

8 Launch Wins: A Study of 1,500-Plus New Churches and Multisite Campuses

brought to you by Portable Church® Industries

by Warren Bird, Ph.D.

Interest in starting **new churches** has never been stronger. Manhattan, the heart of New York City, today has more church plants than at any time in its storied history. In other sections of the country, every single public school is rented to a new church. Books on church planting with big-dream titles like *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers*¹ are popping up with increasing frequency.

At the same time, growth of the multisite movement shows no signs of slowing down. When the first full book on the subject, *Multisite Church Revolution*², came out in 2006, it predicted such widespread adoption of the model that some scoffed. No longer. Multisite innovations happened so rapidly that the next major book on the topic, *Multisite Road Trip*³, released just three years later, used its subtitle to declare multisite as the “new normal.”



These developments raise **new questions** for churches, welcoming research-driven answers. Churches want to know:

- Is it really worth the effort to launch something new, or should we focus instead on strengthening what we're already doing?
- Should we plant a new church or open a new multisite location?
- Should we initially rent and be “portable” or should we immediately lease/buy something “permanent”?
- How do we become more effective at making disciples of Jesus Christ, and not just at gathering a crowd?

This report, drawing from original research conducted through Leadership Network and brought to you by Portable Church® Industries, offers helpful insight from more than 1,500 people doing ministry in the trenches. Each invested 20 or so minutes to give us lots of information and advice about their experience. I applied sophisticated data analysis, and important findings emerged that affirm “yes, it’s time to launch that new church or campus!”

Our prayer is that God will use this report to take your leadership to new levels of spiritual fruitfulness. We echo Jesus’ prayer that as we abide in Him, we will bring much glory to the Father as we “bear much fruit” (John 15:8).

Warren Bird

Dr. Warren Bird, Director of Research

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Section 1: How to Use This Report

How can this report help me?

The information in this report will help you make better-informed strategic decisions. Hopefully it will both encourage you and give you fresh resources. Most of all, it will validate that the effort to start something new—a church, a campus location—is absolutely worthwhile in terms of the spiritual fruit that will result.

Our target readers are lead pastors, executive pastors, campus pastors, church finance people, church board members and anyone else who wants to understand more about what happens in the early years of a new campus or new church plant. While designed for church leaders, both paid and volunteer, this report will be a helpful resource for many other users: denominational leaders, seminary professors/students, researchers, journalists, consultants and more.



Section 2: Who Participated?

This is the nation's first survey⁴ on this scale (that I know of) to ask the same questions of new campuses and new churches, enabling a series of fascinating comparisons that we'll explore later in the report.

The visual overview of who participated in our research (see Figure 1) shows that a substantial number of people took part, enough to give us confidence in the findings. The churches represented a good mix between multisite and single-site congregations, and are on average growing solidly. Most of them were recently started.

They're also almost evenly split between those currently using portable facilities requiring weekly setup and teardown (such as a rented school or theater) and those using permanent facilities where they have constant access (such as leased commercial space or a church facility they own).

In addition (not pictured) some 74% of the senior leaders are the "founder" or original planter/campus pastor, with the remaining 26% being a successor pastor.

The biggest finding: "the effort to start something new—a church, a campus location—is absolutely worthwhile in terms of the spiritual fruit that will result."

The attendance numbers are for the specific campus represented in the survey response, so if this was a multisite church of say 4,000 in total worship attendance, but only 200 at that particular campus, then I used the attendance of 200 in our attendance tally. The attendance numbers include children.

