3

Landmarks

In chapter 2, we laid out a historical and biblical foundation for multisite as an acceptable church model. We also responded to the movement's primary challenge: its alleged lack of biblical and theological support. However, we stopped short of addressing any other common concerns because of the complexity and diversity among multisite models. Simply put, not all multisite churches are the same. This chapter will discuss seven church models, five of which form a spectrum of multisite expressions. Within this spectrum we locate multichurch. The diversity among multisite models reflects the church's creative impulses to advance the kingdom of God and proclaim the gospel. Therefore, before we discuss each model in detail, we will begin by exploring the implications of God's creativity and how examining divine creativity might better prepare us to evaluate the models.

The Creative Impulse

God is creative. He is first introduced to us in the Bible as the Creator, the maker of all things. What he made exudes creativity in its beauty, diversity, splendor, elegance, and fruitfulness. Although we might refer to him as Creator in song or prayer, we rarely spend time thinking about the significance of his creativity for who we are as the church. We are a gathered collection of God's image-bearers, but at times those God-given creative impulses are suppressed within the church. Even when we do embrace them, they are almost exclusively reflected in the context of visual or performing arts.

Creativity, however, is more than the visual arts. It is a divine attribute that God shares with his image-bearers, and it flows through *every* aspect of our lives. We are by nature creative beings, and this trait applies to problem solving as much as it does to painting a landscape, and to our ministry systems as much as it does to writing worship songs. Why do we raise this point? Because we believe it honors God when we give our attention to the beauty expressed in composing an elegant church structure. We should be able to cultivate and appreciate beauty in the organizational structure of a church, much like we are able to see the divine glory and transcendence in the architecture of a majestic medieval church building.

This is more than just an exercise in aesthetics. By acknowledging beauty, we are reminded of the importance of divinely given creativity in the development of our organization models. By emphasizing creativity, we hope it will lead more people on church leadership teams to turn to Scripture and prayer—rather than business journals and analytics—as they contemplate organizational changes. An appreciation of beauty and creativity can diffuse our defensiveness toward new expressions of the church, as we can sometimes be guilty of protecting our preferences. When we see the creative character of God in the innovative impulse to advance his kingdom, we become encouragers and counselors rather than critics. When church leaders are gripped with fear, they compulsively try to tear others down. Instead, by regarding the creativity of others as imaging our creative God, we are free to appreciate, evaluate, and even learn from different models.

When the church is unwilling to embrace the creative impulse, it loses opportunities to advance the gospel. Many opportunities have been missed in the name of doing things as they have always been done. As Henry Ford reminds us, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse." On the contrary, Paul brags that he has "become all things to all people" (1 Cor. 9:22) that he might bring some to salvation. Paul was willing to innovate to reach more people for Jesus.

Chairman Mao's attempt to purge China of Christians and their influence propelled the church to be innovative as well. In China, when Pastor Chang was arrested—not once, not twice, but three times—he gathered with other believers in the prison for mutual support and Bible

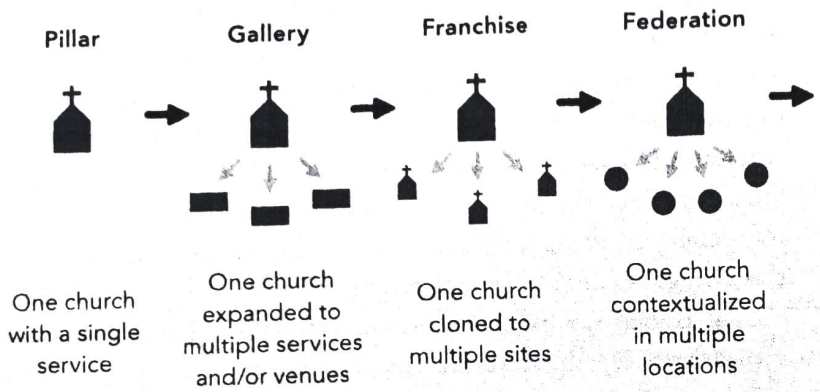
study. They encouraged one another to share the gospel among the nonbelieving prisoners. As the number of the disciples grew, small churches were planted in different parts of the prison. This church-planting movement within Chinese prisons grew exponentially. When these believers were eventually set free, they returned home to plant new house churches that formed the backbone of the underground church that propelled the kingdom of God throughout China. In the face of persecution, creative innovation resulted not only in new churches but also in a movement that changed China's religious landscape forever.[1]

This is not to say that the outcome of our creativity is ever flawless—or even always acceptable. If you have ever painted, written a song or a book, or otherwise tried to create something, you understand the difference between the creative impulse and the outcome. They don't always match up. When we think about the organizational structures of the church, our creative inspiration can be drawn from many places. Sometimes the outcome is an elegant solution to advance the kingdom. Sometimes the result is a hodgepodge that creates more of a headache than it alleviates. But this is the reality of thinking creatively.

We purposefully began with a few words on creative thinking before we examined the seven models of multisite churches. We want to encourage you to evaluate the various models and, rather than beginning with the flaws of each model, to begin by appreciating the God-given creative impulse that fuels each of these approaches. Then you can better evaluate each of these solutions to church growth and commitment to mission based on their ability to reveal truth about the creative character of God.

The Spectrum

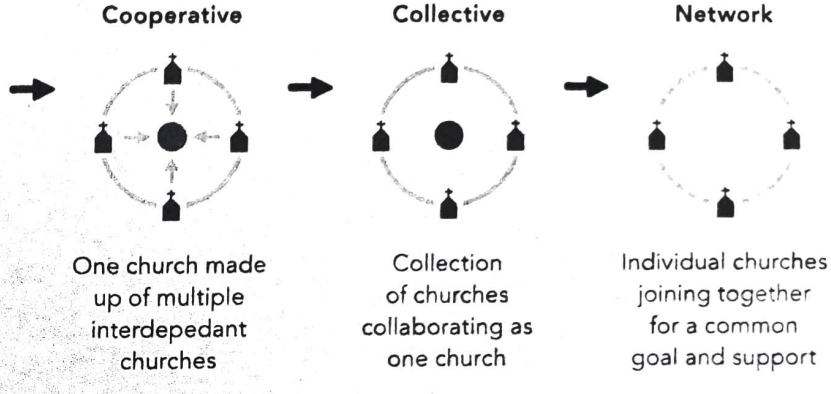
So what are the seven models? These expressions represent a range of church structures. We have chosen to delineate them across a spectrum based on what we call the *locus of power*. The locus of power is the authority and the responsibility to establish vision, make decisions, and spend money. Across the spectrum, the locus of power moves from complete centralization on the left to strong decentralization on the right.



