

SEE, I AM DOING A NEW THING!
**Developing New Mission Starts Using a
Launch Team Approach**



Metropolitan Chicago Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

*“See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” – Isaiah 43:19a*

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1.0 An Introduction from Metropolitan Chicago Synod Bishop Yehiel Curry

Prior models of church planting were reliant solely upon a charismatic leader who would craft the mission, develop the community, network, and implement all the new ministries of this new faith community along the way. The Metropolitan Chicago Synod (MCS) envisions a different approach that is dependent upon a mission developer's partnership with a Launch Team – a small group of imaginative, entrepreneurial leaders who will help establish the form and fashion of the new community as it develops.

In Luke 5, Jesus invited his brand, new disciples to fish differently than they had been. He went out with them, taught from their boat, and said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” These were well-established, successful fishermen, but Jesus gave them advice to launch into the deep water. He called them to try something different, to be bold, even if they had tried before (“we have worked all night long but have caught nothing”). These fishermen (Jesus' own launch team) had their own past experiences with the water that they brought to their role and relationship with Jesus. But only when Jesus directed them were they able to catch “so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst.” They needed help with the huge catch of fish because this brand, new thing happened through their openness to and listening to Jesus. Today, Jesus still guides our work in mission, as we seek God's direction and guidance.

At the outset of a new mission, the Launch Team might begin as a trusted group who support and encourage the mission developer. The Launch Team is not seeking to “follow the mission developer,” but to launch a plan for Jesus' mission that can boldly and reasonably be put into action. People who are always excited about new opportunities or new evangelism activity within the surrounding community can be strong and valuable Launch Team members. They want to participate in the success of this new mission start. Initially, this Launch Team might be people who are invested in the success of this particular mission developer, people from the community, or people from nearby congregations who want to see new growth, energy, and movement in a neighboring new mission start. Above all, they must believe in the values of and vision for the new mission.

The Launch Team will help the mission developer verbalize and strategize the vision, ministry structure, priorities, and values of this new Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC). Launch Team members might not be founding members of the new SAWC ministry, but they must be able to work collaboratively and courageously with the mission developer to support the birth of a new community of faith. In certain circumstances, a Launch Team may be recruited prior to the appointment of a mission developer or Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC) leader.

With the direction and leading of the Holy Spirit, mission developers and launch teams can develop new opportunities, ministries, and communities of faith. “Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.” – 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11

See also the September 5, 2019 blog article by Dwight Zscheile, “Will the Lutheran Church be Here in 30 Years?” on the Faith+Lead website at <https://faithlead.org/blog/decline/>

***Tool #1** in this guide’s accompanying Toolkit contains materials that give further biblical and theological rationale for new missions.*

2.0 Purpose and Scope of this Guide

Jesus said:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
(Matthew 28:19)*

AND

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will
find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
(Mathew 11:28-30)*

In fulfilling Jesus' mandate, call, and promise, the Metropolitan Chicago Synod Mission states:

*We are Christ's body in the world, called to proclaim the Gospel,
make disciples, and do justice, in Jesus' name.*

So how do we proclaim the Gospel, make disciples, and do justice in a faithful, contextually appropriate, sustainable way? This document gives guidance to congregations, conferences, mission developers, and partner ministries for how to faithfully live into Jesus' missional mandate through the creation of new missions, **using a Launch Team approach**. Since every ministry context is different, this document provides a *recipe* rather than a *blueprint* for identifying developing, implementing, and sustaining new missions in this synod.

The accompanying **Toolkit** provides helpful resources that can be used to implement a Launch Team. Those who might be interested in devoting time, energy, and funds toward new mission starts should complete the New Mission Inquiry form (**Tool #2**) and forward it to:

Metropolitan Chicago Synod
Director for Evangelical Mission
1420 W. Dickens Ave.
Chicago IL. 60614
Email: office@mcselca.org

3.0 Roles of the Synod and Other Ministry Partners

Metropolitan Chicago Synod Staff

The word “synod” means “walking together.” The Bishop and staff of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod are eager to walk with you as you embark on a new mission journey. We encourage you to **reach out early in your process**, so we can help equip you for this important work. Your vision and the opportunity for a new ministry matter to us! This walking-with is what we are called to do, and we hope that you will entrust us to accompany you in this holy work. Call the synod office at 773-248-0021 to speak with an Associate to the Bishop.

