

## Multi-site

### Going multi-site

Before outlining some of the lessons we are learning at King's about our transition to being a multi site church, it is probably helpful to place our journey in context. Following a period of growth that has lasted for over a decade, two major building projects on our Catford site and the establishment of three Sunday meetings (two in the morning and one in the evening), our morning meetings became full again. We considered starting a third meeting on a Sunday morning on the Catford site and concluded the logistics would be very challenging. Such a step would not have been ideal on many counts.

So the impetus to become a multi-site church was initially driven by a lack of space to contain the growth we were seeing - not primarily as a strategy to stimulate further growth. Ideally, as with the move to multiple meetings, multi-site initiatives should rise from the need to manage current growth rather than as a means to start growth from a static position.

It was interesting to see that six months after launching two sites, our overall attendance was up 30%, but further, to note that 50% of our new people still came to our Catford 11.30 meeting first - confirming that particular meeting as our current major growth point. At the same time the other two sites also showed encouraging growth signs as they were established. If King's Church has growth momentum, then becoming a multi-site church has increased the rate of that growth. By launching two new locations 15 minutes' drive from our existing site, we have opened up a sphere of operation to reach thousands more people.

It would also be helpful to read alongside this the **Move to Multiple Meetings** paper (see side panel of this blog) as many of the principles included in the move to becoming a multi-site church are similar. For example, we aimed to have 140/180 people on the ground in both our Lee and Downham sites at launch just as we had when we began our second and third meetings at Catford.

To see our three sites, take a look at the short video clip on our website  
<http://www.kingschurchlondon.org/>  
<http://vimeo.com/20368150>

### Why multi-site – why not a church plant?

This is a good question and one which needs a good answer! During my sabbatical I had the privilege of shadowing Nicky Gumbel of Holy Trinity Brompton for the day. He took me round his nine meetings on three sites (soon to become four sites) all within cycling distance of each other in West London. Known around the world as the birthplace of the Alpha course; this is an impressive church. It was fun to cycle between the sites in Nicky's wake and to discuss at length with him the reasoning around going multi-site. While totally committed to church planting, Nicky Gumbel has concluded, as I have, that particularly in urban centres, where appropriate property is so rare and so expensive, the multi-site concept provides a large church with the opportunity to continue to grow, and therefore to build a resource base for its wider vision for reaching the nation and those nations beyond our borders.

Quote from **Good to Grow** by Steve Tibbert with Val Taylor – published July 2011 by Authentic Media

### **What is the ideal location for a multi-site?**

All our reading and research, plus the advice of others with experience in this area, tells us that the ideal location for a further site is 15 minutes' drive away from the sending church. The new site should have about 140 people attending and ideally living in the area - on the ground as it were - who will carry your DNA into the new site. This gives a core of people to work with, who can provide the care and support for all the new people coming in.

The key issues to consider were:

- distance from the sending/'mother' church
- critical mass (around 140 people)
- a group of people who know your ways in Christ.

### **Multi-site: what is the most important decision you will make?**

The most important decision is - who is going to be the site leader/ campus pastor. This person needs to own the whole Vision, Values and Philosophy of Ministry of the one church and should be a good team player. This should not be someone who is looking for space to carve out their own thing, i.e. a church planter - or even a frustrated preacher!

### **What are the critical components that make a new Sunday meeting in a different location work?**

As you are encouraging existing attenders/members to relocate from your existing facility to another one, the greatest appeal for them is a location which is close to their home address. This should not be underestimated in urban centres, where travel time is major factor of life. However, the four key components that require attention are:

- Worship
- Preaching
- Kids' and youth work
- Welcome!

If any of the above do not compare positively to the experience within the sending church context, people will quickly revert back to attending the sending site.

Lastly, don't forget the appearance of the venue itself. It's a very important factor - we spent over £200,000 getting both new sites refurbished.

### **Multi-site: a word about preaching - live or DVD/ live streaming?**

At Kings we decided at this first stage to do all the preaching 'live' on a Sunday – yes, that's five times on one day! We stagger the start times for the five meetings so the preacher is able to travel by car between the sites. These cars are driven by trusted helpers so that parking time is not an issue! We are now in the process of installing cameras, recording and projection equipment and our view is that we will move to a combination of live and video preaching when we move to a fourth site or a multiple meeting on our Lee or Downham sites, whichever comes first! We operate with a preaching team of 4 people, who speak at 42 of the Sundays

in a year; on the other 10 Sundays the site-leaders preach. We believe a preaching team provides a more balanced and sustainable teaching experience.

### **Multi-site: team development**

One of the areas we underestimated in the move to multi-site was the impact on our full-time staff and how they operated. As a large church we had transitioned to a place where most of our staff members were specialists. Moving to being a multi-site church has required us to redefine every single role on the pastoral team, and each site is now run by a team who have to operate once more as generalists – at least in the site context. This is a massive change for all involved. It has also meant we have had to review our weekly leadership meeting structure and clarify our lines of authority.

