



**BEST PRACTICES**  
For Establishing Vital Disciples Congregations

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## Introduction:

In 1999, the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) set four goals known as the 2020 Vision. These goals included: establishing 1000 new congregations, revitalizing 1000 congregations, providing leadership for these congregations, while being a pro-reconciling-anti racist church by the year 2020.

As a part of the General Board at that time, I can attest to the fact that there were many competing interests to see other goals established as a priority for our church. The General Board stuck to the notion however that we could only really have 4 goals, or as a church our energy would be dissipated over too large an area with too little funding.

Now, after just 10 years, it is clear that the four goals established by the General Board were indeed the four areas we needed to pay serious attention to if the Disciples witness was going to flourish. It has also been my observation, that the establishment of 1000 new congregations is an essential goal as it feeds our efforts at redevelopment of congregations, leadership development, and becoming Anti-racist (since many new congregations have added to the diversity of our church).

After 10 years of work in some degree or another with all of these goals, the New Church Ministry Team has developed an infrastructure to support the development of new congregations. In our work across the entire church, we have also seen first-hand the practices that are effective in developing new congregations, as well as the ways in which we have set up new congregations to fail.

The purpose of this manual is for all partners to identify the “best practices” for developing new churches. It describes the roles of Regions in the process, as well as the role of New Church Ministry. It identifies the responsibilities of the planter, coach (Barnabas) and region in establishing healthy vital congregations. Furthermore this manual will recommend a process for adopting congregations through the affiliation process.

While credentialing of pastors is an important ingredient to this process, this manual will only name the conditions and issues related to credentialing our planters for this effective ministry since each Region has separate entities for this task.

It is our hope that each Region will adopt this manual not as their official policy, but as the ideal for their practices in the establishment of new congregations. In doing so, this will allow all partners to forge ahead, knowing what each player does, and how we do it—not for the sake of our organization, but for the sake of the Gospel.

Rick Morse

## A Brief History of Disciples Church Planting

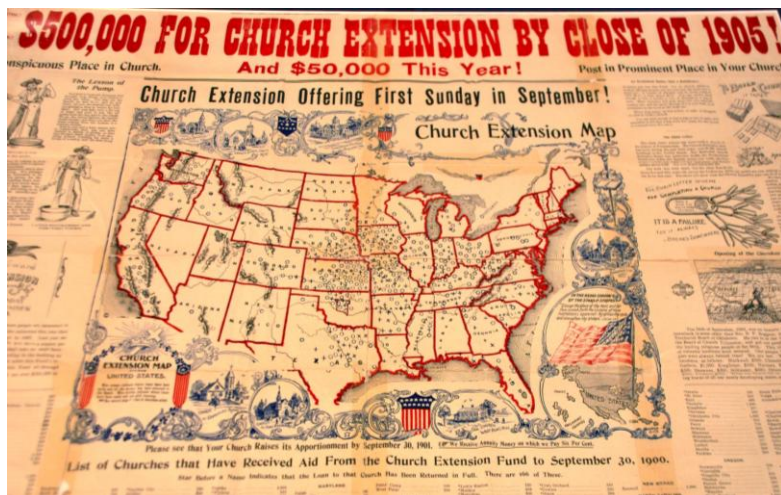
As the Disciple movement emerged on the frontier in the 1830's it was primarily an association of churches that were affiliating and aligning themselves with each other because they shared some common beliefs and values. Moved by the founders of the church, and their reasoning abilities, they were seeking to be churches that followed Christ in the "right" manner.

These values that brought congregations into the movement included a conviction that the Lord's supper was meant to be practiced frequently (at least weekly), and that it would not be up to any individual or church to decide who can take communion since Christ himself extended the invitation to "take, eat and remember". They shared a conviction that we were called to unity, with a common witness that brought people together despite their culture, denomination or past.

The early Disciples wrote a lot about individual freedom, and the understanding that God could reveal "himself" in any way that God chose with the scriptures being our primary source for understanding God. It was that scriptural understanding that Disciples began the practice of baptizing by immersion—understanding that they were baptizing people into the whole body of Christ.

