

The Morse Church

Simple. Authentic. Transparent.



A congregation of Holy Trinity Blue Valley & a ministry of the Swedish Mission Friends (the Covenant Church).

“The Morse Church—a 20 year plan”

By Brian Dahms - drafted 11/06”

Chinese bamboo is an amazing plant, though you would not think much of it during the first few years of its life. In fact, a year after you plant bamboo, all you can see is a little sprig about 5 inches tall. By the end of the 4th year of its life, you would begin to wonder if your planting is a failure—you have a plant of bamboo that is only about 10 inches high that looks like this:



But then in the 5th year, an amazing thing takes place. The plant grows from just a few inches to a size that would fill a whole room—20, 30, sometimes even 40 feet tall.



What happened? Why was the growth of the plant so slow for the first 4 years but then in the fifth year it grows so strong and tall? Because Chinese bamboo spends the first 4 years of its life building subterranean root structure that is able to sustain the full size plant.

The Morse Church is 14 months old this week. Passers by say of it, “what a wonderful little sprig of church plant—tender, sweet, beautiful to see.” It looks small. But is there more than that? Is there something growing beyond what the eye can see that will one-day rapidly grow into a full-size plant, filling an entire room of expectations. I have spent the last few weeks reflecting on our first year of life together. I have taken our vital signs. I contacted a number of people to discuss our little plant, trying to determine our health. And I have great, great news to report. Friends, we are a seed potted in a planter that has sprouted into a sprig with a very healthy root system. By our 5-year mark, we will indeed, God willing, grow rapidly and have a subterranean structure able to support the whole plant.

Where are we today and how did we get here? The answer, in its simplest form, is of course: God has moved through us. But how did he move? Let’s take a few moments to take a brief ride through history.

In many ways the Morse Church started in August of 1983. That month I went to KU as an incoming freshman. In the second week of my life on The Hill, I made a profound discovery while reading a history book. I read these words (emphasis mine),

³⁸ “You have heard that the Law of Moses says, ‘If an eye is injured, injure the eye of the person who did it. If a tooth gets knocked out, knock out the tooth of the person who did it.’³⁹ **But I say, don’t resist an evil person!** If you are slapped on the right cheek, turn the other, too. ⁴⁰ If you are ordered to court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. ⁴¹ If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. ⁴² Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow.

⁴³ “You have heard that the Law of Moses says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ **But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!** ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else?

I realized that those words, which come from the New Testament of the Bible, are not just history—they are straight from the mouth of God. No human has ever thought such a thought, therefore no human could write such words. I realized that the God of the universe was the God of the Bible. I knew right then and there that I **needed** to tell everybody—indeed, I **had** to tell everybody—that God is alive and can be discovered in a book called the Bible.

Over the course of the next 5 years, I had several ministerial internships, primarily in youth ministry and primarily focusing on ways to effectively communicate that God is a God of love who can be discovered through reading the Bible. In fact, I worked at 3 different Presbyterian churches and with Young Life. By 1990, I had left the secular work force—after getting a degree in business at KU, I worked for a bank and a publishing company—to accept a role as a pastor at a large Episcopal church, first as a youth pastor but later as Pastor of Evangelism for adults. While at this church, St. Andrew's, I started taking seminary classes to train me in theology and I began to ask the question, "What is the most effective way—in fact, what is the most efficient way—to tell adults about God's love?" Each way I asked the question the same answer was returned to me—new church starts. Day by day, dollar for dollar, the most efficient way to propagate the Good News of God's love is via church planting.

That led to a number of new internships and sabbaticals. I left St. Andrew's to serve as an evangelist for Alpha North America—the entity that shepherds the Alpha course in our country. But along that journey, I not only was awarded a degree in theology and evangelism from Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA, but I also served in several great mature church plants: St. Paul's Darien, CT; Stanwich Congregational, Greenwich, CT; Lake Avenue Congregational, Pasadena; Clairmont-Pamona Vineyard; Covenant Chapel in Leawood; Olathe Covenant Church; and United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood.

At each stop, my passion for starting a new church was further inflamed. But where? And what type of church?

