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## Authority, Autonomy, and Healthy Communication: Embracing The Organizational Complexities of the MultiSite Church

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**AUTHORITY, AUTONOMY, AND HEALTHY COMMUNICATION:  
EMBRACING THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMPLEXITIES OF THE  
MULTISITE CHURCH**

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Jamus Edwards

**abstract**

A perplexing matrix-style of leadership that reflects numerous leadership teams across multiple locations typically characterizes multisite churches. As a result, the most volatile element in the multisite church is the distribution of decision-making authority. The unique organizational challenge for multisite churches is determining the balance of trust, freedom, and control in the relationship between each campus's leadership and the primary leadership team of the overall church. Inevitable frustrations among campus pastors can often be decreased when multisite leadership teams are characterized by clarity in roles and authority. Additionally, responsiveness in the areas of authentic communication and the embracing of conflict are essential in order for a multisite church to fulfill its mission.

**the multisite trend**

The multisite church movement is sweeping across North America at a rapid pace and is “taking the contemporary ecclesiological landscape by storm.”<sup>1</sup> In 2008,

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell G. Gaines, “One Church in One Location: Questioning the Biblical, Theological, and Historical Claims of the Multi-Site Church Movement” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

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there were an estimated 2,000 multisite churches; now, that number is well over  
5,000.<sup>2</sup> In many church growth conversations, multisite has become the “new  
normal.”<sup>3</sup> Churches of various denominations and theological persuasions are  
moving to multiple locations on an increasing level, and in many cases, the  
transition to multisite is replacing the traditional understanding of church  
planting. While the multisite phenomena is certainly not without its critics,<sup>4</sup>  
scholars Gregg Allison and Brian Frye indicate that both biblical and theological  
warrant can be made for multisite churches.<sup>5</sup> Allison, for example, makes the  
assertion that examples of what may have been multisite churches were “normative  
for the early church.”<sup>6</sup>

However, the purpose of this article is not to interact with the ecclesiological  
arguments for and against the multisite church. Rather, this article is written under  
the assumption that the multisite church is here to stay, and yet in multisite  
literature, a few incredibly important pieces remain that have received little  
attention—issues related to leadership, authority, and communication.

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### **organizational challenges in multisite churches**

#### *Authority and Autonomy*

Perhaps the most volatile element in the multisite church is the distribution of  
decision-making authority.<sup>7</sup> This matter is only complicated with the realization  
that one cannot simply “cram multisite polity into any existing, already-well-  
defined category—whether Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or congregational.”<sup>8</sup>  
Instead, a perplexing matrix-style of leadership that reflects numerous leadership  
teams across multiple locations typically characterizes multisite churches.

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<sup>2</sup> Jim Tomberlin, “What’s Trending in Multisite?” Multisite Solutions, <http://multisitesolutions.com/blog/whats-trending-in-multisite-2013>, accessed June 10, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird, *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 45–46.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey T. Riddle, “A Theological Critique of Multi-site Ministry,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington, DC, November 2006); Thomas White, “The Dangers of the Multi-site church Movement,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, CA, November 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 288; Brian Frye, “The Multi-site Church Phenomenon in North America, 1950–2010” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Gregg R. Allison, “Theological Defense of Multi-Site,” *9Marks eJournal* 6.3 (2009): 8–20 [on-line], accessed April 27, 2010, available from <http://involve.9marks.org/site/DocServer/eJournal200963MayJune.pdf?docID=641>, Internet. For example, citing the church at Jerusalem and the church at Corinth, Allison asserts that many multisite house churches were part of one citywide church. In such cases, the smaller congregations consistently met in homes (campuses), as well as all together as the entire church (the originating campus).

<sup>7</sup> Dave Kraft, interview by author, Owensboro, KY, January 31, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Greg Gilbert, “What is This Thing Anyway? A Multisite Taxonomy,” *9Marks eJournal* 6.3 (2009): 8–20 [on-line], accessed November 10, 2013, available from <http://www.9marks.org/journal/what-thing-anyway-multi-site-taxonomy>, Internet.

