

Igniting Hearts for Mission

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Ideas From Churches, September 2026

Igniting Generous Hearts for Mission: One Congregation's Story



Peace Lutheran Church – Edmond, Oklahoma

A church that:

Forms people in the Gospel of God's grace

Anchors them in Christ-centered relationships

Sends them out in Spirit-empowered mission

This article explores how a mission trip and a faith-based giving approach to budgeting spurred a generous passion for the Great Commission within Peace Lutheran Church (PLC), Edmond, Oklahoma.

A Mission Trip to Ethiopia

In February 2025, Pastor Orrey McFarland and lay member Gregg Hostetler went on their first global mission trip. The trip was organized by Pastor John Conrad of First Lutheran, Floresville, TX, with Rev. Dr. Biruk Ayel, immediate past President of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) Seminary in Addis Ababa, and Rev. Wagnew Andarge, President of the North Central Ethiopian Synod. Also traveling were pastors and lay members from several other North American Lutheran Church (NALC) congregations. The group first visited the EECMY Seminary in Ababa Addis and then traveled along very bumpy roads to some ten congregations, orphanages and outreach ministries in the Afar, Amhara and Tigray regions of north central Ethiopia.



Pastor Orrey McFarland (left) and Gregg Hostetler (right)

For decades, the North Central Synod has faced significant challenges including civil war, poverty and persecution, the latter primarily from the two dominant area religions, Islam and Coptic Orthodox. Over the previous three years, armed conflict between the federal government and rebel organizations led to the loss of countless lives, widespread displacement and rampant looting. Despite these challenges, the North Central Synod has managed to spread the Gospel and plant many new congregations and outreach ministries.

Traveling mostly by vehicle, the group brought encouragement, hope and excitement to every village they visited. Each stop consisted of a tour, listening to testimonies, visits with children, eating and fellowship, worship, prayer, and in some cases even dancing! Each of the travelers were so taken with the hospitality in every setting, and by how much these growing churches and ministries were on fire for Christ and joyfully proclaimed the Gospel amidst serious, even dangerous, circumstances.

Gregg found Zimzim's testimony especially powerful. "Her conversion from Islam, her faith, baptism, and eventual establishment of a home church are answers to years of prayer by EECMY faithful, and powerful examples of Christ's work in the world!"

In every community, the group met with local community leaders to identify areas of most need. Many dealt with church building construction and expansion efforts. Rev. Wagnew compiled a report of the needs identified by each congregation, listing them in priority order. To fulfill every need would take approximately \$220,000.

About the trip, Pr. Orrey reflected, "Our trip to Ethiopia was a potent reminder of the reality of the worldwide nature of the body of Christ — that we are truly united to believers across the world by our faith in Christ. Each place we went, we were generously welcomed — and our relationship was assumed: we are brothers and sisters in Christ."



Ethiopian group worship

Front: Pr. Orrey 6th from right, then Pr. John Conrad and Gregg Hostetler

Setting a Bold Goal

Pr. Orrey and Gregg returned home convicted that Peace should seek ways to meet the Kingdom building needs of the North Central Synod congregations. Their excitement was contagious. After sharing their experience for two Sundays with the Adult Sunday School, temple talks and developing a slideshow display in the narthex, Peace set the bold goal to raise \$50,000 during Lent. The goal included \$15,000 in matching funds committed by the Sending Team (PLC's mission team). The funds were to be used for the two highest priority projects. Pr. Orrey wanted it to be a sacrificial stretch. (Prior to this the PLC's largest Lenten offering was around \$10,000.) Giving was to be over and above regular offerings for those who felt called.

Special giving envelopes were made available in the Narthex and in the Sunday bulletins. Weekly e-newsletter reminders were sent out. The Holy Spirit was at work among us. Prayers were ascending. Then, on Easter Pastor Orrey announced to the amazed congregation that \$83,895 had been raised! Praise God!

When Pr. Orrey called the EECMY North Central Synod to tell them, they thought he said "\$8,395." When he restated the number slowly, they too were amazed! Several weeks after the funds were wired, a temporary building was demolished and construction of a new church begun. Soon after that, we were informed that the other location had received permission from the government to lease land, which they found and are now planning for construction! Today, both communities are worshiping in their new church buildings. God is so good!

Faith-based Budgeting with a Mission Focus

It's possible that none of this would have happened if back in 2020, Peace kept on doing the "same old thing." Missions-giving had almost completely "died" within our congregation in the 20-teens and giving generally concerningly had decreased. The building had needs, which was a focus for many. Then in mid-2019, our pastor suddenly left and months later Covid hit. During this time our church council and missions team met frequently in prayer and reflection to explore where the Lord may be leading us.

