

PLANTING AND GROWING A CHURCH

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^{NIV} **Matthew 18:20** For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

In order to write about starting and/or growing a church, it is important to have a well-defined philosophy of ministry. Without a solid understanding of Christ's desire for His Church, one may unintentionally build nothing more than a social hall instead of a worshipping congregation of God's people. As such, I have prepared a paper titled Philosophy of Ministry that outlines what the Holy Scriptures dictate as the foundational understanding of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this follow-up paper is to utilize that understanding in planning a church plant and/or growing the assembly of believers in the righteousness of Christ.

CHURCH PLANTING

The plan for church planting is separate than that of church growing, although both certainly share many of the same characteristics. The plan for planting a church might follow the items listed below:

1. Pray
2. Unite
3. Organize
4. Call
5. Communicate
6. Assemble
7. Preach
8. Teach
9. Administer
10. Build

PRAY

Prayer occurs when we talk to God. We pray to seek guidance and wisdom and ensure that the steps we are taking in life are in accordance to His will. Jesus said in Matthew 19:26 "...with God, all things are possible" yet only things that are in accordance to His will occur. How do we know that a church plant must take place? We pray and seek His guidance. How do we know that we are glorifying Him correctly? We pray and seek His wisdom in all matters. Although prayer is number one of the list, our seeking of God's approval and guidance must remain constant throughout the initial stages of the church plant and through the launch and subsequent growing of the church.

UNITE

Planting a church is a difficult and mentally challenging task. After initial prayer, it is important to assemble a united group of families that are interested in planting a new church. These families must be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. There will be lean times in the first several years of a church plant. Followers may come and go. The church plant will need a solid group of united believers to be present every Lord's Day for worship. Visitors must see the presence of the Holy Spirit among the members of the congregation before they will consider becoming a part of this assembly. In addition, this united group of families must agree to pray for the Lord's guidance on their new church home as well as praying for each other. Lastly, these initial members will be responsible for the formation and financial well-being of the church plant throughout its early years.

How many families are needed to be united initially for a church plant? This is a difficult question to answer. In my case, I sought at least ten (10) devoted families before

moving forward. Some families consist of a husband, wife, and children while others are simply a single person. Although it would be nice to form a diverse group of united families (i.e. some large families, some small, some young and some old, etc.), it is not necessary. Diversity should not be your focus. If the formation of this new church plant is in accordance with God's will, He will send people and no one should be turned away simply because they did not fit into a specific category.

Once the families have been selected, it is time to begin to organize and solidify what makes this congregation different from the rest while also focusing on what makes it the same.

ORGANIZE

Based on the Philosophy of Ministry, it is a complete focus on Jesus Christ and His Word revealed in the Holy Scriptures that makes this church plant similar to many other churches. However, what makes this church different? As you begin to unite the families that will begin to pray and implement this plan for planting a church, realize the types of family God is sending. These families are war-torn from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American (ELCA). They are Lutherans that have witnessed their denomination fall away from traditional Christianity and spiral downward into heresy. Although the churches of the Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod (LCMS) are available throughout the area, each family has individual reasons for not seeking to join the LCMS. These families expect to worship utilizing the Divine Liturgy and hear the Word of God preached and taught in combination with the Lutheran Confessions. In the area of Southwestern Pennsylvania, which is the location of the congregation I planted, if one

is Lutheran and yet does not belong to the ELCA or the LCMS, there truly is nowhere else to worship. Other areas throughout the United States may be similar. In addition, since many of these battle-weary Lutherans feel that the hierarchy of the ELCA wrestled their church away from traditional Christianity, they desire to have more of a hands-on approach to their ministry. This leaves the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) as the only alternative to the ELCA and LCMS. This church plant will be governed by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through the united, elected members of the churches counsel.

Now that the difference has been identified, the united families must begin to pray for the discernment of gifts. Of these families, are some gifted with the ability to lead? Who will be the elders and who will be the deacons?¹ Who will be elected to lead the church counsel? This time of prayer is important because many questions remain unanswered and this group will be responsible for making significant decisions for the church plant. Who will be the called preacher and teacher of the flock and administer the sacraments to the sheep?² Who is gifted to lead Bible studies or possibly teach Sunday School. Since there are only a few united families at this time, it is important to understand that some individuals may be called to function in numerous responsibilities.

Once a council has been established and the proper papers have been filed with the state authorities, it is time for the council to officially meet and begin to organize the weekly worship service. Where will the congregation meet for Sunday worship? It depends upon the size of the congregation at this time. House churches that meet at a

¹ Refer to p. 8 of *Philosophy of Ministry* for the discussion of the qualifications of elders and deacons.

