

AMERICA'S TOP 25 MULTIPLYING CHURCHES

RANK	CHURCH	LOCATION	PASTOR	WEB SITE	FOUNDING YEAR	AVERAGE WEEKLY ATTENDANCE	BUDGET % GIVEN TO CHURCH PLANTS	TOTAL CHURCH PLANTS
1	Redeemer Presbyterian	New York	Tim Keller	redeemer.com	1989	4,800	15%	100
2	Mars Hill Church	Seattle	Mark Driscoll	marshallchurch.org	1996	6,000	15%	100
3	NorthWood Church	Keller, Texas	Bob Roberts	northwoodchurch.org	1985	2,000	6%	100
4	Perimeter Church	Duluth, Ga.	Randy Pope	perimeter.org	1977	6,000	n/a	22
5	Spanish River Church	Boca Raton, Fla.	David Nicholas	spanishriver.com	1967	1,700	12%	75
6	East 91 st Street Christian Church	Indianapolis	Derek Duncan	east91st.org	1924	4,250	10%	36
7	Community Christian Church	Naperville, Ill.	Dave Ferguson	communitychristian.org	1989	4,800	10%	16
8	Fellowship Bible Church	Little Rock, Ark.	Bill Wellons	fbcl.org	1977	5,500	10%	35
9	Kensington Community Church	Troy, Mich.	Steve Andrews	kensingtonchurch.org	1990	8,500	15%	20
10	Church at the Springs	Ocala, Fla.	Ron Sylvia	thesprings.org	1994	3,000	10%	10
11	Summit Church	Bonita Springs, Fla.	Orlando Cabrera	summitlife.com	2003	1,000	2%	7
12	Vineyard Christian Church of Evanston	Evanston, Ill.	Steve Nicholson	evanstonvineyard.org	1976	800	6%	12
13	New Life Christian Church	Centreville, Va.	Brett Andrews	newlife4me.com	1993	1,300	10%	5
14	Owensboro Christian Church	Owensboro, Ky.	Myke Templeton	owensborochristian.org	1950	2,570	18%	13
15	Elmbrook Church	Brookfield, Wis.	Mel Lawrenz	elmbrook.org	1957	7,000	n/a	11
16	West Ridge Church	Dallas, Ga.	Brian Bloye	westridge.com	1997	3,500	10%	7
17	Journey Christian Church	Apopka, Fla.	Dan Donaldson	journeychristian.com	1969	1,800	8%	2
18	Grace Fellowship	Brooklyn Park, Minn.	Dave Reno	grace2you.org	1987	1,200	4%	17
19	Columbia Crossroads Church	Columbia, S.C.	Jeff Shipman	columbiacrossroads.org	2000	450	7%	17
20	Atlanta Vineyard Church	Norcross, Ga.	Johnny Crist	atlantavineyard.com	1982	700	2%	15
21	CrossPointe Church	Orlando, Fla.	Chan Kilgore	xpointe.com	2002	400	13%	5
22	Set Free	Yucaipa, Calif.	Willie Dalgity	setfreerocks.com	1992	350	30%	70
23	First Southwest Baptist Church	Alief, Texas	Rickie Bradshaw	baptistsites.net/wwwstreettalk.org	1974	120	30%	68
24	French Speaking Baptist Church	Brooklyn, N.Y.	Jean-Baptiste Thomas	fsbconline.org	1972	1,000	n/a	46
25	Vineyard Church of Columbus	Westerville, Ohio	Rich Nathan	vineyardcolumbus.org	1978	6,200	2%	22

FAST FACTS

Three churches on the list—Redeemer Presbyterian Church (No. 1), Mars Hill Church Seattle (No. 2), and CrossPointe Church in Orlando, Fla. (No. 21)—were sponsored by Presbyterian congregation Spanish River Church in Boca Raton, Fla. (No. 5). Only Redeemer is of the same denomination as Spanish River.

In only four years, Summit Church in Bonita Springs, Fla. (No. 11), has grown to 1,000 members and has helped start seven new churches.

300% increase is what West Ridge Church in Dallas, Ga. (No. 16), experienced over the past five years, despite the fact that they have planted seven churches during the same time period.

