

# MULTIPLE EVERYTHING

Insights from Churches with Four or More Campuses

*by Colleen Pepper*

## **Article Summary**

Leadership Network invited leaders from other U.S. churches *with four or more campuses* to participate in a survey that specifically targeted churches with four or more satellite, branch, or regional campus locations. This report includes eight ways that churches with four or more campuses are distinct, and some of the most significant perspectives they're discovering.



“If Starbucks can start four stores a day, why can’t churches?” asks John Bishop, pastor at **Living Hope Church**, in a recent *Wall Street Journal* article.<sup>1</sup> His congregation in Vancouver, WA (<http://www.livinghopechurch.com>), which has a weekly attendance of 6,000, started in 1996 with just five families. Ten years later, Living Hope broke new ground by starting five satellite campuses on one day, all in greater Portland, Oregon. Today, there are 23 Living Hope campuses, most in the Portland area, but also including sites in New Zealand, India, Mexico and the Philippines.

While Living Hope’s double-digit campus count is rare, the number of multi-site churches in general is on the rise, with an increasing number of those churches developing not just a second or third campus, but *multiple* campuses. At last count, there were approximately 2,000 multi-site churches in North America, of which almost 100 have four or more campuses, according to Warren Bird, research director at Leadership Network and co-author of *Multi-Site Church Revolution*.

In 2008, Leadership Network (<http://www.leadnet.org>) invited Bishop and leaders from other U.S. churches *with four or more campuses* to complete an extensive survey on their experiences. Twenty-seven of them accepted the challenge.

Although the term *multi-site* refers to churches that have multiple venues (i.e. a fellowship hall, gym or chapel) or multiple campuses (different addresses), or both, this survey specifically targeted churches with multiple satellite, branch, or regional campus locations, and four or more at that.<sup>2</sup> These congregations regard themselves as one church but meet in many different geographic locations.

Here are eight ways that churches with four or more campuses are distinct, and some of the most significant perspectives they’re learning. Churches with four or more campuses tend to be:

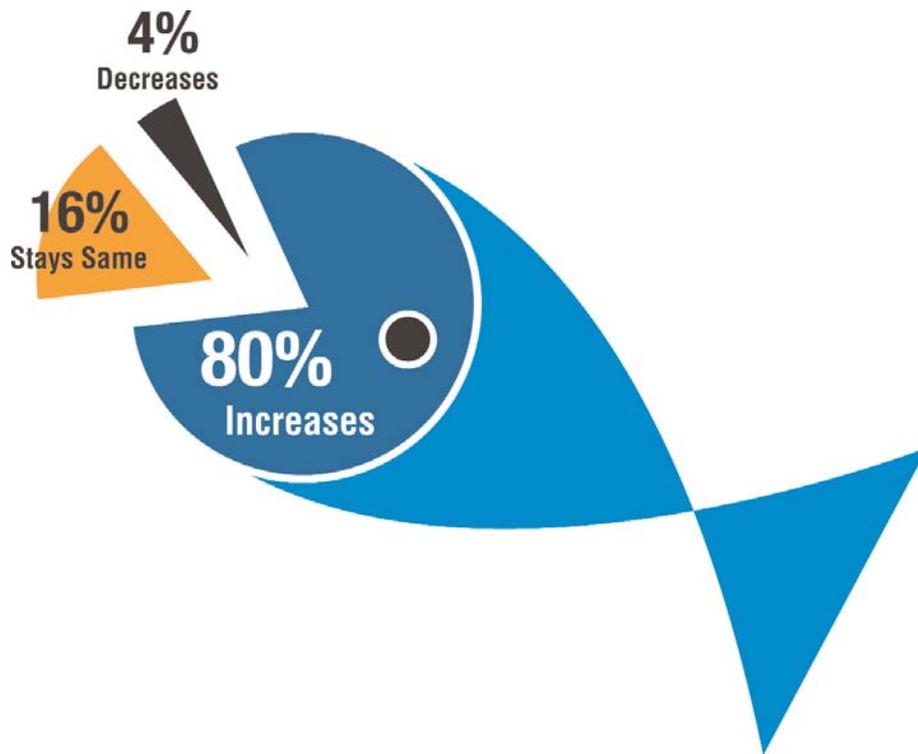
## 1. HIGH IN BOTH CONVERSIONS AND LAY LEADER TRAINING

There are many reasons churches may make the decision to add additional campuses. In the 2007 Leadership Network Survey of 1000 Multi-Site Churches<sup>3</sup>, more than half of respondents cited evangelism as the dominant motivator for employing a multi-site or multi-venue approach.