With the help of a dear friend, and while still living in Southern California, I did a demographic study on South Central Johnson County. I discovered some amazing facts. That in the year 2000, our area had 231 Christian churches that had a combined membership and/or attendance of 224,000. That is amazing. Except that Johnson County then had 455,000 people and was growing (and still is) at a rate of in excess of 14,000 people per year. That means that less than ½ the county is a member of a Christian church. And if a new church was started each year and grew to the size of UMC-COR (14,000), we would be behind the growth curve of the county. Thus our county would be LESS churched than the previous year. Further, our county is somewhat unusual in another area of church life—we have several, massive state-of-the art Protestant mega-churches. 20, to be exact, that have combined budgets of over 250 million dollars and who have sites valued in excess of ½ a billion dollars. That led me an amazing discovery. If the very best the Protestant church has to offer still does not connect with half the county, we—that is to say, the Christian community—will need to also offer *different types* of churches.

The Morse Church—a different type of church.

Mega churches are amazing. As one visitor to one of our area's awesome mega churches said to me last week, "It is so easy to go there. Every conceivable need is met, we can go just about anytime that is convenient (because they offer so many different worship times), and nothing is required of me.

The Morse Church, of course, is the dynamic opposite of that. Virtually no need is met, we offer very few events in a week, and we require everything of a visitor. We don't even have bathrooms, central air, or a parking lot. You don't *go* to the Morse Church; you *are* the Morse Church—even from day one.

We have four foundational values: to worship, to grow, to serve, and to give. Our mission statement sums up what we are about:

*To form an authentic family of seekers and Christian believers who **worship** God together, **grow** in relationship with God and each other, **serve** in God's Kingdom together, **give** to God's Kingdom together, and invite others to do the same.*

So we expect people to come to church each weekend, grow by being in a small group or Alpha, serve somehow in God's kingdom, and to give a proportional amount from their income, working to a tithe (10%) or beyond. Now this is clearly not for everybody. Indeed, about ½ the people who visit us say that it is not for them. That is OK, because our area offers so many other churches that can "meet their needs." We are not and never will be a "needs meeting" church. We don't ask ourselves, "What do the people in our area need or what do they want to hear?" Rather, we ask ourselves, what would it look like to be a 21st century expression of the 1st century church?

On September 11th, 2005 the Morse Church reopened. Since that time, we have become a church of about 120 people. That is to say, in any given month, about 120 different people consistently attend our church (defined by once a month or more in attendance). On any give Sunday, we have about 100 people on campus. Nearly all of those people are enrolled in our vision of worship, grow, serve, and give. In other words, about 100 people have taken *Alpha* or are in a small group (or both), serve either in our ministries to the poor or on our campus in some capacity, and regularly contribute (financially) to the work of the church.

In addition, our church has been blessed with something that almost no other church our age has: land and buildings. We already have a worship space, worship equipment and furniture, and office space/classroom space.

I have collected the data on our church and presented it to several people over the last few weeks, asking them to give me an assessment of where we are in reference to other, similar age church plants. These people include a bankers named Steve Dawson and Jim Lehman and church leaders from several denominations or from several, mature church

plants. Here is the universal reply—God has richly blessed us with an amazing foundation, or perhaps we should say, root system, which will sustain a rapid growth rate in years 4 and 5. We may look like a little sprig, but we are actually Chinese bamboo-like. We are about to rapidly grow. Nobody I found knows of a church that has been in a stronger position after just 14 months. In six more months, they tell me, we will be able to financially stand on our own. This is virtually unheard of—an 18-month old church plant that can be a net giver/producer of resources instead of a net receiver/user of resources. Therefore, it seems prudent to me to ask the questions: where is God taking us? What is our next step? What are our next 20 steps?

Our 20-year plan.

Continuing the gardening metaphor, I suggest we view our church in this way. A gardener engages in different behaviors based on the time of year, or season. In the same way, our church will have different seasons—spring, summer, fall, and then the following spring.

Spring: Planning, Preparing, & Planting

The first two years

February, 2005 to February, 2007

- What type of garden are we going to plant?
- Where is the best patch of land?
- How must the plot be prepared?
- When is the best time to plant?
- What is the best type of fertilizer?
- What is to be done about weeds?

Our church is currently in late spring. Summer is around the corner. During this spring period, our first two years, we have answered most of the questions above. Some of them I have already addressed in this document, but I will again speak to them below.

What type of Garden?

The Morse Church is an “ancient-future” church. That is to say, we believe answers to spiritual questions that future-minded people have can be found by looking into the rich history of the church. We have used two seminal documents from history to inform our answer to this question, a passage from a book that records the earliest days of the Christian Church, Acts of the Apostles, and an extra-biblical book from one of the earliest church fathers and saints.