As we evaluated the growth and development of the multisite movement, we identified seven models, which are (1) pillar, (2) gallery, (3) franchise, (4) federation, (5) cooperative, (6) collective, and (7) network. More precisely, the five models in the middle (from gallery to collective) represent the various models of multisite. We identified distinctions related to the locus of power in each structure.

As we begin looking at the different models, we want to point out that there has been some debate over the past several years about how to refer to the various sites of a multisite church. Some favor the terms *campuses* or *congregations*, while others argue that they should be called *churches*, which fuels the debate on what constitutes a church. While a church is characterized by many elements (worship, discipleship, mercy, and mission), key for our discussion is the fact that a church has a distinct form of government.

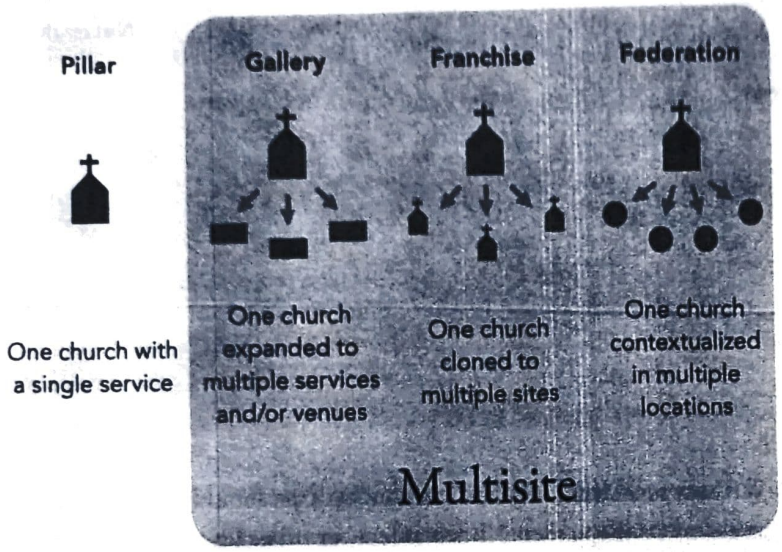
Some have taken this to mean that a site without its own pastor(s) is a *campus* while a site with its own pastor(s) can more properly be called a *church*. Although this line of argument has some merit, we believe it is insufficient because it does not address the ability of those pastors to actually engage in the governance of their church. It is one thing to be called a pastor, and it is another thing to be a pastor with the responsibility and authority to make decisions affecting the congregants (decisions concerning the budget, contextualization of ministries, and more).



Without such decision-making authority, a site should not be understood as a *church*—dependent, independent, or otherwise—but as a *campus*, despite the fact that it is in vogue for large franchise models to call their sites *churches*.

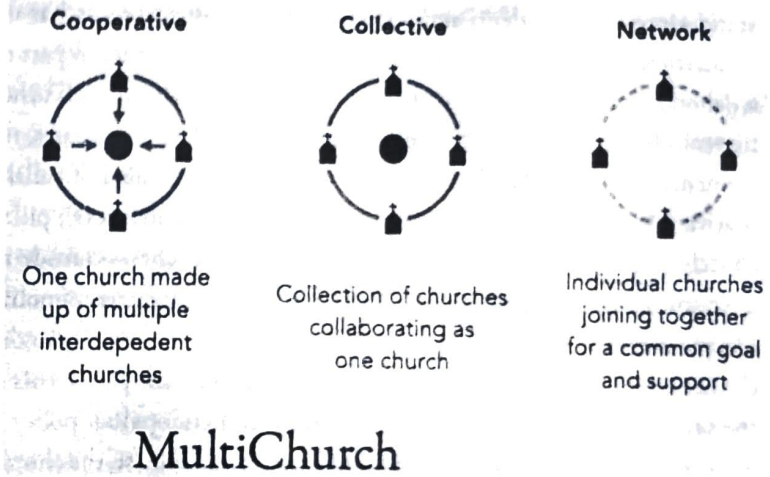
Why, then, do some models refer to their sites as churches? Often it's for practical, usually financial, purposes. It is more difficult to raise money for a campus than it is for a church. We saw this at Mars Hill in Seattle when they changed the nomenclature of their congregations from campuses to churches in 2011. The change did not reflect any revision in philosophy or practice within the church polity. Despite the change implying more autonomy, that was not the case. Arguably, at this time in the history of Mars Hill, it was the opposite. This change in nomenclature, regardless of motivation, appeared to be pragmatically driven. That is not always the case. Regardless of the motive behind the naming convention, we are advocating for nomenclature based on actual governance within the church.

By distinguishing between models based on the responsibility and authority to make decisions, we can consistently distinguish between the various models of multisite without trying to guess at the motivations or reasons for the various naming conventions. In addition, this way of organizing the models clarifies what we are proposing as a new classification: *multichurch*.



In the introduction we defined any church that that does not limit its gathering to one location and time as a multisite church. Therefore, the *multisite model* consists of one church that expresses itself in multiple *campuses* (multiple services, multiple venues, or multiple locations). We are proposing a further distinction from multisite, a natural evolution of the multisite model that differs from the earlier multisite models in where and how authority and governance are focused. We refer to these churches as multichurch. The *multichurch model* consists of one church that expresses itself in multiple *churches* that have a form of polity that provides the responsibility and authority to make decisions about budget, contextualization of ministries, and more.

If all of this feels a bit fuzzy and confusing right now, that's okay. In what follows we will explain these models in greater detail and illustrate the difference between multisite and multichurch on the spectrum of church models. Each model we discuss will be presented according to five aspects: description, examples, locus of power, strengths, and weaknesses.



The Pillar Church Model

Before we begin looking at the various models of multisite and multichurch, we need to talk about a familiar model that is neither of those two: the pillar model. It is a stand-alone church with a single congregation meeting in a single service.

