

A Guide for Mission Planning

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*“Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me
cannot be my disciple.*

*For which of you, intending to build a tower,
does not first sit down and
estimate the cost,
to see whether he has enough to complete it?”*

--Jesus, discussing the cost of discipleship.

(Luke 14:27-28)

The Need for Mission Planning

Things are not good in the church.

Morale in many congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in general and in the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod in particular is extremely low. Anxiety is high. We know it. We feel it. We experience it weekly as we gather for worship. Low morale and high anxiety create a climate for conflict, lack of trust and weak faith. Congregations are getting older and pews emptier. Finances are tight and buildings are crumbling. The Resurrection joy of Easter is a whisper drowned out by the death we consciously and subconsciously fear is fast approaching. Worship is frequently plodding and lifeless despite the best efforts of preachers, worship leaders and church musicians. Fear drives the church inward, with many people hoping it will survive long enough to bury them.

In the world around us, the Christian Faith, at best, has become tangential to many people's lives, and at worst is simply irrelevant.

It is clear, crystal clear,
that the "way we've
always done it" is no
longer working.

Many in our world, including "church people" no longer see faith as the integrating center of their lives. The "church" has become a caricature that is often presented as foolish, money hungry, or simply vapid. Churches that specialize in putting on entertaining religious "experiences" seem to thrive in a consumer marketplace. But, even if it is

slight, these Christian communities are in decline as well. Poll after poll reports that the fastest growing religious group in America are those with no religious affiliation at all.

It is clear, crystal clear, that the "way we've always done it" is no longer working. To do it "the way we've always done it," even if we do it harder or better, is a recipe for experiencing the very death we fear.

In the face of these realities, how is the Church of Jesus Christ to carry out its mission effectively? How are we to create communities of faith where people can come to know the love of God, and be moved to live lives shaped and animated by that love? How can we turn around the decline in our churches and give birth to new communities of faith that are both thriving and growing in faith, love and devotion to our God?

Many wise and knowledgeable people of faith are trying to find the answer to these pressing questions. A plethora of books, articles and blogs have been written diagnosing the problems and suggesting solutions. Seminars can be attended. Videos can be watched. Web sites can be visited. Experiments are being tried. If the way to turn things around was simple, someone would have figured it out already! The way forward is likely complex, multi-faceted and very different than any of us has imagined. It is going to mean significant change, not just some tweaking. It's going to mean letting go of some things that we hold dear and embracing some things we may find difficult to bear. It's going to mean digging deep to, once again, reclaim the very heart and core of our faith – the core -- not just those superficial things we think define us as Christians.

Mission Plan Tasks

- Preparing for Mission
 - Describe the Mission
 - Organize for Mission
 - Develop Resources for Mission
 - Sustaining the Mission
 - Sharing the Mission
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It is going to take time and effort on the part of many people in all parts of the church. It's going to mean trusting God and the Holy Spirit more than ever before.

Congregations interested in becoming the growing and thriving communities of faith that God intends them to be need to commit themselves to deep study, careful reflection, thorough planning and fervent prayer to discern the way forward. Congregations will need to work together to implement the changes and innovations necessary to reach people in this present age. We will all need to be clear about the roots of our faith in the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ, even as we look for ways to tell that old, old story in new and vibrant ways.

The Mission Planning process described in this document can help a community of faith both explore the old, old story that defines the Church and plan a way forward to do the work of ministry God is calling us to today. The "Tasks" described below are not isolated steps, per se, but will be worked and reworked, considered and revisited as the plan develops. The initial work in developing a mission plan will take a minimum of six to twelve months, but the plans that emerge from the conversations described below are never a finished product. They need to be revisited and updated regularly and often so that they don't become "the way we've always done it" for a new generation. God is never finished with us. God is always calling us forward toward that day when God's Reign will come in all its fullness. My prayer for you and your mission planning team is that you will find this process meaningful, fun and energizing for you and the whole congregation.

Forming a Mission Planning Team

The kind of change necessary to move a congregation from a pattern of decline to one of growth in mission and ministry requires the support, encouragement, prayers and participation of the entire congregation. This cannot be a project carried out by just a few individuals, the Council or the pastor. Everyone must get involved. However, a “Mission Planning Team” needs to be selected to lead this process and engage the whole congregation in the holy conversations that will result in a renewed and reformed sense of mission.

Because the congregation needs to be deeply involved in this process, the decision to enter into a time of conversation, discernment and planning for mission and ministry needs to be made by the whole congregation. Therefore, a formal vote should be taken at a congregation meeting to begin this process. Without the support of the congregation, this process will not work. A sample resolution is provided in appendix A of this planning guide.