*⁴²They devoted themselves to the **apostles’ teaching and fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread and the prayers**.⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed **were together** and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and **distribute the proceeds** to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as **they spent much time together** in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. --Acts 2:42*

*“And on the day called **Sunday**, all who live in cities or in the country **gather together** to one place, and **the memoirs of the apostles** or the **writings of the prophets** are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, **the president verbally instructs**, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we **all rise together and pray**, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, **bread and wine and water** are brought, and **the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings**, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, **give what each thinks fit**; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.” -First Apology of Justin Martyr, AD 90*

Thus we are a church that does the behaviors listed above and emphasized.

What is the best plot of land?

We chose the ancient, abandoned Morse Church location as the plot based on the demographics cited above and the type of church cited above. The old buildings are a means to an end—a place that works as a wonderful stage for a play God will enact through us.

How must the plot be prepared?

We believed we should prepare the old Morse Church building just enough to open but not enough to feel as though it was “finished.” We have intentionally left room for new people to enter into the restoration process. Along the way, we have made a fun discovery—that when people come to serve the church they become a part of the church. Our old building has become an amazing tool for evangelism.

In addition, we have raised up a group of people who are already living into the four values (worship, grow, serve, give). These are people to whom Jesus might refer as “good soil, producing a crop 30, 60 and 100 times.” We have a highly dedicated core group of people versed in our vision and committed to it.

When is the best time to plant?

The core group believed we should have launched on September 11, 2005 in order to recapture what is known as a horrific date for good, and God’s, purposes.

What is the best type of fertilizer?

We have discovered that the Alpha Course followed by campus-based teaching events or groups followed by home-based (or off campus based) small groups are best. Dozens of people have followed this spiritual formation path and are becoming deeply committed Christians as defined by the behaviors “worship, grow, serve, give.”

What is to be done about weeds?

We have discovered weeds come in many forms. But the most difficult weed in our garden has been what I will term, “hyper-enthusiastic very experienced Christians.” These are wonderful saints who have been involved deeply in other churches and who know the bible very, very well. Because the rest of community is comprised of people who are new to the journey and new to the bible, these weeds really struggle to coexist with people who do not yet exhibit behaviors or knowledge hyper-enthusiastic very experienced Christians expect other church goers to exhibit. Thus we have had to invite dozens of weeds to consider participating in other churches.

Summer: Growing

Years 3, 4, and 5

2007-2009

- Fertilize
- Prune
- Weed
- Water
- Prepare for the harvest

During summer, a gardener must tend the garden. If the garden does not have the proper fertilizer, the plants are not properly pruned, the weeds are not properly removed, and soil is not properly watered, then the sprigs will not produce the proper crop of fruit. In addition, during summer the gardener must prepare for the coming harvest. Where will the fruit be stored and preserved? How will it be consumed? For the Morse Church, our season of growing and preparing can be perhaps best explained in terms of our vision and values. Over lunch a few weeks back, I was encouraged by one of our members, an investment banker, to project into the future (over the next three years) so that we could have a reasonable understanding of where we can be based on what others have done. What follows is a fruit of that research; based primarily on discussions I have had with experts on church plant growth and church plant stewardship (finance).

Summer: Growing 2007 to 2009

- Worship
- Grow
- Serve
- Give
- Governance
- Staffing
- Facilities

According to the experts in church planting with whom I was able to have a discussion these past few weeks, we can reasonably expect a 20% growth rate over the next 14 months. This growth rate could and, indeed, with careful planning, should be realized across the spectrum of our ministries.

Worship

We will continue to advertise our church services, primarily through bulk mail supported by signage. Over any given week, on average we can expect to have 4 to 6 new people (one to two households). If just 1/4th of the visitors get connected to our **worship, grow, serve, give** model, then we will assimilate about 60 people into the Morse Church family per year. Over that same period, about 15% of our people will leave the area, transfer to another church, or experience a significant life change, such as death or divorce, which will inhibit their attendance and participation. By the end of 2007, we will likely have an average worship attendance of 150 over three services, 25 in the first service, 100 in 10:00 service, and 25 at our evening service.

