

The VOICE

April 2022

Missouri District Newsletter



In This Issue: Church Planting
Pictured: New Beginnings New Friends Gathering



From the President's Desk Sowing the Seed of God's Word – Church Planting

The student newspaper at Concordia University Nebraska is *The Sower*. I spent a lot of time as a student there working on the newspaper. I wrote articles on everything from Spring Weekend to sporting events, a presidential search to dorm renovations. Rarely did newspaper articles elicit responses in the forms of letters to the editor. But each month, a new batch of articles would be written and a new edition would be published.

Thirty plus years later and I am still writing newsletter articles of which I am unsure how many will people read. That fits with the parable of the Sower that Jesus tells so matter-of-factly, "A sower went out to sow." Our Lord tells us that the seed that is sown is the Word of God. The sower trusts not in his own abilities to sow, but in the One who gives the growth to the seed. The late Dr. Martin Franzmann writes, "It is a fragile and defenseless word, as defenseless as the Servant-Messiah whom it proclaims. It can be rejected, even as the Servant can be rejected." (Discipleship, p. 88)

God continues to sow the seed as missionaries and laypeople involved in church planting spread the Word of God far and wide in their communities. Their labors for the Kingdom do not always produce the harvest yield as witnessed at Pentecost, but they are still used by God as "his reckless love scatters abroad the goodly seed." (Franzmann, LSB 586 v. 3). We do not set out to sow seeds or begin mission work because we are sure that the Word will produce an abundant harvest, but because we are called to be faithful. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs writes, "One who hears the parable of the Sower will not expect the ministry of Jesus – either in the first century or in the twenty-first century – automatically to be successful in the ways that fallen human nature considers to be success. In our own day, as in the first century, when the message of the reign of God in Jesus is told, it will not always 'work' in the sense of attracting droves of believers and not inciting opposition." (Matthew 11:2-20:34, p. 687)

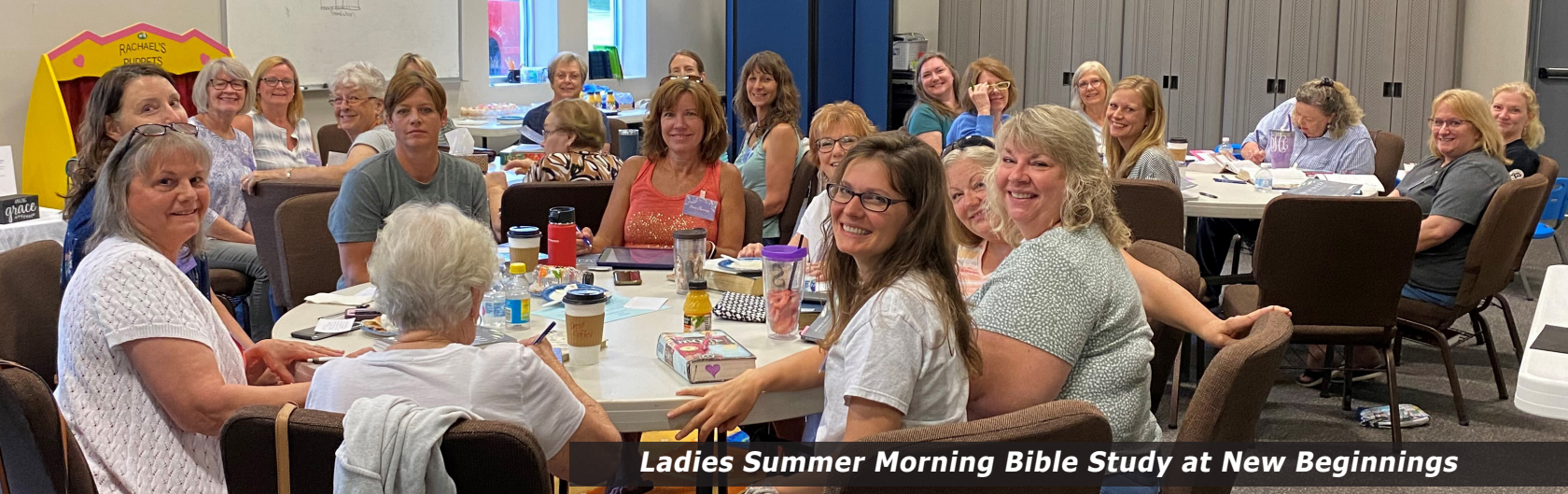
This issue of The VOICE focuses on the opportunities and even challenges related to Church Planting. More than anything, we invite your prayers for the work of our church planters and the laypeople who assist them in being the instruments by which God recklessly sows the seed of His Word in communities across Missouri. We are thankful for the church planting efforts that are happening across the Missouri District and the ways in which our God is carrying out His mission. From large cities to small towns, there is much for us to give thanks to God in this important work.

