RETHINKING THE MULTISITE AND MULTISERVICE CHURCH MODELS

9Marks Author Jonathan Leeman Calls Pastors to a “One Assembly” Church Model

WHEATON, Ill.—A family pulls into the parking of a local church on Sunday morning. The parking lot is full and cars are everywhere. After driving around for twenty minutes, they finally find a spot a few blocks away. Walking into the building, the foyer is busy with children and parents and people catching up. Everyone begins filing into the sanctuary, but there are few places left to sit. In fact, there aren’t even enough bulletins for everyone. The seemingly obvious solution to these problems would be for this church to add a second service or even another location. But is the multiservice or multisite church model the best option? Are they even biblical?

These are questions Jonathan Leeman wants readers to consider in his new book, One Assembly: Rethinking the Multisite and Multiservice Church Models (Crossway, April 2020). Leeman argues that nowhere in the Bible is there an example of a church that is multisite or multiservice. This is an issue because these models divide the assembly and “repudiate the Bible’s definition of a church, redefine what a church is, and so reshape the church morally,” Leeman writes.

“The single assembly of a church demonstrates, proves, embodies, illustrates, incarnates, makes concrete, makes palpable and touchable and hearable and seeable the unity we possess in the gospel. Gathering as a local assembly is the very first imperative to the indicative of the unity we possess as members of the universal church. It literally makes that unity visible and active. The body of Christ is not just an idea . . . the gathering of a church physically pictures in time and space each of these biblical metaphors beautifully. The gathering manifests the capital-C Church. The gathering makes the church present to itself.”

Leeman presents his argument for one assembly by:

• Considering the Kingdom theme in Scripture and why the Bible uses the word ekklesia
• Showing how the Bible consistently and uniformly presents local churches as assemblies
• Pointing to an alternative plan to multisite and multiservice church models, which focuses on planting, revitalizing, peaceably dividing, or encouraging attendees to attend a church closer to where they live

Sometimes, according to Leeman, when churches get too big or run out of space, the best thing to do is to work with other local churches and think...
about the long-term goals of the church: “Short-term thinking says, ‘We have to do whatever it takes this Sunday.’ Long-term faith recognizes that the compromises we make this Sunday actually hurt our mission in the long-run. It believes that fifteen single-service churches in a city, all things being equal, are better for the Great Commission than five three-service or three-site churches, including for the people turned away on any given Sunday. They will eventually benefit from the strength and health that one-assembly churches offer over and against multisite and multiservice churches. . . . Catholicity, in short, requires faith—faith in God’s work through other churches and faith in his work over time.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Leeman (PhD, University of Wales) is the editorial director for 9Marks. He has written for a number of publications and is the author or editor of several books. He is also an occasional lecturer at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and adjunct professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Jonathan lives with his wife and four daughters in a suburb of Washington, DC.

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