One of our main focuses in terms of worship in 2007 will be the development of a consistent cadre of people who staff the various functions of worship. Our interim leadership team and our denomination have both strongly suggested that I deliver the sermon 3 out of every 4 Sundays, or 39 out of 52 weeks a year. Further, approximately half of the remaining 13 sermons should be delivered by a person within the Morse Church family, such as Gib Wood, our interim church chairman. This leaves just 6 or 7 Sundays for outside speakers. Taking this path represents a significant departure from our heretofore approach of having ½ of the Sunday sermons delivered by a voice different from mine. However, both our leadership team and our denomination have suggested that a consistent voice will help people feel more at home more quickly and help people connect with the vision, or intentional direction, of the church.

Additionally, our worship team will begin to invite and assimilate new people and new styles of worship in our services. By the end of 2007, we hope to have multiple people who are participating in the music portion of our services and introducing differing and new musical styles.

We also recognize the need to raise up people to staff two of our up-front worship positions—master of ceremonies and liturgist. The M.C. position will initiate the service with prayer, make a welcome, present the announcements, and introduce or perform the scripture readings. The liturgist position will lead us in the liturgical acts of worship—prayer, responsive readings, confession, communion, and benediction.

Another aspect of weekend worship we will be addressing in 2007 is hospitality. We intend to raise up a team of greeters, ushers, treat-makers and servers, cleaners, and at-home visitors. Currently, I personally visit each prospect, delivering a loaf of homemade sweet bread, Art's Coffee, and a welcome letter. By the end of 2007, we intend to have two more people involved in the visitor follow-up. Currently, we have 3 households who make the treats and 4 households who clean the church and parsonage. Both of these need to double in terms of the number of participants 2007.

Grow

By the end of 2007, we should have 50 people participating in Alpha or small groups, up from our current average of about 30. To date, 47 people from 24 households have taken the Alpha Course, which will remain our first step in our spiritual formation continuum as depicted below:

Visitor ⇒ Alpha ⇒ Wednesday night group ⇒ Home group ⇒ Ministry

One area of emphasis will be to enroll people who attend our church who have not yet taken Alpha in the course.

To staff groups able to feed and care for 50 people, we will need at least 12 trained and equipped lay leaders. These people will understand themselves to be responsible for the spiritual formation, accountability, and pastoral care of their group members.

Serve

In 2007, we will continue to populate and organize our ministry teams. During the spring, we will formally appoint a team leader for each of our 4 teams: worship, grow, serve, give. As the teams become more functional they will be given more autonomy in function. By the end of 2007, we intend to have 75 people, or half of our average worship attendance, involved in a ministry team.

Give

Initially, I mistakenly believed that our church's finances would take care of themselves. That is to say, that if we were faithful to our vision and worked hard to lead good ministries, then people would enthusiastically give generously to our local work and to our outside mission projects. However, I have learned that we must be far more intentional about stewardship than we have been in the past. With the help of experts in this area, we have enlisted a finance team who are developing a budget, creating a stewardship plan, and cultivating outside resources of funds.

Stewardship patterns in church plants who focus on connecting with unchurched people are fairly predictable. During the first 18 months of church life, a previously unchurched participant gives inconsistently, somewhat nominally, and not in proportion to their income. In suburban congregations, this is for two reasons: suburban people often live a fully leveraged lifestyle (making debt payments on houses, cars, and other durable goods) and because they are not familiar with the Bible's teaching on finances (i.e., debt-free living and first-fruits giving). However, if the lay leadership of the church engages in a basic stewardship campaign, giving behaviors on the part of people actively participating in a church plant often shift dramatically 18-24 months after their initial assimilation into the body. As parishioners are exposed to the Bible's 10%-90% model of living (the first 10% of income is returned to God, the remaining 90% is used for living life), most of them become proportional givers and many become full-tithing.

Our church will initiate our first formal stewardship campaign in January of 2007. This campaign, modeled after successful stewardship campaigns of other, similar size and age church plants, will include the following components: vision casting, teaching, budgeting, and appealing (asking).

Our operating budget for 2007, though yet to be finalized, will most likely be in the range of \$14,000 per month. Experts in church planting and start-up church finances tell us that, based on our current attendance, we can anticipate 30 or more households will begin proportional giving in 2007. The average household income for our county is just over \$75,00. The average realized income tax rate for our area is just under 25%. This means a typical Morse Church household receives \$56,250 in take-home income each year, or \$4687.50 per month. Based on these figures, our denomination estimates the anticipated 30 proportional-giving households will, on average, pledge around \$470 a month. That would mean we could plan on \$14,100 per month in local (people who attend church at Morse) giving. Each dollar we receive beyond \$14,000 could be used for mission work, debt retirement, or a building campaign.

