




To see clips from this exclusive interview with Greg Surratt, visit www.visionondemand.net.



Greg Surratt serving communion


exclusive interview

with Greg Surratt, Senior Pastor of Seacoast Church

 Who is Seacoast?



Pastor Greg: Who is Seacoast? Somebody the other day said that Seacoast is “seeker sensitive and spirit led.” Part of that probably is from my background, although we have all kinds of different backgrounds on staff. We have pastors that are ordained as Southern Baptist; we have one pastor that was a Methodist Superintendent. My background is Pentecostal. That’s probably where you get a little of the spontaneity from. We have a value that people need the Lord. That’s number one for me. So everything kind of shakes down from there. We also have a strong value on worship, not only individually but as a congregation, so that flavors what we do.

 One of the things we’ve heard is that Seacoast is considered to be a pioneer in video-venue churches. What’s the story on this?



Pastor Greg: I think it’s been almost two years since we’ve started this. Why do we do video-venues? It’s not something that we said, “Boy, that would be a cool idea that we’d like to do!” We currently occupy 32,000 square feet of building space. We have an auditorium that will seat around 1,400 people and very little space outside of that. Our church began to grow, and we’ve gone to multiple services. We had been attempting to build a larger facility and had been in a building project for about three and a half years. We’ve spent a significant

Photo courtesy of Mahmood Fazal, www.moodphotography.net



Worship at Seacoast's main campus

amount of money and have turned absolutely no shovels... nothing. Through zoning laws, our community is making it very, very difficult for us to expand. We have plenty of land to expand on, but because of traffic issues, we've been in a battle with the city for a couple of years. It's been a big thing in local politics and the paper. It began to appear that we're not going to be able to expand.

We had to look at the best way to go outside the walls, and technology seemed to be something that would take us there. The first thing we did is to decide which group of people would most be open to new technology and who also attended our 11:00 service – that's always the primetime service. Who could we get out of the 11:00 a.m. service to try something new? So we rented about 5,000 square feet in a shopping center next to us and asked young adults (they don't get up early) if they would consider trying something new just to get some more space in our 11:00 service. And so, a couple hundred of them said, "OK we'll do it." We opened up a video-venue next door on Easter two years

ago. That started our first video-venue: live worship, a very low tech camera, and a large screen. It grew to two services. We continued to expand, and now we have eight locations, as close as right next door, and as far away as 120 miles.



What are some pros and cons of the video-venue model?



Pastor Greg: We can't grow in these walls. We think video-venues are a low-cost, positive way to grow because more people

get the Message in their community, and because the additional campuses require more volunteers, more bands...more of everything. You could look at that as a negative, but I look at it as a positive because more people are getting involved. In fact, that was one of the challenges we faced in getting started. Currently, I think we have ten bands every weekend, and they have a pretty reasonable quality level. If you would have told us two years ago that we would have ten bands in two years, and that they would all be at a certain quality level leading people in worship, we would have said, "It's not there." But you know what, it was there. There just wasn't the opportunity for that to arise.



What made you finally decide, "We're going to try this?"



Pastor Greg: It was low risk for us. We didn't have a whole lot of other options. It was either don't grow, or do something.

For us it wasn't like, "Well let's try this and see if we can

Seacoast Church: The Early Years



Pastor Greg: Seacoast started with a real obnoxious telephone/telemarketing deal at that time...2000 phone calls. We got teams together, and each would make calls for three hours asking people if they go to church. If they said "Yeah," we said, "Great." If they said no, we asked them, "Why do you think people don't go to church?" We bombarded their mailboxes with information. We started in a movie theater and had 340 people the first week (which is a lot more than we thought we would have). I thought it would go from 340 to 500 to 750 to 1000...and then we'd reach tens of thousands! Instead we "grew" from 350 to about 150. It took about six months for that revival to happen. I walked into the

elders at Northwood Assembly that had started our church, and said, "Listen, it is a failure, I thought it would work." It was very discouraging for me. I think we have to understand that not every church is going to grow at the same pace. There are various circumstances where churches don't grow, but we thought we were doing the right things. We finally leveled out at about 150 to 200 people and stayed there for three years – didn't grow for three years! There were a lot of times during that period that I did deep soul-searching. I remember turning on a little country music and just kind of feeling bad about the whole thing. For us, we had to find out who we were...everybody does. I think it's good to learn, at some point, to find your own voice.



Worship at Seacoast Church

Tips for a church considering a video- venue campus

by Jason Surratt,
Campus Development Director,
Seacoast Church
& Rebecca Andrews, Marketing
Director, Seacoast Church

- Start small (high impact/ low cost= low regret)
- “Don’t feel like starting a new campus is going to dilute your congregation.

