Ablaze! Covenant Congregations

The fields are ripe for harvest®

LCMS WORLD MISSION
The Global Gospel Outreach of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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THE CASE FOR CHURCH PLANTING

It is not unusual to hear a Christian ask: "Why all this emphasis on planting new churches?" With so much evangelism to do in the United States, should we not be focusing instead on energizing existing congregations to spread the Gospel?" Needless to say, that is a good and fair question.

The kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus' teaching and the integrating paradigm for the mission of the church. Jesus Himself (and John the Baptizer) proclaimed the arrival and advance of the Kingdom of God.

The cross of Christ heralds the incarnational, expansionary movement of the reign and rule of Jesus Christ in the hearts and lives of people also today. And as the Holy Spirit plants the cross of Christ in the world, this results in the establishment of communities of faith, confession of the one, true faith, and mission as the people of God in and into all the world. Church planting, both as a result of the expansion of the Gospel and as an intentional mission strategy, is an integral part of Christ's mission.

At the close of his time on earth, Jesus gave these parting words: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19a). This "Gospel imperative" spoken to the disciples as the representative leaders of the church summarized the will of God that the reign and rule of Jesus Christ in the hearts and lives of people on earth (the kingdom of God) be incarnated, expanded, and lived out in communities of the faith, confession, and mission. The disciples responded then by going from town to town, preaching Christ, sharing the means of grace, witnessing the Holy Spirit make new disciples, and planting new communities of faith.

Thus the New Testament church, as it moved out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, included a strategy both for giving witness to Jesus as the Messiah

within the synagogue communities and for bringing the message of Christ to Gentile communities through the planting of new congregations. The Book of Acts provides a descriptive narrative and illustration of the advance and incarnational movement of the Kingdom of God through church planting in the ministries of Paul and the apostles.

"In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said: 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:1-3).

The people of God are addressed as "God's pleasant planting" (Isaiah 5, and the myriad of references to Israel as God's Vineyard). At the same time that this planting should bring forth good fruit and good growth, it must also be nurtured and pruned.

Much of Paul's concern in the New Testament epistles is addressed to issues of doctrine and life, so that God's people may be a clear witness to the true faith. St. James asserts that it is the Word of God itself that is implanted within us, "which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). St. Paul reminds us that though he planted and Apollos watered, God gives the growth (1 Cor. 3:6).

From the New Testament onward, the Kingdom of God has advanced through the means of grace. Disciples were made, which resulted in the establishment of communities of the faith, confession, and mission, as the church expanded from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth. Therefore, planting a church is an intentional strategy of mission and outreach simply because church planting is an effective means by which the Kingdom of God is incarnated, activated, and expanded.

Although the church itself is built by God through the Holy Spirit and focused on the means of grace (AC VII, Matthew 16:8, Treatise 25, SD II, 50), it is also an organism of human beings, ordered and structured by the way God has made us as human creatures. By the grace of God and over time, many sociological and anthropological insights have been applied to church planting strategies. For example, today, there are many sociological models (approaches) for church planting. Each model has special application and receptivity in diversified mission fields or communities. These models include: Missionary Model (God calls missionaries out of your church and you send them out…like Antioch), Send a Team Nearby Model (perhaps like Ephesus and Asia Minor plants); Raise up a Timothy Model (Raise up planters and send them out); Let My People Go Model (More than 20 percent of Mother Church goes to become part of a Daughter Church); Let My Pastor Go Model (Pastor departs with some to reach new people); Partner Church Model (One Mother Church, but multiple partner churches which collaborate in providing workers, meeting space, funds, and oversight); and the Multi-Site Model (One church doing mission and ministry on multiple campuses).

Within our own The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, those engaged in church planting have gleaned significant insights and observations regarding biblical and sociological principles for church planting strategies. We offer the following list of church planting affirmations as helpful in guiding our renewed efforts to plant new congregations.

1. Church planting is **connected to the biblical mandate and model**.
2. Church planting must be **grounded in biblical theology and anchored in the means of grace**.
3. Church planting **will result from carrying out the Great Commission** as new disciples are brought into a community of the faith, and are taught all that Christ has commanded them.
4. Church planting can also be a strategic part of carrying out the Great Commission as new church plants **attract and engage new people** to be connected to the means of grace.
5. Church planting must seek both the **expansion** of the church and the **unity** of the church.

