

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MULTI-SITE MINISTRY: HOW THIS MODEL CAN ENHANCE THE ABILITY OF
WELS CONGREGATIONS TO ADOPT A MISSION MINDSET

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ABSTRACT

Multi-site ministry has captivated the attention of congregations in recent decades by showing the potential for greater impact in surrounding communities. This thesis investigates the nuances of multi-site ministry by means of literature review, scriptural basis, and case studies. WELS congregations found in Iowa, Arizona, and Florida/Texas were analyzed in the case studies. The interview questions delve into the origin of that specific multi-site, the work that is carried out in the local communities, and the fostering of a mission mindset in the congregation. While exploring the landscape of this intriguing format, this thesis uncovers what factors are necessary to promote a mission mindset which includes, but is not limited to, proper staffing and defined leadership roles. Depending on a few key factors, multi-site might be a feasible (or even advantageous!) option for your congregation. Yet, developing multiple sites is not automatically a revitalizing approach. This study directs its readers to healthy methods behind this popular style of ministry, especially encouraging those involved to ask: "Can we can do more together?"

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INTRODUCTION

The Multi-Site wave has crashed through the United States and WELS is beginning to ride. Surfing analogies aside, multi-site has surfaced as a fascinating approach to ministry that comes with curb appeal and many apparent advantages. What is it exactly that has drawn people to this style of ministry over recent decades? Perhaps one explanation would be that potential arises in connecting a couple of communities which previously had little in common, a pooling together of resources is now suddenly on the table, and a chance to collaborate on the inner workings of the church and outreach-based community events is created.

Furthermore, *The Multi-Site Revolution* by Geoff Surratt lists several reasons to enter into multi-site. It lays out an array of options for new locations to pursue and lays the groundwork for using varying styles of worship and building overall momentum. Multi-site ministry tends to bring the best aspects of larger and smaller churches into the same space. It eases the process for members to invite a friend or neighbor if there is a nearby location, making driving distance a non-factor and connectivity more likely. It pushes leaders and the entire congregation to tap into their creativity in their forms of outreach. It opens up a congregation's eyes to see the wider impact on the kingdom which they can participate in through their church.¹ Today local churches go out to reach communities instead of the citizens of the communities taking on an active role in searching out a local church. In recent years the United States has become more of a mission field rather than a place where Christianity flourishes and claims the majority of the population.²

¹ Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird. *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 88.

² Surratt, Ligon, & Bird, 91-92.

Purpose

This paper aims to explore the factors necessary to develop an effective multi-site ministry. The first segment will be a quick overview of dual parishes for insight into the origins of modern-day multi-site. Investigating dual parishes sets the stage for discussing several issues, especially what current challenges are present when combining ministry efforts.

I will present three case studies of three congregations which decided to forge ahead into multi-site ministry. These case studies will show us how each church entered into the multi-site realm and lead us to understand that there is no perfect template or set standard for multi-site. In other words, there is no set schedule or exact step by step procedure to bring about a thriving mission-minded multi-site. Each setup is unique. Each one is arranged differently to play to certain strengths. Engaging in multi-site ministry lends itself towards flexible setups. The ministries explored in the case studies represent various regions of the nation: Arizona, Florida, and Iowa. Yet they all share a few important qualities: being grounded in their communities and being grounded in the Word of God.

In this paper I will not focus on communication within this particular style of ministry. For example, keeping the congregation's members informed and helping the worship planning running smoothly across sites is crucial, but I have not directed my studies around those points. Despite not being the focal point of this paper, communication was certainly taken into consideration throughout the research and interviews. Studies into communication are undoubtedly worthwhile for pastors and members alike to continue to seek how to improve. Researching communication theory and its practical applications for a church that navigates multiple campuses would be a worthy topic for another paper.

I also do not wish to give the impression that I am upholding multi-site ministry as a superior form of carrying out the work to which God has called us over and above any other format that WELS uses to reach and serve communities. I am not seeking to become a 'cheerleader' for multi-site ministry by advocating its usage in every place. My objective is to realistically represent some of the current, functioning multi-site churches within our synod and lead others to consider what makes those churches healthy and growing. Equally valuable to recognizing what good qualities are found in such congregations is to identify and avoid that which prohibits the fostering of a mission-minded congregation.

Simply put, not every congregation is adequately situated for adopting multi-site. Yes, it is true that some congregations may grow into taking on this approach, but usually that occurs after some significant internal changes. How can the leaders of a multi-site church take abstract ideas and turn them into action? How are these strategies employed in an actual mission field consisting of thousands of people who have not yet been reached with the gospel? What needs to be in place before the first steps are taken? What difficulties can be alleviated as the congregation undergoes significant changes? These questions require plenty of prayer, research, thought, and conversation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout the initial research stage many factors which lead to healthy multi-sites came to the forefront. Particular books spoke about the modern landscape of multi-site ministry and also what church leadership looks like in situations that had multiple staff or multiple sites. In the section immediately following we will investigate dual parishes, which have helped lay the

foundation of multi-site. Next, mergers and new mission starts are discussed as the main forms utilized in the multi-site format. After that the requirements of leaders and their priorities are shown in order to help recognize healthy congregational habits. Finally, this section explores the similarities and differences between American megachurches with multiple campuses and our churches that utilize this type of ministry. The two sections beyond the literature review reflect an effort to draw from multiple sources and draw a fuller picture. A few accounts from the Bible are included to connect the goals and aspirations of multi-site to Scripture. The final major portion of the paper consists of case studies which provide both practical applications and an emphasis on features that make or break the mission mindset of the multi-site method.

Dual Parishes

Historically, the multi-site method takes its roots from dual parishes. A dual parish consists of multiple congregations who employ one pastor to serve as their shepherd as one who travels between each congregation to minister to them. Most dual parishes in America are found in rural areas. This implies the possibility of considerable distance existing between the congregations of a dual parish causing some strain for both shepherd and flock. Part of the difficulty of running a dual parish is deciding who has a claim on the pastor's time at what time.³ There are also financial constraints and debates concerning the pastor's salary. How much will each congregation contribute? Finally, practically speaking, what will the Sunday schedule be? Will each site hold worship services? Will each site have the opportunity for Bible study on Sunday? What about weekly activities at each site?

³ Robert L. Wilson, *The Multi-Church Parish*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 23.

The choice to go into multi-site ministry must be a conscious decision. Full support from those involved in the mission outreach helps immensely. In contrast, dual parishes are usually formed out of necessity. The move to a dual parish is rarely done out of preference. It is often made after hesitation from at least one of the congregations.

According to Robert Wilson's research, two of the most difficult things that a congregation has to give up in a dual parish appear to be maintaining autonomy and each church having a pastor that they could claim as their own.⁴ No matter how similar the demographics of each location may be the two spots are not identical. "Each congregation has its history, traditions, and leadership. Each has its own culture. A merger means bringing together these different cultural groups."⁵ The merging of culture is no easy task.

