



## **Multi-site Launch Strategy for *the Church***

Version 4 – Updated June 22, 2010

### **1 Background**

God is leading us to be “One Church, Regional Impact”. The pursuit of this vision shapes every aspect of our ministry. Our “missional mountaintop” statement reminds where we are headed:

"God is leading us to see a multi-location church emerge that will transform the spiritual landscape of Greater Madison. This church will convene in hundreds of lifeGroups with lifeWorship Centers strategically located in geographical regions throughout the Madison area."

This statement and the strategy outlined in this document are founded on a humble acknowledgement that we are totally reliant upon God for the attainment of this vision. We continually seek His will in prayer, asking that He guide and direct our steps. Confident in the truth that Jesus desires that all would come to know Him, we strive to reach out to those who do not yet have a relationship with Him and connect them to life in Jesus right in the neighborhoods and communities where He has placed us. We have developed this multi-site launch strategy trusting that, with the help of God, the gifts that He has given will be sufficient to do his will.

*Unless the LORD builds the house,  
its builders labor in vain.*

*Unless the LORD watches over the city,  
the watchmen stand guard in vain. (Psalm 127:1)*

### **2 Our Multi-site Vision**

A multi-site church is one church that meets at multiple locations. Every site of *the Church* is a base where our mission to connect people to life in Jesus is carried out.

The key characteristics of our approach are:

**1. Reliance on God and on prayer**

We can do nothing apart from what Christ enables us to do.

*<sup>5</sup>"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. <sup>8</sup>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:5-8)*

**2. Multi-site rather than planting independent churches**

A single-site church's growth is limited by many physical factors such as the capacity of the sanctuary and parking lot, number of available service times, and the willingness of people to travel to reach the site.

Multi-site churches can break through these barriers by distributing worship across multiple locations and times. The growth of a multi-site church is no longer constrained primarily by physical limitations but the availability of equipped and committed leaders. We believe the leadership challenge can be overcome through a focus on leadership development at a lower cost and greater reward than investment in physical facilities.

**3. Regional focus**

Sites emerge as individuals who identify with a region begin to gather together and build relationships with others in the region.

A "region" is anywhere people maintain influential relationships based on a shared identity, such as a geographic region, demographic population, workplace, school, or ethnic group.

**4. Organic growth built upon the foundation of healthy lifeGroups**

Relationships are deepened as people live life together in lifeGroup community. The foundation for a site is laid when multiple lifeGroups share the same regional focus.

**5. Low barriers to site creation**

Sites can be developed without a large up-front investment.

This allows greater focus on the needs of the community instead of on raising funds, buying land, constructing a building, and recruiting a large initial support team. Low costs enable the fluidity to quickly start up a site when interest develops in a region.

**6. Shared administrative and operational functions**

Sharing resources eliminates time-consuming tasks that would be required for a new independent congregation such as writing a constitution and bylaws and staffing to support necessary legal, bookkeeping, clerical, and administrative duties. Instead, site leaders are freed to focus on kingdom-oriented tasks directly impacting the community they are trying to reach.

**7. More incarnational than attractional**

Our starting point is not to build a church and invite people to come, but to be the Church and relationally show people the love of Christ through how we live our lives.

**8. More “ground war” focused than “air war” focused**

Pastor Jamie Munson of Mars Hill Church defines the “air war” as the ministries that deal with the masses: preaching, teaching, events, conferences, websites, marketing, technology, etc., and the “ground war” as those ministries that deal with people face-to-face: community groups, discipleship, pastoral care, service and mercy ministries, classes, counseling, Redemption Groups, post-service prayer, etc.

We lead with the “ground war”, particularly in the form of lifeGroups, to lay the foundation for a site and let the “air war” develop once the ground war has established a foothold.

**9. Openness to non-traditional worship, especially during the early phases of site development**

We want to enable and equip people to focus on their region. We also recognize how difficult it seems for people to add more activities to their busy lives. As sites begin to emerge we encourage people to feel comfortable participating in Regional Impact Gatherings, which may lack some of the elements of traditional worship, even if that means that they don't “go to church” every week.

**10. Unity under one leadership and governance structure**

As multiple sites emerge the risk of fragmentation and competing interests arises. A clear leadership hierarchy must be maintained in order to achieve unity of purpose and to ensure that decisions are made with the good of all in mind and that faithful teaching is presented.