Fraternally in Christ,

R. Lee Hagan

President Lee Hagan





Ladies Summer Morning Bible Study at New Beginnings

New Beginnings

The Missouri District has been blessed with several church plants over the years. Spreading the Gospel in Pacific, Missouri is Rev. Joe Sullivan, lead pastor at New Beginnings Lutheran Church, who has been involved with a variety of church plants. Here are some of his experiences with church planting.

Churches Plant Churches Already established churches are naturally great starting places and foundations from which church plants can grow. New Beginnings engages in helping a variety of church plants, but they are also a church plant.

Build Relationships First, Structures Second Pastor Sullivan says the goal was to go out and meet people. Casual meetups turned into conversations over dinner. Then there would be opportunities like swapping favorite books and having conversations about what was read. As time passes, one on one gatherings would grow into a small group of friends meeting up. That then transfers very easily to an invitation like, "You know, we've been talking about theology a lot. Why doesn't our group meet and talk about our faith and the Book of John?"

It's a Nonlinear Process For Pastor Sullivan in the early days of planting New Beginnings, "My measure of success was every day I asked myself, 'Did I talk to somebody about Jesus today?'" Physically, the location of the church can change. For Pastor Sullivan and the early days of New Beginnings, coming together for "church" started by meeting at people's homes. They had 12 different home groups going. By the time 11 months passed, they had their first Sunday evening worship service. There were 53 people in attendance, 12 of which were attending because of evangelism efforts. The other 41 were members of their parent church St. Mark's in Eureka, who came in support. Fast forward five years and there was a different mix in participants. The different demographics could roughly be divided into thirds among Baptists and Methodists, members of St. Mark's, and those unchurched. (Unchurched being those who didn't have a church home for more than six months.)

It's in the Great Commission Church planting can have challenges, as Pastor Sullivan notes, "You have to bath everything in prayer, every step of the way." But ultimately it's all part of the Great Commission. "Are you excited to see people come to know Jesus?" Asks Pastor Sullivan. "If you're excited, then why wouldn't you do it?... Know Him and make Him known."

If your congregation would like to consider/discuss church planting in your region, consider contacting Rev. Bill Geis at bill.geis@mo.lcms.org.



An Outside Space for Gathering in Mountain View

Mountain View Church Plant

Mountain View is a small town located right along highway 60. Pastor John Perling of Faith in St. Robert notes that many living in the south central area of Missouri are raised in a religious environment of “fire and brimstone”. It’s very law-heavy and people are hungry for the Gospel. There’s just one problem, Mountain View is miles and miles from the closest LCMS church. Enter Kim Bradford, who moved to Mountain View with the intention of sharing the grace of Jesus Christ. Kim became a Christian in college, but within a different church body. She started her journey to Lutheranism by listening to KFUO. And now she wants to share God’s grace to all of her neighbors, with some help from Faith in St. Robert.

In 2019, the Missouri District hosted a “Churches Planting Churches” event. Kim had attended Faith in St. Robert (traveling almost 2 hours one way every Sunday!) And together from this event, St. Robert mapped out a plan for planting a church in Mountain View. Kim works as a homesteader and a letter carrier, and she uses these roles as a way to build relationships with people in the town while Pastor Perling meets with the group and helps to lead the Bible Study. Right now, those that gather in Mountain View may be small in number, but they are growing in God’s Word. One group of ladies decided that they should all read the Bible together. They love learning and digging deeper into the Bible and learning about this God full of grace.