Another prominent issue found inside dual parishes are feelings that a particular group of believers is receiving less care than another. It is common for the pastor of a dual parish to feel pulled in two directions. This has an impact on his mentality and approach to daily tasks. "The natural tendency even for clergy is to put one's time and energy into activities that are rewarding and where results are forthcoming."⁶ The pastor has to fight the urge to pour the majority of his effort into what he believes is the more stable congregation. If the perception that one church is cared for more than another persists then a rivalry could quickly form between the sites and a congregation could become embittered towards the pastor. Perhaps it is easy to dismiss the possibility of two Christian churches harboring disdain for one another. However, Wilson recalls the time when a Lutheran pastor commented frankly on the relationship of the two churches he

⁴ Wilson, 22.

⁵ Wilson, 83.

⁶ Wilson, 57.

served, "They get along fine in a distant sort of way. They last talked to each other in 1933."⁷ The quote is especially concerning since about five decades have passed without meaningful communication. For these reasons Wilson expresses his belief that it is highly unlikely that dual parishes will become the norm among Christian churches.

Distance may have to be dealt with, but it doesn't have to be detrimental. Utilizing the multi-site method helps to disband the formation of a competitive outlook by encouraging consistent contact between members no matter how many sites are established. The pastor in a multi-site congregation is part of a unified mission. It is common that each location uses the same name with the idea of visibly displaying unity, but it is not the case in every situation. Within these congregations there is often a closer connection between the sites since each location is viewed as part of the whole rather than separate entities. Because there one, unified congregation everyone who is a part of it works as a team to share resources and build relationships around the Word.

Mergers

What will the future hold within the WELS when it comes to bringing ministries together? As the number of pastoral vacancies grows or the number remains at a significant level, and with the ongoing retirements of older pastors, more and more churches and their congregational leaders consider stepping into multi-site ministry. Consider the situation of a congregation that has become stagnant in its mission efforts and is struggling to provide funding for their current called workers while failing to draw in new members. The idea of becoming multi-site is now appealing since the congregational leaders acknowledge that the future of the congregation does not look bright by earthly standards. It appears that joining another congregation via merger may

⁷ Wilson, 23.

be the only way to escape an untimely closure. When people notice that there doesn't appear to be a solid plan for growth within the congregation itself and the outreach that is carried out is infrequent, they imagine that adopting multi-site will fix their problems and yet that is often not the case.

Lyle Schaller is a church growth consultant who is mentioned in *Multi-Site Church Road Trip*. He researched mergers in the 1950s and 1960s. Mergers were gaining popularity but the usual result was a decline in attendance and overall growth.⁸ The main issue cited was that many of the churches which decided to merge were already in decline and had attempted to salvage their losses by joining together as a single church.⁹ It is generally unadvisable that two struggling churches merge. Mergers are difficult in almost any case since they demand significant resources in manpower, materials, and solid communication to guide the congregations through the process of joining missions.

Churches that merge together should be aware that the transition takes time. Introducing the change itself is rarely communicated easily and quickly. Surratt notes that no two mergers are alike. There is not a clean-cut map or a predictable path for completing a merger.¹⁰ Flexibility is important given the situation. Communicating the church's expectations for the upcoming year goes a long way toward making the transition easier.

There are several strategic moves that can place the congregation in a position to thrive when initiating a merger. First, a leader will help the members adjust to the new format which the congregation will be taking on. What seems like a simple first step really cannot be taken for

⁸ Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird. *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2009), 160.

⁹ Surratt, MRST, 160.

¹⁰ Surratt, MSRT, 165.

granted. A congregation heading into a merger will inevitably lose its identity in part and will need to acclimate itself by coming to the understanding that the incoming changes are truly in their best interest. Help can be provided through planning out the structure of congregational leaders, setting an outreach agenda, and being willing to answer any questions to the best of their ability.¹¹ Although this process can quickly become time consuming, Surratt pushes people to move with some speed in order to alleviate the anxiety that congregations experience in the beginning stages.¹²

New Missions

Multi-site ministry can also be established by a congregation deciding to start a new mission. The location of the new mission could be as close as the other side of the metro area or it could be several communities apart. While it is meaningful to consider the proximity of the sites and how it might hinder the overall operation, living with larger distances can be alleviated to some degree thanks to the use of technology. A new mission's aim is not to daughter a congregation by making the initial efforts to grow the group and then letting that congregation spread its wings. Instead, there is an intentional plan to have the new group of worshippers remain as an existing branch of the original congregation. Covering more ground and launching sites in new communities is a reason for joy. The development of a new mission that is going to last for decades to come requires hard work. Surratt encourages churches to "answer the why questions as well as where."¹³ Simply having a city, suburb, or farming town in mind doesn't complete the process. The church must identify a need which they could fill through their time and effort

¹¹ Surratt, MSRT, 166.

¹² Surratt, MSRT, 167.

¹³ Surratt, MSRT. 72.

(spiritually-guided child care, in-depth Bible studies, etc...). The reason behind the move will inspire more work than geographical location alone.

A congregation must have a clear understanding of its nature and purpose regardless of the direction it chooses. This is essential and cannot be overlooked at the risk of missing out on the value and time that is put into running a congregation from multiple locations. The church body must be diligent in studying the Scriptures while it forms the mission statement. Being thorough and intentional with the mission statement is crucial, otherwise the culture in which it is immersed could heavily influence and detract from a mission that is consistent with the Christian faith.¹⁴ “Only by a clear theological understanding of its nature and mission can the church determine its own course, and act rather than only respond.”¹⁵

Developing multi-site ministry is just one avenue by which the church may express its thanks to God for all his good gifts. A church does not need to have multiple sites to truly do mission work. More sites do provide extra opportunities, however, for everyone to become involved in the vital work of seeking to accomplish something greater together. Macchia showcases the proper mindset from a philosophical standpoint that appeals to Scripture,

We don't exist on this planet for ourselves. We exist to live lives for the glory of God and, in partnership with others, to fulfill the Great Commandment (to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength), the Great Compassion (to love our neighbors as ourselves; to live out the Golden Rule), and the Great Commission (to make disciples of every nation, teaching others to live in obedience to Christ).¹⁶

¹⁴ Wilson, 90.

¹⁵ Wilson, 90.

¹⁶ Stephen A. Macchia. *Becoming a Healthy Team: 5 Traits of Vital Leadership*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2005), 104.

The aim is to further the kingdom of God here on earth, whether by merger or new mission.

Wilson grounds us in this simple truth, “The Christian church has functioned and will continue to function through a variety of institutional forms.”¹⁷

Leaders

Leaders have the privilege of setting the tone, being constant encouragers, and taking up a position on the frontlines of the battle. Macchia uses alliteration to describe his ideal leader in a clever and memorable way, “A team leader who is aware of the reality of this leadership - a person involved in a process of leading a group of people toward the fulfillment of a purpose under the power of the Holy Spirit - can be used by God to accomplish his purpose.”¹⁸ By definition leaders are part of a team. They interact as a group, in the form of a church council, a worship committee, people who coordinate opportunities for volunteers. If leaders are not guiding others then they end up only influencing themselves.

The goal is to get the team to its fullest form of expression and that's when it enters vibrant maturity. Here the team begins to see with much greater clarity the roles and responsibilities of each member in light of the bigger mission. In maturity the fully formed team functions out of love for one another and with mutual admiration and accountability. The team delights to see each member succeed in building up the entire body. When the team is fully functioning, then fruit blossoms forth in fulfillment of its shared mission and is multiplied in the hearts and lives of others.¹⁹

While one can find leaders serving in several capacities inside the church, the current objective is exploring the dynamic of specifically having multiple pastors who are working within the same congregation. Pastors have a unique call from God to faithfully serve their members and surrounding community full-time with the Word and Sacraments. Pastors who serve together in

¹⁷ Wilson, 27.