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Organizational lines may not be direct or easily interpreted, potentially leading to confusion among leaders.<sup>9</sup>

A particularly essential variable to consider revolves around the level of authority and freedom bestowed upon each campus pastor. The unique organizational challenge for multisite churches is determining the balance of trust, freedom, and control in the relationship between the campus pastor and the primary leadership team of the overall church. The centralized team of authority has the arduous task of being closely enough involved in the operations of each campus to ensure that each campus rightly embodies the DNA of the overall church.<sup>10</sup> Yet at the same time, this centralized team must empower and legitimize campus leadership in such a way that they do not feel unnecessarily restricted and compromised of their unique calling and giftedness. Such perceptions on behalf of campus leadership can lead to mistrust, conflict, and the ultimate deterrence of the mission of the church.

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### *Communication Necessities: Clarity and Responsiveness*

The questions related to authority and autonomy in multisite churches almost inevitably produce frustration at worst and confusion at best. The position of this article is that while many multisite churches appear to be in a state of harmony, a number of them may actually be operating in the shadows of unspoken skepticism and vexation. However, each multisite church can take steps in an effort to reduce the likelihood of such disarray. Every multisite church must exhibit two fundamental communication practices, which are *clarity*<sup>11</sup> and *responsiveness*.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, the conclusion is that in cultures of clarity and responsiveness, trust will be the predictable result. Deep and prevailing trust, though a potentially

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<sup>9</sup> For example, a staff member at a particular campus will likely have more than one person to whom they are accountable—both at the individual campus and at larger church level. Which “boss” has the final say? To whom does the staff member ultimately submit?

<sup>10</sup> In other words, those at the top of the flow chart must maintain some level of “control,” yet not the kind of control considered micromanaging.

<sup>11</sup> The leadership model must clearly articulate and define in whom they find their authority. Secondly, each team leader and member must have a very clear and explicit understanding of their particular role, including its freedoms and limitations.

<sup>12</sup> Rather than “responsiveness,” LaFasto and Larson would prefer the language of “openness.” They argue that of the four essential qualities that team members must possess, “openness” begins the list. “Number eight indicates, “Team members who are *open* and willing to deal with problems, surface issues that need to be discussed, help create an environment where people are free to say what’s on their minds, and promote an open exchange of ideas. These team members tend to be effective communicators, helping to create a climate in which communication flourishes and is used effectively to resolve whatever problems the team confronts to improve the team’s performance.” Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson, *When Teams Work Best: 6,000 Team Members and Leaders Tell What it Takes to Succeed* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 1.

Additionally, responsiveness must characterize each multisite church’s leadership structure. Such responsiveness must begin with all team members adequately knowing and understanding the other team members. Second, healthy teams must exude responsiveness in their commitment to openly recognize and resolve the conflicts that will likely result from the organizational challenges presented above. Third, multisite churches should embrace a culture of encouragement—one in which team members are regularly affirmed.

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immense challenge in the complicated organizational structure of multisite  
churches, are an absolute prerequisite for the health and unity of these churches.

### *Clarity*

One of the greatest challenges facing multisite churches is establishing a clear leadership structure that permits each team member an accurate understanding of their authority, role, freedom, and limitations. Without such clarity in an organizational configuration, team members will often spend more time seeking to define a structure than actually accomplishing the church's mission.<sup>13</sup> Herein resides one of the greatest potential points of conflict in many multisite leadership structures—the likely ambiguity so often found in determining wherein the authority lies.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the first fundamental question to ask when adding an additional campus is, “Who will answer to whom?”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, a few examples of questions to answer relate to whether or not each campus's local leadership has the authority to implement church discipline, develop its own budget, hire and fire its own staff, emphasize a particular ministry, and appoint its own elders and deacons. Possibly, the central leadership team must first approve these kinds of actions.<sup>16</sup>

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Additionally, the leadership team must closely consider the relationship between campus pastors and their authority—or lack thereof—even in terms of identifying whether or not that particular campus pastor is in a position that will allow him to be content and ultimately flourish.

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<sup>13</sup> Pat MacMillan, *The Performance Factor* (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 93. MacMillan adds the importance of finding balance between structure and flexibility. He writes, “Too much (structure) and the collaborative spirit will be stifled, too little and the team will flounder and become frustrated” (94).

<sup>14</sup> See Dean R. Hoge, John E. Dyble, and David T. Polk, “Influence of Role Preference and Role Clarity on Vocational Commitment of Protestant Ministers,” *Sociological Analysis* 42, no. 2 (1981): 11. Studies reveal that a ministry leader's role clarity or ambiguity directly connects to his level of satisfaction and ultimate commitment to a particular ministry. Though the reason is unclear, pastors who are extremely satisfied about their role clarity tend to have a higher commitment to their ministerial position than those who are moderately satisfied. Thus, not only does clarity in roles serve the purpose of eliminating confusion in multisite leadership teams, it is also beneficial in contributing to the longevity of the same teams.