While it’s an intentional process, it’s also very organic. Kim not only meets people on her mail route, but also when the town gathers for the local farmer’s market or at an apple orchard. Any moment can turn into an opportunity to connect. Over time, Kim realized that the group is better served by meeting in a room at the local library. This is a more central location for those spaced all around Mountain View. They’ve also found it to be a nice, easy location for those less familiar with the group to gather. Their Bible Study is held midday since many people have morning chores. Pastor Perling connects with the group in person or via video conferences.

As those gathering for Bible Study continue to grow, Mountain View would love to have a pastor closer in their area. In the meantime, Kim Bradford is in the application process to start this fall at Concordia Seminary in their online deaconess program. This allows her to continue to serve in her community while getting mentored.

Pastor Perling notes that this model of church planting doesn’t require a massive financial commitment, though scholarships and District grants are available. It takes groups of people, often lay people, to make intentional choices to help those in the community to share the Gospel of Christ. “Any town that has a high school, public library, VFW veteran’s hall is big enough to plant a church in, under this pattern.”



A Connect Group at New Beginnings

What's Your Story?

Rev. Bill Geis

"For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."
Psalm 100:5

We plant new ministries and churches because God is good, faithful, and loving. The focus of church planting isn't the buildings and strategies, events and invitations, money and marketing. The focus is people. It is people God loves and for whom He sent His Son to save. We who have enjoyed such grace, now have the privilege and joy to help empower His new gatherings of people.

It is fair to say that these are extraordinarily difficult times for our churches. It is tempting to say, "we can't plant because our strength is waning." Yet the church has multiplied like weeds in a field when it was small and seemingly weak, struggling, and persecuted. Healthy congregations cry out of their weakness, "use us!"

Can every church have a church planting strategy? I believe every church has an active role in the planting of new missions. These new plants may be actually be very simple, yet highly relational and impactful. The way through these extraordinary times is not to hunker down and save what we can. These are times for all of us to pray in earnest, and be counted as workers in the harvest for next generations. This generation includes our children and grandchildren, immigrants and refugees, and includes the (now majority) unchurched population of our society. All who need to know the goodness, faithfulness, and love of God.

In the Missouri District, we have churches of all sizes working together in church planting. We don't always see it as planting because our mental picture is limited to the replication of structures and programs. Church planting today is the story of congregations like Messiah (Independence) and Immanuel (Barnhart) both creating new ministries during pandemic and pastoral vacancies. It's the story of Bethlehem (St. Louis) partnering with other urban churches reaching hundreds of children. It is the story of Faith (St. Robert) discipling groups across a vast network of rural communities and military servants. It's the story of more than a dozen of our Campus Ministry Network churches equipping students to live out their Christian vocation through their academic and career opportunities. It's the story of Christian Friends of New Americans providing a bridge between St. Louis congregations and new immigrants. It's the story of two very different first year pastors leading the rebirth of "Jefferson Avenue Mission" (St. Louis) and shared ministry in Southeast Missouri. It's the story of God sending us to plant His goodness, faithfulness, and love to all!

What's your congregation's story?



Caring Ministry Team at New Beginnings

Funding Church Planting

Church planting can be expensive. This concern keeps many of our churches “on the bench” believing they can’t possibly play ball in the big leagues of church planting. Church planting shouldn’t be out of reach for any of our congregations. If we are going to meet the needs of unchurched populations in the decades to come, we must be stewards with an “all-hands-on deck” spirit together from Mound City to Kennett, La Grange to Neosho, Kansas City to St. Louis.

Only a portion of the cost of church planting comes from District grants. Here are three of several stewardship principles of church planting discussed in our learning communities of planting congregations and their workers.

