

## FAQ's about Substance's Facility Process:

No matter how much we share from the pulpit, we realize that there will always be more questions. So below I took some of the top questions and compiled a list of responses. At the end, I give you a few ways you can feedback to us, as your input is always important. But here are a few of the questions we're going to answer down below:

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## What other campuses might we consider launching in the next five years?

On staff we're constantly throwing around ideas for new campus locations, from London to some place warm (Florida or Los Angeles anyone?) But first, we know we need to accomplish more within our own region. We have a large number of west-siders and south-siders who embrace a rather long drive. We also have a heart for the inner city.

Keep in mind, there are a lot of moving parts to facility planning. Timing, staffing, financing, and the availability of suitable locations all play a part. As we've said before, our hope would be to move into our first permanent facility within the next two years. In doing so, we may likely shut down two of our current three high-school locations when we move into our first permanent facility. Even our third remaining campus might be relocated to better suit the emerging needs of our people. But all of this is ultimately going to be recalibrated based upon where our 1<sup>st</sup> permanent building lands.

For example, it's possible that we will be launching a southern high-school location *even before* we move into our first permanent location. And if we closed down any of our current locations (to better suit our people) we could use many of our portable assets (such as truck/trailers/P.A.'s, etc.) to launch these new campuses.

But we appreciate everyone's patience when it comes to this. We can't give hard-and-fast commitments to a south-side timeline as we can't yet fully predict our finances and construction time-lines either. Yet, we want our people to know that we are working hard to make sure that, no matter what happens in the next two years, we desire to

provide a Substance location to as many people as possible that's within a 20 minute drive of their residence. But we hope it suffices to say: We will be working on a South side location especially if we shut down our Northwestern campus for a permanent location north of 694.

But beyond these two-year goals, we feel a greater calling to this city. For a long time we've felt a call to plant some sort of urban campus within the next five years. As we will likely move further north with our first permanent location, we would *also* like to make strides deeper into the city.

You see, the beauty of being a multi-site church is that we can keep our ministry options open. When the Holy Spirit gives us opportunities to reach special people groups, we can obey without a geographical leash to tether us down.

But be praying with us. There are a lot of moving parts to this machine. It's a lot like a five person juggling act. When one thing change, everything needs to be recalibrated. But one thing is for sure, Substance is designed to be a movement that spreads out everywhere. And we need *you* to help us accomplish this.

**How might a suburban campus affect our target audience? (Are we still trying to reach unchurched 20-somethings?)**

The geographical location of a church has an obvious affect on who it attracts. But multi-site church methods have changed these rules a bit. After all, a church that has "no center" can do things that other churches can't. As we've repeatedly said, we're looking for our 1<sup>st</sup> permanent facility of many. Therefore, we aren't "permanently" alienating any demographic with a suburban location. After all, it's only a matter of time before we focus on a new audience in a new location. Thus, the real question becomes: *which location will create the most momentum and resources that will accelerate our ability to reach others?*

But, that being said, people are still curious about how our first location will affect our Sunday morning culture. So allow us to clarify a few important things.

*No matter where our 1<sup>st</sup> location is, we will always keep our focus on young unchurched people.* Substance will always have our youth culture defining our Sunday worship. Besides, as a church dominated by brilliant progressive musicians, it wouldn't be authentic for us to suddenly become a "traditional or middle aged church."

However, there are times when our "youthy-ness" has definitely hurt us as well. Aside from creating a financially precarious church model, we also have a lack of mentors. Everyone needs a mentor who's one season-of-life ahead. This requires a continuum of ages. And although we "aren't for everyone"... we could still do a better job to keep our church healthy by balancing out our demographics (both in age and ethnicity).

But, the irony of our situation is this: To reach more 20-somethings, we need more people over 35! And just as important, a balanced demographic has a stabilizing effect on the financial health as well. Hence, in the short-term, we need to fill-in the "middle-aged" family category in order to fulfill our longer term goals of reclaiming a young lost generation. And that's where a permanent campus (north of 694) can really be of service to us. But, here's where things get interesting.

