



Report of Metro D.C. New Connections Campaign

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This report reflects the previous Synodical year for the **New Connections Campaign** focused on *growing our church* in the Metro D.C. Synod between June 2019 and May 2020.

On behalf of the entire Synod staff, we give thanks to our donors and to our congregational leaders who continued to prioritize “connecting with new people” **for the future of the Evangelical Lutheran church in North America and for the sake of people who, now more than ever, need to know the love, forgiveness, and hope of God.** The basic tenants of this campaign continued up to and into the Covid-19 pandemic and physical distancing. As I write this, uprisings have engulfed our country and our MetroDC area. These are unprecedented times and never in most of our lifetimes is sharing the Gospel more imperative.

Even though the campaign portion of New Connections is ending, we know we still have much to offer in connecting people with the church, online, with community partners, in newly imagined virtual, small group environments. We know God is preparing us now more than ever to think outside the box, meet people where they are and invite them to become a part of our congregations and communities. So, I ask you to think of this opportunity to start with a new canvas and address the same evangelism questions from different contexts and points of view. We hear people looking for ways to explore their faith with others surpassing geographic borders. Can we find a way to connect and invite them into congregational community without it seeming entirely out of context or weird? When they join us online or in person for the first-time post-pandemic, will they find a genuine welcome that will help them to feel at home and want to come back? How can we imagine an environment that enables them to grow in their faith and become a part of the movement of the Holy Spirit? How do we continue to be disciples making disciples?

So, a few things of business to tend to. I will briefly describe what happened this last year in our four New Connections Campaign program areas and how are we pivoting “post-campaign” in the Synod.

1. GROWING & DEVELOPING CONGREGATIONS

We embraced the New and Renewing Mission Table (NRMT) as the grant arm of the campaign for releasing campaign funds for congregations in a New Start status and with new outreach and growth-related ministries. Specifically, New Connections has funded a total of \$348,066 through May 2020 to both New Starts and Renewing Congregations. This represents well over half of the monies taken into the Synod (keeping in mind most congregations that ran campaigns retained the vast majority of their funds in-house for their own ministry and growth areas).

Speaking of congregations running their own campaigns, five completed their own campaigns which included ministry areas focused on connecting with new people. Some also included major capital improvements to their facilities to make them more technology enabled, inviting and ready for additional growth.

- + Christ Lutheran Church (Washington D.C.) under the leadership of The Rev. Renatta Eustis and the Rev. LeeAnn Schray,
- + Lutheran Church of the Covenant (Dale City, VA) under the leadership of the Rev. Darcy Tillman,
- + Shepherd of the Hills (Haymarket, VA) under the leadership of the Rev. Darcy Percy,
- + Christ the Servant Lutheran Church (Reston, VA) under the leadership of the Rev. Phil Carl

We also delight in the progress of our New Starts over the past year:

1. Swahili Lutheran Church worships weekly at Living Faith Lutheran in Rockville MD. Pastor John Mbatta is faithfully leading the Congregation and further connecting the large population of Swahili-speaking people in our Synod. Together, they are creating a small, healthy community that contributes to the multi-ethnic makeup of our Synod and surrounding communities.
2. King of Kings (Fairfax, VA) hired the Rev. Garrett Wolf to develop King of Kings 2.0 in Loudon County, VA. He and Senior Pastor Lynn Miller are actively engaged in mission community planning and worship in the Dulles South community. Please see a New Connections blog write up on Dulles South [here](#)

2. DEVELOPING LEADERS

Developing our leaders continued to be a focus this year. The Campaign has funded (in total) nearly \$100,000 through May 2020 for the following:

- **Intentional Impact leadership training:** New Connections continued to sponsor training in best practices in intentional, sustainable mentorship and leadership. Growing leaders to try new things, know the why of their ministry, values and vision are all a part of this eight-

month cohort. All rostered leaders who participated had the opportunity for coaching to help integrate their leadership practices.

- **Coaching:** The vision of creating a coaching culture within the MetroDC Synod continued to flourish under the direct leadership of the Rev. Dr. Nathan Swenson-Reinhold. This year, New Connections continued to fund the program and extended coaching to small groups (e.g., church councils and leadership teams) to help discern growth ministry, set goals and take steps to achieve them. We hope coaching will become a bedrock of our Synod's growth and development culture for our rostered and lay leaders. For more information go to MetroDC Coaching website: [MetroDC ELCA Coaches](#)
- **MOSAIX: Building a “healthy multi-ethnic congregation”** cohort training. Five of our original six Cohort-One Congregations continued this year exploring and taking intentional steps towards building a healthy multi-ethnic congregation. The Cohort experienced a 3-day Mosaix Conference in Dallas, TX in Oct 2019 getting a real sense for the broadness and ecumenical movement. They completed their first year in February 2020 with a meaningful retreat with Pastors and founders Mark DeYmas and Chip Freed. Year 2 of the Cohort is currently on pause due to Covid-19 physical distancing. However, the multi-ethnic ministry is still progressing. Please pray for courageous leadership, spiritual growth and multi-ethnic development of the Rev. Jeanette Leisk and Good Shepherd (Alexandria, VA), the Rev. Shannon Anderson and Peace (Waldorf, MD), the Rev. Renatta Eustis and the Rev. LeeAnn Schray and Christ (DC). The Rev. Tom Knoll and First Trinity (DC) and Pastor Lamar Bailey, our Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM) leading this cohort. For more information about Mosaix, please go to <http://www.mosaix.info/>
- **Prayer as Oxygen Retreat:** Recognizing leaders need rest, renewal and to be in community worshipping with one another was highlighted during this year’s rostered leaders retreat called “Prayer as O2.” Newly installed Bishop Leila Ortiz joined over 35 rostered leaders at for 24 hours focused on prayer and worship.
- **Stewardship and Evangelism Training** - No new trainings in these topics – please note that training materials are still available at [New Connections Tools](#)

3. SUPPORT GROWTH ACROSS THE ELCA

This synodical year, we continued to further God’s work of growing new congregations beyond our synod to ELCA North America. To date, we have given \$53,700 to the Campaign for the ELCA.

