

TOP 20 Q&A FOR COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED ABOUT:

(a) Our multi-congregational model

(b) Video-Preaching

(c) Our new property on Witkopp Road

Q1: I can understand planting churches/congregations back in the book of Acts because there were no churches then, but now we have churches all over the place so shouldn't we rather strengthen and fill the existing churches first rather than planting more churches/congregations in places where there are other churches?

(Thanks to Tim Keller for the following answers to Q1).

Answer 1: New churches are the best way to reach new generations, new residents, and new people groups. Studies show that newer churches attract these new groups 5x's better and faster than older churches do. This is because new churches have the following advantages over old churches:

- They are leaner, meaner, and hungrier to grow through reaching the lost.
- The tapestry of relationships is looser, less cliquey, and consequentially easier for newcomers to make friends.
- There is a greater need for leadership/serving positions to be filled.
- There are no traditions and so they can easily experiment.

Answer 2: New churches are a highly effective way to help revitalize older churches and help the overall body of Christ by showcasing new ministry forms and ideas that would not have been adopted in older churches. New churches help create an 'it can be done' mindset in older churches. Furthermore, they help provide new converts in the city that find their way to older churches.

Answer 3: Some churches are beyond the point of re-invigoration and therefore it is unwise to use resources to 'strengthen and fill them'. New wine in old wineskins usually splits the old wineskin, not blesses it.

Answer 4: New churches help older churches check their motives and renew their commitment to reaching unbelievers rather than worrying about whether some of their believers might relocate to the new church. When we are short of unbelievers in Joburg, then churches can start being competitive.

Answer 5: More localities and styles of church means more hooks in the water to catch fish.

Q2: Does this mean older churches don't have a place?

Not at all. But it is a provocation for older churches to continuously reinvent themselves, either through planting, or through a continuous and rigorous commitment to gospel-centric, missional living resulting in steady growth.

Q3: Does this mean that church planting is a 'must' for every church?

No. Church plants that are done in the wrong way, at the wrong time, led by the wrong guy, usually end up hurting people and weakening the body of Christ rather than strengthening it.

Q4: Won't our property become our focus at the expense of the focus of gospel advance?

Based on our track record then this is highly unlikely. Not only has fund-raising and passion to get onto our property clearly not been an obsession over the last two years, but we have in fact multiplied onto 6 *other* locations around Joburg before we have even got onto the property. This hardly indicates fixation on the new property.

Q5: As the property comes into play and the church grows, won't our leaders and our church become 'all about the money'?

Although this is something that we will continually be on the guard against, our track record thus far gives us some courage. PJ purchased and walked away from 4 church properties in Harare, one of which has a stunning 1000 seater venue, and another a beautiful 600 seater venue.

Q6: Is a multi-congregational model about 'power' or 'empowering'?

Some might wonder whether sub-dividing our large church into 7 congregations is a demonstration of power-grabbing (or power-maintaining) or empowering of others. Which is it? Well, there is an element of 'damned if you do or damned if you don't' about this one: by keeping a large church together the leader can be accused of controlism, and then by dividing it up into congregations he can be accused of controlism! But actually this prompts us to see that controlism is an issue of the heart rather than an issue of model. But over the last 12 years PJ and some of the other elders have steadily helped many churches get started, and PJ has planted, grown and handed over two large, healthy churches before planting Godfirst. Also, the de-centralization of the multi-congregational model is clearly a 'releasing' and 'empowering' rather than the opposite. The very reason that all the guys want to stay part of the larger thing is evidence of a culture of release and empowering, rather than one of control.

Q7: But why can't Stephen, Greg, Kaleb, NK, Vaughn and Jac all just be released to go and plant their own churches instead of leading G1 congregations?

They can. But here's the thing: none of them want to. As strange as it may seem to those who have only ever known a controlling scene, none of them are trying to escape to lead their own thing. They all *want* to stay as part of something larger because each believes that we can do more together than apart. Furthermore, Godfirst has planted two autonomous churches in the last two years so it is not as if the option is not there to plant your own church. We are pursuing both 'normal church planting' and 'multi-congregational advance'.

Q8: I have seen a multi-congregational model before that didn't work out

Maybe, but we have all seen churches of all sizes and models that didn't work out either. So, that itself is not a reason not to proceed. However, River of Life Church Harare, that PJ planted in 1997 grew to 1000 in 4 years and that model was a four-congregational model, then it became five, then each congregation gradually became its own autonomous church, and all are going strong today. So, PJ has had recent multi-congregational experience that did work very well.

Q9: Can the congregations ever become their own church plants?

Although we are not doing the multi-congregational model with either the hope or intention of the congregations becoming their own churches, it is possible that in the future they will. This is what gradually happened to each of the River of Life congregations in Harare that PJ planted prior to moving to Joburg.

Q10: I am concerned that the multi-congregational model builds too much to PJ.

Although PJ and a team of elders will still give an over-arching lead to the 'togetherness' of the Godfirst congregations, and although PJ will be doing the lions share of the preaching in 4 out of the 7 congregations, people bond to the local eldership and their friends in that congregation. A multi-congregational model actively builds away from a supposed rock-star leader, not too him.

Q11: So why is PJ doing the bulk of the preaching in 4 out of 7 of the congregations, either live or by video?

A. Because the leaders of those congregations want him to. They don't want to preach more than about once per month, because they do not feel a passion or giftedness to it to the degree that PJ does. It is about honouring God-given gifts, and each of us playing to our strengths. B.