The early Disciples movement was also about empowerment. While there were many highly educated clergy in the early part of the church, they embraced the notion that a church was not hierarchical but collaborative. They embraced Martin Luther's concept of the Priesthood of All Believers in a more radical way than their Lutheran brothers—making lay people partners in ministry and decision making.

It was these common values that brought congregations into the movement at that time, and it is those same values that make the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) attractive to newly established congregations today. As we look at our history, it is interesting that the current New Church movement is often criticized because a large numbers of our new congregations are a result of affiliations. In the early years, affiliation was 99% of all new congregations.



During the first 70 years of development, the Disciples movement added hundreds of congregations through affiliation. Towards the end of the century, Disciples began to organize themselves in a way that led to the establishment of new congregations. Missionary Societies organized themselves for "domestic" as well as foreign mission. The Board of Church Extension (formed in 1883) helped in financing the start of new congregations as well as providing guidance for the early church planters (who were often referred to as "sodbusters").

The period of greatest success in church establishment (until now) was from 1880-1920. Today many existing Disciples congregations claim these dates as their date of origin. This development occurred as the frontier was being settled, and took root in any community when a group of former Disciples from another community moved into a new location.

Congregation history books demonstrate that many of these new congregations were formed by lay people at first, and then when they gained sufficient strength, they called a pastor. Many of these congregations were very small. In fact, in the 1930 U.S. Census that tracked religious participation, you could see that the Disciples had the smallest congregations of all the mainline churches.

In the 1900's the majority of the U.S. population was located in rural and small town settings. Since the U.S. was just entering the industrial age, most families had agrarian jobs, and Disciple congregations emerged in numerous small communities.

A favorite story is of a congregation that formed in central Nebraska during this time. People knew there would soon be a railroad station in this new emerging town, so they asked the Board of Church Extension for a loan to build a new church which they completed. While the railroad was built however, the engineers chose a route that was 5 miles further south, and established a station there instead, leaving the town to dry up almost overnight.

The people of that newly forming congregation located to the town further south, but wanted their church building—so they purchased it from BCE, and moved the empty building, brick by brick, to the new location with the help of everyone in the community. This story demonstrates the way in which congregations were formed. They were initiated by people who aligned themselves with Disciple values—not from a top down structure.

In the 1930's the depression hit, and with that, Disciples closed congregations with little focus or funds to start new congregations. The 1940's and WWII also kept the denomination from starting congregations. During this time Disciples began to lose their passion for church planting.

After WWII, several sociological elements led to some church planting efforts. Veterans with GI benefits now had access to home loans, and for the first time a college education was made possible. The automobile and better highways also led to the development of many new communities. At this time, Disciples established many new congregations as clusters of church members moved to new communities.

Many people believe Disciples planted many congregations during that era, however if you compare Disciple efforts with other denominations you will see that Disciples were underachievers in planting. Of the 180 new congregations established in that decade, only 8 are viable today.

The 1960's were not kind to church planting. Church leaders often felt that planting a new congregation in a new place was not in keeping with our value of Christian Unity. Stephen Compton in his book about Rekindling the Mainline points out to the fact that many church units at this time devoted financial resources to social justice out of their church planting budgets.

For Disciples, the 1970's was our worst decade in church planting. There was one year in which the Disciples did not plant a single new congregation. A letter to the editor in Disciple Magazine sarcastically congratulated the denomination for meeting this benchmark.

The Convocation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) took note of the denomination's lack of enthusiasm around evangelism and church planting. In the late 1970's the convocation challenged the denomination to establish a goal of church planting, and in the 1980's Disciples set a goal of establishing 100 (yes that is right) new congregations by 1990.

This was a difficult matter because the denomination had lost its intuitional memory about church planting. The church raised capital to start congregations through the CAN process (Church Advance Now). It utilized the Pastor Developer model which had been developed by the Lutheran Church. During that decade about 130 new congregations were established, but only 55% survived. This capital heavy model was perceived as very expensive (\$300,000 per congregation) and was abandoned in the 1990's.

Some of these congregations did however make it. In fact, the denomination's largest mission supporter (Ray of Hope Christian Church in the Atlanta area) was started during that decade. Geist Christian in Indianapolis was started then as well. These congregations taught us the importance of the Church Planter to this process.

In the 1990's there were more churches started, but once again Disciples were stymied by funding for new congregations. The retention rate of these congregations was very low, and the church was losing interest in this initiative.

