



The Northwest Conference is set to embark on an unprecedented mission. Over the next 10 years we are prayerfully committing to the development of 50 new church plants in our region.

Why is this so important?

When we look across all denominations, we are seeing approximately 3,500 churches close each year in the U.S.—with only 4,000 new churches being planted. At the current pace we are barely replacing churches that are closing their doors.

The statistics tell us that we are currently planting only 1/8 the number of new churches needed just to keep up with population growth. The statistics also tell us that only 17% of the population in the geographic area covered by the Northwest Conference attends a church on any given weekend.

The mission field is huge, and the opportunities we have to share the good news of Jesus Christ are



expanding. America is now the 3rd largest mission-receiving nation in the world. Of the newest 100 million Americans, 53% are either immigrants or the children of immigrants. And 22% of the population under the age of 5 in the U.S. is Hispanic.

Another reason Church Planting is so important is that new churches impact more lives. Did you know that in the past year, our new Northwest Conference churches reported more than 600 significant faith decisions made by church participants? We have 29 churches under the age of 15 that worship over 4,700 people.

While these numbers are encouraging, we need to do more. We can either accept the current realities, or we can try to do something to change these trends. And together, we can do it!

'Our Mission to Plant'

The NWC, Evangelical Covenant Church, and our parent and partner churches, have decided to change the trajectory. We are committing to accelerate the pace of Church Planting and, in the process, alter the dynamics in many of our communities and neighborhoods. We are committed to provide more places where people can meet Jesus, be empowered by the Holy Spirit and see their families and lives transformed.

Church Planting is always a partnership. In the NWC, it simply can't be done without the partnership of the Conference, Denomination, and local churches ... churches like yours. ➡

➔ Reaching the lost, lonely and hurting is the mission of the whole

Church, and planting new churches is a powerful way to accomplish that mission.

Christianity has always expanded because faithful people started new churches at home and around the world. When the Evangelical Covenant Church began, virtually all the pastors were church planters. Think about it ... your church owes its very existence to a Church Planting pastor and committed lay people catching the vision.

“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am, Lord! Send me.’”
 – Isaiah 6:8

Church Planting is not easy, but we believe that it is God’s Will for the Church and that it is evidence of our undeniable love for the unchurched.

We’ve prayerfully set a goal. Will you join with us in living into the vision? We need you to consider how you might resource and support to see the family of God expand over the next 10 years.

And we encourage you to contact the Northwest Conference office to find out more, or to set up an informational meeting to explore Church Planting at your local church. If every one of our churches would commit to seeing “50 by ‘25” become a reality, we will be able to live into this God-sized mission.

The Pursuit of Being Healthy

By Scott Sagle, Pastor, Calvary Covenant, Grantsburg, WI

In November 2010, I was shoveling snow and contemplating canceling our biggest outreach of the year—our Hunter’s Supper. As I was shoveling, I began to experience tightness in my chest. I came home that night, which was followed by another busy Sunday, and I still wasn’t feeling right. Thankfully, my wife was persistent and scheduled an appointment with the doctor. The medical team considered admitting me to the hospital because my blood pressure was dangerously high.

After several tests and procedures I was allowed to go home, but the doctor was very adamant that I needed to make a drastic lifestyle change. I began to eat much healthier and began walking daily. But even with my new routine and medications, I still was not feeling better.

I decided that I needed to really buckle down and try to regulate my blood pressure with diet and exercise. I began to get praise from my doctor, family and church about how I looked, and after a year I finally started to feel good again. What I realize now is that I allowed the fact that I was feeling better to give me an excuse to stop aggressively pursuing becoming truly healthy.

At first I kept going to the gym faithfully but got lax on my diet. After a while my energy level began to drop slightly and I began going to the gym less often. Pretty soon I realized I had gained back more than half the weight I had lost. In the past six months I have stopped the weight gain and have even lost a couple pounds, but I am finding it much more difficult this time around.

In his seminar at Midwinter, John Wenrich, director of congregational vitality for the Evangelical



Covenant Church, said it is much more difficult to move from stable to healthy missional than it is to move from critical moment to healthy missional. That certainly is true from my experience.

I settled for stable with my personal health, and now I am paying for it. A word of caution: Prolonged stability can be deceiving, and it doesn’t take much for a stable place to fall back into critical moment realities.

Wenrich said that stability and comfort are the enemies of health. If your church is moving from critical moment to a healthy missional place, certainly celebrate the victories along the way, but don’t let the fruits of your labor tempt you into thinking your work is done or that you can take your foot off the gas.

Being healthy and missional are lifetime pursuits and must be engaged with persistent prayer, honesty, courage and a sense of urgency that are constantly being renewed. May God give all of us a renewed passion to be all that He has created us to be, both personally and as the body of Christ.