The results of this latest multi-campus survey seem to suggest that goal continues to be met, with 52% of respondents indicating that the number of new believers at the original campus has increased since adding new locations. Even more impressive, 80% of respondents said the number of new believers at other campuses also increased with the addition of new locations.

What’s behind these impressive numbers of new believers at the newer locations? Geoff Surratt, lead author of *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* and a staff pastor at a multi-site church, observes “Whenever Seacoast starts a new location the people involved in the startup have almost a revolutionary zeal about their new mission. They can’t wait to invite

When a new campus is added, the number of new believers at the *other* campuses...



their friends and their family to join them in the new endeavor and many of those people then commit their lives to Christ. I'd like to think that's the case with other multi-campus churches too, explaining why they report such high percentages of new believers."

With all the growth, one might expect that adding a new campus would put a strain on the human resources of a church. But, in fact, it would seem the opposite is true. According to the survey, the decision to have multiple campuses would seem to improve a church's ability to surface lay leaders and even future paid staff from within the congregation. More specifically, 67% of respondents said, their skill had increased at raising up paid staff from within the church body since going multi-site while 62% reported an increase in finding enough trained lay leaders.

Could it be the addition of new campuses yields an ongoing supply of new talent as new members join? Or perhaps the energy and momentum surrounding a new location is contagious and spreads throughout the church. Bird isn't sure, but it's an important finding nonetheless.

Then there is the positive affect that going multi-site has on church finances. Almost half of all respondents (46%) also indicated that the addition of campuses had a positive impact on their finances, with increased cost savings achieved through economy of scale.

## 2. ONGOING STUDENTS ABOUT MAINTAINING A “ONE CHURCH” IDENTITY

The book *Multi-Site Church Revolution* describes a multi-site church as follows:

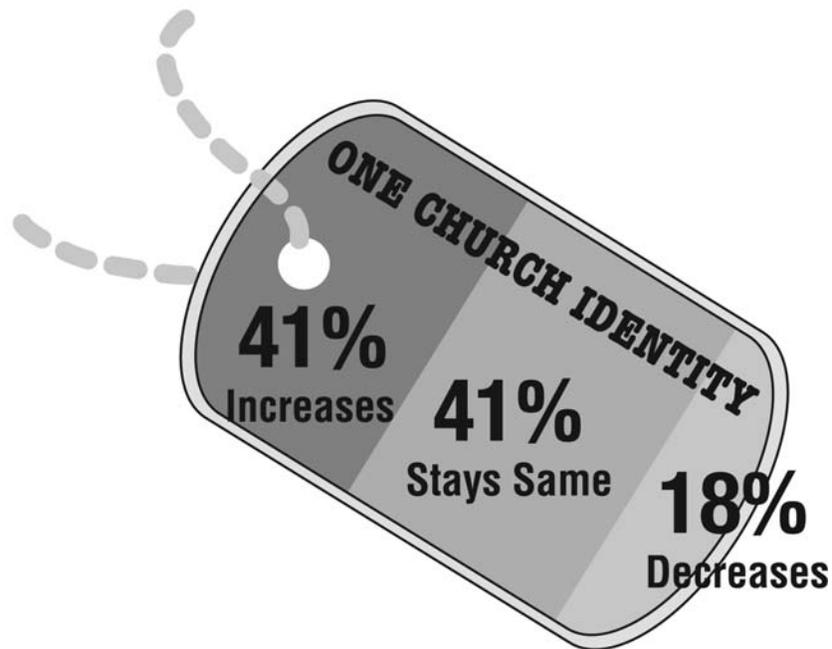
A multi-site church is one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states or nations. A multi-site church shares a common vision, budget, leadership and board.<sup>4</sup>

It sounds great in theory, but is it really possible to have one church meeting in multiple locations without sacrificing unity, community and identity? And what happens when the number of locations grows beyond a handful and starts pushing double digits?