Synod Council

New Missions in the ELCA are usually launched as Synodically Authorized Worshiping Communities (SAWCs). At other times they may develop as non-profit organizations or other community-minded entities with distinctly Christian identities. In either case, to receive guidance and resources from the ELCA and synod, the Synod Council must approve and periodically review the project. The MCS Director for Evangelical Mission can accompany this ministry through the process. A Synod Mission Table (aka Outreach Team, Dream Team) will accompany these ministries as well.

Synod Conferences

The Metropolitan Chicago Synod is organized into eight regional conferences, each with a conference dean who coordinates communications and relates to ministers and congregations of their conference. Whenever possible, when new mission opportunities are identified within the boundaries of a particular conference, the leaders and congregations that make up that conference will share in the vision and development of that new mission. At times, in fact, it is even the shared wisdom of conference participants that births the vision for a new mission.

Congregations

Sometimes leaders of established congregations are the ones who catch a vision for a new mission that goes beyond the scope of their current ministry. Exploring such a possibility is a journey of faith and challenge; one that can excite current members and engage new participants in ways that the existing congregation does not. When a congregation embarks on a new mission journey, it is expected that it will “seed” the new mission with current members who commit to transfer their participation and energies to the new mission for a sustained, sometimes permanent, period of time. Rather than consider this movement of members a loss for the congregation, the prospect of starting something new and innovative, that draws in additional participants, can be a point of justified pride. In addition, a rostered leader in that ministry may be an appropriate mentor for the new mission Launch Team and/or its Mission Developer.

ELCA Churchwide

New missions receive financial and other resources from the Metropolitan Chicago Synod and the ELCA’s Christian Community and Leadership Home Area. Depending on the ministry context, funding and direction from the African Descent, LatinX, or Asian Ministry Teams may also be available. To access these resources, work with your MCS Director for Evangelical Mission.

Full Communion Partners

At times, a new mission may be developed in partnership with another full communion denomination or another non-ELCA congregation. This collaborative work can provide much fruit, engaging strengths from both faith traditions. It also brings challenges, engaging different, but parallel, structures and processes and systems. The MCS Director for Evangelical Mission should be contacted as soon as possible in the process, so that cross-judicatory conversations can happen early.

4.0 Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DIB)

Developing a new mission requires connecting and engaging with the neighborhood. Effectively connecting and engaging requires that everyone at the decision-making table of the new ministry have both voice and vote and be demographically representative of the community being served.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DIBs) addresses the ways that an organization intentionally welcomes and creates space for all. In Colossians 3:10-11 we read:

[You] have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

In a new mission, DIBs takes on a philosophy, culture, and practice of ministry *with* rather than ministry *for* or even ministry *to* those in the surrounding community.

Diversity addresses the presence of difference within a given setting, such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation.

Inclusion assures that people with diverse identities feel and are valued and regarded within a given setting like a team, workplace, or congregation. It ensures that everyone has access to the same opportunities, can exercise their gifts, and experience satisfaction.

Belonging means thinking about the safety and security that the ministry is creating for congregation members and community constituents so everyone can feel accepted as their true selves within the life of the faith community. Creating space which allows people to bring their whole selves to the table is the work of belonging.

If the new mission start involves people of color, the appropriate strategy teams (African Descent, LatinX, or Asian Ministry) should be included in initial conversations. No matter who the mission field includes, DIBs considerations should be a part of training and selecting a Launch Team. Within the first 90 days of their approval, new mission Launch team members will be required to attend a Metropolitan Chicago Synod authorized DIBs workshop.