### **Multi-site: We Are Kings Church...**

We are one church, with 3 sites and 5 meetings.  
We have one name  
We have one vision  
We have one set of doctrines and values  
We have one eldership  
We have one staff team  
We have one budget  
We have one legal identity  
We have one philosophy of ministry  
We have one website

### **Multi-site: where to go for practical help and advice!**

On our multi-site journey Jim Tomberlin from Scottsdale, Arizona has been extremely helpful. He is a recognised expert in this area having seen Willow Creek Community Church successfully through its own multi-site strategy. Look at the enclosed link – there's even a free e-book!

<http://multisitesolutions.com/125-tips-for-multisite>

### **FAST FACTS ABOUT MULTISITE – from Jim Tomberlin**

- Multi-site churches outnumber megachurches.
- Two-thirds of multi-site churches are denominational.
- Multi-sites reach more people and mobilize more volunteers.
- One in three multi-sites added a campus through a merger.
- One in four multi-sites has a campus in another language.
- One in five multi-sites birthed a "grandchild" campus.
- One in 10 has an Internet campus.
- In-person teaching is utilized more than video.
- Average size of a church going multisite: 850.
- Eighty-five percent of multi-site churches have three or fewer geographic locations.
- Average attendance of a multi-site church: 1,300.
- Multi-site campuses have a 90 percent success rate.

## **Views from the Sites 1: King's @ Catford - Malcolm Kyte, Site Leader**

### ***What surprised you most about going multi-site?***

- Nothing too surprising - due to lots of church planting experience!
- Knew it would take a time for things to settle – gaps will eventually get filled. I am quite relaxed about the fact that details are not pinned down and confident they will be gradually resolved.
- Numbers of people filling the empty chairs on Sundays so that it didn't feel very different overall – but then that has always been my experience in planting churches – the seats fill up again fairly soon but it takes longer to fill the serving gaps and get new people giving regularly.
- How many people suddenly came to the church almost overnight.
- How well it went!

### ***What challenged you most?***

- The amount of hard work it took to get to launch day – Christmas to March 2011 was intense with numerous meetings to plan and prepare. The combination of leafleting / advertising campaign / outreach week / 40 days of prayer / t-shirts / new website / refurbishing two buildings / launch etc was pretty exhausting!
- Working out how to address the volunteer challenge.
- Working out my new role as Catford site leader.
- Working out how we work as a Catford site team – who needs to be in which meetings.
- Readjustment of all our roles.
- To what extent the ministry staff team leaders were responsible for just Catford or all three venues e.g. youth / children / pastoral care / safeguarding team.
- Working out how to integrate large numbers of new people into small groups – which will take several more months.
- The 'staff stretch' on Sundays and the need to develop more lay leaders to take on key roles – which will take several more months.
- Working out the meeting pastor role. (Still working it out!)

### ***What are the issues for the 'sending' church site?***

- Losing key staff and volunteers all in one go.
- Working out who had actually gone to the other two sites.
- Integrating large numbers of new people.
- Getting to know new people.
- Not having a separate Catford site budget.
- The whole sense that at Catford it was 'business as usual' rather than a major shift in the way we do church. For those staying it didn't feel very different on the surface and the danger is that you don't readjust your thinking at all.
- Missing those who used to be there on a Sunday.
- Communicating the change to those staying – importance of FAQs booklet on multisite / everyone feeling a degree of ownership / 'selling' the concept to those who are staying put.

**Malcolm Kyte**

## **Views from the Sites: King's @ Downham – Ben Welchman, Site Leader**

*What surprised you most about going multi-site?*

How well the launch went! And people were so gracious in accepting a younger leader.

*What challenged you most?*

Taking on the leadership of a group of people with whom I had no previous relationship or history! Not knowing their stories, the quality of their character or their gifts, while still needing to run a Sunday meeting requiring children's workers, youth leaders, welcome team, worship team etc - and also aiming for diversity in every team.

*What is it like dealing with a merger situation?*

The church at Downham was already part of Newfrontiers - there was a huge amount of common ground in shared values and common history within Newfrontiers and strong relational links between leaders over some years. All this helped!

*Changing the philosophy of ministry?*

This was the biggest area of difference between Downham Way Family Church, as was, and King's Church. While the vision and values of two churches may be identical, the way these are worked out can be very different. Steve (Tibbert) has talked about this a lot which was really helpful.

Changing the culture is a slow process that requires *patience*, taking people on a journey as they may have only known one way of 'doing church'. People need to understand why we are doing things differently, grasp how they can make a contribution and, most importantly, see that the new way works. These are all important in building trust in leadership and preparing everyone for the next step... and the next!

It also requires *resolve* to avoid the temptation to give in and settle for old ways of working just to keep people happy. Occasionally we have to tread on some toes - some people like the way they used to do things! This increases the emotional demands on you with every task.

I'm constantly thinking about the *pace of change* - too much too quickly can mean people are more likely to disengage, lose a sense of ownership and feel that the new approach is being imposed on them. Move too slowly and we can miss the opportunity and the fresh momentum provided by launching as a site.