¹⁸ Macchia, 159.

¹⁹ Macchia, 45.

multi-site ministry are associates that traverse a truly unique landscape. Not only does their work involve direct collaboration with each other; it involves a broader collaboration across two (or more) distinct communities. "It's vital that every team have one leader. Two-headed, double-visioned leadership doesn't work in healthy ministry settings. Even when two or more are designated as a leadership team, set apart from the team membership, there must be a clear delineation of each person's responsibilities from the beginning."²⁰

Priorities in Multi-Site Ministry

The desire for multi-site ministry needs to be paired with an expectation to accomplish something greater by working as a team. When this desire is made into a priority, the natural fruit that follows is a multi-site ministry that is not merely a means for survival. Rather, using the multi-site method broadens into a full-fledged mission-mindset. Those who are inside the congregation reach out to more people in more places through combined resources and fortified relationships. If this mindset is minimized then churches end up missing the target and landing in an entirely different field. They begin to work in vain, suddenly working for the sake of activity instead of doing ministry for the purpose of bringing glory to God.²¹

It is fairly easy to lose sight of this mindset and disrupt a healthy foundation. The sinful nature pulls each of us toward looking to the needs of ourselves while neglecting the needs of others, even if it is those who are closest to us. Take, for example, the body of believers in a modern-day church. The basic principle remains now as it did in the past: people have the tendency to look out for those gathered inside while neglecting other precious souls on the outside. Multi-site ministry might advance this deficiency and make things more difficult as two

²⁰ Macchia, 156.

²¹ Macchia, 39.

groups strive for unity and progress. Some churches that have just one location sense a divide simply by having two service times which end up keeping half of the congregation from spending quality time in worship with the other half week to week. Once a pattern develops, people rarely break away from it. This creates a barrier between the congregation in terms of getting to know each other better. And yet, even through the trials that catch us with misplaced priorities God has continued to supply his church with all that it needs to carry out his divine will:

God's call on our lives as believers is to be interdependently interwoven in a spirit of unity and collaboration with one another. This begins within the context of our immediate ministry teams and expands outward to the entire body of Christ worldwide. Often, however, we forget that there is a larger world of Christians "out there," and we tend to become too provincial in our outlook. That was never God's priority, for throughout biblical and church history the Lord has sought to draw his people together and unite them around commonly held and inherently shared priorities for life and ministry. It's been that way since the dawn of time and will remain so until he comes again in all his awe and splendor.²²

In Lutheran congregations the Word of God, Baptism, and Holy Communion remain constant among every established multi-site ministry. Many other factors change from ministry to ministry. Any single site can undergo significant changes from one year to the next. Add in the unique characteristics of each staff member who fills a role in worship, evangelism efforts, Bible studies, local volunteering (each activity meant to build up the congregation), and you will see more variables come into play. Still, the centerpiece remains the means of grace and ultimately stabilize each situation.

As Wilson puts it, "One minister can attend to education, another to evangelism, another to pastoral counseling, and so on. Each pastor can have the opportunity to exercise a professional

²² Macchia, 94.

specialty or pursue a particular interest.”²³ Personalities vary. Strengths are found in a variety of areas. One pastor excels in an aspect of ministry where another pastor may not particularly be so naturally inclined. Perhaps that is why Macchia makes the comparison between multi-site ministry and the improvisational nature of jazz:

As they are assimilated into a team, they utilize their gifts to create a new sound, in much the same way that jazz musicians do when they make music together. In the intersection of ideas, lives, and ministry responsibilities, the team creates their music. There’s a bit of push-pull going on to produce the new sound, but after much practice, the tempo and lyrics are brought beautifully together - a wonder to behold.²⁴

Influence of Megachurches in America

The methodology that seeks to use more than one location for a single church organization was first formed among megachurches in the United States. Their efforts produced success in gathering more people onto their campuses. Even as standalones, these churches thrive off of networking and furthering a community atmosphere so it is no surprise that they caught on to the advantages of multiple sites. Megachurches look to expand primarily because they are becoming *too mega* which is to say that they are growing at rates that have caused them to run out of room in their buildings and parking lots.²⁵ It is sometimes an issue of space that pushes congregations to consider adding additional buildings or sites within WELS, but it appears to happen more frequently among megachurches.

Through my research I was disappointed to learn that many megachurches which begin multi-site operations look and act more like a corporation. *The Multi-Site Revolution* quotes authors Bill Easum and Dave Travis who said, "The key to understanding the multi-site

²³ Wilson, 76.

²⁴ Macchia, 99.

²⁵ Surratt, MSR, 21.

movement is to remember that fulfilling the Great Commission drives these congregations, not a growth strategy."²⁶ Although the book did occasionally mention spiritual motivation it was unfortunate that the best economic investment often received more ink on the pages. Contemplating the economic implications of their congregational decision is not inherently wrong. It is indeed a wise move to look out for financial ditches and avoid them. Yet I was left with the impression that the authors lost sight of the true reason to move forward with a multi-site format, namely, to spread the life-saving good news of Jesus to as many as possible. That is the greatest motive. Megachurches across the nation are often driven by business savvy leaders. Some leaders inside megachurches are tempted to look at money as the primary motivation. Certainly not every leader is devoid of proper motivation or refuses to acknowledge that reaching more people with the good news of Jesus is the reason for running all of the business transactions, but that motivation did not take center stage or present itself consistently throughout their stories.

Another striking difference found within multi-site megachurches was the extensive use of technology. When working with more than one site there seems to be increased opportunity to utilize technological advancements. The most common use of technology within megachurches is displaying the weekly sermon on a screen at every campus apart from the main campus each Sunday.²⁷ The idea behind this method is to have one preacher over the weekend who preaches in person at the main location of the multi-site. That same sermon is then delivered to the other

²⁶ Surratt, MSR, 22.

²⁷ Surratt, MSRT, 106.

campuses via technology. Greg Ligon noted that his interaction with worship components being shown over a screen did not bother him after his initial shock.²⁸

A positive takeaway from researching megachurches involved in multi-site is rejecting the notion that the second site is second-class to the main or original site. A congregation and its leaders ought to refrain from giving that impression in any capacity. If this feeling is not dispelled the body of believers could come to the conclusion that they are less valuable because they are smaller in numbers of congregants, size of worship facility, or ability to contribute funding. Holding to this notion can cause doubt, lack of enthusiasm, and many other dangerous outcomes that are detrimental to everyday ministry at that multi-site church. This issue will be confronted in the case studies to follow.

How a congregation speaks about having multiple sites gives an indication of their perspective. Geoff Surratt makes an example from a pastor who made this fundamental change in terminology, "We have a decision to make - we will either be a church *with* multiple venues or a church *of* multiple venues."²⁹ How the people view the various campuses will affect their outlook on ministry and conveys either a healthy or an unhealthy mindset. Surratt continues by explaining exactly what the intention is behind using the slightly different turn of phrase:

The change from *with* to *of* is subtle but it transforms everything you do as a multi-site church. You can no longer discuss student ministry or men's ministry or pastoral care or you-fill-in-the-blank ministry without recognizing the implications for each venue or campus. When you decide to be a church *of* multiple venues or campuses, multi-site becomes a foundational underpinning for all the strategies of the church. It involves a significant change in philosophy and a commitment to making the change necessary for effective execution.³⁰

²⁸ Surratt, MSRT, 88.