It works best if the Mission Planning Team is made up of a cross section of the congregation. Seeking a balance of new and long-time members, male and female, young and old, will bring a diversity of voices to the table in the planning process, and allow the team to engage the broadest spectrum of the congregation in the conversation. It is suggested that the Mission Planning Team be made up of 6-8 members, depending on the size of the congregation. Because of the need for balance in the team, it is not recommended that the Council just ask for volunteers.

The following method for selecting the Mission Planning Team has been used with great success in the Call Process:

- The Council discusses the gifts and diversity that is needed on the team. The Council should do this without naming specific individuals.
- After the discussion, there is a time of prayer, as each Council member reflects on individuals in the congregation who fit the criterion established, and asks the Holy Spirit to guide the decision.
- Following the prayer, each council member is given a 3X5 index card and asked to write down the names of potential team members. Each person writes down one more name than the number of people that are going to serve on the team (for example, if the team will have six members, write down seven names).
- The cards are collected and the names are compiled into a list according to those whose names surfaced most frequently.
- After further discussion, the individuals which emerged as the top choices are asked to serve. Extra names are held as alternates in case the top names choose not to serve.
- One member of the council should be selected to serve as a liaison to the Team.

After the Mission Planning Team is selected, the Team should select a facilitator. The facilitator should not be the council member or the pastor (they have plenty of other things to do). The facilitator:

- Coordinates the work of the team.
- Schedules and announces meetings.
- Works with the pastor, council liaison and team to plan agendas.
- Communicates the work of the Team to the congregation.
- Works with the team to engage the congregation in the process.

It is strongly recommended that the congregation invite the Bishop or Director of Evangelical Mission to orient and equip the team for its work. They may also be invited to lead a Mission Planning Workshop or other programs for the congregation and/or the team.

Preparing for Mission

Before a congregation is ready to step out in mission, the individual members of the congregation must be prepared to accept the challenge and the task at hand. Jesus cautioned would-be followers to count the cost of discipleship before choosing to follow him (Luke 14:25-33). Paul reminds the Corinthians that they need to train themselves like athletes in order to run the race of mission successfully. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27) The Mission Planning Team first, needs to evaluate and discuss the readiness of the congregation to engage in mission planning and implementation of the Mission Plan. The Team also needs to work with the leadership to help equip the congregation to provide input, receive and implement the Mission Plan as it emerges.

EXERCISE #1: Readiness for Mission

TASK #1: Discipleship Training

The life of discipleship is the primary vocation of every baptized Christian. This baptismal vocation informs, shapes and impacts how we live in our families, workplaces, organizations, communities, and world. It guides who we are and how we think about the various roles and responsibilities we have in the context of our daily lives.

A variety of resources are available for discipleship training and adult faith formation in the congregation. The baseline for discipleship training and adult faith formation should be a commitment to the regular study of scripture and the cultivation of a life of prayer. Everyone in the congregation from youngest to eldest should be invited and encouraged in these two key faith practices. Other resources are being identified and developed and will be available on the Synod website in the months ahead.

Describing the Mission

If someone wanted to start a new Italian restaurant in your community, the first thing he or she would do is develop a business plan. A business plan is a written document that describes in detail how a new business is going to achieve its goals. A business plan describes what a business will do, how it will do it, who will do it and what it will cost. The plan evaluates the market by analyzing the community, the needs, potential customers and the competition. The business plan also provides some estimate of the expected profits. Banks and other investors will not even consider supporting a new business without seeing a well-considered and thorough business plan. A business plan provides direction for the business, benchmarks for its development and a means to evaluate its success.

A Mission Plan is, essentially, a church's business plan. Unlike a for profit businesses, the goal of a church is not to make money. Like other non-profits, the goal of a church is to impact people's lives and the world in which we live. Like a business plan, a mission plan provides a congregation with direction, benchmarks for developing the ministry, and a means to evaluate its effectiveness. In short, a mission plan describes where the congregation is going, how it's going to get there and how we will know when we've arrived. Understanding, of course, that the Church's journey is never completely finished until the day God's Reign comes in all its fullness.

The first task in developing a mission plan is to *describe the mission*. An Italian restaurant serves meatballs and pasta. A social service agency provides services to people in need. A hospital cares for the sick. A congregation's mission plan needs to describe the church's unique mission within the larger community. Congregations used to be encouraged to develop carefully worded "mission statements" to describe their mission. These statements were usually short, and were intended to be learned and remembered by the members of the congregation. Unfortunately, large amounts of time were spent developing these statements and not actually doing anything with them. At best, they wound up being posted on a wall in the narthex embroidered in a nice frame. Mission statements, I have found, are neither helpful nor necessary. Why? Because God has given Christ's Church a mission and it is already spelled out for us in simple, memorable and concrete terms:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." -- Jesus, instructing his disciples just before the Ascension. (Matthew 28:19-20)

And what did Christ command us? That too, is clear:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 27:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27)

To summarize, the church's mission is to invite people into the love of God in Jesus Christ and inspire them to love God and neighbor in the Way of Jesus Christ.