The problem with our current portable multi-site approach is that it subtly alienates middle-aged families. How, you ask? Well, it's not so much our Sunday services as it is the "other stuff" that goes beyond church services.

For example, we could easily get 800 people at our deeper services if we offered child-care. But there's no room at the Operation Center. Thus, it's a ministry that subtly alienates anyone with families. Or, for another example: Most parents don't want their kids driving *into the city* to attend youth group (when you have teenagers, you'll understand).

Also, most parents won't drive their kids to youth group unless the church offers another program that simultaneously meets *their needs*. (E.g., a Wednesday night church service or adult small group). And because of the size of our Operation Center, it's just not functional to offer "synergistic programming" like this.

We have the leadership bandwidth to be packing out a huge number of auditoriums every night of the week. But we simply don't have the facility space. Thus, permanent buildings have a large impact on 30 & 40 somethings – enabling programs that most 20-somethings simply don't value as much.

So this is what we're doing about it:

**(1). We are going to work as fast as we can to get into our first permanent building that reaches these groups:**

Although the process of constructing a building like this is painstakingly slow, we are working as fast as possible. That's why our Catalyst offerings are so important. They literally help us speed up the time-table in which we can get our next "bigger Operation Center." Keep in mind, this building will also have a huge effect on young people by enabling us to massively grow our internships.

**(2). We are going to take a more family friendly approach to multi-site.** You'll eventually see a separate specialized youth ministry for each and every campus. We'll pick better portable facilities that are more conducive to kids ministry (both in cleanliness, security, as well as overall layout). And we will likely be girding up the pastoral leadership of each and every campus. We want everyone to feel like they have a clear sense of community – thus increasing localized ownership and campus identity (i.e., Less people jumping around... and more familiar faces). In fact, some day soon, each campus will have its own "church picnics" and family fun nights. However...

**(3). We will always have a youth-driven Sunday morning church service.** No matter where we are geographically, we believe that the future of the church rests within our young people. For example, I think it's awesome that we're capable of doing all-techno worship sets. My heart is to integrate more rap or hip-hop into our worship. As our slogan says, we desire to be "tenaciously relevant." And if we can accomplish this without unnecessarily alienating people, that's awesome; but, Substance is not for everyone. And people who are looking for a traditional experience have plenty of other places to find it.

\* How Nice / Extravagant will it be?

It will be classy, tasteful, yet cost-effective. It's easy to get carried away with the details. But it will be functional, like our Operation Center; yet, perhaps one notch higher. (i.e., We will actually finish the drywall : )

But ultimately, PEOPLE are the mission, not a great facility. So, as long as it facilitates this end, we will be happy. Besides, there are many cost-effective ways to make a facility look nice without breaking our bank account. And we are relying upon your resourcefulness to help us accomplish this goal.

## \* What might this building look like?

Again, this is the first building of many. We're not looking at this as our "End-destination" building. Rather, think of this as a much larger version of our operation center. This will be "cool yet functional." "Classy but not expensive." In some ways... I don't even care about buildings. But I care a LOT about ministry to people -- and buildings can be an amazing tool to achieve that end.

That being said, there are a few basic things we need to be able to accomplish with this facility.

**(1). We need a nicer children's ministry.** It bugs me that any old junky-fast-food restaurant can have a play-land... yet we have a mission that's 100-times more important than selling French fries -- yet don't have anything comparable. Don't get me wrong... I'm not talking about having water-slides or roller-coasters... but, it's always sad when a non-Christian comes and refuses to drop off their kid (because their kids are scared). I.e., an attractive kids ministry enables these unchurched parents to finally experience God's Word in a non-distracting way. Indeed, a good kids ministry is actually a statistical predictor of "reaching unchurched." I realize this might sound funny to many of you who don't have kids -- but it's true.

I've always imagined something similar to a nice McDonald's playland next to a café of sorts. Couples could hang-out together before and after church while their kids had fun. And wouldn't it be cool if we could open this to the public all week long while having God-centered small groups meet nearby?