²⁹ Surratt, MSRT, 46.

³⁰ Surratt, MSRT, 46.

By undergoing a simple shift, like changing the way of speaking about the sites, a congregation could avoid certain difficulties as they strive for unification. This alteration in thinking and speaking gears both the speaker and the listener towards being conscious of the connection and seeking the best interest of each location.

Everyone who is a part of the transition into multi-site ministry will aim to reflect their value system in the way they speak. The potential of expanding relationships and joining in with this movement can be spurred on by those who see its incredible impact on the modern landscape of churches. Eric Bramlett, the creative arts director at Community Christian Church (Naperville, IL), states, "The determining factor isn't geographical, but relational."³¹ This quote shows that, while there may be important discussions about places and communities, the true driving force is the relationships that are started, strengthened, and solidified. The relationship between individuals and Christ is evaluable above all, and it will grow as they listen to God's Word and share in the Sacraments.

Relationships are the heartbeat of a multi-site ministry, but they are not automatically formed and fully engaged from the start. "Anyone who pursues assimilation and unity in a team knows that there is a price to pay for this principle to come alive. Human beings are not inclined in this direction, particularly among and within our independently minded American culture. From our earliest of days, we have been taught not to need others."³² Interpersonal relationships take time. Our nation seems to support the idea that individuality and independence are to be valued above all else. It may be an uphill battle at the beginning, but it is worth the fight to promote authentic relationships.

³¹ Surratt, MSR, 152.

³² Macchia, 97.

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE MULTI-SITE MOVEMENT

Is there biblical precedent for multi-site ministry? We probably won't find a clear one-to-one parallel with a 21st century multi-site when we scan the pages of Scripture. Multi-site may be a product of our times, but the Bible reminds us that there is nothing new under the sun. What has been done will be done again (Eccl. 1:9). The foundations of multi-site can be seen in glimpses of the history recorded for us in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Early Christian Church

Most scholars point to the early Christian church as the primary example, upholding how they cared deeply for each other, filled the needs of fellow believers and surrounded one another with spiritual encouragement that directly translated into their loving actions. The account reads,

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47 NIV)

Macchia describes the impact of the early Christian church as having a ripple effect, one that is still felt today thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit through the ages. "From the time of Pentecost to the earliest growth of the Christian church, the believers were known to share all they had with one another so that the mission, message, and ministry of Christ would be multiplied in their generation."³³ As the message of Jesus was spread and seen through their actions, the early Christian church spread to the homes of the people who lived in other cities and

³³ Macchia, 30.

nations. The church grew tremendously despite all of the persecution it suffered. Those who were inside the church ended up reaching several regions outside of its main hub of Jerusalem.

God's hand can be clearly seen in the formation of the early Christian church. The church viewed the geographically distant groups as a close contingent of the family of believers. The most important thing that the Christian church shared was her faith! The church had fearless leaders who worked across the globe, a group of disciples whose adventures are recorded in the book of Acts. The apostles worked tirelessly to strengthen both converts and long-time Christians.

It is true that using the multi-site format naturally leads to the sharing of resources. While this should not be overlooked, it is beneficial to recognize the level of care and concern that the believers in the second chapter of Acts poured into people's spiritual needs. God was increasing the number of those who were being saved. The physical gifts were an expression of their thankfulness which came from hearts that praised God for his many blessings.

Moses and Jethro

The example of Moses and Jethro has been seen as an example of solid multi-site qualities, namely how leaders address organization. Jethro, who was a priest, advised his son-in-law and fellow religious leader, Moses, to divide up his responsibilities so that he would not be consumed by the weight of it all. Moses was in charge of a giant group of Israelites! Jethro heard the report of all that God had done for the Israelites. Afterwards he encouraged Moses to seek out others who had the aptitude in this way, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone." (Exod. 18:17-18) Moses followed through with Jethro's suggestion, "Moses chose able

men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens." (Exod. 18:25 ESV) He broke down the mighty masses into smaller sections and appointed leaders to watch over them while he maintained his place as the primary leader of the children of Israel.³⁴

Delegation is a skill that every pastor would do well to develop over the course of his time working with churches. Truly successful ministry operations are never a 'one-man show'. Any pastor who takes it upon himself to assume a wide range of responsibilities, especially those that are beyond reasonable expectation, risks pastoral burnout. Does a multi-site church effectively encourage more people to step into roles to become active in ministry that they otherwise might have avoided or not seen the need for? I believe that having multiple sites can foster the ability for both pastors and lay members to serve effectively without feeling extremely burdened.

Going over a few examples from WELS churches will assist in making the transition between noting the principles found in the Bible and putting them into practice. A bulk of my research into the realm of multi-site ministry revolved around interviews. These interviews drew out origin stories, recounted successful alterations that were made to help the congregation's mission, and identified possible next steps that the congregation may take. Applications will be brought to the forefront at the end of the paper. Congregations and individuals alike can assess their current situation and decide what factors can be implemented immediately, which ones can wait, and which ones are simply not possible at the moment given their unique circumstances. The goal is to show healthy multi-site organizations and reveal what factors keep them in a mission mindset.

³⁴ Macchia, 28.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

In order to expand my perspective on multi-site ministry as a whole I decided to interview a few WELS pastors around the nation who are directly involved in this type of ministry. The interview process was initiated by sending out a survey via email which consisted of five short questions that gave ten pastors an opportunity to reflect on the way they approach their work in the context of their communities.³⁵

The initial survey was helpful in gauging the basic layout of ministry across some major categories. First, I was able to learn about the origin of the multi-site format for their location. Secondly, I got information on the specific pastoral role of each of the participants and their associates (if applicable). Next, I was able to learn more about the worship styles and the perceived changes in the people's mission mindset they have noticed over the course of time. Finally, I received insight on at least one notable challenge and one apparent blessing of working with a multi-site congregation.

After receiving several responses I took the opportunity to carry out more in-depth interviews over the phone. Each of the interviews lasted about one hour in length.³⁶ These interviews were formed with these goals in mind: to further investigate what elements make multi-site run effectively, seeing how multi-site has impacted the congregation's views and actions, and hearing examples of the intentional steps that leaders take to keep everyone upright and enthusiastic.

³⁵ The survey questions can be found in the appendices.

³⁶ The survey questions can be found in the appendices.

Another high priority while conducting these in-depth interviews was to see more clearly how the unique communities affected the way they were reached with the gospel. In other words, trying to gain insight as to how outreach is approached when one considers the people who make up the communities. Insights and direct commentary from the pastors who participated in the recorded phone interviews will appear later in the paper in each case study.