A pillar is a self-standing column, which is why we use the image to talk about one church with a single service. Until the explosion of megachurches with several services per Sunday, the pillar model was the most familiar. Studies demonstrate that just over half of US churches have one Sunday morning service.[2] Mark Dever's Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, is a good example. While this church does have connectivity through the Southern Baptist Convention and 9Marks,[3] it is driven by the single-gathering philosophy outlined in Dever's *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Under this model, Capitol Hill has thrived, although its growth is limited—a limitation it enthusiastically embraces—by the size of the assembly space in which its members can gather.

In most places, the pillar model continues to be the standard church model due to the small size of most congregations.[4] A pillar church is stand-alone, independent, and autonomous. In some cases, it has no association with other churches. In other cases, a pillar church is part of a denomination or network or has an informal association with other like-minded churches, which exert no authority and, in some cases, no influence over the pillar church. Except for a limited number of collaborative efforts (such as giving to support missional endeavors), pillar churches are formally disconnected from other churches—outside of the personal relationships of their members. In other varieties of polity like presbyterian and episcopalian, a pillar church is necessarily under the authority of higher-level structures. In presbyterian polity this is the presbytery, synod, and general assembly; in episcopalian polity it is the regional bishop. But even when these associations exist, the church operates relatively free from outside structures.

The Locus of Power in the Pillar Model

In later models we will see that multisite and multichurch models feature a dynamic between central authority and local authority. The pillar model does not have the same tension. The locus of power resides in a pillar church's leadership—its solo pastor and board of deacons or its council (plurality) of elders, to give two examples. In a congregational polity, the membership also has a sphere of authority (approving/disapproving the budget and changing the statement of faith, for example). In the case of presbyterian or episcopalian polity, the presbytery or bishop enjoys a locus of power, but it is always seen as an external authority.

Strengths of the Pillar Model

One of the many strengths of the pillar model is the ability of the church to establish and control its own vision, worship, discipleship, mission, leadership, budget, and facilities. As we mentioned before, Capitol Hill Baptist under Mark Dever has been able to capitalize on these strengths to build a significant church in DC. A pillar church's ability to grow is a function of its ability and will to build larger facilities.

This control over its own direction serves it well. Even in presbyterian and episcopalian polities with their external authority structures, the local church authority is primary and functions similarly to pillar churches.

Additionally, a pillar church can contextualize itself for the neighborhood in which it is located. This allows such a church to tailor its aesthetic, music, components of service, and vision for community to reflect the cultural norms of its context. This is true of many historically black churches, such as Forest Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The structures a pillar church develops for its worship service, small groups, finances, and community outreach can be straightforward—nothing like the complexities inherent in the other models. It can have a unified, flexible, nimble, and focused church structure.

Moreover, when sufficiently small, a pillar model church fosters a strong, intimate fellowship. The ability to gather the entire congregation in one place at one time encourages a family gathering feel that can be lost in larger churches, especially when their members can no longer meet all together.

Weaknesses of the Pillar Model

The pillar model has been a mainstay of the church landscape for centuries, yet it is not without weaknesses. For the purposes of this discussion, we will limit our assessment of the weaknesses of the model as they relate to multisite. With this constraint in mind, we see the primary weakness of the pillar model is what it fails to provide as an autonomous church. The two most obvious limitations are isolation (which prevents deep collaboration) and the inherent restrictions on leadership development and growth.

The first limitation is isolation, or lack of collaboration. The Evangelical Baptist Church of Lugano in Switzerland was a pillar church. Filippo Zielke and I (Gregg) were copastors of this congregation of thirty-five people. We planned the worship services, took turns preaching, led Bible studies, and provided pastoral care. Everything was our responsibility. Structures were minimal, relationships within the church were close, and church life was . . . messy. As a church with a dozen

nationalities represented, this was not a surprise. We were one church, with one location, with one service.

When our Swiss church tried to participate in a cooperative evangelistic outreach with other area churches, we lacked the vision and manpower to collaborate. Isolation also made it difficult to find the resources to help when we got in over our head. While our experience was exacerbated by the church's location in a predominantly secular culture, many churches choose the isolation inherent in the pillar model.

While independence has some advantages when it comes to efficiency, it can also be a very "lonely" model. Some pillar churches seek to overcome this weakness by joining efforts in their city or within a denomination, but collaboration and shared responsibility in leading are not inherent within the model. This can be especially critical in times of crisis.[5]

Crises can come in a myriad of ways, from getting overwhelmed by counseling cases to financial strain. One common example is a crisis related to the leadership of the church. We have seen several churches face challenges in dealing with charges against their pastor because of the pastor's isolation. The lack of support puts a heavy strain on the leadership and doesn't provide the safety or accountability possible with connectivity.

Overlake Christian Church in Seattle faced this challenge at the tail end of the 90s when charges were brought against its former lead pastor. As an independent church, it lacked the inherent safety of connectivity that would have provided a sounding board and wise counsel. Such support would have been invaluable during that time. While it has now reestablished itself as a healthy church, it took years to recover from what some would argue in hindsight were poor and avoidable decisions.

As for the second limitation, leadership development and growth are often casualties of the pillar model due to limited opportunities. Churches that don't provide opportunities for gifted leaders to develop in their congregations risk losing those leaders to other works or, worse, see their gifts atrophy from lack of use. While sending leaders to other works may be good for the kingdom, it is not a particularly successful strategy for the pillar church itself. Even pillar churches with a fairly healthy growth curve can saturate leadership needs fairly quickly because

of the inherent limitation for multiple preachers and high-level leaders. In contrast, multisite churches grow at a rate five times faster than single service churches.[6] While growth is not the defining characteristic of health, it is an important factor to consider. Growth not only indicates the advancement of the gospel but also provides new opportunities for developing leaders.

Multisite

As defined earlier, a multisite model is one church that expresses itself in multiple *campuses*—multiple services (one version of the gallery model), multiple venues at the same location (a second version of the gallery model), and multiple locations where the one church is cloned (the franchise model). The following are expressions of the various multisite models.

The Gallery Church Model

The first variety of multisite is the gallery model. This model is one church in one location with multiple services and/or venues. Studies show that nearly half of all US churches have at least two Sunday morning worship services.[7] Many churches consider moving to this model for practical reasons. They have experienced growth and can no longer seat people in a single service, yet they aren't interested in building or buying a larger meeting space. Some churches also use this as an attractional strategy by offering different styles or expressions of worship and preaching in different services. These strategies are called "attractional" because they are intended to draw more people to the church and to Christ by meeting felt or perceived needs. Whether the gallery model is adopted as a temporary or a permanent solution, it is the most basic expression of multisite.

