

AGENDA 2.1.9

Give thanks for new churches

PROPOSED MOTION

Submitted by Council for Local Mission

PROPOSED THAT

1. Synod give thanks for the new life of Christ found in newly established Lutheran churches, and welcome these new churches with joy and thanksgiving; and
2. Congregations be encouraged and actively supported to:
 - a. Pray diligently and regularly that God would raise up and send out evangelists, missional communities, church planting teams, and church planters in the harvest fields of Australia and New Zealand;
 - b. Identify and act on their mission strengths, and identify themselves as a Sending or Partner Church; and
 - c. Invest and promote investment of funds and resources in new church plants, including intentional investment in church planting and local mission following the dissolution of a Congregation.

REASONS FOR PROPOSAL

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ instructed us to 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matthew 28 18-20). Thus, being sent in mission to share the gospel is part of the LCA's identity and not just one of its many activities. In following the command of Jesus to make disciples, a priority of the LCA is to 'equip people for mission and ministry in the church, local communities and the wider world' (priority 1.3, Our Direction 2018-2024, LCA).
 2. The Objects of the Church in the LCA's Constitution include church planting, that is establishing new churches: to 'encourage every congregation to carry out its mission to its local community' (Article 3, Objects of the Church, 3.1.6) and 'establish, develop and support new congregations where it is not possible for individual congregations to do so' (Article 3, Objects of the Church, 3.1.7).
 3. The LCA is beginning to see the fruit of new believers in Christ and new churches planted through the grassroots church planting movement and the work of the New and Renewing Churches department and the Council for Local Mission. We praise God for this life-giving fruitfulness.
1. While newly constituted congregations of the LCA are formally welcomed into membership at District Conventions of Synod, we believe it is important to recognise and rejoice in this new life also at church-wide level, so that delegates are able to take back these good news stories to their congregations and share the joy with the wider church.
 2. Jesus also instructed his disciples to pray for labourers. "The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the

Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” Luke 10: 1-2 (NRSV).

3. One of the important factors in church planting and mission work is the ‘harvest workers’ – the evangelists, church planters, and church planting teams who partner with the Holy Spirit to see new people to faith in Christ and which bring new churches into existence in local areas. The Bishop of the Church encouraged the Church in a six-week season of prayer for this very purpose in 2019. Regular, diligent, church-wide prayer for harvest workers is thus essential to see new people come to faith in Christ and new churches planted.
4. Each individual and congregation is called to join with God in His mission. God has given us many different gifts, and so mission can take many forms, including where God has placed us in our vocations to serve our family, colleagues, community and congregations. One of the best ways for congregations to experience renewal in their own life and mission is to be involved with church planting. As congregations get involved with church planting and experience the joy of the Heavenly Father and of the angels as they see new people coming to faith in Christ and new churches planted (Luke 15:7,10), they are reinvigorated and renewed.
5. The New and Renewing Churches department has a bold vision to plant over 200 new Lutheran churches by 2030 across Australia and New Zealand. In order to realise this vision, the LCA NZ needs a large pool of Sending Churches, which are congregations being trained in health, mission, and multiplication of leaders in order to begin a new church plant. Not every congregation has the capacity to become a Sending Church, but every congregation in the LCA NZ can benefit in its mission and its own congregational renewal by being a Partner Church, engaged in mutual learning and growth, prayer, and practical partnership with a Sending Church or a Church Plant.
6. Thus, all congregations are encouraged to identify as a Sending or Partner Church and undertake the New and Renewing Churches department’s Renew Mission Life training, which has been shown to be effective in increasing church health, renewal, mission and multiplication.
7. Practical support for mission work is also vital, whether it be through funds, gifts of resources such as houses or land, or human resources. For this to occur congregations need to undertake a prayerful and intentional process of investing in the ongoing mission work of the LCA NZ.
8. Planting new churches is costly, and the bold vision of planting many new congregations of the LCA NZ will require significant investment by the wider church. One situation where such investment can occur is where congregations have completed the work God has given them to do in their location and amongst their generation, known constitutionally as ‘dissolution’ of a congregation. The Dissolution clause in the model constitution for congregations of the LCA NZ allows for the congregation to ‘give indication regarding the use of its assets by the District and/or the Church. Any surplus assets which remain after such dissolution and the satisfaction of all debts and liabilities shall be transferred to one or more Lutheran organisations with similar purposes.’ Supporting church planting, either through a Sending Church or Churches, or through the LCA’s New and Renewing Churches department, allows for the passing on of a missional legacy. Such an investment, joyfully and prayerfully given by congregations entering a stage of completion, and joyfully and prayerfully received by new congregations at the beginning of their lifecycle, will reap great benefits for the LCA NZ into the future.