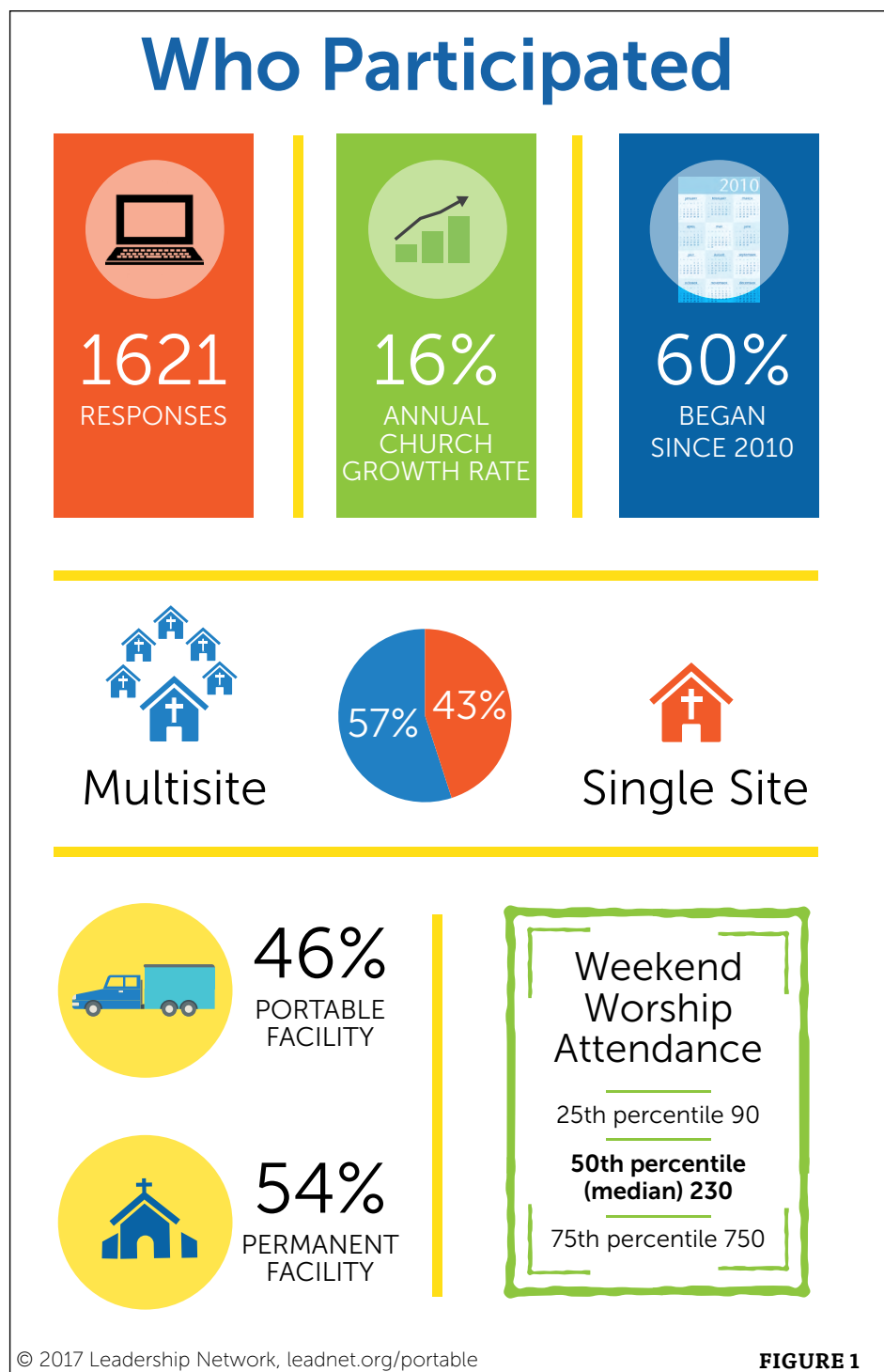


FIGURE 1

Section 3: What We Learned (including an Infographic)

When I tally survey responses, I start with the basic frequencies: what do we learn from how the majority of people answered each question? Figures 2 and 3 show what I found to be the most important discoveries in those tallies, and then Figure 4 lists five compelling new reasons to start a church or campus.

Figure 2 is about sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. It shows that people in new churches or multisite campuses are indeed sharing their faith with others. It's inevitable that a new church or campus will attract a certain amount of people who are already Christ followers, but the eternal difference maker is how many in the new church or campus connect with folks who don't have a church home or who don't have a personal faith in Jesus Christ. Most newcomers are drawn to a church by personal invitation of a family member, friend, neighbor or business colleague. Thus, churches grow in direct proportion to what percent of their congregation is sharing their faith with others.



Figure 2 says that a solid quarter (26%) of the new churches or campuses surveyed estimate that half or more (50%-100%) of their people are inviting others to consider faith in Jesus Christ. Further, more than half (56%) of the new churches or campuses surveyed estimate that roughly a third or more (30%-100%) of their people are inviting others to consider faith in Jesus Christ.

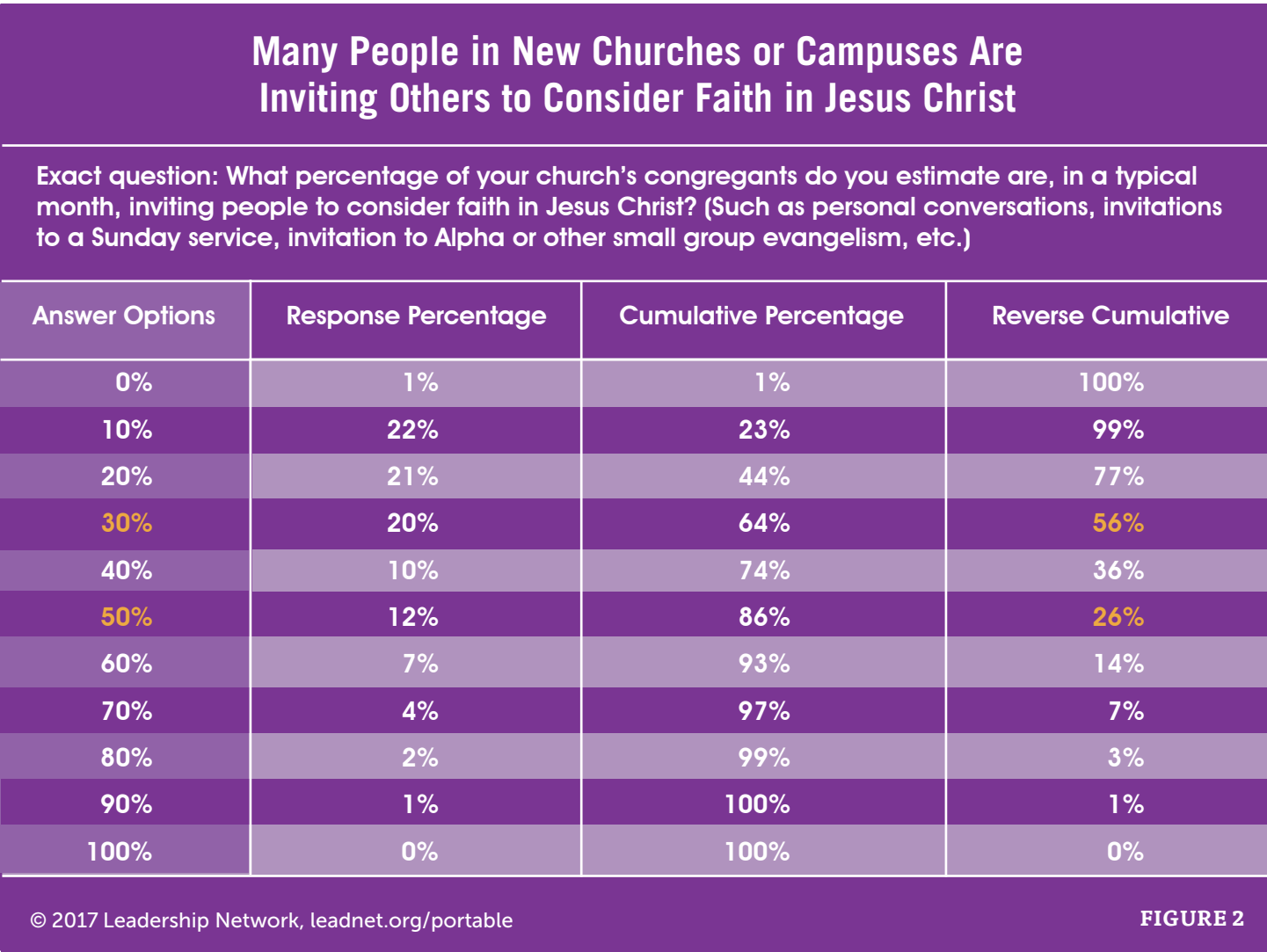


Figure 3 talks about what happens next. Of nine different discipleship practices in the new church or campus, where are the congregations strongest, and where are they weakest? The top-ranked area of effectiveness is that they're the "kind of place where your people can invite unchurched friends/family to come with them to church." Second comes "training in generosity and good stewardship." That's quite a spiritual discipline! Third comes "discipling believers" followed by "training and developing new leaders." See the figure itself for the other six values in the list.