Real Relationships over Real Estate The youngest generations (Millennials, Gen Z, and Gen A) tend to value relationships more than buildings and programs. Real estate costs money; relationships require investing time in people. Time will cost you more because it is priceless in our society. It is also the most effective way of making disciples. One Missouri District example: All Nations (University City) renting space and investing major amounts of time with their community.

Shared Ministry “Where two or three are gathered together... there we are District!” When churches work together in support of reaching new people, we are better stewards of our gifts. We gain capacity working together. We experience the momentum of joy and growth in Kingdom of God. This is low risk, high rewards. One Missouri District example: Our Savior (Platte City) and Northland Lutheran Outreach (Smithville) sharing workers, volunteers, school ministry, video streaming, and much more.

Co-Vocational Workers Most successful church plants in North America today are led by Co-Vocational workers and teams. It’s not just about saving money on salaries. We use the prefix, “Co” (rather than “Bi-Vocational”) to emphasize engaging the very people we are trying to reach through our work. For example a part-time high school baseball coach will meet many Gen Z youth and their Millennial parents through this complementary and financially supportive position in the community. One Missouri District example: My Church (Ozark) where Pastor Jim Bartok meets many young families by teaching Karate School.

Want to learn more? Contact Rev. Bill Geis at bill.geis@mo.lcms.org who gathers and facilitates learning communities around church planting and funding the mission.



Friends at My Church

You Can Help Support Church Planting

All 290 congregations within the Missouri District have their own unique story of how they came to be. There are churches within our state that can trace their origins all the way back to the very beginning of the LCMS, while others began their story in recent history...and some are just getting started! Here we feature church planting at three phases: just completed, in the works, and about to begin.

Praise and Worship Lutheran Church in Branson knows all about new beginnings. Before becoming a chartered LCMS congregation in 2013 and eventually moving into their own space in 2020, the community worshipped in a theater, a restaurant, and a winery.

"Circumstances like these force you to trust the Lord as they unfold, but when you look back and can see what He was planning the whole time, then His joy fills you again and again as more and more people come into His family through the waters of baptism, the proclamation of His Gospel and loving warmth of His people who have reached out into the community!" says Praise and Worship's pastor, Rev. Mark Hunsaker.

While Praise and Worship's time of being known as a church plant has come to an end, My Church in Ozark is one of several ministry efforts in Missouri currently experiencing these early days of forming a congregation. Rev. Jim Bartok shares, "In two years, God has grown our church from eleven people meeting in my living room during a pandemic to forty-five people who are on fire for Jesus." Because the journey to start a new congregation is a long one, it could be easy to become distracted by setbacks and difficulties. God has a way of taking care of all of that, too. "The joys far outweigh the challenges," says Pastor Bartok.

Conversations are already underway for a new church plant somewhere in the rapidly expanding northern suburbs of Kansas City. Rev. Frank Greene, pastor at King of Kings Lutheran in Kansas City, knows there's uncertainty in doing something like this but finds assurance in the One leading the effort. "The Lord has been preparing us to do something big for His kingdom here in Kansas City. We don't know exactly what He has planned for our community, but we are confident He will guide us," he shares.

The planting of a new congregation requires a significant amount of time and financial resources. It's an undertaking the Missouri District has been a part of many times over and will continue to do as the Lord directs where and when these new starts should happen. These are ventures we've been blessed to be a part of—made all the more blessed through the generosity of our donors. Thank you for your mission-minded way of thinking! It's clearly a testament to your faith in our wise God.

If you would like to financially support church planting or any other Missouri District project, please contact Leah at leah.sieveking@mo.lcms.org. God's blessings!



An event with New Beginnings.

Upcoming Events

Visit mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events for more information on these events.



SHINE!

April 22 – May 1

Follow along with everyone's service on our social media channels!



District Convention

June 12 – 14

Check out the Convention workbook, now online.



Missouri District NYG Event in Houston

July 9

The National Youth Gathering is July 9-13, 2022.



2022 Pastors Conference

October 23 – 25

Featuring speakers Rev. Dr. Joel Biermann & Rev. Dr. Richard Serina.

For more news from the District office, sign up for email communications at mo.lcms.org and follow us on social media.



Missouri District

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