

# CGC's future: Multi-site, one church in many locations

27 September, 2009

## Introduction.

'Multi-site' simply means that instead of a church consisting of a single congregation in one site, it starts to consist of more and more congregations meeting simultaneously in more and more sites.

On 18 October 2009, we start a second site in the city bowl. Then early next year we hope to start one further south in Bergvliet, Lakeside or Constantia. Later still we'd like to start one in the Northerb Suburbs. Who knows, but by the end of 2010 we've started 4 or 5 more sites - as opportunity arises and as God leads, of course.

Currently 65% of Common Grounders live between Kenilworth, Pinelands and Observatory. 12% live beyond Observatory toward the city bowl and beyond. 12% live deeper south than Kenilworth. And 10% come from the North. So we're already poised to release many people to these future sites.

Let me explain these sites. Most notably, every site will have some things in common...

- Same name.
- Same mission.
- Same basic DNA and feel
- Same eldership team overseeing all
- Same preaching themes and small group material.
- Same preaching team revolving
- Same website.
- Same CG foundation they're partnering with to serve the poor
- Same conferences
- Same central support for all:
  - Finances
  - The development of materials
  - Special training courses

But every site will also be distinctive. It will have its own...

- vision-carrying eldership couple.
- dedicated elders (who also serve on the overall eldership team).
- deacon-leaders.
- service times.
- special ministries as needed.
- service opportunities.
- ventures to reach nearby people.
- small groups.
- distinct feel, which will evolve over time.

Here are the 7 reasons why we're going multi-site....

**1) We're going multi-site because we're passionate about making space for the people God is adding.**

Jesus once said, 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself' (John 12:32). What does 'when I am lifted up' mean? By this he meant when he was lifted up on the cross. By this he meant his resurrection. By this he meant his exaltation. By this he meant when his people would worship him. By this he meant when we're preaching about him lifted up.

Anyway, we as a church have discovered that as we lift up the crucified, resurrected, exalted Christ in worship and in our preaching that we become a powerful magnetic field drawing more and more people in. But it is not we who draw in the people. It is God himself who draws people in. And he's drawing them in quickly! Amazingly, on 20<sup>th</sup> September, we did a count of all 4 meetings and kids ministry and counted 1700!

Not surprising, but as we look at the early church in Acts, we see that as they lifted Jesus up in worship and preaching, God added to them:

- 'Those who accepted his message ... were added to their number' (2:41).
- 'The Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved' (2:47).
- 'More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number' (5:14).
- 'The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord' (11:21).
- 'A great number of people were added to the Lord' (11:24).

So the Lord draws people to himself and his church, and then adds these people to himself and his church. We're experiencing Christ doing just that in CGC.

*But what do we do these people God is adding when we run out of space. (Judging by our current growth trajectory, this is likely to happen in the next year or two.) We have 4 choices ...*

- 1) We could turn them away. But that's unthinkable. Isn't it? The Apostles did not turn away the 3000 new believers in Acts 2, even when they surely were overwhelmed with the problems these new believers posed.
- 2) We could multiply more services. But we've done that already. We don't have space for more. (Maybe one on a Saturday night?)
- 3) We could build a bigger building. But buildings are very expensive.
- 4) Or we could start new sites - each site potentially having many meetings. Ah, there's an idea! And apparently not such an original idea. In the USA alone, close on 3000 fast-growing churches have gone multi-site in the last few years, simply because they're committed to making space for the people God is adding.

## **2) We're going multi-site because we're passionate about the flexible example of organizing a church in Acts.**

In Acts 2:41-47 we notice that Christ is building a certain kind of church - a church that gives itself to the gospel, the sacraments, the Scriptures, authentic relationships, practical care, trustworthy leaders, gathering regularly, encountering God and helping people find Jesus. These are the non-negotiable priorities of the church. Every church needs to be doing those nine things, or it is not the church Jesus has in mind.

But here's the question. How is a church meant to be organized? This is where it gets interesting, because throughout the book of Acts we see different churches organized differently. In other words the way churches are meant to organize themselves are flexible.

Listen to John Piper on this: 'Neither here [in Acts 2] nor elsewhere in the New Testament do we get detailed instructions on how to organize the church for pastoral care and worship and teaching and mobilization for ministry. There were elders in the churches (they show up very soon in the Jerusalem church) and there were deacons, and there were goals of teaching and caring and maturing and praying and evangelizing and missions. But as far as details of how to structure the church in a city or in an area or even one local church with several thousand saints - there are very few particulars.'