While the findings from these two questions stand out most as individual questions, I believe they pale compared to what happened when I started comparing individual questions against each other by asking, "When variable X goes up, what happens to variables Y or Z?"

By far the biggest discovery of the report happened when I started doing comparisons with the age of the church or campus. I saw that the first five years of a new church or new campus are incredibly significant and fruitful, typically with spiritual returns far superior to any other period in the life of a similar size church.

The first five years of a new church or new campus are incredibly significant and fruitful.

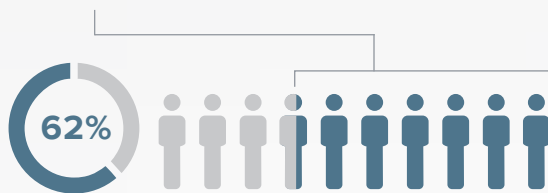


The infographic that follows, Figure 4, shows various dynamics at play in the first 5 years of a new church or campus. If anyone is looking for specific arguments with specific data points on the numerous advantages of launching that new church or campus, the infographic "Five Compelling New Reasons to Start a Church or Campus," gives you the latest research-based affirmation that the effort and energy is absolutely worth it.

FIVE COMPELLING, NEW REASONS TO START A CHURCH OR CAMPUS

#1 MORE MILLENNIALS:

You will reach the next generation with young adults and families eager to grow with you.
The majority of attenders in churches or multisite campuses started in the last 5 years are **35 YEARS OF AGE OR YOUNGER**



#2 MORE OUTREACH:

Your people will do more gospel sharing.
People attending churches or multisite campuses started in the last 5 years are:



#3 MORE ENGAGEMENT:

You will experience greater lay involvement.
During the first 5 years of a new church or multisite campus:



#4 MORE GROWTH:

You will likely see your greatest growth.
In its first 5 years of life, a new church or multisite campus typically grows **170% FASTER** than the average of all subsequent years



#5 MORE FINANCIAL RESOURCES:

You will have more money to spend on ministry.
For churches or multisite campuses started in the last 5 years, the median start-up cost was \$460 per first-year attender (compared to \$1,667 annual "ongoing cost" for each attender in churches older than 5 years)

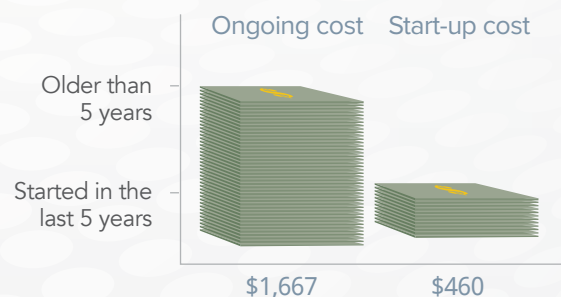


FIGURE 4

Section 4: Digging Deeper Into Each Reason

Church growth authority Peter Wagner famously said that there is no better way to evangelize people than to plant a new church. Would that same statement hold true for starting a new multisite campus? The answer seems to be yes, as the following figures illustrate. What about other variables? I compare several and I think you'll find the results to be informative and fascinating.

In short, I took the five infographic topics and analyzed each one further in five areas:

- Structure: single campus vs. multisite
- Facility: portable vs. permanent
- Size: under 500 in attendance vs. 500 and up
- Momentum: fast growing (10% or more annual growth rate) vs not-as-fast growing
- Leadership age: pastor age 40 or younger vs. pastor over age 40



The study's big finding is that organizational age matters: the first 5 years in the organizational life cycle of a new church or new campus shows far more fruitfulness than subsequent 5-year periods in similar churches or campuses. In the following drilldown comparisons (Figures 5-9), I broadened the study group to those begun in the last 7 years. That means I limited all comparisons to churches or campuses started 2010 or sooner.

For clarity, these number are for the specific location being studied. Thus "attendance," as previously explained is for the individual site or campus—not all campuses combined as in a multisite church. The "under 500" category covers attendances from 20 to 499, including children. Also "pastor" refers to the lead person at that location, site or campus. If it's a multisite church, it is probably the campus pastor, not the senior pastor of all campuses combined.

Here are what I found to be the major learnings:

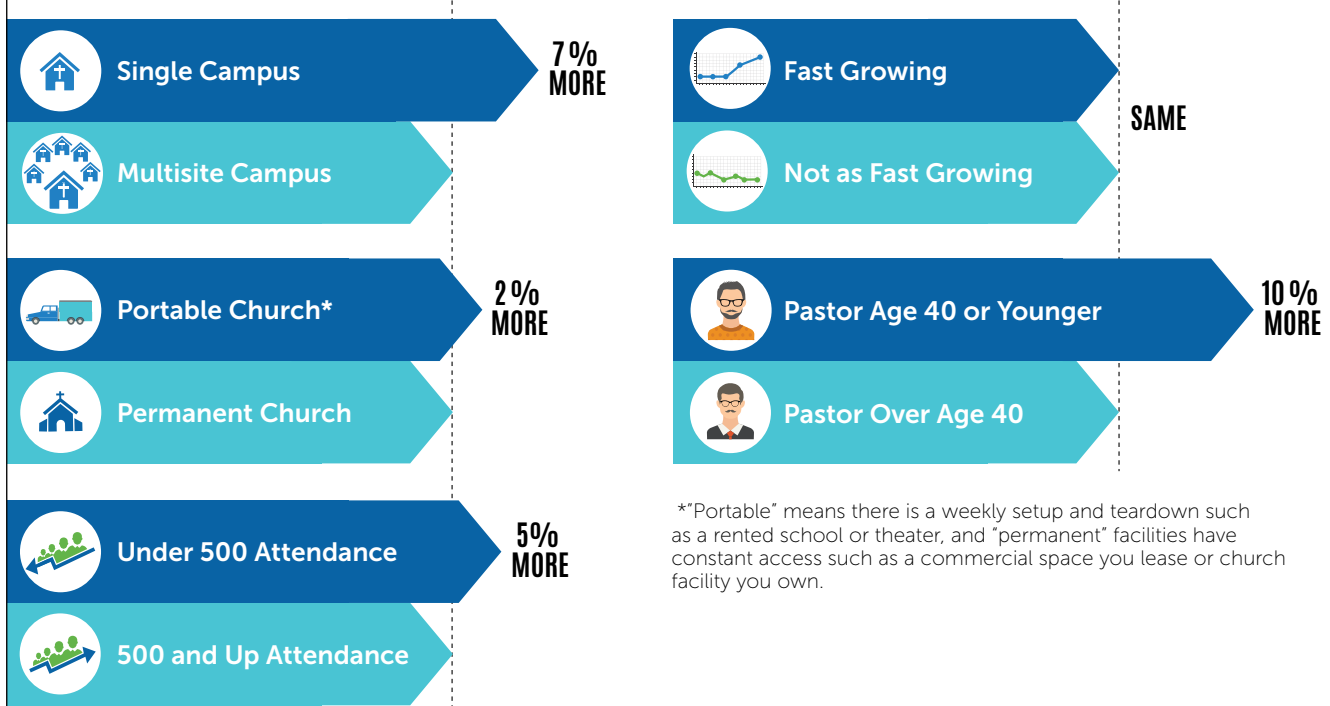
You don't have to be a young pastor to reach millennials, though it does help a bit!

