

MULTI-CONGREGATIONALISM

--A REGIONAL CHURCH MODEL

for CHURCH PLANTING and CHURCH REVITALIZATION--

Frequently Asked Questions

Why plant churches?

The mission of Keystone Bible Church is to honor God by making and maturing disciples who are becoming like Jesus Christ. The book of Acts makes it clear that the natural end-goal of a “be-one, make-one” discipleship process is for new converts and disciples to form new God-centered, healthy churches, as the Lord leads.

Thus, we believe that our missional mandate as a discipleship-focused church, requires us to be intentionally and perpetually on the lookout for God to lead us into the next church planting initiative, as He carries His gospel to every tribe, tongue, and nation regionally, nationally, and globally.

Since our founding in 2006 Keystone Bible Church has had church planting in our DNA, and by God’s grace we will continue to leverage our resources as a church-planting church, for the glory of God and the advancement of His gospel mission.

What does “multi-congregational” mean?

There could be numerous strategies employed for church planting initiatives, and there are a vast array of criteria that might cause one strategy to be more effective than another in specific situations. For example, questions like these are important to consider: Is this a local, regional, national, or global church planting initiative? Is this a plant where there was not previously a church? Is it a revitalization project for another existing church that is dying or unhealthy? Are their cross-culture sensitivities? How far is this church plant located from the church facility that is initiating and overseeing the plant? Are there current Keystone members already commuting from the area that is being considered? Answers to questions like these, will likely cause Keystone to employ different church planting strategies for different circumstances. However, we do believe that the “multi-congregational” model best describes our strategy for local and regional church planting and church revitalization initiatives, as opposed to those initiatives that would be targeted for greater distances away.

In our multi-congregational model, Keystone function as one church, gathering in multiple locations (currently the two locations of Odessa and Wesley Chapel), under one shared eldership. As one church we are one organization, with one employer ID number, one tax ID number, one governing constitution, and one bank account.

We strive for a high degree of continuity between congregations by uniting and partnering around our doctrine, philosophy, practices, vision and mission statements, functional pillars, KBC culture, and methods and systems. As God directs, each



congregation also has the responsibility and opportunity, under the Keystone Bible Church combined and local leadership, to contextualize ministry to most effectively accomplish gospel mission in each geographic region.

Though we technically operate as a “multi-site” church, this phrase has been primarily used to describe a church that broadcasts a video message preached at the main campus. As a result, we avoid using this phrase, in order to communicate a distinction. We also avoid referring to Keystone Bible Church as a “multi-campus” church as that phrase carries many of the same connotations. We refer to each respective building as the “Odessa Campus” or the “Wesley Chapel Campus,” but only when referring to the physical building location. Otherwise, *we refer to Keystone Bible Church as a “multi-congregational” church.*

What are the basics of a multi-congregational church planting model?

- One church gathering as multiple congregations in multiple locations: “multi-congregational” (currently two).
- One combined eldership consisting of pastors from both congregations (as God provides).
- Local deacons and staff in each location (as God provides).
- Live local preaching in each location.
- Separate budgets, one shared bank account, combined oversight of all finances.
- A polity structure that will accommodate elder-led, congregational-rule government at both the local and all-church levels. (leadership, oversight, care, discipline, membership, voting, etc.).

Why does Keystone favor a multi-congregational church planting model?

The elders of Keystone Bible Church believe that multi-congregationalism is an extremely effective and responsible model for regional church planting initiatives. Outside of a reasonably close geographic proximity to the lead campus, it would not be as effective. However, within close proximity, there may be no better way to expand the reach of the gospel into additional regional communities than for a church congregation to leverage its resources and reproduce itself in another location using the multi-congregational model.

Is there biblical precedent for a multi-congregational church planting model?

New Testament and archeological evidence indicate that Corinth, Jerusalem, Rome, Antioch, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Philippi, and Laodicea were referred to as one church even though the Christians living in those regions gathered in various locations. For example, the new congregation in Jerusalem is frequently referred to in the singular, one church (Acts 8:1; 11:22; 15:4). However, it’s clear from the Biblical accounts that they met at different times and in different locations, at least on a weekly basis.



