

# Finding the Right Church Plant Model: An Introduction to Church Models (Part 1)

Which church planting model is best for you? Multiple options exist, and it can be tough to decide.

ED STETZER

 Bio



**This is Part 1 of a series on church planting models. Here is the whole series:**

[Part 1—An Introduction to Church Models](#)

[Part 2—The Traditional Model](#)

[Part 3—The Launch Big Model](#)

[Part 4—The Missional Incarnational Model](#)

[Part 5—The Organic House Church Model](#)

[Part 6—The Multi-Site/Satellite Model](#)

**W**e just got another car. Well, truthfully, Donna (my wife) made me get one. To be completely honest, she went and bought it and brought it home and basically said, "You're getting another car."

You see, I hate car buying. I hate picking the right make and model. I just want my car to get me from here to there.

So, I pick a car model based on the purpose—getting from here to there. And, that's how we should choose church planting models: based on the mission.

## **Models of Church Planting**

In this blog series, I will cover a total of five current church planting models: Traditional, Launch Big, Missional Incarnational, Organic, and Satellite Campus. In covering each model, I will present the main emphasis/elements/components of each model, the financial costs over the period of the first five years of ministry, the type of contexts that prove to be more fruitful (and unfruitful), the strengths and potential weaknesses, the practitioners, and the available resources helping to describe the model.

Obviously, I am not saying this is every way possible to plant a church. Furthermore, I am not saying that my description is a perfect one. However, I want us to think about WAYS to plant a church so we can be more faithful and fruitful in the process.

Just as it is in any missiological context, from a tribe in Southeast Asia, to a rural community in Atlantic Canada, the how of church planting is, in many ways, shaped by the who, when, and where of culture.

And, over time, that "how of church planting" has coalesced into certain patterns that we call "models" when we do missiology.

By the end of the blog series, it is my hope that you will have more information about some different models and how we might evaluate and consider them.

But before I launch into the various models, I thought that it would be wise if I shared some preliminary thoughts planters should consider before choosing a model.

### **1. Consider the definition of the term "model."**

Models are constructions and symbols of a reality—they are guides, but not exact representations of what we do. (No church fits a model, but they can apply a model.)

In other words, models help label and give descriptions to certain practices. In addition, my friend J.D. Payne asserts that “models are God-given guides to assist us in our church-planting endeavors.”

So, as I describe these models, don't get too bent out of shape if I don't fully represent (in detail) your particular model. You can correct me in the comments!

### **2. Operate from one model but learn and implement the strengths of the other.**

In the context of discussing models of church and cultural engagement, there are strengths and weaknesses of every model.

Thus, although one might operate from a particular model, there is nothing wrong—in fact it is very helpful and healthy—with borrowing strengths from other models and implementing them into your own. (We will talk some about how that does not work as well.)

### **3. Pick a model that fits with your giftedness and your context.**

Just because a model worked 10 years ago, or because your hero implemented this model, or you think this model is the rage at the conferences, doesn't mean it will work for you or where you are planting. Rather choose a model that fits within your giftedness and skill set.

For example, if you are not skilled in administration or systems (or if you don't have someone on your team who is), the Launch Big model may not be for you.

On the other hand, make sure the model fits not only within your giftedness and skill set, but also in the cultural environment you are either planting or want to plant. For instance, in many post-Christian settings (often large urban areas), the Launch Big model may not be the right model.

### **4. Remember the model is just a tool, not the goal.**

I understand we live in a highly pragmatic culture. We want something that works and produces the desired results. Given this is our cultural environment, there is a tendency to put our faith in the works of our models, and to rely on our models to produce the results that only God can produce.

### **5. Don't confuse a model with a value.**

All models should be leading people to mission, even though one model will emphasize the missional/incarnational structure. And, all have traditions. And all should have organic elements.

So, as we look at certain models, let's remember that there should also be some universal values.