According to *Applied Qualitative Research Design*, "case studies deal with each case as a complete unit or entity."³⁷ Roller and Lavrakas define a 'case' as "an entity such as an individual, group, organization, event, program, or process."³⁸ Roller and Lavrakas recognize the multi-faceted nature of case studies. The type of input received should be given equal consideration - the spoken words, the chronology of events, the geographical context, etc... and by paying attention to each segment of the case study the researcher is able to offer a more complete display without splitting up the story and missing the big picture.³⁹ The analysis draws especially "on the interconnectedness of the data elements and less so on reducing the data to just a few categories or themes."⁴⁰

Being appropriately flexible is a valuable skill. Gathering multiple perspectives is encouraged to make sure that the case is covered from every angle. The main idea is to ensure that the entire interview process is fair and balanced. The selected research done by the interviewer will likely bring to light a considerable amount of strengths and weaknesses of any given program.⁴¹ However, I did not contact other people within the congregations of the pastors

³⁷ Margaret R. Roller, and Paul J. Lavrakas. *Applied Qualitative Research Design*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2015), 291.

³⁸ Roller & Lavrakas, 293.

³⁹ Roller & Lavrakas, 291.

⁴⁰ Roller & Lavrakas, 291.

whom I interviewed. I am comfortable having this limited perspective since I set out to view multi-site through the pastor's eyes. I wanted to explore the pastoral viewpoint and allow them to speak openly and honestly about the struggles and the benefits of serving in this kind of ministry.

Case studies are useful in capitalizing on a comparison of the real and the conceptual.⁴² It is possible to investigate an actual program, such as an Easter for Kids event put on by a church, alongside something less tangible like the quality of the relationships between the pastoral staff or council members.

Narrative research is closely paired with case studies. Narrative research records firsthand experiences through the sharing of a story. This kind of research is less structured than in-depth interviews which heavily rely on the guidance and direction of the interviewer. Narrative research tends to open up the inquiry by asking a simple inviting question and allowing the person interviewed to answer by speaking freely on the subject for an extended period of time. While this method "does not command a broad following within the larger qualitative research community"⁴³ Roller and Lavrakas believe that narrative research is gaining ground in terms of relevance.

Whether or not there has been a noticeable increase in usage of narrative research, Roller and Lavrakas unveil the main weakness of this approach. Narrative research relies heavily on the narrator's ability to correctly recall past events, choices, and motives. Ultimately, they conclude that this leaves the bulk of the interpretation on the researcher and on his own understanding of

⁴¹ Roller & Lavrakas, 291.

⁴² Roller & Lavrakas, 294.

⁴³ Roller & Lavrakas, 298.

the narrator's words.⁴⁴ The researcher is largely unable to clarify any glaring questions since there is no solid opportunity for direct follow-up.

Although conducting in-depth interviews is thought as a step up from purely narrative research, using those interviews does count on the interviewer having a specific set of skills. Some of the skills are building rapport, engaging in active listening, following leads, and drawing accurate conclusions from the data provided.⁴⁵ All of those examples are crucial for successfully completing thorough in-depth interviews.

The finalized set which I designed for the in-depth interviews contains forty-three questions. The questions were divided into six categories for organizational purposes: Personal, Origins, Leadership, Communication & the Congregation, Communities, Looking Back & Looking Ahead. The first set was designed to build rapport and gently open up to the topic at hand. The last set offered each pastor a chance for reflection on previous events and encounters while also providing the space to share what dreams lie ahead for the congregation.

I did not ask every question on the finalized interview sheet of all the participating pastors. I made that choice by recognizing that each interview had its own conversational flow which meant that certain questions were more pressing and others could afford to be skipped. Many times it depended on the direction which the pastor took us and if he wanted to speak more extensively on a particular subject. On occasion, information provided through the pastor's answers led me to jump to a different section instead of finishing the current one. I was also aware that some answers overlapped with another question which made the interview more efficient. On occasion, I would move up a particular question (depending on its application to the specific multi-site situation) in order to spark more fruitful conversation. The value of particular

⁴⁴ Roller & Lavrakas, 299.

⁴⁵ Roller & Lavrakas, 301.

questions increased in comparison to others after garnering insights from the first round of email surveys.

Reflexive Journals

Prior to conducting the interviews I was encouraged to write a reflective journal. The purpose of a reflexive journal is to record thoughts ahead of time regarding the subject matter. This helps to keep the investigation apart from personal bias. The interviewer's intention is not to try to influence the person being interviewed by steering them into preconceived notions. The reflexive journal provides the opportunity to write down what I sensed would take place or what direction I thought the interview might go. After the interview was complete I could then compare with my notes. The following paragraphs include commentary from a reflexive journal in connection to the first case study with Pastor King.

On November 13th in the morning hours prior to my first interview I recorded the following entry: "I believe this interview will provide unique perspectives to the multi-site format because Pastor King has recently arrived at Good Shepherd and is discovering how to navigate the two campuses. I'm looking forward to hearing what adjustments he has made personally to adapt to the change in type of ministry. I expect that there will be some in depth information given especially in the areas of community differences and the mindset of the congregation changing and growing along with the mission. Those thoughts come from being somewhat familiar with the congregation and assessing Pastor King's words in the initial interview."

Here are Pastor King's words regarding the mission mindset of his congregation and how being multi-site has affected it: "[Being multi-site] enables them to look past their own city or

facility to really focus on ministering to people. When a congregation's focus is on the kingdom and not on themselves, good things happen in ministry."⁴⁶

Continuing with the reflexive journal, "I anticipate much to be said about the future. I think there is potential that Good Shepherd is looking to capitalize on, of course any blessing would come from God and is in no way solely dependent upon Pastor on the congregation. With this being one of the early interviews I am not sure how flexible I will be in terms of asking the questions. I intend to grow in my ability to ask leading and helpful follow-up questions and will look to have decent time management."

Over the course of the interview Pastor King seemed mostly focused on the present. He certainly has an eye to future and is excited about the prospects of Good Shepherd, but he brought to my attention plenty of items to address at the current juncture. One helpful takeaway from writing a reflexive journal was being able to better manage the questions I brought before each pastor after being made aware of the assumptions I held. This benefit became clear to me over the span of conducting three in-depth interviews.

CASE STUDIES

The case studies which follow are intended to give a glimpse into a few functioning multi-site churches within the WELS. The information presented has been taken from interviews which were conducted over the phone and recorded. By presenting the case studies my hope is that the reader would be able to identify key similarities and differences between the cases. The similarities point to the factors which boost the morale and mission of the multi-site congregation. The differences, on the other hand, point to the factors that uniquely affect the

⁴⁶ Billy King, in discussion with the author, November 2019

congregation's efforts to serve their respective communities. It is beneficial to recognize that differences may indicate ideas and strategies that cannot be employed everywhere. The reader can take into consideration their potential value and make valuable judgments as to what may truly invigorate and increase a mission mindset inside their church. Interpretations and conclusions are collected at the end of the paper for this purpose.

Good Shepherd (Cedar Rapids & North Liberty, IA)

The first church setup to explore is Good Shepherd whose primary site is in Cedar Rapids, IA. Pastor Billy King serves this congregation. The newest site of Good Shepherd is located in North Liberty, IA which is 18 miles south of Cedar Rapids and just under 10 miles away from Iowa City. As far as nearby WELS churches go, Good Shepherd is fairly isolated. There is only one church within WELS fellowship in a radius of 50 miles: Pilgrim Lutheran Church (ELS).