Figure 5, drilling down on Fact #1 from the infographic, shows a comparison of what draws millennials (those ages 17-35), along with any children, to a new church or campus. Of the five factors analyzed, only the age of the pastor made an appreciable difference—and younger pastors edged ahead by only 10%. This perhaps affirms the stereotype of millennials welcoming older voices in mentor roles in their lives. This also says you don't have to be a young pastor to reach millennials, though it does help a bit!

Figure 6 goes deeper into Fact #2 from the infographic, showing how outreach compares across various campuses. By outreach, this is the question explored: "What percentage of your church's congregants do you estimate are, in a typical month, inviting people to consider faith in Jesus Christ? (such as personal conversations, invitations to a Sunday service, invitation to Alpha or other small group evangelism, etc.)" The biggest difference-maker by far was how fast the church is growing. We can't discern from the question which causes the other, sort of like the classic chicken and egg dilemma. Does the momentum and excitement of fast growth cause people to reach out to their friends, or is it the outreach that triggers the growth? Maybe it doesn't matter. But it does affirm that high-growth environments are often rich contexts for increased outreach.

Comparison of What Draws Millennials

To Locations Started in the Last 7 Years

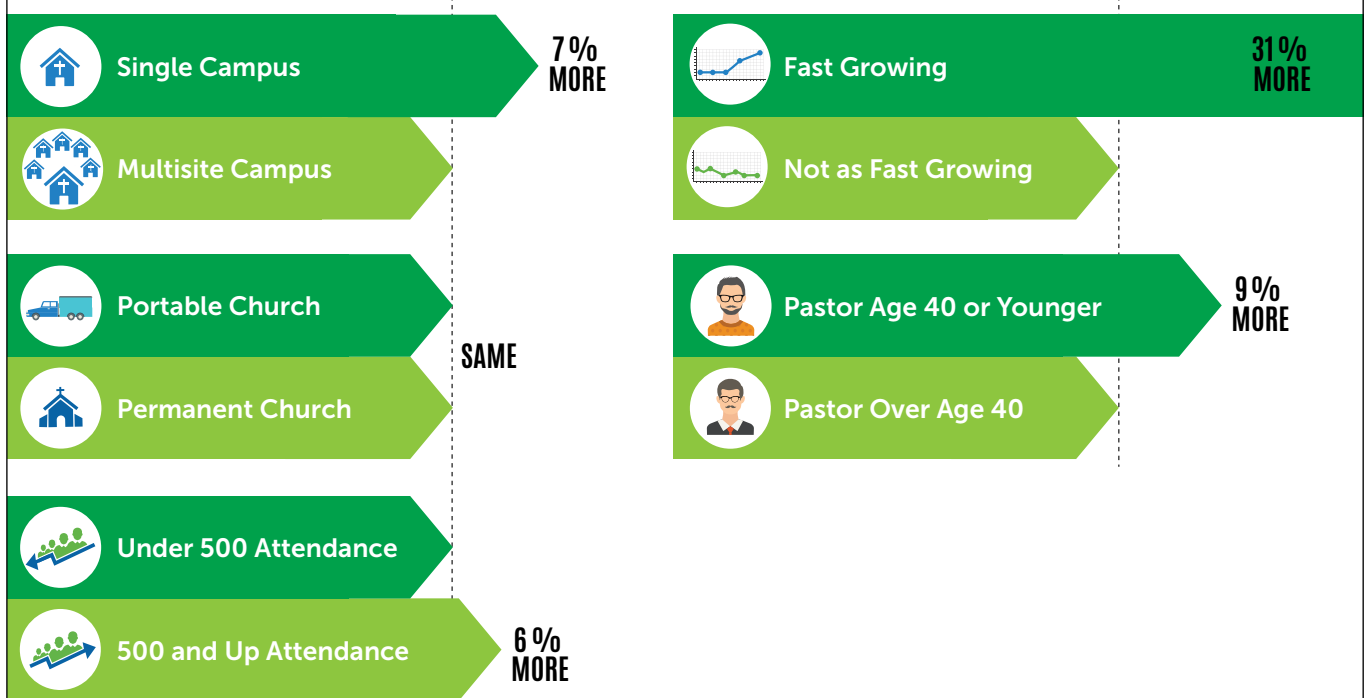


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FIGURE 5

Comparison of Evangelistic Outreach

In Locations Started in the Last 7 Years



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FIGURE 6

Figure 7, drilling down on Fact #3 from the infographic, looks at the involvement level of volunteers, which we call engagement. The actual question was "What percent of your church/campus adults would you say 'volunteer regularly' in any capacity? The two decisive differences are that single-campus churches draw a much greater volunteer level. The data does not tell us why, so my only guess is size: multisite campuses in this study tend to start much larger than do individual churches (the median current worship attendances were 588 for multisite and 140 for single site), and typically the smaller the group, the greater the percentage of its people that get involved. The logic is that when you look around a group of 50 you say, "They really need me to jump in here; if I don't, who else will?" However, if you look around a group of 500, it's easier to conclude, "Probably many people here are far more talented or available than I am."