*Now that I have provided some preliminary thoughts, my next post will deal with the first model—Traditional.*

# Finding the Right Church Plant Model: The Traditional Model (Part 2)

Which church planting model is right for you? Is it the Traditional Model?

ED STETZER

[Bio](#)



**This is Part 2 of a series on church planting models. Here is the whole series:**

[Part 1—An Introduction to Church Models](#)

[Part 2—The Traditional Model](#)

[Part 3—The Launch Big Model](#)

[Part 4—The Missional Incarnational Model](#)

[Part 5—The Organic House Church Model](#)

[Part 6—The Multi-Site/Satellite Model](#)

In the introduction to this series, I listed the five primary models of church planting and outlined some considerations for church planters deciding between them.

The challenge is that too many church planters fall in love with a model of church planting before falling in love with the people being reached. They end up disregarding some tools that might fit their context.

In this post I want to provide some basic information regarding the traditional model and what reasons might compel someone to plant a church in this way.

Prior to the mid 1990's, before the church-planting boom, before church-planting became mainstream, there were unsung planters like Larry Lewis, author of *Church Planter's Handbook*, who simply embraced the mantra, "Go and tell."

If you are a planter, finding the right model can be like finding the right car.

In other words, they had a call to fulfill Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). As a result, they would move to an area with an evangelistic passion to share the gospel with as many as they could. Over time, converts were made who then became the foundational base of the church.

That church would start worship when they had four faith families (that was Larry's stated plan), then would start Sunday School soon after, and use Sunday School to mobilize the church to reach more people.

You say, "Ed, is anyone doing it that way anymore?"

Well, you bet they are—just not at the big conferences.

While this model has lost its appeal as a model of choice for many contemporary planters, it is the most common choice among minority cultures. And, there are also some majority culture plants that start this way.

Why is this model effective among such groups?

Think about it.

Let's say you are a Cuban who senses a call to plant a church among Cuban immigrants in Little Havana in Miami. You will have an instant connection with many of the Cubans living in Little Havana. With that connection, you would have some familiarity with the inhabitants—their background, customs, beliefs, spirituality, etc.—which can lead to a smoother, more natural, and potentially more receptive transition of sharing the gospel.

You start a home Bible study. You connect with the [Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God](#). With that partnership, you start meeting in the fellowship hall of a local AoG church once you have 4 families and someone with a guitar. This begins worship. Then Sunday School. Then [Royal Rangers](#). The church grows and is soon established, maybe even in its own building. That's the traditional model.

Or, let's say you are a cowboy who senses a call to plant a church in [Tyler, TX—the city where the most cowboys live](#). Assuming you are an authentic cowboy (not just a Lonesome Dove wanna-be), you have a natural connections and community with other cowboys.

You start a small group. Then you get four families and start worshipping. (No large launch, no mailers, and probably no full-time staff.) You start with four families, reach 10 more, then keep going.

With the traditional model, the financial costs are lower than some of the other models. The reason being is they simply do not need all the “bells and whistles” like some of the other models. Many planters who choose the traditional model are typically self-funded or bi-vocational, who over-time may come to be fully funded by a self-supporting, self-governing church. However, some planters may find support from

a mother church or denomination that wants to reach a specific people-group or cluster in a particular area.

What about the strengths, weaknesses, and reproducibility of the traditional model? The strength tends to lie in its evangelistic zeal. Its growth is often supported by a homogeneous focus. These two strengths become the factors that lead to many church plant successes.

However, its strengths can become weaknesses since the traditional model tends toward a homogenous group resulting in a narrow vision.

Now, if you started reading this article and immediately decided it was not for you, ask yourself "Why?" Is it that you might like your church model, with its smoke machine and mailers, more than the people Jesus has sent you to reach?