According to the survey, future multi-campus congregations needn't worry too much about whether these issues can be handled well, as 86% of respondents indicated that the sense of “one church” identity within the community increased or stayed the same following the addition of campuses.

When asked how the satisfaction level of long-term Christians changed following the addition of campuses, 90% said it increased or stayed the same.

As the church adds new campuses, the “one church” identity in the overall church...



In Leadership Network's previous survey of multi-site churches, respondents listed a number of ways they endeavored to foster unity amongst the campuses. Top answers included:

- Same "DNA"/values-vision, mission, purpose, strategy or philosophy (20%)
- Same leadership structure, such as church board or elder team (17%)
- Same or similar church name, such as "Trinity East" and "Trinity South" (15%)
- Same primary preachers, similar message and teaching (13%)
- Same or parallel worship teams, worship styles, or approach to worship (10%)
- Same budget or treasury (8%)

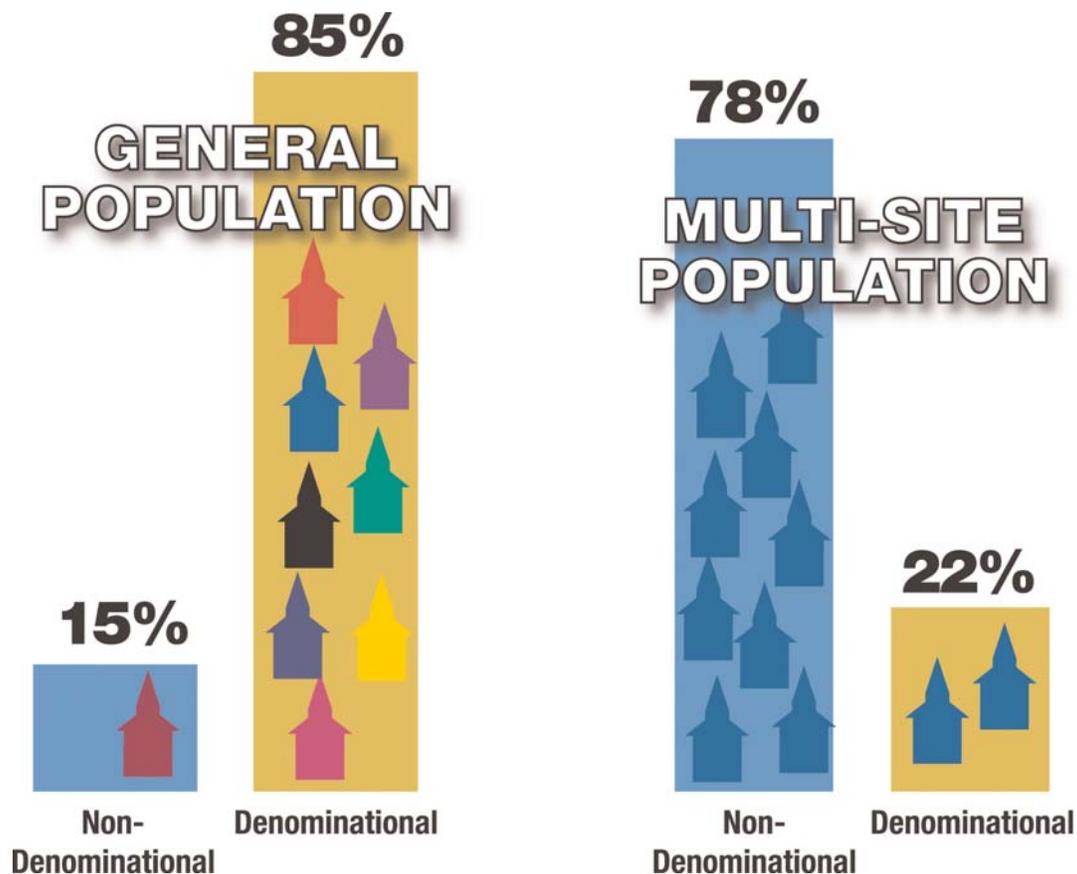
### 3. YOUNGER AND LESS DENOMINATIONALLY CONNECTED