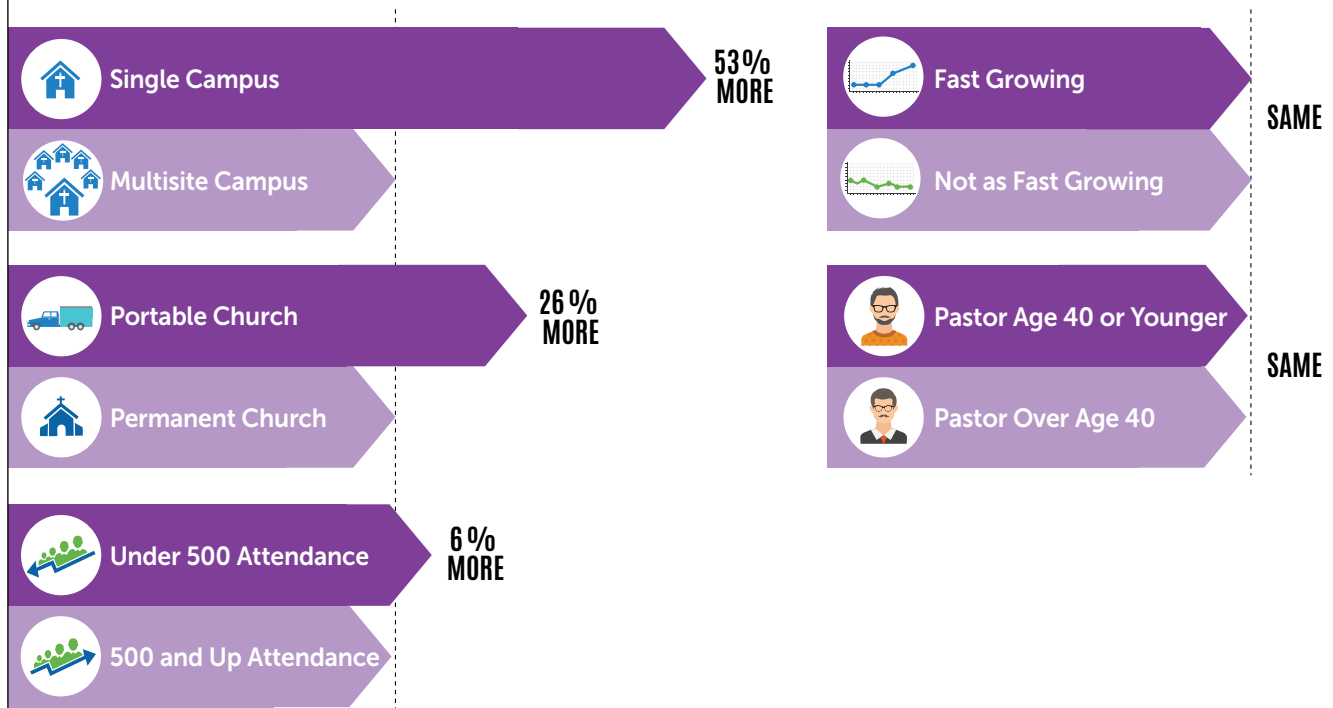
Figure 8 drills down on Fact #4 from the infographic: growth rate. It suggests that single-site campuses grow faster than multisite campuses. My best guess for why is again that multisite campuses tend to start larger, and growth rates are therefore not as high. That is, if you add 25 people to a 50-person church plant, that represents a much higher growth rate (50%) than if you add those same 25 people to a 100-person multisite campus (giving you a growth rate of 25%).



Figure 8 also shows that the growth rate at portable locations, whether new churches or multisite campuses, is slightly faster than at permanent campuses.