Everything else is just commentary.

EXERCISE #2 – What is a “Church”?

This mission of loving God, loving neighbor, loving one another and inviting all people into this way of life can be divided into four areas of ministry:

- Proclaiming the Good News
- Teaching the Faith
- Working for Justice
- Living with the People

Divide into four working groups. Have each group discuss one of the four ministry areas and bring a report back to the whole group. This exercise can be done with the mission planning team, the council, a bible study group or with the whole congregation through cottage meetings.

1. Proclaim the Good News of God’s Reign in Jesus Christ:

- How do you as an individual and through your ministry center proclaim the Good News?
 - Within the church?
 - In your neighborhood?
 - In the world?
- What are one or two ways you might proclaim the Good News in new ways?
 - Within the church?
 - In your neighborhood?
 - In the world?

2. Teach the faith:

- How do you as an individual and through your ministry center teach the faith?
 - Within the church?
 - In your neighborhood?
 - In the world?
- What are one or two ways you might teach the faith in new ways?
 - Within the church?
 - In your neighborhood?
 - In the world?

3. Work for justice:

- How do you as an individual and through your ministry center work for justice?
 - Within the church?
 - In your neighborhood?
 - In the world?

- What are one or two ways you might work for justice in new ways?
 - Within the church?
 - In your neighborhood?
 - In the world?

4. Live with the people:

- How do you as an individual and through your ministry center listen to the people in your community?
 - To hear their needs, concerns, yearnings, joys?
 - To hear their thoughts about faith, hope, love?
 - To hear their ideas about community, gathering and fellowship?
- What are one or two ways you might listen to the people in your community in new ways?
 - To hear their needs, concerns, yearnings, joys?
 - To hear their thoughts about faith, hope, love?
 - To hear their ideas about community, gathering and fellowship?
- Who, *specifically*, is God calling you to reach out to with the Gospel today? Why?

TASK #2 – Describing the Mission

EXERCISE #3 - God's Mission Has a Church

Jesus commands us to love our neighbors. We begin to describe the Mission to which God is calling us by considering who it is God is calling us to serve. Just who are our neighbors and what are their needs? Doing a little research is helpful to overcome our stereotypes and examine our assumptions about those living around us. To accomplish this, consider the following questions:

Who are your neighbors?

- What is the demographic make-up of your community? How does your congregation reflect that demographic? How is it different? The ELCA website has demographic material available for you to download. You can find it at <http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Research-and-Evaluation/Demographic-Reports> We are Synod 4C. You can find your Congregation ID in the Synod Directory or by calling the Synod Office.
- What are the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of the community around your church?
- Who in your community is marginalized, forgotten, or left out?
- Who, specifically, needs to hear the Good News of Jesus' love and grace in your community? Why?
- Who are the neighbors beyond your immediate community who God is calling you to reach?

EXERCISE #4 – Tour of the Mission Field

Once we have a sense of who our neighbors are, and who God is calling us to serve, we can begin imagining how we might reach out to them in mission and ministry. The Church is both gathered community and sent into the world in service and witness. The mission plan needs to include both ways of caring for the spiritual needs of the gathered community and ways of equipping the community to reach out to our neighbors. Consider the following questions:

1. As you reach out, how will you care for the gathered faith community in your congregation? How will you continue to nurture and equip disciples to love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind through...

- Worship?
- Devotion?
- Study?
- Prayer?
- Spiritual Care?
- Fellowship?
- Encouragement?
- Service?

2. How will you equip disciples to love their neighbors as themselves through...

- Study Groups?
- Apprenticeships?
- Mentoring?
- Coaching?
- Outside training and programs?
- Partnering with other congregations, community organizations?

3. What are you going to do to invite these neighbors into the love of God in Jesus Christ through...

- Service?
- Witness?
- Advocacy?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Fellowship?
- Education?
- Worship?

[NOTE: It is important to remember that God is already at work in your neighbors' lives... your task is to help your neighbor's see, experience and name what God is doing among you.]

Organizing for Mission

Like a restaurant serves food, and a grocery store sells groceries and the garage fixes your car, traditionally, the church has existed to provide religious services for the faithful. Churches, and particularly their pastors, baptize, confirm, marry and bury. The pastor preaches the Word and administers the Sacraments, though the faithful may help in carrying out those duties. The pastor also visits the sick, the shut-in, and the hospitalized to pray with them, assure them of God's presence and love, and encourage them in faith. The congregation provides worship services, a Sunday school and other Christian Education programs to teach children faith and morals, and provides for the financial support of the pastor. People come to the church for worship services, bible study, spiritual counseling and Christian fellowship. The traditional church is organized to provide these religious services and to care for its members.

