

## All Missions, Foreign *and* Local

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My good friend and brother, Bishop-elect Pastor Torkild Masvie of the Lutheran Church in Norway, a new confessional Lutheran church body in fellowship with the LCMS, just stayed with us at our house for a U.S. visit.

Jan and I will be going to his consecration as bishop in Norway in late May, God willing. I'll also preach at two of the Lutheran Church in Norway congregations far up in the Arctic, in the Land of the Midnight Sun. They have now grown to five congregations and pastors, with four seminarians preparing to be pastors.

Overseas missions is a valued part of LCMS and NID history, and new starts have always been central to new mission work. Our current overseas missions focus on the same things we encourage each other to do here: serve our neighbors in need, clearly in the name of Jesus and then, if they ask why, tell them and connect them to the Word and Sacraments in the congregation.

The far off new start, Lutheran Church in Norway, has been and continues to be materially supported by congregations from here in the district.

But for my good friend, soon-to-be-Bishop Masvie, going to Norway 11 years ago to plant a new church body (not just a congregation, but a confessional Lutheran church body), was not "foreign missions"—that was home.

He was living here in the district having returned from mission work in Jerusalem. He was burdened by the Gospel needs in his native home, where he had grown up and where he wanted to be—at home.

New starts are just that: both/and. Both far from home, AND ALSO AT HOME.

Many of our congregations work all year to plan for a team to go abroad for mission service. They talk about it frequently with the whole congregation. They raise funds. They recruit team members and prepare them to be the best "missionaries" they can be. They set up prayer teams to uphold the mission experience of their members while the mission work is underway.

They plan such experiences for their youth because they want them to experience "the mission field." They know it can have lifelong impact on career choices and church engagement for these teens. They know those experiences are never forgotten.

And I totally support congregations doing that. Short-term international missions were one of the many great blessings I experienced as a parish pastor at Cross in Yorkville.

I WANT THE SAME THING FOR LOCAL MISSIONS.

I earnestly pray for all our congregations to be so inspired on behalf of the Lord's mission right here in northern Illinois that we do all those things—plan, promote, raise funds, recruit, prepare workers, pray—for our local missions just as we do for foreign ones (and whether you want to locally call it New Starts...New Believers or not).

A local mission can indeed be the experience of a lifetime for your church members, and it definitely is a lifetime and life-giving experience for the people that the Holy Spirit touches as you serve as the hands and feet and voice of Jesus in your community, or nearby.

Here's a true story Pastor Masvie told me just happened in one of the Lutheran Church in Norway congregations. To the great surprise of Pastor Masvie and the members, a state church pastor came and asked if he could speak to them before the service began. Pastor Masvie was hesitant, but agreed. The state church pastor said to them words to this effect: "I'm glad you're here. Please stay in this church, because this is the only place in the community where you will find eternal salvation."

Eternal salvation comes to people when God's Law convicts us of our sins and his Good News not only tells us about but actually GIVES to us our Savior Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again for our eternal life. The state church pastor realized that the LCN congregation was the only place the people there would receive that.

In most of our communities there are other congregations that also proclaim God's Law and Gospel. But there are fewer and fewer of them each year. We live in a time of increasing darkness in our country.

Don't panic, and certainly don't despair and give up. God has entrusted eternal salvation to his faithful churches. He has entrusted it to you and your church for THIS TIME and THIS PLACE.

So look what we get to do: we get to serve our neighbors near and far as God gives to them and to us the gift of eternal salvation through his Son Jesus.