² The called preacher is an elder in the church.

parishioner's home may be best at this time. Certain halls or even school auditoriums may be rented for Sunday morning worship until a permanent church home may be acquired or built. As the congregation grows and the venue requires to be changed, it is important to be considerate of all the members of the congregation so that moving to a new facility will not be too hard for some. When selecting a place to worship, it is important to focus on the worship of the Lord and ensures that the place can be set apart with reverence. After all, even if the assembly is meeting in someone's house, we are coming into the presence of the Lord.

Certain acquisitions may also take place at this time. If finances permit, there are certain elements of worship that the congregation may purchase. Hymnals, such as the Lutheran Service Book from Concordia may be purchased or, perhaps the bulletins may be printed out in their entirety (requires a subscription from Concordia) to save on hymnal costs.³ A keyboard may need to be purchased to play the liturgy if an organ is not present in the worship facilities. Other items such as offering plates, crosses, altar, communion vessels, etc. must be identified and their purchases coordinated with the finances of the congregation.

CALL

Upon the initial meetings, certain individuals were identified as having gifts for the church. After much prayer and discussion, these people will be called into service of ministry. The pastor, other elders, deacons, etc. must be called and officially take on the

³ Permission to copy and/or reproduce the liturgy from *The Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)* can be purchased for approximately \$29 from Augsburg Fortress. This is a single investment that does not expire and permits picking and choosing the parts of the service to be reproduced in a bulletin.

responsibilities of their offices. The calling may take place before, during, or even after the organization of certain committees. It is important to remember that the initial call of people to these offices is vital to the starting of a new church. Prayer for guidance and wisdom is necessary in making these decisions.

COMMUNICATE

After the organization and calling of the congregation, you must tell everyone in the area that you exist and what makes you different than everybody else. The council may discuss the congregation's "vision" at this time and identify why the congregation exists. In the case of this church plant, you may exist simply as a place for those Lutherans leaving the ELCA who seek to worship in the traditional Lutheran liturgy. In addition, a new church plant must also exist for the unchurched as well. It will be important to communicate this message to the surrounding populous. This information will be conveyed via newspapers, social media sites such as Facebook, websites, and email lists. Since the church plant is focusing on those leaving the ELCA, communications through the LCMC and WordAlone channels would most certainly be utilized. Although these means are certainly the most traditional mechanisms to communicate to the masses, I still believe that personal invitations are best and work most consistently. It will be the responsibility of the congregation to invite their friends, families, and neighbors to worship.

In addition to communicating that this church exists, it will also be necessary to communicate events concerning this church. When will be the first worship? Where will the first worship take place? How will someone contact the people of this congregation

(phone, email)?⁴ It will be important to establish the answers to these questions prior to the first communication. A church website⁵ or social media⁶ site is the easiest and most effective means to communicate this type of information.

ASSEMBLE

This is the first of many weekly worship services. Planning for this important day is vital. Regardless of where the congregation is meeting, the assembly must be reverent since they are entering into God's Holy house. The first public worship setting might include ordaining those called into service (e.g. the elders, deacons, etc.). In addition, the consecration of certain elements of worship may take place (e.g. altar, Bible, communion vessels, etc.). This is a very important day and is similar to a birth. A new congregation has started to proclaim the Word of Jesus Christ. The worship service might take some time to prayerfully rejoice and praise God for His abundant blessings upon them.

As the congregation grows, it will be important to continually evaluate the worship space. Is the size big enough (or too big)? Are acolytes necessary at this time? Are there elements to the worship service that need to be purchased? It is crucial to remember that everything may not be perfect. What is important is that the focus remains on Christ and not on what may be missing. Sometimes, people get caught up in the formalities of a worship service, such as an elegant pipe organ or brass offering

⁴ For a cost-effective church office, purchase a TracFone and use it only as an answering service. Record the greeting and worship times, but use a regular phone to check your messages multiple times per day.

⁵ ForMinistry.com offers the quickest and most economic website and email hosting available on the Internet.

⁶ Setting up a Facebook account is quick, easy, and free.

plates. These are not necessary, but may be something the congregation desires to begin a savings plan toward.

