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SPECIAL EDITION | MULTISITE FEATURE | SPRING 2016

SPECIAL EDITION MULTISITE FEATURE



GET SMALL To Grow Big

Alison Hofstede
Mission Heights site &
Communications Coordinator

I love this church, and the fact that we are a multisite faith family. I cannot say that enough. However, I think we have some growing to do. I think we need to get small to grow big, just like pruned perennials.

Confession time: the last few years of waiting and processing ideas for our next site have been really hard for me. I have a vision of our city being transformed through relational ministry and can see multisite playing a huge role in this. But we keep putting on the brakes and I find that frustrating. There - now you know my bias.

The reality is we ARE a multisite church, but we are NOT behaving like it. I feel like too

often we get busy "doing church", maintaining our internal workings and programs and we simply do not prioritize outreach and invitation into close community. I'm just as guilty as anyone for getting caught in the hamster wheel of life. Busy, busy, busy. We work hard when we want something and we want bigger everything: houses, holidays, paychecks, Starbucks cups... But do we see our friends and neighbors encountering Jesus and getting baptized as a big thing, something we want? Something we are willing to work hard for?

Church family, I believe we need to make a change. We need to get our priorities straight. As a multisite church our goal is to reach out, grow new believers and see our members ministering out of their strengths and passions. The best way to do this is to get small to

grow big. The beauty of smaller church sites and small groups is the greater relational impact we can make on each other. It's in these smaller settings that we are challenged to grow in leadership and service of others, hear how others have seen God at work in and through us, and be encouraged. Doctoring each other's wounds is best done in close-knit community, too, where you are known. Multisite allows us to maximize the relational benefits of a small church setting as well as the strengths of a larger church (programs for example).

I'm so excited to see where God takes us in the year ahead as we look at ways to GROW by becoming small, and invite you to join me in this adventure! ■

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

- Necessary Building Blocks -

Alan Jones
Senior Minister and
Highland Park Site Preacher

What does it take?

We have been working toward launching a third site for about two years as a congregation. In the last number of months through prayer, articles, videos and conversations, we have been focussing our attention on this possibility in a more deliberate way. We have reminded ourselves of our multi-site strategy for sharing Christ's love, traced how we are addressing the challenges raised at our Fresh Wind gathering and encouraged prayer, imagination and conversation. **We plan on having further dialogue at our annual financial meeting on April 10th at 7pm.** We hope to then prayerfully move toward a decision shortly thereafter. Today, I am going to share with you what I believe it would take to launch our third site.

any kingdom growth is the leading and Spirit-empowered blessing of our Lord. Many hours of prayer have already been experienced as we opened ourselves to hearing God's heart and pouring out our desires, fears and service before the Father. We are committed to following God's leading as we endeavour to love people into

“
...we opened ourselves
to hearing God's heart”

growth and kingdom life.

Several other foundational building blocks are necessary for a launch. At this point some are in place and some are not. Beyond God's blessing we need a key leader, a team of people, a specific vision for care and outreach, financial resources and an existing body healthy enough to birth an additional site. Discerning the order and timing of these issues is difficult.

most easily measured: financial resources. We currently have \$286,530.07 in our fund set aside for a third site and reserve. The elder's and board's anticipation is that we would budget \$200,000 for the first two years of the new sites life. This sum would cover all third site direct costs (salary, facility rental, program and equipment) for the first two years. The remaining \$86,000 would be held in reserve for potential existing site shortfalls encountered in these tough financial times.

The most difficult building block to measure is the readiness of our current fellowship to participate in launching a third site. The difficulty lies in no small part in the different individual experiences each of us are having. Many of us are enjoying a marvelous season of growth, worship, fellowship and care. Others are feeling a little lost and are acutely aware of some of our fellowship's challenges. It is difficult for us to have an

Obviously, the foundation of

Let's begin with the element

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WHO AM I

(Third Site Musings with the God Who Never Changes)

Ryan Duford
Director of Young Adults &
Men's Ministries

This is a difficult time. We need more leaders. We need more volunteers. We need more money. We need more heart. We are tired. We are burdened. We are hurting. This is the wrong time...