6. Church planting is **nourished by fervent, continual prayer** for the armor of God against the forces of evil (Eph. 6:10ff).

7. Church planting is **guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit** through the means of grace.

8. Church planting is accompanied by **bold witnessing to the Gospel**.

9. Church planting **recognizes that God provides the growth** (1 Cor. 3:6).

10. Church planting can **engage new models of utilizing limited human and financial resources** under God's grace and blessing.

11. Church planting **is about reaching/discipling all people** wherever they dwell.

12. Church planting **sees all humans in need** of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

13. Church planting **understands the biblical mandate of diversity** and engages appropriate cross-cultural strategies.

14. Church planting **is a call to both self-sacrifice and kingdom-joy**.

15. Church planting **recognizes the local cultural context** of the mission field.

16. Church planting is **dependent more on the call and grace of God,** than on human programs or financial resources.

17. Church planting is **hard work**.

18. Church planting **includes ministry to the whole person**.

19. Church planting is often best done by and **through existing, local congregations**.

20. Church planting with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is best done by a congregation **strong in Lutheran doctrine and practice.**

21. Church planting is not an **"end in itself,"** but one of the tools **through which the Kingdom of God can advance**, making use of the means of grace.

The reality is that God is a Missionary God who calls His church to go and make disciples of and for Jesus Christ. That happens as the cross becomes the "planting of God," around which are established communities of faith, confessing the one true faith, and engaging in the mission of the Kingdom of God in and into the world.

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Ablaze! COVENANT CONGREGATIONS

Definition

An *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregation is a congregation that covenants with its respective district and also with LCMS World Mission to plant up to four (4) congregations by the year 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

I. Covenant Congregations

A. Congregations are recruited by the districts or can be self-identified and be approved by the districts. Districts will manage the identification process based on the agreed upon profile of *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregations.

B. Congregations have a covenant framed between themselves and their districts to plant up to four new congregations by 2017. This covenant will be shared with LCMS World Mission.

C. Congregations will participate in training offered regionally by the Center for U.S. Missions—the training can either be part of the identification process before the covenant is framed or may come after the congregations are identified.

D. Congregations have a mission and strategy that is aligned with LCMS World Mission National New Congregation Development.

E. Congregations which are not ready or capable of daughtering congregations may be referred to the LCMS World Mission Revitalization facilitator to be prepared to become an *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregation.

F. Congregations may partner with others to plant up to four new congregations.

Profile of an *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregation

Note: The profiles of the Ablaze! Covenant Congregation and pastor are descriptive of and not prescriptive. These are ideal characteristics; there might be some characteristics that are missing, but can be remedied through training and consultation.

1. The congregation **has peace/harmony**—this is not simply an absence of conflict. The congregation is capable of constructively managing conflicts and has properly aligned congregational resources for mission and evangelism.

2. The congregation **has evidence of the presence of the five pillars of a healthy congregation:** right person, place, vision, resources, and structure.

3. The congregation **has a mission vision**—congregation is embedded within the community.

4. The congregation **is intentional in developing leaders/people/priesthood of all believers.**

5. The congregation has **good communication of vision/process/purpose**—there is a sense of unity in mission and purpose.

6. The congregation **is willing and always ready to learn about mission opportunities and cultural trends** in its neighborhood, nation, and around the world.

7. The congregation **shows a spirit/attitude of churchmanship** —congregation has demonstrated faithfulness to the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and willingness to walk alongside her sister congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (i.e., trust, beliefs, walking together, integrity in doctrine and practice, and a "positive" congregation).

8. The congregation **has a Gospel-centered care system**.

9. The congregation **shows meaningful membership growth** through adult baptisms and confirmations.

10. The congregation **shows meaningful worship** increase.

11. A congregation which
   a) **focuses on the lost**;
   b) **knows themselves** as Reached People—Forgiven Sinners;
   c) **demonstrates leadership** and exhibits a variety of gifts;
   d) are **good and faithful stewards**; and
   e) has an **active prayer ministry** for the lost (prayer is central to the life of the congregation).
   f) is **not waiting for outside funding** to do mission work;
   g) has a **track record of mission-giving** to our work together (involvement/investment);

Profile of Pastoral Leadership (Senior Pastor) of an *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregation

1. Reaches the unchurched: he is able to develop rapport, break through the barriers, and encourage unchurched people to examine themselves and commit to a walk with God. Communicates the Gospel in a style that is understood by the unchurched. He is comfortable moving into the "personal space" of the unchurched without fear, understands the "psychology" and mentality of the unchurched, and is able to quickly get to know them on a personal level.