That was me at my first church—we were in the inner city of Buffalo, NY, planting a church among the urban poor. I wanted a cell-based, contemporary, seeker-sensitive church (*a la* Rick Warren). Yet, we faced major obstacles. The residents were embarrassed by their homes and did not want cell groups in them, we did not have anyone who could lead us in a contemporary music session (piano lessons are not big among the urban poor), and people did not care much about the nuance of a seeker-sensitive service). Once I got over me and my preferences, I found that our church soon had small groups before church (some might call that Sunday School—gasp!), music that was more unplugged than contemporary, and straight up preaching that "told it like it was" were more effective in that broken environment.

The end result—the model was chosen more for the mission, even though it took this young planter (at that time) about two years to figure out how it should have been done.

Maybe this article will help you get to mission-driven models a bit sooner.

# Finding the Right Church Planting Model: Launch Big Model (Part 3)

What is the Launch Big church planting model, and why is it so popular? Is it right for you?

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 Bio



**This is Part 3 of a series on church planting models. Here is the whole series:**

[Part 1—An Introduction to Church Models](#)

[Part 2—The Traditional Model](#)

[Part 3—The Launch Big Model](#)

[Part 4—The Missional Incarnational Model](#)

[Part 5—The Organic House Church Model](#)

[Part 6—The Multi-Site/Satellite Model](#)

As we look at church planting models, I started with a more traditional model. My hope was that people would first consider what they might have rejected. The second model is probably the most used—the Launch Large Model.

What is the Launch Large Model?

In the Launch Large Model, a church planter usually begins with a core/launch team, in some cases, maybe with a small staff. Most of the time, these teams are not that large, but the launch still can be. As they get acclimated to the city/community where they will be planting, they seek to build a core group—numbering somewhere between 30–60 people—which will become their launch team. In some cases, where the mother church is large enough to do so, the church planting team is sent out with a launch team.

Yesterday, I was at [Summit Church in North Carolina](#). Before I spoke, they played a video at each service, [announcing their new church planting residents](#). As part of that announcement, they called for people to move to Orlando, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, or Winston Salem. The church is large enough (over 8,000, if I understood correctly) that they can create a large launch from sending some people, reaching some new people, and starting big.

[Launching Large is almost the norm when starting a majority culture church today.](#)

Once a launch team or core group is formed or close to being formed, the church hosts a few preview services so they can invite people from the community to “come and see” what their new church will be like. In some cases, rather than hosting a few preview services, some churches in an attempt to grow their launch team practices a “soft launch.” This is where the core group holds corporate gatherings, or large Bible studies, that are less publicized in attempt to build their launch team.

In the weeks and months leading up to the “big” launch, the church will host a large event or a series of mini-events to build awareness of the church and her upcoming launch. In addition, the church will typically send out a mass-mailer or two (depending on their launch budget) inviting their target area to the new church.

With nervous anticipation, the planter and the team pray all their hard work will pay off on launch day. But the telltale sign of whether or not the Launch Large Model takes off with a bang are the next 4–6 Sundays after the big launch.

For some practitioners, launching big means that the church would have surpassed some of the early church growth barriers, like the 100 and 200 person barriers.

### ***Where Did The Launch Large Model Originate?***

Biblically speaking, many practitioners of this model would point to Acts 2 and argue that the church of Jerusalem was a Launch Large church planting model. They had a launch of over 3,000 people and kept growing.

You could (and I would) debate if that was really an appropriate example. I think of the Large Launch as more of a strategy, and less of a biblical mandate.

Practically speaking, practitioners and authors such as [Bob Logan](#), [Ron Sylvia](#), [Aubrey Malphurs](#), and [Nelson Searcy](#) have popularized the Launch Large Model.

Utilizing business, attractional, and systematic and organizational savvy elements, proponents of this model believe that if done right—along with the call and movement of God—a church plant can witness numerical success in a shorter amount of time (compared to other models).

In fact, according to a conversation I had with Logan, this model of church planting is a contextual element within an event-based culture.