5.0 Mission Developers

The model for new missions addressed in this Guide focuses on a Launch Team approach. At times, an authorized Mission Developer is identified early and leads the Launch Team. Sometimes a Mission Developer will be identified and authorized after much of the mission exploration has been accomplished by the Launch Team. So as not to focus undue attention on the Mission Developer in this Guide, their role is described in detail in [Tool #3](#).

6.0 Launch Team Overview

Definition

The new mission Launch Team is a group of 5-10 people who take responsibility for the exploration and development of the new ministry envisioned for a particular context.

Membership should be made up of individuals who have varying gifts and skill sets, from a variety of stakeholder locations within the community, and demographically representative of the identified mission field. Launch Team members may be recruited from congregations, other faith communities, nearby organizations (i.e., non-profits), individuals from the mission field community, and often a member of the Synod staff. Launch Team members do not need to become “members” of the new mission start.

Once a mission developer is identified, they will coordinate the Launch Team. Launch Teams could also have a designated convenor or co-convenor. A Launch Team should operate democratically, giving equal voice and vote to each team member. Launch Teams will be accountable to the Metropolitan Chicago Synod office, Synod Council, and to the conference, congregations, and other organizations that have a stake in the success of the new ministry.

Roles and Responsibilities

Cultivating the soil of a new mission field is the primary responsibility of a Launch Team, in partnership with the mission developer. Their role includes:

REACH – Connect with the community to celebrate God’s message of grace and salvation

EQUIP – Discover and provide resources for people to do the work of ministry together

ASSEMBLE – Gather the community for worship, ministry, and fellowship

LAUNCH – Deploy persons into active ministry in and with the community

Skills for Launch Team Members

Launch Team work is rooted in three primary areas:

- Engaging – Helping leaders discover their gifts
- Equipping – Providing practical tools and learning opportunities
- Empowering – Giving permission: creating space for people to innovate and experiment

Launch team members should demonstrate a commitment to collaborating and serving together.

At various times, Launch Teams may wish to establish working groups to tend to particular details of the process. Examples of working groups and their definitions can be found in **Tool #4**, with reference to fund-raising ideas found in **Tool #12**.

7.0 Launch Team Step-by-Step Process, in Brief

The following is an *example* of the activities that a Launch Team will undertake, along with a *sample* timeline of these activities. In some cases, the steps will not follow in numerical order, or will not follow the month-by-month pace suggested here. These steps are supported with details that follow in section 8.0 and with resources found in this Guide's Toolkit.

Day 1	Step 1: The vision emerges and is shared and discussed.
Month 2	Step 2: The conference receives and approves the vision.
Month 3	Step 3: A New Mission Exploration Inquiry Form is submitted.
Month 4	Step 4: The synod staff forwards the proposal to Synod Council.
Month 5	Step 5: Synod Council approves and the Launch Team forms.
Month 7	Step 6: Launch Team begins regular meetings.
Month 9	Step 7: Launch Team develops its first 90-Day-Plan.
Month 10	Step 8: Launch Team does demographic research.
Month 11	Step 9: Launch Team does relational engagement in the community.
Month 12	Step 10: Launch Team hosts events to further engage the community.
Month 14	Step 11: Launch Team does Asset Mapping & Needs Assessment.
Month 15	Step 12: Launch Team identifies a set of ministry experiments.
Month 16	Step 13: Ministry experiments unfold in the community, with evaluation.
Month 22	Step 14: New experiments are launched, or a new mission focus is clearly identified. (If the former, repeat step 13; if the latter, move to step 15.)
Months 23 or 29	Step 15: Launch Team proposes the formation of a new ministry.
Months 24 or 30	Step 16: Synod and Council approve the new mission as a SAWC, or authorize the formation of a new non-profit or other unique entity.
Months 24 or 30	Step 17: Launch Team passes its role on to a new leadership structure.