See also J. Richard Hackman, *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 50. In terms of the authority given to various team members in a multisite church, they must also clearly understand the delimitations. Hackman writes, “Otherwise, team members will do it (determine their level of authority) implicitly as they proceed with their work—and, in the process, run a significant risk of either excessive timidity in making decisions or overstepping the actual bounds of their authority.”

<sup>15</sup> Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church . . . in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 134.

<sup>16</sup> There are a number of other practical questions related to authority to consider. One relates to who has the final authority on receiving new members—is it the local elders, the larger elder body overseeing the entire church, the local congregation, or the overall church congregation? If a campus pastor sees the need to add an additional part-time ministry assistant, can he make this decision, or must the central leadership team approve the decision?

Greg Ligon, director of the Leadership Network's Multisite Churches Leadership Community, asserts that a weakness of the leadership model in many multisite churches is the lack of clarity and definition.<sup>17</sup> However, such clarity is paramount in the earliest stage of a church's transition to multisite not only to decrease the confusion among team members, but also in helping a campus pastor determine whether or not his gifts and calling are conducive to the freedoms and limitations under which he must operate. For example, while campus pastors lead an entire campus, they do not possess the same freedom that a senior, solo pastor would.<sup>18</sup> Such a limitation is not inherently problematic, although it may quickly become so depending upon the leadership capability and aspiration of the campus pastor.<sup>19</sup>

Dave Kraft, pastor of leadership development at Mars Hill Church Orange County, insists that some degree of frustration exists with many campus pastors in multisite churches. These pastors are frequently desirous of more freedom in leadership.<sup>20</sup> In some cases, making certain that the leadership team clearly defines the campus pastor's roles and limitations could have prevented conflict. Thus, in choosing campus pastors, the foundational question to answer by each multisite leadership team revolves around the leadership type and skills of each particular candidate.<sup>21</sup> If a potential campus pastor is a "lead-by-teaching" type, he is going to be dissatisfied in his role almost certainly if he cannot teach and preach on a regular basis.<sup>22</sup> Regardless, even in cases where a campus pastor has the opportunity to teach consistently,<sup>23</sup> he will likely be discontent if he is unable to choose his own preaching agenda and cast vision in doing so. If a leader is compelled to a visionary, teaching-driven calling that sets forth a unique direction for his particular campus (a direction that may at times deviate from the desired comfort level of the central leadership team), he should probably plant a church or

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<sup>17</sup> Greg Ligon, interview by author, teleconference, April 18, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Geoff Surratt, Gregon Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 123.

<sup>19</sup> The challenge again is within the balance between centralized authority and local campus autonomy. While campus pastors often desire more autonomy, they must persuade the chief leadership team to give freedom in such a way that they do not feel as though they have lost a firm grip on the local campus conversation and ministry.

<sup>20</sup> Dave Kraft, interview by author, teleconference, January 31, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> George Cladis says, "The mistake many of us make in leadership is in forming teams without taking into account individual team members' callings and burdens. How does each individual's burden relate to and inform what a team is all about? The more that team life connects their gifts and skills to the arena of their God-given burden, the more likely you are to have built an effective team for the long haul." [George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 98.]

<sup>22</sup> Larry Osborne (senior pastor and teaching pastor at North Coast Church), interview by author, teleconference, March 25, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Some multisite churches, such as Mars Hill Church based out of Seattle, Washington, consist of satellite campuses in which each location streams one primary teacher via video. Other models, such as Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky, utilize each site's campus pastor as the consistent "live preacher" at that particular location.

