

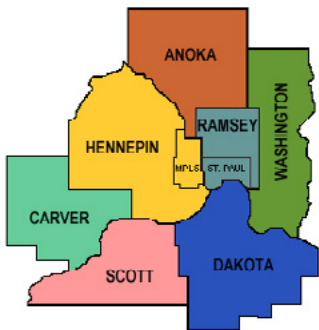


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BRIEFING

2017 Update: Twin Cities Multisite Churches



This briefing is for pastors and church boards, a report on multisite churches in the Twin Cities

October 2017

Twin Cities Multisite Churches

TAKEAWAY 1 - National picture: Multisites are booming

Prior to 1990, the **multisite** church concept was little known. The usual way of starting a new church was for a **mother** church to plant a **daughter** church. The mother would give life to the daughter by supplying an initial leadership team and enough financing and other assistance to enable it to soon become a self-sufficient independent church.

Since then, technology and economics have helped shape a new kind church, the **multisite church**, which does not become an independent church but stays under the ownership, control and consolidated budget of the **parent** church – one church meeting in multiple local locations. Typically, the **Senior Pastor** is over all sites, with a **Campus Pastor** for each individual site.

Nationally, about half of all multisite churches use only in-person teaching and preaching methods, and half use a combination of in-person and video. It is increasingly common for the Senior Pastor to give the Sunday sermon to all sites via video feed.

For decades among Protestants, **megachurch** was the trend. Now its **multisites**.

In the 1980s, there were less than 100 multisite churches in the entire country. Now there are about 10,000 (3% of all churches), and the total is growing rapidly as shown on CHART 8.3.

Two-thirds of multisite churches are part of a denomination; one-third are independent.

One-third of multisite churches are the result of a merger.

Data on **national** multisites come from surveys in which small samples are projected to approximate the whole, not nearly as precise and timely as the annual census used to collect **local** data in the Twin Cities. National statistics reported here are primarily from a survey cited in CHART 8.7, corroborated by many online articles. Surveys tend to overstate successes and understate failures.

TAKEAWAY 2 - Local picture: Multisites are slowing

Because of the huge database and fact-gathering system developed by **Dr. Rev. John A. Mayer** and **City Vision**, the Twin Cities MN is recognized nationally and internationally in church research circles for having the best data on local churches of any metro in the world.

In contrast to **national** survey data, the **local** statistics reported here are from **City Vision's** 2016 census of all Twin Cities churches, summarized in TABLE 8.2. Census data is more accurate than survey data.

The Twin Cities is ahead of the national curve with respect to multisite churches. In the 1980s, when the concept was practically unknown, **Grace Church** had three multisites (Edina, Roseville and Richfield) and **North Heights Lutheran** had two multisites (Roseville and Arden Hills).

Today there are 63 multisite organizations in the Twin Cities with a total of 153 multisite churches. Average size of a parent multisite is 1,214; average size of a subsite is 424. Five percent of Protestant churches in the Twin Cities are multisite, compared to 3% nationally.

However, growth in number of new multisites has slowed in the Twin Cities in the past few years. As shown in TABLE 8.3, there was a **net gain** of only two new parents and one new subsite in 2016.

TAKEAWAY 3 - Positive interpretation of the data (it's working well)

As with most statistics, there can be different interpretations. Here is a **positive interpretation** of the local data:

- + In 2016, overall attendance in multisite churches in the Twin Cities increased 4%, while attendance in non-multisite church declined 5% – a **huge 9% per year differential!**
- + The number of **multisite churches in the Twin Cities keeps growing** – 2% growth last year among Protestant churches and 14% among Catholic churches.
- + Multisite attendance has grown so large in the Twin Cities that now **one out of every five Protestants attends a multisite church.**

TAKEAWAY 4 - Negative interpretation of the data (it's not working well)

Here is a **negative interpretation** of the local data:

- In 2016, there was a net gain of 132 new churches in the Twin Cities, but **only three were multisite.**
- In 2016, among multisite churches, attendance in subsites increased 23%, but **attendance in parents – the bigger churches – declined 4%.**
- Overall, the multisite concept has been a **disappointment for most Twin Cities churches** that have tried it. Among the 54 parent churches that have been operating multisites for five years or more, 26 gained overall attendance during the period, but 38 lost overall attendance.