**11. Willingness to learn and adapt as we go, taking each step one at a time in faith**

Although we begin from the basis of the philosophy outlined here, we are taking each step one at a time and are watching and waiting to respond when we see where God is leading forward or turning us back.

### **3 Site Development**

The following steps provide an overview of the site development process.

1. A lifeGroup leader arises
2. A single lifeGroup forms
3. lifeGroups multiply
4. Multiple lifeGroups recognize a common regional bond
5. A leader or leaders initiates an exploratory Regional Impact Gathering
6. lifeGroups (and others) agree to regularly gather together regionally in Impact Gatherings
7. A committed regional leader (lay or pastor) is identified and set apart
8. Weekly gatherings may begin in the region.
9. Impact Gatherings eventually transition into a lifeWorship center

There is no fixed timeline for transitioning from each stage to the next, nor is it always necessary or desirable to pass through every phase. Some sites may reach their full potential at stage 6, for example.

#### **3.1 *lifeGroup leaders arise***

We have identified two lifeGroup leader styles:

Disciple builders are most comfortable shepherding the believers. Most of the members of their group will be drawn from new members, transfers, and “church shoppers” who visit the Church prior to becoming connected with lifeGroup.

Neighborhood missionaries feel called to reach out to their unchurched friends, family, and neighbors. They strive to build a group where many of the participants have never visited the Church prior to becoming involved with lifeGroup.

lifeGroup leaders are supported and equipped through monthly lifeGroup leader training, annual lifeGroup leader retreats, personal coaching, and resources provided under the guidance of the lifeGroup leadership director.

#### **3.2 *lifeGroup formation***

A leader will generally experience life lived together in a healthy, mature lifeGroup before stepping forward to become a leader themselves. Depending on the leadership style and circumstances, the leader may start a new group entirely on their own, as a couple, or with additional members of the birthing group who may accompany them to seed the new group.

Growth of lifeGroups, both in numbers and in spiritual maturity is a critical factor in the success of our strategy. Outward growth in numbers relies on the cultivation of spiritual friendships.

*“In order to be someone’s spiritual friend you need to like, approach and serve them.” More Ready Than You Realize by Brian D. McLaren*

Cultivating spiritual friendships begins with simply knowing someone by name...  
praying for them...  
developing a friendship...  
engaging in fun activities with them...  
having heartfelt discussions...  
caring for and serving them...  
joining with them in the service of others...  
sharing the Good News of Christ...  
encouraging them on their walk of faith.

lifeGroups need to strive to be welcoming to those who have not yet opened their lives and hearts to Jesus and be a place where spiritual questions can be thoughtfully and respectfully discussed. lifeGroup leaders need not feel that they have to provide all the answers but should know that there is support and resources they can turn to if needed.

### ***3.3 lifeGroup multiplication***

Over time, healthy lifeGroups produce more leaders who step forward to form additional groups, resulting in organic and exponential lifeGroup multiplication.

### ***3.4 Regional Identification***

A site begins to emerge when multiple lifeGroups identify with a single region or demographic.

### ***3.5 Exploratory Regional Impact Gathering***

An individual or team that recognizes that there are others who share their interest in a region can initiate an exploratory Regional Impact Gathering. They identify a meeting location (possibly a home) and invite other groups to meet together. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss regional needs that can be met (“What good can we do around here?”) and gauge interest in scheduling regular Impact Gatherings.

Assuming there is interest, the short-term leadership team is named. This team is responsible for identifying groups and individuals interested in focusing on the region, finding and coordinating the meeting location, sending invitations, and ensuring follow-up both for future Regional Impact Gatherings and for community service opportunities.

### ***3.6 Ongoing Regional Impact Gatherings***

When several groups recognize a shared affinity for a region they begin to gather together in Impact Gatherings. Other individuals in the region but not yet active in a lifeGroup are welcome to participate.

The purpose of the Regional Impact Gathering is:

1. Worship
2. Develop a regional identity
3. Vision casting
4. Equipping
5. Brainstorm and collaboration to meet needs of the region using the gifts of those gathered
6. Participate together in service and in prayer
7. Encouragement to grow and invite at the lifeGroup level

Impact gatherings may be quarterly or monthly, depending on the readiness of the groups in the region. Gatherings will likely increase in frequency as the site develops.