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 5, Iss. 2 [2014], Art. 3 simply go into a traditional church in which he can serve in a senior leadership role. This is not to say that campus pastors with this kind of limited freedom in multisite churches are not often high-level leaders; it simply means their leadership type is one that allows them to have contentment in more of a subordinate position.<sup>24</sup>

### *Clearly Articulated Empowerment*

Regardless of the leadership structure of any given multisite church, team members—and campus pastors in particular—must receive very clear affirmation of the fact that they are being empowered to legitimately use their God-given gifts in their context. A helpful example is the Austin Stone Community Church. This multisite church seeks to be characterized not as a top-down organization, but one in which organizational ownership is embedded at every level of the church, whether a person is an intern or a lead pastor.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the multisite church leadership models that will be most effective are those that exude what Hackman describes as an “enabling structure.”<sup>26</sup> He adds that the most successful leadership teams are those that entail four features, one of which allows each team member the ability to possess a “clearly specified authority to manage their own work processes.”<sup>27</sup>

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This will be a unique challenge in multisite churches whose campus pastor is not given the opportunity to teach on a regular basis or cast his vision for that campus.<sup>28</sup> In such churches, those in senior leadership must be intentional to ensure that their leadership is “authentic” in nature, and one that on an increasing level encourages those under them to “reach their true potential based on their own distinctive qualities.”<sup>29</sup> If a campus pastor does not have the autonomy to lead

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<sup>24</sup> According to Greg Ligon, often a campus pastor’s gifts should relate more to shepherding, as opposed to vision casting. Furthermore, a campus pastor should have more of a “developers’ profile.” While sitting in on the conversations surrounding planning and vision fulfills such a leader, they are wired and content to take the delivered vision from senior leadership and seek to implement it in their own context (interview by author, teleconference, April 18, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Todd Engstrom (executive pastor of Campus and Communities, The Austin Stone Community Church), interview by author, teleconference, March 11, 2013. Engstrom says that The Austin Stone Community Church desires that “the best idea win,” not simply the person at the top of the chart. Thus, their organizational church is built primarily around influence and is not a top-down hierarchy.

<sup>26</sup> J. Richard Hackman, *Leading Teams*, ix.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. The other three features that a “real team” must possess according to Hackman include a team task, clear boundaries, and membership stability over some reasonable period.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to the freedom, or lack thereof, to teach and preach, another possible point of tension for multisite campus pastors relates to their ability to oversee particular staff members. In *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird write that with the addition of a second campus, “Department leaders will usually report directly to the ministry leader at the original campus rather than to the campus pastor” (136). Granted, this particular typically changes when a church moves to more than two campuses. However, at least at this point, does this communicate to the campus pastor that he is *truly* leading his campus? Will he experience insecurity and frustration if his influence and authority is limited in the very campus that he serves?

<sup>29</sup> Robert Steven Kaplan, *What to Ask the Person in the Mirror: Critical Questions for Becoming a More Effective Leader and Reaching Your Potential*, Kindle (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 208.

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in such a way that is sufficiently utilizing his gifts, he will become perplexed or  
disgruntled, in many cases. Moreover, he may even begin to think, “This is a  
church, and I am the pastor, and I’m not the pastor.”<sup>30</sup> In many multisite contexts,  
the freedom of the local campus leadership is innately limited simply because the  
initial campus has predetermined much of the church’s vision, mission, and core  
practices. Nonetheless, the freedom to contribute their own ideas and to learn to  
trust their own abilities significantly enhances confidence and productivity in those  
leaders (including campus pastors).<sup>31</sup>

188 Cladis would argue that such a climate for healthy leadership is only possible in  
a decentralized institutional philosophy in which decision-making and authority  
are pushed “as far down the ranks as possible so that the people who live with  
actual implementation have a major voice in the decision.”<sup>32</sup> If campus pastors  
and local campus leadership teams feel unduly controlled and restricted by the  
central team, not only might they become frustrated and less productive, but also  
such a culture may foster mistrust. According to Addington, “Mistrust breeds  
control. Control feeds mistrust. It is an unhealthy cycle.”<sup>33</sup>

This article does not necessarily seek to argue for the flattening of all  
hierarchical structures in multisite churches.<sup>34</sup> Rather, the considerations above  
simply seek to create an awareness of the unique challenges often faced by  
multisite churches. Ultimately, multisite church leaders must find the appropriate  
balance between trust and autonomy, and yet they must do so while recognizing  
the biblical nature of what it means for a man to be identified as a pastor. The New  
Testament seems to suggest that upon Paul’s appointment of elders<sup>35</sup> in each  
church, he gave the elders a substantial amount of independence.<sup>36</sup> It should not  
surprise multisite churches of the leader’s potential disenchantment if they do not  
give adequate freedom in leadership and if they limit by an unhealthy amount of  
bureaucracy and control of pastors—whether in positions of senior, executive, or  
local campus leadership. At the same time, however, the senior leadership team

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<sup>30</sup> Grant Gaines, interview by author, teleconference, February 5, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, “Developing New Leaders for the Global Task,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (April 1989): 169.