Why do we call it the gallery model? A gallery is a collection of shops under one roof. Accordingly, the gallery model consists of one church expanded to multiple services and/or venues. One variety is a *multiple services* church. As a pillar model church expands beyond its seating capacity for one service, it might add another service at a different time.

The two services are often (nearly) identical; only the meeting time is different. Alternatively, that church may seek to reach two different audiences. It expands from one to two services, and these two are quite different. For example, when Hinson Church moved from one service to two, the 9:00 a.m. classic service was primarily aimed at the church's senior population, and the 11:00 a.m. contemporary service targeted a younger crowd. As a two-service church continues to grow, it might add a third and a fourth service.

A second variety is a *multiple venues* church, or one church that expresses itself in multiple settings at the same location. While meeting at the same time at the same location, members may choose to attend a venue that features worship with jazz music, while others select a different venue that features country music for worship. In many cases, the church synchronizes and broadcasts the sermon via video at all the venues.

One example of a well-known gallery model with multiple venues is North Coast Church. Its Vista location in North San Diego County has ten different venues offering nineteen worship services on Saturdays and Sundays. As it explains, the Vista campus "features multiple simultaneous worship venues. . . . You can choose the style of worship that you like and still enjoy the same great teaching in every venue." These are

- *North Coast Live*, featuring a "full worship band and live teaching,"
- *The Edge Venue*, featuring "an edgier atmosphere for worship,"
- *Soul Gospel*, featuring "groove oriented, gospel centered music with a touch of soul,"
- *Sundays 4 Singles*, "a video venue sponsored by our singles ministry,"
- *The Message*, committed to "simply the message,"
- *Traditions*, featuring "a mix of classic hymns and old favorites,"
- *Last Call*, featuring an "extended, reflective worship time after the message,"
- *Encore*, which "features contemporary worship,"
- *Country Gospel*, featuring "gospel/bluegrass worship," and
- *Venue en Español*, featuring "live worship and teaching all in Spanish."[8]

A key characteristic of the gallery model is having one staff that leads multiple services. The emphasis of this model is on being one church while accommodating the needs (overcrowdedness) and wants (worship style) of different groups within the congregation.

The Locus of Power in the Gallery Model

Like the pillar model, and unlike the other models that follow, the gallery model has only one locus of power. Indeed, leadership for this model typically looks very similar to that of a pillar model church. The single, central leadership structure—whatever this may be (and it may vary significantly)—makes all the decisions, and the different worship services or the different worship venues express these centralized decisions.

Strengths of the Gallery Model

The gallery model is a creative solution to the problem of growth, and it is very useful as a strategy to engage diverse groups of people. It creatively replaces the costly solution of building a larger facility by using the same space for additional services. This is both efficient and wise stewardship. Sizing a building for one service often leads to a building design that is impractical for other uses during the week. This commits a significant amount of resources into a space used only fifty-two times a year. By offering different styles of worship in various venues at the same location, a church can more effectively attract a wide variety of people, thereby expanding the mission of the church. Additionally, for both multiple services and multiple venues, the simplicity of having one, unified staff is an important strength.

Weaknesses of the Gallery Model

Like the pillar model, the gallery model also has its weaknesses. By settling only in one location, the church limits its missional footprint within a city. What do we mean by a limited "missional footprint"? Simply that being in one geographic location has the potential to isolate the church as a destination that people travel to attend, rather than fostering an expression of the gospel throughout the city, contextualized to different neighborhoods.

Another weakness, as many gallery churches illustrate, is that multiple services and multiple venues cause division in the church: part of the membership attend the 9:00 a.m. service while others the 11:00 a.m. service, or part of them worship in the jazz venue while others in the country venue. In the latter case, when the division is defined by the members' experience, competition between the congregations at different services or venues can develop. This competition can be a distraction when it leads to arguments or disagreements over resources and staff.

In addition, there is always a danger that a consumeristic mentality may replace proper church unity, self-sacrifice, and service. By building services to accommodate personal preferences like a mall food court, we cannot avoid reinforcing consumerism. We cannot tell people that we can tailor church to meet their needs and then be disappointed when they demand their needs be met rather than seek out opportunities to serve.

Finally, as gallery model churches multiply services, the need for additional staff (each worship venue has its own pastor) and volunteers (each worship service needs children's ministry personnel) increases exponentially. Such expansion calls for careful budgeting so that staffing needs do not dominate to the detriment of ministry, mercy, and mission.

The Franchise Church Model

The second variety of multisite is the franchise model. This model focuses on cloning one church, and it is the model that most people think of when it comes to the multisite movement. A franchise is a business that is granted the responsibility and authority to market a company's goods or services. Suppose a company's product (such as computers) or service (such as care for the elderly) experiences some measure of success. The company distributes its brand—that product or service—through its licensed affiliates, or franchises. Working from this definition, the franchise model is one church cloned to multiple sites, each of which is granted the responsibility and authority to express the church's "brand," that is, its vision, worship, preaching, discipleship, care, and mission. Two distinguishing features of this model are the centralization of control and the management of the church's brand. In most cases, there is a third

distinctive: the use of video or streaming to broadcast the sermons of the lead pastor.

Even though Mars Hill in Seattle closed its doors in 2015, it remains one of the most well-known examples of the franchise model. Willow Creek in Chicagoland is another well-recognized expression of this model. Others include Summit Church with J. D. Greer at the helm (Durham, North Carolina), Harvest Bible Chapel with James MacDonald as its leader (Chicagoland), Fellowship Church under Ed Young Jr. (Grapevine, Texas), Saddleback Church with Rick Warren (Lake Forest, California), Prestonwood Baptist Church under the leadership of Jack Graham (Plano, Texas), and Southeast Christian Church led by Dave Stone and Kyle Idleman (Louisville, Kentucky).

The Locus of Power in the Franchise Model

While both the pillar and gallery models have only one locus of power, the franchise model is the first model to distinguish between central and local authority. This split is always a source of tension in multisite and multichurch models. The central authority is typically a leadership team making and enforcing decisions to promote the brand (its vision, finances, staff, programs, etc.) for the cloned sites. The franchise model tends to be heavy on centralized leadership and brand management. This locus of power may reside in a lead pastor who is the founder and visionary of the church, or it can rest with an executive team. The use of video or streaming to broadcast the same sermon to all the sites centralizes the authority of the preaching of the Word of God. Decisions primarily come from the top down, flowing from the central authority that is responsible for the brand outward to the cloned sites. Still, some expressions of this model work hard to receive input from the leadership at the cloned sites.