TAKEAWAY 5 - Six denominations excel at multisites

Forty-three different Protestant denominations and independents operate multisite churches in the Twin Cities, but, as detailed in CHART 8.4, all net growth over the past five years can be attributed to six denominations: **Assemblies of God, Converge, Catholic, Lutheran Congregations in Missions for Christ, Church of God and Association of Related Churches.** The other 37 denominations and independents have had minimal or no success in increasing attendance through the multisite strategy.

TAKEAWAY 6 - Weak but common argument for multisites

A weak argument for establishing multisites, frequently heard, somewhat arrogant, is that *“people in other parts of the Twin Cities need to hear the gospel, too.”* Fact is that there are 3,476 churches in the Twin Cities. The database shows that there are good churches of every theological stripe in every part of the metro, and commuting is fast and easy on Sunday mornings.

Stronger arguments are: *‘We’re nearing capacity, and we can’t expand where we are’* or *‘We’re adding a church in another language or culture.’*

The data suggests that churches that still have hundreds of empty seats should study and evaluate very carefully before starting a multisite. It may be better to use the time, money and energy to fill empty seats in an existing facility than to start a multisite. See analysis in [Briefing 3](#).

TAKEAWAY 7 - List of Twin Cities multisite churches attached

There are now **153 multisite churches** in the Twin Cities, as summarized in CHART 8.1 and identified in detail in the attached list titled *Multisite Churches by Parent*.

This list, compiled from the **City Vision** master database of Twin Cities churches, broken down by *parent* church, identifies each subsite, with start date and attendance data. This list is also online at www.churchscouts.org/multisiteparent.pdf.

Because multisite churches are usually larger than single-site churches, 37% of the 100 largest Protestant churches in the Twin Cities are now multisites, detailed in [Briefing 7](#).

TAKEAWAY 8 - Size and/or multisite not a big advantage

People in the Twin Cities have a huge selection of churches of all types and sizes within easy Sunday morning drive time. If large churches had a growth advantage, one would expect that there would be more and more larger churches and fewer and fewer small churches. However, CHART 7.4 shows that there is actually a trend away from large churches toward small churches.

Most Catholic churches are large by design, but among Protestants, the statistics reported in [Briefing 7](#) show:

- One-third of Protestants choose church size under 200
- One-third of Protestants choose church size 200-700
- One-third of Protestants choose church size 700+

[Briefing 7](#) shows that, overall, large churches do not have a growth rate advantage over small churches.

This [Briefing 8](#) shows that, overall, multisite churches do not have a growth rate advantage over single-site churches.

This is encouraging information for small and medium-size churches that thought they were at a big disadvantage for church growth relative to large churches and multisite churches. Not so.

The statistics show that it is essentially a level playing field for churches of all sizes and organizational structures.

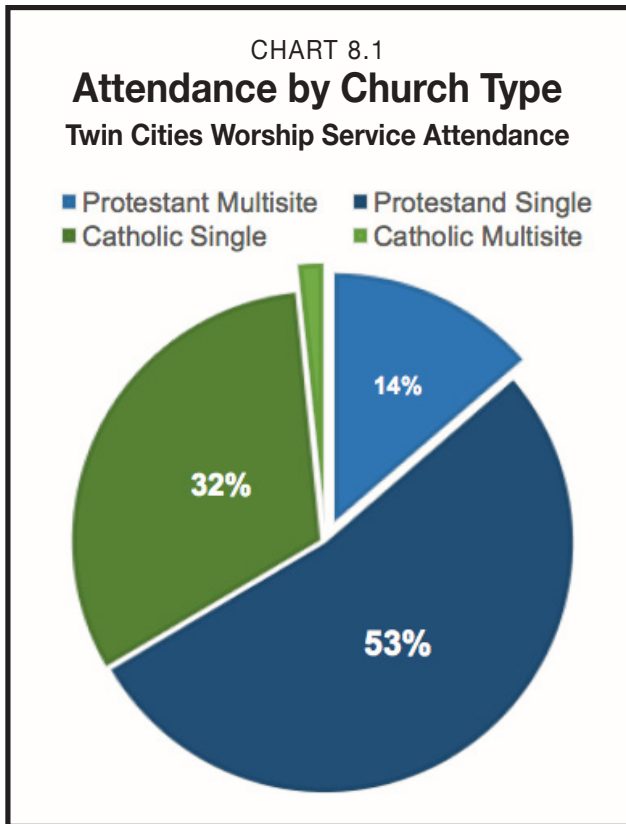
Digging deeper, CHART 7.7 shows that churches grow fast in their first five years, then growth rate begins steady decline to twentieth year, then levels off.