Pastor King noted that the mission to North Liberty began in earnest in the 1990s. The beginning was somewhat stagnant as they were denied permission to daughter a church upon first request. A few decades later the mission to North Liberty began in earnest with an established core group.⁴⁷ Several members of the church already were living in the North Liberty area and were willing to become part of the foundation of the second Good Shepherd site.

Good Shepherd hit a few speed bumps in the process. Recently the congregation decided to close their school at the Cedar Rapids campus. This development broke the hearts of many congregants. Despite the school closing and the redirection which was now necessary, the desire to maintain outreach remained strong. King acknowledged that having so many people who want to be actively involved in the church's outreach effort (no matter what form it may take) is a

⁴⁷ A core group is an essential part of a new mission startup. Core groups provide committed members who participate in events and worship in the new area for an extended period of time.

major blessing. Pastor is working hard to encourage this mindset and he continues to fan into flame that godly desire to bring more and more to know Jesus. If this positive trend carries on others will pass on that same desire and over the years it would gradually become part of the congregation's DNA.⁴⁸

Pastor King sees great potential in the setup that Good Shepherd has today. Currently the congregation offers a Bible study that is held on a regular basis in the recreational center of North Liberty. Not only are there footprints being made in that town, there is also a plan to call a second pastor to become part of the staff and serve as the "boots on the ground" pastor for the new mission.⁴⁹ Excitement has been building due to the fact that North Liberty is a short drive away from Iowa City, opening up the possibility of a future campus ministry. According to Good Shepherd's vision, the pastor in Cedar Rapids would serve primarily as the administrative pastor. As much as it is possible that specific pastor would ideally have good organizational skills and would focus on equipping the membership through Bible studies and taking people through more evangelism training.

Though the members of Good Shepherd certainly trust God to provide for them there is no guarantee that a second pastor will enter the picture soon. The challenge of only having one pastor at the moment is understanding how ministry time should be divided between the two locations. Pastor King mentioned that multi-site "adds another layer" and complicates the week to week process for the sole pastor.⁵⁰

The worship style of Good Shepherd is based around two key concepts: simplicity and participation. A straightforward approach helps worship guests acclimate to the scene and

⁴⁸ Billy King, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁴⁹ Billy King, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁵⁰ Billy King, in discussion with the author, November 2019

enables them to take little steps toward participating more. North Liberty's worship mirrors what goes on in Cedar Rapids. One notable difference is found in the music. Members bring in a keyboard to North Liberty which takes the place of the organ.

Regarding leadership, it is important to have representation from both sites. King informed me that there are currently three council members who are rooted in the North Liberty site. One quality reason to maintain a balance inside the council is that results in having both sides represented. Members from each location are able to contribute to the discussion and give a more accurate assessment of Good Shepherd's affairs.

Pastor King spoke about acquiring a volunteer coordinator, a role that might be deemed necessary in order to help the members at both sites prepare for opportunities to serve inside the church and outside in the communities of Cedar Rapids and North Liberty. In the meantime King expressed his thankfulness for all of the work that the paid secretary accomplishes now. He theorizes that some of the responsibilities of her position could be shifted after acquiring a volunteer coordinator.

When I asked Pastor King about Good Shepherd's mission statement he proceeded to read it in full. He quickly realized that the mission statement specifically mentions Cedar Rapids and not North Liberty. It's clear that the statement has been useful for many years in the past, but now it could use an update which reflects the mission beyond a single community and includes their new venture to the south.

What do the next steps look like for Good Shepherd? Pastor King is aiming to keep kingdom work at the forefront, for himself and for the members in Cedar Rapid and North Liberty. He wants the congregation to view their responsibility to the mission in light of the bigger picture of Christ and the promise of heaven that awaits all who believe. When those in

Cedar Rapids look beyond just themselves they accomplish exactly that. He loves to remind the people of his congregation that “evangelism doesn’t have to be corporate”⁵¹ and that individuals should not underestimate the impact that they have in kingdom work.

Grace (Tucson, Vail, Benson, & Sahuarita, AZ)

Pastor Koehler serves at Grace in Tucson, AZ. Grace is one of the earliest established multi-sites within WELS and currently consists of four sites: Tucson, Vail, Sahuarita, and Benson. The impetus for multi-site in this Southern Arizona region was Grace’s 100th anniversary.⁵² Shortly after celebrating God’s constant grace to them the congregation decided to embark on a new mission to Vail in 2011. Vail is a smaller, growing community located to the southeast of Tucson.

The next two sites of Grace came along in consecutive years, 2013 and 2014. Both congregations in Sahuarita and Benson reached out to Grace asking for help with preaching while vacancies were ongoing. The response they received went over and above that call for action. Instead of simply receiving assistance with preaching they got a counter-proposal which suggested that Sahuarita and Benson become sites of Grace.⁵³ After several meetings each place agreed to join the Tucson congregation.

The majority of the pastoral staffing of Grace works from the original Tucson site. In fact, three of the positions are based there: the Lead Pastor, the Administration/Outreach Pastor, and the Youth and Family Pastor (the latter position also conducts the campus ministry at the

⁵¹ Billy King, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁵² Ronald Koehler, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁵³ Ronald Koehler, in discussion with the author, November 2019

University of Arizona). There are hopes for adding another pastor to serve in Vail as the spot is vacant for the time being. Pastor Koehler remarked that the people of Grace have a desire for a familiar face as opposed to a revolving door of preachers, so they do their best to have consistency in that regard. There are exceptions to this rule. For example, Grace rotates preachers across the four sites during the Lenten season.

Among the four sites there is one congregational name, Grace, along with one shared logo. Sahuarita did not have qualms with the transition in name and identity, but it did take Benson's membership significant time to integrate fully and adjust to the various fast-paced changes.⁵⁴

Benson is a small town of about 5,000 people. It is the easternmost site of Grace and requires the most driving time between sites (about 45 minutes from the Tucson location). The building in Benson is modest and supports around fifty people for worship services.

As previously mentioned, Tucson hosts campus ministry activities at the University of Arizona. Among those are ESL⁵⁵ programs that create an avenue to reach and teach even more students through language work.

Sahuarita has experienced growth in recent years and has made one very notable addition in the form of an Early Childhood Center. Koehler remarked that this learning center was not part of the original plan.⁵⁶ God clearly had something else in mind for the faithful people there, and this new building opens up the potential to draw more residents of Southern Arizona to hear the good news of Jesus.

⁵⁴ Ronald Koehler, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁵⁵ The acronym stands for "English as a Second Language"

⁵⁶ Ronald Koehler, in discussion with the author, November 2019

Vail is a community located twenty-three miles from the heart of Tucson. This community is growing at a steady rate. Recent highway improvements, new schools, and medical buildings have contributed to the growth.⁵⁷

Most pastors would be willing to admit that their busy schedule can quickly become an obstacle as far as maintaining good contact with those who encourage and build them up in Christ. In reply to the question about what the staff does to boost spiritual encouragement among the workers, Koehler brought up how valuable their meetings on Tuesday mornings are. The meetings typically last up to 3 hours. When the staff meets together it serves as a "State of the Union" address posing the question, "How are things going among our sites?" It also provides an opportunity to discuss any relevant issues at length and discuss a book or article that everybody has read in advance.⁵⁸

Grace's mission statement revolves around three main verbs: Teach, Proclaim, and Nurture. Koehler finds the multi-site approach to be effective in fostering these actions and attitudes. The congregation is able to take part in each of the three aspects through interactions at church and outside of it.

