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Connecting Resources with Ministry

Church Development Discussion Papers

TITLE: Church Multiplies Ministry through Multiple Sites

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When Peter Semeyn accepted a call to be pastor of Faith Reformed Church in Traverse City, Michigan in 2002, one of the issues on the congregation's agenda was their Sunday morning worship schedule.

Three worship services were packed into Sunday morning, but for a variety of reasons things didn't seem to "click." Semeyn and a group of church members started meeting to discuss the Sunday morning schedule.

As they were praying and studying, they stumbled across the idea of becoming a multi-site church. "One congregation in many places" is the simplest definition, says Semeyn. "It's like a bank that has a main branch and also has other branches all over town. It's all the same bank, but in different locations."

Faith Reformed started by moving one of its morning worship services to the youth centre, a separate building on the church's campus. The youth centre, which seats 230, provided a smaller and more intimate setting for informal worship. People who see the church's large sanctuary as a barrier have started coming to the youth centre services, which are known as "The Clarion."

The services in the youth centre began a year ago. Today, The Clarion is Faith Reformed's fastest-growing worship service, and this fall they have added a second Clarion service. The church is making plans to develop other worship sites off-campus and hopes to develop an increasing number of ministry sites in the future.

"We're very mission-driven," Semeyn says. "The best way for our congregation to reach out in our context is through worship experiences. Multiple worship sites make this possible."

Reaching more people hasn't been the only advantage of developing a multi-site ministry, Semeyn reports. Since it continues to be a single congregation, the church's resources can be used at any of its worship sites, as needed. In addition, the satellite worship services allow for a kind of fellowship that is hard to find in a large church. In short, the church is able to be "big and small" at the same time, enjoying the benefits of both.

Semeyn acknowledges that a multiple-site ministry won't work for every church. He believes this approach has worked for Faith Reformed in part because the church

has a good reputation in its community.

"Traverse City is a 'big-small' town," he says. "We are able to multiply because people know the name 'Faith Church' and our ministry has a solid reputation in town for quality and service.

Adding a worship service can be intimidating for a church. "Somebody will always ask the question, 'Won't we be divided?' But in a large congregation, unity means something quite different than in a smaller setting. And even in a congregation of 200, you can't all be unified all of the time."

Semeyn compares churches that offer more than one worship service to movie theatres with more than one daily showtime.

"If you have a good movie to show, you want to show it at multiple times because you can get more people to come that way than if you say, 'We are only going to show this movie at 8 pm. Take it or leave it.' It's proven – the more worship times you have, the more people you reach."

In the end, Semeyn believes, the benefits of multiple ministry sites outweigh the risks.

"Unification has more to do with people buying into a common mission than with people just sitting in church together," he says.

A news report of the Reformed Church in America.

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