



SELCLCMS

CHURCH PLANTING STRATEGIC PLAN

“Every Church Can Plant Churches”

SELCL District Convention Presentation

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Why Plant Churches	3
Premise: Every Church Can Plant Churches	4
Focus: Church Planting	4
Heritage of Church Planting in the SELC	5
New Plan	5
Mission	5
What are New Testament Churches?	5
Marks of a New Testament Church	6
What's the same?	6
What's New?	6
Model	7
Mentored Training Cohorts	7
Benchmarked Funding Models	7
Strategic Planning Templates	8
Next Steps	9
Check Out our Church Planting Webpage	9
Listen to Podcasts on the New Church Planting Vision	9
SELC Church Planting: Past and Future	9
New Testament Churches	9
SELC District Vision for Church Planting	9
Podcasts on Marks of New Testament Churches	10
Gospel-Fueled	10
Outward-Focused	10
Discipleship-Driven	10
Multiplication-Minded	10
Enroll in Church Planting Courses (Fall 2022)	11
Cultivating Partners for Ethnic Church Plants	11
Developing Disciples for Sending	11
Preparing to Plant a New Testament Church	11
Securing Your Congregational Legacy	11
Conclusion	11
Planning Task Force	13

SELC CHURCH PLANTING PLAN

Every Church Can Plant Churches

Introduction

For the past two years an SELC district task force, appointed by President Vinovskis, has been designing a church planting strategy to propel us forward to reach the lost for Christ by establishing healthy, replicating “New Testament Churches.” This plan is shared with the earnest prayer that it reflects the leading and blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Why Plant Churches

The narrative of God’s Word in the Book of Acts is the story of planting churches from Jerusalem to Rome. Beginning in Antioch, Paul in successive missionary journeys went to the cities and preached the Gospel. He would see to it that elders (what we call pastors) were appointed in every town (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:3). The goal of Paul’s preaching was that a local congregation would be founded and grow.

It has been well established for many decades that church planting is the best way to reach the lost for Christ. Dr. Timothy Keller, a well respected urban mission leader:

The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for (1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ in a city and (2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else—not crusades, outreach programs, parachurch ministries, growing megachurches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes—will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting. This is an eyebrow-raising statement, but to those who have done any study at all, it is not even controversial.¹

Keller further asserts that “New churches best reach new generations, new residents and new people groups.”

- *New generations* –“Younger adults have always been disproportionately found in newer congregations. Long-established congregations develop traditions (such as time of worship, length of service, level of emotional responsiveness, sermon topics, leadership style, emotional atmosphere, and thousands of other tiny customs and mores) that reflect the sensibilities of longtime leaders from the older generations who have the influence and money to control church life. The automatic maintenance of such habits does not reach younger generations effectively.”

¹ Keller, Timothy, Why Plant Churches, <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/why-plant-churches>, accessed 4 May 2022, p.1.

- *New Residents*—“Older congregations may require a tenure of ten years before someone is allowed into places of leadership and influence.”
- *Ethnic Groups*—“Brand-new immigrant groups nearly always can be reached only by churches ministering in their own language. If we wait for a new group to become assimilated into the local culture, we will wait for years without reaching out to its members.”²

Keller also boldly states,

*“New churches best reach the unchurched—period. Dozens of denominational studies have confirmed that the average new church gains most of its new members (60–80%) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshiping body . . . This means the average new congregation will bring six to eight times more new people into the life of the body of Christ than an older congregation of the same size.”*³

A recent extensive study in the LCMS confirmed that new church plants are in fact the most effective at reaching the lost among us. Unfortunately, this same study confirms that church planting in the LCMS has dropped *alarmingly* in the last 20 years⁴

Premise: Every Church Can Plant Churches

A central premise of the SELC district mission plan is that every existing congregation can be involved in planting churches. At first, this may seem “a bridge too far” for many, if not most, of our churches. However, this involvement can take many forms as outlined below. (See [Church Planting Courses](#) below.) A concerted effort by all SELC congregations, with the help of God, can have a transformative impact.

Focus: Church Planting

An aphorism by the highly respected missionary, [David Hesselgrave](#), nearly twenty years ago rings especially true today,

*“When everything is mission, nothing is mission.”*⁵

His point was that if the word “missions” is used too broadly in the church to refer to everything that she has to do, it loses its meaning in reference to the unique privilege of sharing the Gospel with those who have yet to come to faith.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, p. 2

⁴ Office of National Missions, Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, unpublished, see Mark Larson for more information.

⁵ Hesselgrave, David, Contemporary Issues in Missions, Class lecture, Trinity University, Deerfield, IL, June 2004.

While granting that the task of church planting proposed herein will include activities that may seem tangential at first, the ultimate focus remains the establishment of local congregations. The task force assigned to develop this church planting plan has worked to keep the focus of our work clear and unambiguous. The language that we use now and future activity is tuned to focus on the outcome of planting new congregations.