What kinds of churches have adopted a multi-site model with four or more campuses? Not surprisingly, most have a recent founding date. According to the National Congregations Survey, the average Protestant church in America was founded in 1940. The average multi-site church, by comparison, has a founding date of 2003, according to Leadership Network's "2007 Survey of 1,000 Multi-Site Churches."

Intriguingly, some of the more recently started multi-site churches build the multi-site idea into their DNA from day one. For them, the decision to have multiple locations isn't an afterthought, but a core part of their identity. As a result, they tend to be leaders in the movement, taking the multi-site idea to new levels. Their success is assisted by the fact that they tend to be high tech and multiplication minded. Many younger churches also have a culture of innovation and flexibility in their DNA that enables them to respond quickly to opportunities for expansion through the addition of campuses that appear on their radar.

In terms of affiliation, 78% of the four-plus campus churches are non-denominational. While this is disproportionate to the overall church population where, according to Scott Thumma, roughly 85% percent are denominational and only 15% are non-denominational it is representative of the multi-site population in general. "Historically speaking, non-denominational churches have been a bit more free to innovate than denominational congregations," explains Warren Bird. "With less hierarchy, they often find it easier or quicker to try new things."

Multi-site churches have fewer denominational ties than churches in the general church population



Nevertheless, three quarters (74%) of survey respondents launched their second campus between 2000 and 2004, suggesting that even among churches with greater autonomy, the shift to multiple campuses is still relatively new.

In terms of age, a third of respondents were from congregations founded in the 1980s, and nearly two-thirds from churches founded in the last 30 years. The oldest congregation in the survey was founded in the 1920s.

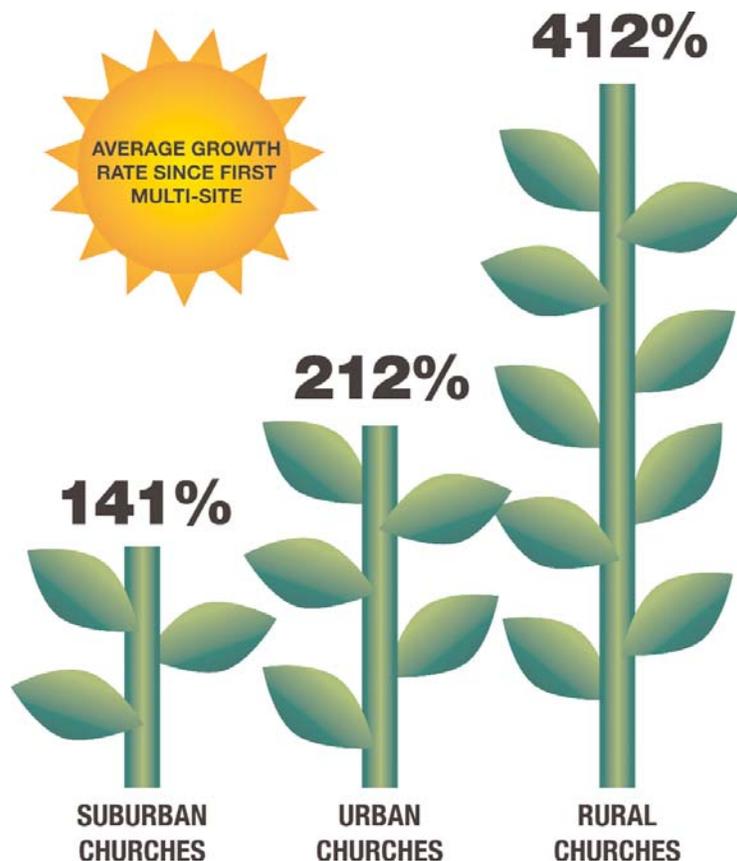
In previous Leadership Network research, medium-size churches (200-800 people) that go multi-site were found to have only two or three campuses, with larger churches (800-2000) and megachurches (more than 2,000 people) most likely to develop more than four campuses.