## Why the Popularity of the Launch Big Model?

Given that church planting over the past two decades has been focused primarily in suburbia areas—saturated by middle to upper class people who love the next big thing, a good event, and something for their kids—the Launch Large Model has been effective. In short, it has been effective in reaching a certain demographic. Because of its effectiveness in these areas, the Launch Large Model has been the model most practiced and explained in books, conferences, and seminars.

Launching Large is almost the norm when starting a majority culture church today.

Although this model has been effective in the recent past, this model has lost (at least) some of its effectiveness in areas saturated by similar churches. For example, most of the largest of these launches have been in suburbs with a growing base of new people. And, as culture becomes more secular, the pool of people open to consider this kind of church plant approach is declining.

## *What's the Upside and Downside to the Launch Large Model?*

Having implemented many of the elements and components of this model in some of the church plants I have led, I have seen first-hand, its effectiveness. I remember in the plant I led in Pennsylvania we launched a “How to Fix Your Bad Marriage” series.

We sent mailers, postcards, and made lots of phone calls. Undoubtedly a lot of people had some messed-up marriages, given that over 200 people showed up. We were thrilled, and then again, we weren't.

For that's the upside to the Launch Large Model—it methodologically can work in an event-based, consumeristic, spiritually seeking, church-inquisitive culture. As a result, the church can grow quickly.

The downside is four-fold. **First**, this model takes some high-end funding. You have to fund the rental site, equipment, staff, community events, and marketing tools. This can be very costly.

**Second**, you can potentially attempt to grow with the wrong people. This can lead to organizational, structural, and discipleship frustration, which can also lead to a high turnover rate over the first couple of years. For instance, when we launched in Pennsylvania with the marriage series—sure we reached a lot of people—most of the people we reached were people with a lot of problems and baggage. While, once again, that it is a good thing, many of them were in no place to serve, minister, or disciple another. What ended up happening is that our marriage series turned into more like a three-month group therapy session.

**Third**, the sad reality is that most Launch Large church plants never actively plant another church. Some may give financially to a church-planting denomination or network, but do not serve as a training and sending church. While there may be various factors that contribute to this, the Launch Big Model simply has a low to mid reproducibility rate.

**Fourth**, many critiques the consumeristic and a theological mechanics used to reach people. As a result, people like Neil Cole would argue, “What you win them with is what you win them to.”

# Finding the Right Church Planting Model Part 4: The Missional Incarnational Approach

What do Missional Incarnational church plants look like, and how do they work best?

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[Bio](#)



**This is Part 4 of a series on church planting models. Here is the whole series:**

[Part 1—An Introduction to Church Models](#)

[Part 2—The Traditional Model](#)

[Part 3—The Launch Big Model](#)

[Part 4—The Missional Incarnational Model](#)

[Part 5—The Organic House Church Model](#)

[Part 6—The Multi-Site/Satellite Model](#)

When it comes to alternative church-planting models, there are two main ones. In the next two posts I will cover both of them. First, I will cover the Missional Incarnational approach. Now, some caveats are needed. I think that all churches should be missional. And, I think that believers should represent Jesus in incarnational ways.

The truth about the Missional Incarnational model is that it comes in all different shapes and sizes. Why? Because it seems everyone wants to be missional—thanks in large part to Princeton theologian and missiologist Darrell Guder and those like him. As evidence of the variety within in this model, Craig Van Gelder wrote a [book mapping out all the different missional branches](#).

The truth about the Missional Incarnational model is that it comes in all different shapes and sizes.

I would classify at least branches of the missional church planting approach.

First, there are some church plants that you could classify as "Traditional" missional churches. By traditional, I mean there will be some form of organization and discipleship programming, as well as some form of structured church governance.

While I have implemented elements of the [Launch Large model](#), this is where I would classify some of my ministry efforts. Tim Keller's [Redeemer Presbyterian Church](#) in New York City and Daniel Montgomery's [Sojourn Church](#) in Louisville could also be classified this way.

