

**NO. 0905**  
**Board of Church Extension**  
**of Disciples of Christ**  
**dba Church Extension**

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*Called by God, Church Extension, together with our investors and partners, offers mission-driven capital planning and funding services to Disciples of Christ congregations in the context of their culture and stage of life.*

The year 2008 marked 125 years of service for Church Extension to provide for the capital planning and funding needs of new and established Disciples of Christ congregations. In 1883, when the Cincinnati General Christian Missionary Convention named the need to provide for the building of houses of worship, Christian Church congregations stepped up to donate hundreds of dollars to fund much needed loans to emerging frontier ministries. In the 1950s, individuals, churches and institutions expanded these loan possibilities by investing with Church Extension, who used these investments to fund loans for property purchase, new construction and remodeling for Stone-Campbell congregations. By 1969, following Restructure, the General Board asked Church Extension and the Division of Homeland Ministries to lead out on a new initiative for starting new congregations, assigning these two ministries to work closely with regions in administrative oversight of the initiative. Again, in 1985 and in 2000, the General Board and General Assembly assigned priorities related to new church advancement to Church Extension's administrative oversight. For 125 years, Church Extension has sought to "extend the witness" of Disciples local mission by helping new and established congregations build on that intersection between ministry dreams and building needs.

First and foremost, celebrating 125 years of ministry means the celebration of partnerships with the regions, general ministries, constituency groups, investors and donors, who make new church establishment, capital planning and loan services possible. It is the Church Extension directors' and staff's distinct honor to facilitate these services on behalf of the larger church. May God bless our future together, even as congregations have been blessed these last 125 years.

**What is the state of the mission of Church Extension in relation to the mission of the whole church?**

In 2008, Church Extension began an ambitious effort to attempt to understand the unique circumstances confronting our congregations as they seek to establish and house ministry into the future. Within our mission and with financial prudence, we set before us the hard task of seeking to serve congregations not easily served by other institutions, even as we strive to meet the needs of churches that could more easily attain capital funding from other lending institutions. In order to accomplish this task, we believe that we have to do two basic things: 1) ensure that our services are multiple in approach so that they can meet the distinct needs of diverse communities, and 2) raise net assets by increasing CE's donor base in order to continue to make available future low-interest funds and low-cost services to congregations. In 2008, CE piloted and launched new services, experienced very strong donor support, and conducted more than 700 consultations with Disciples new, affiliating and long-time congregations. CE financials will show that we also had positive operational results.

Yet, we faced and continue to try to partner to confront deep missional problems for congregations across the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. These issues primarily fall into three categories:

- The state of the economy

Some congregations, especially hard hit by the unemployment of congregants and the loss of community industry, have found it difficult to raise or sustain giving for capital projects. Loan delinquency rates for congregations making payments on existing loans are higher than normal or acceptable. Church Extension staff continue to work with congregations, on a case by case basis, to create new funding plans to alleviate shortfalls.

- High costs for new construction

Costs per square foot for new construction have doubled over the last decade, making it increasingly difficult for new congregations to consider building. In addition, many of our newer congregations are located in places where rental property is extremely costly. Estimates now suggest that most new congregations are having to wait at least 10 years before acquiring permanent facilities—nearly twice the time needed a decade ago. The challenge for Church Extension staff and directors and the denomination as a whole is to identify better options for sharing space, lower cost options for facility acquisition, and new fund raising models to help meet the housing needs of today's generation of emerging congregations.

- High utilities costs and facilities that are larger than congregations can support

By Yearbook statistics, 63 percent of churches reporting have seen declines in worship attendance, participating membership and total giving for 20 years or more. Most of these congregations have little building debt, but increased operational costs to maintain, heat and cool these facilities. In addition, nearly all of these congregations have much more space than they need or that they can support through

annual offering. The result is that most of these congregations are spending inordinate percentages of their budgets on building costs at the expense of their program and mission budgets. In a recent study of 100 of these congregations, more than half of them now spend less than 10 percent of their operational budgets on program and mission combined. The challenge for Church Extension and the entire denomination is to find ways to help these congregations “right-size” and/or share their facilities so that they can use larger portions of their assets for mission.

Church Extension staff and directors believe that the challenges for extending Disciples witness into the future can be met with faithful and steadfast innovation. Creative opportunities for congregational partnerships, asset reallocation, fund raising and renewed mission that meets the missional needs of demographically changing neighborhoods are popping up in communities all over the United States and Canada.

