

Kingdom Movement Strategies in North American Megachurches

An Interview
by **DOUG LUCAS**
with **CHRIS GALANOS**
AND **BRYAN KING**

Chris Galanos is the Founding and Lead Pastor of Experience Life Church in Lubbock, Texas. *Outreach* magazine named Chris the Youngest Megachurch Pastor in America several years in a row and named Experience Life one of the Top 100 Fastest-Growing Churches in the country five different times. Chris lives in Lubbock with his wife, Emilie, and daughters, McKinley and Charis.

Bryan King serves as Mobilization Minister with Cedar Ridge Christian Church in Broken Arrow, OK. He is a graduate of Ozark Christian College and Columbia International University and served cross culturally in Mexico City from 2001-2008.

Doug Lucas founded Team Expansion in 1978 and, over 40 years later, still serves as the organization's president. Doug's new book, *More Disciples*, is designed to help believers discover how they can be more effective at multiplying disciples and churches. www.teamexpansion.org

The megachurch movement has been one of the most exciting examples of church growth in the past few decades, impacting not only North America, but also the entire globe (note that to qualify as a megachurch, a community of faith would typically need to consist of 2000 or more people in weekend worship attendance). Perhaps the most well-known transition in the megachurch world is the one articulated by Chris Galanos, chronicled in his book, *From Megachurch to Multiplication* (ExperienceLifeNow.com, 2018) and featured in the Jan-Feb 2020 issue of *Mission Frontiers*.

An Interview with Chris Galanos, Lead Pastor at Experience Life Church in Austin, Texas.

18 years ago we embarked on a church planting strategy that would utilize our church facility to house multiple ethnic congregations. Each one maintains their autonomy, yet we partner together to accomplish what we cannot accomplish individually.

DL: Chris, can you paint for us a quick picture of what has happened at Experience Life Church?

Chris: Sure. We started eLife, as we often call it, in April 2007 in our living room with 12 other people. We prayed that first night that the Lord would allow us to see 10,000 people commit their lives to Christ in the next 10 years. By year

eight, we passed the 10,000 mark. At that time, we began to ask, "Lord, what do **You** want us to pray for in the next 10 years?" Around that same time, God brought a number of influences into our lives that exposed us to what He was doing through these miraculous movements overseas. We heard about millions, not just thousands of people coming to Christ. I remember asking our Leadership Team the rhetorical question, "Do you think God could do here what He's doing in India, China and parts of Africa?" We all agreed that He could. Through prayer, fasting and studying His Word we began to believe God was leading us to pray for 1,000,000 disciples in the next 10 years. And that's the exciting journey we've been on ever since.

DL: Help us grasp the difference you saw between addition and multiplication.

Chris: You've got to multiply disciples to reach millions, not just add to weekend worship services. Meaning, you have to let it move away from you. If you try to control it and keep it close to you, you'll only get addition. But if you let disciples multiply away from you, like these movements are doing overseas, you could see millions reached.

DL: I'm not sure there are very many megachurch pastors who would have taken such radical steps. It just seems like there's a conflict of interest or something. The very appletart you were shaking up was the source of your salary, as well as the livelihoods of everyone on your church staff.

Chris: Whatever the Spirit leads us to do, we should do. The church is not ours, it's His. If He tells us to lead the church in a different direction than it's gone for the last 10 years, we must follow His lead. If He tells us to become bi-vocational and give our salaries back to the church to be used for ministry, we must follow His lead. None of this was our idea. I don't think most people would go this direction if they were thinking just about what's best for them or their family. We believe God spoke to us and we've done our best to follow His lead, regardless of the cost.

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DL: We're on the edge of our seats, Chris. It's now been four or five years since those adventurous moments. What's happened in the interim?

Chris: Far more than we could've asked or imagined. We were told early on that multiplication takes time. A farmer doesn't expect a harvest overnight. We were willing to scatter seed, water it, and be patient for God to bring the growth. But God has brought some exciting growth here toward the beginning. Soon after making this transition, pastors from all over the world began to reach out to us saying God had spoken to them in a similar way. We began to take them through the same DMM training we had gone through. They began to take others through the training. And those began to take others through. This number is probably the floor, not the ceiling, of people that have been trained, but in talking to the leaders recently, we've counted 1,662 pastors/church leaders that either we've trained directly or others have trained that we trained just in the last few years. We constantly have waiting lists of people eager to be trained. These trainings have resulted in a network forming that has started 78 new churches in 12 states and five foreign countries. These churches have started over 300 Discovery Groups with unbelievers who are discovering more about God and His plan for

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their life through His Word. These Discovery Groups have reached 4th generation in one stream and 2nd generation in several others. As Discovery Groups start, some become churches over time and others stop meeting if they choose not to follow Christ. Some of these Discovery Groups that are currently meeting could become churches soon. These 78 churches have thousands of conversations with lost people each week, spend hundreds of hours in prayer and see new groups started regularly. I began to quickly realize that the weekly impact of just a few of these churches was much more significant than our entire megachurch, in terms of reaching out to lost people and engaging them in conversation about God. One DMM church alone has a goal of talking to 100 new lost people each week, and this church only has eight families in it! Our large church in its heyday would only have 100-200 first-time guests each week, and this small church would talk to almost that many people in the same week without the buildings, budgets, and staff. So, even just one DMM church, could rival a megachurch in terms of its impact. Think about 78 churches doing this!