**(2). A Second thing we need this facility to do is provide space for our mid-size groups:** As a younger church very few of our members own houses. And if they do these are usually not "large houses" that are conducive to hosting more than 9 people at a time. Thus, compared to most churches, we have an unusually small number of meeting spaces for groups between 10-300 people. We literally had a group that attracted over 128 people on a weekly basis. Unchurched people would regularly come to it. But we didn't have space at our Operation Center anymore. And because we had to turn them away they had to shut down. Can you imagine how frustrating that was to us? That one singular group was probably more effective in reaching unchurched people than the vast majority of churches in the U.S. and yet we had to shut down for lack of facility infrastructure.

Thus it's important you understand: We are constantly shutting out Bible-studies, prayer-groups, family ministries and conference opportunities simply because we have too many groups fighting for the same limited space. Yes, we are always looking for churches and conference centers to rent. But if we all chip into our catalyst offerings, we can do WAY better. Again, we believe that, once again, we could quadruple our small

groups and mid-size events in a matter of months of moving into a permanent space. So pray with us about this.

**(3). And Finally, we need a permanent weekend facility for our church:** As you'll see below, we can't assume that our portable campuses will last forever.

Also, there are many downsides to being a portable church. The set-up required becomes a big drain on our volunteers. As a result, it's very difficult to offer a variety of church service times without it becoming a logistical nightmare. However, in a permanent facility, (where the sound and lighting system is always set up), we can easily add two Saturday services, four Sunday services, without worrying about load-in/load-out or Public school contractual obligations. I.e., Long story Short: We could grow a much larger church without the same extreme efforts.

The result would be this: More consistent audio (less ear-piercing). A prettier lighting system (making for a better video recording for our video venues). Better Children's ministry. More outreach to the community. And ultimately... the most important one: Many more souls in the kingdom! For us, the formula is simple: A bigger building equals more souls. This isn't true for every church; but, it's definitely true for us.

## Why are we focusing on building from scratch instead of retrofitting an existing facility?

A facility of our size can be complicated to build. There are a lot of industrial warehouse sites around the city. But very few of them possess adequate space for parking. Part of this is because most warehouse businesses only need a small number of parking spots. Yet, a facility like ours needs a minimum of 500-650 parking stalls (which is a couple hundred more stalls than a typical old Target or Walmart). Keep in mind, parking lot sizes have dramatically increased over the last 20 years as the ratio of cars-per-family has increased. Many buildings have adequate square footage, yet the parking lot sizes or egress (street sizes and/or interstate access) is woefully inadequate.

Also, many of these large existing facilities might appear to meet our spatial needs; yet, the costs of retrofitting these same facilities is usually far more expensive than the costs of building from scratch. After vetting numerous properties, (and burning a lot of time) we finally came to the conclusion that, unless someone donates a large building to us with adequate parking, we'd be better off looking for a blank-slate property where we can start from scratch.

## What types of criteria are considered when looking for a facility?

When we assess a facility, (both for portable campuses and for permanent space), we have extensive list of requirements. We often do an extensive amount of research into each of the following:

Seating Capacity; Parking Capacity (1 car stall per every 2 seats); Is it suitable for Children's Ministry (clean, secure, appropriate size for campus); Worship Friendliness (how well might this facility accommodate a modern worship experience); Pricing (How well does it fit within our budget); Traffic Egress (Do the nearby streets facilitate

adequate traffic flow and interstate access?); Psychological Accessibility (Does it feel too far/ too urban/ too suburban, can you describe the location in one sentence? etc.); Is the facility close enough to our current congregation? Is the facility close to our "desired congregation" (I.e., demographics we hope to reach who aren't currently coming.) And finally, there are also city politics and zoning considerations that affects our value of a given facility/property.

As you can see, there are a lot of criteria that need to be considered before we pull the trigger on a new location. We are always interested in researching new locations. Now that you know a few of our criteria, feel free to help us eye-up future locations.

## What are the basic specs of an ideal permanent facility?

Five or ten years ago, before multi-site church methods became popular, a traditional architect would have laughed at Substance for building anything less than a 3000 seat auditorium. Keep in mind, we've averaged over 350-500 new attendees per year. So, traditionally, a church should never build a facility that they could realistically outgrow within five years. For us, that would probably be a thirty-million dollar facility – which is about 20 million dollars out of our current price range.

