

## Getting going

Church planting is challenging. No one should enter it with any illusions. “The costs must be counted and sacrifices will need to be made for the sake of the Gospel.”<sup>5</sup>

A yellow light on a traffic signal tells us to exercise caution. Before entering the church-planting “intersection,” we ought to pay attention to a few yellow lights:

- Not everything we do in church planting is going to “work.”
- This reality can frustrate people, especially if they want some rote formula or “magic bullet” that will guarantee success.
- Still, there are some bad ideas to avoid, such as spending a lot of money on land and buildings at first. “Large launches” are not necessary.
- Church planting calls for commitment. Most young churches will need assistance for about nine years — not just three or four. However, the planter may well move on after about four years, calling for a transition.

A traffic signal also has a green light to tell us to go. Think of these “greens”:

- Church planting has great potential to reach the unchurched.
- Church planting provides established churches a way to engage the mission, not simply let it go by.
- Even if a church plant were eventually to disband, if people heard the Gospel through it and were saved, the effort will not have been a “failure.”

Regarding church planting, let us hope and pray to avoid red lights.

The first president of the LCMS, Dr. C.F.W. Walther, lived at a time when a number of mission societies were going strong. While grateful for much of their work, Walther pointed out that the Christian church is itself the mission society that God has established. Where Christ is, He is there in His fullness. Even the smallest congregation has the full dignity of being His church.

Church planting is a great way for your church to act like the church.

# Church Planting and Your Congregation

## PART 2: Your Church's Involvement

### Getting started

Church planting can take one of two basic approaches. Although different terms can be used, in the past these approaches have been called “pioneering” and “colonizing.”

*Pioneering* is when one or two church planters strike out with God’s Word to plant a new church in a given place. This is isolated and lonely work. It seldom seems a good idea to send out a single pioneer church planter, if it can be avoided.

*Colonizing* refers to church planting as done by a group, not only pastors but also laypeople. Frankenmuth, Mich., (the city as well as the church there) started with a group of German immigrants who had crossed the Atlantic in 1845 so they could, as a community, begin outreach to the Chippewa Indians. Many churches have begun as members of one or more existing churches made themselves available to form a core group for a new one.

A study of LCMS church-planting efforts since 1917 shows the value of putting a cohort of people into a new church start from its very beginning. Some or all of these folks may return to their original church after a while, or they might stay with the new church. In any case, during the early days of a new church plant, they amount to an invaluable “people resource.” The congregations from which they come are concerned less about “losing members” than about losing the mission to seek and save the lost.

<sup>5</sup> Schave, *Mission Field: USA*, 29.

## Getting help

A flock needs a shepherd. God wants His church to have shepherds, that is, pastors. The ascended Lord gave His church “shepherds and teachers” to build up the Body of Christ (EPH. 4:11ff). A new mission needs to be served by such a missionary. He might be called a “mission developer.” Here, we will simply refer to him as a “church planter.”

This church planter may be called by one church to start another, in a “mother-daughter” arrangement. Perhaps the district may call him as a church planter. He might be the pastor of one of the other churches in the circuit, taking on the new church-planting responsibility on a part-time basis. Especially in the last case, other pastors and also laypeople in the circuit can contribute their time and efforts to assist him as he serves not only in the new mission, but also in the church where he is already called. In any event, choosing a church planter should be done with much prayer and care.<sup>1</sup>

A circuit can provide help for a church plant in a variety of ways. It can be a source of financial and, as noted above, other kinds of assistance. Circuit forums, consisting of a pastor and a lay representative from each circuit congregation, are official settings in which new work can be considered and recommended and joint plans for mission outreach can be adopted.<sup>2</sup> Circuits may also appoint committees for specific assignments, such as circuit mission councils.<sup>3</sup> These councils usually meet more frequently than circuit forums. They can concentrate on ways to encourage and assist mission work within the circuit, including church planting. A mission council can be one of the best friends a new church plant can have.

Church planting takes the Good News of Jesus to the surrounding area. It goes out, as it were, from the Lord’s altar. It cares for people with the forgiveness of sins in Christ. It also renders services of love in various human-care capacities. For these, the church may partner with other community agencies. Yet its great object is to bring people back to the altar, eventually to receive the body given and the blood shed for them by Jesus.

## Getting organized

Before taking steps such as assembling a core group or searching for a church-planting pastor, a congregation or group of congregations would do

well to engage in serious discussions. Here are some “pre-planning” questions that you might ask in order to get organized for church planting:

- In a particular area, are there members of what might be a mother church or of several supporting churches, such as a circuit? Do other potential members for a new church live in this area? Have any of these people expressed interest in the establishment of a new LCMS church?
- Is there an unserved people group in the area? Might members of that community have an interest in a new mission?
- Have you consulted the demographic information available from your district office, so you can understand your surroundings better?
- Has the congregation interested in planting a new church used the *re:Vitality* survey “Congregational Assessment of Development/Decline Status”? This survey helps a congregation to pinpoint its strengths and weaknesses. (However, you need not solve every problem prior to getting into church planting!) Find the survey at [lcms.org/church-revitalization](http://lcms.org/church-revitalization).
- When and where will you look for a church-planting pastor? Will he serve full time? Will he be part time, perhaps a pastor already serving in a circuit church? Will you seek out a specially trained seminary candidate? Will your church planter perhaps be bi-vocational, working another job to make a living while doing his church-planting work?
- Will you be able to help the new mission plant until it is chartered as a congregation? In what ways and to what extent can you offer support? What support might your circuit and/or district contribute?
- Will you be able to provide the new church plant with monetary and other assistance after it has become a new congregation?
- If your congregation is seeking to start a daughter congregation, will you place it under the umbrella of your administrative support until it becomes self-sufficient? If the church plant is initiated by your circuit or a group of churches within the circuit, will one of these congregations temporarily place the new plant under its administrative umbrella?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A helpful “checklist” of items to consider is in Steven D. Schave, *Mission Field: USA — A Resource for Church Planting* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2016), 31. [lcms.org/church-planting](http://lcms.org/church-planting).

<sup>2</sup> Synod Bylaw 5.3.1. See especially b.2.

<sup>3</sup> Synod Bylaw 5.2.1.b.

<sup>4</sup> These questions are closely based on a similar list in Schave, *Mission Field: USA*, 29. This 114-page manual provides a theologically grounded guide to church planting. It is an important resource for people who are seriously considering planting new Lutheran churches.