

# Ohio District Case for Support

## Ohio District Mission

The mission of the Ohio District, Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, is to foster the fulfillment of the Great Commission in ways that are faithful to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions. To this end we seek to develop healthy church workers, healthy churches and healthy relationships.

## Ohio District History

The Ohio District was organized by nearly 140 congregations in Ohio, northern Kentucky and West Virginia in 1963. Since its formation, the district has grown to 175 congregations through church planting and transfers by Lutheran churches from other denominations. Through its history the district has made significant contributions to the LCMS in such areas as stewardship and Lutheran schools.

Today, close to 14 million people reside in the area served by the Ohio District. Studies have determined that more than 60 percent of the residents have no congregational affiliation. At the same time, only 20 percent of the people in the area will attend divine services any given week. So the mission field of the Ohio District includes between 8 and 10 million people.

## Our District Today

Today, God is blessing the shared ministry of our congregations even as it faces significant challenges. We are blessed that:

- + The Ohio District leads the LCMS in the number of congregations involved in revitalization through the Transforming Congregations process. This process is part of the synod's *Ablaze!* movement.
- + We have church plants in all three of our regions, from Waterville, OH in the northwest to North Ridgeville, OH in the northeast to Powell, OH in the southern region.
- + Our district has deployed Mission and Ministry Facilitators to all three regions, providing in-person support for congregations that did not exist five years ago.

In the midst of these blessings, the congregations of the Ohio District find a challenge in fulfilling the Great Commission.

- + Approximately 80 % of our congregations are on a plateau or declining in worship attendance.
- + Between 50 and 60 churches are at-risk for either functioning with minimal part-time ministry or closing in the next decade.
- + Currently, the district expects to start 25 or less new congregations in the next decade.

## **Our Response: Start 60 new mission churches**

The most effective strategy for reaching non Christians or unchurched Christians over the past 30 years has been starting new churches. Planting new congregations is also the primary strategy for districts to regain health. These facts make launching new congregations the best stewardship of the resources God provides. This has led to a simple yet challenging vision of starting 60 new congregations, including 20 in West Virginia, over the next decade.

This vision raises immediate questions. Are there enough growing cities in the district to support these churches? Where will we find that many church planters? How will we fund 60 new starts? These questions lead us to face this reality: We cannot by our own power or strength successfully launch this many congregations. The power of this vision is that it forces us to confess our dependence on God. As we trust in God to fulfill His mission among us we also acknowledge this vision forces us to change the way we start new churches.

Here are some of the changes that are necessary to facilitate starting six new congregations annually:

- + The responsibility for new starts will shift from district staff to local congregations.
- + The responsibility for providing resources, encouragement and accountability will be with the district.
- + New strategies for church planting will be implemented, such as churches becoming multi-site congregations, starts through bi-vocational pastors and cross-cultural missions.
- + These strategies will open new mission fields, adding to suburban church plants, new starts in rural northwest, urban northeast and Appalachian southeast Ohio and West Virginia.
- + Funding for new churches will be shared between the district, mother churches and those who form the launch teams for new plants.

To ensure that all *Fan into Flame* funds are used for church planting, all funds will be placed in the Ohio District New Mission Fund. Starting 60 new mission churches in the Ohio District will cost approximately \$4 million. Half of these funds will come from the offerings to God through the district by our congregations during *Fan into Flame*. The other half from major gifts targeted specifically for church planting during our campaign. While the majority of these gifts will come from members of Ohio District congregations, some may come from additional sources. For example, last year district congregations received \$100,000 in *Ablaze!* Covenant Congregation grants from Synod.

Starting 60 new congregations gives the district the best opportunity to fulfill its mission, ensure the long term health of the district and serve as a faithful partner of Synod. Most important, it provides district congregations the most effective method known to see people separated from God brought to faith in Christ and disciplined in community through Word and Sacrament ministry.

## ***Fan into Flame***

Two out of every three people in the world today have no relationship with Christ! The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and its 30 church partners worldwide have initiated a mission movement to reach 100 million people by the year 2017. Entitled *Ablaze!*, this movement will deliver hope and spiritual renewal by communicating the message of the saving Gospel and igniting the flame of faith in the hearts of people everywhere.

In order for the Ohio District to collaboratively continue ministry work in support of our people and in response to the opportunities for new mission work God is placing before us, we plan to fund each priority area of our Mission Plan over the next decade.

Working in partnership with LCMS World Mission, the ***Fan into Flame*** campaign is designed to help the mission objectives of the Ohio District. To fully fund our mission plan outlined in this case statement, new gifts over and above the current support of the mission and ministry efforts of the Ohio District will be required. In addition to designated gifts, our district will receive 15% of net unrestricted gifts offered by Ohio District members through congregational ***Fan into Flame*** appeals to launch this dynamic mission plan. Campaign leaders from the Ohio District and LCMS World Mission will also seek major gifts to support our church planting strategy that will with His blessing, bring the Good News of Jesus to those who have not yet heard His saving love.

Consider this appeal as your personal invitation to covenant together with the congregations, schools, ministries, missions and workers of the Ohio District in this historic effort that, with the Lord's blessing, will bring Jesus Christ into the lives of millions as well as His renewing Word among His congregations and missions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.