



## Mission Action Team

### Looking Back and Looking Forward in 2025

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

We would like to present a series of updates on the recent activities and the bigger learnings of your District's Mission Action Team during this current triennium. God has been busy, His people have been active, and we are thankful and praising Him!

In particular, we want to share some background with you on missions in our district and synod, since lessons learned in the past can so effectively impact our future. You may have read our synodical Office of National Mission's recent report on church planting in the LCMS. We wish to reflect upon it in light of how God works in our district, to His own glory. We will share this story with you joyfully, in four parts, over these first four months of 2025. In so doing, we look back AND look forward as a District that actively supports, equips, and encourages new missions wherever it pleases the Lord of the Harvest to plant them.

#### **Part 2: Church Planting in a "Borderless" World**

In Part 1 of this overview, we looked at some of the first efforts in our synod to guide and support church planting. Over the subsequent decades, it became apparent that Missouri, as a church body, was both flexible and adaptable! This, despite the often self-deprecating remarks from your favorite local Lutheran about "Lutherans who don't like change," turned out to be a highly change-inducing group when it came to new congregations.

Still, we in the non-geographic English District have a particular stake and interest in the mechanisms of starting new missions and ministries, precisely because we have no single, defined space in which to plant them. Had we a defined and limited geographic boundary, we would encourage our circuits and congregations to plant new ministries in those places, end of story. But we are a district, by the Lord's blessing, WITHOUT borders, meaning that our scope for new missions is without horizon or edge.

Sounds great and perhaps even Great Commission-esque, yes? And yet we fervently desire to carry out excellent ministry as best we can *whilst not "competing" with the geographic districts at hand*. I've had many an occasion in my years as an English District pastor to be asked, "and what will you guys do when the English District goes away?", the implication being that any moment now, our 33 bordered sisters-in-arms will be rid of their borderless neighbors. Or neighbours. But yet, it has pleased the Lord to keep

two non-geographic districts in service to His Church, and often times having a District NOT tied to geographic lines has proven imminently valuable to missions and ministries across our synod-at-large.

The 2010 and 2013 Synodical Conventions dealt with this important issue. They summarized their position as the same position we hold in the English District. New mission starts need to be a cooperative effort, not a competitive one, when it comes to their “home” district. (This stance also, incidentally, impacts English District ministry in Canada amongst the geographical confines of the Lutheran Church–Canada as well). Since, we might say in a paraphrasing of Hebrews 12, we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.....we follow Jesus, and we follow Him *together*.

We practice cooperation & fellowship with our geographic neighbors in Christ not only because it is good churchmanship, and certainly not only because we resolved to do so twice in Convention (though these are both good reasons). We do so because that is the best and most faithful witness to our oneness in Christ. When we are at peace with one another and truly walking together in the concord that God has given to us in one another, then we are living in His harvest fields how the Lord would have us to live.

We are grateful and thankful to God for the opportunity to serve you as your Mission Action Team. Many of you are in congregations and circuits where new churches are being planted. Many others are in places where new missions are being explored and considered. Still others are supporting the local and global work of those planting new churches, all to the Glory of God. May He bless you richly as you serve Him with joy!

*In Jesus,*

***Rev. Justin Laughridge  
On Behalf of the English District LCMS Mission Action Team***