

Why Plant Another Church in Sterling?

Evangelical Free Church of Mt. Morris | July 24, 2016

We are exploring the possibility of planting a new church out of EFCMM: sending a small portion of our congregation to start a whole new body of believers in a different community. This idea has raised many questions, and we hope to answer a few more today.

Why plant new churches when there are enough of them already?

In short, church planting is the best way to reach the lost and renew the Church.

From “Why Plant Churches?” by Tim Keller (copies available or find it on the web):

The normal response to discussions about church planting is something like this.

- “We already have plenty of churches that have lots and lots of room for all the new people who have come to the area. Let’s get *them* filled before we start building any new ones.”
- “Every church in this community used to be more full than it is now. The churchgoing public is a shrinking pie. A new church here will just take people from churches that are already hurting and will weaken everyone.”
- “Help the churches that are struggling first. A new church doesn’t help the existing ones that are just keeping their noses above water. We need *better* churches, not more churches.”

We plant churches because we want to be true to the Great Commission.

New churches best reach new generations, new residents, and new people groups.
New churches best reach the unchurched—period.

But what about all the existing churches that need help?

We plant churches because we want to continually renew the whole body of Christ.

New churches bring new ideas to the whole body.
New churches are one of the best places to identify strong leaders for the whole body.
New churches challenge other churches to self-examination.
New churches may be an “evangelistic feeder” for a whole community.

We plant churches as an exercise in kingdom-mindedness.

“New churches, as we have seen, draw most of their new members (up to 80%) from the ranks of the unchurched, but they *will* always attract some people out of existing churches. That is inevitable. At this point, the existing churches, in a sense, have a question posed to them: “Are we going to rejoice in the 80 percent—the new people the kingdom has gained through this new church—or are we going to bemoan the situation and resent the three families we lost to it?” Our attitude to new church development is a test of whether our mindset is geared to our own institutional turf or to the overall health and prosperity of the kingdom of God in the city.”

So, while there would be a cost to planting a new church, we believe the gains—including the revitalization of the sending church and other churches—are worth the cost.

Are there other good churches in Sterling?

Out of around 50 churches in Sterling / Rock Falls, the vast majority are not conservative, evangelical churches. These include dozens of Catholic or mainline liberal Protestant churches, and some fundamentalist ones. There are few churches that may be solid, healthy, Bible-believing, gospel-preaching churches, and some of these differ from us in our distinctives: robust theology, expository preaching, congregationalism, etc.

Also, while we do not simply want to further our denominational “brand,” we do think the EFCA is a healthy fellowship of churches that would do well to be represented in the Sterling / Rock Falls area. Ultimately, we would hope to complement, not compete with other gospel-preaching churches in the area.

If there was a good church like ours in Sterling, why wouldn't we send the Hiltys there?

Yes, it would be simpler to send them to another established church. But as Keller argues, there are real needs for more good churches. His points are, in general, widely accepted, as evidenced by the many evangelical denominations and church planting networks that are aggressively pursuing church planting. Is this our opportunity to join this missionary effort?

Why would we plant a church, with all that involves, for just one family?

First, let us be clear that Tim & Andrea Hilty did not ask us to do this for them. This is not about their convenience, or their lack of commitment to EFCMM. From the beginning, they have said they plan to continue to come to Mt. Morris if we decide against a plant. *This is about seeing a new, healthy church like EFCMM started near where they live in order to better reach the people in that area.* In other words, this is not for the Hiltys. This is for Sterling.

Tim & Andrea are still thinking like missionaries, willing to play a significant role in helping to see a new church started in a needy place. They approached the elders of EFCMM, not to request a church of their own, but because they see Sterling as a mission field and believe a healthy church like ours is the best mother to birth a strong new church. They wanted to show the respect of asking for our blessing, and they desire a partnership in this venture.

Fundamentally, the elders see this as an opportunity. So, yes, it's not something we have to do, and there could be simpler, easier options... that offer fewer returns, make less impact. BUT, *if* we believe that evangelism is our mandate, churches are necessary for disciples, and church planting is strategic for reaching the lost and renewing the Church, *then* we start looking at whether we have the resources to take on this project and the willingness to do the work.

We agree that a plant would be more feasible if there were more families at EFCMM from Sterling, but if that were the case, more of us would be worried about sending away *too many* people. One advantage we have is that some of our people have many contacts in that area, so while there is not a ready-made group, there is a vision of a familiar field ready for harvest.

Are there others who have expressed interest in being a part of the core group?

Wil & Melissa Clark, who have two young daughters, have said they would like to participate. They currently live in Dixon, but Wil works in Sterling. Eric & Deb Forman from Dixon are interested as well. If you add a church planting pastor and family, that makes four households before doing any further recruiting from EFCMM or the Sterling area.