2. He is a good administrative leader. He is a strategic planner and is able to institute a system of accountability and delegate others to carry out an agreed upon strategy.

3. He is a visionary and effective communicator; he has a demonstrated ability to project a vision into the future beyond the present and persuasively communicates it to other people. He also approaches challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles, is able to creatively manage vision-opposing elements, and believes in God's capacity to do great things.

4. He connects with the community, agencies, and other churches and pastors. He understands that the needs of the community can be addressed better in collaboration with other community leaders, agencies, churches and pastors in the community. He also is in touch with the needs of the community and leads his congregation to become an integral part of the community to bring health and wholeness.

5. He has the ability to equip and send others for ministry. He actively and intentionally identifies the gifts of the people around him and devotes his time to equip and send them to use their talents in mission and ministry.

6. He possesses good people skills, especially with sinners.

7. He is a life-long learner of community and Word. He keeps current with social trends (population shifts, cultural changes, and community needs), and studies the Word for personal growth and for developing sound theological answers to contemporary questions.

8. He is collegial (synod in all that it means).
   a. Willingness and ability to walk together with other sister congregations and brothers in ministry.
   b. Trust—puts the best construction on everything.

c. Commitment to unity.
d. Prayer life, spiritual growth—He spends time in prayer for himself, family, congregation and the world around him. He also takes time to read devotionally for his personal spiritual growth.
e. Truly understands and conveys the Faith.

II. Training *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregations (A!CC)

A. **Training I:** Church planting orientation workshop will be available to all *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregations to which the pastor and key leaders of the A!CC must attend.

B. **Training II:** The senior pastor or a staff member from the A!CC must take Daughter Church Planting Training.

C. **Training III:** Mission planter will engage in the Mission Planter Development Process, which includes Basic Mission Planter Training, the Edge Gathering (an annual conference event of planters and spouses in a successful church plant for sharing and refreshment), and Advanced Mission Planter Training.

III. Planter Identification

A. It has been realized that successful congregational development depends on three major factors: the right place, the right person (planter), and the right plan. In other words the identification of the planter is very critical to the new congregation development. An indigenous congregational planter is preferred to that of an outsider. This reduces the time that a planter would spend in studying the landscape and developing the right plan for the plant.

B. New Planters should be coming from:
1. *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregations;
2. district-called missionary-at-large; or
3. recommended by the National Affiliates.

C. A Planter can be self-identified: certain personalities come to the forefront, i.e., engaging, using theology in life, family/spousal support, etc.

D. Pastors of *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregations may identify gifted members based on a profile for effective church planters.

Planter Qualifications:

1. To confirm the potential for church planting, an instrument developed by the Gallop organization may be administered to candidate planter. This is computer-scored and based on a profile of successful planters. The result will give one of these recommendations: recommended, guardedly recommended, or not recommended. The instrument measures talents on motivation, influence, workstyle, relationship, and thought process. Knowledge and skills must be determined from information gathered in application documents and/or followup interviews. The cost is $100 per planter candidate.

2. Seminary Mission Formation program, which prepares seminarians for congregation development, requires that each student in the program take the Ridley Behavioral Interview before acceptance into the program.

Profile of a Successful Church Planter:

Note: This section is taken from "Training for Selection Interviewing," Appendix A: Church Planter Performance Profile, by Charles Ridley and Robert E. Logan, with exceptions in #7.

These thirteen qualities are selected from the larger list of 48 dimensions contained in the CPPP. The CPPP is the result of a job analysis study conducted in 1984 and subsequent field testing. Although all of the 48 qualities are important, these thirteen qualities are considered critical, if not essential. Although not all planters will have these qualities in equal measure, these dimensions have been used with a very high degree of success in selecting and predicting effective church planters.