But because we have a multi-site philosophy, we don't have to think "traditionally." I.e., We can build almost any size facility we want knowing that it will simply be the first of many. That being said, we've set our hopes on a 1200 seater requiring at least 12 useable acres (i.e., non-wetland acres, etc.).

This wouldn't be an extravagant facility. Rather, this will be a well-designed multi-purpose facility, enabling a variety of events, from marriage conferences to large worship nights.

## Where might this facility be and why?

Keep in mind, this is the first facility of many. Because we are a multi-site church, we will always be looking for ways we can expand into different parts of the city. So, the big-picture answer is this: It really doesn't matter where the first facility will land. After all, we will always be one-part permanent, one-part portable. And the end goal is to have campuses that cater to people in almost every part of the city: Urban/Sub-urban/ North-south-east-west. So, the real question about our 1<sup>st</sup> facility is this: *What location would enable us to gather critical mass the quickest?* In light of this, here are a few of the criteria that helped to narrow down our search for this first location.

### **First off, we asked the question: Where do our current members live?**

Obviously they come from all over the Twin Cities. Some drive as far as 50 minutes every Sunday. But the vast majority live north of downtown Mpls all the way up to northern Blaine/Maple Grove. But the vast majority who have kids and own their homes live slightly north of I-694. These are the people who would benefit the most from a building (as well as pay for it : )

**Another factor we considered is the Cost of the property.** Keep in mind, there aren't a whole lot of properties which fulfill our complex list of criteria. Finding large, well-zoned properties with adequate parking and roadway-egress is complicated. And demolishing or retrofitting existing buildings isn't cheap (which is often the case when searching deeper into the city).

As a general rule, the deeper into the city, the more expensive the overall property cost. Of course, there are many exceptions to this rule. But as we took the median cost per/acre going 10 minutes *south of 694* and compared it to going 10 minutes *North of 694*, it was pretty striking. The spectrum ranged from \$600,000 per acre to \$18,000 per acre (And we need at least 12 acres). Of course, there are always certain properties that are extremely cheap; but again, very few that meet our extensive criteria.

In fact, the average cost/per acre seemed to dramatically drop with every ½ mile we'd search north (of NE Mpls). It seemed that for every 40 seconds north our search went, overall property costs were roughly \$250,000 less. And for a "below-average" church-income like ours, this is a critical issue. After all, we can't simply cap our growth for 6 years while our finances catch up to our church size. Which leads to the third criteria known as the "cost of waiting."

**The "Cost of Waiting" criteria** would usually bring to mind issues like: *Cost of rental fees each month*. And yes, Substance spends over \$40,000 each month on rental fees. And we'd love to put that money towards equity. But these are not the costs being discussed here.

Substance has a rather large number of "loose attendees." I.e., People who show up once every month or two, but have little or no commitment. They might regularly download our podcasts or have an openness towards God; yet, for various reasons they keep their commitment and ownership at a minimum. As demonstrated by programs like our Christmas services, we can easily break 5000 when we diligently work to reach our loose attendees; yet, we realize that, without a building, we are seriously hindering the ministries necessary to disciple and empower this audience.

For example, when Substance moved into its Operation Center, we literally tripled our small groups, volunteers, and exploded a staff of interns. And not surprisingly, these ministries engaged and transformed a whole new wave of loose attendees into committed Substance members – many of whom now staff and fund the ministries you are currently experiencing.

In other words, although our Operation Center cost us \$250,000 to build, it's probably catalyzed over \$1 million dollars extra *per year* in donations from the people it's empowered – people who had loose connections with our church, if *any church at all*.

In the same way, we believe that a building like this will explode with new ministries that will engage this sleeping army of loose attendees. We also know that a building like this will have a huge impact on attracting missing family demographics that will stabilize both our discipleship processes as well as our income. And these are critical assets, especially as we continue our strategy of planting new campuses all around the metro and abroad.