This ministry of pastoral caregiving is certainly a biblical model. James encourages the members to call upon the elders of the church to pray for them. Jesus cares for the sick, the hungry and the suffering, he instructs the disciples and welcomes children into his arms. Hebrews encourages the community to gather for worship. Acts tells the story of the appointing of the first deacons to care for the widows and the orphans in the community, and lifts up communities of faith that had "all things in common."

Within this traditional model of ministry, "Evangelism," if it is practiced at all, is about recruiting members. It's about gathering up like-minded people who are looking for the kind of religious services the congregation offers, and who will appreciate the fellowship of others who have been socialized and educated in similar ways. Lutheran churches were often planted where there were already Lutherans, or to serve Lutherans moving into the area. Lutherans moving into the area often sought out Lutheran churches where their faith could be cared for and nurtured.

Many of the Lutheran congregations that I visit, and that I have served, operate out of this model for ministry. In seminary, I was trained to lead congregations functioning in this way. For many decades in the middle of the twentieth century, this way of doing ministry and shaping congregational life seemed to work very well. You put a "Lutheran Church" sign in the yard, and people came. But, since then, this model has disintegrated in a society that no longer seeks the religious services congregations have traditionally provided. Like the livery stable following the advent of the automobile at the turn of the twentieth century, the traditional church no longer seems relevant to most people.

Today, churches need to re-organize themselves to re-focus on carrying out the primary mission of the church rather than just recruiting members and servicing their religious needs. Many of the tasks carried out in a traditional congregation will still need attending to, but will be given new form and will be understood in new ways. The gathered community will still need to anchor its life in Word and Sacrament, the sick and suffering will still need to be cared for, children will still need to be taught the faith. However, these things will not be seen as the purpose of ministry, but as a means for

equipping Christians to carry out Christ's mission in the worlds where they live, work and play.

As the details of the congregation's mission begin to emerge, the Mission Planning Team will need to lead the congregation in re-organizing its life and work to accomplish this mission. Imagining and implementing these changes will be the most difficult, challenging and uncomfortable part of the mission planning process. Time worn practices will have to be set aside. Experiments in doing church differently will fail and hard lessons will need to be learned. Disagreements will emerge and must be negotiated. The truth is, conflict can be a positive and creative force, making ideas better and stronger... if it is handled well. Change is never easy, and it is important for leaders to be sensitive and compassionate toward those who find new ways of doing things painful. People will leave the congregation looking more familiar ways of being church. But new people will also arrive, bringing new ideas, perspectives and energy.

Jesus knew this wasn't going to be easy. He told his disciples how hard it would be in the upper room the night before he died, and promised to send the Holy Spirit as an Advocate and Guide to help them on the way. I think that's why, on that Galilean mountainside at the end of Matthew, he promised to be with them always, to the end of the age.

TASK #3 – Organizing for Mission

In light of the detailed mission you described in TASK 1, the Mission Planning Team should spend time exploring the following items, lead the congregation in discussing their ideas, and work with the Council to begin implementing them. [NOTE: Go slow, start with small changes, live into them, and then work on the bigger ones.]

Develop specific goals, objectives and indicators based on the mission described in TASK 1.

- **Goals** – A one sentence statement describing the key intended result or expected change in *people's lives* sought over the long term. Ask:
 - What does the desired future look like for the community the congregation is called to serve?

e.g. People know the love and grace of Jesus Christ in their lives.
- **Objectives** – A one sentence statement describing what is different in the life of the community or individuals who have experienced this result or expected change. Ask:
 - How have people's lives improved?

e.g. People live with more hope and meaning in their daily lives.
- **Timelines** - Work backward from the anticipated completion date to establish the timeline for accomplishing your goals and objectives. Timelines should be flexible and amendable to account for changes and surprises.
 - When will you complete work on these goals and objectives?
 - What are the tasks that need to be accomplished to reach the goals and objectives? What order will they be accomplished? When?
 - When will you start working on these goals and objectives?
- **Indicators** – A specific characteristic that can be measured or observed to demonstrate or provide evidence that the desired change has taken place. Use "SMART" Criteria:
 - **Specific:** Precisely defines what will be achieved/measured
 - **Measurable:** Can be quantified/measured.
 - **Achievable:** Realistic given context, resources, etc.
 - **Relevant:** Aligns with the goals and objectives.
 - **Time-bound:** Can be attained within a specified period.

e.g. By Easter, ten people will be able to share a story of how they have experienced or shared God's love in their life.