No where in the book of Acts do we learn that a church is only a church if all the people in that church all gather together at the same time to worship God.

Consider the Jerusalem church, which didn't have a meeting space big enough for everyone to be together at the same time (they grew to perhaps 10000 in a few months). We know that they met in many homes, and as many as could fit in Solomon's Colonnade (max 1500). So it was one church - led by one leadership team - and yet meeting in many locations. The new congregation in Jerusalem is frequently referred to in the singular, one 'church' (Acts 8:1; 11:22; 15:4). Think about that: the Jerusalem church was a multi-site church by necessity.

We find that liberating. We know that we cannot deviate from the nine non-negotiables previously mentioned. But when it comes to how we get these things done structurally and methodologically, then there is flexibility. Though our mission will never change, yet our methods can keep on changing.

### **3) We're going multi-site because we're passionate about reaching people for Jesus.**

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son - on the cross for our sins, for our salvation - that whoever entrusts their lives to him, shall not perish but shall instead enjoy life forever! What a promise. And what a heartbeat - God's own heartbeat for every single person. God the Father is passionate about taking more and more people into his family. God the Son is passionate about drawing more and more people into the new life that his death accomplished. And God the Spirit is the one who is doing the drawing, opening blind eyes, and setting people free.

And we as a church join the dance. We too are passionate about more and more people finding Jesus in our city. Some people may say we're a big church. Maybe if you compare us to a smaller church, yes. But if you compare us to the amount of people that simply drive by every Sunday - why, we're a tiny church!

Anyway, because we're passionate about reaching people for Jesus, we think multi-site is best. For three reasons...

First, we've found that it is difficult to invite our non-churchgoing friends who live more than 10-15 minutes away to church. The ones that live nearby are more likely to come when we invite them, but the ones far away - the ones in town, Sea point, Camps bay, Bergvliet, Constantia, Fish Hoek etc ... they tend to say no. The distance gives them a handy way of slipping out of the invitation. Christian people will drive further, but not people who don't yet know Jesus. So we've got an idea: instead of trying to bring them to CGC, why not take CGC to them?

Second, we've found that a non-churchgoing person is more likely to go to a church that has some positive visibility. This includes name recognition. If a person is not that excited about going to church, and you invite them to a church they've never heard of - they tend to shy away. But if they say, 'Hey, I've heard of that church'. Well then they are more likely to come. And that's the advantage of multi-site. Each site enjoys the name 'Common Ground Church', which is a name that more and more non-Christians have heard of. So each site instantly enjoys the credibility and visibility of that name.

Third, we believe we can penetrate specific cultures with the gospel better. For example, imagine one in Khayelitsha, or one in Wynberg for foreigners? Instead of trying to get everyone in our city from every culture to have to adapt to us in order to join us, what if we adapt to those cultures and contexts, taking the gospel to them in their own language or culture?

#### **4) We're going multi-site because we're passionate about people experiencing community and care.**

Christ wants all of his children connected into community, and cared for by shepherding deacons and elders. We share this passion.

The challenge is that the bigger a church becomes the more possibility there is that a person can come and go, unnoticed and unconnected. When this tragically happens, they are not drawn into small groups. They don't get to enjoy live-giving relationships there. They don't know any shepherd leaders who can take care of them when times are tough.

But going multi-site will help us better care for people. Since the venues are smaller, it's easier for site elders and deacons to keep up with those that come. In other words, smaller venues reduce anonymity. By having more and more venues it divides the church into smaller groupings. This means that every person is more likely to be noticed, and connected, and cared for. This means that the bigger we become, the smaller we feel!

#### **5) We're going multi-site because we're passionate about everybody getting involved.**

Christ wants everyone in the church involved and serving in practical ways. There should be no passivity in the church. We're committed to getting everyone involved.

We've done some extensive study of about 20 churches that have gone multi-site. One of the recurring positives they have noted is that a greater percentage of their church has become involved. One church said, 'The percentage of people who serve in a worship gathering went up 60% when we went multi-site.'

It's obvious isn't it? For example, with each new venue, we need more worship bands, more people doing parking, more people serving coffee, more people hosting newcomers, more people doing sound and multi-media, more people doing kids and youth ministry, more people taking up the offering etc. And each new need is a new opportunity for somebody to get off their bum as a spectator, and onto the field as a team-player.

When people get involved, they grow spiritually. They build new and deeper relationships. They feel deeper levels of ownership of the church. And more people are touched by the growing amount of people who express the servant nature of Christ in such practical ways.

