

BEST PRACTICES FOR CHURCH PLANTING

BEST PRACTICES FOR “CHURCH PLANTING” ALIGNED TO A MISSIONAL DISPOSITION

ABSTRACT

Good Christian works are the fruit of saving faith in Christ; Christian behavior reveals and demonstrates the heart relationship with Jesus; Christ-centered repentance produces fruits, which includes its practices. These practices, and not simply church resolutions, bylaws, programs or just going through the motions in church planting, will reveal the mission heart of Christ in the lives of believers (“You will know them by their fruits”). The Christ-Apostolic authority and attitude must be reflected in the congregation’s planting practices. There can be no disconnect between the essence of Christ’s mission and the practices, which provide the means of assistance in the authoritative sending activity of Christ and His church.

*A unique community in the world, which God has created and through which the Holy Spirit carries on His work unceasingly and through which He speaks and does all His work, is the assembly of sending and sent churches (planting and planted churches) carrying out **best practices to beget[s] and bear[s] every Christian through the Word of God.** (Cf. Luther’s Large Catechism, Apostle’s Creed, Article III).*

Practices are “best” if they flow from, are based upon, reflect, and demonstrate the mission attitude of Christ’s heart and mind. Practices are a curse and curved in on themselves if they do not assist in or support focusing on Christ’s apostolic authoritative sending and purpose (*ἵνα—in order that, **John 20:31*** “but these are written *so that* you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and *that* by believing you may have life in his name”).

Christ-sending and sent churches (apostolic, missional) will align all their practices with Christ’s apostolic authority and attitude for the sake of His mission. The beneficial best practices in church planting and church life will avoid practices that focus on “arrangements” or on planting structures, property, buildings, technology, times, places, polity, or a planting of an “organized” institutional-centered and self-serving church (the propensity of being institution church-centered rather than apostolic Gospel-centered – “one holy Christian apostolic Church”).

THE PARTICIPANTS AND CO-PARTNERS OF A CHURCH PLANTINGⁱ

Sending Church: A congregation of believers-missionaries and pastor(s) and/or other auxiliary ministers-missionaries of the congregation, who, based on being **sent** by Christ, and being transformed by Him, are founding or establishing a new **Sent Church** (planting/sowing/growing a “Church plant”)ⁱⁱ.

Sent Church: With the leadership of a **Sent Called Leader Pastor** (or SMP or LLD, etc. by authorized/authorizing congregation), the **Sent-Church** is a gathering of transformed believers-missionaries (a community of faith and mission), who, having left their baggage, comprise a new **Sent-Church** (a “Congregation-plant”), established to be the **sent-ones** to a new community to reach the lost through saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Supporting Church: Other individual members and congregations who provide prayer, advice, encouragement, missional, and financial support for the **Sending Church and the Sent Church** with the vision of also becoming a **Sending Church**.

THE MISSIONAL AUTHORITYⁱⁱⁱ, APOSTOLIC^{iv} DISPOSITION AND PRINCIPLES^v

- A community of believers (**CHURCH** - a divinely established Christian congregation), which has originally been given the “sending-mission-keys” and which is **apostolic** - simultaneously a “sent,” “sender,” and “sending” one, just as the sent-sender-sending Jesus (John 17:18^{vi} and John 20:21-23^{vii}) with His missional authority and disposition [“*habitus*,” “DNA”] (Luke 4:18-19^{viii}) and is-
 - **Christ-centered, Gospel-centered**, saving faith and relationship-with-Jesus focused.
 - **Apostolic congregation-centered engaged**, (divinely established with the priesthood of believers) and partaking, participating, and partnering with God and fellow believers in the sending.
 - **Apostolic-absorbed (Sent and sending-absorbed)** to reach the lost, the unclaimed, de-churched, the Jesus-disconnected, under the **power of the Holy Spirit**.
 - **Led by sent called apostolic Leaders**.
 - **Holy Spirit empowered, Scripture-truth** and **apostolic-based** under the power of the **Word of Christ**.
 - **A Transformed Heart** under the power of the Holy Spirit for a **Missio Dei** existence, including a leaving of the old self and negative baggage.
 - **Christ-modeled sacrificial leadership**^{ix} empowered, executed, and multiplied.
 - **Carrying out mission practices** which are based on and reflect Christ’s apostolic missional authority, disposition, and principles (a “cognitive consonance”).
 - **One** (unity) with Christ and with one another in Christ (Christ-fellowship) **purposed**.
 - **Being God’s apostolic Church** with the multiplication^x of the 1) Word, of 2) Converts (people coming to faith), and of 3) Sending, Sent Ones, of Sent Leaders, Sent Churches and Sending Churches.