With its emphasis on centralized leadership and brand management, the franchise model limits the decision-making ability of the local leadership. Managing the brand limits how far a local staff can diverge from the standard. In this, it restricts contextualization in favor of the brand. What authority is granted to local expressions typically resides in a local lead pastor or local elder team, which is given the responsibility

to reproduce the brand at its site. Generally, neither the local pastor nor the local leadership team participates in the governance of the church through the central leadership team, yet some expressions of this model may incorporate the local leadership into their central leadership structure in creative ways.

Strengths of the Franchise Model

When a church is fruitful and growing, it is only natural for its leaders to want to replicate the conditions that produce that growth and effectiveness. This desire is often driven by a strong commitment to engage more and more people with the gospel and expand the church into new geographical areas. A strength of the franchise model is the addition of new worship services at sites that are not confined to one location unlike the gallery model. Furthermore, as a church replicates its brand, a proven reality is cloned at multiple sites. The rate of success is very high, the replication is easy, and the expansion is fast.

The model is also very attractive to the church membership because it provides a sense of unity through consistency. To draw an example from the business world, many people today like to be able to walk into the same coffee shop (Starbucks) or use the same service (Jiffy Lube) in different locations knowing exactly what they are going to get. Familiarity is calming and secure, and this model provides comfort and safety in a culture that is transient. Moreover, the limited need for local leadership allows a franchise model church to grow with less developed leaders. In this, it allows for leadership growth and development by providing opportunities for new and inexperienced leaders while not requiring them to have skills beyond their capacity. In particular, because of the centralized sermon by the lead pastor, the local pastors do not need to have well-developed preaching abilities.

Weaknesses of the Franchise Model

As we will discuss in more detail in chapter 4, the franchise model is susceptible to many of the common critiques of the multisite movement. One criticism is that the use of video preaching in multisite churches promotes idolatry. Digitizing one preaching pastor and beaming his sermon-bearing image into multiple sites fosters arrogance and pride. Add to this the highly publicized failures of several multisite pastors in recent years, and it does give credence to the idea that the franchise model is inherently susceptible to cultivating a cult of personality.

A second critique concerns the failure of the franchise model to effectively develop preachers and leaders. With centralized sermons and leadership, local pastors are not given sufficient opportunities to mature in their preaching and leading. Their role, while essential, is limited to shepherding and caring for their local members. This results in a continual exodus of younger leaders who look to other churches or organizations that give them opportunities to use their God-given gifts.

Another potential weakness of the franchise model relates to the idea of a brand that defines the identity of the church. There is always the danger that sticking to the brand takes priority over spreading the message of the gospel. When a franchise exports an entire brand, it sometimes does so in such a rigid manner that some sites are unable to embrace the brand because of cultural differences. In order for the vision, worship, preaching, discipleship, care, and mission to be tailored to multiple sites, many of the elements of the brand must become fairly generic, lacking a contextualized approach. This "generic" approach emphasizes the lowest common denominator for unity and can result in less impact for Christ as the church detaches from the culture where the site or campus is situated. One of the key criticisms of the franchise model is that it is more deeply rooted in secular notions of branding than in the Scriptures.

The Federation Church Model

The federation model focuses on being one church that is contextualized in multiple locations. A federation is an organization made up of smaller or localized organizations. A key difference between the federation and the franchise models is that federation models employ *live preaching* at every (or almost every) location, and the different locations have local elders and staff. This enhances the church's ability to contextualize the gospel and provide more effective leadership at the local level.

A federation model church has both shared (centralized) staff *and* local staff for each location. The centralized staff provides support for campuses in ways that maximize efficiency and reduce administrative burden. Federation churches are often led by executive teams that establish vision and provide day-to-day management of the church. In these models, many management decisions, including staffing and budget, are still determined centrally and presented to campus pastors. However, there is distinctly more freedom to contextualize at the local level—in everything from the sermon preached on Sunday to how the ministry allocates spending.

A federation model church may develop out the franchise model in an effort to address some of the weaknesses of the franchise model. This can happen as the managers at the cloned sites mature into strong leaders and seek greater flexibility and freedom to deviate from the brand of the franchise. If the central leadership of a franchise model church is willing to empower campus pastors, it can make the transition to the federation model. Each campus pastor must own the overall vision of the church while capably adapting it to their particular context. This model is dependent on church leaders understanding the importance of contextualization and possessing the skills to adapt the gospel and its expression in different places. The central leadership team urges, supports, and celebrates this contextualization, while the leaders at the multiple locations carefully contextualize the one church according to, and for the sake of, their different demographics.

Though it is beyond our purpose to address contextualization in depth, it can be helpful to clarify what we mean by this term. Pastor Tim Keller of Redeemer Church in New York City says that contextualization "is giving people *the Bible's answers*, which they may not at all want to hear, *to questions about life* that people in their particular time and place are asking, *in language and forms* they can comprehend, and *through appeals and arguments* with force they can feel, even if they reject them."[9] According to Keller, contextualization requires a number of skills, including the ability to exegete the Scriptures, study and understand the culture in which the church exists, and creatively and winsomely communicate the message of Scripture and the gospel in ways that people in that culture can understand. It is a missionary task and one that is biblically warranted, even demanded.

As I (Gregg) have said elsewhere, "Contextualization is seen in Peter's Old Testament-rich proclamation to his Jewish audience on Pentecost (Acts 2:14–41), Paul's simple words to the peasants of Lystra (14:8–18), and his address to the philosophically sophisticated Athenians (17:16–34)."[10] Flowing from the contextualized gospel is the adaptation of the church in different cultures in terms of its worship, discipleship, mercy, care, and mission.

The founding documents of The Gospel Coalition, a network founded by Keller and his friend Don Carson, further explain the need to contextualize the gospel for fruitful ministry: "The gospel itself holds the key to appropriate contextualization. If we over-contextualize, it suggests that we want too much the approval of the receiving culture. This betrays a lack of confidence in the gospel. If we undercontextualize, it suggests that we want the trappings of our own sub-culture too much. This betrays a lack of gospel humility and a lack of love for our neighbor."[11] While contextualization is certainly wrought with difficulties, neglecting contextualization is simply not an option for churches that take the Great Commission seriously. This is one reason why the emphasis on contextualization in the federation model—as well as in the cooperative and collective models—is necessary and proper.

