

# Multi-Site Exposed Webinar 2

3-4pm, September 2, 2008

Notes by Jim Egli, Lead Small Group Pastor of the Vineyard Church (Urbana, IL)

This webinar was an interview of the senior pastors of two very different multi-site churches.

- Greg Surratt of Seacoast Church in Mt. Pleasant, SC. Seacoast has 21 weekly worship services on 13 different campuses. Their church has grown to 7500 people since it's founding in 1988.
- Mark Batterson of National Community Church. The vision of this church is to establish services in movie theaters at Metro stops throughout the Washington, DC, area. They have 8 services in 4 locations.



*Greg, tell us how you started multi-site?*

We started using this strategy kind of accidentally. In 2000, we wanted to build a 4000 seat auditorium. We thought we were all set. We bought the land. We had spent a year lining everything up and at the last meeting with the city the doors were closed and we could not get the permits that we needed.

So we went to a multi-site strategy in 2002 as the result of this.

*Mark, how did you start using this strategy?*

We started with about 19 people meeting in a public school. But the school closed down so we had to find another location and we ended up renting the movie theater at Union Station. This worked great. The subway system brought people to our front door. We also could not afford land in DC. Where we live it costs \$10,000,000 an acre.

Initially we moved into a theater as a short term strategy. But this has turned into our overall strategy. We are in three theaters now and also we have the largest coffee house on Capitol Hill. We have three live services and five video venues every weekend.

*Greg, what is unique about your church?*

Gary Collins says in his book to ask what you are passionate about and what you can be the best in the world at. We are passionate about reaching the lost, and we are good at providing quality worship services without spending a lot of money.

We spend from \$75,000 to \$125,000 to launch a new location. This includes equipment and the salary for the campus pastor. This is less than most multi-site churches spend.

Most of our sites are video. This works. There is no question any more. These campuses grow well just like those using live preaching.

*We had intended to include Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge, LA, in today's webinar. But because of Hurricane Gustav hitting them, Dino Rizzo, the senior pastor could not join us today. He will, however, speak at the Multi-site Exposed Conference.*

*Mark, what is the greatest strength of using theaters? Why should others consider using them?*

Our motivation for using movie theaters is that they are a comfortable and neutral environment for those who are seeking God but did not have a church background. Most people have been to the local movie theater and have good memories of it. We feel like it's a safe place for us to deliver a dangerous message—the message of the Gospel. We want to remove as many religious barriers as possible.

Also, the large screens are a big plus. They have the technology that we need. We also like the smell of popcorn! It's kind of like our incense on Sunday morning.

*Greg, tell us about some of the locations that you are using?*

We have also used movie theaters and found that that works great. Some people told us that movie theaters would not lend themselves to worshipping God, but we have found just the opposite.

We had one service in a senior center. But one drawback was that there was no children's facility and we had our kids ministry six blocks away, but it still grew to 600 people before we moved.

We do have some facilities that are just used by us—a warehouse, a call center, a shopping center. We have also used schools. In one poorer location, we have opened a dream center where we do food ministry and medical ministry. We also use church building in that area for worship, having our worship at 8:15am, before that church needs the facility themselves.

We are also using a college facility. We have used lots of different venues.

*What is the major challenge that you guys are facing?*

Greg: Everything raises and falls on leadership. If we have strong leadership, a campus does well. If it is weak, the church is weak. Most of our leadership comes from within.

Mark: You need campus pastors who are strong leaders and own your culture but who don't feel a need to speak. We are just now starting a protege program, like the Mosaic church in Los Angeles. These are people who have raised their own support and come

to do ministry with us. It's like a glorified internship process. We are hoping that some of these people become campus pastors.

One of the biggest challenges is that the more campuses you have, the more work it is! It's like having more children. But just like having more children, more campuses also bring more joy.

*Greg, what are some things you have planned for the future?*

We are moving into more rural and smaller communities. In one of them we are doing video worship as well as video sermons.

Someone is doing our worship on a submarine. They have two services. We are also experimenting with house churches using our videos.

*Mark, what are doing next or different in the years ahead?*

Our coffee house has done real well. So we are considering doing more of those. Our coffee house actually earns about \$100,000 a year and that enables us to do more outreach, ministry, and missions.

So we are looking at doing more of these, giving us new venues and possibly new revenue.

*What are you guys going to share at the upcoming Multi-site Exposed conference?*

Mark: CS Lewis says everyone's life is composed of a few themes. This is true. One of the themes of my life is "playing offense." We are to take the gates of hell. We are not called to play defense. Multi-site calls us to launch more and more locations and reach more and more people. We are always looking ahead and looking out. How can we reach more and more places and people with God's grace and God's love?

I want to talk about this and best practices to make that happen. Part of that is learning from lots of other churches. It's important to learn from others. We learned a lot from churches like Seacoast and Community Christian Church. In the same way, we want to share what has worked for us. We want people to learn from us and do even better than we have done.

