

THE NEW CHURCH MINISTRY TEAM

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New Church Ministry is pleased to report to the General Board on behalf of the Disciples New Church Movement. Since 2001, Disciples have celebrated the start of more than 600 new and affiliating congregations, bringing more than 40,000 new participants to the Disciples movement. This has happened through outstanding partnership across the entire church with every general unit and region.

What is the state of the mission of New Church Ministry in relation to the mission of the whole church?

Our denomination has accepted the mission, "To be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from our doorsteps 'to the ends of the earth.'" The New Church movement emulates this mission in its everyday acts. New congregations account for most additions to the Christian Church, which means they are heavily engaged in sharing the good news. More than 75 percent of the participants in new Disciple congregations report that their new congregation is their first church in their adult life.

Since the last General Assembly, Disciples have welcomed more than 100 new congregations with a continued sustainable rate of 80 percent. Thirty percent of these new congregations are affiliations; the vast majority of those affiliating were independent congregations under two years of age.

New Church Ministry provides development opportunities that lead to successful church planting. Included in these opportunities this past year was the Super Peer Group, which assembled more than 100 planters at Bethany W. Virginia to explore our Disciples heritage. This year, we welcomed Dr. Carlos Cardosa from Columbia Seminary, who explored Latino theology and its current impact on church planting.

In September and February, New Church Ministry trained 120 New Church planters, core team leaders, and a few regional representatives and redevelopment pastors. This training focused on the early foundational work of congregational identity and leader development within that new church. Planters who have attended other para-church training events have all enthusiastically stated that the Disciples new church trainings are superior to other events.

On January 28-30, the long awaited Regional Partner Summit was held in Indianapolis. Despite a nearly historic snowfall, 21 regional and area ministers attended the conference, along with our racial/ethnic leaders and a number of guests, who were invited by the New Church Ministry Team.

The focus of our conversation was "Best Practices for Supporting New Church Plants." We discussed the many different ways that congregations come into being, and the prospective roles of New Church Ministry and regional or area leaders.

The conversations raised numerous issues that are currently hampering the new church movement. Recognizing we could not solve everything, five areas of concern surfaced as areas where we need more conversation. These areas include:

- 1) How can we attract qualified new church planters for this ministry? (We currently have 18 funded positions with no appropriate matches.)
- 2) How can we more adequately fund church planting and the structures needed to support robust planting so that we can increase the quality of our church plants?
- 3) What strategies can we employ to encourage existing congregations to plant daughter churches?
- 4) How can we best improve the "sponsor representative" relationship in the accountability triangle (the coach/Barnabas, planter, sponsor representative), so there is more communication with the region?
- 5) What can we suggest to all partners as the best practices for the affiliation process? (As a denomination we currently identified more than 50 processes that vary widely.)

Additionally, new congregations are involved in loving and serving. New churches are committed to being global congregations, and countless new church pastors have traveled abroad on global mission trips to witness our mission overseas. Disciples new churches support the Disciples Mission Fund, and while it is impossible to track their giving in the initial years, we know that congregations established over the past 20 years support the Mission Fund at a disproportionately high level.

Many of our new congregations are serving first generation immigrant populations. These congregations represent the changing face of the United States, and the new congregations are moving the Disciples

towards more diversity. Given our current trajectory, 40 percent of all Disciple congregations will have started in the past 20 years. Of those congregations, 80 percent are comprised of people of color.

Please comment on NCM's work in regard to the four mission priorities of New Church, Transformation, Leadership Development and Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism and the mission imperative of strengthening congregational life for mission.

While New Church Ministry's focus is on establishing 1,000 new congregations by 2020, this ministry spills into all four aspects of the 2020 vision. For example, it is impossible to plant congregations without highly trained and coached church planters, which has engaged our mission in working in leader development. New churches are sending growing numbers of people to seminary. New congregations encourage new ways of approaching our context of ministry, which has impacted the transformational process of our denomination as well. The New Beginnings process has led more than 100 existing congregations to view their context as new church planters view them and has provided ideas from church-planting efforts.

New Church Ministry also deals regularly with the anti-racist/pro-reconciling vision. Church planters worked with the Council on Christian Unity in a recent consultation on the topic. Church planters learn in multi-cultural settings and are starting as anti-racist congregations. In the spirit of becoming an anti-racist church, we are committed to multi-lingual trainings, which are challenging to provide.

This document does not adequately report the total engagement of church planting within the Christian Church. Nor does it capture the struggles and challenges our planters face on a daily basis as they persevere in the very difficult task of church planting.

We have been blessed by the commitment of an effective group of dedicated individuals, who love being Disciples. Working together towards serving the mission of Christ, their contributions to this movement add to our total mission as Disciples.

Disciples should not be lulled into a belief that we adequately fund this vision. Our funding for new congregations has not increased in the past eight years, despite demonstrated success and rapid growth. Much of the fruit from this movement is coming from the commitment of planters who come forward at great personal sacrifice and primarily fund their own projects. And, while we have planted more congregations than any previous decade, we still have four states and 25 metropolitan areas that do not have a single Disciple congregation. In the past 20 years, all but five Disciples regions have declined in worship attendance despite rapid population growth; only regions that are engaged in robust church planting are showing gains.

We believe that Disciples are uniquely positioned for growth in this post-modern age. We are a "Church whose time has come," and we see it emerging in this movement. We thank the General Board for its support of this vision and pray your continued support in encouraging the entire church to achieve this vision.