To allow the leader to focus on the main agenda of church life which is reaching the lost through provoking and equipping the church to be highly missional.

Q12: How does the multi-congregational model allow other preachers to develop?

It provides many more opportunities for preachers to develop than if we remained just one congregation. Take Stephen Jack for example, in 2009 he preached twice on Sundays, but when leading his own congregation in 2010 he can preach 12+ times on Sundays, not to mention the multitude of other mid-week preaching opportunities. Stephen feels that he is currently at his best preaching occasionally rather than all the time.

Q13: How do Video Congregations work?

A professionally filmed and edited version of the preach is played as a DVD to the congregations. The Sunday meeting of the Video Congregation runs as it normally would (before and after the preach), but instead of the preacher stepping up onto the stage, he appears on a large screen.

Q14: Why is Video-Preaching working so well around the world, including South Africa?

A . Because even 'non-anointed' TV/movies work: Have you ever stopped to analyse the phenomena of TV/movies? The power with which you are impacted by a movie is amazing. Think about it: we all know that what we are watching is (a) make-believe; they are actors! (b) not current i.e. it was made months/years ago in another continent, (c) by people who don't know us or care for us. And yet the medium of audio-visual coming to us from a screen keeps us riveted for hours, producing laughter, tears, and impacting us greatly. *How much more will the impact of a preacher on a screen be: someone who is real and not acting, who knows us, loves us, and who preached it mere hours/days before, and who is preaching to us the Word of God that is living and active – it has supernatural power!*

B . Because if reading out a letter worked, how much more does Video-Preaching: In New Testament times the word of God was effectively communicated via media - letters being read out: *Col 4v16: After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Loadiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.* Paul used letters to communicate God's word to the churches as they were the best tool available. It is not hard to image Paul using DVD's, videoconferencing and satellite feeds to spread the gospel if he were alive today. Paul was not present, not visible, and the letter had been written months beforehand, yet it was the living word of God to those churches and even to us today!

C . Because the Word of God is living and active (Heb 4) and is not limited by time or space. Although we are used to a live preacher, the biblical imperative is not a 'live' preacher, but rather the 'live' (living) Word of God.

D . Because we live in an increasing screen-ager culture.

Q15: What are the deeper benefits of Video Congregations over standard church plants?

A. Better stewardship of Gifts

Let pastors be pastors: Very few great pastors are great preachers. A traditional church plant usually forces a man to try and be the ultimate super-hero excelling at both preaching and pastoring, and consequentially the church plant struggles to gain momentum, and the leader gets burnt out. Thus, our modern fascination with church planting often results in a smaller and weaker end product than we hoped. Video Congregations relieve pastors of the stress of preparing and delivering an excellent message every week, and frees them to max-out on pastoring, empowering leaders, building community and mobilizing their people to mission.

Let preachers be preachers: The use of video harnesses the preaching gifting of some, allowing it to bless beyond the limitations of one venue. Traditionally, this would have meant a large church meeting in one venue which is of course of bottle-neck, and anyway, any meeting of 800+ usually requires video and most people end up watching the preacher on screen anyway!

Let leaders be leaders: Some are gifted to exert a 'high-altitude' (apostolic?) leadership influence over congregations (or churches) that strengthens that congregation's quantity and quality, without meddling in the details. Our one-church-multi-congregation model, especially those congregations that receive PJ by video, will enjoy a constant drip-feed of PJ's leadership gift that will give security to, and enhance, that of the local leadership.

B. Better stewardship of Finance: A Vid-link congregation is +/- 30% cheaper than a conventional church plant.

Q16: Video Congregations: I still can't quite get my head around it. I can't see it working.

I know just what you mean, but church history is littered with 'crazy' ideas that ended up as the norm. For example, the invention of pews, bibles, and musical instruments were all more radical than this. I was a doubting Thomas saying 'unless I see it and am touched by it myself, I will not believe.' That happened and now I believe in Video-Preaching.

Q17: I am concerned that Video-Preaching will build too much to PJ.

Even at 'live' church, although some people initially join the church because of the preaching, they end up staying because of friendship and pastoral connections. People in Video Congregations will be joined in heart to that local leadership and vision more than to PJ, and thus the congregations will be healthy and sustainable.

Q18: I am concerned that Video-Preaching will stunt the development and opportunities for other preachers.

Good point, but interestingly the stats suggest the contrary. For example, in 2010 PJ will preach 75% of the time at 4 of the 7 congregations (Bry, 4ways, RBank, Monte) resulting in PJ being heard live/video at 240 Sunday meetings, and others preaching in 72 meetings. In the other 3 congregations (Wits, UJ, Tembisa) others will preach 156 Sunday meetings. This is a total of 228 Sunday meetings that others will preach at in 2010.

Q19: Video Congregations: What if I honestly discover that Video-Preaching doesn't work for me?

No problem. You can remain in (or revert back to) a live-preach congregation. But be cautious of two things: (A) making an anti-video theology out of your personal preference, or (B) falling into the trap of thinking that local church is essentially about you being fed a great sermon. Remember, a local church is a community of interactive friends on mission together in Joburg as modern-day urban missionaries. With this view of church, you might find it easier to adjust to Vid-link as a medium of preaching that enhances our mission. But at the end of the day, you will be the most effective missionary in a congregation that you love being in.

Q20: Does Greg Tait ever wash his hair?

To the best of our knowledge, no. However, the Lord, yeah verily brother, the Lord alone should be the judge of that.