Comparison of Volunteer Involvement

In Locations Started in the Last 7 Years

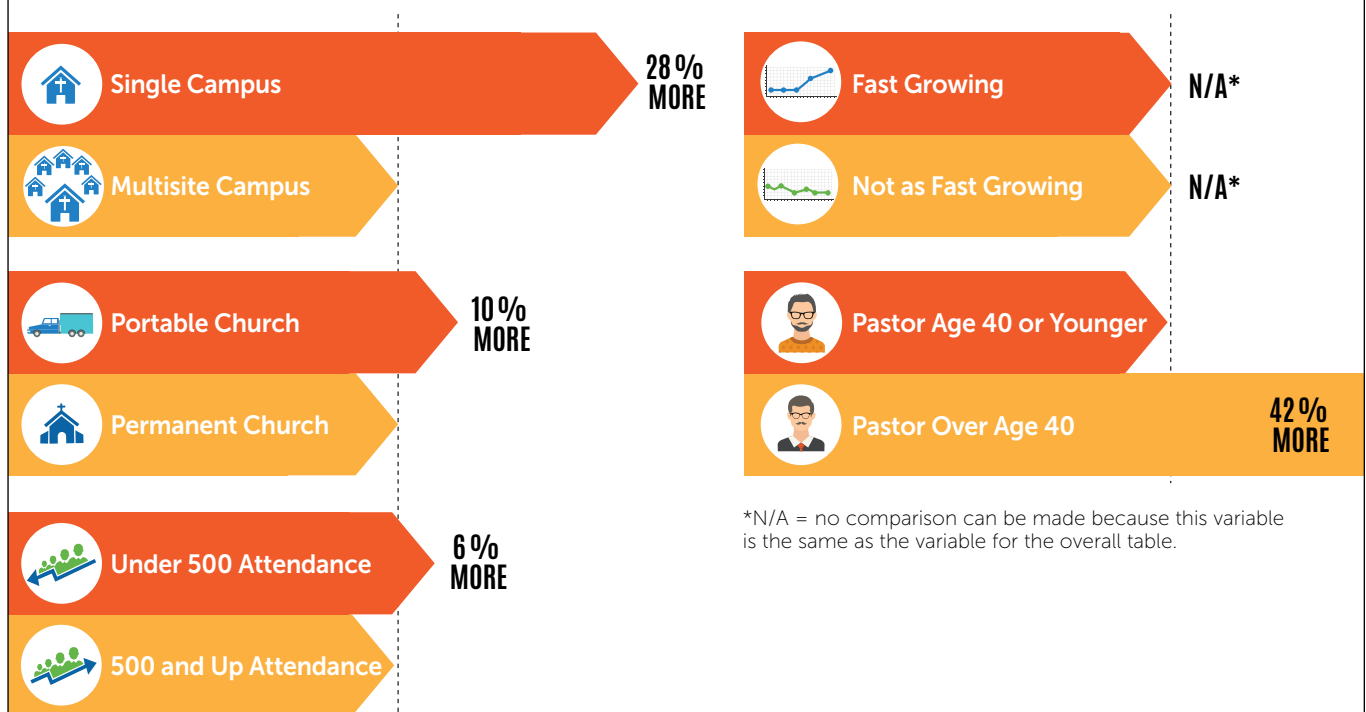


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FIGURE 7

Comparison of Annual Growth Rate

In Locations Started in the Last 7 Years



*N/A = no comparison can be made because this variable is the same as the variable for the overall table.

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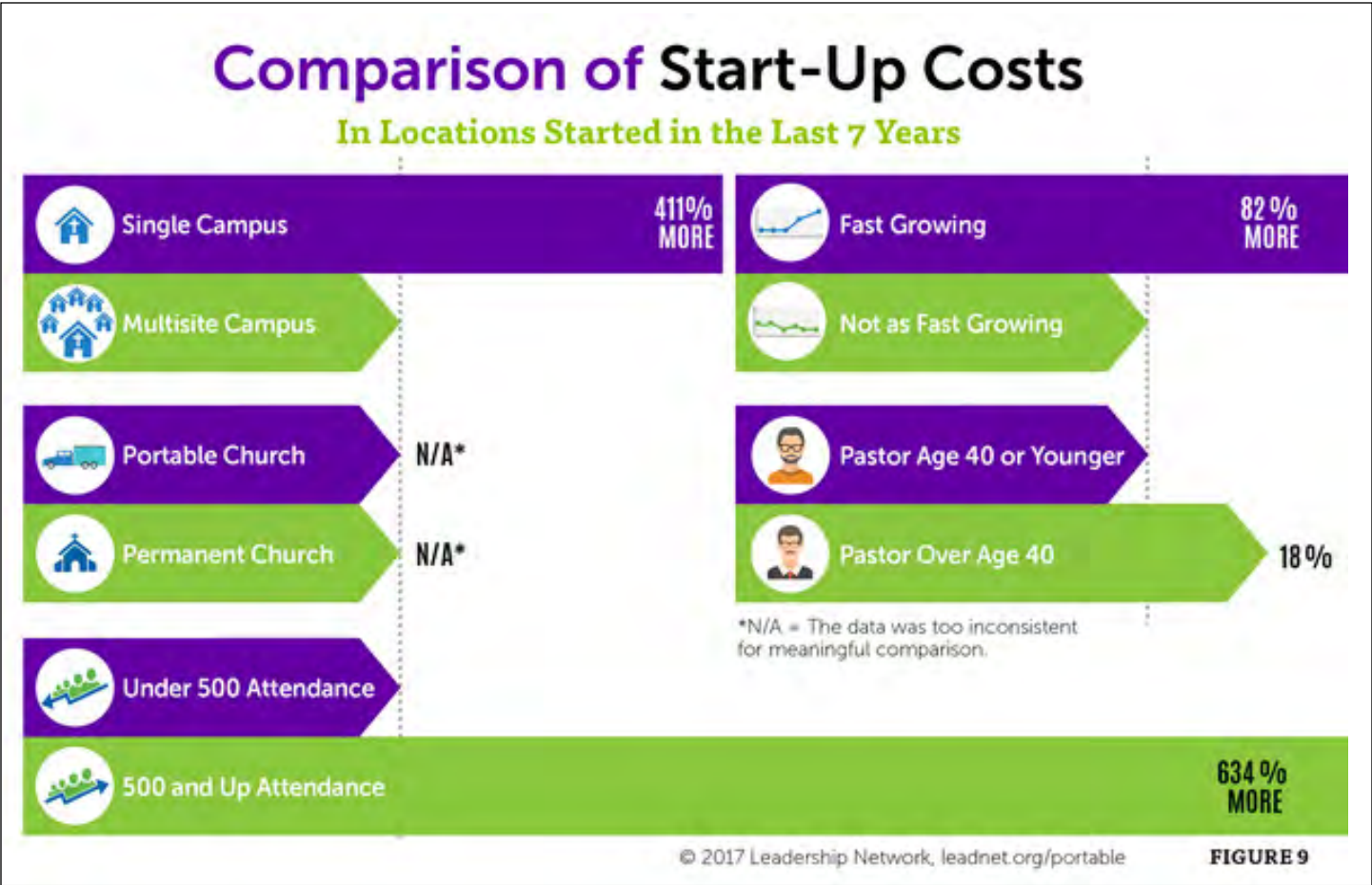
FIGURE 8

Section 5: Start-Up Costs and Other Learnings

Figure 9 demonstrates that start-up costs are all over the map. They're higher for single campuses, larger campuses and fast-growing churches. These differences are so dramatic that I created another diagram, Figure 10, to break them down further by the three categories explored in the survey: first-year start-up costs for equipment, facility and advertising.

Figures 11 and 12 draw from two other survey questions, both specifically about when the church facility is portable – and was limited to people whose church is portable. The first, in Figure 11, shows that a significant percentage of unchurched individuals are thought to be open to both permanent and portable facilities. The second survey question, reflected in Figure 12, shows what people in portable facilities like best, when given nine different choices. The question they responded to was this: If your church/campus has been “portable” at any time in your history, what has been the chief advantage? (Select only one.)