It’s not going to take away from your congregation, it’s going to expand your reach,” Rebecca says. “If you can combine the high-tech, big-church feel with community, that’s a win-win situation.”

- Focus on the newcomer – that first touch is an important key in getting people “plugged in” to church.
- Put into place a leadership “pipeline” to intentionally raise up leaders; that way they’re ready to lead as your ministry expands into new opportunities. “We’re planning on starting 15 or 16 of these in the next 3 years,” Jason says, “and so we’ve got to have leaders to do that. We would rather them come from within the church than having to hire from the outside because then they know our culture and what Seacoast is all about.”

reach more people.” It was, “We’ve got these people coming and we have to do something.”



What does a day in the life of Greg look like?



Pastor Greg: A day in the life of Greg; Lots of meetings. I generally

study in the morning for the weekend because the weekend is the big deal. My biggest contribution here is vision, leadership, and communication on the weekend. Then I meet with various teams in the afternoon. Starting at the first of the week we have weekend planning, Message planning, and brainstorming meetings to keep it interesting. Then I have various staff meetings.



What does your week look like in terms of planning for the weekend service?



Pastor Greg: Part of our uniqueness is our spontaneity. I know a lot of

places that do multi-media are a lot more “programmed” than we are. Some of that comes from my personality and who I am. I’m highly spontaneous. But that does make it difficult to plan and prepare for the technical aspects of it. Around here, we know that on Monday, more often than not, we’re starting with a clean slate. Sometimes, even the plans we make on Monday get adjusted by Thurs-

day. Everybody is kind of “in gear” to make it happen – whatever it takes to make it happen. There are downsides to that, I know. The upside is – I think what we do could probably be replicated easier by other churches.

It’s not intricate and technical. We could change, but we’re not going to. We will go to all kinds of lengths to reach unchurched people. That’s our number-one priority, but we want to keep it within the context of who we are. A lot of times people will come and see what we do, even with the multi campuses, and they’ll go, “Yeah, if they can do it, we can do it.”



Why would someone go to a video-venue campus when they could stay home and watch it on TV?



Pastor Greg: Always, when we talk about doing video-venue cam-

puses, everyone’s first response is, “It won’t work. Why should I come do something I could do at home watching TV?” In fact, when we first started talking about the idea, some of our staff had the same response. The dynamic is the church worshipping together in live worship...you can’t do that at home.



What is the dynamic like in a video-venue campus?



Pastor Greg: We’ve noticed that even in our main facility, people

are looking at the screen more than at me. When I’m watching some of our other speakers here, I tend to watch the screen. I go back and forth a little bit, but I watch the screen. So the dynamic in a video-venue is similar to being in a large auditorium and watching the screen. People tell us that within the first two to three minutes they forget I’m not actually there.

V Why not just plant a church?



Pastor Greg: That is a valid thing to do. We do that, too. But in our local area, we've discovered that there are people who really like the experience that they get here, which includes the worship and the teaching. If we can reproduce the worship, and they can get the same teaching, whether it be me or one of the other teachers, that seems to be an effective thing.

V How do video venues grow once they've gotten started?



Pastor Greg: The initial push was to get people out of our auditorium and make more room for new people to come. What has happened is that the video-venues take on a life of their own. Because they're closer to the community – to where somebody lives – people are more apt to invite their neighbors and friends. I go visit video-venues when I'm not speaking, and I meet all kinds of people who have never been to the main campus.

What is important about the venues is they each have their own worship. They have their own children's ministry. They have small groups built around that particular location. They each have a strong campus pastor. The people in the campus know this is their pastor. I'm the teacher, but the local campus pastor is the pastor, and they make a lot of decisions at the local campus.

V How have you had to change your style to adapt to the additional campuses?



Pastor Greg: The way we do it, it's not live. We record the Saturday night service, and that's what we show the next day in the various locations. You have to be very careful [not to mention that it's Saturday night]. You have to talk like it's the next day, and talk to the congregation here, too, which is a challenge. One Saturday night, it started raining. We have a tin roof, and it was raining really hard. I said, "For those of you who are in another campus, you just need to know, it is raining here. It is really raining!" Well, the next morning they played that tape at one of the campuses (that is only a half mile from here) and people started leaving to roll the windows up on their car. One guy comes back in and says to an usher, "It's raining over at the campus next door, but it's not raining here?" That's when it blew our cover.

V How do you connect with other campuses?



Pastor Greg: I talk to the other campuses. I'll stop and say something to the other campuses – a joke or a funny story. I don't tell jokes much, I just use self-deprecating humor. If it bombs, I'll turn and look at the camera and say, "You know what, in Columbia they are just laughing hysterically at that." So they do. We do try to involve the other campuses. In our Saturday night service, there's a whole different mentality in my mind. I know I'm not just preaching or speaking to 1500 people right here. I'm talking to another 1,500-2,000 people who are outside of the walls and who will be watching this tomorrow.

