

Ablaze! Covenant Congregations:
Engaging Congregations to Multiply
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In every generation, Jesus calls Christians to be his witnesses “beginning in Jerusalem, Judea Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Lord gave this commission to disciples who were timid, hiding behind locked doors. Afraid for their lives, they could not muster courage to go out and be God’s people. So the commissioning to be witnesses was followed with an instruction to wait until they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit prepared the disciples of old, and prepares the disciples of today, to be witnesses wherever they go and in all circumstances. People who know Christ have hearts *Ablaze!* by the power of the Holy Spirit and cannot help but shine the light of him who saved them.

The Apostolic church went to Judea, Samaria and the end of the known world in a powerful way when the church was scattered due to persecution after the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1; 11:19-21). The disciples became witnesses, even martyrs, for the Gospel. The Jerusalem church multiplied as her scattered members witnessed to communities around them, and the Cross of Christ was planted in worlds in darkness.

Barnabas was sent to check out the church in Antioch. After observing their faith, he “encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts” (Acts 11:23). A covenant of sorts was entered in between his people and God. Hearts that were set *Ablaze!* covenanted to partner with God in His missionary enterprise.

Antioch then sent Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys (Acts 13: 2-3), and churches were planted in Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus and other places. These congregations multiplied by sending their people, some through persecution, and some for the intentional purpose of expanding the kingdom of God on earth. These early congregations held each other accountable “to remain true to the Lord” and keep their covenant promise to be the witnesses that God called them to be.

The work of the evangelization of the world was not given to angels, professionals or institutions. The mandate is given to each Christian as they exercise their faith in a community of believers. In other words, the congregation, as a body of these individual believers, is in the frontline of the expansion of God’s kingdom. Thus, the call is for congregations to covenant with God and their fellow Christian brothers and sisters to engage in the expansion of the kingdom of God numerically and geographically, beginning in their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

In her early years, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod grew as congregations took every opportunity to expand their mission through planting congregations and preaching stations as the national frontiers expanded. God blessed the church with numerical growth and geographical expansion.

Today, as the U.S. population continues to grow and the number of believers continues to decline,

the call to be in mission is as urgent as it was in the first century and will always be until the Lord comes. People who are not counted in the company of the believers are people for whom Christ has compassion (Luke 6:34). We should have the same compassion also.

Will you covenant to remain true to the Lord today? God is faithful and will remain true to himself – he is and will be with you always!

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is again called today “to remain true to the Lord” and send her members to multiply and expand God’s kingdom on earth. LCMS congregations have covenanted to one another to walk together for the purpose of mission and ministry to the ends of the earth, which is the meaning of a “synod.” However, there is a need to be more intentional; LCMS World Mission is asking at least 10 percent of LCMS congregations to covenant with their districts to plant up to four congregations by 2017. LCMS World Mission and the districts of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will also covenant to align all national and district church planting resources in support of these ***Ablaze!*** Covenant Congregations. ■

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