Furthermore, historians tell us that there was no space in Jerusalem available to the disciples in which three thousand or more people could have met on a weekly basis even if they had wanted to. It stands to reason then, that many first-century house churches met separately, and then would come together periodically to celebrate the Lord's Supper and worship as one citywide church (see 1 Cor 11:17–20; Romans 16:5).

Why are multiple congregations better when functioning together as one church?

The list below is not exhaustive and will certainly expand and change over time, but here are ten ways that everyone will be better together, than apart:

1. Each local congregation's pastor/elder team is better because they sharpen, encourage, and support one another as they contribute to the shared eldership of the whole church.
2. Staff teams are better because they have accessible associates within other congregations who are doing similar work.
3. Serve team leaders and new staff are especially helped by the experience surrounding them within other congregations.
4. Lead teaching pastors are better because they work together to share and develop ideas for sermons.
5. Each congregation is strengthened by the overall regional testimony of Keystone Bible Church.
6. Church planters are better because they don't have to reinvent the wheel and start from scratch, but instead have the support and strength of a regional church-planting movement behind them.
7. Newer congregations are better because resources and leadership is available immediately, rather than waiting to develop it on their own.
8. Financial stewardship is better because we are able to share and combine many resources, including staff, programming, processes, and teaching.
9. Leadership development is better because there are more opportunities for leaders and more environments to test and nurture aspiring leaders.
10. Members seeking to build evangelistic and discipleship relationships regionally are better served with additional localized congregations to invite friends and families to attend.

What holds Keystone Bible Church together?

Keystone Bible Church, as a multi-congregational church-planting church, requires high levels of trust and relationship within the leadership. As we form, grow and expand, we are held together by six main things:

1. ***Covenant Relationship.*** The bonds of covenant unite the congregations of Keystone Bible Church beyond that of a fellowship, collective, or network. Like a marriage, this bond provides the security of commitment while requiring mutual



sacrifice. We are blessed by shared gifts and challenged by shared burdens. We are better together than apart.

2. **Vision, Mission & Pillars.** The essential, foundational elements of vision, mission, and pillars have always guided and grounded Keystone Bible Church.

Our vision is to be a God-centered, healthy community of faith.

Our mission is to honor God by making and maturing disciples who are becoming like Jesus Christ.

Our functional pillars are (Acts 2:41-47): *Learning experiences* with the Word of God ("the apostles' teaching"); *Worship experiences* as a lifestyle in private and public ("with glad and generous hearts, praising God"); *Relational experiences* with other believers ("fellowship" including the elements of praying, eating, sharing, and praising); And, *Witnessing experiences* with the world ("enjoying the favor of all the people")

Our shared vision, mission, and pillars continue to lead Keystone Bible Church and unite each congregation.

3. **Doctrine, Philosophy, & Practices.** Our doctrine and philosophy provide the foundation for unity in mission. Therefore, it is critical that all of our leaders affirm the same core beliefs. Our practices are the "things we do" according to our understanding of Scripture, history, and cultural context. The practices of each congregation are built upon a common foundation and are instituted for common purposes.

Each of the following practices listed will be a part of every Keystone Bible Church congregation, without exception:

- Believer's Baptism by immersion
- The Lord's Supper
- Membership
- Church Discipline
- Homogenous God-centered Worship Services (same service order)
- Expositional Preaching
- Groups
- Studies
- Teams
- Discipleship ministry for Kids, Students, Ladies, and Men

4. **Culture & DNA.** The core convictions of our leadership are embodied in the behaviors that define our KBC culture and DNA. All congregations *submit* to this culture, building in harmony with it. All congregations also *contribute* to the culture,



bringing new life and vibrancy by nature of their participation. We seek to maintain high degrees of cultural continuity from one congregational experience to the next. However, unity in cultural experience does not always necessarily require absolute uniformity from one congregation to the next, if the unified perspective of the leadership requires flexibility for local contextualization.