## **6) We're going multi-site because we're passionate about raising up more leaders.**

Everything rises and falls on the quality of its leadership. This is true even of the church. It's no wonder then that Jesus has always been about developing leaders. As we read the gospels, we see that the bulk of his time was spent pouring his life into 12 apostles who would later lead the church. And as we read the book of Acts, we see these apostles making it their priority to raise up more and more leaders (Acts 6:1-7 for example). The deepening and the multiplication of leaders led to the deepening and the multiplication of churches.

Now for the point. Can you imagine a better way of deepening and multiplying leaders in our church than by starting new sites? Each new site will have at least two eldership couples that lead that congregation. Each new site will be led and served by a growing team of deacons. More sites means more opportunity to lead, which means more leaders. Simple.

Another thought. As we start a new site, many leaders who currently serve in various capacities here in Rondebosch will leave for the new site. This will create an opportunity for a new leader to be raised up in their place. Again, there's no doubt about it: going multi-site is to put our leadership development as a church on steroids.

One key kind of leader multi-site will help us develop is the church planter. The best way to reach the world is to plant more and more gospel-preaching, gospel-transformed churches in more and more cities, towns and hamlets. And as CGC, we're committed to sending out church planters. But they must be the right people, and they should be sent at the right time. That said, there is one big problem facing any church committed to church planting. It's this: no less than 50% of all church-plants fail (and terminate) within a year or two. The reason: church-planters have not had sufficient testing or experience. Wouldn't it be helpful to have an in-between stage in which leadership abilities can be tested and developed? Leading one's own site as part of a larger eldership team provides the solution.

**7) We're going multi-site because we're passionate about taking authentic prophetic words seriously.**

'The Lord does nothing without first telling his servants the prophets' (Amos 3:7). This is still true today. Over the years we have received many prophetic words as a church to help us navigate the way ahead. Let me give four examples ...

*1) Here's a message from Gill Patterson, a renowned and trustworthy prophetess.*

'This building is not your permanent dwelling (*in other words 'don't too strongly associate your church with this location*). The area where I have posted you, I want you to widen it because I call you to a broad, roomy pasture. Stretch beyond where I have placed you, beyond your comfort zones and extend the sphere of your influence. I have given you all of my authority to go ... and release those who are hell-bound. You and your spiritual children will take possession of the inheritance that I have given you.'

Though it doesn't specifically mention multi-site, doesn't it sound like a description of what we're moving toward in this new multi-site phase in our church's story?

*2) Here's a prophetic message given to us at the beginning of this year by a leader at Hillside church in Durban...*

'When praying for your church I saw a picture of a hen-and-chicken plant.'

What a peculiar prophetic word, isn't it? It perplexed us. But think about it. A hen-and-chicken plant appears to be several separate plants, but in fact it is one plant. The plants above the ground are joined to a common root system. That sounds like 'one church, many locations.'

*3) Then a deacon in our church, who had not even heard of the concept of multi-site, sent the elders this prophetic word early this year...*

'You asked us to e-mail you about things we felt God saying to us over this week of prayer. On Monday at the prayer meeting I was constantly thinking about the story of Simon and Andrew fishing most of the night, and not catching anything, and then Jesus telling them to go out once more and throw their nets over the other side. They pull up such a large catch that the boat starts to sink. But then they get some other boats and fill those boats with fish too. There's a song that Don Francisco wrote about this story, and one line in particular was stuck in my head the whole meeting: "How our nets were filled to bursting, more than both our boats could ever hold." I was praying around that line, and felt God saying that as a church, if we partnered with Him, and teamed together in drawing the lost to Him, that our boat would get more and more full, in numbers we didn't think were possible, to the point that it would almost seem as though it was

straining under the weight. But rather than letting the boat go down, or give us a bigger boat, God said that he'd give us more boats.'

How's that for yet another description of multi-site?

*4) Lastly, for the last year Rigby has been using a phrase that God gave him to describe the future of our church...*

'God wants to take this church wider into our city, deeper into its culture'. Again, multi-site is about the most literal fulfilment of that call.

Going multi-site seems to be the fulfilment of these, and other prophetic messages to our church.

### **In conclusion.**

In light of these seven reasons, we as elders and deacons of Common Ground Church are convinced. We're going multi-site. And we believe we have the full backing of heaven in this decision. We believe our future is so bright that we need to start wearing shades. And we will need new jeans, because we're going to have to be on our knees in humble dependence on God more than ever before.

If you're a Common Grounder, we request that you throw your full weight behind what God is calling us to. We need everyone on board if we're going to achieve the kind of success we believe God holds in store.