

## **Acts: The Early Church and the Church Today**

LTSG – DMin Independent Study with Dr. Mark Vitalis Hoffman

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# **Called to Mission in the World**

## **A Five-Session Mission Planning Process for Congregations Based on the Book of Acts**

The 2011 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) received a report from the LIFT Task Force (Living Into The Future Together), a group of planners who had come together to envision the future of the denomination. At the heart of the report was an invitation to every ELCA congregation to develop an intentional plan for its participation in God's mission.

What follows is one possible module to guide such congregational mission planning that has grown out of the experience in the Delaware-Maryland Synod. This process works best in a small group setting, i.e. seven to 14 persons, and can be used with a Congregation Council or a transitional planning team.

The process is divided into five sessions of 90 minutes each. Each session includes bible study, team building, focus on a particular area of planning, and prayer. A suggested time line is as follows:

0:00 – 0:30	Welcome and Introductions Opening Prayer Bible Study on the assigned text
0:30 – 0:45	Team Building Exercise
0:45 – 1:15	Focus Area
1:15 – 1:30	Prayer

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**A Five-Session Mission Planning Process For Congregations**  
**Based On the Book of Acts**

**OVERVIEW**

	<b>Session 1</b>	<b>Session 2</b>	<b>Session 3</b>	<b>Session 4</b>	<b>Session 5</b>
Theme	INTRO- DUCTIONS AND OVERVIEW	MISSION IN CONTEXT	A LOOK AT OUR CONGREG- ATION	TRANSFORM- ATIONAL MINISTRY	PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER
Bible Study	Acts 2:1-12	Acts 17:22-28	Acts 16:6-10	Acts 8:26-39	Acts 16:25-34
Team Build- ing	“The Name Game”	Individual Life Chart	Congregational Life Chart	Sharing Faith Stories (in triads)	Sharing Faith Stories (whole group)
Focus	“Sister Act” video  “The Three Great Listenings”	Community Demographics  Asset Mapping	Congregational Trend Report  Intro to NCD	1-on-1 training  NCD Evaluation	Developing a Missional Plan
Prayer	“Prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi” (ELW p. 87)	“Founders and Previous Leaders of a Congregation” (ELW p. 75)	“Mission of the Church” (ELW p. 75)	“A Prayer of Martin Luther” (ELW p. 87)	The Lord’s Prayer

**Session 1**  
**INTRODUCTIONS / OVERVIEW**

**Bible Study**

Acts 2:1-12

- Mission planning is a spiritual process
- How has the Holy Spirit worked in our lives recently?
- What surprises can we expect when we allow the Spirit to blow where she will?

**Team Building**

Play “The Name Game”

Each participant writes his/her full name, including middle names, maiden names, nick names on a large piece of paper. Invite each person in turn to introduce themselves by explaining their name(s), i.e. how they came to receive this name, what it means to them and to family members, etc.

**Focus**

Show a clip from the movie “Sister Act” (beginning where the choir sings during the Sunday worship service through the sisters’ reaching out into the community, approximately 9 minutes)

Discuss:

- What did the nuns do to save their convent?
- How were they open to the leading of the Spirit?
- What can we learn from them in the areas of worship, social service, stewardship, and evangelical outreach?

Introduce “The Three Great Listenings”

- Listening to God (through bible study, prayer, conversation)
- Listening to the church (through individual interviews, town hall meetings, Natural Church Development surveys)
- Listening to the wider community (through the study of demographics and 1-on-1s with community leaders)

**Prayer**

Spend at least 15 minutes in prayer as a group.

Conclude with the Prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi.

**Session 2**  
**MISSION IN CONTEXT**

**Bible Study**

Acts 17:22-28

- Mission planning takes seriously the culture of the people
- How is God calling us into God's mission?
- How does our context inform our mission?

**Team Building**

“Individual Life Chart”

Ask each participant to draw five things about themselves on a large sheet. Taking turns, invite each person to introduce him/herself by explaining what they have drawn.

**Focus**

Present demographic Census data for the mission service area of the congregation, such as a radius around the church (1, 3 or 5 miles)

Discuss:

- What does the community around our church look like?
- Who lives here? Who is missing?
- How do the demographic data around our church compare to the make-up of our congregation?

Asset Mapping: “SWOT Analysis”

Using different-colored post-it notes, invite each person to write down at least three “Strengths,” “Weaknesses,” “Opportunities,” and “Threats” that the mission context presents. Ask participants to put the post-it notes up on a wall in a designated space. Break into triads and sort the notes, looking for both similarities and differences.

**Prayer**

Spend at least 15 minutes in prayer as a group.