In my opinion every one of these things is true. There is so much difficulty. We are in need of greater leadership development and more volunteer support. Gosh we could certainly use more money and it is so easy to lose heart. There is so much going on in all of our lives, and no one could possibly be blamed for being tired in this fast paced city. Loss of jobs, loss of direction has led to large burdens shouldered by many. Others have emotional burdens, relational burdens, and so many other things that lead to profound hurt. Do more? Try more? Push for more? It all sounds so exhausting. I agree this is the wrong time... This is exactly why we must go forward. Let me tell you why. Take a moment; let me tell you a few stories.

Curse, sin and death abounded on the earth. There was no hope. All was lost. The people assembled to

wage war on heaven through the great tower of Babel. What could be done? What would *this* God do? Simple, he would call a man and a woman who were too barren and too old to have children and promise them a son! The plan was so silly that Abraham actually fell down laughing! Talk about poor planning! Talk about wrong timing! But nevertheless *this* God moved forward.



Abraham's children hid in clefts and caves for fear of the swarming armies. Midian stood against them, terror on every side. What could be done? What would *this* God do? He told Gideon, the leader of Israel's army, "You have too many men." Two thirds of the men were stripped away. What next? Still too many men! The army was stripped down to 300 men. Who would have thought that the solution to a massive invading hoard was less warriors? Would you? Talk about lack of volunteers! Talk about a dif-

ficult time! But nevertheless *this* God moved forward. So that Israel could not boast and say "My own strength has saved me."

Abraham's children became trapped in sin. Ruled over by oppressors. Those who were meant to bless the world fell victim to the curse themselves. There was no one left. The Lord looked upon the earth and there was no one to help. What could be done? What would *this* God do? He put on flesh, became a man. His power? Service. His reputation? A nobody. His weapon? Love. He stood against the might of the enemy. He was tired. He was burdened. He was hurting. His friends abandoned him. His closest leaders denied him. He cried out to his Father "Is there any other way? Isn't there a better time?" But nevertheless *this* God moved forward. The outcome? His death. A spear to the very heart of the Father. But nevertheless...

I have never heard of this God working at the right time. Scarcely does he work in abundance. Scarcely does he work without pain. Scarcely does he wait for more leaders. But **HE never fails!**



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low for a smooth transition between Jaron and the new youth pastor. Please hold this transition in your prayers. Further, if you are aware of possible candidates please encourage them to contact us. As always, youth ministry is a priority.

Jaron's sense of being called in a new direction is independent of our progress toward a third site and he and Robyn are aware that there is no guarantee of a third site. *[Please note: Since the original writing of this article Jaron has decided this opportunity at this particular time is not for him and his family. So, should we go ahead with a third site, Alan will be exploring other staffing needs/ideas.]*

The model the church board is favouring would allow a site pastor spend maximum time in evangelism, training people in faith and service while providing pastoral care - highly relational ministry and leveraging the preaching/teaching/music/administrative gifts of existing staff and committed volun-

teers. **We plan to provide you with more information on this idea at the financial meeting on April 10th.**

Personally, anticipating launching a third site puts a smile on my face. I am very aware, however, that there is much to do before forging ahead. Most importantly, is prayerfully discerning the Lord's leading in this decision. "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1). We also need to flesh out what the site would look like and where it would be located and get as much information to the congregation as possible so an informed and prayerful decision can be made.

In my heart I believe the time to launch a third site is upon us. The time to invite young, growing leaders to expand their ministry and explore new frontiers is upon us. Honestly, I am restraining my enthusiasm because I don't want to give the impression that the decision to move on the third site has already been made.

It has not.

Nobody wants people to feel pressured into feeling they have no choice.

You have a choice. We must do all we can to discern the Lord's leading, but boy, do I get excited thinking about the possibilities... ■

“Most importantly is prayerful discerning the Lord’s leading in this decision.”



overall God's eye view of the GP Church of Christ. Regarding readiness a number of things occupy my thinking. First, I am reminded that the multi-site strategy indicates that we launch additional sites as soon as a church can, not when a church has to due to space demands etc. So, the question for me is can we do a healthy launch at this time?