### ***3.7 Committed Regional Leader Set Apart***

Initial Regional Impact Gatherings can be organized and led by a lay leader or team. If there is sufficient interest in ongoing commitment to a region, a regional leader is identified and set apart to provide consistent leadership. A committed leader should be identified before a regional site considers meeting on a weekly basis.

### ***3.8 Weekly Impact Gatherings***

Increasing the Impact Gathering frequency to weekly is a major milestone in site development. This signals the willingness of the regional groups to make an ongoing commitment to a region. Weekly gatherings should not begin until a site leader has been identified and a minimum of four, and preferably six, lifeGroups have dedicated themselves to the region.

During this stage the regional lifeGroups continue their engagement with the community. More elements of worship are brought into the Impact Gatherings and the meeting format may evolve as the gathering becomes a rehearsal for eventual public worship. Site leaders should be reasonably confident of launching a public lifeWorship Center within six months of starting weekly Impact Gatherings.

### ***3.9 lifeWorship Center***

At this point the site would have the characteristics that would be recognized by most people as a church. Attendees are encouraged to begin to invite those who are not already connected via lifeGroups and the gathering is publicly announced and advertised.

Signs of maturity indicating that the site is ready to become a lifeWorship center include:

1. Site pastor or lay leader identified and set apart. The leader need not be exclusively focused on a single site.

2. Sufficient healthy lifeGroups with trained and prepared leaders so that new visitors and members who attend can immediately be connected to a regional lifeGroup.
3. Self sufficient volunteer base. lifeServe volunteers to fill all the roles described in the Site Roles and Responsibilities document can be drawn from within the region.
4. Self sustaining – not dependent on outside leadership to keep moving forward.
5. May not necessarily have reached the point of being self-sustaining financially.

## **4 Resources Required**

While resources vary greatly depending on the stage of development of the site every stage requires “The Place”, “The People” and “The Particulars” – the details that need to be addressed for successful implementation.

A detailed checklist of these resources is currently being developed outside the scope of this document. For guidelines regarding the people resources required, refer to the document titled Site Roles and Responsibilities.

## **5 New Member Requirements**

With multiple sites it is critically important to ensure the consistency and integrity of the teaching. Everyone wishing to become a member of *the Church* is required to attend Connections classes which are offered at least annually and are currently taught by the pastor. Following completion of the Connections program the individual may be received as a new member, but will also be encouraged to complete a second phase of instruction by participating in the Truth Project, also offered at least annually. These two classes together form the core of the lifeTrack covenant membership program.

## **6 Leadership Development and Support**

This growth model is heavily dependant on continually reproducing quality leadership at many levels.

lifeGroup leaders resources are listed in section 3.1

Lay preachers are being developed though the Preacher’s Learning Community. This program enables lay preachers to be coached and mentored by the lead pastor and to provide feedback to one another as they occasionally share preaching assignments. Lay preachers may serve as site leaders or may provide support across sites. Their participation also enables Pastor to travel or preach at different sites.

Participation in the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program can be used to “fast-track” the development of ordained pastors having a specialized focus area.

Standardized pre-recorded messages and material can be developed for use at each stage to equip participants and encourage further site development.

## **7 Maintaining unity across sites**

All sites are under the direction of the pastor and leadership board of the Church.

Activities and resources shared as one body include:

1. Annual Voters meeting
2. All sites use the same worship series and teaching materials
3. Higher Ground youth ministry
4. lifeGroup leaders training and coaching
5. Annual vision sharing event
6. One mission support team serves all sites
7. Connections class
8. Truth project
9. VBS curriculum

## **8 Site-specific activities**

Many activities will be left to the site to determine how, when, and whether to provide. Activities under the direction of the site leadership include:

1. Regional outreach activities
2. Ministry to the community
3. Child care during worship
4. faithBuilders classes
5. Music during gatherings
6. Local VBS sessions
7. Kid's Connection

## **9 Challenges**

***Change the culture at the Church at Christ Memorial to have a multi-site mindset.***

Begin to refer to Fitchburg as a lifeWorship Center.

Encourage the Fitchburg-based lifeGroups to meet and work together to engage and serve the community.

***Empower grass-roots ownership***

Provide collaboration and communication mechanisms to enable participation and leadership to emerge spontaneously. Passion for growth and vitality must be owned at every level and not depend on being driven by top-down leadership.