MISSIONAL PRACTICES CONSONANT WITH APOSTOLIC MISSIONAL AUTHORITY, DISPOSITION AND PRINCIPLES

A **Sending Church** (authoritatively) initiates, executes and comes alongside a **Sent Church and/or Sent Called Leader** with other **Supporting Churches** by praying for, participating with, encouraging, strengthening, and/or providing for the missional, spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical needs of the **Sent Church, and/or Sent Leader** and family. In many ways, strong missional **Sending Churches** play the primary role in the **Sent Church’s and/or Sent Called Leader’s** long-term missional disposition, health, and success (See: *The Great Sending, God’s Heart for the World Beating Through You*).

Some important practices and characteristics of a strong Sending, Sent, and Supporting Church:

I. The Sending Church (es – a partnership) -

In its determinations, decisions, and executions of the mission, **the Sending Church** (partnerships and participants) establishes each activity to be in alignment with the missional authority, disposition, principles and leadership essentials, without making the “arrangements” the mission^{xi} -

- Submits to a **Word-created** vision and heart transformation to be a **Christ Sending Church (Christ-Apostolic Authority)**

- Develops at the very outset a prayer life for Christ’s mission (Missio Dei), the **Sent Called Leader, Sent Church** (“Church plant”) and **Supporting Churches**.
- Conducts a **Missional health assessment** (including “baggage”) by self (**Sending Church**) and the District.
- Conducts missional training using current missional resources including the resource of *The Great Sending, God’s Heart for the World Beating Through You*, the district (District President and District staffs) and its resources (cf. *Center for U.S. Missions; Lutheran Society for Missiology; LCMS missiologists*^{xii}; *Missioninsite; Exponential (accelerating multiplication); Barna Group; APEST; thearda; etc.*^{xiii}).
- Conducts missional Bible studies, such as in *The Great Sending, God’s Heart for the World Beating Through You* coordinated with all Bible Study groups for the development of and transformation toward a missional mind-set (disposition).
- Engages every circle/cell/group/leadership entity in the congregation.
- Engages neighboring and collaborating **Sending Churches** and **Supporting Churches**.
- Uses “concentric circle”^{xiv} leadership approach for optimum engagement.
- Engages the whole congregation in a collaborative effort with the congregation’s decision-making body (Board of Directors, Voters, etc.).
- Makes a formal decision to establish a new **Sent Church** (a new “Church plant”):
 1. Identifies and clarifies values/Do's and Don'ts for being a **Sending Church** or for sponsoring/supporting of a **Sent Church** (<https://www.namb.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Supporting-Church-Best-Practices.pdf>), and identifies the beneficial use of other resources and articles/books.
 2. Defines “success:”
 - Becoming a **Sending Church**? “Planting” a divinely instituted **congregation**? Or the Scriptural “**Antioch**” Model for planting? Establishing a **missional-discipling community**? Continue being a **Sent Church**? Or just establish “arrangements?” Or planting a “Self-sufficient” church by a certain date? or planting a traditional Lutheran church?
 - Finding de-churched “Lutherans?” De-churched “Christians?” Disconnected from Christ? Those far from Jesus? Or “Lutherans” who do not want to drive so far?
 - Establishing its own “missional church culture” with its own unique gifts (1 Cor 12) and its own target community? Or **One holy catholic apostolic Church**? Or a clone? A replica? A satellite? Same church different location? An Institution?
 3. Determines how to help and strengthen the **Sending Church itself** (the planting congregation) continue to grow in discipleship and mission (Bible study, prayer).
 4. Determines the financial/stewardship model with acceptable and responsible budgeting, accounting, auditing, accountability, and reporting procedures and requirements (not Just sending a check with no missional mind-set and no clear relationship); develops a

specific stewardship plan that helps create a **spiritual/missional attitude** for the **Sending Church and the Sent Church**.

5. Determines what baggage must be “sent away” and implements the sending for being (the “I am”) of the Missio Dei
6. **Communicating, communicating, communicating** within & with the Sent Church, congregations, circuit, district, and with the community, etc. (a lack of adequate and clear communication breeds mistrust).
7. **A sending** with identifying, clarifying and establishing of 4 “P’s:” **People (Priesthood of believers) of the Sending and Sent Church** (with a common understanding of Christ’s mission to **the world** and community and the relationship between the **Sending and Sent Churches**); **Plan (Scriptural missional plan** formed by **Sending Church**[es], Sent Leadership, [planter, and/or core team?]); **Person-Leader (Sent Leader Pastor*)**; **Place** (target community for immersion mission [and with land/place to build?]).
 - **Calls (a divine call)** the ***Sent Leader Pastor*** (SMP, LLD? Pastor “Church Planter”).
 - Proven missional DNA (administer a behavioral assessment)?
 - Ability to exegete the community and needs (and immersion of community ability), etc.?
 - Leadership capacity (administer a behavioral assessment)?
 - Spiritual and emotional health (a behavioral assessment)?
 - Any noteworthy “baggage,” which would influence the sending?
 - The **Sending Church** reviews full report of the district assessment.
 - Interview by representatives of the Sending Church (network).