As I have conversations regarding launching, three concerns frequently arise.

1. FINANCES, see above.

2. A SHORTAGE OF LEADERS. This is a critical issue. Our most recent inventory revealed that 38% of our youth and adult congregants are serving in ministries hosted by the church. This figure does not account for folks who express their spiritual gifts and ministry callings outside of the church. In truth, there is always room for improvement and the need for folks to pour their lives out for others will always be with us. As long as we desire to serve others we will always need more servant

leaders. On the other hand, we must be wise and not stretch existing ministries too far. To ensure we don't strip too many needed leaders from our existing sites is our plan to have only 25 people form the core of the new site. We believe this will not overly tax our current sites.

3. MEETING THE CARE-NEEDS OF OUR PEOPLE.

I am not sure we can ever give or get enough love and care.

This is a continuous challenge. The foundation of our strategy for care is our small group ministry. One emphasis this year is "we have to get small to get big." If I want my heart, my spirit my marriage, anything really, to grow I need to be in some form of a small gathering where I am known and can get to know others. Growth and care is found in the intimacy of relationships. When we compiled a list of people involved in some form of small group/discipleship group or coffee and prayer clusters we found that a little over 100 of our adults participate in such groups. I have been encouraged this year

by the ability to get almost all who, via the welcome cards found in the bulletin, express an interest in being part of a small group within a couple of weeks.

In addition to small groups, the elders, staff and a number of others spend a good deal of time providing pastoral care for folks. There is a lot of work to be done in meeting peoples' need for care. There always will be because sin has broken us all.

One point that is often forgotten, to which Ryan points, is that starting a third site provides another environment small enough to help people get big.

Most of the other questions we have about our readiness arose at our fresh wind gathering. I invite you to view the video in which I outline our progress on these points. Find it on the Chronicle tab of our website (gpchurchofchrist.com) or look for our church communications channel on YouTube (www.youtube.com/channel/CHosX0kIdVX9rIh1SEuzDg).



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WHAT DOES IT TAKE ... Continued from page 3 (necessary building blocks)

In short, my opinion as to our readiness to healthily launch a third site is that it will be a challenge but in God's strength and our ongoing commitment we could launch in the near future.

The next three foundation blocks, a key leader, a team and specific vision/focus, are so intertwined it is difficult to think of them individually. In terms of a team our leadership believes that this site should begin with a team of approximately 25 recruited members. This number will not be too taxing on the existing sites in terms of people leaving. It will provide enough people to establish a site and drive evangelism as their energies will not be completely spent on internal ministries. Whenever we move ahead to launching the next site a key leader will need to be selected. This individual will be critical to forming the team of 25 and together prayerfully

formulating a specific vision for the site.

As I formulate these thoughts the word 'many' comes to mind. We have many opportunities, many challenges, many good things and many people to love and grow in Christ. But in the midst of the 'many' we have a few

“Growth and care is found in the intimacy of relationships.”

things to build upon. We have the love, power and mission of Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We have some parameters within which to work as the Lord leads. The third site will be a church not only a “mission point.” It will be an expression of the Grande Prairie Church of Christ with all of our core values and mission. We are suggesting a

two year budget of \$200,000 which we have already in hand. The launch team will be of approximately 25 people with a heart and drive for evangelism. We desire to launch as soon as we can, not when we have to. Our prayers and conversation now need to include our spiritual and church readiness and when to begin searching for a key leader.

Finally, I want to ask you to come and participate in our gathering on April 10, 7 pm at Highland Park.

We will be reporting on our congregational finances and spending time praying about and discussing how we are doing in the process of launching a third site. This will be an important meeting with lots of information and opportunities for us to share our thoughts and hearts with each other regarding a third site. Please come and participate. ■



MULTI-SITE IDENTITY - Continued from pg. 6

kind of church format gets you excited and passionate?? That could be the next site!



FALSE:
We've already accomplished multisite status.

No need to do more.