V How do you keep energy and life in the service without physically being there?



Pastor Greg: Several criteria make up energy levels. One is the dynamic of the Holy Spirit. We see that especially in the worship setting. Each venue has live worship, and it's not identical to here. In fact, to be honest with you, some of the venues are a little hotter energy-wise than this one,

continued on page 32

Great Video Resources From WorshipFilms.com . . .



Worship Backgrounds
Seamlessly-loopable video backgrounds that will add a whole new dimension to your worship services



Specialty Backgrounds
Collections of video backgrounds that meet the needs of specific groups or worship service segments



Sermon Illustrators
Short vignettes (comedies, dramas, documentaries, music videos) that powerfully reinforce your message




Devotional Discoveries
Call-to-worship videos that combine beautiful scenery, music, and scripture to set the right tone for your service

Visit us online to order or view sample clips at:
www.WorshipFilms.com (252)451-8887



interview, continued from page 15

based on geographics and the congregation's style of the worship. You've got to consider the size of the room. If you have a crowd that's proportionate to the size of the room, there's going to be a certain amount of energy. If we're in a room that's half full, there's certainly not as much energy. Our goal is not to have huge venues. Our goal is to have 300 to 500 people per venue, and then multiply it to another neighborhood. The rooms are such that they handle 300 to 500 people. When they're full, and when there's the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, and when there's a worship band that's playing, then there's energy there. As far as my energy conveying through the screen, I use a lot of humor. That's just who I am. The humor conveys. They laugh more at different campuses, at different things, than they do here. That's what's amazing. People actually respond. If I say, tell your neighbor this, at the venues they turn and they tell their neighbor.

 *What is the standard for worship at the campuses and how do you maintain it?*




Pastor Greg: We have what we call [affectionately] the "good enough" standard. We have pursued excellence for years, but we've also understood that after a certain level, more excellence doesn't really add to the experience with God or the "cringe factor" from an unchurched person coming in, and so we have a good-enough line. We found out that when we have the good-enough line, there are a lot of people that can do that. The quality level is maintained by the campus pastor who is clued in to what quality is expected. Our worship pastor from the main campus is very much involved with the worship



The main lobby at Seacoast Church's Mt. Pleasant campus

leaders. Plus, we have people who go from campus to campus and give instant feedback. I did that a week ago at a couple of the campuses – pulled the campus pastor aside and said, "You know what, this was good, but not real good. We need to work on this."

 *In your mind, what makes a good video-venue campus?*



Pastor Greg: Good atmosphere, which has to do with the facility. We've done some incredibly creative things to make it very inviting – in the foyer, with kid's stuff, and these kinds of things. This makes people say, "This is cool. I could go to church here." Another aspect is strong campus pastor leadership. There's really not a shortcut to a good leader. Another aspect is a quality worship experience. In our model, size is intentional: 300 to 500 people per campus is our goal. If you ask me, that is the perfect size for a church because you know everybody and you aren't fighting city hall on zoning issues all the time because the building's available at that site. Someone can come in and they're not really picked out as being different or labeled visitors, and yet it's also a place where you've got a good feel on everybody else. So, to me, that's a great size.

Photo courtesy of Mahmood Fazal



Worship at Seacoast Church



Do you think that the video-venue model is on the forefront of how churches will be planted in the postmodern world?



Pastor Greg: We don't know. We ask ourselves: "Is this really going to work?" Probably the jury is still out on that. I think it's one of the ways churches will be planted. I think that the church is going to see a lot more community resistance (I don't want to call it persecution) to mega churches. I think we're seeing that all over America. Of course there are court cases that could go either way and open up doors, but I still think you're going to see resistance, and we as a church need to adapt. Some of the big box corporations (WalMart® and others) have already started adapting by making smaller "neighborhood" stores. From that regard, especially in large cities and rapidly growing churches, we have to ask ourselves: "Is it God's will for us to continue to grow?" We think so. **V**



There are times when they just need their parents... and any delay is too long!

Contact parents in seconds with ParentsCall™ Silent Paging System. Give your church nursery staff instant private communication with parents anywhere in your facilities without disturbing the service.



www.fowlerinc.com

Features:

- Instant personal communication
- Unlimited paging (no monthly service fee)
- Up to 10 different message codes
- Supports up to 1,000 pre-programmed pagers
- Will not interfere with your sound system

includes **FREE** book and video!



For more information call

1-800-729-0163 or visit us online at www.fowlerinc.com