**A fourth consideration is the reality of our shifting demographics.** Part of Substance's "low income" is obviously due to the massive number of 20-something families. We realize that as our church ages, the geographic center of our church will quickly shift north (where affordable housing and good school-districts are). So, we do

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not want to be ignorant of this migration – paying a mint for property only to have the majority of our church "drive south" for church.

Of course, we will always allow our college students to define our Sunday morning worship culture. And we will always keep a focus on young unchurched people (both urban and suburban). Yet, in the short-term, we need to be ready to embrace this northward shift. There's a baby wave happening that will have a dramatic effect on our congregants needs (both geographically as well as programmatically in the form of kids, youth, and family-friendly ministries).

So, to simplify all of this: After triangulating our current campuses and demographics, we discovered a "hot zone" along the 694 corridor and upwards. And then we asked: *Where are the cheapest blank properties that would still enable us to empower our current members while simultaneously positioning us (economically and functionally) to accomplish even greater works in the future?*

In light of all of this, we need to look for property that is north of 694, which does several things: (1) It literally cuts millions of dollars off the price tag. (2). This better positions us for the northern migration of our 20-somethings (due to housing costs and school systems) and (3). It simultaneously enables us to reach more 30 & 40-somethings (a much needed demographic for our church health). Ironically, to better reach 20-somethings, we need to reach more 30 & 40-somethings. But, our south-siders and urbanites shouldn't fear. After all, we are simultaneously plotting out new potential campuses that will engage anyone who might be disenfranchised by this first location. (Thus, see the question: *"What other campuses might we consider launching in the next five years?"*)

But here's the big picture: I remember when Substance was back on the U of M (St.Paul Campus). We had totally outgrown our facility. I vividly remember when we first suggested Fridley High School as a solution, numerous people thought we were out of our minds. After all, Fridley Highschool was 20 minutes northwest of our current location! Will anyone make the drive!?! (i.e., Are we gonna kill the church by moving?) At the time it felt like a huge risk.

And when all was said and done, we probably lost around 80 members (which, at the time was roughly 15-20% of our congregation). Yet, get this. Within two years we grew by 1500 people and added two more locations. Looking back, that move was one of the most important decisions we ever made in the strategic history of our church. And today, so glad our leadership team had the boldness & foresight to pull the trigger.

But the reason why I'm sharing this is because, facility decisions can seem counter-intuitive to some. Part of this is because, most of us are thinking about our *own needs* rather than the big picture needs of Substance. Yet, with all of this said, don't be afraid to ask us questions about all of this. Indeed, that's what this document is all about.

## How long might it take to build?

A facility of this size can be a daunting task. There are a lot of hoops to jump through when you consider city/state politics, zoning issues, soil testing, city utilities, architectural processes – not to mention fundraising or the construction itself. Not surprisingly, it can take a full two years to move into a building like this...assuming a reasonable amount of money can be fundraised. Right now, we still need a minimum of \$2 million to pull off this first facility (which is astronomically cheap considering that

this facility will likely increase our yearly income by three times this amount). So, one of our biggest prayers is that the men and women of Substance could increase their generosity. Like I mentioned above, every dollar we spent on our Operation Center resulted in 4 times the amount in our yearly income. (Talk about a return on investment).

But fundraising aside, it could still take two years. So being praying with us. Two years is a long time – especially when our current facility situation is already forcing us to cap dozens of our ministries from growing. Pray that God would give us favor and efficiency, with city-planners, architects, and financiers. And pray that everyone will understand the profundity of our catalyst offerings on our ministry capacity.

### \* What might this first facility cost and why?

If you've noticed over the past few years, our estimates have been all over the map. Part of this is because, the smallest details can have a dramatic affect on the cost.

For example, 12 acres of land can cost between \$1.5 million to 6 million based on where you buy it. (That's a 4.5 million dollar difference, for those who are slow at math). By simply moving one minute north or south, it can make a mind-blowing difference – not to mention 5 minutes.

Another factor that can skew costs is the design complexity of the facility. Certain design shapes and sizes can even affect whether the bank will loan you money! Thus, between architectural and construction costs, churches can be all over the map for the same size auditorium.

