

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Multisite Q&A with Jim Tomberlin (Part 1)

Episode 83

Basics of the Movement, Bad Reasons Churches Go Multisite, and Church-Planting vs. Campus Launching

Tony Morgan and Jim Tomberlin [recently announced](#) that our two ministries—MultiSite Solutions and The Unstuck Group—are coming together! Jim was one of the pioneers of the multisite movement back in the early 1990s and has been helping churches effectively transition from being one church to being one church in multiple locations ever since.

The Multisite Movement

- Now in its third decade, the multisite movement is exponentially growing. Twenty years ago there were fewer than 50 multisite churches in the United States and Canada. Now there are 5,000+, according to Leadership Network's [data](#).
- What began as a radical idea became the cool idea, and has become now the mainstream idea. We see that progression happen all of the time.
- Take the idea of offering multiple services, for example. Offering multiple services is now a staple strategy of growing churches, but it was radical when it first took off in the 80s. It paved the way for multisite, because after moving to multiple services, many then began trying out services multiple days of the week (e.g. a Saturday night service).
- Then we began to see multiple rooms on a campus with a closed circuit TV. And as the technology got better, that experience got better and it was an inevitable step that we eventually have multiple locations.

Bad Reasons to Go Multisite

- “All the growing churches are doing it.” It’s not a good idea to chase “trendy” in ministry. Just because something seems to work for another church doesn’t mean it will work for yours.
- “A church knocked on our door and wants to join us.” If you weren’t thinking about multisite before a church approaches you about a merger, you should pause and prayerfully consider your next step. We’d recommend getting an outside perspective before proceeding, as well.
- “We’re feeling stuck, and we need to try something new.” Think of multisite as a marriage. If you have a healthy marriage, the odds are better you’ll raise healthy kids. If something is

broken in your marriage, having kids will exacerbate the problem. You reproduce who you are. The same is true of multisite.

The Right Reason to Go Multisite

To reach and serve more people in your larger community. Why? Because this strategy can actually help you accomplish that aim. Many times, multisite helps churches solve a space problem or a distance problem, or both. It helps healthy, growing churches continue to expand their reach and spread the gospel further in their communities.

Multisite vs. Church-Planting

- Multisite and church-planting are both helpful ways for churches to replicate who they are. As far as the community is concerned, there's no difference between the two. It's a church. How it's governed and how the teaching is delivered is a decision for the sending church.
- Leadership Network's study also found that multisite churches are growing faster and seeing more conversions than church plants. That tends to be because they are not starting from scratch. They hit the ground running on day one with the strengths of the sending location and are able to gain traction quickly, rather than having to grow into it. They're able to deliver those best ministry practices at a high level of quality—the quality of a large church in the context of a smaller one.
- The cost to launch a multisite campus is generally less than a new church plant.
- The strategies needed to successfully launch a campus and shift to operating as a multisite church are different than the strategies needed to plant a brand new church.
- Jim's "3 G's"
 - *Geography.* Most multisite campuses launch within 20 to 30 minutes of the sending campus. There should already be a significant number of people driving from the area. Most church plants will be 30+ minutes away, and you start without a base of people in the new area already connected to your church.
 - *Gifting.* Church planters and campus pastors both need strong leadership gifting—but a campus pastor's leadership gift tends to be oriented to be a team player, and a church planter's to be a team owner.
 - *Governance.* A multisite campus is centrally governed. A church plant is self-governed.

The strength of the multisite model lies in having clarity about mission, vision, strategy, and philosophy, and consistently delivering that across campuses.

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