Several churches around the country employ the federation model, including Veritas Community Church (Columbus, Ohio), Apostles Church (New York City), and Brentwood Baptist (Brentwood, Tennessee). Each of these churches is a multisite church that features live preaching at their various sites.

The Locus of Power in the Federation Model

Some of the locus of power in the federation model resides in an executive team that is responsible for the governance and management of the church as a whole. This team is responsible for establishing vision, developing the budget, and managing the staff. This usually includes determining staffing and budgets for local campuses as well. In many

federation churches, this central team provides vision and oversight for essential ministries that are expected to be available to each campus. This team is often made up of staff from local campuses with the local bodies and the central authority sharing the staff's time.

Despite significant central control, federation model churches share some responsibility and decision making with the leaders at the multiple locations—certainly more than a franchise model church. These local leaders exercise their authority in conjunction with the executive team, which encourages and commends contextualization at those locations. This authority for contextualization is exercised through the pulpit, through the various ministries of the church, and through some budgetary autonomy.

Strengths of the Federation Model

The federation model shares many of the strengths of the franchise model—as one church expanding its mission by cloning itself at multiple sites—while also encouraging greater contextualization at those locations. Whereas the franchise model tends to emphasize the promotion of the church's brand (and this point does not discount the centrality of the gospel to this brand), the federation model highlights the expansion of the gospel and its expression—the church—contextualized for different people in multiple locations.

The federation model also has some very practical benefits in developing leaders. Campus pastors have more opportunities to exercise their gifts as leaders by expressing their ownership of the church's vision, adapting the church in their multiple locations, and developing their preaching gifts and other leadership skills.

Weaknesses of the Federation Model

When the federation model's balance of power is tipped toward its centralized leadership, it suffers from many of the same weaknesses as the franchise model. A strong centralized leadership that fails to empower local leadership can discourage new leaders, and like the franchise model, there can be a tendency to promote the brand over and against contextualization.

Because the federation model lies between the franchise model and the two multichurch models, it exists in a "no-man's-land," where campus pastors taste some freedom but are frequently frustrated with feeling micromanaged. This particular weakness makes the federation model difficult to sustain for long periods of time, especially when local sites develop strong and capable leaders. As we will discuss further in chapter 8, the financial cost of the central control tends to increase some of the frustration that campus pastors feel in this model.

Finally, as we saw with the franchise model, the federation model finds it very difficult to maintain balance in the locus of power. As a practical matter, many churches that give more freedom to local sites end up having to standardize the vision, worship, preaching, discipleship, care, and mission to maintain unity, effectively impeding the church's impact across different demographics.

Multichurch

As indicated by our focus on the locus of power in the church, there are many strengths and weaknesses to the various multisite models. Tensions develop as churches seek to balance centralized authority and governance with the desire to contextualize the gospel to local congregations and give greater freedom to local leadership. This tension leads us to the next generation in the evolution of the multisite movement: the multichurch model. As noted earlier, the ***multichurch model*** features one church that expresses itself in multiple ***churches*** that have a form of polity that provides the responsibility and authority to made decisions about budget, contextualization of ministries, and more. The first variety of this model brings together multiple interdependent churches as one church (the cooperative model). The second is a collection of independent churches collaborating as one church (the collective model). We will take a look at each of these in turn.

The Cooperative Church Model

The first multichurch model on the spectrum is the cooperative model. A cooperative model is multichurch because it is one church composed of

multiple interdependent churches. Moreover, the level of interdependence between the churches is fairly substantial. It is the degree of interdependence among the churches that distinguishes it from the collective model, in which largely independent churches collaborate.

The cooperative model of multichurch is similar to the business model that goes by the same name. A cooperative (or co-op) is a business or organization made up of people that voluntarily cooperate for their mutual social, economic, and cultural benefit. These members, marked by interdependence, act in concert toward a unified goal. When applied to the structure of the church and our discussion of the multisite spectrum, the cooperative multichurch model features one church made up of multiple interdependent churches.

This model strikes a balance of control between the centralized and local leaders by having a leadership council composed of pastors representing their respective churches as well as some shared staff. The local leadership teams of these churches are composed of pastors and staff, and these teams develop and execute their respective contextualized visions, always in conjunction with a shared vision that is determined collectively through the central leadership council. Their interdependence as one church is expressed in a variety of ways, including a shared theology, vision, and philosophy of ministry. Some cooperative multichurches have a common liturgy for their worship services and a common approach to discipleship, while others have joint mission and mercy ministries or other centralized services. This is a brief summary of the model, but we will discuss this model in greater detail in section 2.

The Locus of Power in the Cooperative Model

In the cooperative model the central leadership focuses on the broad, long-term vision and the management of central functions. The governance of the church as a whole is shared between local and central leaders who form a board or leadership council. The members of the board may include some with special roles as executive elders, whose primary concerns are the overall vision and core values of the church. The board also includes the pastors of the various local churches, whose concerns

are the contextualized expressions of that vision and the core values for their respective demographics. There may be other leaders included as well, such as nonstaff elders, whose concern is to mediate between the executive elders and the pastors of the churches when either the centralized leadership or the local leadership threatens to dominate the church.

At the local level, authority resides with the local pastors, staff, and their respective elder teams. Consciously working in conjunction with the leadership council, this team contextualizes the overall vision, worship, mission, discipleship, mercy, care and more for the particular demographics of their location. Unlike the federation model, this team has budgetary authority for spending and staffing along with the freedom to contextualize the vision locally.

The church that we, as authors, belong to is an example of this model of multichurch. For many years, Sojourn Community Church operated within the federation model and has recently evolved into the cooperative model. As a federation model church, Sojourn was deeply centralized in terms of its preaching (though not broadcasting sermons, the four speakers for Sundays preached the same text and worked with a fairly standardized outline), liturgy, community groups, discipleship, children's ministry, pastoral care, missions, mercy, and women's ministry. Staffing was centralized so that these ministries were led by central staff pastors or directors. Finances were also centralized. All the money given to Sojourn's four campuses was pooled together, then distributed back to the churches for staffing and ministry needs. Financial decisions, including the budget allocations to the four campuses, were largely made by the executive leaders with limited input from the four campus pastors.