But, my point in this approach is those who church plants are primarily focused on missional ministry done in incarnational (and more organic) ways.

Practitioners like Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost could be placed within this category. In addition, Hugh Halter pastor of [Adullam Community](#) in Denver and author of *Tangible Kingdom*, are other examples. Most of those churches are similar that traditional missional churches, but tend to be smaller, more communal, etc.

And, of course, even this have degrees, and some eschew structure to the point where they are missional incarnational "communities." Although many in the previous subset also use "community" language, I have in mind movements like the [New Monasticism here](#)—where people share meals, housing, etc., while on mission.

## **Main Elements of Missional Incarnational Church Plants**

While there may be a few strains of Missional Incarnational church plant models, they all still have some main components and elements in common.

- 1. They desire to incarnate in the community.** Holding John 1:14 as their banner verse, Missional Incarnational church plants seek to be present in the everyday rhythms of the community.
  - 2. They are highly relational.** Looking to the early church and seeing how they had "favor with all the people" (Acts 2:47), Missional Incarnational proponents seek to build bridges to the community's people, businesses, and organizations, as well as the local government.
  - 3. They engage in a holistic mission.** They seek to be a blessing to the city or community in which they are planted. Thus, they embrace a spiritual, social, and cultural mission.
  - 4. They disciple their way into a church.** By becoming part of the ebb and flow of the community, serving and loving the community, and establishing relationships with the people of the community, Missional Incarnational church plants may have people "belong" to the community before they "become" a follower; but in doing so Missional Incarnational plants disciple themselves into being a church.
- Challenges

Approaching the city, community, and people in the ways described above and embracing such a holistic mission, Missional Incarnational church plants are more conducive in urban, post-Christian environments.

However, these contexts also lend to slow or gradual growth rather than the quick and steady growth of the Launch Large Model.

As a result, those who would choose to go the Missional Incarnational route may want to think or rethink their funding strategy. In many cases, while funding may be raised through a denomination, network, or mother church, choosing a bi-vocation or tent-making skill may be in the best interest of a Missional Incarnational planter.

### **Strengths, Weaknesses, and Reproducibility of Missional Incarnational Plants**

The Missional Incarnational model has many strengths and is one I resonate with deeply. However, if we are going to evaluate models, we need to do that here as well.

Missional Incarnational churches are relational and authentic, with both an internal and external community orientation. In addition, they embrace a holistic mission, which in my opinion is correct. Furthermore, given their love for relationships, authenticity, community, and biblical (missional) holism, they do discipleship really well.

Along with the strengths associated with the Missional Incarnational model, there are a few weaknesses. First, some Missional Incarnational people are reactionary against the established church. Either through railing against or denigration, they vocally attempt to distant themselves from the established church.

Second, some Missional Incarnational practitioners have an unbalanced mission where they value demonstration (or service) over proclamation.

Third, some Missional Incarnational practitioners have loosened their grip on solid, sound orthodoxy. Given their high view of relationships, context, and community, some allow the context and community to craft their theology or interpretation of Scripture rather than allowing the Scripture to speak for itself and to speak into the community and context.

As such, the Missional Incarnational model—given that it too comes in various shapes, sizes, and features, in addition to its focus on relationships, community, and missional holism—should and does appeal to many planters desiring to impact urban, post-Christian areas.

# Finding the Right Church Planting Model Part 5: The Organic House Church Approach

A brief look at the strengths and weaknesses of the Organic House Church approach to church planting

ED STETZER

 Bio



**This is Part 5 of a series on church planting models. Here is the whole series:**

[Part 1—An Introduction to Church Models](#)

[Part 2—The Traditional Model](#)

[Part 3—The Launch Big Model](#)

[Part 4—The Missional Incarnational Model](#)

[Part 5—The Organic House Church Model](#)

[Part 6—The Multi-Site/Satellite Model](#)

Our culture has been obsessed with “organic” in recent years. Organic usually means there is an absence of foreign, unnatural, and/or processed chemicals or elements. In other words, it doesn’t have all the unhealthy additives or chemicals as the regular stuff.