## The Post-Modern New Church Movement:

As mentioned earlier, the General Board of the Christian Church established the 2020 vision as Disciples approached the new millennium. The goal first established by the General Board was for the development of 630 new congregations which was the estimate of congregations that would likely close during the next 20 years. This goal was not seen as realistic by some, in fact a letter to the editor in Disciples World Magazine stated "Why don't we pick a more realistic number like 200 so we don't set ourselves up for failure?"

In the fall of 2000, Church Extension with some help from Disciples Home Missions sponsored a New Church Summit in which regional leaders and church development experts could gather to discuss the barriers to new church development, and spin out ideas of how a new church movement might excel. It was during this conference that the General Minister and President, Dick Hamm decided that the goal of 630 congregations was not a growth goal, but a survival goal. So at this conference, the convicted leaders of the denomination chose to raise the goal to 1000 new churches by 2020.

It was immediately after this summit that several people were called to the staff of Church Extension to form a team to give emphasis to the movement. At first the office was called the "Office of New Church Establishment", but as the team formed a critical insight was brought to the table. The emphasis of the new church movement has been on the planters. They are the ones that establish new congregations, and they are the ones who live it on a daily basis. In fact in many cases they are bankrolling the start of new churches. Neither the general church, nor regions establish congregations...planters do. It was at this point that the team took on the identity as New Church Ministry.

The team then focused its efforts on discovering the best ways in which we could support planters as a church, and established with our regional partners an understanding about which elements a national structure could support best, and which elements Regional partners were best equipped to serve the establishment of so many congregations. This led to the Regional Policy Playbook that was introduced in 2002.

The playbook was designed to give permission to a movement of empowerment, rather developing systems that required all new congregations to use the same process for development (like was done in the 1980's). The team developed a motto: "1000 new congregations, 1000 different ways"

Four principles became the structure for the National Strategy. 1) Successful church plants are dependent on a good planter, therefore we need tools to identify people who have the behaviors needed to succeed in this ministry, and apply them to planters early on. 2) Successful church planting requires planters who are well equipped with knowledge of how to plant, but also the spiritual preparation for planting successfully. 3) Coaching is an effective method for helping planters remain accountable to their vision, their family and personal lives. 4) Planters who engage regularly with other planters find new ideas and energy for this difficult ministry.

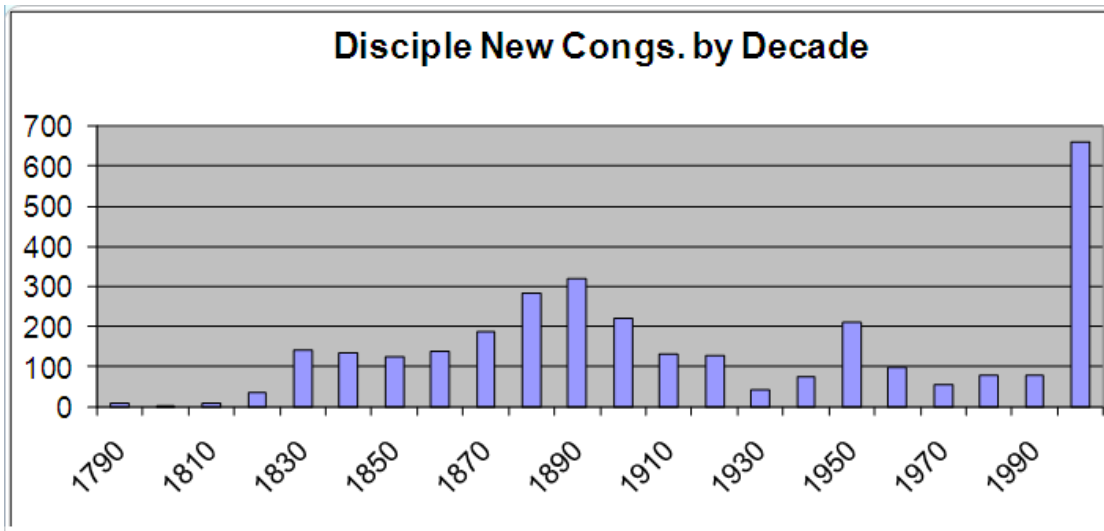
Based on these principles, the team asked the Lilly Endowment for help in funding a coaching and peer group program for New Church Planters. This initial grant was for \$1.67 million, and was followed by a supplemental grant

of \$850,000. This grant was the largest source of financial support for the ministry; however the funding was scheduled to phase out by 2012.