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DL: These are incredible numbers. In another article in this issue (regarding Kingdom Movements in jails), we read about one of those changed lives: Billy. Powerful stuff, Chris. Where do you see this thing going in the future?

Chris: Only God knows, but we are raising the sails by trying to do what God has asked us to do and then praying for the wind of the Spirit to blow into our sails and bring movement! Perhaps

one of the most exciting things God is doing is bringing partners from all over North America, and even the world, to join us. This is not an eLife-thing. We aren't doing this alone. We're currently partnered with 30+ organizations and churches in pursuing movements in North America (and overseas). These partnerships continue to increase and that gives me great excitement about what the future may hold!

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Other Megachurch Case Studies

Roy Moran, directional leader of Shoal Creek Community Church (shoalcreek.org) on the northeast side of Kansas City, MO, told us that he sees their church's Sunday morning service as a starting place for Persons of Peace. These POPs are equipped in how to read the Bible for themselves and encouraged to invite their social networks along on their spiritual journeys. They have run as high as 1000 in attendance on a normal Sunday morning and Roy uses that experience as a net to catch and release visitors for the "micro-church" which happens in Discovery Bible Groups throughout the week. In those neighborhood/workplace disciple-making groups, attendees from Shoal Creek along with their neighbors, friends and relatives get their fingerprints on the Bible and encounter real life-on-life transformation. In these groups people get a chance to hear from God personally by reading the Bible for themselves. But they not only read it, they are asked to commit to how they are going to do what it says. They engage with one another personally, holding one another accountable each week for how they lived out their commitment to do what God says and share it with one other person.

Since implementing this strategy in 2012, Shoal Creek has consistently started 30–40 groups each year. They see repeated second generational growth of these groups and twice have experienced fourth generation growth. On this journey there have been many learning experiences that continue to influence the future. Currently Shoal Creek is retooling to make better use of teams rather than individuals to reach where people live, learn, work and play.

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Shawn Walden is the Outreach Pastor at Shepherd Church in Porter Ranch, CA., (shepherdchurch.com) a church of around 12,000 ethnically and racially diverse members, all of whom seem to have captured the passion of their lead pastor, Dudley Rutherford. Shawn invites every new member to go through a healthy portion of a disciple-making course called Zume (zumetraining.org), an online, in-life version of the same training encountered by Chris and Roy (previously). As this article went to press, Shawn's latest Zume group included 30 participants from Shepherd, as well as from all over the world. Shawn is now organizing regional leadership cells which will organize around particular regions or language groups, thereby utilizing Zume (and other Kingdom Movement tools and strategies) to launch groups focused on their diverse ethnic groups at Shepherd.

Ross Ramsey is the Education Minister at First Baptist Church, Allen Texas (fbcallen.org). By his own commentary, FBC was a cookie-cutter “legacy church.” Ross learned about Kingdom Movement (CPM/DMM) strategies and their emphasis on “getting out into lostness.” He decided to try it at FBC Allen. He went with two other guys and they knocked on 15 doors where seven answered. They shared the gospel with five. Three were very open. One invited them in. Ross was amazed and humbled. He later said, “I felt that within the course of 90 minutes, I had done more among truly lost people than I had done in the past five years.” Three weeks later, Ross found himself training and taking 45 others “into lostness.” They then went out as 15 groups of three. Ross remembers, “One by one they started coming in after the three hours were up. Within a few minutes, there was a line of five or six people wanting to tell me what had happened in the harvest. One by one, each group shared incredible stories. A Muslim lady had given her life to Christ. Another group happened to knock on the door of a guy who was at that very moment, praying for a way out of a horrible problem.” The stories went on and on. The lead pastor said, “In 35 years, I’ve never seen anything like that. You have to share this tomorrow morning.” That weekend, Ross says, “We flipped the church in 24 hours—because they experienced Christ in the harvest.” The momentum continued to grow. In time, a level of diversity from the community began to come into FBC Allen the likes of which they had never seen before. They’ve now trained literally thousands of people how to practice these simple, reproducible strategies. They constantly run at least 10 groups internally and they’re all led by volunteers, not staff. What’s more, parts of this pattern of making disciples are slowly filtering into the other established groups in the church in the form of inductive teaching and having a simple gospel presentation.

Josh Brown is one of the Groups Pastors at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY. (southeastchristian.org) Southeast runs around 25,000 in worship attendance each weekend. Josh and his team at Southeast are utilizing Kingdom Movement (CPM/DMM) strategies as “churches within the church” because, from Josh’s perspective, “They are the easiest and most effective way to catalyze caring small group experiences. Also, because multiplication is built into the DNA of each and every group, they naturally replicate in a healthy way. We don’t have to worry about screening the content of each group because we train the groups to be ‘self-feeding.’” Throughout the past two years, Josh and his fellow volunteers have helped launch 95 groups that utilize Kingdom Movement (CPM/DMM) principles. Josh tracks these groups carefully—and there are several second and third-generation groups with over 500 people taking part.

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