In this post, I want to continue my series on church planting models, including alternative models, by sharing some information regarding the organic/house/simple church approach.

Thinking of organic people may bring to mind the granola and Vespas, but for organic church planting, I immediately think of Neil Cole. He is a proponent and practitioner of the Organic Church approach and has the best and most winsome writing on the subject. In fact, in talking to Neil, he eats, drinks, sleeps, and breathes this movement.

But certain terminology relates to certain people. Using people who have been here at the blog, [Neil Cole](#) is who I associate with Organic Church, [Felicity Dale](#) is often associated with Simple Church, and there have been several associated with [House Church](#). Of course, David Garrison, author of [Church Planting Movements](#), is one of the best known missiologists for promoting simple expressions of church. But even more recently, Francis Chan—author, speaker, and now church planter—has become a practitioner such approaches in his current ministry. Yet, I can't keep writing organic/simple/house, etc., so I will just call this the Organic Church model.

## How Widespread?

The rumors of Organic Church are often larger than the presence of organic churches. That's not to say that there are not helpful and promising expressions, but much has been written, so people are perhaps more aware.

For example, if you read George Barna, particularly in his widely-read book [Revolution](#), you might know a lot about the movement, but might know fewer examples. [I've commented on Revolution before](#), and had some concerns about [the ecclesiology](#) and [the numbers](#).

As of now, we don't see an outbreak of such churches, and every investigate of the promised Church Planting Movement in the western, industrialized, democratic world has failed to meet the CPM test. However, while the Organic Church model may not be as wide spread as other approaches, there are still some parts and communities that are promising.

## Main Components/Elements of the Organic Church Model

Just like organic food is the absence of the foreign, unnatural, chemical, and processed stuff, so organic churches are the same, just in regard to the modern trappings of church. Because proponents and practitioners are focused on multiplying disciples, not necessarily expanding an organization, they have less *stuff* that could otherwise prohibit reproduction. Their mantra is, "Less is more."

Therefore, you typically will find very little structure, organization, programs, and bells and whistles in an organic or house church—especially when compared to [Launch Large](#) or even [Missional Incarnational](#) church plants. Organic Church planting practitioners are usually focused on one thing: discipleship.

## Biblical/Theological Foundations and Conducive Contexts

Obviously, proponents of this model will note Acts 2 and other places where the church met in houses or from "house to house." They will articulate how the early church didn't have the church buildings, programs, or any other ecclesiastical trappings we enjoy today, yet they still grew and multiplied. Their attraction was their simple lifestyle and incarnational living.

And, they'd be right.

It is just bizarre that some Christians don't acknowledge this approach to church while still having a New Testament that basically describes this approach to church.

Yet, there are challenges and we've not seen a breakout of this approach like we have in some places.

The places where we have seen some progress (and often substantial) include restricted areas, closed countries, college campuses, large apartment complexes, urban or high-density areas where the cost of living is expensive. Also, people who are disenfranchised, weary, or intimidated by the more institutional and organized forms of church may be open to an Organic Church.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses**

There are many strengths of the Organic House Church model. First, many do an incredible job at discipleship—focusing on the simple elements of discipleship, which enhances the effectiveness to rapidly reproduce. Truthfully, this is an area that can benefit all church planting models.

Second, organic or house churches typically release believers into areas of leadership and service at a higher rate than other models. (Neil Cole describes this practice in [\*Cultivating a Life for God\*](#).)

Third, given that house churches typically only have the gospel and community, that's what they win people to. As Neil Cole has expressed, "What you win them with, is what you win them to." As a result, they don't have to worry about adding anything else in order to keep them committed or entertained—especially in a culture where the attention span of consumeristic people is often less than that of a gnat.

But this is also one of their weaknesses (or at least challenges).