5. **Methods & Systems.** The systems and methods of Keystone Bible Church help make the organization effective in its mission. From the execution of homogenous worship service orders, to careful assimilation of guests, to the articulation and pursuit of discipleship (Worship in Services, Live in Groups, Grow in Studies, and Serve on Teams), to technology platforms for communication and organization, shared systems and methodologies allow all congregations to benefit from visionary leadership and learned best practices.
6. **Established Boundaries.** The boundaries explained above define the cooperative aspects of a one-church relationship that all congregations share. They also help to identify other areas, not addressed, where leaders are encouraged to creatively develop programs and practices that meet the needs of their local community.

How much independence does each congregation have?

This could be one of the most challenging parts of a multi-congregational model. There certainly cannot be a “set-it and forget it” approach. Based on personality and gifting, some leaders may push for more unity and uniformity, while others may push for more freedom and individuality. It is a constant, ongoing tension to manage, but having a diversity of leaders forces all of us to a healthier place.

One of the more confusing aspects to clarify for pastors, staff, and volunteers is chain of command: Who has jurisdiction over what? Who has responsibility for what? What ministry efforts should be centralized or decentralized?

As a result, our commitment is to work within the following categories:

1. **Centralized** = Things done the same way, overseen by centralized leadership. This category includes all-church finances, accounting, staffing and human resources, media and communications, Worship Service orders, and church planting initiatives and strategies.
2. **Unified** = Things done the same way, overseen by the local leadership. Once local leadership is established within each congregation, this category includes assimilation, groups, studies, teams, preaching, membership, elder-led / congregational rule government, church discipline, biblical counseling, discipleship, and benevolence.
3. **Decentralized** = Things done in different ways, overseen by local leadership. This category includes guest follow-up, kids, students, men’s and ladies’ ministries.



Will there ever come a point when a local congregation will separate to form an independent local church?

The goal of multi-congregationalism is responsible, effective gospel ministry and expansion for the sake of the mission. As a result, as long as it is in the best interest of gospel ministry to remain connected through multi-congregationalism, there is no definitive end-date for the connection between congregations. However, if at any point, the plurality of Keystone pastors collectively believe that it is in the best interest of gospel mission for a local congregation to separate from Keystone Bible Church and form an independent local church, or if it is to the detriment of overall church-wide health for a particular congregation to remain connected, this decision must be approved by a majority vote of the elders, followed by a three-fourths vote of all members from all congregations.

How does the leadership structure work?

Senior Lead Pastor

As a first among equals the Senior Lead Pastor functions as an equal authority elder, tasked with leading the entire organization through vision casting, staff employment, and setting the teaching direction for all KBC pulpits. He “pastors” the other Lead Pastors, leads the leadership and staff teams, and develops relationships and partnerships that advance the mission of Jesus Christ. The selection of a new Senior Lead Pastor must follow the pulpit committee process outlined in the Keystone Bible Church Constitution and must be voted on by all Keystone members from all congregations.

Campus Lead Pastor

Each congregation is led by a Campus Lead Pastor. He is the primary shepherd, and teacher/preacher of the Word of God for his local congregation. He meets regularly with the Senior Lead Pastor, and any other Campus Lead Pastors of Keystone Bible Church to collaborate and communicate on teaching plans, and all-church visionary strategic planning. He meets regularly with all of the pastors/elders of Keystone Bible Church and leads the localized pastor/elder team represented within his local congregation. The selection of a new Lead Campus Pastor must follow the process outlined in the Keystone Bible Church Constitution for a Vocational Pastor and must be voted on by all Keystone members from all congregations.

Localized Pastor/Elder Teams

Each local congregation votes on and is led by a local pastor/elder team that could consist of both vocational and non-vocational pastors/elders, as defined in the Keystone Bible Church Constitution. As a team, they are responsible to shepherd their local congregation, oversee its ministries, vote on its local budget, carry out discipline, and hire its local staff. While these pastor/elder teams will care deeply about, and will share in the overall vision and leadership of Keystone Bible Church, their primary oversight and investment will be



concerned with the local congregation they are leading. They will meet with all of the elders from all Keystone congregations periodically to discuss church-wide decisions and leadership strategies. The selection of new localized vocational or non-vocational pastors must follow the process outlined in the Keystone Bible Church Constitution and must be voted on only by Keystone members who attend the local congregations where he will serve.