Grace holds to a philosophy of intentionally not attaching labels to their worship style. This does not mean that there is little to no thought put into developing a regular set of worship *principles*. Grace intends to use the liturgy and implement variety whenever possible.⁵⁹ Screens were a consistent component in Vail until the vacancy came. The worship protocol at Grace is to simply use the skills of those who are willing and available to create the basis for the style of worship. No set style is imposed directly from on high. Koehler maintains a realistic view of

⁵⁷ Ronald Koehler, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁵⁸ Ronald Koehler, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁵⁹ Ronald Koehler, in discussion with the author, November 2019

worship when it comes to the smaller sites of Grace. Less musical variety will exist at those sites. He has accepted that and has not considered it to be a problem. The software program 'Hymnsoft'⁶⁰ is utilized at the Benson site to supplement congregational singing. As the church grows, the musical variety usually grows in conjunction.

Divine Savior (Doral, Delray, West Palm Beach, FL & Santa Rita Ranch, Sienna, TX)

Pastor Boggs serves at Divine Savior in West Palm Beach, FL. Divine Savior is a sprawling multi-site that crosses state borders. Additionally, the two states in which Divine Savior is found do not share borders. Florida contains three of the sites: Doral, Delray Beach, and West Palm Beach. The other two sites of Divine Savior are located in Texas: Santa Rita Ranch and Sienna Plantation.

Multi-site was never a part of the original plan for Divine Savior. Creating multiple sites was brought about organically, and the members recognized its formation as God directing them to a wide open door. The leaders of Divine Savior first considered the logistics of running a multi-site ministry. The decision was made to move forward and form more sites after their discussions. Divine Savior's strategy was to immediately jump into the deep end and figure out things as they go, addressing whatever roadblocks might show up along the way.⁶¹ Divine Savior felt comfortable adopting this adaptable game plan because of the ample amount of ministry experience present in their leaders.

Pastor Boggs has served for a total of three years in West Palm Beach and described himself as the grizzly veteran of the pastoral group, at least in terms of being involved with

⁶⁰ Hymnsoft can be used to play simple piano recordings of hymns found in Christian Worship and most hymns found in the Supplement.

⁶¹ John Boggs, in discussion with the author, November 2019

Divine Savior. The other pastors who serve have accumulated years of ministry experience but do not have as many years in their current locations (whether in Texas or Florida).

As a ministry team the pastors of Divine Savior have attended a number of conferences that focus on multi-site (some run by WELS and some by non-WELS organizations). For a span of three days over the summer they meet at a resort to plan worship, create sermon series, and spend quality time relaxing and enjoying fellowship. Aside from their planned summer excursion the pastoral staff also commit themselves to frequent collaboration on sermon series, brainstorming logo designs, and putting together Bible studies.⁶²

Pastor Boggs told me that when people left the West Palm Beach site to form the core group of the Delray Beach site the outcome was a positive development. While West Palm Beach "lost" several members and family units in the process they actually increased the family feel of the congregation and became more tight-knit overall.⁶³ Boggs commented that the departure of those core group members moved the remaining members outside their comfort zone. With fewer people showing up and being involved at their site members felt the need to respond by springing into action and engaging in more friendship evangelism. Pastor Boggs noted that this mode of evangelism seems to work out the best, as far as numbers go, in bringing new people into church. The members of West Palm Beach have certain opportunities that the pastor does not. They have the ability to reach out to people that the pastor and his associates may never have contact with in daily life.⁶⁴

⁶² John Boggs, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁶³ John Boggs, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁶⁴ John Boggs, in discussion with the author, November 2019

Looking at the inner workings of Divine Savior at the West Palm Beach location, Pastor Boggs brought up the leadership team which aims to encourage straying members to return to regular worship and study. A more expansive board exists to improve communication among all five sites of Divine Savior.⁶⁵

One emphasis that Pastor Boggs highlighted as a part of Divine Savior's mission is changing lives with Jesus as he and the congregation worship, connect, and serve their local community. While a level of connectedness prevails throughout Divine Savior's five locations, Boggs feels the closest connection within the walls of his own congregation in West Palm Beach.⁶⁶ The worship there is largely liturgical and pays homage to its Lutheran heritage while utilizing the musical gifts that belong to the congregation. Boggs seeks out capable musicians and encourages them to make the most of their gifts by enhancing the worship services where they praise their Savior.

In an attempt to further explain how ministry is carried out at Divine Savior, Pastor Boggs used the phrase "fast-paced" and noted that each location has its own reasons for moving at such a tempo. Doral is the main hub of Divine Savior. Beyond the activities that take place inside the church, Doral also keeps busy by running a school that has a student body of around 1,000 kids. Doral's community is very diverse so they offer a Spanish ministry program as well. None of the Divine Savior sites in Florida are strangers to cultural diversity. Delray Beach has been likened to "the fifth burrow of New York"⁶⁷ and West Palm Beach features residents from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Bahamas.

⁶⁵ John Boggs, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁶⁶ John Boggs, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁶⁷ John Boggs, in discussion with the author, November 2019

Another intriguing aspect of pursuing ministry in Florida (which contributes to the fast-paced nature) is the fact that the communities are growing by leaps and bounds. Both the economy and the housing market are on the rise. These trends are exciting to Pastor Boggs. He sees them as an opportunity placed before him and his people. He's ready to dream big by reaching out to the growing population and find out how God blesses them further.

One such blessing was made evident by someone who found Divine Savior to be inviting. They complimented the church especially for taking a stand apart from the majority of modern churches by maintaining proper Biblical doctrine.⁶⁸ Certainly it is refreshing to hear such an encouraging account given the current cultural climate of the United States. Occasionally people do notice and appreciate the distinction in how WELS worship functions, that it has a specific purpose and stands for the truth without watering it down.

Looking towards the future, Boggs would like to see Divine Savior gain a full-time worship coordinator who could ensure that everything is done well and oversee the organization of each site. He continues to put forward the pivotal question, "Can we do more?" There is a clear desire to push his members to think outside of the box and discover more ways in which they can speak about their faith and visualize themselves in a thriving mission field surrounded by people who are hungry to hear the gospel.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ John Boggs, in discussion with the author, November 2019

⁶⁹ John Boggs, in discussion with the author, November 2019

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

The growth of multi-site ministry in our nation and our synod provided a compelling paper topic. I am thankful to all who participated and contributed to the research. Factors that feed into a stable multi-site congregation were clearly seen. It is clear that being mission-minded is important. Churches that set their sights on survival alone travel a dangerous path because without growth they will continue to struggle. Churches that view multi-site as an avenue for more pronounced mission work and for bolstering the believers already inside the church are much more likely to flourish.

Multi-site fills an apparent need. Regardless of whether the multi-site is established through a merger or a new mission start, the format seeks to provide greater spiritually-driven assistance to one or more communities. The strongest multi-sites spring from strong, healthy congregations. In order to give your best in multiple locations it is necessary to take off from a firm foundation. It is not my intention to give the impression that multi-site carries no risk in those instances. There will always be legitimate risk when entering into a multi-site situation no matter how prepared the church may appear to be at the outset. No one can accurately predict without fail whether the people in a community will respond to the gospel in such a way that bolsters the congregation with activity and involvement.