Most Organic Churches aren't a place where one will find the singing to be excellent, the teaching and preaching to be proficient, and the children/youth programs to be safe, secure, and engaging. Of course, that's the point—but, it is also a challenge to most and a weakness to some.

I remember Felicity Dale telling me how their simple church compares to the expressions of large churches in Austin, and she was quite honest that the draw of larger community, singing, and more is significant (and, she reminded me, one of the reasons that large churches shouldn't worry about simple churches stealing their people—large churches have plenty of draw to the average Christian).

Another possible weakness, and one I've seen frequently, is that some Organic Churches have a weak ecclesiology—meaning they may not have all the elements many Christians would say constitute a church. This is particularly true in some corners of the movement that are populated by the frustrated children of evangelical mega churches who simply want to do church differently—thus they are birthed from more a negative reaction against something rather than a positive reasoning to be for something.

So, they just do life, which is good, but they don't do church, which is more than just being in community. Doing church, as practiced by those first century Organic Churches, included things like covenant community, biblical teaching, baptism, and more.

## **Conclusion**

As is the case in all of these descriptions, my analysis is brief and imperfect, but I am trying to overview different approaches. However, I do see some great strengths in this approach and am grateful for the way some of the people I've mentioned challenge me.

You can probably sense that when I write about people like Neil Cole. For example, [in this post](#), I compare him to a dancing shirtless guy. (Be sure to read it before wondering what that is all about.)

So, I'm a supporter (and sometimes a defender) of Organic Churches. (I once had to go to battle in a way that almost cost me a job.) I want more, not less, Organic Churches. Furthermore, I think this approach will increase in influence in the years to come.

I also want a sober analysis of Organic Church—seeing what has happened, but perhaps not overstating the impact as some have done.

Either way, I'm thankful for many practitioners who have cast their boat into a new sea, that is really as old as the New Testament church, as they joined Jesus' mission of planting Organic Churches.

### **Resources**

- [Organic Church](#) and [Cultivating a Life for God](#) by Neil Cole
- [Simply Church](#) by Tony and Felicity Dale
- [Missional House Churches](#) by J.D. Payne
- [Church Planting Movements](#) by David Garrison
- [The House Church Book](#) by Wolfgang Simson



# Finding the Right Church Planting Model Part 6: The Multi-Site/Satellite Model

In our final installment in this series, we look at the attributes, strengths, and weaknesses of the Multi-Site/Satellite model.

ED STETZER

 Bio



**This is Part 6 of a series on church planting models. Here is the whole series:**

[Part 1—An Introduction to Church Models](#)

[Part 2—The Traditional Model](#)

[Part 3—The Launch Big Model](#)

[Part 4—The Missional Incarnational Model](#)

[Part 5—The Organic House Church Model](#)

[Part 6—The Multi-Site/Satellite Model](#)

**I**n this series on church planting models, I've focused on church planting approaches that create autonomous churches. That's my bias—I prefer planting churches, and starting campuses is not the same as starting churches. There are missiological, theological, and historic reasons for that, and not enough time to address them all here.

I've been in favor of starting new sites but have separated that from church planting. I still do, theologically, but I think that practically these approaches have much in common, particularly the Large Launch and Multi-Site, that we should include them in the list of models.

So, now we are talking about planting churches and planting campuses.

The Multi-Site Satellite model is an emerging model. According Multi-Site Solutions—founded by Mr. Multi-Site himself, Jim Tomberlin—[15% of Protestant church goers attend a multi-site church](#) (though that does not mean they are AT a site). Many well-known pastors such as Andy Stanley, Billy Hybels, Perry Noble, Tim Keller, Matt Chandler, Mark Jobe, Darrin Patrick, and J.D. Greear, utilize this model. I pastor at Grace Church and teach regularly at Christ Fellowship—and both are multi-site. Although there are many churches that implement a Multi-Site/Satellite model (over 5,000—many of them not being classified as mega-churches), there are still those [who disagree with its practice](#). So, it's not without critics, but it has also [become a new normal](#).