PREACH

As the assembly gathers to worship the Lord, they must hear the Gospel message preached. This message should come from a properly called and ordained pastor. The message requires much thought and research from the pastor and should not be something thrown together in a short period of time. In addition, this message is not simply to be a devotional. It is the minister's responsibility to read the text and determine what God is saying to His people. After careful examination and prayer seeking wisdom, the minister must provide a modern application of the principles of the text. Although there is some teaching in preaching, the focus on the message is the Law of God upon the sinners of the world and the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their lives.

TEACH

In addition to gathering for worship, the congregation may be ready for formal instruction in the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. This may be included as a preamble or postscript to public worship on Sunday morning or, perhaps, on an evening during the week. Although there is some preaching nestled among the teaching, the focus is on the historical and contextual background of the Holy Scriptures and the confessional documents of the church.

ADMINISTER

Proper administration is important within the church. This administration may be related to the sacraments, absolution, and/or general care for the members of the congregation.

Administration of the sacraments during worship is properly executed by the office of the called and ordained minister of the congregation. It is the responsibility of the pastor to ensure that the sacraments are not received in a trivial manner. For instance, the sacrament of Baptism is administered to the children of those in the congregation that regularly attend worship. If someone is not a regular attending member of the congregation or someone has recently become a new member of the congregation and desires to be baptized, it is the pastor's responsibility to make certain that the person understands and accepts what they are being baptized into. It is also the pastor's responsibility to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is offered to professing Christians who have been baptized and have received proper communion instruction. The elders may examine visitors via a quick conversation to determine whether they should receive the Lord's body and blood.

The pastor is also responsible to hear confessions and provide absolution. This may occur in a corporate or private setting. Although absolution was occasionally considered a sacrament in the Lutheran church, it is not currently. However, this should not diminish the power of forgiving sins in the name of Jesus Christ.

Care for the people of the congregation falls on all of the members, however, certain care is handled by the pastor. For instance, visiting the sick and comforting the bereaved may occur through any member of the flock. Oftentimes, those tormented by

anguish will seek out the pastor for spiritual guidance and prayer, however there may be many in the congregation whose friendly presence and comfort are also helpful. The pastor is also primarily responsible for burying the dead. When a member of the congregation dies, the congregation mourns the loss of a brother or sister in Christ. The pastor will preach the Words of comfort and commit the body for burial.

These last four (4) steps (Assemble, Preach, Teach, and Administer) are proper results according to one's philosophy of ministry. We are called to be slaves subjected to Christ's commands.

BUILD

As the church gathers and worships, it will begin to grow. Some newly planted churches will grow considerably faster than others. This growth takes place through all of the steps listed above, but primarily through the building of relationships.

The pastor will preach and teach the Word so that the people will build their relationship with Jesus Christ. This builds and grows a strong congregation. The worshippers must grow in Christ day-by-day. As their relationship builds they will grow into Christ's righteousness.

In addition to building relationships with Christ, the congregation must build relationships with each other. As they meet for worship on Sundays and meet for Bible study, they will also be growing together as brothers and sisters in Christ. The initial families that started the church plant will have a unique bond together. In addition, as

new families join the congregation, over time, they too will be bonded with the church family and desire to worship and fellowship together regularly.

The building of relationships outside the church will be important to church growth, too.

Many studies have reported that advertising for the church is simply not very effective.

The most effective means to get a visitor to come to church is by personal invitation.

Many people that attend a new congregation were asked why they chose this congregation among the many available. The answer is usually, "Because I was asked".

Lastly, it is important to build relationships with others Christians in the area. The congregation should form bonds with other local churches. The pastor should also form bonds with other pastors in the area. Fellowship meals, vacation Bible school, and community gatherings may help to foster camaraderie between the Christian churches.

CHURCH GROWING

As mentioned earlier, the plan for church planting shares a great deal with church growing. Growth, in this case, does not necessarily have to deal with numbers of members. Growth of the congregation in terms of their devotion to Christ is very important.

Church planting deals primarily with determining a core group of devoted families, organizing those families based on their talents and gifts, and assembling weekly for Sunday worship. Church growth, however, continues to develop and reform that initial plan based on the congregation's needs and vision. The congregation will continue to pray for their people and their called and elected elders. The prayers will ask God for

His wisdom and guidance in decisions that the people must make. The congregation will bring new families into the flock and, based on their gifts, elect certain members to the council or as elders or deacons. The congregation will call and ordain church leaders as they continue to grow. They will communicate their message of the love of Jesus Christ and the invitation to join them in corporate worship. They will assemble weekly to hear the Word preached and taught by a called and ordained minister of the Gospel who will continue to administer the sacraments and tend to the sick and dying. All of this occurring as the people build their relationship with Jesus Christ and each other.