REALITY: Multisite is a calling. And like any calling, one is never “done.” This church followed God's leading 7 years ago and chose to adopt the identity of “Multisite.” It is who we are. Our purpose as a church is to reach out into new areas to further God's Kingdom. We have been called to this identity. To stop now would be like a seminary student declaring that he had “accomplished” being a pastor and sitting back after preaching one sermon, never to do another

again. A calling is a journey, not a destination.



FALSE:
It's a bad time. Money? People?

Resources?



REALITY: I only realized this after I became a member of the staff, but there has been SO much behind the scenes work on this. Lots of prayer. Lots of research. Lots of careful consideration. The church has been budgeting for this since the last site was launched. The next site doesn't necessarily need a lot of people/resources, depending on what form the next site takes. We don't need to buy another building. We don't need to have an “insta-congregation” ready and filling the pews at another

location. Multisite is so flexible! And, remember, the goal is growth. The goal is to reach new people. It's not about spreading our current congregation out thinner. And God has been so very faithful to us! He has provided in areas of need. He has blessed us in many ways!

With all of these “Reality Checks”, I've gone from digging my heels in and shouting “No!” at every mention of multisite to actually being very excited at the possibilities multisite offers! This is wide open! This is creative! This is Kingdom work! This is being on the frontlines of God's battle against the darkness! This is bringing new light to people in this community and beyond! Instead of being mildly tolerant of our identity as a “Multisite Church”, I am now passionately excited to be a part of this movement!

What do you think? What possibilities do you dream for a church? What areas/demographics do you see a need for a new kind of church site? What has God put on your heart? So many possibilities! ■



Alan Jones
Senior Minister

At a board meeting shortly after Christmas valid questions were raised:

“Do people know WHY they are being flooded with multi-site information these days?”

“Do they realize we are headed for a time of decision this spring?”

As you know, we have been working on preparing to launch a third site for well over a year. We recently reported on our progress in resolving some of the challenges raised in our meetings in February of last year. Our hope is to continue providing you with necessary information **in preparation for a significant conversation regarding launching a third site**

at our annual financial meeting April 10, at 7pm.

While we trust you are already praying about this decision, we plan on having a concentrated time of prayer surrounding the 10th and then make a decision regarding go/no go, timing, character and process for launching soon after the financial meeting. My hope is that we will participate in a time of prayer and fasting as a congregation and be in a position to launch in September 2016 - less than six months away.

One of the central questions we work through in launching a third site is staff. One idea that gained traction early this year was for Jaron to be our

third site-pastor as he is stepping down from Director of Youth Ministries, and for Ryan and myself to provide the bulk of teaching and preaching for both our Highland Park site and the new site. This idea would allow these three men to leverage their dominant gifting and interests. Ideas do not mean plans have been made, though - we look forward to further prayer and input from the congregation.

[Please note: Since the original writing of this article Jaron has decided this opportunity at this particular time is not for him and his family. So, should we go ahead with a third site, Alan will be exploring other staffing needs/ideas.]

We want you to know that Jaron will be leaving the youth position regardless of the multi-site decision. The question that leaps to mind is, “what about our present youth ministry?” We have begun the search for a new youth pastor. **Our prayers are that the new leader will be in place by July and the camp season.** This will hopefully al-



Scott Pence
Mission Heights Site Minister

Multi-site. It's the buzz-word around here lately. That's O.K. because it's who we are. And it's O.K. because the fact that we are a multi-site church has been a tremendous joy in my life so far. I have loved serving and leading with the Mission Heights manifestation of our church. It continues to be a journey with highs and lows, but I love my role. I love the people with whom I serve. I love the staff of which I'm a part - an interdependent support network of people who love Jesus, love one another and love our church. Mission Heights is blessed to be a part of a larger church while having the freedom to express the Church of Christ vision and culture in a unique way. Being multi-site has given our church some diversity in how people can experience God in our midst. Multi-site has been good.

Which is why it may be surpris-

ing that I have been hesitant about a third site. I can see the potential downsides as well as anyone and probably better than most. When we launched Mission Heights we were at a different place in our church life. We had explored the bigger building possibilities. We were ready to move on something.