<sup>32</sup> Cladis, 59.

<sup>33</sup> T.J. Addington, *High Impact Church Boards: How to Develop Healthy, Intentional, and Empowered Church Leaders* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 162.

<sup>34</sup> Cladis might suggest that he would likely argue for such a structure (even though he does not specifically address multisite churches). He writes, “Empowering teams are very effective teams for the Kingdom of God because they spread out power and flatten hierarchies” (15).

<sup>35</sup> Bartensen summarizes Benjamin Merkle’s argument that in the New Testament, the terms “elder,” “overseer,” “bishop,” and “pastor” are synonymous, and we see evidence of these words being used interchangeably. Surprisingly, Ephesians 4:11 mentions the word “pastor” only one time (121–123).

<sup>36</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 358.

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 5, Iss. 2 [2014], Art. 3 must seek to accommodate each pastor's calling and giftedness apart from compromising one of the substantial motivations for moving to the multisite model—the security that each campus will duplicate the DNA found in the birthing campus.

## responsiveness

### *Authentic, In-Person Communication*

Due to the complex nature of leadership structures in multisite churches and the likelihood that they do not allow campus leadership the autonomy they desire, the building of trust may not come with ease.<sup>37</sup> As a result, a practical step that multisite leadership teams should take in order to cultivate trust is creating opportunities for team members to spend adequate time together in which they can deepen their relationships through a culture of interpersonal responsiveness.<sup>38</sup> This time spent together should not merely consist of strategy and planning; rather, Macchia asserts it should be a time of transparency that allows members to connect with one another at a “heart and soul level of communication.”<sup>39</sup> Members must share feelings, confess sins, and cultivate genuine friendships. Healthy church leadership teams are rooted primarily in their spiritual relationships to Christ and one another. These teams understand that they are a “family” before they are an institution.<sup>40</sup> Such an atmosphere of responsiveness among ministry teams must begin with the leader, who according to the Authentic Leadership theory, must be one who is depicted by “transparency.”<sup>41</sup>

While this suggestion may initially appear to be easily applicable in the propagation of trust, it unfortunately does not come effortlessly in multisite churches in which geography separates leadership.<sup>42</sup> This spatial separation of

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<sup>37</sup> It could be a challenge for central leadership to trust campus leadership fully, simply because they must make certain that they allow freedom in such a way that it does not compromise the already-established DNA and direction of the church as a whole. Campus leadership, on the other hand, could struggle with trust of the senior leadership because they may feel as though the senior leadership's motive is to restrict local campus autonomy to maintain their larger church brand.

<sup>38</sup> Ben Merold, “Walking in Step: Elders and Ministers Can Lead Successfully Together If They Share These Four Priorities.” *Leadership Journal*, Spring 2008, 1–2. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/spring/19.30.html?start=2>.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Team: 5 Traits of Vital Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 60. For Macchia, this includes allowing team members to hear about one another's “spiritual journeys,” and “caring for the health of each other's soul.”

<sup>40</sup> Todd Engstrom, interview by author, teleconference, March 11, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Arif Hassan and Forbis Ahmed, “Authentic Leadership, Trust and Work Engagement,” *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology* (2011): 751. In addition, Walumbwa indicates that relational transparency characterizes the authentic leader, and that such an example fosters positive self-development (94).

<sup>42</sup> See McConnell. Joe Stowell, teaching pastor at Harvest Bible Chapel (a multisite church) reported in an interview regarding the transition to multisite, “It's been hard on our staff morale. We have staff spread out over five campuses, so people don't see each other as much anymore, and the relationships aren't quite as tight” (168).

Edwards: Authority, Autonomy, and Healthy Communication: Embracing The Org leadership teams makes “in person” encounters a unique challenge.<sup>43</sup> While two of the primary means commonly identified to enhance communication among multisite team members include intranet sites and blogs,<sup>44</sup> MacMillan indicates that, “Face-to-face communication is the richest form (of communication) because we can draw on the resources of words, body language, voice, or even physical arena itself to deliver our ideas.”<sup>45</sup> While such gatherings will require intentional effort on behalf of multisite church leadership teams, they will prove to be helpful in increasing the likelihood of trust among team members.