Establishes lines of mutual Christ-centered trust, transparency, clarity, and high accountability with advice, counsel, and encouragement to strengthen but without control, and yet full utilization of the gift-partnership (network) – Sending Church, the Sent Called Leader, Sent Church – all for Christ’s mission!

II. The Sent Church and Sent Called Leader -

In the determinations, decisions, and executions of being a *Sent Church and Sent Called Leader*, the partnership and participants establish each action/activity to be in alignment with the Missio Dei essence and essentials, the Christ-missional authority, disposition, principles and leadership essentials without making any “arrangements” the mission.

Church planting that must not by-pass the lines of Biblical authority, responsibility, and accountability but honor and uphold (abide by, act, and teach in accordance with) God-established authority (Christ Apostolic Authority), the *Missio Dei* essence and the divine agent of the congregation. This applies to

- The sending or sponsoring congregation
- The sending association of congregations
- The sent congregation

- A sponsoring congregation
1. **Determination to know, understand and put into practice the Missio Dei essence and essentials (Cf. *The Great Sending, God's Heart for the World Beating Through You*)**
 2. **Key alignments with e Missio Dei Essence and essentials:**
 - a. Absorb and execute Scriptural leadership and missional essentials!
 - b. **Establish a missional and leadership core team, who –**
 - i. Exegete the community! Implement community immersion!
 - ii. “Save” and serve all people instead of being served or self-service
 1. Not “congregation”-self-centered
 2. The core team having left their baggage
 - c. **Carry out an “Incarnational” engagement (“become” - γίνομαι – 1 Cor. 9: 19-23^{xv}) of the target community by the *Sent Called Leader* and *Sent Church*.**
 - i. **Relational-centered in Christ-contacting, connecting, compassion, caring, cultivating, communicating, community-building, collaborating, celebrating.**
 3. **Function to gather a community of believers (saving faith in Jesus Christ), who are Christ-discipling, reaching the lost (Luke 19:10)^{xvi} and serving Christ – focusing on a Christ-missional community (a community of faith and mission).**
 4. **Establish at the outset a regular prayer life for the *Mission of Christ*, the *Sent Leader*, the *Sent Church (community of sent believers)*, for the *Sending Church* and *supporting churches*.**
 5. **Coordinate missional Bible studies such as in *The Great Sending, God's Heart for the World Beating Through You* with the core team and all Bible Study groups for the development of and transformation toward a missional mind-set (disposition).**
 6. **Practices that reflect “...five characteristics stand out as five markers of what I’m calling Gospel DNA. They are People, Multiplication, Truth, Adaptability, Self-sacrifice”^{xvii} – *Rev. Michael Newman*. (Emphasis added)**
 7. **Avoid self-service, being in-grown and institutional church-centered.**
 8. **Communicate to the community! Create exposure and Identification! Build Relationships! Community immersion! Incarnational mission!**
 9. **Develop mutual in-depth relationship, including appropriate accountability with the Sending Church(s) and mutual relationship with *Supporting Churches*.**
 10. **Develop relationship with other current Sent Churches and Sent Leaders, sending-coaches-mentors as well as experienced Sent Churches and Leaders.**
 - a. **Develop Relationship with other congregations, pastors, and the district.**
 11. **Align “arrangements” that are necessary and beneficial but aligned with the missional apostolic authority, disposition and principles and kept in proper focus**

(establishing “arrangements” are NOT the *sending authority, purpose or priority*)
such as:

- a. **Missional** and mutual support and relational mechanisms (fellowship venues).
- b. Responsible in finances, budget, stewardship, etc. with accountable reporting avenues
- c. **Missional** site/property/location.
- d. **Missional** worship/discipling times and place (of worship, Bible Classes, the means of grace, Christian education-discipling including home venues, etc.).
- e. **Missional** chartering process (including constitution, organization - organizing/governing principles, naming, vision, etc.):
 - i. Engage as many of the potential “charter members” as possible in the above arrangements in order to respect and execute the theology and missiology of the congregation (vs clericalism, control-centered).
 - ii. Develop the Constitution including *Name* in consultation with the **Sending Church(s)** and the district.
 - iii. Obtain approval of the Constitution by the District with the blessing of the **Sending Church**.
 - iv. Formally subscribe to the newly approved and adopted Constitution, which is a mutual covenant, and if desirable, subscribe to an additional accompanying non-governing “spiritual covenant.”
 - v. Focus on performing the Rite of Baptism and Confirmation of “converts” that can also subscribe to the Constitution and become charter members.
 - vi. Receive appropriate transfers and/or profession of faith from LCMS congregations in order for the charter membership to be in effect at the subscription to the Constitution by the new **Sent Church** (a member is under the spiritual care of a congregation until formally transferring that care to another congregation – in this case, a transfer to the new **Sent Church** [“plant”]).
 - vii. Execute administration/administrative actions of the new **Sent-Church** Constitution (carrying out at the outset the adopted and subscribed Constitutional provisions, such as officer elections, formal minutes, etc.).
 - viii. Execute signing (subscription) of Synod’s Constitution by the president and secretary of the newly chartered Congregation (signing of Synod’s Constitution by the official constitutional representatives on behalf of the congregation and thereby officially joining the LCMS, which has already approved the new Constitution).

- ix. Once constituted, set in motion formally and constitutionally **the regular call process** to call its pastor since the new congregation has/is being served by the ***Sent called pastoral leader*** who was called by the ***Sending Church***.
- x. If the newly formed congregation calls an SMP (Specific Ministry Pastor), the new congregation, with the approval of the District President, requests a regularly called pastor of a neighboring congregation to be the SMP supervisor and formally requests the congregation to give its approval for its pastor to be the supervisor of the SMP.

III. Supporting Churches -

- Develop a prayer life for Christ's mission and prayer life-support for the ***Sent Leader, the Sent Church (community of sent believers)***, for the ***Sending Church*** and other supporting churches
- Conduct **missional** Bible studies and training such as in *The Great Sending, God's Heart for the World Beating Through You*
- Develop **missional** support
- Form financial support
- Submit to a **Word-created** vision and transformation to become a ***Christ Sending Church***

IV. Underlying Five Capitals for the Sending, Sent and Supporting Churches

1. **Spiritual -**
Support through Word, prayer, and encouragement with unity in Christ and our confessional unity for guiding our work together with *The Great Sending* being the prism for church transformation and planting.
2. **Relational –**
Spending time with one another – eating, working, and playing together in healthy relationships in building a mutual trusting community – not supporting rebel or rogue self-centered relationships, initiatives and establishments.
3. **Intellectual –**
Drawing on one another through various resources and venues – in humility not being above one another but sending, learning, serving, working, and sharing together through the prism of the Great Sending of God in Christ.
4. **Physical –**
Investing time, gifts, people, and resources with one another as being sent to each other in the connecting and sending.
5. **Financial –**

Flowing from the four above capitals, providing financial means to cover the launch expenses (including salary and benefits of called workers), and preparing for self-support.

CONCLUSION

With being *co-heirs and co-associates of all Christ's blessings* (allegedly, Luther's Bible marginal note on 1 Cor. 1:9), the participants and co-partners of God's Christian community, of which all baptized are a *part and member* (Large Catechism, Apostle's Creed, Article III), will strive for

- 1.) a mutual knowing and understanding of the *Missio Dei*, the Christ-apostolic (sending) authority and instructions, and for
- 2.) a mutual wisdom of aligning all practices with Christ's mission.

Over the years the LCMS has been apparently good at the "how to" conferences and workshops of practices and programs but without connecting such to the very theological essence of the *Missio Dei*. And it has been equally good at times in the study of the Biblical essence of Christ's mission, but without connecting such to the best practices with which they are to be consonant. Faithful missiology, which is not just an academic pursuit, unpacks both together.

Christ, Who is the Wisdom of God, produces both fruits and not one without the other, even though proper distinctions are made. As faith and works go together, so the essence of the Christ-apostolic (sending) authority and sending instructions must go together with best practices in church planting (and in the life of all congregations).

"Our church body is right at a fork in the road where she chooses to walk with the mission of God, faithfully, or she chooses not just to ignore it, but I would say, to reject it. That's where we sit as a church body at this time." (Dr. Robert Newton's Keynote Address, LSFM, February 2018).

While in total agreement with Dr. Newton's assessment, this note and caveat: When church planting practices are not in harmony with the apostolic Christ-centered mission of God, that too is a rejection of the mission of God. When church planting practices are in harmony with the apostolic Christ-centered mission of God, it allows and accepts the dynamic and productive sending (apostolic) authority of Christ and His Word to "seek and save the lost," not returning empty but accomplishing that for which it was purposed and succeeding in the thing for which it was sent (cf. Is. 55:11^{xviii}).

