but found ourselves facing emergency repairs of our roof and basement. In the last seven months, the debt of \$211,000 for a new roof and basement repair is almost complete.

With God placing his fingerprints on these critical financial projects, the leadership believes God is moving us forward to consider other opportunities for ministry. Statistics reveal more of our visitors are coming from a distance. Statistics also reveal that our main drawing card is our worship service. We began experimenting with the idea of what it would take to make the worship service available to more people who come from a distance. As part of that research, we ran across the concept of Satellite campuses. This may be the next big step God is leading *Faith Church* to take.

What is a Satellite Church?

A satellite church is one church meeting in multiple locations but they share a common vision, budget, leadership and board.

Satellite churches share the same name and have the same core ministries. While the worship is typically live, the teaching can be live or via video.

It is similar to franchising a church. Think of McDonalds. Whenever you see a McDonalds, you know you will find the same core menu and quality of service. Because of the positive association we have with one McDonalds, we are comfortable stepping into another. If it worked for burgers, why wouldn't it work for a church?

What is the difference between a church plant and a satellite campus?

A church plant starts as a small group that eventually develops a critical mass. Once critical mass is obtained, they hire a pastor, purchase property and build a church. A plant cannot offer the ministries and strengths of a medium to large church. Ministries such as children's and youth are entry level. A church plant must transition through multiple growth barriers to get passed the 300 attendance mark. This is a challenge that many church plants can not overcome. 33% of church plants do not last beyond four years and the average size of a plant after four years is eighty.¹

A satellite campus offers the chance to begin with a solid vision and stable leadership in place. It offers the chance to begin with the core ministries in place. The success rate of a satellite is higher than a church plant.

Don't we have enough work to do on the corner of 28th and Erie?

Of course, there is always more work to do in our immediate region! That doesn't mean we shouldn't begin a satellite.

- **First**, we are a church with a regional mission that extends beyond Spirit Lake. We are "reaching our region" with the good news of Jesus Christ. This means we need to

¹ <http://www.movements.net/2007/06/05/how-many-church-plants-survive.html>

think regionally, not just locally. Developing multiple campuses to operate in a regional format is a natural outgrowth of our mission.

- **Second**, this is driven by vision issues, not capacity issues. There is still space in our sanctuary. The consideration of a satellite campus is driven by our desire to fulfill the Great Commission by extending *Faith Church* into another city of our region. Planting a satellite campus for missional, not capacity issues, is one of the most common reasons to plant a satellite campus.² The vision of *Faith Church* and the EFCA denomination are unique. More cities in our region are in need of churches like *Faith Church*. Let me give you an example. The preaching of Scripture has become increasingly passe in the main-line denominations. For example, last week the Presbyterian denomination followed the path of the Lutherans and they will now ordain homosexuals for ministry. This is happening because they hold a low view of the Bible. Our region, is primarily populated with main-line churches. While not all the individuals churches are ready to ordain homosexual clergy, their denomination is. The next 25 years will see main-line denominations in deep trouble. There is a need for more churches like *Faith Church* in our region. This is the reason I am in Spirit Lake, IA and not on the mission field. We are a mission field!
- **Third**, becoming a multi-site church, from a statistical standpoint, will help us become a more evangelistic congregation in Spirit Lake. 69% of the congregations that went multi-site say their congregations became more evangelistic after doing so³.
- **Fourth**, adding another campus increases our rate of growth. Just as moving to two-services allowed each service to grow at a consistent rate, adding another campus will add another service that will grow alongside the other two worship services.

How could this work?

There are a variety of models. One of the most common is the video-venue model which was pioneered by Larry Osborne at *North Coast Evangelical Free Church*. In this model, every campus is live except for the preaching, which is done by video. We were skeptical of this but found ourselves surprised by the effectiveness of a video-venue when we did an exploratory trip to *Prairie Lakes Church*. People responded much better to the video than we imagined. They laughed with the jokes and took notes in their outlines. In some churches, people prefer the video sermon to living preaching because it is easier to see. The larger image allowed better connection with the facial expressions of the teacher.