### *Embracing of Conflict*

Similarly, multisite leadership teams must be committed to a philosophy of responsiveness among team members that allows for the embracing and discussion of foreseeable conflict.<sup>46</sup> Lencioni indicates that a fundamental dysfunction of a team is its “fear of conflict,”<sup>47</sup> while Rutan and Stone claim that a healthy, mature ministry team must be exemplified by a “tolerance of ambiguity, anxiety, and problems.”<sup>48</sup>

If no perceived conflict is evident in a multisite church leadership team, someone is not being honest. In fact, lack of trust, as discussed briefly, perpetuates a team’s unwillingness to engage in open, constructive conflict.<sup>49</sup> However, such a fear and avoidance of conflict only leads to artificial harmony—one that will eventually implode. The essence of a team’s avoidance of conflict is rooted in their aversion to tolerate the interpersonal discomfort that necessarily accompanies difficult conversations.<sup>50</sup> Hence, campus pastors, for example, must be willing to openly dialogue with the central leadership team regarding any level of discontentment they are experiencing. Such an admission may lead to increased level of freedom afforded by the senior leadership, thus further empowering and satisfying the campus pastor. In other cases, the uncomfortable conversation could

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<sup>43</sup> Allison points out the importance in multisite churches for the pastoral teams of each site to “engage in ministry together by meeting regularly, sharing ministerial resources, encouraging personal accountability, fostering pastoral cooperation through the preparation of sermons together, addressing problems as a team, praying together, and the like” (315).

<sup>44</sup> Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, 139.

<sup>45</sup> Macchia, 160. He adds that words alone account for only 7–10% of the communication that our intended audience receives, 35% includes vocalics (tone, inflection, volume, and speed), and 55% is body language. As a result, multisite churches must be intentional in creating venues for their team members to communicate in person, and not to settle simply for teleconferences, Skype calls, or other online venues (159).

<sup>46</sup> Macchia states there are several indicators of a team that avoids conflict. They are as follows: boring meetings, environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive, controversial topics ignored that are critical to team success, the opinions and perspectives of all team members not analyzed, time wasted with posturing, and interpersonal risk management (70).

<sup>47</sup> Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 91.

<sup>48</sup> J. Scott Rutan and W.N. Stone, *Psychodynamic Group Psychotherapy* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 34–44.

<sup>49</sup> Lencioni, 91.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

Regardless, the multisite church as a whole will only be healthier when leadership not only allows, but also requires, such conversations.

### *Culture of Encouragement*

Multisite churches' intricate leadership structures and their innate tendency to limit the authority of eager leaders may cause frustration. Accordingly, a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment may be a challenging experience for some staff members. For this reason, leadership teams in multisite churches must be committed to producing an environment of encouragement. Even when staff members desire more autonomy, they will likely perform well and still be able to experience a level of excitement in their role when they are recipients of healthy support and encouragement.<sup>51</sup>

Alternatively, when multisite team leaders are not encouraged, they are more likely to be drawn into episodes of conflict.<sup>52</sup> Combined with the already present stresses and latent insecurities of leading in a complicated organizational structure, a number of discouraged or seemingly underappreciated leaders or team members could become a recipe for significant disunity. While this kind of appreciation, affirmation, and encouragement of team members is typically the last phase to develop in interpersonal relationships among a staff,<sup>53</sup> it is an absolute essential in multisite church leadership teams.

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### **conclusion**

While the increasing trend of multisite churches across the nation has yielded unprecedented growth and apparent success, this movement still stands in the need of addressing key questions related to authority, autonomy, and team communication. Due to the complex nature of multisite leadership structures, it seems almost unavoidable that many of these churches' leaders will experience confusion. At times, they may encounter legitimate disappointment as it relates to their particular role and freedom—especially at the campus level.

The argument of this article is that essential to the health of any multisite church is the presence of trust among its team members. After all, "Trust is the starting point for all healthy relationships, the fuel for team ministry, and the

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<sup>51</sup> Jon R. Katzenbach and Zia Khan, *Leading Outside the Lines: How to Mobilize the (in)Formal Organization, Energize Your Team, and Get Better Results* (San Francisco: Booz & Company, 2010), 184.

<sup>52</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry: Using Multiple Gifts to Build a Unified Vision* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 200.

<sup>53</sup> Arlo Genz, *The Confident Leader* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 147–59.