

Campus Transitions

Campus Vision: A Narrative Arc

In fall 2002, Matt Chandler sat in The Village Grill restaurant with a group of leaders from Highland Village First Baptist Church. The table was covered in butcher paper, and some crayons became his instrument to provide a picture of his vision for the church.

He drew a simple illustration of a circle with several lines emanating from it. At the end of each line was another circle.

The circles represented churches. Matt's vision for Highland Village First Baptist Church was for it to be a church that planted churches for the glory of God. The Great Commission of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28 compelled this vision.

As Matt assumed the pastorate and HVFBC became known as The Village, it is interesting to consider how this vision has taken shape. The Lord has closed some doors and opened others. As the Lord brought numeric growth, there were decisions that had to be made regarding how The Village would steward this growth. Would we build one large building to house everyone, or would we steward it another way?

During a season of prayer and fasting in 2007, called "Venture," the Lord brought clarity. As we were gifted with a Denton campus, the decision to not build one large building was made. The Lord guided our hand and decided a direction for us. At that juncture in the life of the church, we moved toward multi-site rather than one large site.

The church has steadily added campuses over the years. In 2009, the Lord graciously provided the Dallas Northway campus. In 2013, we opened our fourth campus in Fort Worth and then added a Plano campus in 2014. A Southlake campus is forthcoming, and we continue to look to God's provision for future campuses. Each campus is under the leadership of a campus pastor, who also serves on the central elder board.

The story of God's work at The Village continues as we follow His call for us to utilize this multi-site strategy to establish,

strengthen and launch churches. This began with the conviction that the Denton campus become an autonomous church. Conversations and prayer about this transition began among Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, Beau Hughes and others in leadership years before it was brought before the church body as a whole. In January 2014, Matt presented this conviction to the entire church and asked the body to pray with him and the other leaders to be guided by the Holy Spirit. In May of 2014, the Covenant Members at the Denton campus then voted 96% in favor to move forward with the transition, and The Village Church Denton held its inauguration service on August 23, 2015. While we have no current timeline in place, it is our hope that each of our campuses will, like Denton, become autonomous churches in the future.

Campus Transitions: Reasons and Rationale

Life Cycles and Multiplication

Linda Ellis, a popular American poet, brings attention to the most important mark on any tombstone: the dash. Oftentimes overlooked, if even noticed at all, the dash subtly rests between the birth date and the day of dying. This simple punctuation mark represents the narrative of a unique life—a fingerprint of sorts stamping the stone with a story to be told. As one story fades into the recesses of memories and histories, another is being made and constructed. The cycle of life continues.

The cyclical nature of life depends on one factor: multiplication. All living things must multiply to perpetuate; thus, a failure to multiply is ultimately a failure to exist. When multiplication fades or ends, the cycle either slowly dissipates or comes to an abrupt halt. This principle proves true for humanity, organizations and, especially, churches.

The normative experience of humanity starts with birth, is followed by gradual growth, maturity, multiplication through children and eventually ends with death. Organizational and church life cycles work similarly. They begin with the inception of an idea or a calling and then grow. Maturity and multiplication must soon follow, or extinction inevitably will.

The metaphor of children and the new life they represent aptly fits for the Church. It is a healthy and biblical expectation for churches to multiply at various levels. Multiplication occurs as disciples—compelled by the person and work of Jesus Christ—make new disciples, but it should also occur as churches start new churches.

Multi-Site: Prudent Church Planting and Multiplication

Over the last couple of decades, various movements in the American church coalesced to generate a new wave of multiplication. The church has enjoyed a new gospel centrality, producing a fresh missional passion, a resurgence of the Great Commission and newly energized local and global church planting efforts. One recent movement in particular, the multi-site church movement, continues to enjoy expansion and growth as churches extend their reach through multiple venues and locations. It is with deep humility and gratitude before the Lord that we recognize The Village's blessing to be a small part in many of these movements.

Everything, from the biblical mandate to multiply to the normative life cycle of growth and maturity to the existing platform of multi-site campuses, stirs a growing conviction within the leadership of The Village Church to take advantage of this opportunity unique to multi-site churches. We see the transition of our campuses into autonomous churches as a prudent form of church planting and multiplication.

We want to establish campuses and strengthen them with solid gospel-driven leaders so that healthy campuses might become healthy churches. In short, we would prayerfully consider this when it seems right to the Holy Spirit and us (Acts 15:28). This principle serves church leaders in the decision-making process. A confluence of unity among the church's leadership and affirmation of the Holy Spirit presses the church forward. Sometimes God uses clear and objective signposts to follow, but other times He uses the subjective sense and collective biblical wisdom to lead a church into the unknown. Either direction takes convictional courage.

This transition strategy modifies the traditional approach and strategy of multi-site churches, resulting in significant implications for the entire church. Rather than interpreting this transition as a critique of the typical multi-site approach, it should be understood as capitalizing on an opportunity. More directly, it is leveraging the typical multi-site approach to, instead, plant more churches.

Celebrating Maturity and Multiplication

The Village Church seeks to unleash leadership and celebrate the growth of a campus into maturity and multiplication. Transitioning healthy campuses to autonomous churches also reinforces to the entire membership the biblical mandate to multiply through concrete actions. This is a strong and tangible action that demonstrates one way a church can multiply. As a parent celebrates the leaving of children, we have the opportunity to celebrate our campuses becoming churches. What is celebrated is cultivated. The greater hope is to have young churches growing with a burden to sprout new growth and continue the life cycle.