#### 4. NOT JUST FROM SUBURBAN AREAS

In recent years a number of high-visibility, very large, suburban churches have developed four or more regional campuses, or announced plans to do so. These suburban pioneers include Willow Creek (South Barrington, IL), Saddleback (Lake Forest, CA), Fellowship Church (Grapevine, TX), North Point (Alpharetta, GA) and LifeChurch.tv (Edmond, OK). Given the prominence of churches like these, one might assume that the shift to multi-campus churches is happening only in suburban areas. However, more than a third of survey respondents were from churches located outside the suburbs, including small towns, rural areas and urban centers.

Even more interesting, the survey suggests that churches in these areas may enjoy greater fruit. Respondents from suburban churches with four or more campuses reported an average of 141% growth since first going multi-site—compared with 202% growth at urban multi-site churches, and a jaw-dropping 412% at small town/rural multi-site churches.

In terms of geography, nearly half of survey respondents hailed from the southern U.S., especially Texas, although Bird suspects that fact may have more to do with Leadership Network's location in Texas and thus closer ties to the South than to a broader regional trend about multi-site churches.



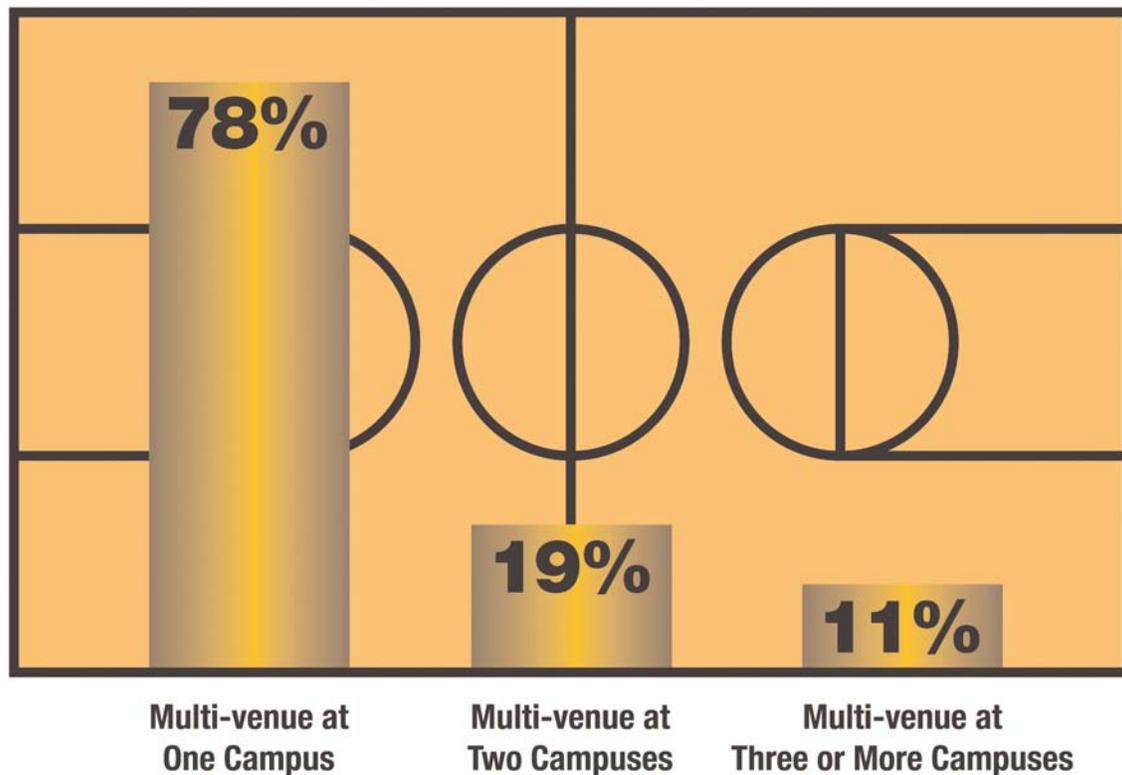
## 5. BOTH MULTI-SITE AND MULTI-VENUE

As stated, the survey targeted churches with at least four campuses. More than half of the respondents had 4 or 5 locations and 6 had more than 10 locations—including one church with more than 20 locations.