[NOTE: Based upon a goal-setting method presented by ELCA Global Mission, 11/20/2015]

EXERCISE #5 – The Goal Setting Worksheet

Review and re-imagine each of the structures, organizations and patterns of the congregation's life and ministry. Be brutally honest with one another.

- How do the current structures, organization and patterns in the congregation support these goals? How do they get in the way? What needs to be discontinued or redesigned?
- What new structures, organization and patterns will be necessary to achieve these goals.
- How do the current programs and activities of the congregation support these goals? How do they get in the way? What needs to be discontinued or redesigned?
- What new programs and activities will be needed to achieve these goals?
- Make sure to consider:
 - Worship
 - Education
 - Fellowship
 - Service
 - Witness
 - Advocacy
 - Administration (i.e. staffing, council and committee structures, etc.)
 - Partnerships (other congregations, community organizations, synod, churchwide)

What risks might need to be overcome to accomplish these goals?

- How will you use conflict creatively?
- How will you seek to include those with a different vision, values or perspective?
- How will you help people grieve the changes and those things that are being given up or left behind?
- How will you give people permission to walk away?

How will you share this emerging vision with the congregation and the broader community?

- How will you communicate these new ideas to the congregation and community?
 - What are the communication tools at your disposal?

i.e. websites, newsletters, newspapers, community calendars, etc.
- How will you market and advertise what the congregation is doing? How will you communicate with those you wish to reach?
- How will individual members of the congregation be equipped to share what is happening in the congregation and invite friends and neighbors to participate?

Developing Resources for Mission

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled... --Jesus feeds 5000 men, plus women and children (Matthew 14:19-20)

There is a lot of fear and anxiety in the church.

Everywhere I go, I feel it. It is palpable. Everywhere I go, I hear people worrying about a lack of resources for doing ministry. The numbers do not lie, since the ELCA was founded in 1988 we have fewer people giving more dollars. The overall financial resources of the church continue to dwindle, especially when adjusted for inflation. There are fewer and fewer people willing and able to do the work of maintaining church organizations and buildings. It tears my heart out every time a congregation chooses to close rather than redefine and reclaim their mission. Every time, it is due to a lack of resources: people and dollars. The model we have for doing church is no longer sustainable in many places. Churches have grown too small to afford the salaries and especially the benefit packages of even a beginning pastor. And, without well trained, well equipped pastoral leadership, congregations perish.

How are we going to find the resources to keep doing ministry in the 21st Century? Is the Lutheran Church as we know it even sustainable? Probably not.

But, we are not without hope. Jesus can still do miracles with a few loaves and a couple of fish. I've seen it.

The way we have always done church is an expensive proposition. No one denies that. Pastors and staff are expensive. Buildings are expensive. Organs and classrooms are expensive. But, why do we need to keep doing church so expensively? There has to be a better way.

We need to remember that Jesus sent twelve men and a handful of women out into the world to make disciples with little more than the clothes on their backs. And... they did. In fact, they, and those who followed them converted a whole empire and today the Way of Jesus can be found in almost every corner of our world.

Do we trust that Jesus can do the same with the loaves and fishes we have to offer? Do we believe that God has given us what we need to do ministry in this present age... or don't we?

This is a matter of faith, and of stewardship. It is a matter of letting go of old models and embracing new ones. The church is growing like crazy in places where the people seem to have nothing, by American standards, and maybe that's the key. By embracing

our poverty, we discover the riches of God's grace. By acknowledging our lack of resources, we discover God's abundance.

Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 9:8, *"And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work."*

The truth is, people give to what they are excited about. If the congregation has captured the vision of the emerging mission, and are beginning to see God doing new things among them, they will support the work.

So far, the Mission Planning Team has described the specifics of carrying out God's Mission in the community where the congregation has been planted, and they have worked with the council and congregation to develop goals, strategies and structures for carrying out that mission. Now it is time to explore how to identify and develop the resources for accomplishing the mission. The Team needs to do this work in the confidence that God always provides the resources necessary for carrying out God's Mission... even if those resources come from unexpected and unanticipated places. But, sometimes this means we will need to drop our nets and follow Jesus in faith with just the clothes on our backs.