After Transition: The Village Church Network

With the Denton transition, we created The Village Church Network, a network consisting of The Village Church, its campuses and campuses that transition into autonomous churches. We are intentionally keeping this network small to allow for shared resources and Ministry Services (such as Communications, Facilities and Production). Our hope is that this network would function like a family, sharing a Statement of Faith, doctrines and distinctives, and the mission of bringing glory to God by making disciples.

As one of our network churches, we stand ready to help The Village Church Denton financially should the need arise. We believe a solid financial foundation is vital for the flourishing of a new church. This transition of responsibility allows the new church to grow more independent over time, rather than being suddenly responsible for all of its finances and ministry services immediately. The extent of these services is periodically re-evaluated, based on the needs of the church.

You can learn more about The Village Church Network and the specifics of the Denton transition on our website.

Campus Transitions: Questions and Answers

1. What compelled this change in your multi-site strategy?

The Holy Spirit really compelled this change. This process began as a conversation several years ago and has matured into a growing conviction. We are leaning heavily on the words of Acts 15:28: "It seems good to us and the Holy Spirit" in this situation.

As with the Denton transition, conversations and prayer among The Village Church's leadership about future campus transitions will be brought to the attention of the church body as a whole and voted upon by the campus in question's Covenant Members when the Holy Spirit compels the leadership to move forward.

2. What is the overall gain of transitioning campuses?

Sometimes the economics of the kingdom don't match our economic sensibilities. We read about a shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to search for the one that is lost. Jesus praises Mary when she pours an entire bottle of expensive perfume on His feet. A widow is told that her two coins are more valuable than the contributions of the wealthy. A farmer pays the same wages to workers who put in different hours. At other times, armies are dwindled from thousands to hundreds to make a point, while loaves of bread and fish are multiplied. Kingdom economics don't always work well on a typical balance sheet.

Although this is a spiritual decision, not a mathematical one, we do see several positive gains with these transitions:

- The church's focus and contextualization would improve. This contextualized mission would be reinforced from the pulpit and by the church leadership (elders, deacons and staff). Our original hope with multi-site was to provide greater contextual ministry, so a transition of this nature clearly aligns with the original aspirations for campuses.
- As George Peters writes in *A Theology of Church Growth*, "The concept of multiplication seems to point in the direction of an increasing number of groups and churches rather than an expansion of existing ones." This stirs within the leadership a growing conviction to consider what opportunities we might be able to leverage with multi-site.
- This is a concrete and tangible outworking of our church's mission statement, specifically gospel-centered multiplication.
- It is proactive succession. At some point in time, each and every church will face the issue of succession. We believe we can be on the front end of it and celebrate it rather than be surprised by succession—or, worse, reluctant to embrace it.

3. What is the timeline for these transitions?

While we have no timeline currently in place for a campus transition, know that we will allow ample time for our elders, staff and church to prepare accordingly for transition. We will not rush the timeline to assure we handle all transitions with care and detail.

For reference, between the Denton campus' vote to become an autonomous church and its inauguration service as The Village Church Denton, 15 months passed. This timeline may be lengthened or shortened depending on the particular situation of each campus, but we are committed to transitioning campuses well, using whatever time is necessary.

4. What if a significant group of Covenant Members do not vote in favor of a transition?

If this is the case, we will not move forward with the transition in question at the time, but we will continue to teach and preach out of our growing conviction to multiply the gospel and use the multi-site model as a strategy for planting healthy churches.

5. Will Covenant Members from other campuses vote on transitions?

Only Covenant Members from the campus in question will vote on the decision to become an autonomous church. However, if the campus votes in favor of the transition, then members from other campuses will vote on the transfer of assets—the building, equipment, etc.—to the new church. We will, though, be asking our members and attendees across all campuses to be praying about all our transitions.

6. Was the Denton transition an experiment or are we committed to this strategy for all campuses?

No, it was not an experiment. We have a growing conviction to see the gospel multiplied and to use the multi-site model as a strategy for church planting. We also believe this strategy gives our church the opportunity to use Matt Chandler's gift of preaching and gathering to raise up strong, gospel-centered churches. With that said, there is no definitive timeline in place to transition other existing campuses into autonomous churches.

7. What are the staffing implications for campus transitions?

The current campus staff would be invited to stay and participate in its transition. Please keep in mind that there are no guarantees of what the future will bring. This is true regardless of the campus or church at which we serve.

Also, new churches mean new benefit packages, etc. These will be investigated on a case-by-case basis.

Some staff members of transitioning campuses might not be inclined to stay at their campus. Although we would not be able to ensure continued employment at The Village Church, each person is welcome to have these conversations, and we will make case-by-case decisions.

8. What does this mean for all current and future campuses?

Given that this is a growing conviction, we are continually praying for all our current and future campuses.

If it should seem good to the Holy Spirit and us, we will prayerfully explore the next steps for any particular campus. Should we move in a similar direction for a specific campus, then we would prayerfully and patiently move in this direction looking for three key indicators: 1) the man, 2) the leadership and 3) the membership. Does the campus pastor have the conviction and calling to lead a church? Is the leadership of the campus (elders, deacons and staff) prepared for the transition? Does the membership affirm the direction and are they committed to this new mission?

We will be open and prayerful regarding new campuses. They would be started with the wisdom of past experience and prayerful hope that, in due time, if it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us, they will transition to become separate churches. We will move prudently, prayerfully and faithfully, one step at a time, and learn as we go.