It appears that the **key factor** for church growth rate in the Twin Cities is not **size** or **multisite**, but rather the **early-years dynamic** that's inherent in new churches: entrepreneurial spirit, less bureaucracy, faster decisions, more involvement of lay people, more accepting and relational, and more excitement.

This is confirmed by CHART 8.2 which shows that in 2016 parent multisite (old, large) attendance was **-4%** while subsite (young, small) attendance was **+23%**.

Discussion of this **early-years dynamic** is beyond the scope of this Briefing but will be discussed in **Briefing 9**. This is a dynamic that older churches should try to regain.

This **Briefing 8** is an update of **Briefing 3**, which is still a valuable resource for anyone wanting to study Twin Cities multisites in depth.



153 Multisite churches in Twin Cities Metro

Approximately 755,000 people attend worship services in a typical week in the Twin Cities.

15% attend a multisite church.

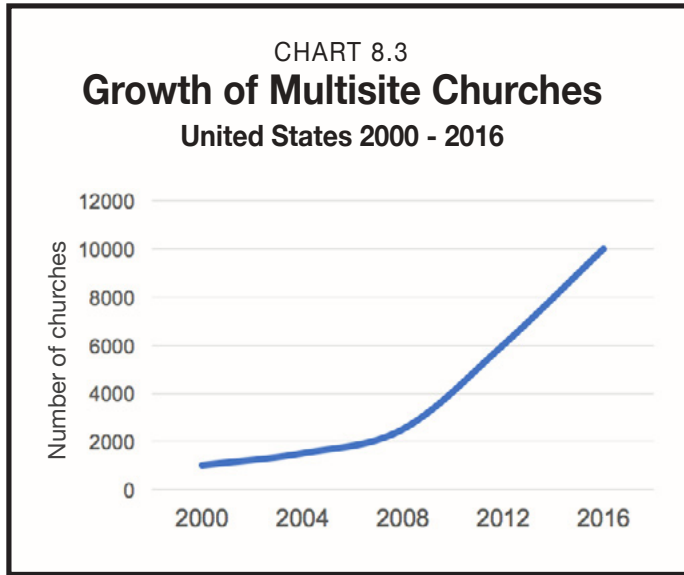
Data on all known 3,476 Twin Cities churches was collected by [City Vision](#) and Rev. Dr. John A. Mayer in 2016. This table summarizes data relevant to multisite churches.

Overall, multisite churches grew faster than non-multisite churches.

Attendance at parent multisites fell during the year, but subsites grew.

TABLE 8.2
Multisite Data Table / Year 2016
 From City Vision master database of Twin Cities Churches

	2015	2016	Change
Multisite Parents	61	63	3%
Multisite Subsites	89	90	1%
Total Multisite Churches	150	153	2%
Parents Attendance	79,669	76,470	-4%
Subsites Attendance	31,078	38,196	23%
Total Multisite Attendance	110,747	114,666	4%
Average Attendance Parent	1,306	1,214	-7%
Average Attendance Subsite	349	424	22%
Average Attendance Multisites	738	764	4%
Total Twin Cities Churches	3,344	3,476	4%
Total Attendance (all churches)	762,000	755,412	-1%
Average Attendance (all churches)	228	217	-5%
Roman Catholic Parents	7	8	14%
Roman Catholic Subsites	8	10	25%