TASK #4 – Developing Resources for Mission

EXERCISE #6 – Asset Mapping

Following the Asset Mapping exercise, the Mission Team should consider and discuss the following questions and ideas in conversation with the congregation and the council:

1. What financial resources are available to carry out the mission plan?

- Cash Resources - Make sure to use those rainy day funds. Trust me, it's raining.
- Endowments – Are they properly structured for the mission needs of the church, or do they need to be restructured?
- Real Estate – Is the building a tool for mission and ministry, or is it a hindrance? If it is a hindrance, should it be sold? Could it be re-mortgaged to provide resources for ministry? Has the building become a sacred cow that cannot be sacrificed?
- Stewardship Campaign – can people be encouraged to increase their stewardship? When was the last time you had that discussion with one another?
- Estates, Bequests and Trusts – Have people in your congregation remembered your congregation in their wills or estate plans?
- Are there grants available to help you with your plan? (The ELCA has renewal grants for congregations with clear plans for renewal and redevelopment. When the goals of the AR-OK Synod *Living God's Abundance* campaign are reached, the Synod will too.).
- Develop a budget that reflects the available resources and the goals of the mission plan.

At this point, the congregation may need to ask itself: “Would we rather close flush with assets to distribute or close knowing that we spent every dime in an effort to reach people with the love and grace of Jesus Christ?” Chances are, if you adopt the later perspective, you won't be closing any day soon.

2. What human resources are available?

- Continue to expand your asset map by further identifying the talents, gifts and skills present in the congregation. This must be more than just putting a “time and talent” sheet in the bulletin. This is an inventory of all the ways God has blessed the gathered community.
- How do the assets match the developing plan? How should the plan be adjusted to best use the assets available?
- What assets are available in the community around the church? The church is not just called to reach out to the community where it is planted, but to partner with the community too. Do you have friends, neighbors, relatives or co-workers who may be able to support the ministry with their time and talents?

3. What physical resources are available?

- How can your building and grounds be used as a tool for carrying out your emerging mission plan?
- Do members have physical assets that can be used for ministry? Vehicles, businesses, store-fronts, real estate, farms, tools, computers, a role of masking tape? Do as complete an inventory as is possible and practical.
- Are there physical assets in the community that can be used for ministry? Schools, libraries, parks, etc.

4. What other resources are available to you? Think creatively!

5. How can you design ministries that take little or no resources beyond your hands and your time to accomplish?

6. Who might you partner with in ministry? Can you share a pastor, a building, a program, a project, an administrative task with someone else?

In a business plan, the proposal analyzes the competition. No sense in opening an Italian restaurant if the other three in town are struggling. In a mission plan, the church always looks for partners who may be doing the same work or might be interested in doing the work with you. We really do not need to look at other churches as competitors. In every community, there is more than enough ministry to go around! There really is.

7. How might you generate or identify new resources that might not be available to you now?

Active mission and ministry, focused on the primary mission of the church, generates new resources. It just does.

Sustaining the Mission

Whether any one congregation, synod or denomination thrives, barely survives or dies, God's Mission will prevail. God's Word never returns empty. The Reign of God will come in all its fullness with or without us. Knowing that God's Mission is ultimately not in our hands but is God's work among us can relieve us of anxiety and fear, and free us to engage fully in the work God has prepared for us to do. However, every good mission plan has a sustainability plan built into it.

At the beginning of the book of Acts, Jesus sends his disciples to carry the Good News of the Resurrection to the far ends of the earth. Throughout the book, we see the Apostles carrying out that mission by planting new congregations and communities of faith wherever they went. Once Paul got involved, the church grew like crazy throughout the Gentile world. In Acts, and in Paul's letters we get a sense of how Paul planted these churches and organized them so their ministry would be sustained.

- *Paul, like Jesus gathered people together.* Gathering is important for sustaining ministry. No one is meant to walk the Way of Jesus alone. Jesus sent the disciples out two by two. Paul gathered people in homes and other places. We need one another to sustain mission and ministry. We need to be encouraged and challenged, comforted and cajoled by our brothers and sisters. The love we are called to share with the world begins with the love which we share with one another.
- *Paul, like Jesus, recognized that people have a diversity of gifts.* Leaders in Paul's communities took a variety of shapes and forms. Jesus called a wide variety of people into discipleship, from fishers to tax collectors. In Paul's communities men and women served as teachers, preachers, prophets, leaders, deacons, overseers and in many other roles. Each used their roles to further the mission and reach out into their communities with the Good News.
- *Paul, like Jesus, knew that communities were stronger if they were linked together.* Paul often wrote his letters to a group of congregations and encouraged them to share his letters with other churches. He dispatched his companions to check on congregations and he himself visited churches more than once to encourage them in their mission and ministry. He brought and sent greetings between churches and encouraged them to share their resources with one another.
- *Paul, like Jesus, kept bringing people back to the basics of the Word and encouraging them in prayer.* No ministry is sustainable if it loses touch with its taproot in the Word. No ministry is sustainable if it fails to pray together, listening for the guidance of the Spirit in the discerning of God's will. Paul's genuine letters always begin by exploring the depths of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ, and then conclude by unfolding the meaning of that grace by describing the life of service, witness and discipleship.