And the technology within the building (sound system, lighting, etc. is also another "X" factor.) Thus, I know churches who've spent 20 million dollars on a 1400 seater. Yet, I also know churches who've spent 12 million for a similar size facility.

But it begs the question: How much will OUR facility cost? Initially we estimated that it would cost us around \$10 million. Obviously, this price would be for a conservative facility (no 3-d Holograms yet). But another thing that affects the cost is the financing costs.

Most banks want a down-payment that's at least 1/3<sup>rd</sup> the total cost (in cash) plus another 1/3<sup>rd</sup> in "pledges." I.e., On a \$10 million facility many banks want \$3 mil. in cash plus another \$3 million in pledges (i.e., about 60% down). As you'd imagine this is a pretty massive burden for a "lower-income" church like ours to produce. Before the financial down-turn we probably could've done the entire project with just 20% down. But in this new economy... we're kind-of the perfect situation for getting lost in the cracks.

Recently, there's been a third option that many churches are starting to choose: A build to suit lease. For example, many churches will purchase land. Then, they will have a developer build the building (with the developers cash) who will then lease the building back to the church in a "lease to own" scenario. The advantage to churches here is that they can get into a building for far less cash up front. To be specific, in such a situation, we could probably get into a building for \$2-3 million + cost of land.

For a leadership team like ours (who hates debt), at first glance this build to suit option seemed like a bad one. (At first, we all imagined Dave Ramsey looking over our shoulder with a skeptical glance). But, at second glance, it could easily be the best way to steward God's resources.

For example, I mentioned above how our Operation center cost us a quarter million to build out (as a leased facility), yet increased our yearly budget by at least a million per year. Part of the reason for this is that the facility enabled us to dramatically expand our ministries (by around a factor of three). Thus, those ministries reached people who, in turn, began giving to Substance. Thus, if we had waited around to build our very own Operation Center (instead of leasing), we'd probably still be a church of 500 members with very little fruit to show.

Thus, we're in a similar situation now. If we do a build-to-suit "lease-to-own" situation, we could be in a facility in 12-26 months. The other option could easily take 4 years to save up (and then another 2 yrs to actually build). So we've had to ask ourselves the question: Is our goal to become wealthy, building church real-estate? Or is our goal to reach as many souls as possible? Especially in an era when church designs are changing so rapidly and obsolete church facilities abound, we don't want to get lost in the wrong pursuits.

Even still, the leadership teams at Substance are still keeping all options open. In the end, we simply want to steward Substance resources in the best way possible.

### \* Why can't we just continue to add portable campuses?

Short Answer: We can & we will! Portability has created a great situation for us as it allows us to grow our church to a large size while keeping our overhead down. However, some people get the idea that there are no downsides to portability. Truth be told, every strategy for facility management has its pros and cons. And we've probably pushed portability further than anyone. However, portability also has some pretty extreme drawbacks.

First of all: We can't assume that any portable location can last forever. Almost every month I hear of a church like ours that's getting ousted from their facility for one reason or another. A while back, Northwestern was asking Substance about our exit strategy. Then, recently, they decided that it would be a win/win for us to stay a bit longer. But the experience reminds us that there is a ticking clock on these things. You can't just indefinitely move into your friends house thinking that they'll never get sick of you. (I realize that this is a rather profound insight for some of you).

Most places, like the ones we meet in, do not want to sign long-term contracts (i.e., contracts that last longer than a year). Yet, the average build-out time for a permanent facility is roughly 17-22 months. (And the only way to speed that up is by spending inordinate amounts of money.) I.e., Portability can be like going without health insurance – you better be saving every dollar because there's a good chance that eventually, you'll use it either way.

Besides: On average it costs about two to three hundred thousand to purchase the portable equipment to launch a portable campus like ours (I.e., Sound system, Children's equipt., Video equip, Truck, trailer, boxes, etc.) Thus, it's not always smart to drop this amount of money on a facility that may *or may not* be available within the year.

To make this more complicated, with our growth rate, it's not even economical or efficient for us to launch a portable facility without having at least 600 seats – and at least a couple years to recoup the costs. Yet there are very few facilities in the metro that fit these criteria. Then when you add in other factors like parking, children's ministry, foyer

space, cost, or special dates when that facility is totally "un-rentable," we're talking about a very limited number of facilities that work for a weekly church experience.