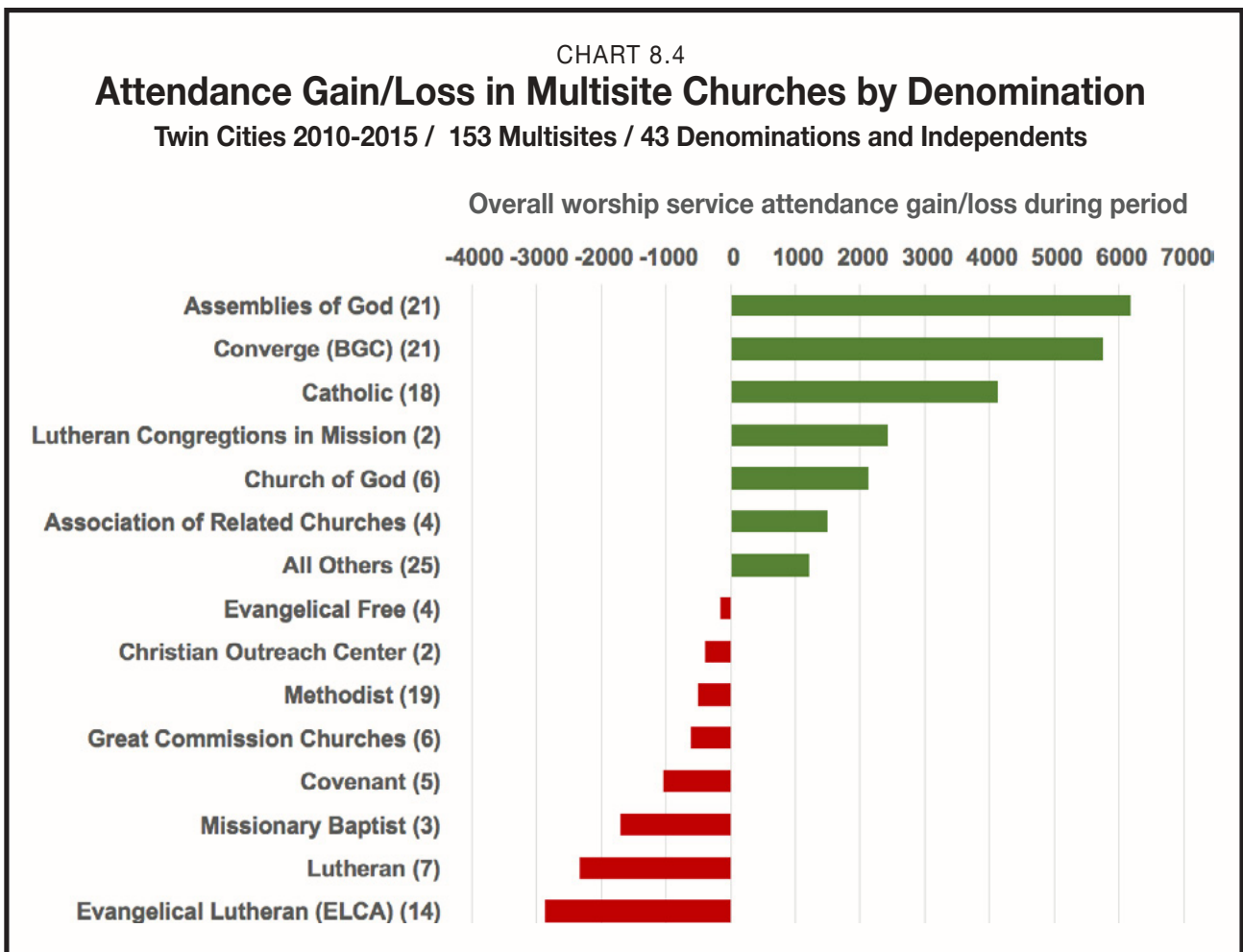
Growth rate for multisite churches in the United States in recent years has been dramatic.

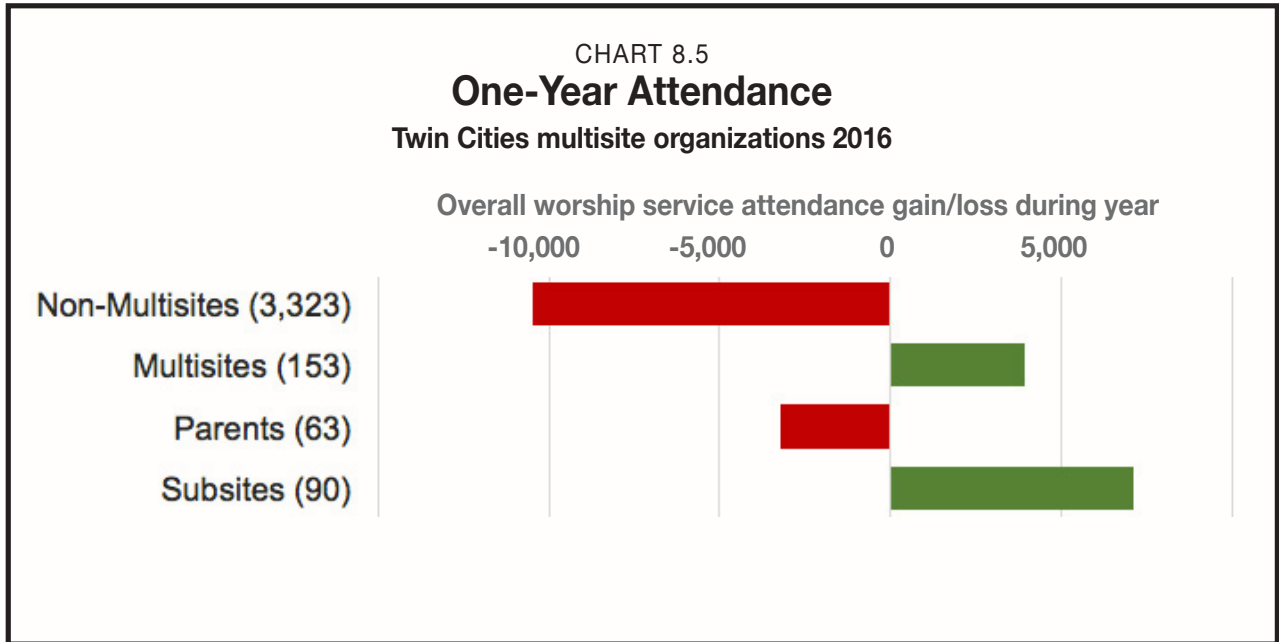
However, the 10,000 multisite churches is only 3% of total U.S. churches.