Governance

We are a congregational church. Each member has one vote. Our congregation approves the annual budget, elects a leadership team, approves the call of the senior pastor, and adopts/amends a constitution. An interim leadership team invested a great deal of time and energy exploring ways in which we can set up our church government. They have concluded that we should use a “leadership team model” used by many successful church plants in the last 15 years. Under this model, the church elects team of 4 people, usually the heads of the ministry teams (worship, grow, serve, and give) who, along with the senior pastor, form the leadership team. The leadership team is responsible for the day-to-day oversight of the church. At the time the congregation becomes self-funding (30 or more proportional giving households), the interim leadership team will present their draft constitution to the congregation for their input and approval. When the final draft is approved, the congregation will vote to call a senior pastor and the leadership team.

Staffing

In 2007, our staff will consist of a senior pastor, a part-time worship leader, and a part-time administrator.

Facilities

We believe as a church that we should commit the smallest possible amount of our resources to our facilities so that we can maximize the resources we have available for ministry and missions. In other words, we take a minimalist approach towards buildings and grounds. What, then, are the minimal needs to complete our mission? Based on the information we have gleaned from people and organizations familiar with church planting, we need to offer the following:

- A worship space able to comfortably seat 150 people
- At least 8 comfortable, safe classrooms or break-out rooms for the following age groups: infants, toddlers, preschool/kindergarten, grades 1-3, grades 4-6, middle school, and high school.
- A room large enough to seat 100 people at tables and chairs.
- Customary restroom facilities
- Parking for at least 50 cars.

Since the Old Morse Church building already seats 150 people, we only need to focus on making it more comfortable. Over the next few months, we will continue with the restoration and repair of the church, with the intent of completing the following projects:

1. Repair and paint interior walls (November, 2006)
2. Install heat pump/heat strip forced-air units (December, 2006)
3. Install brick walkway and courtyard (December, 2006).
4. Repair wood floors (December 2006)
5. Repair windows (January/February, 2007)
6. Install sound and video projection system (Spring, 2007)

Since we do not currently offer appropriate restroom facilities nor do we have adequate classroom space for our children, we will explore all options to gain access to these appropriate facilities.

So in review, by the end of 2007, we should look something like this:

- **Worship**—150 people or more attending one of three services
- **Grow**—50 individuals in “grow” ministries (small groups and Alpha)
- **Serve**—4 ministry teams established
 - Each team has a team leader
 - Each team is populated with at least 10 people.
- **Give**
 - 30 proportional giving households by February 1
 - \$14,000 in monthly local giving
- **Staffing**
 - Senior pastor
 - Worship leader
 - Administrative assistant
- **Facilities**
 - A worship space able to comfortably seat 150 people
 - At least 8 comfortable, safe classrooms
 - A room large enough to seat 100 people at tables and chairs.
 - Adequate restroom facilities
 - Parking for at least 50 cars.
- **Governance**
 - Leadership team of 4 plus senior pastor
 - Constitution in place
 - Budget adopted

As stated above, we can reasonably expect, God willing, to grow at a 20% rate across the entire spectrum of our ministries—worship, grow, serve, give—not only in 2007, but in 2008 and 2009. When we apply that growth rate to our current state, by the end of 2009—our 5th year of life together as a church—we could look something like this:

Morse Church at the end of 2009 (5 years out)

- Worship: 200+ people attending 1 of 3 services.
- Grow: 72 in Alpha or groups.
- Serve: 80 people involved in the ministry of the church.
- Give: 43 tithing households.
- Staff: Senior Pastor, 2 Worship teams, administrator, children's pastor, youth pastor

Therefore, by the end of 2009, we will be a fully functioning, “mature” church plant. Praise be to God—he will have done a great thing through us.

However, out county will still be populated by mostly unchurched people. How will we reach them?

The Morse Church—the non-mega church **Years 6 to 20.**

We started the Morse Church because research on evangelism in the United States points to this conclusion—the fastest and cheapest way to increase church attendance is by starting new churches. Since this is unlikely to change in the next 10 to 15 years, we will continue to focus on church planting. In other words, instead of continuing to attempt to grow a single congregation around a single leader or vision, we will instead focus on growing big by growing small. That is to say, when we reach the mature stage discussed above (200+ in attendance, 70 people in small groups or Alpha, 80 or so in ministry positions, and adequate staff and facilities to minister to people of all ages), we will then raise up leaders and core group members who leave the Morse Church to start new, affiliated congregations. But has this been done before? Is there a precedent for small, mature, and young churches starting new congregations as an evangelism and growth strategy. The answer is a resounding, “YES!” Indeed, this is the method of church growth the Christian community has employed for most of its 2000 year history. Indeed, mega-churches are a relatively recent phenomenon. Let me illustrate by introducing 3 Christian communities who could serve as models for us.