Many of the respondents said their church was not only multi-campus, but multi-venue as well—with 78% of respondents reporting they have additional services in the gym, fellowship hall, chapel, etc., of at least one campus. Nineteen percent indicated having multiple venues at two campuses, and 11% had multiple venues at three locations.

These churches have quite a knack for getting maximum usability from a wide variety of locations. While one might expect the original campus to be filled to capacity—hence a motivation to start new campuses—the numbers also indicate significant growth at the satellite campuses as well. “There also seems to be an attitude toward ministry that sees multiple locations and venues as the ‘new normal’ way of doing church, says Warren Bird.

### Many multi-site campuses are also multi-venue



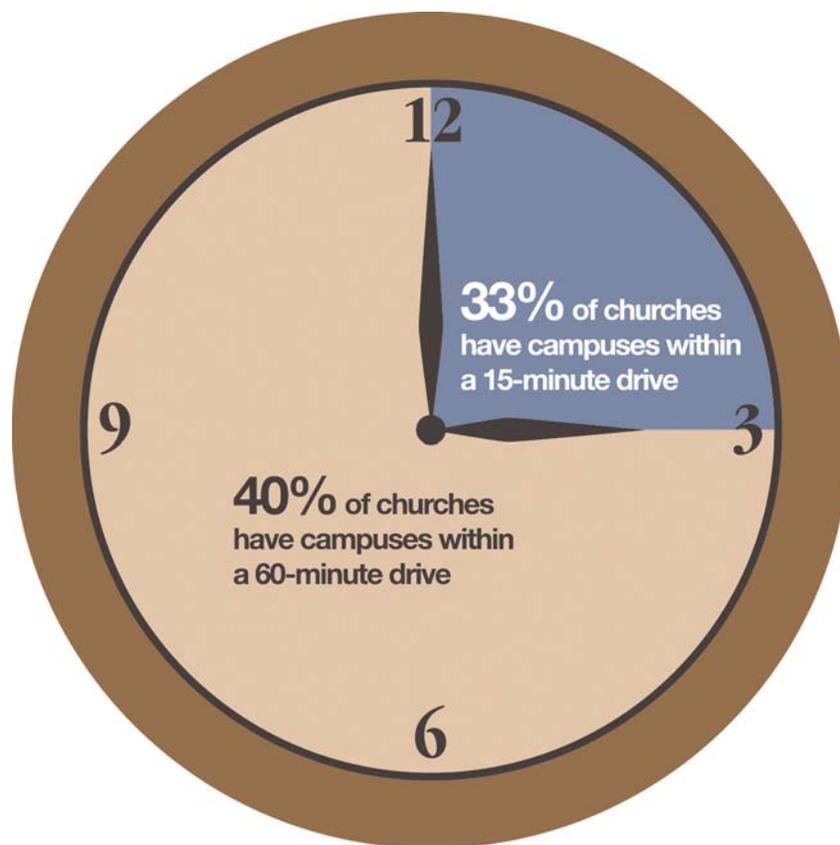
## 6. ALL OVER THE MAP IN TERMS OF CAMPUS PROXIMITY

Distance between campuses varied. Some multi-site churches reported establishing locations across town, or in neighboring communities. Others said they expanded further afield, establishing campuses in other states (36% of respondents) or even other countries (15%).

Nevertheless, the survey found one out of every three multi-site churches has an additional campus (or campuses) within a 15-minute drive of the original, and about 40% indicated they have campuses located within an hour's drive of the original location.

When asked what three things they'd done in adding campuses that they'd never do again, respondents' stressed the importance of choosing the right location for each satellite campus.

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“Don’t start too large in an area where our brand is unknown,” wrote one. “Don’t go too far from the original campus,” wrote another. “Don’t start without small group development first,” commented a third.

