

# CENTRAL STATES SYNOD

## New Start Task Force Report

*Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

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### PURPOSE

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The congregations of the Central States Synod have been faithfully proclaiming the gospel and serving their communities for generations—some for more than a century. Empowered by the gifts of Word and Sacrament, these Spirit-led congregations continue to nurture faith, form disciples, and transform lives through the power of the Gospel. They raise up leaders, engage their neighborhoods with ministries of compassion and service, and offer mission support that strengthens the work of the whole church. Through their witness in both word and deed, they embody the hope and love of Christ for a world in need.

The Central States Synod is changing. While many rural areas continue to experience population decline and aging demographics, both Missouri and Kansas are seeing steady overall growth—driven largely by expanding urban and suburban communities and increasing demographic diversity. Across these states, new neighborhoods are emerging where no ELCA congregation is currently present. These growing communities represent both an opportunity and a responsibility to proclaim the amazing grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ by developing new congregations.

Many of these expanding areas are filled with children eager to discover the love of Jesus, newcomers seeking meaningful community, hurting people longing for a word of forgiveness, and faithful disciples ready to offer their gifts in service to God. Local ELCA congregations make this ministry possible.

*"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

—Luke 10:2

Starting a new congregation is not solitary work. As the practice and economics of mission development evolve, the resources required to establish a thriving new ministry have grown significantly. A new start depends on the prayers, support, and shared expertise of the Synod—congregations walking together to proclaim the Good News.

The New Start Task Force has been formed to identify opportunities for launching new congregations and to determine the resources needed for this essential work. This effort does not overlook the challenges many congregations currently face, nor does it diminish the importance of faithful witness through existing ministries. Rather, a renewed culture of evangelical mission—expressed through the commitment to start new congregations—strengthens all ministries through shared vision, collaboration, and resources.

## UPDATES FROM THE TASK FORCE

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### 1. Identifying Viable Opportunities for New Ministries (Top Tier Growth Areas)

The Task Force identified the highest confidence growth areas for 2026–2030 in three regions: Kansas City Metro, St. Louis Metro, and Wichita Metro.

#### KANSAS CITY METRO

##### Spring Hill, KS (Southern Johnson County)

Fastest growing city in the KC metro; approximately 26–40% growth since 2020. More affordable than Olathe/Overland Park, with large master planned subdivisions approved.

##### Projection (2026–2030):

- Annual growth of 5–7%
- Transitioning into a small city hub
- Magnet for young families

##### Planting Strategy:

- Family-centric congregation with strong children's ministry
- Community engagement: HOAs, block parties, school service days

##### Gardner, KS

Steady, high-volume growth; among top 100 fastest growing U.S. cities. Approximately 5% annual growth with high housing permits and spillover from Olathe.

**Projection:**

- +1,000 residents per year
- Growth spreading west and south

**Planting Strategy:**

- Young professionals and dual-income families
- Consider bilingual/multicultural ministry

**Raymore, MO (Cass County)**

One of Missouri's fastest growing cities. An affordable alternative to Lee's Summit, attractive to first-time homebuyers.

**Projection:**

- Cass County mirrors south Johnson County growth patterns
- Raymore/Belton absorb overflow from Lee's Summit

**Parkville & the Northland (MO)**

Urban-suburban hybrid growth. Parkville up approximately 25% since 2020; North Kansas City up approximately 26%. Airport proximity and mixed density housing contribute to continued expansion.

**Projection:**

- Parkville/Platte Woods fill out
- Growth pushes toward Platte City and Kearney

**ST. LOUIS METRO****St. Charles County**

Positive natural change combined with strong immigration makes St. Charles County the fastest growing large suburb in the region.

**Ministry Opportunity:**

- Strong kids/youth ministries
- Bilingual/ESL outreach

**Plant Style:**

Full-scale suburban campus with vibrant children's ministry.

**Warren & Lincoln Counties**

Positive natural population change and housing expansion along I-70 are driving growth in these "next frontier" suburbs.

**Ministry Opportunity:**

- Young families seeking affordability
- Strong neighborhood community feel

**Plant Style:**

Neighborhood-based plant using schools as venues, with emphasis on marriage, parenting, and community events.

**Moscow Mills, MO (Lincoln County)**

- School-based portable venue model
- Marriage/parenting/community ministry focus
- New businesses planned for the area

**Wright City, MO (Warren County)**

- New meat packing facility driving incoming community growth
- Significant workforce and family influx anticipated

**WICHITA METRO**

**Maize, KS — #1 Growth Engine**

Fastest growing city in Kansas at 94.7% growth since 2010. Characterized by young families, excellent schools, and explosive housing development.

**Planting Strategy:**

- Family-centric campus model
- Marriage, parenting, and sports-based outreach

**Andover, KS**

41% growth since 2010, with strong schools and a suburban professional population.

**Planting Strategy:**

Strong worship experience combined with intentional small groups.

**Valley Center, KS**

32% growth driven by NW Wichita spillover.

**Planting Strategy:**

Neighborhood ministry model with emphasis on youth outreach.

**Bel Aire, KS**

31.5% growth since 2010, attracting upwardly mobile families and immigrant households.

**Planting Strategy:**

Multiethnic ministry model.

**Goddard, KS**

3.52% annual growth (2026 projection) with an expanding school district.

**Planting Strategy:**

- Sports outreach
- Strong kids' ministry

## 2. Resource Requirements for New Congregation Development

**A New Start Begins with Exploration.** Once an area is selected, a Synod Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC) Exploration determines vision and viability.

**Resources Required for SAWC Exploration:**

- Exploration Leader stipend
- Programmatic expenses (meals, coffee for one-to-ones)
- Travel expenses
- Coaching (\$100/month)
- Most expenses can be covered by Churchwide grants

**Resources for Launching a New Start.** New starts benefit from strong, visitor-ready ministries from day one—especially for children and youth. Effective marketing, outreach, worship, and administration require staffing, volunteers, and ministry partners.

## Estimated Costs — First Three Years:

Year	Estimated Cost
Year 1	\$388,000
Year 2	\$335,000
Year 3	\$345,000

### Staffing

- Pastor Developer
- Worship Leader
- Children/Youth Staff

### Marketing

- Partnership with Evoke (branding, social media, design)
- Website design and management
- Signage
- Printed materials
- Promotional items (mugs, shirts, etc.)

### Worship

- Facility rental
- Audio/visual equipment
- Instruments
- Equipment trailer
- Worship supplies

### Administration

- Office space
- Computers
- Church management system
- Printing
- Programmatic expenses
- Travel

### 3. Realistic Goal for New Starts (2027)

The Task Force concludes that available synod funds, combined with churchwide grants, support one new ministry start at this time.

#### ★ Recommended First Start: Maize, KS ★

##### Reasons for this Recommendation:

- Designated funds from Peace Lutheran, Newton, KS are available
- Prior contextual research has already been completed
- Identified partners from earlier exploration work are in place

**Explorations Encouraged in Other Tier 1 Areas.** Exploration leaders may be lay or ordained. They will receive training from the Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) and cohort coaching to equip them for this vital work.

### 4. Missional Opportunities & Collaborative Partnerships

The key to new start initiatives is raising up leaders, connectors, and storytellers—both lay and ordained—who are gifted in community listening and faithful sharing of the Gospel.

The Task Force invites:

- Individuals, congregations, and conferences to identify people gifted in community listening and faith sharing
- Consideration of contributions to the New Start Fund as part of legacy planning and estate giving