In Twin Cities, multisites accounted for 5% of total churches in 2016.

Six denominations shown below (green) have been particularly successful in increasing attendance with multisites in the Twin Cities.

For the other 37 other denominations and independents (red), results have been modest to disappointing.

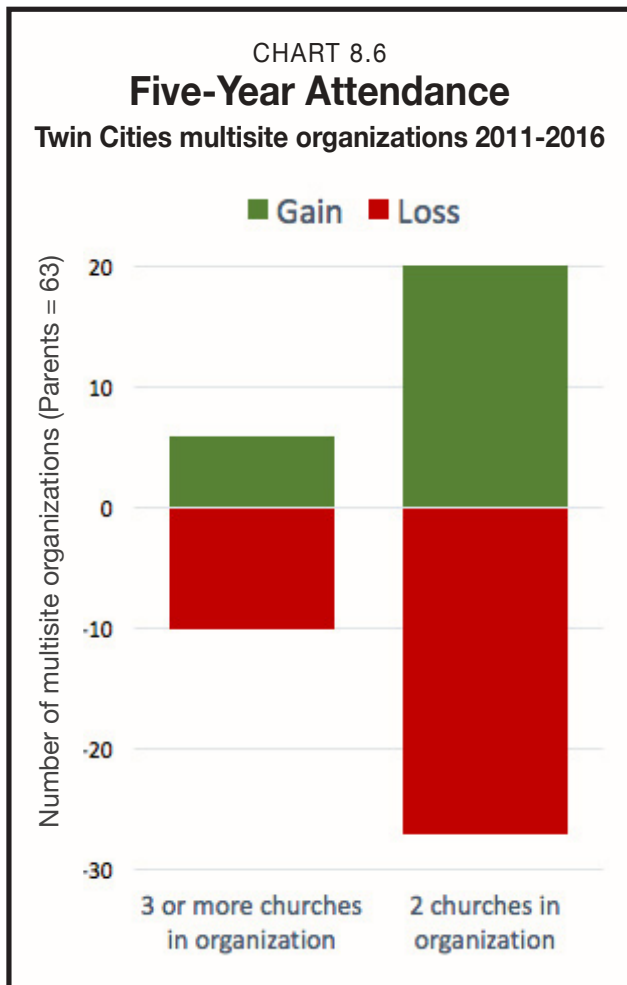




Overall in 2016, the 153 Twin Cities multisite churches increased average worship attendance by 3,900 per week, compared to 11,000 lost by non-multisite churches.

The subsites gained 7,000 per week, but the parent sites lost 3,000, so net gain was 3,900.

Comparison of the one-year picture (here) with the five-year picture (CHART xxx) shows that when a multisite succeeds in increasing attendance, the number are often big, but most don't succeed.