It's a different time now. A lot has changed in our city and even somewhat in our church. So as we looked to our future and considered our opportunities as a multi-site church, my prevailing thought was: “We're not ready for more sites. We simply could not pull off a Mission Heights-type venture at

this point.”

It's interesting, being a Christian for so long, like I have. You sometimes settle into certain rhythms of life and ways of thinking. I guess that's natural. Some of those ways of thinking are shaped and formed by the Spirit of God and the community of faith. But some of what you actually believe can drift a bit. We actually worship, serve and follow a God who went to where people were; who got down in the dirt with people like us. We worship, serve and follow a God who sometimes invites us into kingdom work that takes us out of our comfort zones. We worship, serve

“...we have been working on preparing to launch a third site for well over a year.”

“Multi-site. It's the buzz-word around here lately. That's O.K. because it's who we are.”

MULTI-SITE IDENTITY

Exploring Misunderstandings & Reality

Malorie Peterson
 Director of Family
 & Children's Ministries

I joined the Church of Christ a few months before the Mission Heights location opened its doors. The whole concept of a "multisite" church was new and strange to me. I didn't quite understand the point, beyond a cost-savings perspective. A church gets to expand without rebuilding and has one staff to run it all, rather than planting a new church (and having to hire a completely new staff), or building an expensive "mega church" to house the growing congregation.

But with that perspective alone, I found myself resistant when there were whispers of another site in the works.

"What's the point?" I asked myself, "We haven't grown to the point of needing another location yet! Our volunteer base is stretched thin as it is! How will we support ANOTHER site? Nope. I can't get on board with this."

This, my dear friends, is the story of a skeptic turned believer.

A lot of my hesitation towards multisite actually stemmed from a misunderstanding of what it means to be multisite. Here are some misunderstandings I had:

FALSE: Multisite is for churches who have outgrown their current location and need another site to accommodate their numbers.

REALITY: Multisite is a strategy for growth, not a response to growth! We use a new site to reach new people. We use a new site as a way to further the Kingdom of God on new frontiers! It's not about our current population.

FALSE: Multisite means cloning our church. We just repeat what we did with Mission Heights.

REALITY: Multisite is endless possibilities! The definition of church is actually quite flexible! Beyond a few "non-negotiables", a church can take all kinds of forms. Perhaps a leased space downtown for low-income families? Perhaps a gathering on the GPRC campus to teach students? Perhaps an internet-based church? Perhaps a church in a small town that currently has no church? Seriously. The possibilities are endless! What

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and follow a God who looks at a world that is broken and says that those people are worth dying for. And I'm glad that's who God is, because "those people" are us. "Those people" is me.

As we looked at our calling, I needed to go back to what being a multi-site church means,

are, and inviting them to share in the life of God right in their very midst.

Here's what hasn't changed:

- We are a multi-site church.
- We have a heart for church unity.

"...going where lost and broken people are, and inviting them to share in the life of God..."

and I was reminded of how many different manifestations it can have. The truth is, our leadership isn't for taking another 80 people out of our existing congregations to start another one. Our leadership does see the some opportunities at this time, that our multi-site church might be able to leverage to express the heart of God: going where lost and broken people

- We have a desire to follow where Jesus leads.
- We have a leadership that has a history of being very responsible with finances and resources.
- We have a heart and a bit of a reputation for trying to help the marginalized in our city.

- We hold scripture in high regard and want to follow God's word.

- We are called to reach as far as we can toward lost and broken people while standing firmly on the truth of God's Word.

These realities of who we are, coupled with the demographic and economic realities of our city mean that we have some opportunities right now as Grande Prairie's only multi-site church. So if you're like me and feel a bit, maybe even a lot, hesitant, I invite you to come talk to us. Or have us come talk to your life group, men's group, women's group, coffee gathering or whatever. And prayerfully join us as we explore where it is that God is leading us.

We worship, serve and follow a different kind of God. We look forward to discerning with you what God is doing among and where he would lead us next. ■