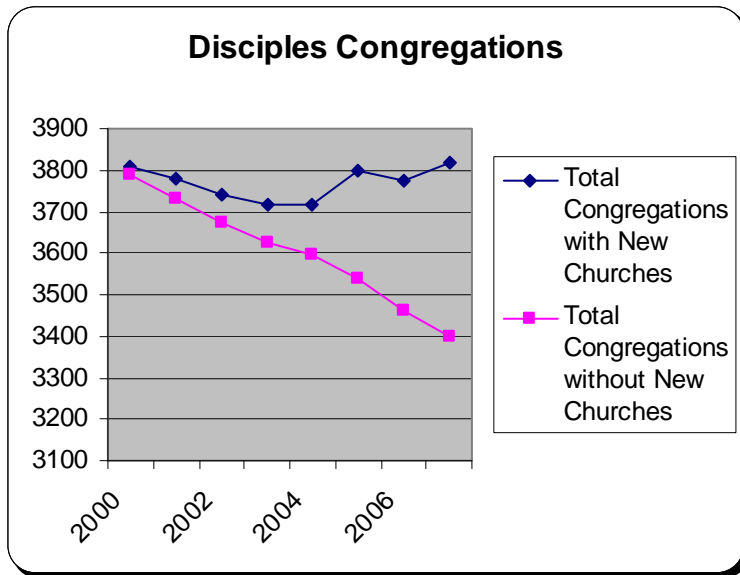


**Report to the General Board
New Church Ministry
March, 2008**

1. What are your long-range planning goals and how are they integrated into the mission and vision of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)?

In 2000, the Disciples of Christ adopted a goal of launching 1,000 new congregations by 2020. Today, we are 540 congregations closer toward achieving that goal making this our greatest decade of growth as a denomination. New Church Ministry, which is housed at Church Extension, is organized to resource our denomination for this goal, and is pleased to make this report.

Last year, Disciples set a new record with 107 new congregations in a single year. This is more growth than most decades since 1920. Unlike our Ecumenical partners, our church is showing a net gain in congregations.



2. Knowing that the current priorities of the church are to start new congregations, transform existing congregations for mission, nurture leadership for these new and renewed congregations, and become an anti-racist/pro-reconciling church, what is the role of your ministry in fulfilling any of these priorities?

With the infrastructure we have in place, Disciples have an 85% sustainability level in new congregations, meaning we are having a net gain in total Disciples congregations. We are also approaching the 3% growth rate (our goal for 2011). These new congregations represent a significant variety in culture, ethnicity, mission and style of worship. While we are ahead of the curve in terms of time, we have yet to achieve growth needed in terms of new churches planted and fostered directly by existing congregations.

This leads us to the fact that the 540 new congregations outpace the 3700 existing congregations in net gains of baptisms and additions.

We are thrilled to report that in February, we had our largest initial training class, with more than 40 new projects coming on line in the near future. This group of 100 planters, core team members and coaches engaged in one of two initial trainings this year, and represent 4 different languages. We also have a wait

list of participants we could not accommodate in this event. Our September training already has 12 registrations.

3. In what ways are you partnering with other expressions of the Church and with other general ministries?

New congregations are making a difference in terms of their support for the Disciples Mission Fund and in the vitality of the Disciples over all. According to the report from CFC presented at the 2006 General Assembly, new congregations have much to do with the increase we have seen in the Disciples Mission Fund.

Despite remarkable achievement, the Pentecost Offering has yet to grab the imagination of our congregations. This past year there was another small decrease in congregational support of this offering. To date, slightly fewer than half of all Disciples congregations participate in this annual offering that divides support between the Regions and New Church Ministry.

Denominational support for new congregations is approximately \$3000 per congregation per year from both Regions and New Church Ministry. This is well below the average of our ecumenical partners who spend more than \$100,000 per congregation per year.

The Pentecost Offering only provides one-third of all support for New Church Ministry, which receives financial support from the Lilly Endowment and from Church Extension. While the portfolio of new churches is growing at a high rate, we are basically funding this ministry on less money than was available 5 years ago. As you can imagine, this is creating stress, as our inventory of new congregations is larger in number than the number of congregations in our largest Disciples region.

4. How has your ministry served to strengthen congregations for mission?

New congregations are bringing new energy and new challenges to our church. We are grateful for the growing number of commissioned ministers who are working in the church, and for the way in which our regional partners are engaging and training them in ministry. We are also grateful to see the many ways in which groups of congregations are starting to encounter new churches, and make them a part of regional and denominational life. Our planters felt welcomed and inspired at the last General Assembly and it is gratifying to see the way in which they value aspects of our church that many of us take for granted.

Rick Morse
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