The structure that was put in place worked well for the first decade.

- Disciples established more than 600 congregations
- More than 40,000 new Disciples worship in these new congregations
- 79% of those congregations were still functioning
- 80% of the congregations were people of color which helped Disciples look like the face of America
- More than 1000 Planters, spouse, core team members and Regional partners attended initial planter trainings
- More than 700 planters and spouses have attended a peer group gathering for continuing education
- About 60% of planters have received coaching from 80 trained Barnabas's (coaches)
- Since 1980 new churches have contributed more than \$116 million to the Disciples Mission Fund at a rate of about \$4.6 million a year
- 600 New churches have engaged more new participants in their congregations than the 3700 existing congregations combined have brought in

The decade of 2000-2010 is the decade of greatest growth in the number of new Disciples congregations in our entire history. The most remarkable part of this achievement however is the fact that when you combine all sources of denominational support of these new congregations, **Disciples have spent only \$6500 per new congregation.** This is well below a denominational average of \$300,000.



The future holds many challenges for all of the partners in the New Church Movement. These include the fact that funding continues to be inadequate for supporting these new churches, requiring the dismantling of many support services for new congregations. The shortage of pastors for existing churches makes recruitment of planters more difficult. The cost of building congregational facilities is out of reach for most congregations.

Disciples are confident though that we will achieve this goal because of the movement of empowerment that has been embraced by Regional partners in seeking this goal of new church establishment.

## A Case for the Development of New Disciples Congregations:

It is hard to escape the fact that participation in faith communities today is at an all time low. Disciples are closing 65-70 congregations each year. Two-thirds of all Disciple congregations are declining—30% of which are declining at rates over 10% per year! The evidence is clear that the Disciple witness is losing ground.

The Disciples are not in a vacuum however. All faith communities are in decline. Even the Assemblies of God would report that 80% of their churches are either in decline or in plateau. Numerous studies from Evangelicals, mainline groups, the Pew group etc. are all pointing to the state of decline in congregations.

Since 1988, the US has had a net growth of more than 51 million people through immigration and birth. Ironically, in 1988 US churches had a combined attendance of 51 million people. You would think with the growth the US population has experienced that church attendance would grow during that period. Today, church attendance is at the very same level as 1988.

The fastest growing groups in American religious practices are the unaffiliated. More than 92% of the population claims spirituality, but today only about 49% attend worship with any community of faith.

When you consider the benefits of a faith community on an individual's life, this is difficult to watch. Think about what a difference a faith community makes on the life of a child that is raised knowing they are loved by others outside of their family, and that they are not the center of the universe. Consider how congregations help teens navigate their issues of self-identity in a group setting of Christians. Think about how the church is there for adults at every phase of their development, right up to the very end of life. There is no other institution like a congregation for helping people explore the meaning of life, gaining strength and encouragement for life, or simply pausing to contemplate how we can be meaningful participants in God's mission on earth.

There are many reasons for this decline: Churches are serving more generations than they have in the past, making it harder to relate across their different experiences. Mobility rates have increased dramatically, making it difficult for people to engage in traditional congregations. Birth rates are much lower than they were in the past, and extended families now live in other communities. Shifting values in religious expression, particularly the rejection of membership model organizations towards organizations that make a difference in the lives of their neighbors.

Since 1988, each region has lost an average of 29% of their congregations. This loss represents about \$20 million a year in outreach dollars. That means the church as a whole has been turning inward to find resources rather looking outward in how we might be instruments of God's peace.

This isn't happening because Disciples are bad, it is happening because congregations are not adapting to the rapid changes in our culture today—and while we must work with established congregations to adapt to this new world, the most rapid way of sustaining our witness is through the development of new congregations.

Most of us became engaged in ministry because we want others to experience what Christ has given us. Numerous studies demonstrate that the fastest way to reach “the unchurched” is through the development of new congregations. New congregations provide unique new experiences for worship and mission. They reach groups of people that existing churches have little success in reaching. They become portals of entering the faith since they are less threatening for a new comer to attend church in a school, library or other public place.

