

Our Church

St. John's Lutheran Church is located in the Southeast Nebraska town of Tecumseh. Our congregation, known for its mission zeal and willingness to serve the Lord, is eagerly anticipating its 125th anniversary celebration in 2010. We currently have 310 baptized and 272 communicant members, with an average worship attendance of 115 people.



Our Plan

The **Fan into Flame** appeal has been a tremendous blessing to our congregation. Pastor Diener was contacted about the opportunity to serve as a pilot congregation. A group of our leaders attended one of the **FANtastic Festivals** which clearly outlined the details of the **Fan into Flame** appeal. This mission opportunity was presented to the Voters' Assembly, which gave unanimous consent for the appeal.

The key to our congregation's ready acceptance and mission zeal for this appeal was the Holy Spirit working through the startling fact that **every minute 83 people die in the world not knowing Jesus Christ**. This message cut to the heart of our congregation and provided them with a sense of urgency found in the heart of Jesus who came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Throughout the appeal, Pastor Diener used various means to highlight the value of every minute in sermons and other communications.

With the materials providing the steps for conducting the appeal and the encouragement and full support of the District, our congregation willingly stepped forward to serve as a pilot congregation. An invitation for a commitment to serve on the **Fan into Flame** planning and implementing committee was placed before the members, with 20 people answering the call to serve. In the course of **ONE** meeting, the appeal plan was chosen (Plan 2 - a group orientated approach with cottage meetings), the suggested goal was set according to the District suggestion of 10% of the budget (\$15,000), and the entire timeline for the ten-week appeal was laid out. The timeline provided a clear structure for both the leaders and the congregation to understand and implement.

One week after the first congregational mailing was sent, the Church Council met to hear more about the appeal from Pastor Diener and were challenged to give their **early gift commitment**. This meeting resulted in eight leaders and their pastor giving early gifts of \$17,000, eclipsing the entire congregation's goal. The Holy Spirit set the hearts of our leaders *Ablaze!*, and this passion set the tone for our entire appeal.

The **Fan into Flame** appeal kickoff was a Friendship Sunday and picnic. Our members, along with many personally invited, currently **unchurched** visitors, heard of the friendship we share in Christ Jesus and the mission appeal that day. Our monthly newsletter, weekly bulletin, and information table overflowed with information about the **Fan into Flame** appeal. Every worship service during the appeal had a **Fan into Flame** "minute" following the sermon to show the **Fan into Flame** video clips, make the campaign announcement provided in the information packet, and provide appeal details. The following week was Testimonial Sunday, where our leaders who gave early gifts shared their faith, their commitment, and the sense of urgency to make a difference through gifts that will provide international, national, district, and local opportunities to share the Good News. These testimonials helped bring this appeal to a personal level for our members.

Our appeal also featured a Mission Festival prior to the cottage meetings. Our cottage meetings were meetings held for a specific portion of the congregation for 30 minutes immediately following the worship services. These meetings were led by Pastor Diener, who answered questions and provided encouragement not to miss the wonderful opportunity our Synod was giving every member to be involved in the mission of the Church. Some members responded immediately with pledges, while others waited until our Commitment Sunday. During the Commitment Sunday worship celebration, all the pledges were dedicated for the Lord's mission work. Our appeal is still ongoing as those who have not participated are being personally contacted.

Our Results

Despite the thought that \$15,000 may be too aggressive a goal for these current economic times, the power of the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of our people to provide a generous response of \$56,270 (375% of our goal), with \$23,360 sent through initial gifts. This amount represents only 38% of our giving units responding. With our ongoing encouragement for further participation, we hope to eclipse four times our goal.

Our Local Mission Outreach Effort

The Voters' Assembly, taking suggestions from the **Fan into Flame** planning and implementing committee and the congregation, decided to divide the use of the 15% net that will be returned from the appeal for support of the St. John's PACK (Planned Acts of Christian Kindness) ministry, which intentionally shares the Gospel every month in our community and welcomes visitors into the area, while the other half will go toward the formation of the St. John's Assistance Fund to respond to the needs of our community with financial support and the Gospel.