Localized Deacon Teams

Each regional congregation nominates and votes on task-oriented deacons to serve their local congregation in an official capacity and in such a way that it frees the pastors/elders for the ministry of the Word and prayer as described in Acts 6:3. Deacons will be assigned individual localized tasks by the pastors/elders based on the needs represented within the local congregation and the giftedness of the individuals.

Leadership Values

Keystone Bible Church leadership operates with these critical values:

- **Real local leadership:** Each congregation must be led well by a Lead Campus Pastor and a local pastor/elder team, as God provides. This team must include biblically qualified men who are serious about knowing, shepherding and accounting for the flock that God has entrusted to them. This team will make real decisions, will hold their Lead Campus Pastor really accountable, and will care for real people.
- **Visionary leadership:** We believe that our church will be most effective in our mission when we allow visionary leaders to exercise their gifts. The Senior Lead and Campus Lead Pastors will combine to provide visionary leadership for our organization, philosophy implementation, strategic ministry efforts, and church planting initiatives.
- **Accountability:** No leader at any level should operate outside of real accountability. Functionally, all pastors/elders lead by way of plurality and consensus in making decisions. Regardless of the position they hold and the tasks they are assigned, all pastors are equal in authority, yet not equal in influence, since tasks and influence in the body flow from individual giftedness. It is critical that all leaders have clarity in the standards for leadership, the authority they carry, the influence they have, and the responsibilities they own.
- **Collaboration:** Leadership is most effective when it operates in collaboration. Regardless of title or tenure, our desire is to include the right people in the appropriate decision-making process.
- **Transparency:** Since all Keystone leaders collectively have responsibility to shepherd and care for the church, we are committed to open communication among all leadership teams.

How do the finances work?



Each congregation is expected to be self-supporting. Understandably, this could take time for a new church plant or revitalization project.

1. All funds given to Keystone Bible Church from all congregations are combined to meet the respective needs of each congregation in Odessa and Wesley Chapel.
2. Detailed financial planning is presented for congregational vote in one cooperative budget at each congregation's annual Family Meeting in December.
3. The annually approved budget will include reporting of and planning for all revenue sources from all congregations, a centralized budget expenses, and separate budget expenses for each local congregation.
4. Each congregation is responsible to operate within its annually approved local budget for its local ministry needs and directives. These budgeted funds pay for things like rent/mortgage, local staff salaries, and local ministry expenses.
5. At the end of each fiscal year, any excess dollars from each congregation are added to the all-church savings account. Expenditures from the all-church savings account must be voted on by all congregations and will be used for things like property purchases, large capital improvements, church planting endeavors, and large ministry projects.

How does the preaching work?

Each congregation is committed to a steady diet of live, expository preaching, overseen by each congregation's Lead Campus Pastor, who serves in cooperation with any other Lead Campus Pastors from other congregations, all of whom follow the visionary leadership set by the Senior Lead Pastor for all of Keystone Bible Church. Most of the time, all KBC pulpits at all campuses will present the same sermon text and/or topic. This allows the Lead Pastors to study in advance together and share resources. It also builds unity across all congregations as everyone is tethered to and discussing the same text. However, when necessary, the Lead Pastors may agree together to depart from the cooperative sermon schedule to address particular topics that they deem important for their local congregations. Additionally, the Lead Pastors will periodically rotate pulpits to build relationships with Keystone members from within all congregations.

Who votes on what?

Keystone Bible Church polity functions with elder-led, congregational-rule government. The elders lead with united decisions and make recommendations to the members. The members vote as follows:

All Keystone Members from all congregations vote on the following:

New Senior Lead Pastor, New Campus Lead Pastor, Gospel partnerships, Non-budgeted all-church savings account expenditures, New church planting or revitalization initiatives. Centralized budget.



Keystone Members from each respective congregation will vote locally on the following: Local elders, local deacons, adding or removing members, discipline, local budget.

The information included in this document is meant to best articulate how Keystone Bible Church seeks to operate in a multi-congregational experience. This document is subject to change and evolve in the future based on the direction of the pastoral team at Keystone Bible Church. Much of this strategy and the explanation in this document has been taken from resources made available from Redemption Church (www.redemptionaz.org) and Christ Church (www.christaz.org). We are thankful for their helpful guidance in developing our own strategies.