Clearly, as in real estate, choosing the right location is of critical importance. But it’s not the only important factor. “Go in response to the call,” advised one respondent.

Virtually all respondents indicated that people would likely choose a campus to attend based on geographic proximity to their home. When asked, “On your website or literature, how do you help prospective guest decide which campus to visit?” most respondents indicated using a map or landing page to list locations.

## 7. DEPEND HEAVILY ON EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

There’s no question that adding additional campuses poses a challenge for leadership, not only at the original campus, but at the satellite locations as well.

Many respondents mentioned the importance of ensuring the campus pastor has the DNA of the ministry (i.e. the mission, vision and values) and “a proven loyalty to vision,” as one respondent expressed it. Two respondents commented on the challenges that come with taking over an existing congregation and making it a location, and in particular, advised against allowing the current pastor to remain as a leader.

Another cited “training, training, training” when asked what three things churches should always do when adding campuses, while another advised against placing an “outside” campus pastor in charge.

In general, the open-ended comments in the survey emphasized the importance of having a shared vision, a committed team and adequate facilities.

## 8. FACING DRAWBACKS, AS DO OTHER TYPES OF CHURCHES

What are the drawbacks of having four or more campuses? While multi-campus churches appear to yield increased conversion rates and enviable leadership development opportunities, these results don’t come without a price. The biggest registered trade-off of a multi-campus church, according to the survey, is the stress level on staff. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) said the overall stress level on staff had increased with the addition of new campuses.

Another tradeoff is the ability of the senior pastor to mentor campus pastors. Since many multi-site churches are located miles away from the original campus, the opportunities for one-on-one interaction, shepherding and personal guidance may be limited. As well, with each new campus, the demands on the senior pastor’s time increase. Without careful planning, the addition of more campuses can quickly result in less time for each campus.

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How common is this situation? Nearly half of respondents (48%) said adding new campuses had decreased the ability of the senior pastor to mentor campus pastors.

On a related note, respondents also highlighted the importance of having sufficient resources and support for satellite locations. Several leaders commented on the need for appropriate funding and programs. When asked what things their church had done in adding campuses that they'd never do again, many mentioned not having the right people in place, or alluded to trying to cut corners by not hiring administrative staff, or pastoral staff for children and youth. One respondent wrote, "delaying the designation of a campus pastor and trying to cover with non-ministry staffers." Another wrote of "launching without a full team in place and not having the right campus pastor." Similarly, when asked what things churches should always do when adding campuses, the responses included "ensure there is a vibrant home church community to support it" and "ensure the space works for our children's programming."

Respondents also cautioned about trying to launch too quickly and recommended allowing at least six months of lead time.

## MORE TO COME

The eight trends outlined above affirm that the multi-site church revolution continues to flourish, both in growing numbers of locations for multi-site churches as well as single-campus churches becoming multi-site. As multi-site churches extend beyond four locations, their effective leadership training processes are a crucial part in reaching more people through evangelism, training up additional leaders, and serving people closer to where they live. As D.J. Chuang, Director of Multi-Site, says, "When you have something good, it's worth sharing, and multi-site churches through multiple venues and multiple locations are proving to be a very effective way to make and equip followers of Christ."



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Leadership Network's mission is to identify, connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.

*\* Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the NIV translation.*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Inspired by Starbucks*, June 13, 2008 (<http://www.wsj.com/article/SB121331198629268975.html>).

<sup>2</sup> For findings related to multi-site churches in general, visit <http://www.leadnet.org> and from the resource dropdown menu choose downloads or see direct link <http://www.leadnet.org/SampleDownloads.asp?ID=434&Type=Downloads>

<sup>1</sup> 2003 Survey of 1000 Multi-Site Churches visit <http://www.leadnet.org> and from the resource dropdown menu choose downloads or direct link: <http://www.leadnet.org/SampleDownloads.asp?ID=109&Type=Downloads>

<sup>1</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon and Warren Bird. *The Multi-site Church Revolution*. Zondervan, 2006, pg 18.