Dear Fellow Mission Partners in the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

We are truly blessed to have a Synod and District that is *Ablaze!* for mission and has such Spirit-filled leaders to provide the opportunity for every congregation and member to make a difference with the Gospel through international, national, district, and local mission support. I thank God that I serve the Lord in a congregation that understands and supports mission work. Prior to the ***Fan into Flame*** appeal, my congregation eagerly supported LCMS World Mission projects, the broadcasting of the Lutheran Hour world-wide, global care packages, support of preparation of professional church workers, Jamaica and Honduras ministries, and various other mission opportunities through the LWML and LLL. But the unique quality of the ***Fan into Flame*** appeal was the opportunity to support mission work in "Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Throughout the ***Fan into Flame*** appeal, serving as a pilot congregation, I was able to place before God's people the opportunity to make a difference in lowering the number of people who die every minute without a saving relationship in Jesus Christ, along with the opportunity to set a challenge before other congregations to set the bar high. The power of God's Word and the Holy Spirit moved the people to respond. Although the exceedingly generous response of the St. John's people far eclipsed their initial goal (by almost 400%), I couldn't help but feel that we have been blessed by God's generosity to accomplish even more. We have been praying for greater participation in our own congregation. In like fashion, we have been praying for greater participation in our own circuit and throughout the Nebraska District.

The Nebraska District has many wonderful leaders who stand more than willing to help your congregation participate in the ***Fan into Flame*** appeal. I would be more than willing to speak with any congregation or group of leaders about the blessings that God has provided my congregation through the ***Fan into Flame Ablaze!*** appeal. We are excited about the work of the 15% net that will be returned to our congregation to further the efforts of our PACK (Planned Acts of Christian Kindness) ministry and the formation of a new Assistance Fund to meet the ever increasing needs of our community.

On a personal level, the statistic that has driven me to my knees in repentance and daily inspires me to share the urgent message to get involved is the fact that 83 people die every minute who do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. And these are not 83 people "out there somewhere" that we don't know, but the 83 includes people in our own community. I tried to convey this alarming truth in a variety of ways, but it always came back to the passage from **Romans 10:13-14 which says, "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"** The goal is to reach 100 million people with the Gospel message by 2017, and I pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit, many of the 100 million will come to believe in Jesus Christ and have life in His name.

During the cottage meetings, I shared one of the greatest disasters in history which took place in 1271. Nichelo and Matteo Polo (the father and uncle of Marco Polo) were visiting Kubla Kahn, ruler of all of China, all of India, and all of the East. He was attracted to the story of Christianity as Nichelo and Matteo told it to him. And Kubla Khan said to them, "You shall go to your high priest and tell him on my behalf to send me 100 men skilled in your religion and I shall be baptized, and when I am baptized all my barons and great men will be baptized and their subjects will receive baptism too, and so there will be more Christians here than there is in any part of the world." So Nichelo and Matteo went to the Pope in the Vatican, but he responded that "those barbarians don't deserve the Gospel." Nothing was done for 30 years, and then only 2 or 3 were sent. As a result of this delay, Buddhist monks, who were pleased to come, converted the largest empire history has ever known - from China to the Middle East and Europe - to Buddhism. The world is ripe for a harvest now but the laborers are few. We can do something about that - and not miss this opportunity. ***Fan into Flame*** gives us the opportunity to directly support mission work all around the world, including our own community.

May God bless your congregation's prayerful consideration to participate in this life-changing and life-giving mission opportunity. Your congregation will surprise and delight you with their support - not because of your efforts - but because the Holy Spirit will bless it beyond even your highest expectations. If you want to know the difference the Spirit makes, speak to the people of St. John's, Tecumseh, and they will share with you the joy of responding to the challenge of the ***Fan into Flame*** appeal.

Working Together in God's Kingdom,

Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20
St. John's, Tecumseh