That being said, it will take partnerships across the lines of general, regional, local and global/ecumenical church to capitalize on these opportunities to create congregational growth in mission, outreach and evangelism. In partnership with the larger church, Church Extension’s continued mission imperative is to focus on “strengthening congregations to be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ from our doorsteps to the ends of the Earth.”

**Please comment on CE’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.**

Church Extension, like all general ministries – including those ministries that connect congregations with global or historic mission – exists primarily to strengthen congregational life for mission. Each general ministry is a conduit through which Disciples help Disciples live out what God has called particular congregations to do and to be. Church Extension is an entity through which Disciples help Disciples establish new congregations and work to plan and to fund the ongoing housing needs of Disciples local mission. CE carries out its ministry, both financial and programmatic, in ways that seek to maximize a congregation’s human, financial and building resources for its ministry. To this end, CE staff and directors seek to operate in a way that integrates all four priorities into its goals and directives. As well, CE staff and directors seek to partner with other Disciples ministries in order to realize true accomplishment of these priorities.

For more than 10 years, CE has had internal diversity education and anti-racism teams working to help prioritize resources and services to better meet the needs of the growing diversity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the communities we serve in North America. Specifically, in 2008, CE has continued to test and create fund raising models that better meet the contexts of African American, Latino, Pacific Asian, Haitian, and other racial/ethnic groups. Thirty-five percent of loans approved in 2008 were to Disciples of Christ congregations in these cultural contexts or in Puerto Rico. In addition, CE’s loan team is considering ways of underwriting loans which better reflect the giving and growth patterns of racial/ethnic communities. Finally, New Church

Ministry continues to work with racial/ethnic constituency groups, immigrant communities and long-established congregations of color to establish Disciples communities of faith that reflect the increasing diversity of the United States and Canada. In fact, 80 percent of our new church starts are majority Hispanic, Pacific Asian, Haitian, African American, and first generation African congregations.

Church Extension staff and directors understand that New Church Ministry is both a priority of the whole church (and as such reports directly to the General Board/General Assembly) and a general ministry of the church for which CE provides oversight. Increasingly, all of our field consultant staff are being trained to provide intentional building readiness service to new congregations. While planter training and coaching will help new congregations succeed in their first years, site acquisition, demographic targeting, fund raising, building planning and interest-free loans are necessary to the sustenance and vitality of new congregations as they grow. Identifying facility ownership options, new ways to share space, new gift resources and other congregational support for new congregations are all avenues CE is exploring as we move into an era of helping the nearly 600 new Disciples congregations find permanent space for ministry.

While Church Extension does not work directly with congregations who are in strategic missional transformation processes, CE does now work with regions to provide an assessment process for congregations in their fourth quadrant of life. This assessment tool, called *New Beginnings*, is a thorough analysis of the resources (building, location, human, financial) and the challenges of a congregation. It offers a portrait of a congregation and its relation to the ministry needs of the surrounding community. The assessment service also offers small group training and leaders manuals for congregations to use as they process their reports. The intention of the process is to help congregations decide whether they can move into an intentional decision for missional redefinition, redevelopment (through relocation, restart, etc.) or closure. Depending on the option chosen and working closely with their regions, these congregations are then referred to various general and regional partners for help with next steps.

It is through this work with *New Beginnings* congregations that CE staff has been alerted to the need for broader partnerships in the area of leader development. CE's current work in leader development is related to new church planters through recruitment, assessment, training and coaching. Increasingly, however, we are beginning to understand that pastor "redevelopers" need similar kinds of assessment, training and coaching. With so many of our congregations in decline, we see great need for new kinds of leaders who are trained and then coached in organizational change management, multicultural awareness, fund raising and sociological analysis, in addition to preaching, teaching and pastoral care. This kind of leadership development requires a different focus than that which generally falls within CE's mission. CE seeks, however, to be a partner with HELM, DHM, Regions, Constituency groups and Seminaries as we address the leadership urgency for new and redeveloping Disciples of Christ congregations.

As Church Extension staff and directors look back on the last 125 years of ministry and plan for the next decade, it is clear that these four priorities have provided guidance to the

goals of living out the larger mission of strengthening congregations for their mission. CE's commitments remain as strong as ever: to serve churches in a way that strengthens them to be the good news (outreach and mission) and to share the good news (witness and evangelism), that together we may live God's call from our doorsteps to the ends of the Earth.

## 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.

**Recommended Action:**

The General Board receives the reports from Church Extension and the New Church Ministry Team.