

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



7 Best Practices for Unity Building in Multisite Church Teams

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Are you serving in a multisite church and sensing some tension building between members of your broader team?

Do you currently feel a sense of competition with other campuses that isn't entirely healthy?

Do you serve on a central support team and are looking for ways to increase the unity amongst the teams you help lead?

If you want to experience a more profound sense of unity among the staff team at your multisite church, you are not alone! The most recent comprehensive study of the multisite church movement by [Leadership Network](#) discovered that one of the top ten issues that leaders are facing is how to increase unity across locations.

I've been a part of the multisite movement since the early 2000s. During those years, I've led the launches of 13 campuses and then helped manage those campuses as they began to work with their churches' other locations. Over the years, I've also seen all kinds of break downs in unity among campuses. However, through prayerful leadership, we were able to develop a more profound sense of unity among our teams. Here are a number of the best practices that have helped churches to develop a deeper understanding of community amongst the campus teams.

Defer to Younger Campuses

One of the dynamics that drive healthy, growing multisite churches is that they defer to the newer campuses regularly. This is a heart attitude of humility that needs to be continuously championed with your leaders.

If you're going to choose where to invest financial resources, it needs to be in the youngest campuses.

If you're making a decision where you're going to send your best campus teams, you should point them towards the new locations.

If you're building a new process, you want to make sure it works best at the campuses that are the latest to launch.

Every campus at your church was started because the "original location" sacrificed to launch out the next location. They led the way and got the ball rolling. As leaders connected to this movement, we need to echo that heart and defer to the needs of the younger campuses.

Why? Because we know that campus is the most fragile in their early days; the hardest weeks and months are always at the beginning of the process. Accordingly, you should do everything you can to lift up those locations as they get started.

We need to keep this reality in front of our leaders as we roll through new launches.

Moving leaders beyond a “scarcity mindset” that focuses on their location to an “abundance mindset” is the best strategy for building unity in a multisite church.

Get the Language Right

So many problems in developing unity in a multisite church can be avoided by simply getting the language right. Think carefully about how you refer to the various aspects of your ministry and shape your words in a way that reinforces unity.

Avoid some of these common language pitfalls:

- Don't refer to the first location as headquarters, mothership, or the main site.
- Avoid using language that diminishes your campuses like “satellite location,” “overflow,” or “extension campus”.
- Make sure to honor the leaders at all the locations by paralleling their titles like Campus Pastor or Community Pastor.
- Campus distinctions that assume the first location (“First Church North”) because that subtly communicates that campuses are only an appendage to something else.
- Overreaching in titles. Make sure the titles of your team (particularly on the Central Service Team) are understood by the people at your campuses.



Someone needs to play the language police role in the early days of your campus expansion to ensure that what you are communicating is pushing towards unity. Language can subtly alter culture over time. A slight shift in the way you talk about your community can make a massive difference in the unity of your church!

Campus Pastors with Cross Campus Responsibilities

After a campus pastor has completed the launch phase of their campus, it can be helpful for both them and the church if they serve in a leadership role that impacts the whole church.

These cross-campus responsibilities can help develop a deeper sense of unity because the campus pastor gets an active understanding of what's happening at other locations. It's also great for one campus to experience leadership from another.

This cross-campus responsibility could take the form of a short-term project. Charging the campus pastor with the task of helping the church improve on a particular aspect of the ministry can be a unifying experience. These short-term projects are a great way to begin because it gives the leader a chance to try their hand at investing in other locations while still keeping an eye on their primary site. Here are a few examples of short-term projects that a campus pastor could be a part of:

- **Benchmarking the “New Here” Process Across all Locations** // This is a study of the first-time guest experience at all locations. Looking for best practices employed at all locations and then working with teams to bring harmony to those approaches across the church creates a sense of unity that prioritizes the mission of bringing new people to the church.
- **Coaching a New Campus Pastor Through Launch** // A seasoned campus pastor could be a massive asset to a new campus pastor as they launch. The short-term project would simply be lending an extra hand (and the knowledge of experience) as the new location builds its core team toward launch. The new campus pastor would welcome the help!
- **Short-term Mission Trip Coordination** // Does one of your campus pastors have a heart for developing short-term mission teams? Empowering a campus pastor to draw together a series of teams from various campuses would be a great project! Training trip leaders to execute an effective trip experience takes a particular skill, and it could fit well with the right campus pastor.