Secondly: Chances are, we will *always* be launching new portable campuses. Obviously we believe in portable campuses. But we also need to have a certain amount of permanent facilities to stay balanced. We always tell people: "*Church doesn't start until the service is over.*" I.e., it's about your friends and family – not just about a big weekend service on Sunday. But, there are an amazing number of deeply relational experiences that are too big for someone's house, yet there's nowhere else for them to meet.

Many of our small groups are desperate for a larger meeting space to meet in. When people apply for a time slot at our operation center, we turn-away the vast majority of applicants...from Bible studies, prayer groups, mom's groups, to addiction recovery groups. We simply have no room! It's tremendously sad for me – especially when we are SO GOOD and so fruitful at doing these types of things. Without a doubt in my mind, I know that with more facility space, we'd probably have triple the number of amazing ministries... from marriage/missions conferences to financial coaching... more worship events, more concert events, mom's events, teen event... you name it. And every one of these events would be bringing in the lost on a whole new level.

For example, having a weekend facility without any mid-week meeting space is like saying to your 17 member family: "*As long as I get you a hotel and a meal on the weekend, you should be fine being homeless all week!*" It's a ridiculous position to put our leaders in. In fact, many of our leaders have a clear lid on their ministries due to a basic lack of facility space. So permanent facilities have an ability to dramatically increase "mid-week church experiences."

Lastly, permanent facilities generally affect families more than other age-groups. Once you have kids (outside of the baby-phase), your standards for kids ministry and youth ministry are going to dramatically increase. Don't get me wrong: I believe we have one of the best portable kid's ministries around. But we've also got to be honest about the limitations. It takes an amazing number of volunteers to set up a portable experience – (volunteers that could be devoting their time to *more kids programs throughout the week*)... i.e., volunteer bandwidth gets severely eaten up with additional logistics. So, if finances were the ultimate priority, then yes, portability looks like the winner. But, if *ministry effectiveness* is the goal, we'll definitely need to seek the Lord about how long and where he wants us to be portable.

Yes: We will always be looking for cheap ways to expand our weekend service options via portability. We're already utilizing every imaginable space -- from community centers to renting other churches. (This is a constant discipline for our staff and small groups). And, don't get me wrong, we're happy "making due" with our current inadequate circumstances. But there comes a point of diminishing returns. Too much portability can ironically increase our financial liabilities. And we're definitely there in our current facility configuration.

**\* Why can't we just take over dying churches?**

Short Answer: We can & we will!

The Long Answer: Dying churches are dying for a reason. They usually have serious leadership problems or the buildings themselves have hidden costs due to deferred maintenance. We've probably looked at over a half dozen various acquisitions or take-overs in the past few years. But after further investigation, most of those churches required a list of untenable conditions – resulting in a no-deal.

Substance has a very specific recipe for success. And if dying churches come to us with a desire for us to cook up our recipe in their kitchen, then fine. But most churches in these situations want to have Substance's success without allowing Substance's recipe. But we simply don't see these types of compromises as realistic for us – unless the proper conditions exist.

Also keep in mind: Old church buildings can be very expensive to maintain. Much like hotels, many of them have a limited shelf-life. Many of the churches we've looked at possessed intolerable parking or children's ministry spaces (which is why they were dying in the first place). Also, dying churches tend to have a rather large amount of deferred maintenance (e.g., pot-holed parking lots or rotting rooflines). Hence, many of these older church buildings can be money-pits compared to the costs of building new.

If you know of a church that might be a good fit, call us. We've developed a rather clear list of criteria for such take-overs or acquisitions. In the meantime, we're continuing to move forward with the methods that are already working for us.

**\* How can I give feedback? Where do I aim my questions, comments, encouragements or concerns?** Simply call us or stop any of the pastors on Sunday mornings. We'd be happy to listen and relay your concerns to the applicable leaders. Also, feel free to email [Contact@Substancechurch.com](mailto:Contact@Substancechurch.com).