

Ripe Harvest: Church Planters Target I-29 Corridor

In the Upper Midwest, people are spread few and far between. It's also one of the least-evangelized areas of the country.

Consequently, Christian leaders are trying a new initiative to spread the gospel there.

The I-29 corridor runs north and south through several states in the Upper Midwest, all the way from Kansas City, Mo., to the Canadian border.

The route also runs through what Southern Baptist leaders see as a ripe mission field.

Leo Endel, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, told CBN News that research led to a vision for **evangelism**.

"We began to realize that it wasn't just that Southern Baptists weren't there. Evangelicals at large were under-represented," he said. "There are many evangelical churches in these communities, but they're in much smaller numbers than in other places in the United States."

Heartland Interstate Strategy

As a result, the North American Mission Board, along with other partners, will launch the Heartland Interstate Strategy this year.

Its goal: Strengthen existing churches and plant new ones across the region over the next four years.

"I think people in the Upper Midwest are like people anywhere," Endel said. "They're trying to make sense out of life. They're struggling through with the regular struggles we

all have, like making ends meet and trying to find our way.”

The Heartland Interstate Strategy will focus on planting churches in seven strategic cities along the I-29 corridor.

Once the churches are established, they plan to spread the gospel east and west and into more remote regions.

“We wondered if we could take the strength of Missouri, particularly, and come straight up I-29 into the major cities: St Joseph, Omaha, Sioux City, Sioux Falls, Fargo, Grand Forks, and then all the way into Winnipeg,” Endel said.

Church planter Jonathan Land recently relocated to Sioux Falls, S.D., with his wife and two girls.

In addition to being a strategic target, Sioux Falls is also the biggest city in the Dakotas.

“We made an intentional effort to have volunteer teams to help us canvass areas, knocked on doors, introduced ourselves as a church and said this is who we are. We love this city; we’re excited to be here and we want to bless you,” Land said.

Land told CBN News his vision for reaching the Upper Midwest comes straight from the Bible.

“Our passion came from the book of Acts, and we wanted to be a part of a biblical church. We wanted to see the Gospel go out in an area that had been impervious to it or completely unaffected by it,” Land explained.

Prayer Is Key

Mark Elliott, who helps in the overall planting strategy, said the key for a strong church foundation always begins with prayer.

“The critical No. 1 piece is pray for the spiritual needs in the area, pray the Lord would raise up leaders for the harvest

and from the harvest," Elliott said.

While the Heartland Interstate Strategy is still in the beginning stages, church leaders hope a major push planned for the fall could ultimately help fulfill the Great Commission.

"We see our role here in Sioux Falls as just one little piece of this amazing thing that God has been doing among the nations," Land said. "His glory is going to be known among everyone."