Some 1,500 new churches annually access free online resources provided by New Life Christian Church in Centreville, Va. (No. 13). The church coordinates the National New Church Conference each year.

Two pastors, 100–200 members and approximately \$100,000 are what Elmbrook Church in Brookfield, Wis. (No. 15), sends out from its 7,000-member congregation as a church plant core team.

75% of 70 plants started by Set Free Church in Yucaipa, Calif. (No. 22), have started another church.

175 people have moved to the most recent two plants of Columbia Crossroads Church in Columbia, S.C. (No. 19). Since the church began in 2000 with a weekly attendance of 450, it has planted 17 churches.

“Reaching Minnesota for Christ” is the focus of Grace Fellowship in Brooklyn Park, Minn. (No. 18), which has planted 13 churches in its own state.

11 churches in eight years is the number of congregations launched by The Florida Church Planters Network, founded by Journey Christian Church in Apopka, Fla. (No. 17).

A networking and training event is held monthly by CrossPointe Church in Orlando, Fla. (No. 21). About 50 church planters in the Central Florida area attend each event.

MAKING THE LIST

More than 300 churches responded to a recent survey sponsored by Leadership Network (leadnet.org). A “Top 25” list was compiled by ranking the top 40 respondents using self-reported criteria, such as:

- the total number of church plants over the life of the church
 - the average number of churches planted each year
 - dollars and percentage of budget dedicated to church planting
 - the number of daughter churches that have planted a new church
- We also factored in a church’s influence on the entire church-planting community. This list is ultimately a celebration and an evaluation of what all these churches are doing to reach people with the Gospel. If you have suggestions for the list, send them to research@newchurches.com.

Note: Several churches on this list partner closely with church-planting networks and report most of their plants through the network, not the church. Also, some churches did not have a set budget percentage for church planting; this is represented by n/a.

Church Squared: America's top 25 multiplying churches

CHURCHES ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE FINDING NEW WAYS TO OBEY ACTS 1:8—TO MULTIPLY TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. IS THERE AN EQUATION THAT WORKS FOR YOUR CHURCH?

by Ed Stetzer

<http://outreachmagazine.com/library/features/ja07ftrchurchsquared.asp>

Multiplication blindsided Kristen, my 8-year-old daughter. Addition had been easy; she could do $4 + 4$ on her fingers. Unfortunately, the multiplication table of four required memorization and thinking—fingers were not involved. To help, my wife turned to the experts—Schoolhouse Rock!—ABC's collection of animated songs covering everything from math to government. Kristen still had to work at multiplying, but the cartoons and catchy songs helped her understand what she was learning and made the experience more enjoyable. After all, there was no moving ahead to 4th grade until this skill was mastered. Multiplication was hard, but it was essential.

Similarly, churches are finding that the inability to multiply limits both Kingdom impact and outreach potential. Church multiplication—or church planting—requires more work and more risk than simply adding to an existing church, but it often affords more opportunities for people to come to Christ.

The churches in this article are multipliers. They have taken risks, given up control, sought God's direction and done the heavy lifting to work it through. Addition was too limiting for what God had put on their hearts. Their zeal to reach the lost and to impact their communities was beyond what they could've accomplished with one pastor, one building or even one church. They had to multiply.

In fact, our research reveals that while megachurches and multi-site models continue to grab the media spotlight, another movement has been gaining momentum under the radar: Churches throughout the country are indeed becoming multiplication centers for more churches.

A glance at [America's Top 25 Multiplying Churches list](#) reveals teams of pastors, leaders and church members spurred by vision and determination to follow the mission Christ mandates in Acts 1:8—to multiply beyond Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. And while they are but 25 of the many churches, denominations and organizations also committed to church planting, the scope and experience of these congregations provide valuable lessons for the rest of us.

As Dave Ferguson, lead pastor for Community Christian Church (communitychristian.org; No. 7 on the list), explains, the motivation for reproducing leaders, artists, sites, churches and networks comes from the Acts 1:8 mission.

“For us to accomplish Christ’s directive, we have come to value the edge over the center, the new over the established, and the lost more than the found,” says Ferguson.