Congregations that have no sustainability plan, and no plan for adapting to change, wind up doing the same thing over and over again with diminishing returns. Sustainability is not about survival, it is about cultivating an ever expanding mission to reach more and more people with the love and grace of Jesus Christ. It is an intentional plan for reproducing and sending more disciples and apostles into the world to carry the Good News to the next generation and beyond. It is about being a church of continuous reformation and change so that a new generation can hear the Good News that animates our lives. Our failure at this task is one of the reasons our children are gone from the church. We cannot live in the past. To do so is faithlessness. God, our God, is a God of the future. Jesus is the revelation of the fullness of God's Reign in the middle of history, but the fullness of God's Reign still lies in the future, not the past. As a church, we should never give in to nostalgia. We should always lean into the future that God is, even now, preparing for us.

TASK #5 – Sustaining the Mission

The Mission Team should consider and discuss these questions along with the congregation. Mission Planning should focus not just on the present, but on the future.

1. How will this ministry reproduce itself?

- Once this mission plan is implemented, how will you consider ways to expand the work you are doing?
- How might you duplicate the work your congregation is doing in other communities in need of mission and ministry?
- How might you plant new congregations or ministries?

2. How will you replace or reproduce your leadership?

- What is your plan for mentoring/coaching new leaders? Every leader should have an apprentice who is learning how to lead... either to replace their mentor, or to expand the ministry.
- What is your plan for encouraging people to study for rostered leadership in the church as pastors or diaconal ministers? The current shortage of rostered leaders is only expected to get worse in coming years. Raising up new leaders from within the community of faith is the only way for us to address this predicted shortfall.
- How will you help support current and emerging leaders financially, spiritually and emotionally for their challenging work?

3. How will new disciples be integrated into the life of the congregation?

- How will new disciples be taught the mission of the congregation and equipped to participate in that mission?
- How will new disciples be encouraged to use their unique gifts and assets for the sake of mission and ministry – both within the congregation and in the world?
- How will new disciples be valued for their new ideas, perspectives and creativity? How will those ideas and perspectives be integrated into the life of the congregation?

4. How will this ministry adapt to changes over time?

- How will new challenges, opportunities and changes in the world around us be identified and explored?
- What will be the ongoing process for reviewing, renewing and updating the mission plan?
- How will ongoing changes be introduced, discussed and implemented within the congregation? How will change become a part of the congregation's lifestyle?

Sharing the Mission

"We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lords." -- Paul, concluding his thoughts to the Romans (Romans 14:7-8)

It is not our church. It is Christ's Church. It is not our mission. It is God's Mission. It is not about us, it is about the work God, in Christ, has given us to do. It is so easy to become possessive of our churches, of our church buildings, of the programs and activities and ministries that have given our lives meaning, hope and purpose within the life of the church. Many of us have spent our whole lives in the church, learning in Sunday Schools and Vacation Bible Schools, singing in choirs, teaching, leading in worship, working in the altar guild, making quilts in the basement, cooking in the kitchen for potlucks, weddings and funerals, working on the building, mopping floors, and repairing broken boilers on Sunday mornings before church. We have invested a lot in the church that is passing away. And that's what makes it so hard to let go, even if we know we need to.

But, just as Jesus invited the disciples to drop their nets and follow, and encouraged a rich young man to give up all his possessions for the sake of following, we are again being asked to let it go and trust that God will lead the way into an uncertain future. Like old Abraham and Sarah we are being called to walk through the desert to a new land, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land we've never seen, but know is there. Because God promises us that it is.

Generosity is a hallmark of Christian faith and life. We are generous because God, in Christ, was so generous to us. When we live in fear, we cling to whatever is safe, familiar and seemingly secure. When we live in faith, we turn it over to God, knowing that God will bless it and multiply it and use it for the sake of God's Mission in the world.

Generosity *must* be a part of any Christian Mission Plan. Unlike the Italian restaurant with which we started, the goal of a Christian Church is not to make a profit (in dollars or increased membership numbers), but to give it all away in love and service for the sake of Christ. What did Jesus say?

"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the good news, will save it." (Mark 8:35, Matthew 16:25, Luke 9:24)

The ultimate goal of a Mission Plan is for people to experience the love and grace of God in their lives, and to respond to God in love and share that love with others. Some of those people will join us in that work, many of them, in fact. Others won't. Perhaps they will find other communities of faith to connect with in time. But sharing the love of God in Christ is what is most important, not filling our pews. That's just a fringe benefit.

The last part of the Mission Plan is to lay out the metrics of generosity against which the plan will be evaluated, revised, and updated by the Mission Planning Team, the Council

and the congregation. As a colleague and friend of mine once wrote, “The church will not be full until it is empty.” That is true. The true measure of our success is not a full church that looks like the church of our memories, but a church emptied into the world in love and service, where each member understands themselves to be about God’s Mission wherever they find themselves.