1. **Visionizing Capacity**
   - ability to project a vision into the future beyond the present
   - persuasively selling it to other people
   - bringing the vision into reality

- developing a theme which highlights the vision and philosophy of ministry
- approaching challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles
- coping effectively with non-visionizing elements
- erecting artificial walls or limits either overtly or subconsciously
- establishing a clear church identity related to the theme and vision
- believing in God's capacity to do great things

2. Personal Motivation

- having a desire to do well
- commitment to excellence
- determination and persistence
- having initiative and aggressiveness without the negative connotations
- having a willingness to work long and hard
- being a self-starter with a willingness to build from nothing
- having a high energy and vitality level; physical stamina

3. Creating Ownership of Ministry

- instilling a sense of personal responsibility in the people for the growth and success of ministry
- training leaders to reproduce leaders
- helping people to "buy in" and feel responsible for the growth and success of the church
- gaining commitment of the people to the vision
- establishing a congregational identity
- avoid stereotyping congregation by imposing unrealistic goals for which it cannot claim ownership

4. Reaching the Unchurched

- ability to develop rapport, break through barriers, and encourage unchurched people to examine themselves and commit to a walk with God
- communicating in a style that is understood by the unchurched
- understanding the "psychology" or mentality of the unchurched

- moving and functioning in the "personal space" of the unchurched without fear
- quickly getting to know the unchurched on a personal level
- breaking through the barriers erected by the unchurched
- handling crises faced by the unchurched

5. Spousal Cooperation

- creating a workable partnership that agrees on ministry priorities, each partner's role and involvement in ministry and the integration of ministry with family life
- having an explicit agreement regarding each partner's respective roles and involvement in ministry
- having explicit rules regarding the use of home as an office
- evaluating the consequences of ministry demands upon the children
- functioning as a team through individual and collective action
- having a strategy for dealing with strangers
- modeling wholesome family life before church and community
- agreeing upon and sharing the ministry vision
- deliberately planning and protecting private family life

6. Relationship Building

- taking the initiative in getting to know people and deepening relationships as a basis for more effective ministry
- responding with urgency to expressed needs and concerns of people
- displaying Godly love and compassion to people
- getting to know people on a personal basis
- making others feel secure and comfortable in one's presence
- not responding judgmentally or prejudicially to new people
- appreciating and accepting a variety of persons
- spending quality time with present parishioners without overstepping them for new people

7. **Commitment to Growing the Church**

- pastors and leaders of the congregation always looking for ways and means to more effectively communicate the Gospel and disciple members in a contextually appropriate way
- appreciating steady and consistent growth within the context of spiritual and relational growth (more and better disciples)
- establishing the goal of becoming a financially, self-supporting church within a specific period of time
- not prematurely falling into a ministry of maintenance; remain outreach-oriented
- seeing the church project within the larger context of God's kingdom

8. **Responsiveness to Community**

- adapting the ministry to the culture and needs of the local residents
- understanding the culture of the community
- identifying and assessing community needs
- responding to community needs on a priority basis such that resources are most efficiently used
- determining successes and failures of other organized religious attempts to respond to community needs
- not confusing what the community needs with what the church wants to offer
- acquiring an understanding of the character and "pulse" of the community
- adapting the philosophy of ministry to the character of the community

9. **Utilizes Giftedness of Others**

- equipping and releasing people to do ministry according to their spiritual gifts
- discerning of spiritual gifts in others
- matching the gifts of people with ministry needs and opportunities
- delegating effectively in areas of personal limitations
- avoiding personal overload by delegating effectively
- not prematurely assigning ministry assignments before people are adequately equipped

- not placing unwarranted restrictions on others' spiritual giftedness

10. **Flexibility & Adaptability**

- ability to adjust to change and ambiguity, shift priorities when necessary and handle multiple tasks at once
- coping effectively with ambiguity
- coping effectively with constant and abrupt change
- adapting oneself and one's methods to the uniqueness of the particular church planting project
- shifting priorities and emphasis during various stages of church growth
- doing "whatever" is necessary "whenever" necessary

