



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. Today, 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 3: De-centralized Church Planting in the LCMS (and the English District)

We have said for some time now that in the English District, we wish to see churches planted "from the bottom up, not from the top down." What does that really mean, how is it accomplished, and how do those answers fit into the historical practices of our church body?

Well, it turns out that no later than our 1975 Synodical Convention, then-President of the LCMS, the Rev. Dr. J.A.O. Preus, affirmed along with the voting delegates the desire of the LCMS as a Synod to promote church planting that is rooted in the efforts of local congregations and circuits, and NOT primarily directed at any higher level per se. What that means is that when we affirm de-centralized or "from the bottom up" church planting, we are actually standing in firm agreement with our forerunners in the faith, not inventing any sort of new, less official, or less organized model for planting churches.

Consider the Synod's track record overall when it comes to church planting --- it is innovative, adaptable, and applicable to local settings as God planted churches. For example, in the American South when it was still tragically segregated, it was local LCMS congregations who sought to plant congregations for Black families and communities, led by Black pastors --- and **local efforts** are what brought that to fruition. There was no "from the top down" directive to make this happen. It was a local need being met in God's harvest fields.

More recently, we have seen case after case where Synod or district-driven policies can be very helpful, but they still aren't what moves the needle when it comes to new churches being planted. Since 2022, we have in the English District LCMS offered all congregations and circuits the opportunity to participate in "Church Planting Simplified" --- it certainly supports and encourages the work of local efforts, but the local leaders themselves are the ones planting the church as God guides and leads. We meet with and support planting teams on their timetables, and according to what they need. We support them in prayer, in resources, and sometimes in finances or other forms of support.....but we are supporting and equipping, not directing or agenda-setting.

This means that local congregations, local circuits, and local teams of dedicated and committed Christians are the ones planting the church! They covet your prayers more than anything else, as well as your partnership with them in the Gospel. We have seen beautiful examples as recently as this year where a local team, planting a local congregation, followed God's guiding and timing, and a new congregation is now chartered, all thanks to our God. But they were also supported by clergy and laity from across their circuit – a wonderful picture of church planting happening from the bottom up, and not from the top down. Praise God for what only HE can do!

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