## The New Church Ministry Team:

The New Church Ministry Team is a group of church development professionals whose vision is ***“To ignite the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in all of its expressions to be actively involved in birthing, nurturing and encouraging sustainable new churches in as many ways as possible.”***

The New Church Ministry Team is part of the staff of Church Extension, one of the 12 units of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). As of January of 2011 the team has been homed in the Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation a new subsidiarity of Church Extension. While they are deeply convicted about church planting, they are also engaged in delivery of additional services at Hope, namely in leadership development for redevelopment congregations, congregational assessment services, and helping congregations with issues related to housing their ministries.

Regardless of the additional disciplines, the team is absolutely convicted to the ministry of planting 1000 new congregations by 2020. The team works with Regional Partners in identifying potential planters, potential target sites for new congregations and encouraging the church at all levels to support the development of these congregations.

The teams' main source of funding in the past decade was the Lilly Endowment. Thanks to the generosity of that endowment, about \$2.4 million was given to develop the Barnabas ministry. Today, it is funded through half of the Pentecost offering, and through donors who support the ministry of Church Extension. Church Extension also has a long established endowment that contributes to the following New Church Services:

- Gallup Assessment of Potential Planters
- Behavioral Assessments for Planters
- Demographic research services for planters and regions
- Initial planter training
- Barnabas (Coaching) for planters in their first 2 years of the project
- An Annual Peer Group gathering at a Disciples historical site
- Mid-course correction consultations
- Regional team orientations
- Global Mission Trip for planters
- The team is also available for consultation on a wide variety of topics
- Bi-vocational training
- Recruitment

The team organizes its work by tasks, with key people assigned to each task. Like all partners in this movement, we all accept responsibility for identifying and recruiting people who might make excellent church planters. Our team also takes responsibility for identifying people who may work well as a coach. We all work at identifying congregations that may have a heart extending their witness through a church plant.



**Our primary New Church Ministry roles include:**



Rick Morse:

- Relationships of New Church Ministry to the wider church (Regions, Constituency groups, and General Units)
- Strategic ministry development for New Church Ministry



Gilberto Collazo:

- Team supervisor
- Relationship with Hispanic Ministries



Nadine Burton:

- Discernment Process and Planter Assessments
- Planter Initial Training
- Relationship with the Convocation



Charlie Wallace

- Congregational Relations
- Cong. Initiated Project Development
- Relationship with the Haitian Ministries



Ketty Santos

- Barnabas Ministry
- Peer Group Development
- Relationship with the Hispanic Ministries



Franz LeBlanc:

- Haitian Congregational Development



John Roh:

- Korean Congregational Development
- Relational work with NAPAD



## ROLES:

Strategies best developed by a National Strategy:

- Planter Training
- Planter Assessment
- Peer Groups (unless a region has a significant number of plants and can organize)
- Coaching Network
- Demographic expertise

Strategies best developed by a Regional Strategy:

- Identification of Target sites and populations
- Identification of potential planters
- Keeping in touch with new congregations
- Engaging regional congregations in prayer for planters and projects
- Credentialing of planters
- Creating urgency for the planting of new congregations with existing congregations
- Provide some funding for new churches
- Engage new congregations into full participation with the Christian Church
- Legal and Formal recognition of congregations
- Funding support for new congregations