Today’s multiplying churches are adopting new ways of planting, as well as new principles. As they multiply themselves—taking care to instill a DNA of reproduction in each new church they plant—these churches are increasing their Kingdom impact.

From Expansion Growth to Exponential Growth

Among churches today, the conversation—a long overdue one—is moving from church growth to Kingdom growth. These churches, like NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas (northwoodchurch.org; No. 3), are discovering that multiplication is better than addition, and exponential growth is more effective than self-expansion.

Under the leadership of Founding and Senior Pastor Bob Roberts, the 22-year-old Texas church has planted 100 congregations in the past 15 years—creating a legacy of church multiplication, rather than church magnification. NorthWood is producing churches that will produce more churches. It has even planted nine churches within a 10-mile radius of its own campus.

Transformational Leadership

At the heart of its reproducing strategy is the NorthWood Church Multiplication Center, a nine-month intensive internship in which Roberts, author of *The Multiplying Church* (Zondervan, releasing early 2008), annually trains more than a dozen potential planters and their spouses. To ensure that it’s reaching diverse communities worldwide, the church seeks to fill half of the internships with non-Anglo planters who plan to multiply inside or outside North America. NorthWood also provides financial support to internship graduates.

The new plants aren’t limited to a specific model and include various church types—multi-site, house church, traditional. Instead of beginning with a model of church, the church’s training focuses on the needs of the community.

“We want to embed the ethos, or DNA, that we believe is essential for the planting of churches that will transform people and the world,” Roberts explains. Key to achieving this goal is the teaching of global engagement through a required “other side of the world” trip that Roberts personally leads to places like Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Egypt and Afghanistan.

Above all, however, NorthWood emphasizes the vital elements necessary to begin faithful churches.

“All churches have different areas of focus,” Roberts says. “We highlight the transformation of individuals and local communities.”

Growth as a By-Product

While exponential growth doesn't necessarily correlate to individual church growth, our research found that intentional church planting doesn't automatically prevent a church from experiencing sizable growth. Kensington Community Church in Troy, Mich. (kensingtonchurch.org; No. 9), has planted 20 churches since it began in 1990. The church gives 15% of its annual budget to church planting and reports an average weekly attendance of 8,500 people (an 11% increase over the past year and a 52% growth increase over the past five years). And French Speaking Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y. (fsbconline.org; No. 24), which has daughtered 46 churches since its beginnings in 1972, has continued to see its congregation grow.

Says Pastor Jean-Baptiste Thomas: “We could never have daughtered this many churches if everyone stayed here to worship. The more I encourage our people to go out, the more our congregation grows.”

From Denominational Plans to Local Church Passion

When I planted my first church in 1988, our denomination had a plan that involved eight planters, one supervisor, Buffalo, N.Y., and a lot of energy. Ultimately, this plan didn't work too well; only one of those churches is left today.

Both churches and denominations are discovering that it is almost always better for the health of new church plants to come from involved mother churches, rather than from denominational leadership. Although many of the churches on our list are unapologetically denominational, they consider church planting a local church function and make it a priority.

One of the best examples of this new trend comes from Spanish River Church in Boca Raton, Fla. (spanishriver.com; No. 5), a Presbyterian church which helped provide the seed money to start Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City (redeemer.com; No. 1) and co-founded the non-denominational Acts 29 Network, which Mars Hill Seattle (marshillchurch.org; No. 2) uses as its primary church-planting ministry.

Spanish River Pastor and Planter David Nicholas stands amazed and motivated by what God has done through others who invested in him 40 years ago.

“I am a very pragmatic, results-oriented person, and I love the bang for the buck we get from church planting,” Nicholas says, adding that 19 years ago Spanish River invested \$100,000 in one of its church plants, and that church is now annually investing more than \$1 million in church planting.

“That's a great return on investment!” he asserts. “To keep the ball rolling, we now mandate through our Church Planter's Covenant that the church planter will build a church that has church planting in its DNA.”