A tale of three churches.

Holy Trinity Brompton

In 1978, Holy Trinity Brompton Church (HTB) in central London, England, was typical of most Church of England outposts. It was populated by a handful of elderly women and led by a kind, caring chaplain-like vicar. However, that vicar, John Collins, read the Daniel-like writing on the wall—if things did not change, his congregation would soon go the fate of so many other Anglican churches. Soon HTB would be closed.

Collins embarked on a plan to repopulate the church with young people by building a staff of young leaders. Using the English system of raising up new pastors via a curacy—that is to say, pastoral internships for recently graduated seminarians—he built a team of young staffers who revitalized the church. Two of the first curates brought onto the team at HTB were Charles Marnham and Sandy Millar. The two of them collaborated to “invent” the Alpha Course, a basic introduction to the Christian faith. Via Alpha, within 10 years the church grew from 160 to 1600, which challenged the facilities and the staff of HTB. Since the church was landlocked and thus unable to expand the facilities, they were forced to explore other means of ministering to their growing flock.

So HTB began an internal leadership development track called “pastorates,” wherein potential Christian leaders could be deployed to shepherd a flock of around 50 congregants. The best and brightest of these leaders were then dispatched to seminary. Upon completion of their formal theological training and ordination, these leaders return to HTB for a one to two year stint as a curate. During this time, they themselves identified a leadership team and core group of people numbering approximately 100 who then leave to form a new, autonomous yet affiliated congregation. The result is that today HTB is a church of around 1000 people that has planted 12 affiliated congregations that reach a combined population in excess of 10,000 people. So HTB has had mega-church like results but no single congregation has more than 1000 people. None of these churches currently has a mortgage or debt of any kind. Over 400 people staff the various ministries of these churches.

Each summer, thousands of members gather for a week-long church retreat at a vacation resort on the southern coast of England. Here they become cohesive in worship and collaborate on a single vision. But they execute this vision in ways unique to their congregational style. Some are urban, some are suburban, some are racially mixed, some are racially homogenous, some worship with hymns in old buildings, and some worship with rock and roll in modern facilities. All do the work of the Gospel and all reach new people.

Bayside Covenant Church

Ray Johnston arrive in the Sacramento, California area about 15 years ago with a dream to reach unchurched people. Sacramento is similar in size to greater Kansas City and its suburbs are growing quickly, too. Ray planted Bayside in a warehouse-like facility and, as God blessed

Ray with a vision and with strong leading and teaching gifts, Bayside rapidly grew. When Bayside reach about 1000 people, they began to send out teams of 50 or so people to start new congregations. Today, Bayside has 9 such affiliated yet autonomous congregations that reach 9,500 people in combined attendance.

Stanwich Congregational Church

Located on the boarder of two extremely wealthy New York City suburbs, Greenwich Connecticut and Stanford, Connecticut, Stanwich Church was actually planted in 1684 by pilgrims. The church building was recently remodeled—in 1845! Since that time they have met in this very small, classic New England white clapboard church building similar to old Morse Church building. For the first 325 years of its history, Stanwich Church attendance remained steady at 50 people. Then in 1990, Neely Tow was elected senior pastor. Blessed with amazing administrative, leadership, pastoral, and teaching gifts, Stanwich Church began to grow rapidly under her leadership. When they reached 200 people in 1996, they had a dilemma—the congregation no longer fit into the little, ancient building. Their solution—plant a new church. Their youth pastor, Ian Crone, was dispatched with about 100 young people to start a new church just down the road. Today, Stanwich Church is a church of about 200 and Trinity Church, the name of Ian’s plant, is a church of about 500. Recently, the old New England church building was renovated and expanded—they added a balcony, a basement, and classrooms.

So that is the long term vision for Morse. Each time we grow to reach 200 or so people, we will raise up a team of people to start a new, autonomous congregation. In other words, we will grow big by growing small. That is to say, we will increase the total number of people reached by the ministries of the Morse Church by planting new churches instead of building a single, large congregation.