How do new churches and new multisite campuses feel about replicating their experience elsewhere in the future? Our survey offered five options to the question: How are you moving toward multiplication? An impressive 74% responded positively, selecting “We have a future vision to plant churches and/or launch multisite campuses.” Then 60% chose the second option, “We are very intentional about multiplying the number of small group leaders,” and 54% chose the third option, “We give money (directly or indirectly) to support church planting here in this country.” A distant 21% and 20% selected the next two options, and only 6% selected “none of the above.” (We allowed people to select as many options as applied, so the numbers don’t add up to 100.)



Comparison of Start-Up Costs

	Percentile	Equipment	Facility	Advertising	Equipment	Facility	Advertising
Sites		One Site (Church Plant)			Multisite		
	25 th	\$ 4,625	\$ 44	\$ 500	\$ 25,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
	50 th (Median)	\$19,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 5,000	\$60,000	\$ 24,500	\$ 10,000
	75 th	\$50,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$117,500	\$175,000	\$ 20,000
Attendance*		Site Attendance < 500			Site Attendance 500+		
	25 th	\$ 5,000	\$ 120	\$ 505	\$ 32,500	\$ 5,000	\$ 2,000
	50 th (Median)	\$20,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$100,000	\$ 40,000	\$10,000
	75 th	\$55,500	\$22,000	\$ 10,000	\$225,000	\$600,000	\$20,000
Growth Rate		Annual Growth Rate < 5%			Annual Growth Rate 5%+		
	25 th	\$ 5,750	\$ 100	\$ 1,000	\$ 8,000	\$ 725	\$ 510
	50 th (Median)	\$ 27,500	\$ 15,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 32,500	\$ 6,000	\$ 5,000
	75 th	\$ 87,500	\$ 50,000	\$ 11,500	\$100,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 12,000
Pastor Age		Pastor Age 40 or Younger			Pastor Over Age 40		
	25 th	\$ 10,000	\$ 110	\$ 1,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 960	\$ 500
	50 th (Median)	\$ 40,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 6,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 5,000
	75 th	\$ 90,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 76,000	\$ 50,500	\$ 10,000

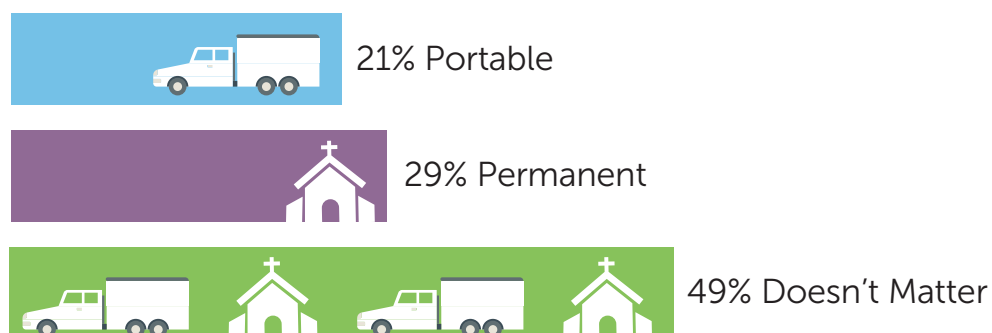
* If the church is multisite, attendance is for the one surveyed campus only.

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FIGURE 10

How People Meeting in Portable Facilities Feel About Inviting Others

In your observation of unchurched individuals, are they more likely to come to a place that is ...



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FIGURE 11

What People Like Best About Being Portable

30%	We had no choice: portability was the only option we could find
20%	Portability reduces our "facility" costs, so we can spend the money elsewhere
19%	Portability is more cost effective
11%	Portability can buy time for us to raise money for a more permanent home
8%	Using a neutral (portable) venue seems appealing to unchurched people
5%	Portability offers more flexibility
3%	Portability can buy time for us to get to know the area
2%	No advantages

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FIGURE 12

How Churches Ranked Their Move Toward Multiplication

74%	We have a future vision to plant churches and/or launch multisite campuses
60%	We are very intentional about multiplying the number of small group leaders
54%	We give money (directly or indirectly) to support church planting here in this country
21%	We have already trained one or more future campus pastors , such as through a residency (or advanced internship)
20%	We have already trained one or more future church planters , such as through a residency (or advanced internship)
6%	None of the above.

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FIGURE 13

Section 6: Counting the “Launch Wins”

To summarize this report, Figure 14 pulls together what I consider to be the top 8 launch wins—the rewards for launching a new church or multisite campus.

This report documents that newly planted churches and newly launched campuses evangelize very effectively, affirming the strategic importance of launching new works. Reality likewise screams that we need more disciple-making churches. Armed with this report, ask God how soon you can launch that next campus or church!

Top 8 Launch Wins for Launching a New Church or Multisite Campus

Benefit	Figure
1. Generating more invitations to people to consider faith in Jesus Christ	2
2. Developing the kind of place for attendees to invite family/friends to join them	3
3. Reaching more millennials	4
4. Doing more gospel sharing	4
5. Achieving more engagement through people who volunteer regularly	4
6. Experiencing more growth, likely at a rate faster than at any other period for the church or campus	4
7. Focusing more financial resources on ministry	4
8. Expressing a commitment toward planting or launching again	13

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FIGURE 14



Churches Launch Strong in Rented Venues

Scott Cougill, CEO of Portable Church Industries

"The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city." – Timothy Keller, *Why Plant Churches*.

But how can churches quickly and effectively launch new campuses and new churches when the costs, upkeep, and space limitations of permanent campuses sometimes get in the way? The solution: They rent alternative venues in the communities they want to reach and they partner with portability experts. Why and How? Here are four main reasons:

Lower Costs

It is hard to know what size shoe to buy when you don't know the size of your foot. Growing your church in a portable venue – almost like an incubation period – where the overhead is very low allows you to run the church on about 20% of the income, substantially less than a permanent building, so that other money can be leveraged toward your church's future. Down the road, maybe in 3-5 years – after a strong, steady congregation is developed – a permanent location can be built or acquired.



Speed, Flexibility, Growth, Reproducibility

Compared to building a new campus, rented venues allow you to enter (and possibly exit) a community faster – your time to open a new location will be in weeks or months rather than years. As the needs of your church grow, rented venues are more likely to be able to adjust or change to match your needs. In a period of three years, while I was Executive Pastor of Pacific Crossroads Church in Los Angeles, our adult attendance doubled and more families with children began attending. We outgrew two different schools we were renting and ended up in the largest high school in the area. We would have been in serious trouble if we had been in a permanent space.