As the four campus pastors developed strong gifts of preaching and leadership, became proficient at contextualization in their respective locations, and struggled with the heavy-handed centralized locus of power, Sojourn found itself in a position to transition into a cooperative model of church. This began with the creation of a leadership council that addressed both centralized and localized concerns through representation at those levels. Sojourn established a structure that strives to achieve a balance between control and ownership, elements traditionally in tension with each other.

Strengths of the Cooperative Model

If there is one word that sums up the strength of this model, it's *balance.* More than the other models, the cooperative model seeks to achieve a balance between control and ownership. To accomplish this balance, there are several systems in place to avoid, on the one hand, a blatant abuse of power and, on the other hand, a stifling of initiatives through micromanagement. The same is true regarding the balance between the one church's vision and core values and the contextualization in and through the multiple churches. The model seeks sufficient ownership of the common mission to ensure a significant degree of similarity between the various churches, matched by sufficient freedom given and creativity encouraged to ensure a proper contextualization. In section 2, we will take a more exhaustive look at the advantages of this model; therefore, we keep our comments here brief.

Weaknesses of the Cooperative Model

Of course, the bane of theoretical balance is that the balance is never fully achieved in practice. As in any cooperative model, balance shifts back and forth as the various checks and balances operate over time. This is true of any governmental system, of course. Consider the American system of federalism that seeks to balance the interests of the states with a central federal authority. The divisions of power and authority into three branches and the checks and balances designed into the structure help to preserve balance over time, but at any given time the balance is shifted in one direction or another. You never achieve that perfect balance. Likewise, the cooperative model suffers from the normal and constant tension between central and local authority and between the overall vision and its actual contextualized expressions.

Other weaknesses include the complexity of the cooperative model, the increased time commitment that interdependence demands, and the higher risk for leadership conflict between the central structure and the local churches.

The Collective Church Model

Continuing to the right end of the spectrum is the collective model. A collective model church is a multichurch because it is a collection of individual churches. Though these churches are largely independent, they collaborate as one church. It is this unifying factor that distinguishes the collective model from the network model on the far right of the spectrum.

A collective is a group of individuals working together on a common project without relying on internal structures. Members of a collective, marked by a limited similarity, compose the one group with a unified commitment to sharing power and authority. A collective multichurch is a collection of largely independent churches—equal partners—collaborating together as one church. Located to the right of the cooperative multichurch, the collective model possesses the least amount of centralized leadership and grants the most autonomy to the local churches. Despite this high level of independence at the local level, these churches cooperate in a limited number of ministries and share a limited number of resources. In some cases, these churches are former sites of a multisite church or are church plants from the original congregation.

Redemption Church—"one church in ten local congregations across the state of Arizona"—is an example of the collective multichurch model. It has a very limited central governing structure, as they explain on their website:

> Central Operations are structured to support and empower local congregations in the freedom that has been given to them. This is done by efficiently meeting common needs with centralized leadership, freeing congregations of the burden to dedicate energy, resources, and/or staff to meet those needs locally. Central Operations are intentionally minimal to reduce the financial burden place on the local congregations, who contribute a percentage of their budget to fund it. Currently in Redemption Church, facility maintenance, media and communications, legal and finance, and Outward Focus Ministries (missions) are

> part of Central Operations. Central Operations provides a tremendous support structure for the birthing of new Redemption congregation.[12]

Clearly, Redemption Church's balance of power is strongly tipped toward the leadership teams of the ten congregations, each of which has freedom to contextualize its efforts. These are independent churches collaborating together.

The question of how these congregations are unified is answered by their commitment to four categories of boundaries, which help to

> define the space in which local congregations have freedom to contextualize their ministry. These boundaries are meant to empower leaders with clarity, direction, and resources rather than limit them with constraints. They are in place to help the multiplication of healthy disciples and leaders who do the work of ministry in their local church.[13]

These four main categories of boundaries are as follows:

1. Covenant: We are bound together as one legal entity with shared resources.
2. Beliefs and practices: We operate from the same foundation in the gospel.
3. Culture: We have shared values and expectations.
4. Communication: We speak the same language and present a consistent message.[14]

Thus, the unity and collaboration are centered on relationships, resources, theology, values, vision, and speech, with an outward focus on the multiplication of new Redemption Church congregations.

The Locus of Power in the Collective Model

Because the collective model emphasizes local independent churches in cooperation with each other, central control and authority are intentionally

kept to a minimum. Centralized leadership that includes significant representation from the collaborating churches fosters relationships between those churches, provides resources for them (such as finances, communications, legal services, and human resources), imparts common vision and shared values, and encourages multiplication. A minimum percentage of the collaborating churches' budgets is contributed to support the work of the central leadership team.

Freed of the burden to take care of the many administrative tasks that are part and parcel of the responsibilities of pillar model churches, collective model churches dedicate their staff, resources, time, and effort to worship, discipleship, pastoral care, mercy, and mission. These churches, led by their respective leadership teams of pastors and staff, possess the requisite authority to engage in these ministries in a contextually sensitive manner. They delegate the responsibility for finances, communications, and other administrative structures to the central leadership team and have representatives from their local church on that team.

Strengths of the Collective Model

For many pastors, what makes this model attractive is the delegation of many of the normal church administrative tasks to a central operations team. This frees up the pastoral leadership to focus on preaching, discipleship, and having gospel conversations with members of their local congregations without the added pressure of taking care of hiring and training staff, keeping up facilities, seeking legal counsel, and the like. Two other strengths are that a limited percentage of the local churches' budget is contributed to central operations, and the intentional cooperation among those churches is limited to multiply like-minded churches. Again, we will delve into the strengths of the collective model as well as the cooperative model in section 2.

Weaknesses of the Collective Model

A weakness of this model is that its success is largely dependent on avoiding conflict between the local church leaders. The minimal level of expected collaboration and contribution to the collective (as contrasted

with the cooperative or other multisite models) is such that each church could easily spin off from the collective as an independent church. While this could be considered a strength, it can also require additional time and energy to maintain healthy relationships among the leaders. This is similar to some of the weakness of the cooperative model, but the greater independence of the local churches in the collective model can also mean less accountability. Conflict resulting in high turnover could be substantially disruptive to the mission of the church.