Heritage of Church Planting in the SELC

Because of a concerted emphasis on planting new congregations over the last 40 years, today 31% of our congregations have been planted since 1980. Being a district focused on planting new churches has helped us to remain strong in a time when many mainline churches are rapidly declining across our country.

Three phases of church planting

- 1890s - 1920s: Slovak immigration led to the planting of churches. The flourishing of the initial churches led to metro hubs of mutual support in Cleveland, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and the like.
- 1940s - 1970s: Strong growth in existing churches and a commitment to church planting led to a flurry of new churches in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.
- 1980-2000: An ongoing commitment to church planting led to the planting of 20 congregations and 5 ethnic ministries, with a concentration in Florida in alignment with regional population growth.

Church planting will continue to be central to the SELC's DNA, just as it has been throughout our history. In a social climate that is increasingly shifting sand, cultivating healthy soil for planting churches will be ever more important. We aspire to plant many new churches, while resourcing our established congregations to support the effort through local (circuit-level) connections that sow missional innovation for the expansion of the Reign of God.

New Plan

God has blessed the church planting efforts of our district, even in recent decades. With profound gratitude for the work that has been accomplished and for the servants who labored, we re-hone our plan to meet the ever changing environment in which we share the Gospel

Mission

To initiate and support replicating New Testament churches.

What are New Testament Churches?

It is a return to how it all began. We define "New Testament churches" as local congregations established in cultures that do not necessarily welcome them, just like at the birth of the church.

These congregations are zealously faithful to the Jesus proclaimed in Scripture, to the Scriptures themselves, and hence to the Lutheran Confessions drawn from Scripture. New Testament churches also understand that some attitudes and practices that have grown up over the centuries in Christian cultures need to be evaluated for the current mission context.

Marks of a New Testament Church

The marks of a New Testament Churches are listed below. Each will be discussed further in upcoming podcasts. ([See below.](#))

- *Gospel-Fueled* - Healthy churches proclaim the Gospel that saves sinners.
- *Outwardly-Focused* - Healthy churches are not focused on serving current members. Rather they meet the needs of the cities to which they're sent.
- *Discipleship-Driven* - Healthy churches cultivate life-on-life environments where people learn to live like Jesus, growing to maturity in their faith.
- *Multiplication-Minded* - Healthy churches plan and train for seizing opportunities to start new things.

What's the Same?

- Same Gospel through proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments.
- Same Gospel-centered partnership among us in the SELC.
 - The church of Antioch sent Paul and his companions on successive missionary journeys (Acts 13:2-3).
 - Paul brought the message, but also employed strategies for church planting in his day. He went to leading cities, first to the synagogues, and to the public squares, etc.
 - District church planting leaders will follow this same pattern of encouraging and supporting church planting
 - Throughout our history, but especially in recent years, the district has planted new churches under the direction of an established ministry or particular leader, functioning as a "hub leader." We intend to plant new churches in a similar fashion both in areas where an SELC presence has already been established as well as in new regions, which have not yet been reached by SELC congregations.

What's New?

- *Every SELC congregation can be directly involved in church planting* – While this may not have been considered by many, there are ways that all congregations can be involved in church planting.
- *Using strategies that emphasize models that are replicable* – Models of planting that require a large amount of outside resources (financial and otherwise) cannot be widely repeated, limiting the impact of our work.

- *Planting is accomplished with local resources*
 - Leadership – Church planters may be raised locally, and credentialed through distance education.
 - Relationships – Local leaders have strong relationships in their existing communities.
 - Resources – Planting using local resources limits or avoids dependency on outside sources and allows for broad replication.
- *Programs and structure to facilitate relationship-building with the lost*
 - Pre-planting ministries that build relationships with the community will be common.
 - Examples may include childcare, coffeeshops, mercy ministries, etc.
- *Land and building, while still possible in a limited number of situations, will be a lower priority.*

Model

Mentored Training Cohorts

We propose that the above objectives are best accomplished through pairing a cohort of church planters with a mentor leader.

- These church planters can listen to one another as they grow together, sharing best practices and encouraging one another as they blaze a church planting trail together.
- Mentors will provide the framework of tested processes that help these emerging leaders to ask the right questions at the right time, while coaching through prayer and wise counsel.

Leaders who have been called by God to initiate church plants already have all that they need to accomplish their God-given work. The training and guidance they receive should be focused less on giving them what they do not have, and more on guiding them to steward the resources they already have, and to discern the next steps for the ministries they lead.

We imagine that the SELC district may partner with existing ministries to support regionally-focused mentors (hub directors) who are responsible for recruiting new leaders, and walking with them as church plants are developed.