TASK #6 – Sharing the Mission

The Mission Planning Team, along with the Council, can use the following questions and ideas to identify the metrics of generosity that will be used to evaluate and revise the mission plan.

1. How will this ministry “pay forward” what has been invested in it?

- How will you share what you learned with the synod and beyond?
- How will you share your leaders with the whole church and other partners?
- How will you coach and train leaders in other congregations as they develop their own mission plans?
- How will finances and other resources be shared beyond the congregation, even when they seem limited?
- What will be the process for sending people out when they leave the community?

2. What process will the congregation use to evaluate the success of its ministry on the basis of the goals of God’s Mission?

- What does success look like?
- Don’t be afraid of number-based metrics. They do not tell the whole story, but can tell part of it. What numbers will you track and how will you interpret them?
- Narrative evaluation is also meaningful. What stories can the congregation tell about the impact of their mission and ministry?
- How will you share those stories?
- How will you apply and build on the lessons of success?
- How will you learn from failures?

3. How will you invite, encourage and cultivate creative and innovative ideas for new ministry?

In conclusion, I share with you one of my favorite prayers from the Daily Prayers in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship. It is my prayer for all of us as we continue down this new and exciting path in the name of Jesus Christ:

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Go in Peace,
Serve the Lord!
Christ is with you!
Amen.

Sample Mission Planning Resolution

WHEREAS, Jesus commands his disciples to *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* (Matthew 28:19-20) and

WHEREAS, this congregation was planted in this community to invite people into God’s love in Jesus Christ and to serve our neighbors in Jesus’ name, and

WHEREAS, our Reformation heritage leads us to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit to reform and renew Christ’s Church for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world, and

WHEREAS, God is always drawing us forward toward the day when God’s Kingdom comes in all its fullness, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that _____ (name of church) enter into a time of conversation, discernment and planning about the mission and ministry of our congregation in this present time, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that _____ (name of the church) instructs the Congregation Council to form a Mission Planning Team of ____ (number of team members) to lead us in this process.

Tour of the Mission Field

RULES:

- Weather permitting, DRIVE with the WINDOWS DOWN.
- GET OFF the main drag.
- NO TALKING with one another while you are driving.
- JOT DOWN NOTES for discussion.
- RETURN in 30 minutes.

QUESTIONS to THINK ABOUT:

1. Where is God already at work? Where is God present? How might you partner with God in God's work?
2. What signs of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs do you see?
3. Where might people be searching, seeking, or yearning for hope?
4. Who might feel marginalized, forgotten or left out?
5. Who might need to hear the Good News of Jesus' love and grace?
6. What opportunities for ministry do you see?
7. What partners in ministry do you see? (Make sure to note both religious partners and secular partners).

Mission Planning – Goal Setting Worksheet

Goal setting is critical part of developing a mission plan for your ministry. Without a concrete, specific and clear plan for accomplishing your mission, your ideas will never be more than ideas. Use this worksheet to identify goals, objectives, indicators and timelines for your work. [Note: start with small, achievable goals that build toward a larger vision for mission and ministry.]

GOAL

A goal is a one sentence statement describing the key intended result of expected change *in peoples' lives* sought over the long term.

What does the desired future look like for the community the ministry is called to serve?

OBJECTIVE

An objective is a one sentence statement describing what is different in the life of the community or individuals who have experienced the result or expected change when this goal is accomplished. There should only be one objective per goal setting sheet.

How have peoples' lives changed or improved?

TIMELINE

Work backward from the anticipated completion date to establish the timeline for accomplishing your objective. Timelines should be flexible and amendable to account for changes and surprises.

When do you plan to complete the work on this objective?

What are the specific tasks that need to be accomplished to achieve this objective?

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-
-

When, specifically, will these tasks be accomplished and in what order?

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-
-

Who will accomplish these tasks?

-
-
-

Add more sheets as necessary.

INDICATORS

Indicators are one or more specific characteristics that can be measured or observed to demonstrate or provide evidence that the desired change has taken place. Use SMART Criteria:

Specific: Indicators should define precisely what will be achieved or measured.

Measurable: Indicators must be quantifiable.

Achievable: Indicators must be realistic given the context, available resources and timeframe.

Relevant: Indicators must demonstrate alignment with the goal and objective.

Time-bound: Indicators define a specific period of time after which a goal and its objective will be attained or evaluated.

What are the SMART indicators that will be used to evaluate this mission or ministry objective?

INDICATOR #1

INDICATOR #2

INDICATOR #3

INDICATOR #4

NOTES, THOUGHTS AND IDEAS