Redeeming Public Space & Community Involvement

We live in an increasingly post-Christian culture. For many, “holy buildings” can be intimidating. Rather than ask people to “come to us,” portable churches get to “go to them” and use spaces that are used throughout the week by the people you are trying to reach. Another opportunity rented venues provide is outreach and partnerships with the landlord or community at large.



“

I can't emphasize how important it is to be known as the type of church that exists to help others. The principals and staff at our schools should know you by how much you're willing to serve the school and community with no strings attached. That type of love is permanent even if you're a portable church."

– Jordan Rice,
Renaissance Church, Harlem, New York City

Volunteer Engagement

At the heart of the portable church experience is a group of dedicated volunteers who set up and tear down all the equipment needed to turn the facility into a sacred space each week. As a result, portable churches engage more volunteers and a wider spectrum of people serve on their teams – often more men than in permanent campuses. And when churches treat this challenge as an incredible opportunity, more people volunteer, they are more engaged, they give more, they invite more guests, and they stay involved.

The most successful portable churches prepare for launch by designing their equipment and systems with the volunteer in mind, to maximize the volunteer experience while being efficient and creating an excellent, welcoming environment. Because this is a unique challenge, many churches engage experts in portability on the front end to help design volunteer-centric solutions that are optimized to the specific venue and culture of the church.



How Portable Church Industries May Assist

We are obviously biased about how awesome portable churches can be. After assisting over 2,500 church and campus launches in rented facilities across North America we know how important it is to continually be launching worshipping communities. To do that with excellence takes much prayer, planning, and expertise. If you would like to discuss strategy or are planning to launch a new campus in the next few months or even the next 1-2 years, please reach out to us via our website portablechurch.com.

Interested in the primary Principles of Portability?
Check out this **free white paper** on our website as well.

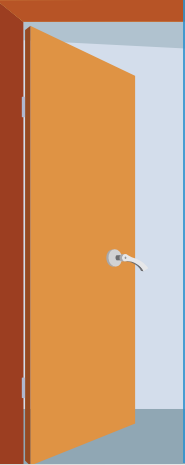
4 MYTHS

About Portable Churches

...AND WHY THEY AREN'T TRUE

Take a look at these common myths about churches that meet in non-permanent spaces - portable churches! You might be surprised at the advantages of launching a portable ministry model in your community.


MYTH #1 | CHURCHES WITHOUT BUILDINGS ATTRACT FEWER NEW PEOPLE



Truth: Going to where the people are lowers the bar for new visitors to check you out—especially young families and millennials.

According to Lifeway research, new churches that meet in public places experience 42-49% increased attendance than others.


MYTH #2 | YOUR OWN BUILDING MEANS MORE FREEDOM



Truth: The cost and time to construct and maintain a building for a new church or campus takes away funds for building teams, ministry and community.

Churches enjoy more freedom and flexibility with the portable church model than in a permanent building.

MYTH #3 | IT IS DIFFICULT TO LAUNCH IN A FACILITY THAT IS NOT DESIGNED TO BE A CHURCH



Truth: With expert assistance and a custom system, most churches successfully launch and thrive in all kinds of normal and even bizarre portable venues!

The advantages of the portable church model clearly outweigh any extra effort needed to transform a rented venue – such as a bowling alley or zoo!

MYTH #4 | SETTING UP AND TEARING DOWN IS HARD WORK



Truth: Not with a volunteer-centric, custom Portable Church® System!

Systems designed by experts make setup and teardown efficient for volunteers. Being on a team can be fun, build relationships, and engage more men.

Credits

Feedback

Readers are warmly invited to suggest questions for us to consider using in future surveys or reports, emailing them to research@leadnet.org.

About Leadership Network

Leadership Network's role is to foster innovation movements that activate the church to greater impact for the glory of God's name. The nonprofit founded in 1984 now serves over 200,000 leaders all over the world.

See leadnet.org.

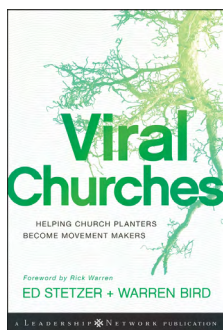
About the Author



Warren Bird, Ph.D. serves as Director of Research and Intellectual Capital Development at Leadership Network. An ordained minister with background as both a pastor and seminary professor, he is an award-winning author or co-author of 29 books for ministry leaders including *How to Break Growth Barriers: Revise Your Role, Release your People and Capture Overlooked Opportunities for your Church*, by Carl George and Warren Bird, revised and updated, and *Multisite Church Roadtrip: Exploring the New Normal* with Geoff Surratt and Greg Ligon. Other recent titles are *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work* with Jim Tomberlin, and *Wisdom from Lyle E. Schaller*. He is widely recognized as one of the nation's leading researchers of megachurches, multisite churches, large [church compensation](#) and high-visibility [pastoral succession](#). Follow him on Twitter [@warrenbird](https://twitter.com/@warrenbird).

Additional Resources from Leadership Network

Readers are warmly invited to subscribe to *Leadership Network Advance*, the best in innovative church strategies, trends, resources, and innovative ideas for larger, growing churches, including news of upcoming Leadership Network events. Free subscription available at leadnet.org/advance.



For more on multisite, see Warren Bird's online report "[Leadership Network/Generis Multisite Church Scorecard](#)," a free download. For material on new churches see the Leadership Network sponsored book by Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers*.

For resources specifically related to large church salary and economics, go to leadnet.org/salary. See also large-church materials at leadnet.org/megachurch, leadnet.org/Canada and leadnet.org/world.



Credits

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Notes

¹ Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird. *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (Leadership Network Series). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

² Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird. *Multisite Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

³ Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird. *A Multisite Church Roadtrip: Exploring the New Normal*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

⁴ After design and testing, the survey was formally launched 2/1/17 and closed on 3/20/17, drawing 1,621 valid completes. It was publicized by direct email with up to 3 reminders to people who had not yet participated. It was also widely announced through general blogs and Twitter, both from Leadership Network and from many partners including Portable Church Industries and various denominations and church-planting associations.

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