In 2020, the church council boldly set out in a new direction: faith-based budgeting. According to [LightandGospel.com](https://lightandgospel.com), faith-based budgeting "transforms money from a source of stress into a tool for worship, service, and peace. It fosters dependence on God, encourages generosity, and creates financial stability that honors Him."

Gone are the pledge cards and stewardship campaigns. The fundraising campaigns to fix the building have been replaced by mission emphases. The congregational budget is carefully constructed to prioritize the mission of the church. To help deal with building issues, an “Asset Preservation Fund (APF)” was created. The APF is funded by an annual budget contribution plus half of the following: bequests received in any year, interest from a money market account, and funds remaining from offerings at the end of a fiscal year. As it grows various building projects are undertaken. The other half of these funding sources is placed in a dedicated missions reserve account that, like the APF, carries over from year to year.

The Sending Team

The missions team, renamed “Sending Team” in 2021, set out to follow suggestions of its denomination, NALC, that “each congregation support at least one local, one regional and one global mission.” Under the new system beginning in fiscal year 2021, 10% of offerings was allocated to missions and a bequest deposited in the missions reserve account helped cushion any cash flow issues in the first year. The dedicated missions reserve fund provides flexibility to help pivot when new opportunities arise.

Initially the Sending Team developed a detailed annual budget, designating amounts for each mission partner based on 10% of the total congregationally-approved larger budget. Initially we sent 65% of our 10% of offerings to the national church and 35% to mission partners representing Jerusalem, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). We identified 4 local partners, 3 regional partners, and the NALC staff helped us identify a global missionary who was getting ready to serve in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to support.

In later years we increased the percentage and now it sits at 15% of offerings. To expand involvement and generate enthusiasm, we hold special fundraising events over the year to gather goods and/or raise funds beyond the budget allocation for each partner, often having the mission reserve fund “match” those raised by the congregation. Where feasible, we invite partners to visit our church and always stay in touch with all of them. Missions is all about reciprocal relationships, and we recognize that our partners have much to teach us about trusting in Christ.

Peace has been blessed richly over the past six years since we changed to faith-based budgeting. Not only has giving increased generally, but also the percentage of offerings dedicated to missions has increased from 10% to 15%, and the Sending budget has more than doubled. We flipped the percentages given to our now ten partners (65%) and the NALC (35%), with

both categories still increasing. The \$15,000 “match” by the Sending Team for the two Ethiopian churches came from the mission reserve funds. The remaining funds came from the saints at Peace whose hearts were ignited by the stories from the trip and new relationships being formed.

Dwelling in the Word

Another contributing factor to our growing focus on mission is that from fall 2021 to winter 2025, some 75+ parishioners were engaged in weekly study of the Bible from Genesis to Revelations within Anchor Groups. At the same time, 30-40 attended Adult Sunday School exploring the same Scriptures, and 125 or so Sunday worshipers heard Pastor Orrey preach on them. You could say that for almost four years we were “marinating” in the Scriptures. Surely God’s Word and the Holy Spirit were at work igniting a passion for Christ’s Great Commission among us. Today, seven Anchor Groups continue to study, pray and do mission together.

Through all this we have really begun to understand what it means to live into the Great Commission and our own congregational 2021 vision: “a church that FORMS people in the Gospel of God’s grace, ANCHORS them in Christ-centered relationships, and SENDS them out in Spirit-empowered mission.”



Lynn Kickingbird, a mission team member at Peace Lutheran Church, Edmond, Oklahoma, served on the Strategic Planning Team for Missions in the formation of the North American Lutheran Church and later served on its Executive Council. She currently serves on the Texas-Oklahoma Missions Region Mission Team and on PLC’s Sending Team, leads a weekly in-home Bible Study with her husband, and is active with her 4 grandchildren.

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Links:

PLC: <https://www.peace-lutheran.net/>

First Lutheran: <https://dojoy.org/>

EECMY: <https://ircaddisababa.org/eecmy/>

NALC: <https://thenalc.org/en-us/>

Seminary: <https://mys.edu.et/>

Addis Ababa: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Addis-Ababa>

Afar: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Afar>

Amhara: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Amhara-Plateau>

Tigray: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tigray-historical-region-Ethiopia>

Andarge: <https://www.facebook.com/wagnew.andarge/>

Ethiopia: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ethiopia>

Islam: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam>

Coptic Orthodox: <https://copticorthodox.church/en/>

LightandGospel: <https://lightandgospel.com/>

DRC: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Democratic-Republic-of-the-Congo>