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ⁱ While a "planting" terminology and concept has been helpful and is used (See Luther in end note ii), the **apostolic** (**sender-sent-sending**; "**going**" - **John 17:18; John 20: 21-23; Matt. 28: 19**) terminology and Scriptural concept is preferred. It would be salutary if a *District* would take the lead with a focus on **sending**, the "One holy Christian and **apostolic** Church" and the "**apostles**" of Eph. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12: 28-29, which would be in harmony with the excellent vision, which a *District* may already have.

ⁱⁱ "A Christian and also a congregation are plants that have grown from the seed sown by other Christians and congregations. Therefore, this congregation and every individual Christian is to be a seed from which new Christians and congregations can ever again grow. That is why the apostle says so emphatically, 'The church is the *mother* of us all' (Gal. 4:26). Just as

surely as we are now members of the church, so surely we should also be fruitful mothers; and if we are unfruitful mothers, i.e., if we do not produce spiritual children or fail to do those things whereby such children can be produced, then we are not obeying our calling, and God will not say, 'You pious and faithful servant,' but rather, 'You unfaithful servant!' God grant that we never need to hear Him say those words to us!" – Luther, quoted by Walther, 1879, "Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod," Thesis VI, ESSAYS FOR THE CHURCH, C.F.W. WALTHER, VOLUME II © 1992, CPH.

ⁱⁱⁱ The sender-sending-sent motif centers around the authority of the *Missio Dei* and the Sent-Sender, Christ.

^{iv} "The Apostolic Church, – One, Holy, Catholic and Missionary," Dr. Robert J. Scudieri, 2016, Mission Nation Publishing; "Who Are the Apostles," Dr. Robert J. Scudieri, 2015, Mission Nation Publishing.

^v Will Sohns, "Antioch Model for Faithful Participation in Christ's Mission," *Lutheran Mission Matters* 27, no.1 (May 2019); 107.

^{vi} **John 17:18** "As you **sent** me into the world, so I have **sent** them into the world." -emphasis added

^{vii} **John 20:21-23** "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has **sent** me, even so I am **sending** you.' ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." -emphasis added

^{viii} **Luke 4:18-19** "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has **sent** me to **proclaim liberty** to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to **set at liberty** those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (cf. Matthew 28:18-20 and Matthew 9:30 – 10:23). -emphasis added

^{ix} *Pastoral Leadership Institute* (PLI) offers training in leadership essentials, which are necessary missional components.

^x Cf. Acts 1:8; 2:47; 4:4; 5:14, 42; 6:1,7; 8:1,4,40; 9:15, 31; 12:24-25; 13:49; 14:1,21,27; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31

^{xi} Every step, decision, action, event, arrangement is a **missional teaching moment**.

^{xii} **LCMS missiologists** such as **Rev. Dr. Eugene Bunkowski** (deceased), former missionary, Seminary professor of missions, author; **Rev. Dr. Robert Newton**, former missionary, Seminary professor of missions, and District President, author; **Rev. Dr. Robert Scudieri**, former Mission Executive of the English District and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, President of *Mission Nation Publishing*, author; **Rev. Dr. Robert Kolb**, Professor of missions, former director of the *Institute for Mission Studies*, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, author; **Rev. Dr. William W. Schumacher**, mission professor, director of the *Institute for Mission Studies*, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, former missionary, author; **Rev. Dr. Henry Rowald**, former missionary and professor of mission, author; **Rev. Dr. Daniel Mattson**, former missionary and chairman, *Lutheran Mission Matters* – journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, author; **Rev. Dr. Victor Raj**, Professor of Missions, *Editor* of *Lutheran Mission Matters*, *Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology*, Author.

^{xiii} Other resources: *Pew Research*; *Send Institute Missiologists Council*; *Lutheran Mission Matters* (journal of LSFM); *Lutheran Laymen's League (Lutheran Hour Ministries)*; *North American Mission Board (NAMB)*

^{xiv} Concentric circle approach: Working from a small core group or leaders and then intentional expansion of the group – expanding the partakers, partners and participants (another example: Core-congregation-community).

^{xv} **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I **became** (**γίνομαι**) as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I **became** as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I **became** as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I **became** weak, that I might win the weak. I have **become** all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." (emphasis added)

^{xvi} **Luke 19:10** "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

^{xvii} Rev. Michael Newman, "Gospel DNA – Five Markers of a Flourishing Church," 2016, Ursa Publishing, San Antonio, Texas. (Rev. Newman is District President of the Texas District, The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod)

^{xviii} **Isaiah 55:11** "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."