Additionally, the low cost for churches to participate in the collective model necessarily limits the resources and services that the central collective can provide. This leads to role duplication in each local church, more than might be necessary, and it can lead to inequality among churches in the collective. In this model there can be significant disparity between staff compensation, ministry funds, and facilities depending on the demographics of the local congregation.

We found this to be the case for Redemption Church, as compensation and ministry budgets vary significantly between collective churches as a function of location and demographics. For them it is part of their story, but it can be frustrating for staff, requiring more effort to maintain unity. This also means that members' experience will be vastly different based on which church they attend. For example, within a collective church it is common to find a well-funded children's ministry in a church situated in an affluent suburb and a spartan version of the same ministry at a more economically challenged location. Members may not understand the disparity and may find it difficult to move between churches as they transfer homes or jobs.

Network Churches

To the far right of our spectrum is the network model. Because the partnership aspect of this model is quite limited—with a single concentration on church planting—it is neither multisite nor multichurch. Still, the network model is included on the spectrum because it shows a further step between a central authority and local congregations.

A network implies the concerted participation of individual churches that band together for a limited purpose. Pillar model churches may partner with other churches as part of a network; thus, it is possible to bend our spectrum into a circle. That being said, the pillar model is driven primarily by the desire for autonomy while a network is built for connectedness, though intentionally limited. The contrast between these models places them on opposite ends of the spectrum in regard to authority. On the left, there is the complete control of the pillar church because there is only one organization, the church itself. On the right, the control of the network exerts little authority over individual member churches.

In this way, the network model is slightly different from the other self-contained models already presented. It is included here because as you move across the spectrum toward less centralized authority, you eventually cross the line toward independent churches. A network represents the transition from one church to several independent churches that still maintain connectivity.

A network is a system of people or organizations interconnected for a purpose. When the independent churches are functioning well, a network accomplishes more than the sum of the parts—in this case, independent churches. Here we have individual churches joining together for a common goal and for mutual support for greater fruitfulness in mission and ministry.

Dave Harvey, speaking with regard to church planting, explains that "a network is churches partnering for mission by or through message, men, model, and money."[15] The apostle Paul emphasizes this type of partnership when he thanks the church in Philippi for their "partnership in the gospel" (Phil. 1:5). This was a church that participated with Paul in his imprisonment and in defense and confirmation of the gospel (Phil. 1:7). This type of collaboration was *external* to the church through an association with Paul and consequently, through Paul, with other churches that supported his missionary efforts to launch new churches.

Network churches give a percentage of their budget to support common church-planting initiatives. They pool other resources as well, such as prayer, training, and expertise in areas like pastoral care and

sermon preparation. In the past two decades, the growth of networks, especially for church planting, has been startling. Networks include Acts 29, Redeemer City to City, Sojourn Network, Summit Network, Pillar Network, and Church Multiplication Network, to name a few.

The Locus of Power in the Network Model

In keeping with the reduction in the central locus of power of the previous multichurch models, the network model has the least amount of centralized authority. A network is often led by a board of directors made up of leaders from the network churches. This centralized board has authority to execute a very limited range of activities. For example, it may collect the individual churches' network giving, distribute it to support church planters and their ministries, accept new churches into the network, and assess potential church planters. When an individual church is not carrying out its commitments to the network, the board has the authority to remove it from the network. The sole authority of the network's centralized leadership is to promote the common cause. Typically, they do not get involved in the internal decisions of individual churches unless the churches seek advice as they would from a friend.

This means that everything else pertaining to the individual churches is under the leadership of the local locus of power. Local churches have their own vision, part of which includes network initiatives. They make their own decisions about worship, discipleship, care, and mission priorities, some of which may extend to efforts beyond those of the network.

Strengths of the Network Model

Networks have significant strengths. They attract like-minded leaders who band together in a brotherhood that energizes the common cause. Most networks are highly relational and missional in focus. Many younger leaders, frustrated by the bureaucracy and stagnation of denominations, are joining these more informal networks. Additionally, because networks are focused on a limited number of initiatives, their leadership structures and administrative costs are minimal. Low administrative costs enable them to devote a high percentage of their budget to a specific

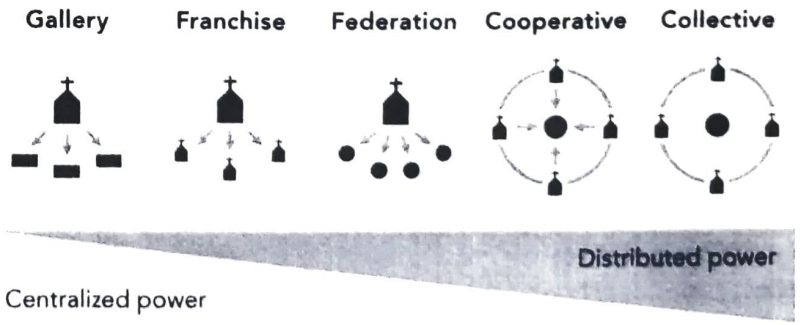
purpose—church planting, for example. This is one reason why the network model has grown and has proven to be effective in recent years.

Weaknesses of the Network Model

That said, the model also has its weaknesses. If we consider some of the recently initiated networks, their staying power is a big concern. How will they weather the storms caused by failed church plants, disagreements among members, church transitions, or other challenges that accompany organizations with diverse leaders? Will they still be around in another twenty years? Some traditional denominations are critical of networks because they now do some of the things the denominations used to do so well. When churches opt out of denominations and join a network or when denominational churches dually align with a network, financial support for the denomination may suffer.

Conclusion

The spectrum of churches encompasses a wide range of models, from the nonmultisite pillar model to the beyond-multichurch network model. In between, as the locus of power shifts from centralized authority toward local authority, we move from multisite (the gallery, franchise, and federation models) to multichurch (the cooperative and collective models). For each model, we have presented its description, examples, locus of power, strengths, and weaknesses.



Now it's your turn! As you consider each of the models, where does your church fit? Consider the strengths and weaknesses. Where do you see the locus of power in your own church? Is that a strength or a weakness?

In addition we encourage you to consider if your current model is still a good model for what your church wants to be and do. Is there a better model to which your church should transition? Before we dig deeper into the different models on the second half of the spectrum (the multichurch models that represent the next generation of the multisite movement), we will first take some time to address some of the additional concerns with the multisite church movement. In the next chapter we will interact with the most common critiques and evaluate each of the models we have discussed in relationship to these criticisms.

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