Nearly a Decade of 'New'

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Do you remember what the Northern Illinois District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is? How about what it's not?

It's not an office in Hillside; it's not the district president; it's not the district staff; it's not even all of the above plus the board of directors. The NID is all the girls and boys and men and women, believers in Jesus, in 200-plus congregations. So "the district" isn't THEM. It's US.

And do you remember why we've joined ourselves together? Two main reasons.

One, it's to help each other use the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions so that we guard our life and our teaching. We're all sinners and we're all subject to going off to one extreme or another. Luther described it as a drunk on a horse: he falls off one side, gets back on, and then falls off the other side. Not too complimentary. But pretty accurate. So we, together, continually encourage and call each other back from extremes to be centered on God's perfect Word, the Bible.

The other reason we're together is to help each other—again, encouraged by God's Word, as the Lord himself carries out his mission of bringing the Good News of salvation to all the world, both to our neighbors and to the nations. He does this through the Word and Sacrament ministry of congregations.

Now, do you remember what we call that mission here in NID? Hint: it's four words. Got it? "New Starts…New Believers." New starts can be huge, like a brand new congregation or a second (or third, or fourth site), or it can be small, like tutoring kids after school.

What "new starts" have in common is that they are sustained (not a one-time thing) and missional (engaged with unchurched people) and intentional (connecting over time in a way that builds relationships where faith-sharing impact can occur).

Every congregation can find at least one new, sustained way to connect with their neighbors in the name of Jesus!

A number of years ago I heard Pastor Matt Harrison who is now Synod president describe the work of the Church. It goes like this. The Church is the Body of Christ, so the Church does what Jesus did. Well, the Church does *part* of what Jesus did. Defeating sin, death and the devil by his perfect life, his innocent sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead – Jesus did that all by himself. No one helped him; no one could. And he accomplished it perfectly for all. But the other things Jesus did his body the Church does. "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction" (Matthew 9: 35), and Jesus "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10: 38).

There it is: We proclaim the Gospel and we do good in Jesus' name, always praying that the Holy Spirit will bring more people to saving faith. Gospel proclamation and mercy ministry. That's what our LCMS international missionaries do all around the world, and that's what we get to do here as well.

We're in our tenth year of New Starts…New Believers. So how's it going? The district office staff recently ran some statistics and put them in a chart. In 2006 we recorded 6 new starts. It's been steadily growing ever since. In 2015 there were 31 new starts.

Not every congregation has done something new in outreach, but some have done one new thing, and then another, and another. Add the years together; we've identified 222 new starts to storm the gates of hell with the Good News of Jesus. Thanks be to God!

There are many new believers who have heard this Good News in LCMS congregations. And there are many believers who were not closely connected with the Lord through Word and Sacrament who now are. The Lord has done this. Isn't it great that we get to be part of it? He is carrying out his mission through the NID – and again, I don't mean the district office; I mean all of us.

So what are you doing?

Number of "New Starts" by Year

Year	New Starts
2006	4
2007	14
2008	23
2009	15
2010	25
2011	23
2012	30
2013	22
2014	26
2015	40
2016	11