8.0 Steps in Greater Detail

Step 1:

The vision for a new mission might emerge from the Bishop's office or Synod Council. It may be caught by a pastor or leaders in an existing congregation or participants in a Synod conference. It may be the movement of the Spirit in the heart of an individual in the community. However it comes, it's important to test its authenticity and viability with other potential stakeholders and to enlist the Synod staff's accompaniment, if not already involved.

Step 2:

Any new mission exploration requires a **recommendation from the conference** that operates in the territory of the new mission field. Those interested in exploring the ministry opportunity should reach out to the dean of their conference to ask for a conversation among conference leaders. Deans are listed on the Synod's website (www.mcselca.org) in the pull-down menu "Who We Are: Conference Deans and Relators."

Step 3:

With approval from the conference, those interested in exploring the ministry opportunity complete and submit to the synod the **New Mission Exploration Inquiry Form (Tool #2)**.

Step 4:

The Launch team **stays in touch with members of the synod staff** to track their reaction to the proposal and the subsequent actions they intend to take, including introduction at Synod Council.

Step 5:

Once the proposal for a new mission is approved by the Synod Council, the **assembly of the official Launch Team** begins. It's wise to collect a diverse array of individuals to serve. Leaders in places where a stake in the new mission has already been identified will have ideas as to who might be good prospects for the Team, from MCS conference congregations, community organizations, other faith communities, known community leaders, etc. It's important to be intentional about building a team that accurately reflects the demographics of the mission field, and to consider a diversity of backgrounds, ages, experiences, ethnicities, gender identities, etc.

Identifying a leader or co-leads for the Launch Team will be a major matter of consideration. If a Mission Developer is named and assigned early in the process, that person can be the team leader. Alternately, one or two individuals who have demonstrated a deep commitment to the vision of the new mission, and who have the organizational and relational skills to lead, might be the best choice. Whoever takes on this leadership role will be responsible for convening the Launch Team, setting meeting agendas, and setting the tone for collaboration and accountability.

Step 6:

Before the work of cultivating the mission field can begin in earnest, it will be important to **establish the Launch Team** as a cohesive unit, committed to a collaborative, Spirit-led process. To get there, various tools are available to identify members' gifts and to set good patterns and disciplines. Several such resources are provided in **Tool #5** of this Guide.

Step 7:

The use of a **90-Day-Plan** keeps the Launch Team on course. **Tool #6** provides examples of effective 90-Day-Planning. It is wise to ask someone who does not serve on the Launch Team to be an accountability partner as the team carries out its 90-Day-Plan. Part of the 90-Day-Plan should be a **communications strategy**, an example of which can be found in **Tool #7**.

Step 8:

The ELCA and other organizations provide helpful resources for gaining an accurate picture of the **demographics of the mission field**. Certain members of the Launch Team may have a particular interest in or aptitude for this sort of research. Consult with the MCS Director for Evangelical Mission for access to tools the ELCA and other organizations provide.

Step 9:

Along with gathering demographic data about the mission field, it is essential that members of the Launch Team **move out into the community** and get to know members of the population on a relational level. The best tool for getting to know others is the One-to-One Relational Meeting. See the “One-to-One Primer” in **Tool #5**.

Step 10:

Once Launch Team members start to understand better the nature and make-up of the mission field, through demographic research and relational meetings, they can begin hosting **community engagement events**. Those events can range from pop-up worship gatherings to Community Café Conversations to family fun nights to prayer on the corner, based on needs or opportunities emerging from the team’s interactions with members of the community. A checklist and sample agenda for a Community Café Conversation can be found in **Tool #8**.

Step 11:

To better assess the mission field, the Launch Team should spend some time dedicated to **Community Mapping, Needs Assessment, and Asset Mapping**. Examples of each can be found in **Tool #9**, along with links to related resources.

Step 12:

Having a stronger sense of the community and its contextual opportunities can inspire the team’s creativity about what kinds of **ministry experiments** would be worth trying out in the community. Ideas may also have arisen from interactions with members of the mission field and other stakeholders. (See **Tool #10**, *A Signature Ministry*.)