FINANCIALS

As mentioned above, the vast majority of funds raised by Congregations continue to *remain* within congregations. And, a portion of their campaign goals counted towards the over-arching

Report of Metro D.C. New Connections Campaign (June 3, 2020)

New Connections campaign goal of \$2.25M. We estimate this amount to be nearly \$1.7M, or 75% of our campaign goal! And, we know that congregations who did their own capital campaigns during this time were tremendously successful overall raising over \$5M towards their ministry and building upgrade needs. This Synod can do campaigns and can raise funds! As of May 31, the Synod has received over \$630,000 in gifts and pledge payments. Since donors continue to honor their pledge commitments, additional funds will be received in the coming year. Should the Synod receive this amount in full, we anticipate continuing to be able to provide funding towards New Connections program areas through the life of the pledges/agreements (roughly through June 2022). I would be remiss if I did not mention the unknown impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and physical distancing. We cannot predict at this time the congregational giving or the remaining donor giving. What we can say is that we know our God is benevolent and abundant. No matter what, 100% of monies received for New Connections will continue to fund our four campaign thrusts (Growing Congregations, Establishing New Starts, Developing Leaders, and Tithing to ELCA church-wide growth ministry) which have already begun to pivot under the new leadership of the Synod.

GROWTH

We sing praises to God that our MetroDC Synod congregations did grow during this campaign and still intends to grow!! We have congregations that pledged 1671 new connections, roughly 57% of our 3000 campaign goal. Please see final thoughts for my call to continue growth strategies!

HOW THE PROGRAM AREAS OF THE CAMPAIGN ARE PIVOTING?

Rest assured, our fantastic Synod treasurer, Ms. Julie Hamre will continue to manage the accounting of NC funds. Additionally, each of the program areas will be transitioned by the end of June 2020. Specifically,

- Renewing Congregations & New Starts - Existing and new grants are and will continue to be overseen by the Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM), Pastor Lamar Bailey and the New & Renewing Mission Table as well as the Synod Council as required.
- Developing Leaders – Specific leadership topics and additional rostered leaders’ retreats will be developed and programmed by Bishop Leila Ortiz and the entire Synod staff primarily through the Leadership Academy. MetroDC Coaching will continue under the leadership and expertise of the Rev. Dr. Nathan Swenson-Reinhold.
- Gifts to churchwide ELCA Fund – will be monitored by the DEM and Synod treasurer and approved by Bishop Ortiz to ensure tithing continues to the completion of pledges.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We are at the end of year three of our congregational phase of the campaign. **We celebrate each rostered leader, lay leader and congregation active participant who has engaged in growth ministry during this campaign.** We are steps closer to growing God's kingdom and bringing people to know God's enduring love and grace. Let's keep this growth mindset alive after this campaign AND during this physical distancing pandemic! *How might we make new connections online and define active participants now?!*

I depart my MetroDC Synod work ask five things of our leaders and congregations:

- (1) Pray for one another;**
- (2) Participate boldly** in stewardship/capital campaigns, engagement and GROWTH;
- (3) Continue to meet your pledges** so that ministry areas can continue; and
- (4) Share your new connection ministry stories.** We need to share our stories across the Synod!
- (5) Keep a GROWTH mindset**

I am beyond grateful for the love, support, friendship, collegiality, and willingness to try new things both among the Synod staff and with many of the rostered and lay leaders. The Rev. Dr. Phil Hirsch took a chance when he called me to do something neither he nor I had done before! And, together we paved a way forward with the guidance of many including Bishop Dick Graham, the Synod Council and rostered leaders who were willing to lead pilots, who participated in visiting numerous church councils and who gave of their time generously through strategy meetings, calls, visits, etc.

I feel humbled and honored to have learned alongside rostered leaders in Intentional Impact (Cohort 2), Mosaix (Pastors Jeanette Leisk, Shannon Anderson, Mitch Watney, Renata Eustis LeeAnn Shray, Tom Knoll, Mark DeYmas and Chip Freed), the New and Renewing Mission Table (with Pastors Ken Taylor, Mike Gutzler, Brett Davis, Julie Bringman, Shannon Anderson and Lamar Bailey) and through coaching with the Rev. Dr. Nathan Swenson-Reinhold and all I have personally coached (you know who you are!). It has been so much fun being a part of TWO Synod staffs for over 3 ½ years! I am indebted to Katharyn Wheeler who is "world class" in her administrative calling, Pastor Tom Knoll and Julie Hamre for your tireless partnership in everything financial, both Bishops Graham and Ortiz for your friendship, leadership and humor, Assistant to the Bishop, Pastor Erin Swenson-Reinhold for your compassionate efficiency and may gifts as chief of staff and retreat leader, Kelly Champaign for your fantastic strategic communication and Katie Simbala for your creative video and worship gifts! Finally, I greatly appreciate both Pastor Garry Rhinesmith during his interim DEM time (after Pastor Phil Hirsh was called to churchwide) for his leadership continuity and Pastor Lamar Bailey who has leaned in, asked great questions, provided amazing support and offered new ways of seeing and thinking. The pivot of New Connections is in great hands! Thank you.

This work of growth and sharing the Good News never ends and is meant to be an amazing journey! Inspired by Pastor Sarah Scherschligt in her Pandemic Facebook posts, I say "Be well, Be inspired. Be bold, and Know God holds you!"