Church Multiplication Mission and Vision; 2/26

At the core of Woodlands Church is a deep desire to help people faithfully follow Jesus. Healthy churches are God's primary vehicle for doing just that - making disciples and bringing the gospel to communities. Central Wisconsin is full of people who need to grow in their relationship with God, and it's through local churches that God will win hearts, grow disciples, draw families to health, and transform eternities. Central Wisconsin needs more healthy churches, not simply a larger Woodlands Church.

Mission

To multiply healthy churches throughout central Wisconsin, helping people faithfully follow Jesus.

Vision

By God's grace and for the sake of the gospel, we will develop a model of healthy church multiplication that mobilizes our congregation toward outreach and evangelism and establishes a network of five new healthy church communities throughout central Wisconsin by 2036.

The Value: Mobilizing the church, Multiplying churches

We believe the value of this mission and vision is incredibly high, both for Woodlands itself and also for the mission of God in central Wisconsin. More than a quarter million people live within a 50 mile radius of Plover - these are people in desperate need of the gospel. This vision mobilizes Woodlands and multiplies gospel ministry.

For Woodlands, pursuing this vision would energize and excite a broad demographic of the congregation, guarding against falling into complacency or consumeristic Christianity. Furthermore, it models faithful dependence on God as we trust Him to do far more than we imagine or think. It also engages our congregation in new ways: while we currently have hundreds volunteering, this multiplies serving opportunities and adds new types of opportunities, allowing people to give and use their gifts towards Kingdom work in ways we haven't before provided. And, it allows us to explore new and unique partnerships with localities, individuals, and even businesses, and to further develop a model of church multiplication that can then be shared with other churches throughout the EFCA.

But so much more than just the impact on Woodlands, this vision has dramatic impact for Central Wisconsin. It multiplies thriving churches, which in turn multiplies faithful followers of Jesus, affecting their homes, workplaces, and communities. More healthy churches throughout local communities, working together for the sake of the gospel, deepens the faithfulness of more people, which is our Matthew 28 commission.

By adding additional healthy churches throughout Central Wisconsin, we will remove barriers that some might feel toward Jesus. This includes people who simply don't prefer Woodlands; by multiplying churches, we leverage preference as an opportunity to invite people to Jesus, rather than allowing it to be a barrier. Importantly, it places local churches closer to local people, removing distance and commutes from ministry engagement. And it allows local churches to serve local communities in more specific ways. Finally, by sending our congregation to their local communities, we open seats in Plover for our growing congregation.

The Cost: A Heavy Investment and a Fierce Focus

At the same time, the cost for this would be high, and we don't want to undercount or under-acknowledge that. To begin this initiative without the willingness to pay the true cost would be in itself costly. This would include a significant investment of time, effort, and finances from both the staff and the congregation. Because we have been internally or globally-outreach focused for the past half decade or more, our focus would need to move to a 'local outreach multiplication mindset.' This might require other current high-investment, all-church initiatives to reevaluate their purposes. In particular, higher congregational cost events like Trunk-or-Treat, Spring into Action, or global short term trips would need to include strategic investments in the communities in which we're seeking to launch. These are healthy elements of who Woodlands is, but they need to be integrated into our mission of multiplication. Where staff or the congregation aren't willing to accept those prioritizations, this initiative could cause frustration and friction.

Perhaps most striking is a high additional weight placed on current staff, especially in the area of administration, finance, and human resources. The accounting, database, safety, communication, and administrative logistics of each campus adds complexity and, in some cases, greatly expands workloads. Each ministry at Woodlands would feel the cost of multiplication, whether through sending people or through increasing tasks or complexity. The thought that we could add campuses or support networked churches without expanding our current staff team would be shortsighted. There is a significant workload, management, and financial cost to this mission and vision.

There is also the concern regarding the communication and 'buy in' of the whole congregation. We readily acknowledge not everyone will be energized, excited, or in agreement with a vision for multiplication. This can increase a need for social navigation and could also result in people leaving who don't agree with this vision.

Conclusion

We need to properly count the cost. It could be heavy. But the value is worth it - and there is a cost to not pursuing this vision as well, whether the space constraints that a constantly growing church faces, the lack of congregational mobilization or an increasingly inward focus, or the lower engagement from those who travel to attend services. We believe Woodlands should eagerly chase this mission and vision.