These planters will be identified from among existing SELC congregations, as well as through our seminaries and universities. Many of the church planters will not be full-time clergy, but will build ministries alongside their marketplace occupation. As the new ministries grow, staffing models will be developed to discern the best occupational path for the worker.

Benchmarked Funding Models

Decades ago, funding models relied on large early-stage investment to fund full-time staff as well as brick-and-mortar facilities. The struggle with these models is that they required the

funding agency (in this case the SELC district) to commit God-given resources to a ministry before the viability of the church plant is readily apparent. We plan to segment funding into stages that incentivize building sustainability prior to the application of large amounts of capital funding.

We propose that, in conjunction with Strategic Planning Templates ([below](#)), funding for new mission endeavors be tied to milestones. With this funding model, it would be assumed that not all church plants progress through the full funding schedule. Therefore the District would have the opportunity to pursue *more* endeavors while reserving resources for a more targeted approach to mission funding.

Benchmarks could include (but may not be limited to)

- Gathering a core launch team for a new endeavor,
- Securing a certain level of local funding to be matched by the district,
- Launching a certain number or quality of grassroots-led mission activities, or undergoing a process of vocational discernment.

While participation and funding may be parts of the benchmarks, the goal of the benchmarks would be to aid in discerning faithfulness more than extrinsic “success”, to enable the emerging leader and the District to discern where God is guiding in order to invest most wisely.

Strategic Planning Templates

While God is able to work in many ways to establish and sustain His Church, our current cultural climate requires innovative mission strategies. By drawing on learnings from church planting leaders around the country, we will define expectations of how new ministries may develop along specific paths.

We propose developing Strategic Planning Templates for the following paths:

- Word and Sacrament Ministries - Prioritizing Word and Sacrament ministry as the primary galvanizing program for a community.
- Social Enterprise Endeavors - Beginning with felt-need ministries to initiate a community that intends to yield a future church plant.
- Marketplace-focused Applications - Starting a business to establish a neighborhood footprint for Kingdom impact

After careful examination of possible strategies, emerging leaders will discern the path that they feel is best for the work God has given them. This can significantly increase efficiency around planning and goal-setting as new missional endeavors are pursued.

While it is the goal of the District to establish Word and Sacrament communities (churches); we believe that the above categories represent proven paths to that end. Working with experienced leaders and planters, we propose marking out 3- to 5-year plans as templates for emerging leaders. These templates would inform the process by which leaders discern and learn in their cohorts alongside peers and mentors.

Next Steps

1. Check Out our Church Planting Webpage

The fullest explanations and latest information will be on the SELC district church planting webpage, <http://selc.lcms.org/churchplanting/>. You will be able to

- Register for church planting events
- Access the library of podcasts
- Find resources and tools for church planting

2. Listen to Podcasts on the New Church Planting Vision

These podcasts, hosted by Mark Larson and Jacob Hoyer highlight aspects of the new district church planting plan. They will be located on the above website. The first two are available now; others will be released for the summer of 2022.

[SELC Church Planting: Past and Future](#)

Guest: Rev. Paul Hoyer

This podcast highlights the recent history of church planting in our district under the leadership of Rev. Hoyer. He opines on what factors led to the planting of numerous churches in Florida and beyond, how strategies changed over time and ideas on how to move forward to the next era of church planting.

[New Testament Churches](#)

Mark Larson and Jacob Hoyer

This podcast explores what we mean by “New Testament Church” and how the way we define a church can help or hurt our efforts to plant new ones to advance the Kingdom. They also discuss how the District will “*initiate and support*” church plants.

SELC District Vision for Church Planting

Guest: President Vinovskis

President Vinovskis shares his vision for church planting for the next triennium and beyond. He explores:

- The emphasis that will be placed on church planting in the SELC
- How our non-geographic nature opens opportunity for church planting
- How our past ethnic nature allows us to serve other immigrants groups

Podcasts on Marks of New Testament Churches

Gospel-Fueled

Rev. Jim Douthwaite, St. Athanasius Lutheran Church, Fairfax, VA

Rev. Douthwaite explores the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel and how this understanding provides the fuel for a church in any stage of development. We will discuss what some other tempting substitutes are and how this plays out. What will it mean to move all of our SELC churches to be more and more fueled by the Gospel?

Outward-Focused

Rev. Jon Palmer, The Way Lutheran Church, Columbia, IL

As the pastor of the newest SELC congregation, Rev. Palmer will share what it means to be outwardly focused in ministry and why this is one of the attributes of a New Testament church. He will explore:

- How an outward focus does not mean not caring for its members.
- What things tend to give churches an unhealthy internal focus.
- What it means for our communities as more SELC churches are intentionally outward-focused.