In the same way, Perimeter Church, in Duluth, Ga. (perimeter.org; No. 4), which meets 10 miles from its denominational headquarters, keeps church planting part of its local passion. The church of 6,000 weekly attendees could rely on the leadership of the Presbyterian Church in America Mission to North America (MNA; pca-mna.org) to do its church planting, but instead the church partners with MNA to plant more and better churches through a shared system of assessment and training.

Comprehensive Support

With an annual budget of more than \$600,000, and six staff members, Perimeter's official Church Planter in Residence Plan provides a two-year course to develop each resident. The church staff also coaches and mentors residential planters, and encourages current members to join the emerging church plants. Additionally, the church allows residents to raise funds of up to \$100,000 within its church body for their church plants.

The mother church also participates financially on levels up to \$30,000 per year. "For three years, we will be heavily invested financially to the tune of at least \$20,000 a year per church plant, as well as providing administrative insight," explains Perimeter's Church Planting Director Bob Cargo. For the first two to three years, the church also handles human resources, payroll, accounting, elder training, leadership coaching and mentoring for the church plant.

The scope of this church's impact on church planting isn't limited to its modest self-report of 22 churches planted. Cargo points out that in church-planting terms, the words "plant" or "participate" can be ambiguous.

"If we use those terms as some churches do in a very, very broad sense, such as providing money, people, mentoring, etc., our numbers would be in the thousands, including both U.S. and international church planting," he says.

From Sponsorship to Sacrifice

To make the Top 25 Multiplying Churches list, churches had to have committed not only financial resources to the church plant but also the time and energy of both staff and members in order to see long-term success. They did not just send money—they gave themselves away.

Since brothers Dave and Jon Ferguson and three friends planted Community Christian Church (CCC) in 1989, the Naperville, Ill., church has demonstrated missional commitment beyond its walls in numerous ways as it's grown to more than 4,800 Christ-followers meeting weekly in eight locations throughout the Chicagoland area. As a leader in the emerging multi-site church model, CCC is one of very few churches that doesn't see church planting and multi-site as either/or, but both/and. The terms "multi-site" and "multi-staff" define CCC's key church-planting strategy. In addition to its current eight Chicago-area sites, the church has planted eight churches nationally and is steadily reaching its goal of planting 10 more new congregations in 2007. CCC is not slowing down as it gives itself away.

Although CCC dedicates 10% of its \$4 million annual budget to church planting, the church doesn't limit its church-planting support to finances. Its NewThing Network (newthing.org), begun in 2002, hosts events promoting church planting and multi-site development. NewThing also offers coaching, creative content development and products, collaboration on church planting and accountability for reproducing.

"Church planting helps us fulfill God's vision for us to be a reproducing church," Jon Ferguson explains. "Our mission is to be a catalyst for a movement of reproducing churches relentlessly dedicated to helping people find their way back to God."

Equipping and Releasing

In the same way, Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, Ark. (fbclr.org; No. 8), has given itself away through its own network. Planted in 1977 by a small group of bi-vocational pastors, Fellowship has directly planted 35 U.S. churches to date, committing approximately 10% of its annual budget to church planting and consulting efforts, and mentoring and training emerging church planters.

Two years after its launch, the church began Fellowship Associates, a one-year church planting residency program offered to seminary graduate leaders interested in planting churches of influence. Residents participate in a 10-month Leadership Residency Program that equips planters with proven ministry tools and strategies, a network of relationships, greater personal awareness, team ministry skills and insights from veterans who have gone before them.

The network pays residents a salary, so that church planters don't have to find a second job. "They are free to focus exclusively upon developing as a leader and on planting their church," explains Fellowship Bible Pastor and Program Director, Bill Wellons.

As a result of the program, 25 churches and six "granddaughter" churches have been planted throughout the United States, as well as in Spain and Poland.

Another church that stood out in our study is East 91st Street in Indianapolis (east91st.org; No. 6), not just for the 36 churches it has planted, but for the influence it has wielded as a partner and example among other U.S. Christian (the denomination) churches. East 91st Street was mentioned repeatedly by Christian churches responding to our questions about which churches they were partnering with to plant new churches and which ones had been the most influential in their decision to plant.

From Generic Plants to Intentional DNA

Common to the multiplying churches on the list is the shift from planting churches with no specific direction or calling to those with a passion for reaching a specific community or instilling a specific DNA in their attendees.

Nestled in the vast equestrian community of Ocala, Fla., Church at the Springs (thesprings.org; No. 10), led by Founding Pastor and Director of Next Churches Inc., Ron Sylvia, has a penchant for multiplying itself. Church planting stands as a primary goal for

the 13-year-old church, as stated on its Web site: “The heart of The Springs is to carry out the Great Commission by planting new churches across the world.”

As a result, The Springs staff demonstrates a strong commitment to church planting, sharing their experience and insight during national church-planting coaching intensives provided through The Springs. The church also has sent teams of up to 100 members to start church plants in and around Florida and hosts smaller regional conferences throughout the United States, providing materials, administrative support and resources to lead pastors wanting to plant churches.

“We don’t teach them how to plant just any church,” Sylvia says. “We teach them how to plant a church with a specific DNA.” For Sylvia and Church at the Springs, the right DNA is purpose-driven—and that is evident in their training, resources and church plants.

The Springs has directly planted 10 churches and at some level, is involved in more than 100 church plants per year. And it has a goal of starting 1,000 new churches in the next five years, with each one breaking the 200-attendee barrier, equating to about 200,000 people potentially coming to Christ.

First Southwest Baptist Church in Alief, Texas (baptistsites.net/wwwstreettalkorg; No. 23), also plants with a specific DNA. It’s one of several smaller, non-Anglo churches on our list, but it has a large vision led by Senior Pastor Rickie Bradshaw, who also serves as executive director of Street Talk, a national hip-hop church-planting network.

At the heart of the network is a specific calling to creatively and intentionally reach out and plant missional churches in an often ignored and avoided urban mission context. Over the past 15 years, First Southwest has started 68 churches, including African, Hispanic, black, Latino and Asian churches. Its emphasis now is on the younger generation and hip-hop culture reflected in its worship and outreach.

Bradshaw, who felt increasingly convicted to be a missionary in his community, initially asked his church members to gather and pray with him every day for 18 months to seek what God would have them do in their community. Not surprisingly, the “every day” part was a bit much for several members who went on to find other church homes. As the remaining members gathered with Bradshaw to pray and seek God’s direction for reaching their community, they became increasingly burdened for the hip-hop culture surrounding them. God then began bringing artistic people with a love for God and hip-hop music into their church, Bradshaw says.

Becoming a Multiplying Church

The Top 25 Multiplying Churches in America bear witness to what can happen when Kingdom-minded leaders stop focusing so much on what is hard or risky, and move beyond the comfort of addition within their own building. With multiplication, there is risk, but also amazing potential.

Yes, multiplication is hard to learn and even harder to live. But it is essential, and it is worth it.

Ed Stetzer is director of LifeWay Research and missiologist in residence (lifewayresearch.com). This article was based in part on a church planting study conducted for Leadership Network (leadnet.org). Stetzer is the author of *Planting Missional Churches* (Broadman & Holman) and recently relaunched the church planting Web site newchurches.com.

What Multiplying Churches Value

Serious about multiplying? Learn about the values common among church planters and multiplying churches.

Reaching unchurched people. They are driven by a belief that God has sent them as a missionary to their community, state and world.

Staff and membership involvement. Both staff and members invest in new planters. They help establish long-term strategies and goals; the whole church sees multiplication as central to its vision and purpose.

Kingdom-growth focus. The dream of becoming a larger church is less important than the dream to multiply Gospel influence to a larger and more diverse audience.

Ongoing relationships. As daughter churches become more independent (which is part of the vision), multiplying churches maintain fellowship with the churches they have started. Many of these multiplying churches go from being a mother church to being a sister church.

Selfless giving. Sacrifice and money does not intimidate multiplying churches. Staff, salaries and other valuable resources are freely given in order for new churches to more effectively impact their communities.

No stalling. Lack of size or staff, or poor timing are not acceptable excuses for delay. Churches with 500 or fewer attendees planted one to three churches actively involving their staff. The same number of churches with 1,000 or more attendees responded to our survey that they are not yet ready to start planting churches, although they considered themselves close.

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