Conclude with the prayer for “Founders and Previous Leaders of a Congregation.”

**Session 3**  
**A LOOK AT OUR CONGREGATION**

**Bible Study**

Acts 16:6-10

- Paul follows the vision
- How is God calling our congregation?
- Where or what is our Macedonia?

**Team Building**

“Congregational Life Chart”

Ask each participant to draw five things about their congregation on a large sheet. Invite each person, in turn, to show what they have drawn and explain.

**Focus**

“Congregational Trend Report”

Pass out copies of the Congregational Trend Report for the congregation.

Discuss:

- What does our congregation look like?
- How have baptized membership and worship attendance changed over the past seven years?
- What’s the make-up of our membership? Who is missing?
- What does this report tell about our stewardship? Our mission support to the wider church? Our involvement in meeting community needs?
- If Dave Daubert is right and we have moved from the center to the margins of society, what does this mean for our congregation?

“Natural Church Development”

Using the power point presentation, “NCD in 20 Minutes,” introduce key concepts of Natural Church Development. Announce that 30 members of the congregation will be asked to take the NCD survey before the next meeting.

**Prayer**

Spend at least 15 minutes in prayer as a group.  
Conclude with the “Mission of the Church” prayer.

## **Session 4** **TRANSFORMATION**

### **Bible Study**

Acts 8:26-39

- Philip is being sent as a missionary
- How is the Ethiopian's life transformed?
- What does baptism mean for us?

### **Team Building**

Sharing Faith Stories

Divide the group into triads. Ask that each person take five minutes to share their faith story. Ask the triads to end in prayer for one another.

### **Focus**

1-on-1 Training

Present the principles of 1-on-1 conversations, a tool gleaned from community organizing. Include short role plays so participants can practice interviewing skills.

NCD Evaluation

Present the results from the Natural Church Development survey.

Discuss:

- What picture emerges from the survey?
- What is our congregation's minimum factor?
- How might we address the minimum factor needs?

### **Prayer**

Spend at least 15 minutes in prayer as a group.  
Conclude with the Prayer of Martin Luther.

**Session 5**  
**PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER**

**Bible Study**

Acts 16:25-34

- How does God make mission possible?
- What lessons can we take away from this story?
- How do you think God will surprise us when we engage in God's mission?

**Team Building**

Sharing Faith Stories

Ask each participant to share a faith story with the whole group. Allow 1 – 2 minutes each, using a timer, if necessary.

**Focus**

Developing a Missional Plan

Lead the group in developing a missional plan that is based on what the participants have heard during the “three great listenings.” Break into subgroups, if necessary, to develop specific ministry goals in these areas:

- Worship and Hospitality
- Prayer and Bible Study
- Evangelism and Outreach
- Stewardship
- Leadership Development

**Prayer**

Spend at least 15 minutes in prayer as a group. Conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

## Resources:

### Session 1:

“Sister Act.” 1992. Hollywood, California: Touchstone Pictures. (The suggested 9-minute clip starts at 53:52 and ends at 1:03:20).

Bouman, Stephen P. 2013. *The Mission Table: Renewing Congregation & Community*. Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress. (For detailed description of “the three great listening,” see pp. 90ff.)

### Session 2:

Census Data: Available at no cost or low cost from a variety of sources, such as:

[www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

[www.elca.org/Resources/Research-and-Evaluation](http://www.elca.org/Resources/Research-and-Evaluation)

[www.perceptgroup.com](http://www.perceptgroup.com)

Snow, Luther. 2004. *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on its Gifts*. Washington, DC: The Alban Institute. (For resources on asset mapping and the SWOT analysis, you can also go to: [www.luthersnow.com/asset-mapping-title-page.html](http://www.luthersnow.com/asset-mapping-title-page.html))

### Session 3:

Congregational Trend Report for all ELCA Congregations is available at

[www.elca.org/Resources/Research-and-Evaluation](http://www.elca.org/Resources/Research-and-Evaluation)

Schwarz, Christian A. and Robert E. Logan. 1996. *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*. St. Charles, Illinois: Churchsmart Resources.

Daubert, Dave. 2007. *Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress. (For a helpful discussion of how the Christian Church has moved from the center to the margins of society, see especially Chapter 1).

### Session 4:

Engh, Susan. *One-To-One Relational Meetings*. Cited 1 August 2014. Online at:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Guide To 1 On 1 Conversation.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Guide%20To%201%20On%201%20Conversation.pdf)

### Session 5:

For resources in developing a congregation-based missional plan, go to:

[www.elca.org/Resources/Mission-Planning](http://www.elca.org/Resources/Mission-Planning)