Discipleship-Driven

Tige Culbertson, Pastor St. Luke Lutheran Church Oviedo, FL

Discipling believers is a critical activity to raise leaders to be involved in church planting. Without mature, zealous leaders to lead new ministries, our church planting efforts would be thwarted.

- What is discipleship? How does it happen? Whose responsibility is it?
- How can a lack of discipleship end up defining our churches?
- What would it mean if all of our SELC churches were thriving in discipleship?

Multiplication-Minded

Rev. Mark Crossman, The Cross, Mt. Dora, FL

While it required zeal and sacrifice, New Testament churches multiplied in the Book of Acts. The Lord added daily to the number that were being saved. Rev. Mark Crossman will explore:

- What it means for churches to multiply and some models for it.
- Why we should multiply churches and not just continue growing larger in one location.
- What will be required for more of our churches to be multiplication minded and how this could benefit the reign of God.

3. Enroll in Church Planting Courses (Fall 2022)

Are you ready for your congregation to join the effort by mobilizing for mission around the ministry that God has already begun in your context? Starting in the Fall of 2022, SELC Church Planting will be offering learning cohorts for clergy and lay leaders to learn how they might engage their congregations in the work of church planting. These courses will each include six weekly online meetings. They will be designed to begin conversations and help you identify next steps in your context.

Cultivating Partners for Ethnic Church Plants

The SELC has a rich history of advancing Kingdom growth through ethnic church planting. Learn more about identifying the opportunity and developing the potential of a multi-cultural partnership for church planting.

Facilitator: Rev. Dr. Mark Larson

Developing Disciples for Sending

Any church planting endeavor will need strong leaders. Learn how your church can more strategically engage in training individuals to be leaders of new mission endeavors that have potential to yield New Testament churches.

Facilitator: Rev. Jacob Hoyer

Preparing to Plant a New Testament Church

Planting a new church can feel overwhelming, but it comes down to a few key commitments. Learn about how, even before a church is planted, you can plan for the hallmarks of a New Testament church.

Facilitator: Rev. Paul Hoyer

Securing Your Congregational Legacy

Are you an established congregation struggling to identify your best path forward? Learn key strategic planning concepts that can help you build a plan for what's next when your church is in a late stage of life.

Facilitator: Rev. Jacob Hoyer

Conclusion

So here is the plan. You may be asking the question, "Will it work?" Perhaps the classic movie, *The Princess Bride*, provides some insight. The heroes of the movie go to Max and Valerie for assistance to resurrect the dead Westley in order to exact vengeance on their enemy Humperdinck.⁶

⁶ <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/princessbride/section6/page/2/>.

Here is their solution: [Video: Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AemKK4BaSI>. Start at 0:56]

Fezzik: It's a miracle pill?

Valerie: The chocolate coating makes it go down easier, BUT you have to wait 15 minutes for full potency and you shouldn't go swimming for at least an hour.

Fezzik: Thank you for everything

Max and Valerie: Bye, bye, boys, have fun storming the castle

Valerie: Do you think it will work?

Max: It would take a miracle..

Will this church planting plan work? In the words of Miracle Max, "*It would take a miracle!*"

A miracle is an event that is contrary to nature. It is completely contrary to our fallen flesh that people, who are spiritually dead before God (Eph. 2:1), come to faith. It would take a miracle! Gathering new believers into churches challenges our powerful enemies of a hostile world and a scheming devil. It would take a miracle!

Fortunately, our God is in the miracle business. The Gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation (Rom. 1:16). It's a miracle! The power of the Visible Word in Baptism, slays the Old Adam in us and births the new man to live before God (Rom. 6:3-4). It's a miracle. Though it is a miracle, it is by no means rare. It has been repeated billions of times since the founding of the Church. We are invited to be a part of this everyday miracle.

The SELC District is inviting you to be a part of this miracle.

- We invite you to pray for this endeavor and us.
- We covet your support in various forms.
- We invite your input and godly critique to sharpen our work together.

Together, our district has the opportunity, and with God's help, the capacity to reach untold thousands for Christ through planting new churches..

Planning Task Force

Rev. Dr. Wally Arp, Senior Pastor, St. Luke Lutheran Church, Oviedo, FL

Rev. Jacob Hoyer, Pastor, Holy Cross Lutheran Church (Deland), Lake Mary, FL

Rev. Paul Hoyer, District Mission Executive, Senior Pastor, Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Lake Mary, FL (retired)

Rev. Dr. Mark Larson, Pastor, St. Lucas Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO

Rev. Dan Lepley, District Vice-president, Lutheran Church Extension Fund

Rev. Ron Meyr, Senior Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Rockledge, FL

Rev. Waldemar Vinovskis, President, SELC district, Pastor, Concordia Lutheran Church, Macungie, PA

Guests

Rev. Dr. Peter Meier, Mission Executive, Florida-Georgia District

Rev. Vince Parks, formerly Director, LINC Houston