

Tending the Fire  
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Starting a fire is one skill. Keeping it going is another. In order to cook juicy burgers over charcoal, or toast s'mores to perfection over the campfire, or prolong the beauty and the warmth of flames, you need to know when to add another log or adjust the air drafts or move the burning items closer together or farther apart.

*Ablaze!* is a fire that must be not only ignited, but also tended for the long haul. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's *Ablaze!* goal is sharing the Gospel with 100 million people, 50 million of them in the United States, by 2017. There's 11 years of work ahead toward reaching, and hopefully exceeding, that goal by God's grace and power. And that fire is actually a piece of an even bigger task, our commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

How do we keep the blaze burning? How do we avoid being a flash in the pan, burning brightly for a while but quickly dying out?

First we each must tend our own flame. We must provide the right fuel: not ambition or growth or the image of our church, but the Gospel. Recalling all Jesus Christ has freely done for us, our hearts are *Ablaze!* with love for our risen Lord. We want everyone to know that same love, so we share it in every possible way. We eagerly receive the Gospel through Word and sacrament in weekly worship, and through daily time in the Word and in prayer.

We also tend the flame through good stewardship of our time and energy: using each day wisely; prioritizing responsibilities, especially to our families; knowing when to say 'no' to requests for our time; recognizing and filling our own needs for rest and re-creation. We realize that poor choices here make for a short-lived fire.

But another important way to tend the flame is less intuitive and definitely less common. It is to bring fellow believers alongside as we reach out to the unchurched, as we plan for, watch for and carry out 'critical events' – those opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ with a person who doesn't yet know him.

For example: invite a brother or sister in Christ to do that outreach activity with you. Ask others (especially the 'others' you don't usually work with) to help you plan and implement. Draw out their ideas that might be different than your own. Find an *Ablaze!* partner or start an *Ablaze!* small group. Ask others to pray about how God is calling *them* to reach out, and commit to helping them do it. Delegate things you usually do to others who have gifts for that task.

Our churches excel in studying together, fellowshiping together and caring for each other in need. What if we became equally skilled in *working* together? How might that affect our *Ablaze!* goals—our part in God’s harvest?

“It’s easier to do it myself.” That is correct. Immediate results might even be more noticeable when we all just jump in and do what we can. But a long term effort is much more effective when there is teamwork and cooperation, when one person supports, trains and encourages another, when we invest time and energy in working alongside each other rather than independently of each other.

When I invest time in helping someone else reach out, helping their flame burn brighter tends my own flame also. And, when my flame dims in difficult times, they are there to build it up again. And we are both better equipped to last through the long haul.

It is the Holy Spirit who ignites the fire in our hearts and empowers us to reach out with the Gospel to those who don’t yet have the flame of God’s love in their hearts. The same Spirit has also brought each believer into a relationship with other believers in the body of Christ which “grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:16).