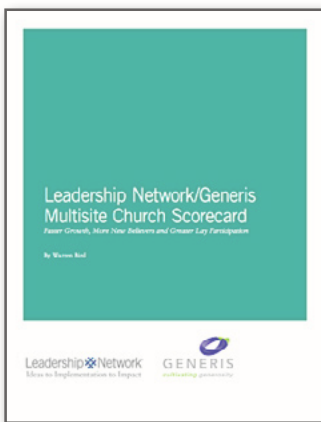
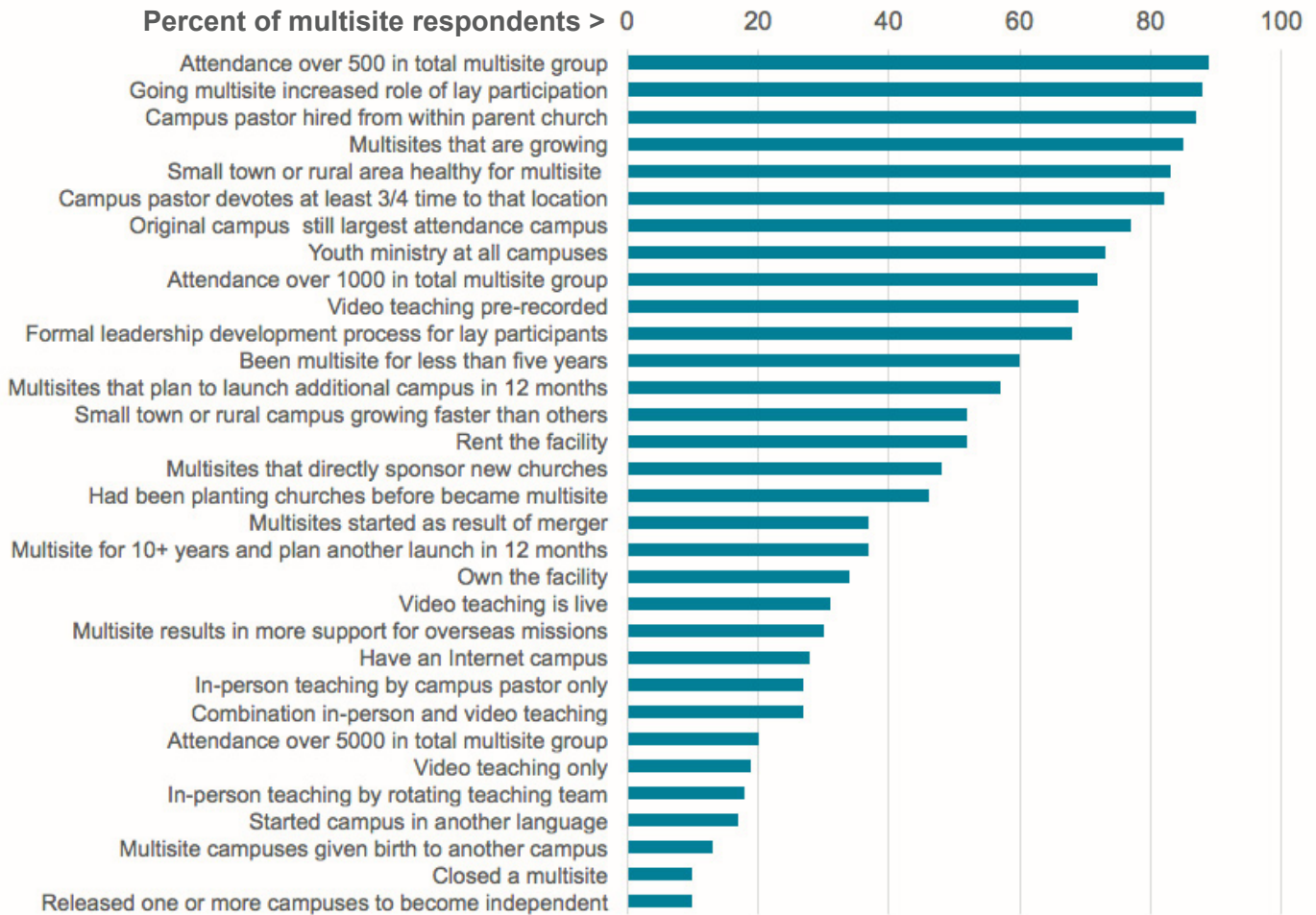


During 5-year period 2011-2016, 17 Twin Cities churches were part of a multisite organization of three or more churches; seven of these churches gained worship service attendance, and 10 lost attendance.

During the 5-year period, 48 churches were part of an organization with just two churches; 20 gained attendance, and 28 lost attendance.

This shows that, even after five years, most parent churches that start multisites in the Twin Cities do not re-gain their initial attendance.