Of course, there might come a time where a campus pastor is looking for more challenges beyond leading locally. Rather than shying away from that desire, it might be wise to embrace it as a way to develop more unity in your church! There are a number of roles where a campus pastor could provide on-going leadership at your church:

- **Cluster Coach** // As you grow beyond 8+ locations, it's a best practice to start clustering your campuses into smaller groups to provide coaching and leadership. A model campus pastor who has been serving with your church for a while could take a smaller group of campus pastors under their wing to provide coaching, care, and direction.
- **Groups Director** // A good campus pastor is a master at executing systems that encourage community. There is often an overlap between this skill set and that of a small groups director at your church. Maybe a seasoned campus pastor could take over the management of the "groups system" at all of your campuses.
- **Launch Coach** // We've seen a number of churches where a campus pastor is ultimately put in charge of coaching the new campuses and leaders throughout a launch. This is a logical choice in many cases because they've been on the ground after a launch and can guide new locations towards what the church is looking for from its campuses.
- **Residency Director** // An increasing trend in churches is investing in launching a robust residency program to train next-generation leaders. More than just an "intern" program, these churches provide 12 to 24-month experiences that raise up future staff members. Running a church's residency program would be a logical choice for the right campus pastor because churches often use these programs to meet the staffing need of their expanding campuses.

Celebrate More

Most churches need more IFTBUMs (It's fun to be us moments)!

Celebrating is the best thing to do because we

have so many good things going on at our churches. But it's also the right thing to do because it deeply reinforces what is essential to the church. **Whatever your church celebrates is what you will replicate.** Churches that are experiencing increasing levels of unity amongst their teams are regularly celebrating.

When was the last time your leadership team strategized what you should celebrate in the next six months at your church?



This celebration could take the form of small and regular communication with your team. For instance, you could inject celebration into these normal communication channels:

- A Monday email that tells 2-3 stories of good things that happened during the weekend services.
- Team huddles that share the great things happening at other campuses.
- Taking time at weekly team meetings to write thank-you notes to other campus teams to celebrate what you see happening at their locations.
- Social media posts of campus teams cheering on something special happening at another location.
- A pre-service video scroll that could show images of the various locations of the church as a way to remind people that the church is bigger than this one campus.

However, your team should also consider some of the larger visible ways to celebrate what is happening across the church. Sometimes the best thing a leader can do is to throw a party! Here are a few bigger celebration events you should consider:

- **All Under One Roof Event** // There is something about the power of gathering all the locations of a multisite church under one roof for a single service. It's a visible sign of unity as the church literally is unified! It's a compelling vision communication piece because the church will see each other all at one time. These services can be excellent at special anniversaries or to mark a milestone in the development of the church. Make sure to leverage this event with lots of fun!
- **Mass Community Service Event** // What if you motivated all your people out of their seats and into the streets to serve the community at the same time? Imagine gathering your whole church to make a few hundred thousand meals for some local food banks/soup kitchens at the same time! These events can do a bunch of good but also be a lot of fun at the same time. They are a powerful example of the difference we can make when we work together!
- **Campus Launch Celebrations** // Don't miss the opportunity to celebrate when new campuses open. Taking time out during the other campuses services to celebrate the new location reinforces that you are one church in multiple locations. Maybe shoot a quick video from each of the campuses cheering to welcome the new locations? A little investment of time during those seasons of development can ensure that campuses know you're all in this together!

Clarity Around Central Service Responsibilities

Multisite churches are matrix organizations. That means that there are people who are responsible for the delivery of the experience in the location but there is also a central support team who is responsible for ensuring that experience is great. Understandably, there is inherent tension in that model.

Every multisite church that I've either worked in or came in touch with has struggled with these dynamics.

The most recent [Leadership Network](#) study of multisite churches found nearly three-quarters of churches in this model are more centralized

than decentralized, which means that the majority of churches have the weight of the leadership authority coming from the central. This makes sense because the multisite church movement is about multiplying learnings across multiple locations.