### **Main Elements of a Multi-Site/Satellite Model**

A campus plant tends to be better resourced than most church plants—they are often connected to the main, or mother, campus. Given their connection—their shared mission, vision, structure, strategy, and budget—the satellite campuses may have many, if not all, of the features of the main campus. This is why many multi-site churches embrace the motto, “One church in multiple locations.”

Many multi-site churches embrace the motto, “One church in multiple locations.”

### **Why Implement a Multi-Site/Satellite Model?**

There are many reasons why churches and practitioners utilize the Multi-Site/Satellite model. First, many, like Tomberlin, insist it is less expensive to duplicate a campus than it is to plant an autonomous church.

I'm not 100% sure I am with Tomberlin, but he may have a point. I'm just not sure. I *am* sure, however, that if churches were as involved and committed with their church plants as they are with their campuses, church plants would be doing much better.

Second, churches implement a Multi-Site/Satellite model to extend their reach (their mission and vision) into a geographical area. In many cases, the geographical area they intend to reach is filled with people who already attend the main campus. This leads to the third reason, which is that satellite campuses typically come with a built-in launch team who do not have to learn another mission, vision, or structure.

Fourth, the days of building a large worship center that can house all attendees in a single service have basically ended. There are [many reasons for this](#), but one reason is the growth of the Multi-site/Satellite model. Many are finding this model—compared to building larger facilities—more prudent, fiscally wiser, and more sustainable over the long-run.

Fifth, some churches employ a Multi-Site model to revitalize or replant a declining or dying church. For instance, New Life Community Church in Chicago, IL, under the leadership of Mark Jobe, uses this model to [bring dying churches back to life](#). For many dying churches this is a sound, but (often) costly strategy.

## Strengths and Potential Drawbacks to the Multi-Site/Satellite Model

Just like all approaches, the Multi-Site/Satellite model has both positive and negatives. The many strengths of the model can be found in the reasoning for its implementation. But there are two main strengths to which I would specifically like to point.

First, the multi-site campuses are well resourced—fiscally, organizationally, structurally, and professionally—for they are connected to the main campus. This connection strengthens the campuses' foundation. Secondly, multi-site and satellite campuses can be a great incubator for developing new and young leaders.

### Some churches employ a Multi-Site model to revitalize or replant a declining or dying church.

One of the drawbacks is the church and the multi-site campuses can be built around a personality (especially if he is the lead teaching pastor for all the campuses). When this is the case, the church suffers when the personality is gone.

Another drawback, according to some, is this model “[McDonaldizes](#)” the church. It can be a cookie-cutter approach appealing to the consumeristic and entertainment-driven culture.

I've expressed some of that [concern myself](#) (and [Geoff Surratt responded](#)) and we've done some [research on video venues](#), just one type of multisite approach, and then had a [pro](#) and [con](#) discussion of the issue.

## Conclusion

In this series, I have attempted to present some basic information on each model. To help think about the various church-planting models. Obviously, I haven't been able to be in-depth. But hopefully, it has been informative—providing the basic components and elements, strengths and weaknesses, and practitioners and proponents of each model so that if you are planting or desiring to plant you can see where God is calling you.

Once again, we must be reminded that models are tools. Therefore, we should not allow the model to become the main thing, but a tool for us to use in order to bring glory and honor to King Jesus as we advance His mission of sharing and showing the gospel to the nations.

In each post, I've included resources at the bottom. READ THEM if you are going to plant a church or a campus! Practitioners are always better than analysts when it comes to church planting.

## Resources for the Multi-Site/Satellite Model

[A Multi-Site Road Map and The Multi-Site Church Revolution by Geoff Surratt and Greg Ligon](#)

[Multi-site Churches by Scott McConnell](#)

[Church Locality and 125 Tips for Multi-Site Churches by Jim Tomberlin](#)