CHART 8.7
Responses from Multisite Church Survey
 Statistics from survey report by Leadership Network and Genairis



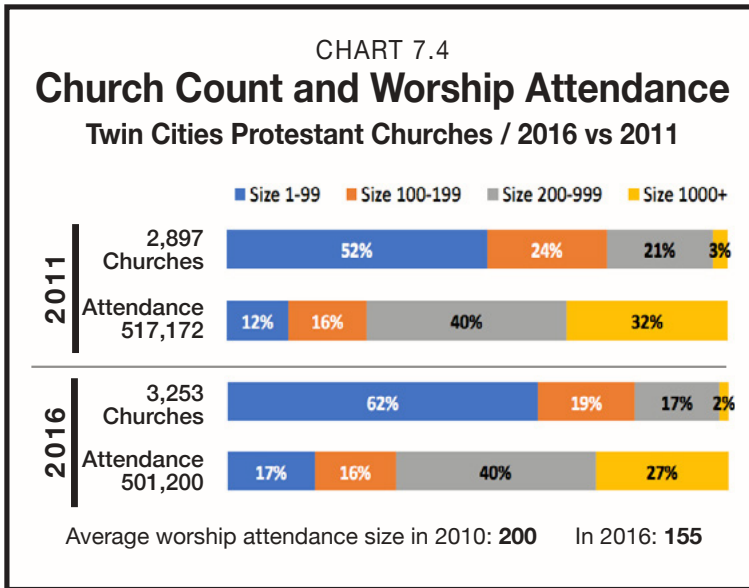
Click cover above for full report in PDF format

Largest Multisite Survey Ever

In 2014, Leadership Network and Genairis conducted the largest survey of multisite churches ever (535 multisite churches), and you can get a PDF copy of the 37-page illustrated report by clicking cover at left (www.churchscouts.org/multisitesurvey).

Multisite was defined as one church in two or more locations, under one overall leadership and budget. Average (median) for all respondents was four years as a multisite. Nationally, average size was 125 in the first month, 160 after one year, and 200 after two years. Nine percent of all Protestants attend a multisite church; three percent of all Protestant churches are multisite.

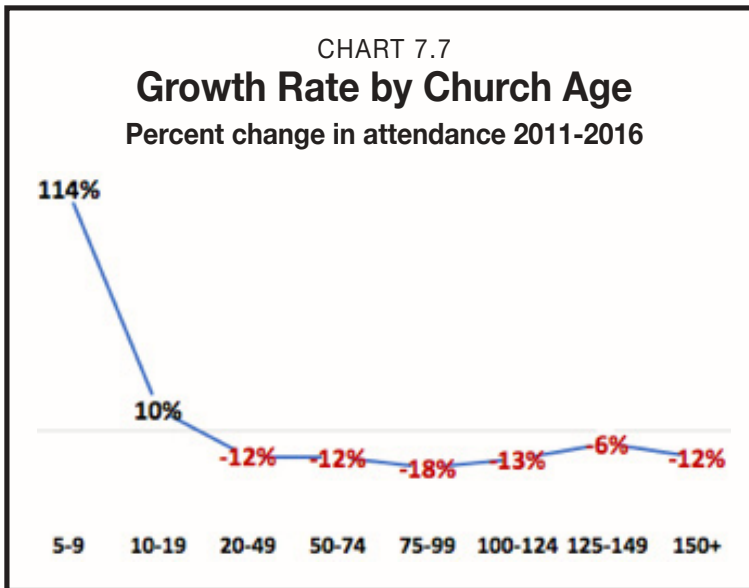
NOTE: This survey is helpful, but findings are biased in favor of multisites because the sponsoring organizations actively promote multisites, because survey is voluntary (churches most satisfied are most likely to respond), and because data is now nearly four years old, as contrasted to **City Vision's 2016 full census** of the Twin Cities.



The key factor for growth rate does not appear to be **size** or **multisite**, but rather the **internal dynamic** that's inherent in new churches:

- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Less bureaucracy
- Faster decisions
- More involvement of lay people
- More accepting and relational
- More excitement

In 2016, parent multisite (old, large) attendance was **-4%** while subsite (young, small) attendance was **+23%** (see TABLE 8.2).



In the Twin Cities, overall, churches grow fast in their first five years, then growth rate begins steady decline to twentieth year, then levels off.

The above CHARTS 7.4 and 7.7 and supporting statistics appear in **Briefing 7** as part of an analysis of all 3,476 churches in the Twin Cities.