MOVE 2014: “Lose Yourself”

By Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry

On April 4-5, 268 students and youth workers from throughout the NWC converged on First Covenant Church in Minneapolis for MOVE 2014—a weekend of teaching, worship, service and experiential learning. This year’s theme was “Lose Yourself,” based on Matthew 16:24-25.

The weekend kicked off with a worship service that featured a performance by hip-hop artists Urban Jerusalem, praise music by Dan Rodriguez and his band and a challenging message from Tim King, chief strategy officer at Sojourners.

On Saturday morning, youth groups fanned out to 12 different organizations and ministry sites across the Twin Cities for three hours of service. Saturday afternoon students and leaders came back to First Covenant for three different learning experiences. MOVE 2014 concluded with another powerful worship session and message from King, who challenged students to serve even if they were never noticed for doing so.

Rest and Renewal for Children, Youth & Family Ministers

*By Kara Stromberg,
Director of Children & Family Ministry*

A small group of children, youth and family ministry leaders spent two days at Covenant Pines Bible Camp, Feb. 26-28, for a Sabbath retreat. A collaboration between the Northwest Conference, Covenant Pines and the Department of Christian Formation, this retreat offered ministry leaders the chance to rest, seek God, and connect with one another in the midst of a busy season of ministry. Participants said:

“I loved the reflection time and flexible schedule for self-care and down time.”

“I appreciated the way the spiritual disciplines created space for us both to do some reflecting and to talk to one another.”

Personal care and development is a priority for the Northwest Conference as we invest in ministry leaders, so stay tuned for more opportunities like this in the future.

Updates From Pastoral Care & Development

By Jeff Burton, Director of Pastoral Care & Development

Judy Swanberg, Associate Director of Pastoral Care & Development, and Jeff Burton, Director of Pastoral Care & Development, continue to visit the district meetings of pastors and ministry staff in the NWC. These meetings are times to connect, share life and process issues related to our personal and professional growth.

There’s almost always food involved, and often we are able to stay after for one-on-one discussions. This is just another picture of the reality that we are “in it together” and we are “better together.”



New Church Plant: Catalyst Covenant Church

By Jeff Olson, Planting Pastor

On May 1, Catalyst Covenant Church became the latest church plant in the Northwest Conference. Planting Pastor Jeff Olson will be moving back to the Twin Cities after serving the last seven years in a Covenant church outside of Providence, RI.

Jeff, along with his wife Lisa, sons Jonas, August and another baby boy on the way in July, eagerly look forward to returning to an area in which they have lived and served before.

Why have you chosen to become a church planter?

Deciding to become a church planter has been a prayerful journey over the last five years. As we looked back and began to see how God had used us in various ministries, we began to see how He was preparing us for this unique calling. From having served at a church plant a decade ago, to helping start a new service within an existing church—and Lisa having experiences with fundraising and evangelism for InterVarsity—we believe all of these experiences have grown, shaped and prepared us for the exciting journey in faith ahead.

I enjoy the building process and

look forward to more people across the Twin Cities knowing Christ, being in community with one another, and, in both word and deed, joining together in radically transforming the Twin Cities with the hope of Christ.

How did you choose the location of your Church Plant?

I was born and raised in Roseville, attended college and seminary in Arden Hills, and have always found that the Twin Cities feel like home. I have a desire to see neighborhoods I know and people I love encounter Christ and be transformed. We will not have Sunday morning services for several months, and thus do not have a Sunday morning location yet, but expect us to be somewhere near where Northeast Minneapolis, Falcon Heights and Roseville converge. Pray for us as we discern where God will have us gather together.

What will be unique about the church you lead?

The goal of Catalyst is not necessarily to be unique but to help people find community, meet Christ and



join God in the renewal of all things. Churches have been doing this for centuries and we are thankful to be a part of that tradition and join together with others in that work.

Many of the people who are beginning to make up Catalyst are folks who were not in church a year before, and we hope this is a trend that continues. We wish to foster an environment where people can come with their questions, skepticism and hurt, and encounter a community that worships a God who meets us all where we are at—and loves us enough to not leave us there.

NWC Calendar

6.21-28 » Adventures in Leadership – Adventurous Christians

6.23-28 » Gather '14 – Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Chicago, IL

8.7-9 » MUUUCE – Crossroads Church, Woodbury, MN

8.22-24 » Emerge – Lake Beauty Bible Camp

9.3-5 » CRIM (Covenanters Retired in Ministry) Retreat – Covenant Pines Bible Camp

10.6-8 » Ministerial Association Retreat – Sugar Lake Lodge, Grand Rapids, MN

11.8 » Imagine – Salem Covenant Church, New Brighton, MN

11.8 » VIVE – Location TBD

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