11. **Building Group Cohesiveness**

- enabling the group to work collaboratively toward a common goal and skillfully handle divisiveness and disunifying elements
- developing a nucleus group or groups as a foundation
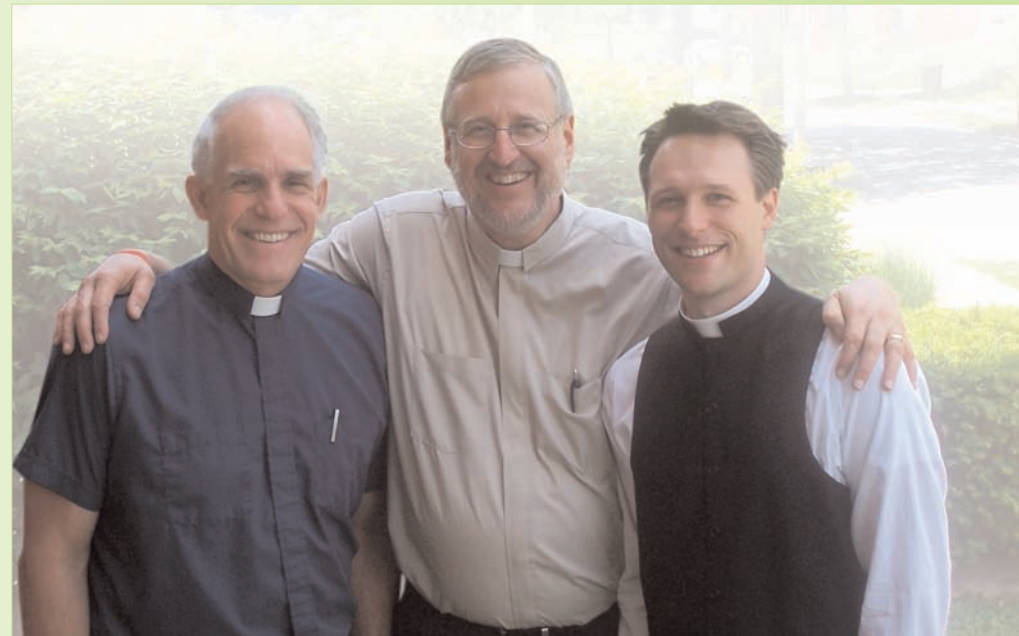
- quickly incorporating newcomers into a network of relationships
- engaging others in meaningful church activity
- monitoring the morale of people
- utilizing groups effectively
- dealing with conflict assertively, constructively, and tactfully

12. **Resilience**

- ability to sustain oneself emotionally and physically through setbacks, losses, disappointments, and failures
- experiencing setbacks without defeat
- riding the ups and downs (i.e. attendance)
- expecting the unexpected
- rebounding from loss, disappointments and failure

13. **Exercising Faith**

- demonstrating how one's convictions are translated into personal and ministry decisions
- possessing a conviction regarding one's call to a church planting ministry
- believing in God's action
- having expectation and hope
- having a willingness to wait for answers to specific prayer requests

IV. Pastoral Planter Training

A. Seminary Residential Mission Formation Track Student:

1. After student is accepted into the program, during their third year, vicarage is delayed; student takes some missional courses and attends a one-day seminar in Groups *Ablaze!*, Daughter Church Planting, Team Ministry, and three field trips.

2. Final year is vicarage, when students will have a well-rounded vicarage experience with an *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregation and also will strategize for the new church plant.

3. Student attends Basic Mission Planter Training during the vicarage year; this begins the two-year Mission Planter Development process, which includes collegial groups, Edge Gathering, and Advanced Mission Planter Training.

B. Non-Residentially Trained Planter:

1. Planter will have the commitment to engage in distance theological education to be certified for ordination, especially those planting self-standing congregations.

2. Planter will engage in the two-year Mission Planter Development Process: Basic Mission Planter Training, Collegial Groups, Edge Gathering, and Advanced Planter Training.

V. Funding/Support of *Ablaze!* Coventant Congregations

A. *Ablaze!* grants will be primarily available to *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregations—always remember these three factors: right place, right person, and right plan.

B. Funds will also be available through the *Fan into Flame* campaign to *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregations.

C. Other funding sources will also be identified and made available to *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregations.

D. Church Development Partners, a Not-for-Profit Development organization affiliated with LCEF, will also be available to help with land procurement and development processes.

E. Open Arms Institute, an early childhood ministry development organization affiliated with North American Missions and LCEF, will also be available to *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregations.