

Partners in Starting Churches

by Wayne I. Schulz

Introduction

Have we fostered the mindset that only “the Synod” can start new churches? To the average WELS person, watching often from the sidelines, is there any difference between a World Mission and a Home Mission? Is there any connection between the relative lack of expansion in both the Word and the Home Mission programs during the last decade? If we are not starting new churches at home, if most of our people have not actively participated in the start of a new church, should we be surprised if there is a seeming lack of excitement over the possibilities of mission expansion in a world in which 65million people are born annually and only 2million of them become Christians, in the USA where 5,000 die and 11,000 are born each day? Is there a need for more grass roots, hands-on, participatory activity between congregation and congregation or congregations and the Synod to return us to a more fervent climate and zeal for community, home, and world mission work? As partners with Christ and partners with one another, what can we do to extend the “It is finished” victory and eternal comfort of Jesus Christ to our age’s countless and drifting souls searching, usually in the wrong place, for Paradise, meaning, and purpose in life?

Why Should We Start New Churches?

- 1) *God’s redeeming love* in Christ is the motivating factor!

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10,11).

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!...We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors...” (2 Corinthians 5:17&20).

- 2) *The Great Commission* is the guiding opportunity; an *outlet* for God’s redeeming love in Christ. It guides that love into meaningful and prioritized action. It tells us in the Church that the world is the field to which we carry a *message* and bring the *gift*! It reminds WELS heartland congregations that they are a special planting of the Lord, that they are necessary and important for the upbuilding and forward movement of the Church.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:20).

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

More beachheads for the Means of Grace, the illuminating tool of the Holy Spirit.

The nature of God’s Church: living organism, grows, reproduces, multiplies! Marvel at this! Look around you! Don’t stand in its way!

The historical record: the book of Acts and all of church history. As the Word of the Lord (the Spirit’s tool) grows (in hearts) and goes (person to person), congregations multiply. Look around you!

“(My Word) will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:11,12).

“Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations... Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’ They will be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord...” (Isaiah 62:10,12).

Look at God's history and see what happens when God's people take to heart the truth that the Lord has anointed them to "preach good news to the poor... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives... to comfort all who mourn... and to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isaiah 61)! We will do the work of the Lord with renewed vigor when we remember that we are called "oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor" (Isaiah 61)! *Doxology* must continue in worship, in education, in evangelism, in home and world mission expansion until the very last minute of this world's existence! God's people are splendid oaks in Christ, not dead branches on a lifeless, decaying trunk.

6) The growing population and the American record:

1899-1906: one new church for every increase of 280 people in the USA.

1980's: one new church for every increase of 685 people.

1890's: one new Lutheran parish for every increase of 5,000 people.

1980's: one new Lutheran parish for every increase of 15,000 people.

It is true that the Church grows not only through the multiplication of churches. Records show, however, that Lutheran efforts at starting churches have not kept pace with those of earlier history.

7) Urban growth areas also grow in numbers of unchurched people.

New churches tend to be less internally structured and more outreach-minded, aiming their ministries more at reaching the unchurched with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

New churches are often rallying points for newcomers to a growth area or for others who have drifted into spiritual inactivity.

New churches provide opportunities for Christians in older churches to become involved in the birth of something new (for which future generations of Christians will thank them)

Where and When Do We Begin New Churches?

The ideal model: the thirtysomething percent ratio; when a growth area or development is 30% complete, 30% in progress, and 30% planned for the future.

2) Many variables, depending on place and culture.

3) When a large congregation has become too large for its existing staff and gifts among its people to reach out effectively to a nearby growing area.

The Community Profile Form is a helpful tool (available through the District Mission Board or the Board for Home Missions office).

Consultation with the District Mission Board (DMB) is important even if no Synodical funding will be needed for a local churchplanting venture. (Strategic planning of district, region, area; guidelines, help).

Involvement with the DMB is *essential* if funding of a churchplanting endeavor is to be dual-natured (partially by DMB, partially by a mother congregation or by multiple mother congregations).

7) If a congregation or a group of congregations wish to become involved in starting a new church, they should prepare as a proposal a feasibility study and present it to the District Mission Board for evaluation and negotiation. If DMB funding will be necessary, the request for the same will have to be presented by the DMB to the Board for Home Missions for approval according to established patterns.

8) Full or partial involvement of individuals or congregations in churchplanting efforts (especially where there is a strong WELS base) is highly *desirable*! A multiplication of such efforts would increase the numbers of new WELS mission startups and enhance outreach work in areas where the WELS could and should be more visibly present. Local, hands-on initiatives and ownership should not be stifled! It is the way we used to start churches. It is the way many congregations in this district were founded.

When people say, “That’s the Synod’s mission,” they will tend to watch from the sidelines and critically let “the Synod” do the work. A better way, in areas where the WELS is strong, is to seek more local involvement and more partnerships in new church startups. When people and congregations are gifted and willing to do this, they will find great satisfaction and wonderment in doing that which the earliest New Testament Christians did. They will keep a sharper focus on the Lord’s mission assignment to his Church. They will rekindle interest in all areas of ministry. And there will be greater and prayerful appreciation for similar work “the Synod” is doing in frontier areas where the WELS is not as yet well represented (but where the field is vast and ripe).

Concepts for Brainstorming and Development of Proposals for Starting Churches

- 1) District Mission Board (DMB) initiates a project with an interested WELS nucleus who want a church in their city (often with manpower from another WELS church). Pattern for 60’s and 70’s.
- 2) Use existing manpower in selfsupporting congregations to do exploratory work in areas targeted (by DMB) for openings. The Board for Home Missions (BHM) would pay the pastor the equivalent of ¼ of a missionary’s salary (in addition to the normal salary from the pastor’s congregation) to do this work. He would work to:
 - a) start a congregation geared for selfsupport
 - b) start a daughter congregation
 - c) start a satellite of the existing congregation
start a congregation that will be a part of a dual parish (field of churches) for the foreseeable future
 - e) start a preaching station as an outpost for Gospel proclamation.
- 3) DMB initiates a project and calls an *outreach explorer* (missionary) to work an area six to eight months before holding public worship services. Often without a WELS nucleus. Pattern for the 80’s and early 90’s. (*Examples:* Shoreview, Elk River, Maple Grove, Cottage Grove, and Andover, MN; St. Peters, MO; Appleton and Green Bay, WI)
- 4) A mother church gives birth to a daughter congregation and funds it entirely (no financial assistance from the DMB) This is the *normal understanding* in the WELS of the motherdaughter concept. It has produced few churches in the WELS the past 30 years.
- 5) An individual personally funds a new mission for a Period of three years (or so). This is the pattern for home mission expansion in some church bodies. Resources from the Church Extension Fund (CEF) may or may not be necessary.
- 6) Several individuals support a new mission startup for a period of three years (or so). CEF assistance may or may not be necessary.
- 7) A congregation splits in order to form another congregation. This saves costly enlargement of facilities in the mother church (or a total relocation).
- 8) *Multiple mothers*, a group of mother congregations, begin a new church in a growing nearby area (which they cannot thoroughly serve in outreach work) with a core group from each joining the new church. The multiple mothers give the needed support for operating expenses and future building costs.
- 9) Same format as #8 (above). Multiple mothers provide operating subsidy only. CEF resources are necessary for the buildings.
- 10) DMB initiates a new church venture and supports the project with operating subsidy for three to five years. An individual, group of individuals, a single congregation, or a group of congregations agree to purchase the land and raise the necessary funds for the initial building project.
- 11) *Combination* of multiple mother congregations and DMB involvement (similar to #8 & #9 above). Not just verbal/moral support, but the support of people and congregations committed to the cause of an outreach exploratory situation. (detailed example below)

For This to Occur We Need:

- a) A meeting of representatives of prospective congregations to receive their blessing and permission for informational meetings and publicity about the project.
- b) Creation of a task force (midwife group!) of about six mission minded, creative, and supportive people to lay out plans for extension of information and solicitation of member interest and support in each participating congregation. Members of each church would be given opportunity (at an informational service/ meeting) to commit themselves to various ways of participation in the project.

Samples of Commitments

Daily prayer support.

Financial support. For operating subsidy or for land and buildings. Over and above normal congregational support. Monthly, annual, or occasional support. Three to five years.

Personal membership commitment. Three to five (or so) families/ individuals (interested in the ministry of a developing congregation) from each congregation commit themselves to working with the outreach explorer and the new congregation. Mother churches would *commission* these people in a worship service about the time the missionary arrives on the scene (to increase local ownership; to make the statement: "We are not losing members. We are sending them out on a special mission for the Lord!") / They would have to know the vision for this mission and support it through involvement in outreach. / They would attend church in the mother congregations and give a certain percentage of their offerings to the mother congregations during the first 68 months of the exploratory effort (until worship arrangements are established for the new mission). Their departure from the mother churches would be gradual.

Telephone canvassers

Neighborhood canvassers

Computer help (and other secretarial items)

Musical help (keyboard, choirs)

Utilization of talent bank of mothering churches

Banners, hymnals, furniture

Definitive and enabling school policy for members of mission

Joint youth activities

Sharing of Bible class ministry/fellowship opportunities

Monthly gym night for new group .

Others: (brainstorm ideas for your area/from your group)

- c) After the degree of mothering has been determined, the task force would prepare a report and develop a proposal for the DMB and its request for manpower for the new mission. The DMB would request funding for that part of the budget not committed by the mothers. Task force would continue to serve as liaison in both directions.
- d) Summary of the birthing process of a new mission:
 - aa) *Conception* (vision for field, planning, *team* development, levels of commitment)
 - bb) *Pre-Natal Stage* (approvals by DMB & BHM, call, outreach explorer on scene for 68 months, outreach work, training of core group, Bible studies, canvassing, prospect list, development of ministry plan, working in concert with mother churches, development of support system)
 - cc) *Birth* (first public worship service, continuing ministry)
 - dd) *Growth Toward Maturity* (Bible studies, leadership development, Organization/ Planning/ Accounting manual and planning, people in mission serving the Lord, outreach to people emphasis, assimilation, buildings, *self-support*.)
 - ee) *Now What? Reproduction!* (Daughter churches start granddaughter churches. The Word of the Lord goes forward! Each one starts one!)