Crown of Life Lutheran Church		590	490	-100 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Crown of Life Lutheran Church / West St Paul	1873	490	420	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Crown of Life Lutheran Church / Eagan	1975	100	70	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Bethel Christian Fellowship		400	490	90 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Bethel Christian Fellowship / St Paul	1927	350	400	Fellowship of Christian Assemblies
Bethel Christian Fellowship / Minneapolis	2007	50	100	Fellowship of Christian Assemblies
Discover Church		660	430	-230 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Discover Church / Brooklyn Park (1)	1959	560	330	Evan Lutheran & Lutheran Congregations
Discover Church / Brooklyn Park (2)	2007	100	100	Evan Lutheran & Lutheran Congregations
Salem Lutheran Church		1,080	420	-660 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Salem Lutheran Church / Stillwater	1855	900	350	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Salem Lutheran Church / Woodbury	1863	180	70	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Woodbury Peaceful Grove United Methodist		860	360	-500 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Woodbury Peaceful Grove / Woodbury	1853	800	300	United Methodist Church
Woodbury Peaceful Grove / Cottage Grove	1989	60	60	United Methodist Church
Bethel World Outreach Church		390	350	-40 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Bethel World Outreach Church / Robbinsdale	1997	290	250	Bethel World Outreach
Bethel World Outreach Church / St Paul	2010	100	100	Bethel World Outreach
Valley Christian Church		400	330	-70 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Valley Christian Church / Apple Valley	1975	300	230	Churches of Christ
Evengsong Worship Community / Apple Valley	2008	100	100	Churches of Christ
Life Church Bloomington		280	300	20 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Life Church / Bloomington	1975	180	200	Church of God (Cleveland TN)
The Edge Church of God / Lakeville	2003	100	100	Church of God (Cleveland TN)
Iglesia De Cristo Ministerios		250	250	0 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Iglesia De Cristo Ministerios / Minneapolis	2001	200	200	Non-Denominational
Iglesia De Cristo Ministerios / Burnsville	2008	50	50	Non-Denominational
River of Life Christian Church		680	210	-470 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
River of Life Christian Church / St Paul	1974	600	130	Christian Outreach Centre
Waters of Life Outreach Ministry / Minneapolis	2003	80	80	Christian Outreach Centre
Jacob's Well		400	210	-190 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Jacob's Well / Minneapolis (1)	2006	300	110	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
Jacob's Well / Minneapolis (2)	2010	100	100	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
Greater Deliverance Baptist Cathedral		200	200	0 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Greater Deliverance Temple / Minneapolis	2004	200	150	Missionary Baptist Church
The Victory Cathedral / St Paul	2011	0	50	Missionary Baptist Church
First Trinity Church of God in Christ		200	200	0 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
First Trinity Church of God in Christ / St Paul	1976	150	150	Church of God in Christ
First Trinity Church of God in Christ / Minneapolis	2009	50	50	Church of God in Christ
Christ Covenant Chapel		230	200	-30 <i>[all numbers rounded to nearest 10]</i>
Christ Covenant Chapel / Lakeville	2005	180	150	Advanced Life Network

Christ Covenant Chapel / Brooklyn Center	2008	50	50	Advanced Life Network
Twin Cities Church		220	190	-30 [all numbers rounded to nearest 10]
Twin Cities Church / St Paul	2007	200	150	Fellowship Grace Bretheren & Acts 29
West Side Church / St Paul	2009	20	20	Fellowship Grace Bretheren & Acts 29
Compass Church / Minneapolis	2014	0	20	Fellowship Grace Bretheren & Acts 29
Corner Church		160	170	10 [all numbers rounded to nearest 10]
Corner Church / Minneapolis (1)	2005	110	130	Assemblies of God
Corner Church / Minneapolis (2)	2002	50	40	Assemblies of God
Discovery United Methodist Church		210	100	-110 [all numbers rounded to nearest 10]
Discovery United Methodist Church / Chanhassen	2002	110	90	United Methodist Church
Discovery United Methodist Church / Chaska		110	20	United Methodist Church
Iglesia Dios Habla Hoy		50	70	20 [all numbers rounded to nearest 10]
Iglesia Dios Habla Holy / Anoka	2005	50	50	Wesleyan
Iglesia Dios Habla Hoy / Bloomington	2014	0	10	Wesleyan
Spirit Garage		300	50	-250 [all numbers rounded to nearest 10]
Spirit Garage / Minneapolis	1997	250	30	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
Spirit Garage Underground / Minneapolis	2006	50	20	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

Total weekly worship attendance in 153 multisite churches above	113,020	114,666	1%	5-year growth multisites	1,646
Total weekly worship attendance in all 3476 Twin Cities churches	792,587	755,412	-5%	5-year growth all churches	-37,175

Data from City Vision and Rev. Dr. John A Mayer / see www.churchscouts.org/cityvision

August 12, 2017 • Data for year 2016 • View and/or download this and other reports at www.churchscouts.org/library

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