



New Churches

for New People

Bishop Christian Alsted on church-planting:

"I consider relearning to create new faith communities key to the growth and the development of the United Methodist Church in the Nordic and Baltic region. "Faith communities" understood as made up by two interacting components: a worship experience and a discipleship system. The focus of the annual conferences will be now on planting new churches. "



Pray for our current and future church-plants, also for the revitalization of old churches! Join our network of intercessors by contacting Camilla Klockars. Prayer requests and updates by e-mail on a regular basis.

Some of the Baltic church-planters in Riga, February 2011.



New faith communities with new people

New churches are being planted within the episcopal area. Several teams, more than 40 people, are trained this year. The two Danish teams meet in Denmark, the Swedish, Finnish (S) and Baltic teams in Riga, Latvia. The training is called M4 and stands for Master, Mission, Multiplication and Movement. A few church-planting coaches get their training at the same time. We also have some church-plants that don't take part in M4: two in Finland (F) and one church that was planted in Sweden 2010.

The first M4 weekend in Riga was held 18-19.2 2011. Some of the participants summarize their experiences from the weekend as follows:

- I liked that the conference had not mere lectures but also group discussion times. It is strange, but it seems that we had to drive all the way to Riga just to speak out some things to each other, like „where are we“, „what are we to do for the Lord“ and „what is the exact mission for all of us, individually“, says Taavet from Estonia.

- For me, M4 in February was a great experience, says Vivita from Latvia. I got new ideas for the next steps in team-building. I also met new friends from other churches, not just Methodists. For me, these two days was a great time and it was wonderful to see that God can unite all confessions like one family.

- For me it was amazing that, despite the huge amount of information, there was room for the Holy Spirit to move freely among the people and touch their lives. I personally felt that God corrected a few things in my heart, at least, says Minna, from Finland.



M4 2011

May 13-14
September 23-24
November 25-26

Don't miss **School of Congregational Development** (Nordic languages) August 31-September 4 2011 in Gothenburg, Sweden. Church-planting track with Öivind Augland and Camilla Klockars.



Challenges in Lithuania

District Superintendent William Lovelace is taking part in M4 together with a group from Lithuania. Read what he shares about current challenges in the country:



- All of our team agreed that it was very good that the Riga M4 focused on broad principles rather than a step-by-step program which allows for adaptation to the local environment. The mix of worship, prayer and instruction was also seen as a plus by our team members. One of our team members commented that it was great to have a Northern European perspective, previously they had input only from American evangelicals on church planting, which of course, doesn't always fit exactly in the context here.

- One of our current challenges is revitalizing existing churches, perhaps using church planting principles. Hearing about examples, f.ex. from Finland, is helpful. Most of the revitalization stories I hear focus on the church becoming an international church among immigrants. Are there other examples which include revitalization to churches which consist mostly of a countries "native" population?

- Another big challenge is the current demographics. Lithuanians are moving to big cities where jobs exist, especially young people. Those young people who have the capabilities and opportunities are taking advantage of the Lithuania's EU membership to emigrate to other EU countries where salaries are 2-4 times bigger. When the UMC in Lithuania was re-started 15 years ago, we re-started churches (and built buildings) in the places where Methodist churches had existed before WWII. But the population has shifted and in the small towns where we have churches people are moving out leaving the elderly or other disadvantaged who cannot leave. Another large exodus may occur when Germany loosens its labor laws next year. Our challenge is how to minister and revitalize churches in areas where the population is poor and elderly. But, it is also an opportunity to plant churches in the places where people are now.

- And the final challenge I will mention is how to move a church which is heavily dependent on overseas (American and Norwegian) churches to pay even the basic necessities to a church which is self-sufficient. Our average church spends 10x more than it receives in offerings. The above mentioned demographics make this harder.

Why not in your own home?

We easily think that we need so much (that we usually don't have) in order to start a new church. We talk about funding, a building, a pastor. The list can be made long. In the worst case it can mislead us. What did the disciples of Jesus start with? Why would we need to do it differently? The simple question "What is a church", can help us get right from the beginning. "Church" is not a building, it is not religious activities and it is nothing a pastor can do or be alone. The Greek word "ekklesia" (church) stands for "those that have been called out". Church, in other words, is a *network of people* that have been touched by the gospel.

I think we can minimize the conditions and demands radically and put together some small steps for church-planting. Feel free to adapt them to your own context.

1. **Start with prayer.** Prayer is the engine and the power that gives birth to every new thing. We can't start a church in our own strength, nor can we make people surrender to God. Only He can. Our part is to ask Him to do it. Why not start to meet on a regular basis with a few Christians from your neighborhood? Pray for the people living there. Maybe God shows you some that you should pray for in a special way and focus on?
2. **Invite those you have prayed for to your home for dinner**, a tea-party, a BBQ, a children's party - any kind of get-together where you can have fun and share life. Make it a pot-luck (all bring something to eat), if you want. Do it many times, learn to know the people and be interested in their lives and everyday situations. Be open with your own life and personal challenges. What does it mean to you to have God in your life? *Pray together* in a natural way. Avoid being too formal or complicated. Our own example forms the culture of the new group. If we are natural, open and simple in our faith, this will also be the fruit of our ministry. If we get stiff, unnatural and formal, people will quickly pick it up and become and expect the same.
3. **If people get interested in knowing more** about Christian faith, give them an introduction. Maybe an Alpha-course, maybe you make an own "course" with the first steps in faith? Lots of material is available.
4. Give people an opportunity to **make a personal decision** to follow Jesus. This is very important. Wesley said: "All men need to be saved; all men can be saved; all men can know they are saved; all men can be saved to the uttermost".
5. Help people **grow in faith**. Alpha (or something similar) is just the beginning. How can you help people become disciples of Jesus that also want to open their homes for new people? *Model the right thing from the beginning*. Spiritual equipment is the key-word. Teach people through your own example. We do not want them to only grow big heads, we want them to live a life that glorifies God and brings more people to Him.
6. **Split the group in two** or open new homes when the work grows too big. Fellowship in a home often feels much more "tight" than fellowship in a church-building (unless there are very many in a church). Meeting in homes is therefore no bad option at all (and much less costly!) – especially not in the beginning. Camilla Klockars.