- 12) A conference, circuit, or district do a version of #11.

- 13) Adoption. DMB begins a new mission according to its strategic planning. Another church (or churches) in the region adopts and supports it. If the adoptive church is from outside the region, it would be called an uncle, aunt, or cousin church.
- 14) Colonization. A mother church sends out a colony of 5075 of its members to form the working core group of a new church. Mother church or DMB funds that portion of the budget the colony or mother cannot meet.
- 15) Hive off or loaning method. Some members of a mother church are “loaned” to the new mission effort. They “hive off” for a period of a year or two to lend support and then return to the mother church.

Several home Bible study groups (located in a growth area) are encouraged to merge to work at forming a congregation.

The muftisite congregation. Congregation continues as one legal corporation with one governing board staff, budget, building fund, and membership roll, but with two sites, two worship areas, two Sunday schools, and two sets of trustees. One or two pastors (or more). This arrangement often becomes two congregations. (or: one site used by more than one congregation)

- 18) The Field of Churches approach (Dual or triparishes/one staff). Two churches in two areas of slower growth are started at the same time. Or a declining congregation in one area starts a congregation in another nearby area with the use of its manpower and resources. Or two plateaued or declining congregations vote to share manpower. In all of these cases the effort is intentionalized with divisions of time, property, and the use of manpower clearly spelled out in a covenant or document of agreement. A definitive outline on field of churches possibilities is available from the BHM, the DMB, or myself. This approach has advantages and may be helpful to ward off a shortage of manpower. This approach will mean that members of the churches in the field will have to assume an increased share of ministering activities.

The satellite approach. This is an interesting alternative in nontraditional areas (like Calgary) where people do not automatically associate “church” with a visible building. This is appropriate where friendship evangelism has been embedded as the Christian’s natural way of life. A congregation could increase its staff to have one, two, or several satellites.

Characteristics of Satellites

- a) They could be geographical, cultural, people of similar interests (students, military), or combinations.
 - b) The satellite would require minimal space (storefront, strip mall, or other rented or purchased quarters) for Bible information classes, fellowship, task forces, counseling, and possibly midweek worship.
 - c) The mother church would continue as the administration center (ministry planning, staff, coordination, scheduling), worship center (satellites would worship with the big group or have a special time designated for their worship if the building is small and the group large), and the spiritual nurture center (core curriculum, school).
 - d) If a satellite grows to a large size, it could divide and form another satellite, or it could go on its own, fund its own building, create its own identity, and become another mother church.
 - e) The satellite approach may not be well received initially in a traditional area. But it may be a concept possible for very large congregations (the establishment of more than one ministry center) in a traditional area and for growing congregations in frontier areas. Calgary example.
- 20) Additional ways (from your brainstorming) of starting new churches with combinations of the mothering and multiple mothers concepts:

(This section for task forces in potential areas)

After the task force has completed this, it should *write a proposal* for consideration by the DMB.

We are partners as heirs of salvation!
We are partners in education for service!
We are partners in ministry!
We are partners in starting congregations!
We are partners in home and world mission work!
Teamwork!

Additional Ways for Mothering Groups to Help the WELS in Starting Churches

- 1) Pay the salary of one staff member for one, two, or three years.
- 2) Purchase the land for the mission (with DMB approval of location).
- 3) Purchase the parsonage for the mission, or make payments on it for the first five years.
- 4) Purchase the initial building for the mission. Or raise funds for a portion of the building. Or raise matching (or double or triple) funds for the mission's building endeavors.
- 5) Use accumulated or willed funds to make an interestfree or low interest loan to the new congregation for a period of three to five years (or so!).
- 6) Purchase a secondhand building as the mission's initial unit.
- 7) Join a builder's club to assist with a building or remodeling job. Volunteers and project managers are needed for the *Builders for Christ* organization (building a chapel in Houghton, MI, this summer; worked in Elk River last summer).
- 8) A congregation or individual makes a onetime financial grant to the mission either for operating expenses or for building projects.
- 9) One congregation guarantees compensation for the missionary for 12 to 18 months. A second congregation assumes budgetary assistance for the next 12 to 18 months. Or a third congregation pays the cost of a second staff person for the second 12 to 18month period. Several other churches join to purchase the land. (or variations of these)
- 10) Two or three smaller churches merge to form one new church at a new location.
- 11) One or more sponsoring churches loans the money for the site acquisition on a second mortgage so that the new mission can take out a first mortgage from a lending institution to finance the first building. Research ways for creative financing!

“The word of the Lord spread through the whole region... They (Paul and Barnabas) preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith... Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust. After going through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch... On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 13 & 14).