*Benefits of resources from the 'mother-ship'?*

As a site leader in a multi-site church you simply don't have the same kind of pressures as a church planter or a one-site church leader. If I was leading a *church* of 160 people rather than a *site* of 160, I would have to grapple with raising money for buildings and handling budgets, as well as employment and legal issues. Whilst I have picked up more administration and facilities issues than I expected, there is someone else on the King's team who has overall responsibility for the premises at Downham. Consequently I can focus on running Sundays, developing leaders and teams and strengthening ministries like midweek groups. That's a real privilege!

**Ben Welchman**

## **Views from the Sites: King's @ Lee - Phil Varley, Site Leader**

*What surprised you most about going multi-site?*

It dawned on me how different it was setting up a new work at Lee – we were not known in the area and had no history on the new patch, unlike the Catford and Downham sites. Also we were 'hidden' in a side road with no visible presence on main thoroughfares like the other two sites and there are some really good churches within easy walking distance of our building. I was really pleased how many good people wanted to come from the Catford site and be involved in this new venture! The pioneer spirit was there and we saw gifted people rising to the challenge - there was a huge amount of energy!

*What challenged you most?*

- Setting everything up from scratch. There was a real volunteer challenge – to find the right people for the tasks and ensure we were providing essential ministries and had appropriate skills available, establishing new work patterns, getting equipment and furniture. While there was initial energy and ownership to serve, I foresee a future challenge in maintaining that when we are through the honeymoon period.
- The time-scale in which it all had to be done. The period from December to March was fairly manic! We had surveyed the King's people in November to find out who was interested in coming to the Lee site and from then on the amount of work required and the speed at which important decisions had to be made and preparatory work done was 'full on'. Looking back, I feel it was too small a time-window and needed a longer lead-in time.
- Of course the challenges don't end with set-up. The challenge for the next season is to push on and see something lasting established in the community. That will be more like success!

*What is it like dealing with what is more a 'planting' situation and opening a completely new location?*

This is so much easier than being a single church plant. We have all the benefits of a large church in terms of financial support and people resources – and we start with our own building! That's a big plus when you see churches operating in facilities that have to be cleared at the end of the meeting. Nor do we have just six people in a small group – or 25 in a school hall. We began with 150 people who knew what we were about. We are already seeing visitors, week by week, too. However, because we are a smaller context than the Catford Hill site, I believe we can develop a greater relational feel and while retaining the strengths of the wider King's ethos and culture, we can bring colour and depth to our community.

Whatever happens I don't want us to be doing the same things this time next year. I want those of us at Lee to use our gifts to change a community and to broaden and deepen what we are currently doing. I want us to be authentic, making a difference, and in reaching the people of our area I want to see space for creativity and the arts, reaching those in the area who have not yet heard of us – or the love of God. Our fantastic building lends itself to such things! This is part of setting the unique culture of the Lee site – for the glory of God and to reach people for Jesus.

**Phil Varley**

## **Views from the Sites: King's @ Downham - Nigel Mumford - Downham joins King's**

Downham Way Family Church, part of Newfrontiers, had been my spiritual home for about 30 years when in early 2009 I found myself leading the church and considering what God had for us in the future.

King's Church was close by – we saw what God was doing there and I wondered if there was a way for us to share in it. I met with Steve Tibbert in a Brockley café to discuss how things were going and over a cup of tea he told me that that King's was considering going multi-site. I was amazed - I had been praying about a future where Downham could become a part of King's! I took this as a God-given opportunity and soon found myself in earnest discussion with Steve.

Nothing was definite – over the following months there was much to think about and to pray through. However, from October 09, with both leadership teams supporting such a move, the possibility was discussed with both churches and the conviction grew that this was the way to go. We proceeded slowly and carefully into the future we now believed wholeheartedly God was calling us to. Then, in Jan 2010, Martin and Ruth Alley moved over to Downham to work with us on the move to our multi-site future. Their contribution was invaluable as they helped us to get to know King's Church and they got to know us!

By December 2010 we had progressed to the point where we formally closed Downham Way Family Church. This was another essential step in the process. While recognising God's faithfulness to our church over decades and with our long history within Newfrontiers, we needed to 'die' to enter into our new existence as the Downham site of King's Church. There was a recognition that this brought sadness for some but for many of us there was excitement, not to mention a bit of trepidation!

For three months we moved en masse to the Catford site for Sunday worship and midweek events – a valuable time that gave us all the chance to see more of what God was doing at King's and a glimpse of what could be our experience too. Meanwhile the Downham building underwent extensive refurbishment - £100,000 worth – to prepare the site for all that was to come as part of King's, reaching out to the communities around us.

We now look forward to a new future. I am now privileged to serve as part of the wider King's team while Ben Welchman is Downham site leader and there are already encouraging signs of growth – a recent baptism saw over 200 people in the meeting. I know that God is leading us to even greater things, whatever the future brings and I am so glad that we followed His prompting and direction!

***Nigel Mumford***