Molding a multi-site congregation introduces many questions, some of which have no apparent answer until more time passes. For example, "Will we be able to establish a foothold in this community?" "Are we spreading our pastoral staff too thin?" Hypothetically, the best situation offers a sense of stability that is comforting in its own right, but it guarantees no success in and of itself. As seen by the pastors who were interviewed God will work in the way he

pleases. That may not be according to our dreams or imaginations. My prayer is that any church that enters into the realm of multi-site is energetic to proclaim the good news of Jesus found in Scripture.

Doing multi-site ministry doesn't necessitate constant contact with every site. That level of contact is unrealistic for most parishioners and sometimes is untenable for pastors too. Depending on the situation the pastor may serve best by giving his full attention to one site as he equips and encourages the flock there. The pastoral staff must carefully consider rotating preachers versus establishing a strong sense of familiarity at each site by having one pastor serve mainly one location. For the parishioners there is benefit to worshipping outside of their usual place on occasion and taking part in events that are held at the other site(s). Taking part in activities across the sites doesn't have to be a huge shift in routine for members. They have the option made available to them and are able to become more involved on the ground level when there are more opportunities to participate. Not everyone is going to run a booth at the local summer fair. Not everyone will walk through the local neighborhoods and canvass for church, but each person can discover their niche when the staff provides several ways to join in the work of the church.

Participants in multi-site ministry need to be willing to think outside of themselves. Egos are checked at the door. Minds come together to plan for the future and solve problems of the present. Members will do well when they understand that they belong to something bigger than the four walls where they worship. A church building exists, yes, but that church is filled with people who make a difference by God's grace. That realization is liberating! It expands the possibilities for outreach and boosts motivation to continue to strive for excellence out of thankfulness to God.

Staffing is also critical for success. Before launching into a multi-site format each church must evaluate what staffing positions they can support immediately and which staffing positions will be designated as possibilities for a later time. Taking the next step may require an additional staff position that can ease the administrative or organizational process. Congregations will consider what they can accomplish in their current setup and what goals must wait for further support before they are completed.

Anyone who is interested in further research could explore the leadership dynamic. I did not spend much of my time looking into leaders and their interaction with one another, though there are plenty of quality reasons to do so. A few suggestions to initiate the investigation of leaders are finding what qualities are prevalent in them and how they affect multi-site ministry, the usage of their time and how they schedule, and how they equip those around them to effectively participate in evangelism.

One more possibility for research into this topic is the usage of pastors within multi-site. Pastor Koehler mentioned that some people question Grace's extension of calls for another pastor when there are many vacancies throughout the synod. Does multi-site take away from other vacancies? Should we be redirecting those calls and prioritize spreading out and serving smaller churches or places where there would only be one pastor? Is it worth it overall if another pastor is called to a multi-site congregation in an attempt to keep it running at full strength when other places are left vacant?

Finally, remember that multi-site doesn't have a strict template. The size of the congregations and buildings will vary. Some ministries will have schools while others have early childhood centers. Some sites are located on the other side of town and some sites are several states away. Multi-site might work with five or more pastors while others function with one or

two. Every multi-site setup is going to look slightly different from the next one. That fact should not be concerning. Multi-sites are as diverse as the people who populate them. Showing hesitation over minor details or differences ultimately hinders the mission. God is able to grow a congregation where the Word is faithfully preached and taught despite the variables that come from the communities and the resources which are available. When considering taking on multiple sites make sure to return to the pivotal question alluded to earlier, "Can we do more *together* than we could accomplish alone?" If the answer is a resounding "Yes!" and people are willing to work within their communities then you likely have great reason to take on this style of ministry.

APPENDIX 1

INITIAL SURVEY FOR PASTORS:

Good evening, Pastors!

My name is Jordan Uhlhorn. I am a Senior at the Seminary looking for your help in providing information about WELS multi-site setups around the nation. The five questions below take about 10-20 minutes to complete, depending on the level of detail you provide. Hopefully this doesn't interrupt your working schedule. I understand your weeks are busy! Thank you in advance for taking any amount of time to respond. It is truly appreciated!

Important to note: After receiving the answers you provide I may ask a few of you for a more in-depth interview (via Skype, phone call, or in person if possible) for further research. Let me know if there are any questions regarding that next step or the survey itself.

Thank you again & God's blessings on your week

1. How did your church become multi-site?
(Merger, New Mission, both, other... feel free to comment on any factors that led to the decision)
2. What kind of staff members do you have? Do they work with every campus or only a specific site?
(# of pastors, ministry/worship/music coordinators, staff ministers)
3. Do you copy the style of worship, small groups, and events at each campus or are they unique?
4. Have you found that being a multi-site congregation increases the mission mindset of your people?
5. Give one example of a challenge directly related to being multi-site and one example of a blessing.

APPENDIX 2

IN-DPETH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Personal Info

How long have you been a pastor?

What were the major influences leading you to this path?

Origins

Who was behind the initial push to become multi-site?

Did you consult others in the process? Other pastors... books... synod leaders... etc...

Were there any significant roadblocks along the way to becoming multi-site?

Was a concern over funding a factor in deciding to go multi-site?

With your best estimate, would you say that the existing membership was on board/supportive to merge/start a new mission?

How long did it take to become established (as a multi-site)?

Did you have access to buildings for worship/bible study or was there a renting phase?

Are there plans to gain/form more sites?

Leadership

(If there are multiple pastors) How do you divide the duties?

How do you foster spiritual encouragement among the staff?

How did the council influence the movement into multi-site?

Did you have any specific committee work that dealt with the task at hand (as in, more specific, smaller numbers, focused)?

How did the leaders of your congregation prepare the members to take on this approach?

Was it a natural transition? Was it more work than expected? If so, what steps did you deem necessary to overcome that?

Congregational Involvement / Communication

How much room for growth do you have in the current facilities?

Could you comment on the importance/role of the main site?

How much contact do the members at different sites have with each other?

Do you sense a feeling of rivalry between sites?

As a congregation do you have a mission statement? In what ways do you use it (put it in front of your people)?

Do you feel that each site is aware of your mission statement?

In what way do you feel your congregation best lives out this statement?

Personally, do you feel a strong connection with each campus? Explain/expound

Community

Is the community / are the communities growing?

Moving to the communities of your sites, how much does distance play a factor in your interaction with each campus?

Comment on the unique features of the communities of your sites (to the best of your ability).

Do the worship styles you use play a part in reaching out to the communities?

Is there an event that has significant success in terms of reaching out?

Are there other local congregations that you have contact with/influence what you do in the community?

Looking Back & Looking Ahead

Any learning moments? Something where you had to step back and reevaluate?

What has been the mindset when going through times that feel stagnant?

Have you seen growth in the mission mindset of the members?

If you could implement additional staff positions, what positions would you be looking for and why?

What cautions would you give to a church that is entertaining the thought of going the multi-site route?

What encouragement could you share with a church that struggles in the area of reaching out?

What is the most valuable asset for a pastor who's engaged in multi-site format to have?

How do you develop goals with your congregation?

If you don't mind sharing, what are some of your long term goals?

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