The Launch Team should settle on a finite number of ministry experiments (2 or 3) to launch over the next few months, and include implementation of these ministry experiments into a **new 90-Day-Plan**. (Note: it could easily take more than 90 days for experiments to be fully implemented.) Experiments will differ from the series of community engagement events the Team hosted in Step 10. These will be more like long-term ministry activities, such as regular worship, Christian education, or non-profit-like enterprises (mentoring, skill-building classes, a food pantry or community meal, etc.)

Step 13:

At strategic times during the execution of experiments, the Launch Team should engage in intentional **evaluation** of each process. Interested participants in the experiments should be asked to join the Launch Team in these evaluative processes. Adjustments can be made to the experiments, based on the evaluations. Remember that any ministry experiment needs time and space to grow naturally, unless it has already proven to be completely ineffective or unsustainable. A sample evaluation process is provided in **Tool #11**.

Step 14:

Experiments that don't yield the hoped-for results should not be considered failures to be lamented, but rather opportunities to learn, adapt, and try anew. If all the original experiments prove ineffective or unsustainable, the Launch Team should **devise a new set of experiments** to launch in the community, using a new 90-Day-Plan and conducting an evaluative process, as was done with the first set. Don't skimp on processing what was learned, even if the first experiment had to be put aside.

Step 15:

Some experiments will be so successful that the Launch Team may decide to turn them into full-blown ministries of a new start congregation. At this point the Team is ready to propose to the Synod and Council the **formation of an official enterprise**: a SAWC, a non-profit organization, or another unique entity. The MCS Director for Evangelical Mission will guide you through this approval process.

Step 16:

Synod Council **approves the new mission** as a SAWC or authorizes the formation of a new non-profit or other entity. If it has not already occurred, and if the new mission is to be a SAWC, the Synod, with input from various stakeholders, identifies and begins the authorization and appointment process for a Mission Developer. If the mission is to be a non-profit or other unique entity, the identification of a director is undertaken by the Launch Team.

Step 17:

When the new ministry is more fully established, the Launch Team may pass the leadership of the organization to a **new ministry council, steering committee, or board of directors**. Members of the Launch Team *may* be appointed to serve on the new leadership structure, but new leadership should have emerged as well.

9.0 Conclusion

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” – Isaiah 43:19a

The birth of a new ministry or congregation requires much thoughtful and devoted planning, alongside large doses of partnership, prayer, and creativity. The Launch Team can be a critical ingredient for success of a new ministry site. God can be doing a new thing with many different people, through many avenues, and in many ways. Sometimes the communal discernment of a Launch Team can help the mission developer or missional community see new opportunities and possibilities in new ways. God has gifted our communities in many ways, and God is always at work in the world around us and already goes ahead of us into those mission fields where we serve. As faithful followers of Jesus, we must creatively pay attention to the multitude of places God is at work in, around, through, and with us.

10.0 List of Tools in the Accompanying Toolkit

1. New Missions Rationale
 - Biblical Principles for Starting New Congregations
 - The Beatitudes: A Call to Mutuality
 - Shining Light on the World
2. New Mission Exploration Inquiry Form
3. Mission Developers
4. Launch Team Working Group Resources
 - New Mission Announcement Flyer
 - New Mission Interest Card
5. Launch Team Development Resources
 - 5-Part Team Bible Study
 - Spiritual Gifts Assessment
 - One-to-One Relational Meeting Primer
 - Establishing Team Norms
 - Running Effective Meetings
6. 90-Day Planning
 - 90-Day Planning Form Templates
7. Communications Strategy
8. Community Café Resources (Checklist & Sample Agenda)
9. Community Assets & Needs Resources
 - Community Mapping
 - Needs Assessment & Asset Mapping
10. A Signature Ministry
11. Effective Evaluations
12. Funding the Mission