

A Vision for Church Planting from EFCMM

What is church planting?

Church planting is the work of starting new churches in places where there are too few evangelical churches to reach the lost and provide fellowship for believers. A missionary and/or a group of Christians can start a new church, but sometimes a healthy, established congregation nearby is the catalyst, sending some of their own people and resources as the seed. It is this model of church multiplication that we are considering.

Why are we exploring the possibility of church planting?

Our Calling – We are a people whom God has called by the gospel and commissioned for gospel ministry. While our first responsibility is to reach the lost in our home community, we are also committed to the evangelization of our region, our nation, and the world. We are faithful servants when we steward the resources God gives us to further his glory through the message of Jesus Christ.

Our History – EFCMM was started in 1956 by a group of believers in Mt. Morris with significant assistance from the First Evangelical Free Church of Rockford. First Free sent elders, music leaders, and others week by week to help our church become established. In the years since our founding we have supported many foreign missionaries, with church planting as a priority.

Our Partnership – The Evangelical Free Church of America strongly encourages the congregations in its fellowship to plant other churches. Our EFCA Great Lakes District offers consultation and support for these projects. The research and experience of these and many other evangelical organizations demonstrate that church planting is the best way to reach the lost and renew existing congregations.

Our Health – While our congregation represents many communities, there is a strong core from the village of Mt. Morris where we meet for worship. We have seen many visitors in the past few years and have been blessed with growth in both regular attendance and weekly offerings. Some newer members have gifts and experience that could be reinvested in a new church.

Where would we consider planting a new church?

Though we would love to see a healthy evangelical church in every town in northern Illinois, we think it best not to try to plant in a community immediately neighboring Mt. Morris. In 2005, our church decided against planting a church in Dixon out of concern for the health of EFCMM. It seemed that too many of our people were from Dixon—several having significant roles in various ministries—which would make it harder for EFCMM to recover quickly.

In January of this year, Tim and Andrea Hilty asked our elders whether EFCMM would consider planting a church in Sterling, where they live. This community is further from Mt. Morris than Dixon, but it is still close enough that an effective partnership is possible between EFCMM and a church plant. The Sterling / Rock Falls area is the largest population center in northwest Illinois without an EFCA church.

How would we do church planting in our situation?

Core Group – We would develop a core group of people to be the start of the new church. This could include some who would be permanent members of the new congregation, while others may commit to one or two years of participation before returning to EFCMM. As recommended by the director of church planting for the EFCA Great Lakes District, we would send no more than 10% of EFCMM's body to the plant, and no more than two current elders.

Lead Planter – If the plant is approved, we would begin a search for someone who could serve as the lead planter and first pastor of the new church. Our first concern is that he would share our core beliefs and have a similar philosophy of ministry, though there would need to be some freedom for the church plant to have its own identity and strategy for reaching its community. This pastor needs to have gifts that would allow him to help develop the core group from EFCMM and start a new work in the Sterling area.

Financial Investment – Funding for church plants usually comes from the following sources:

- Sending Church: regular budget, special offerings
- Support Raising: lead planter raises support from wider network of individuals/churches
- Employment: lead planter may have a part-time job while new church is small
- Core Group: once the church starts to meet, its offerings go to the plant

In the role of the sending church, we believe we can commit to raising half of the planter's salary for up to two years from special offerings, plus provide some monies for operating expenses from our missions budget.

Leadership – We would assign a few of our elders who would be staying in Mt. Morris to provide oversight along with the Lead Planter and some members of the core group. This would help with direction during the first year or two, or until the plant has its own Council of Elders.

Starting Small – Depending on the size of the core group, they might begin meeting as an evening home Bible study, while still attending EFCMM on Sunday mornings. When they outgrow this stage or are ready to hold Sunday services, they may look at suitable spaces to rent in Sterling.

When would a church be planted?

Congregational Approval – The elders will make a church planting proposal to the members of EFCMM in September of 2016.

Lead Planter Search – If the elders' proposal is approved, the search for a lead planter will begin immediately. It is hoped that a planter could be found during the fall and winter months.

Core Group Development – If a planter is in place by spring, 2017, he can develop the core group through the spring and summer. They may begin to hold small group meetings at any time during this period.

Launch – In the fall of 2017, the core group may still be early in small group meetings, or they may be anticipating the start of Sunday morning worship services in the very near future.

All of these dates are very flexible, and while this means we are not in any hurry, we would like to turn this around in a year after making the decision to approve, if possible.