That being said, it's essential to be clear where the lines of responsibilities of the central service teams begin and end. Generally:

- Central service teams are responsible for systems and curriculum.
- Campus teams are responsible for relationships and execution

That means that the central support team is responsible for developing training materials, processes, shared approaches, teaching, and similar items. That team is also responsible for defining the standard operating procedures and processes that ensure the church functions. Campus teams are accountable for taking those systems and curriculum and executing them with excellence with and for the people in their community. Campus teams are experts at how the church's approach gets rolled out with the people in practice.

Taking time to communicate and reinforce these responsibilities clearly will help with the unity of your team long-term. If this gets fuzzy, the team will start to pull apart as team members look over the fence at other areas and start thinking that they could do a better job.

Keep Launching New Locations

The church is best when it's on mission. It's best understood as a community of people looking to take the next hill in the mission that Jesus' is calling them to. Unity starts to suffer when the church isn't on mission.



One of the possible reasons that your church is not as unified as it could be is that you are failing to cast a large enough vision to keep the whole team pulling for the future.

When people aren't on mission, it's easy for them to focus on their issues. Leaders who aren't a part of a bigger vision will start to invent a mission to lead their people towards. When that mission is out of alignment with the church's broader mission, unity will begin to disintegrate.

Maybe it's time to launch your next location. The vision casting required to move your church towards launching a new location can drive a more profound sense of unity as leaders recommit to the bigger vision.

I've seen firsthand how a strong commitment and execution to launching new campuses keeps a leadership team focused on what God is calling the church to. Whether it was a campus launch every year or every other year, that sort of launch rhythm had a way of keeping the team together and focused on the bigger idea the church was driving towards.

Courageous Conversations

All of the above tips and tactics are about the systems side of keeping unity. I've presented an approach that assumes that if you fix the environment, then team unity will somehow click into place.

I wish that was always the case. It isn't.



Sometimes the best next step for you to help unity at your church is to have a series of courageous conversations that move leaders towards a deeper sense of unity. These conversations aren't easy, but they are essential. Some courageous conversations you might need to have to drive more unity in your multisite church in this season could be:

- Meet with that campus pastor that seems 5 degrees off of the mission. Leaders that seem to be drifting away from the team need to be drawn back in. Explain how you've seen them acting in a way that seems to be distancing from the team and ask them to explain that gap. Don't accuse them but earnestly seek to understand where they're at.
- Sit down with that central support team member who is coming off a little negative during their campus visits. Explain to them that the behavior they are exhibiting is being perceived negatively at the campuses. Mature leaders will be thankful for this feedback and seek to improve. Give them strategies for making these visits a positive next step for every campus!
- Take that young leader who seems to have trouble navigating some of the nuances of the matrix model out for lunch. It can be challenging to understand the lines between authority and influence. Newer leaders can sometimes operate in ways that actually push against unity.

Can you think of a person (or two) that you need to have a courageous conversation with? Reach out to them to plan a time to talk.

Getting the system right is an essential piece of the puzzle in building unity but that often needs to be paired with face to face conversations with your team members.

Get the FREE three-part video series designed to help your church launch more multisite campuses.

Is your church thinking about launching new multisite campuses? **Have you already launched a campus or two but are stuck getting the next locations launched?** Are you ready to take the next steps in your multisite expansion but aren't sure where to start?

I'm releasing a FREE three-part video series designed to help your church reach more people through multisite church expansion.

The lessons in this series come from my practical experience of being in the driver's seat for 13

launches and from helping other churches like yours! Here is what we'll be covering in the free video series:

- **Video #1: The Biggest Mistake Churches Make When Launching Campuses.** Build an approach to launching locations that avoids this mistake, and your church will scale up to reach more people!
- **Video #2: Keys to Picking a Great Location for Your Next Campus.** Apply the lessons in this video and you'll find effective locations that will aid your church's growth for years to come!
- **Video #3: 5 Dirty Secrets of the Multisite Church Movement.** Finally, get an insider's look at the underbelly of this movement to better inform your leadership as you move forward!

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