Another model involves multiple teachers following the same teaching outline or one teacher traveling to multi-locations, like the circuit riders of old.

We are considering the video-venue model where our first service would be video taped and second service would alternate between live and video teaching between campuses.

Remember, ***the word does not have to be delivered live to be active***. Every time we hear a preacher on the radio that convicts us, it was not live. Every time we read a Christian book that convicts us, it was not live, but the spirit was active. Every

² Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, pg. 66

³ *Ibid.*, pg. 24.

time we read our Bible, it was not live, but the Holy Spirit still uses it effectively in our lives. Even the first century letter in our New Testament were not delivered live, yet they were still active.

What is in it for me?

A second campus is not primarily for us. A second campus is about reaching others with the gospel. It is the entire congregation engaging in a first-century missionary effort to reach another part of our region with the gospel. The payoff is seeing Christ transform lives and knowing he let us play a part in it.

Of course, there are some benefits for us, I just you to realize that a satellite church is not primarily about benefit to us but about the glory of God's name.

- It is more cost effective than building a bigger sanctuary.
- It overcomes geographic barriers of people getting to church
- It enables untapped talent to emerge
- It mobilizes more volunteers through adding ministry opportunities
- It assists in reaching family and friends unwilling to travel
- It accelerates the climate of diversity, creativity and innovation in ministry.
- It improves a congregations stewardship of funds and resources.

How much will this cost?

Our research puts a price tag on this of between \$50,000 to \$150,000 depending on the degree of excellence used when the satellite campus is launched. *Prairie Lakes Church*, which launches their satellite campuses using top of the line equipment budgets \$300,000 for the first three years. This involved all of the latest technology you can imagine and a lot of technology most of us can not imagine.

Most satellite campuses pays for themselves within a year of opening because of the reduced cost of startup.⁴ The best way to think of it is counting the cost of *not* opening another campus. It is cheaper in the short run but with less risk comes less reward.

Wouldn't it be cheaper to just plant a church?

Just the opposite is true. It is more costly to plant a church compared to launching a satellite campus. Here are some of the benefits and cost savings associated with a satellite campus compared to a church plant:

- Accountability
- Sharing resources
- Pre-trained workers
- Share DNA (vision and values)
- Pre-established framework for problem solving
- Ministry opportunities to develop new leaders

I have never heard of a satellite campus before. Are other churches doing this?

One out of four megachurches are holding services at multiple locations. Seven out of the country's ten fastest-growing churches offer worship in multiple locations, as

⁴ Ibid., pg. 106.

do nine of the ten largest churches.⁵ 30,000 churches are predicted to be multi-site by the end of this year.⁶

How big do you have to be to offer a second site?

Churches 250 and up successfully go multi-site.⁷

Where would we open this campus?

We are considering Spencer. We are not settled in this direction. We are still asking God to confirm this.

The EFCA district office has Spencer on their heart. It is one of the larger cities in Iowa without an EFCA church. They supportive of the satellite campus approach and are interested in working with us to move forward with the creation of a satellite campus in that city. Regarding timing, they recommend we move forward as soon as possible.

What are the next steps?

We have begun by sharing this vision with you, the congregation. Financially, we do not believe this challenge is out of our reach. In the last three years, God moved the heart of his people to joyfully give \$420,000 above and beyond their regular offerings. A launch price of \$150,000 for a satellite campus is within our reach.

That being said, before we move forward, we desire to retire the last \$40,000 of our roof and basement debt. Perhaps God is moving your heart this morning to write a check toward helping retire that financial obligation. It wouldn't surprise me if that \$40,000 obligation was gone in a matter of weeks and we were able to come back to you with more concrete plans for a satellite campus later this summer. *The money is secondary, not primary.* I like the way John Calvin said it, "Where God guides, he always provides."

This morning, is God calling us to move out of our comfort zone and reformat the way we do church into a multi-campus model instead of a single campus model? Is God calling us to step out of our comfort zone and plant a campus in a community beyond our own? That is the question we need to answer. If God is behind this, it will succeed.

⁵ Ibid., pg. 9.

⁶ Ibid., pg. 11.

⁷ Ibid., pg. 19.