## DEFINITIONS:

- A. New Church Ministry Team: A group of people organized on the national level to provide leader development services for new church planters (NCP).
- B. New Church: A new congregation is a congregation whose intent is to become an autonomous Disciple congregation. A new church is counted once its planter has been recognized by the Region, and the planter is actively engaged in gathering a faith community (regardless of whether it is worshipping yet or not). It is considered a new congregation for 5 years regardless of its charter status. Congregations in affiliation are considered a new congregation once they have formally informed their region of their intent to affiliate.
- C. New Church Planter: (NCP) Planters are individuals who have been called by God to gather people into a faith community. NCP's received their credentials from the Region, and can either be ordained or commissioned. Planters are the single most important component for the success of a new congregation. (See information regarding the NCP development plan)
- D. Discernment: A formal process of disciplined prayer and reflection by a person who is dealing with a call to plant a congregation. A planter begins the process by contacting New Church Ministry and receiving the guide for Discernment. The process usually takes 60-90 days.
- E. Assessment: A two part process in which a Planter is evaluated for their propensity to plant a successful church. The first phase involves the GALLUP ASSESSMENT which is taken on-line after an initial conversation with NCM staff. The second phase involves a telephone interview with two members of the NCM staff. The final assessment report provides a summary of the candidates behaviors related to church planting, with a Recommend, Conditional Recommend, or Do Not Recommend appraisal.
- F. Initial Training: The first training for NCP's. This week long event exposes a planter to the realities of planting, and enables the planter to develop their new congregation's identity statements. If the project is recognized by the region, the planter will begin their relationship with the coach (Barnabas). Numerous other starts up topics are covered at the event such as marketing, core group development, and legal issues. Participants receive a certificate that they have completed the course.
- G. Sponsor Representative: If a project is receiving funding support from another entity i.e. a local congregation or Region, a Sponsor Representative is appointed who will be the primary contact for the Barnabas in the development of the project.
- H. Peer Group: An annual event in which NCP's from across the US and Canada gather at a Disciples historic site for an educational experience usually conducted by a nationally known author or professor. The event allows planters to engage each other in conversation regarding their plant, and the sharing of strategies for success.
- I. Revival: An additional day's worth of activities added to the Peer Group for planters who have completed their third year. This small group activity (of a recreational nature) is an extension of thanks from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in recognition of their sacrifice and commitment in church planting.
- J. Vision Statement: A formal statement that states in measurable terms where the congregation hopes to be in five years.

- K. **Mission Statement:** A formal statement that identifies the target group the new congregation hopes to reach. It names their needs, and what the congregation will do to meet those needs.
- L. **Values Statement:** A formal statement of 5-7 Biblical/Theological values that are essential to the life and formation of the congregation.
- M. **Ministry Plan:** A formal plan that shows the starting point of the congregation with the measurable goals that lead to the congregation fulfilling its mission. The plan includes attraction methods, equipping methods for leader development, contextual analysis, and a preliminary budget.
- N. **Target:** The specific population that the church hopes to attract. There are three kinds of targets 1) Geographical, 2) Racial Ethnic and 3) Affinity (generational or other).
- O. **Status:** The Yearbook designation of a congregation. These include E, F, Y, or A.
- **E- Emerging:** A status granted to a congregation that is in stages of formation in which the Regional Minister is aware, but has not yet received approval from the Regional Board. This status does not print the congregation's name in the Yearbook, but reports the congregation on the addendum to the IRS so that a congregation can receive tax-deductible donations.
  - **F- Congregation in Formation:** A congregation that is recognized by the Region where a planter is actively engaged in the field and is gathering a faith community. F congregations do not necessarily need to be worshipping to get this status.
  - **A- Affiliating:** A status granted to an existing congregation that is seeking affiliation with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This status is granted once the process of affiliation has begun (once a congregation has declared its intent to affiliate). These congregations are not listed in the Yearbook, but are printed in the addendum.
  - **Y- Chartered Congregation:** This status is granted to a congregation once it is fully recognized as a congregation by the Region.
- P. **Nesting Congregation:** A congregation that meets in another church's facilities.
- Q. **Host Congregation:** A congregation that hosts a new church in its facilities.

## Regional Church Multiplication Team Development:

Most regions appoint a committee or team to attend to the development of new congregations. These teams have a wide variety of responsibilities and functions—most of which has been to provide policies and procedures for the development of new congregations.

New Church Ministry has worked with nearly 40 different entities (as some Areas have oversight of new church development). Each entity has had its own policy for the development of new congregations.

Realistically, today only about one-third of all regions have an active committee in place. The remaining two-thirds rely totally on the Regional Ministers discretion for the development of new congregations. Given the stresses on Regional Ministry today, that means that much of the regional work related to the development of new congregations is “reactive” rather than “proactive”.

As planters compare notes with each other (and they do...remember they are networkers), they have discovered a wide variety of practices and support from their region. To many, these practices seem arbitrary, especially if they are a first generation immigrant congregation.