Greg: We have been doing this since 2002, only because we could not get the building permit for a very expensive building. You can imagine what a 4000 seat auditorium was going to cost. But, we have reached many more people and spent far less than if we had gotten the building permit. Multi-site is more effective and a better stewardship of resources.

Our church is also very aggressively planting churches. I want to talk about how you decide when to plant and when to do a new location. I want to share our mistakes. What

would we have done differently? I want to share what we look for in a campus pastor. I want to talk about when NOT to do multi-site. It is not the best strategy for every growing church. Sometimes I advise churches I consult with against it. Send me your questions and I can also speak to those at the conference.

## **Question and Answer Time:**

*What technology is best—live streaming or DVD recording?*

Mark: We put our Saturday night service on hard drives that go to our Sunday morning locations. Live streaming is kind of risky. Sometimes our first recording on Saturday does not work and we record our second Saturday evening service. We can also add the graphics and make a higher quality recording by not going live.

Greg: We also don't do live. We take it a step further. My better sermons are Sunday morning not my trial sermons on Saturday. We record these and they are used the *following* week at the outlying locations.

*What makes for an ideal campus pastor?*

There are five crucial characteristics that they must have and five that will sink the boat. We will go over this at the conference, but let me tell you briefly now.

We need a leader who people follow but is content to play second chair. We need a team player. We need a good communicator but not a gifted communicator. A church planter needs to be a gifted communicator, but this is not true of a campus pastor.

You need to know what your gifting is and how strong that gift is. If you are a gifted communicator and you are not part of the teaching team, you will be frustrated and so will we. We have transitioned some campuses to sovereign churches for this reason.

At the same time, some pastors do not make good senior pastors and are more caring. They might be perfect campus pastors.

Mark: After spiritual qualifications, we need people with a sense of humor. We need people who don't take themselves too seriously.

Don't hire someone externally to come in and be a campus pastor. Who has proven themselves? Who needs a new challenge? Most of our campus pastors are doing something else as well on our staff besides their role as campus pastor.

You need relational people. People who love people. People who are touching guests and your volunteers.

Do people have your DNA? Again, I recommend that you hire internally.

*What kind of time frame do you have from the time a pastor is chosen to when you launch a new campus?*

Mark: In January, I cast vision for the year. Three to four months out we start talking about a new location, sometimes six months out, we start casting vision to the church for the new site. But don't talk about it too soon.

It's like the relay races in the olympics. There is a good time, a optimal window in terms of timing. Don't begin talking too soon or you loose motivation and momentum. We start taking several months out, then we have an interest meeting, then we ask people to sign on the dotted line to serve. This may be as short as two months. Then we have an interest meeting and practice services and then we launch.

It's possible to over plan and over think. You may never feel ready. Don't wait too long or wait until everything is aligned. You need to just go for it.

Greg: We normally have a 4 to 5 month time frame. (The shortest we have ever done is 45 days.) We choose a campus pastor. We typically have them intern at a couple campuses, watching how things like set up and tear down work. They start a small group with the core team and then those core team members start small groups with their teams.

We do three practice services. The first one is just setting things up and making sure they work. The second, we do a partial service. The third service we do everything. Then we are ready.

*As senior pastors, how involved are you in your individual campuses?*

Mark: The campus pastors now relate directly to the pastor who started our first campus, not to me. He can help them more than me. I still give input and set direction but I know less and less about more and more. Even things like finding new locations I am more disengaged from. At first this was all my work. Now others are doing more of that work. I am delegating more and more all around.

Greg: With just one additional site you can do whatever you like, but when you have four campuses it gets very complicated and harder to communicate and coordinate things. Like Mark said, people don't relate to me. In our church they relate to my brother Geoff. I meet with all the site pastors as a team once a month and communicate vision then.

I preach several weeks in a row at the main campus and then have two weeks off. My first week off I preach the message I gave the week before at the main campus at one of the other locations. This helps me keep in touch with those campuses in a more personal way.

*Where do you expect the multi-site church movement to go in 5-15 years?*

Greg: People have predicted the death of the megachurches. I don't think it will happen. But with multi-site you can go both ways. You can offer both larger and smaller churches. We are, for example, experimenting with tying house churches in.

Mark: Tough question. Don't false prophets get stoned? I don't know what to predict. I hope that there is more and more diversity. People are all unique. Church should be too. I would like to see more variety and creativity. I am optimistic about this. Are there ways of doing church that we haven't thought of yet? I think there needs to be lots of permission and we need to celebrate new expressions.

To learn more about the upcoming Multi-site Exposed Conferences, visit [www.multisiteexposed.com](http://www.multisiteexposed.com). Registration is \$235 and the fifth person comes free. You can also download free multi-site resources from the website [www.leadnet.org](http://www.leadnet.org).