The first principle of forming a team is that this is a work of evangelism, not of institutional vitality. Walter Bruggemann said it best:

***In our moments of sanity we know that the issues of evangelism do not concern the health of the institutional church. The issue is rather that the life of creation, the fabric of human community, is deeply in jeopardy among us. The crisis of evangelism is a world question and not a church question.***

When a regional committee is formed to “protect” the region, it will always discover ways to kill a new church. If a team only meets to “review” church plants, it will always assume an evaluative role.

Instead, an effective new church team takes leadership in the planting of new congregations in a region, creating a vision of planting that is compelling, and constantly evaluating itself as a team to ensure that the plant has what it needs to succeed.

An effective Regional team is a partner in the planting process. After all it isn't the planter that makes a church develop, nor is it a regional team. But together one plants and the other waters so that God can create a new thing.

*<sup>1</sup> Cor 3:6I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. <sup>7</sup>So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. <sup>8</sup>The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.*

### Best Practices for a Regional Team:

1. An effective regional team is always aware of its mission field, and the way it is changing. They know the communities where there is extensive growth, and they know the places where there is growth in racial ethnic communities. They are aware of generational gaps within the region.
2. An effective regional team is always aware of the projects and planters that are starting. Since they have a propensity towards action, the effective teams have representatives that actually attend worship in newly forming communities. They pray for planters, and encourage the entire region to pray for specific needs of the new project.
3. An effective regional team is always looking for potential planters. In addition to being aware of potential targets, an effective team is always identifying pastors and lay people who may show talent in planting. They encourage the potential planters to be assessed and for them to be in discernment about this specialized ministry.
4. An effective regional team is always finding resources for projects. This may mean identifying a church facility and advocating for a nesting congregation. It may mean asking churches for surplus supplies that could be utilized by the plant. It would also mean encouragement and nurturing. Partnership between new and existing congregations.
5. An effective team has goals and a vision. A team sets a numerical goal for congregations to be planted (at the rate of at least 2% annually). The team also has a strategy for reaching that goal, primarily in how they will attract planters, identify sites, and fund projects. Since they know the regional gaps in population groups, they seek to make the region look like the “face of their region”.
6. Effective regional teams “over-communicate”. They send note to planters, New Church Ministry, and Racial Ethnic ministers, not only words of encouragement, but information regarding the steps they are taking. They are in constant communication with existing churches in their planning process—and are always encouraging prayer for their planting movement.
7. Effective regional teams meet frequently. They consider participants who have a passion for evangelism who may not be distributed across the region geographically.
8. Effective regional teams challenge local congregations to multiply. Gathering 3-4 existing congregations together to sponsor a new congregation is a way in which existing congregations can multiply their witness.

### Recruitment of the team:

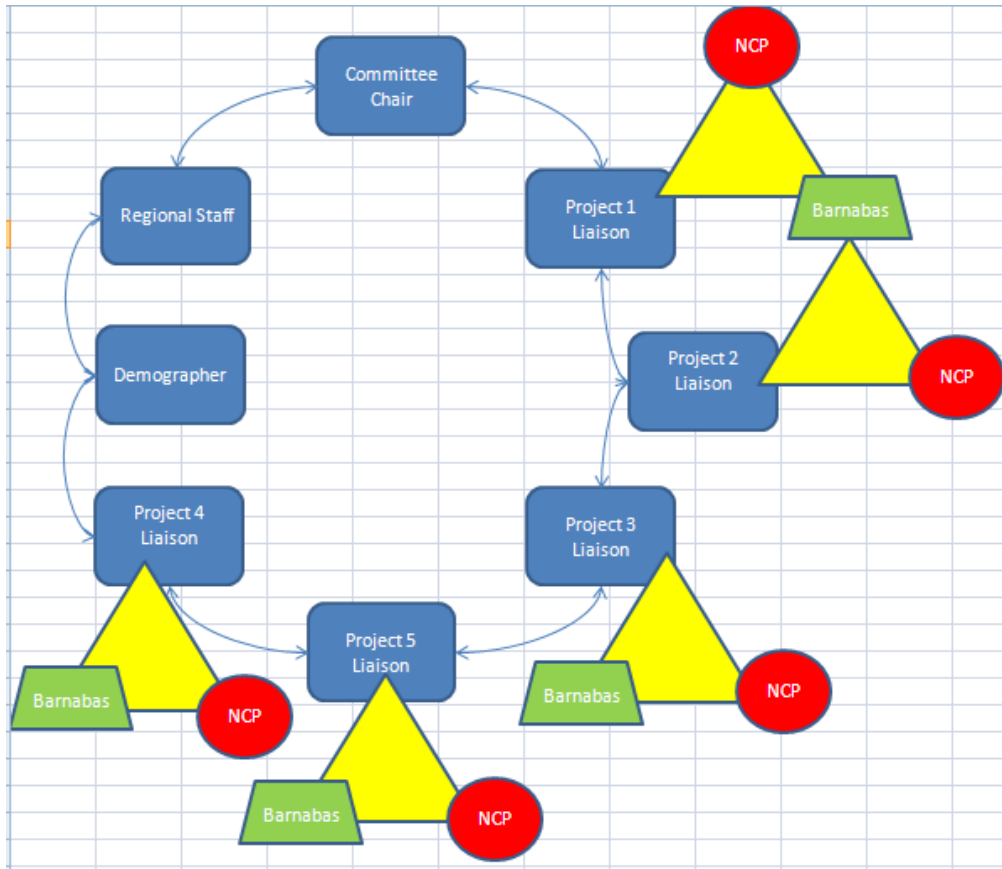
Consider the following types of people for your team:

Chair: Someone with great communication and organizational skills who is positive in outlook and can delegate tasks.

Demographer: Somebody who loves to do research, and has an eye for demographics in the Region.

Project Liaison: Imagine a matching one team member with each project with the goal that they would be the regional expert on that project. They would be in relationship with the project coach and planter of that project, and would commit to visiting the church annually, and continually praying for the church.

## Multiplication Team Structure



## Accountability

While freedom is important in church planting, Disciples do have basic beliefs that are important to maintain. Many teams or committee's however get "beliefs" confused with practices. In the early history of denominations, it was their role to insure "Right Thinking" as well as "Right Behavior". Today's denominations are more voluntary in their association with each other—but they are unified by their common beliefs.

While it is a pay grade above this writer to make a complete list of basic Disciple beliefs, I think there are some guides that unify us. For example: if you read the Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)—it would be hard to ignore that Disciples are Christocentric in their theology. It also clear that we are unified by the Lord's Supper, and that we have a passion for unity.

As members of the Christian Church,  
We confess that Jesus is the Christ,  
the Son of the living God,  
and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.  
In Christ's name and by his grace  
we accept our mission of witness  
and service to all people.  
We rejoice in God,

maker of heaven and earth,  
and in God's covenant of love  
which binds us to God and to one another.  
Through baptism into Christ  
we enter into newness of life  
and are made one with the whole people of God.  
In the communion of the Holy Spirit  
we are joined together in discipleship  
and in obedience to Christ.  
At the Table of the Lord  
we celebrate with thanksgiving  
the saving acts and presence of Christ.  
Within the universal church  
we receive the gift of ministry  
and the light of scripture.  
In the bonds of Christian faith  
we yield ourselves to God  
that we may serve the One  
whose kingdom has no end.  
Blessing, glory, and honor  
be to God forever. Amen.

While the Preamble was not ever written to be a test statement of faith or a creed, it is a guide to what we believe.

What is not mentioned in the Preamble however are our practices as a church. For example, weekly communion is a practice—but our belief is that joins us together as one church. The Preamble says nothing about women in leadership; however our practice since the 1880's has been to allow full participation of women in leadership. But like all practices, we can point to long-established Disciple congregations who do not embrace all of these practices.

This brings into our thinking: “can we expect new congregations to adopt practices that not all existing Disciple congregations practice?” A partner once stated to a newly forming congregation that their practice is for all congregations to “tithes” to the Disciples Mission Fund. While that was an ideal, it was not the reality however.

Another regional team was approached by a new church that wanted to affiliate. They would gather in the desert, and form a circle of rocks and pray while the sun rose. They were particularly interested in the Disciples non-profit status. When the committee interviewed the pastor however, it became clear that they had no relationship with Christ whatsoever; in fact they were primarily engaged in Druid practices. This committee had no trouble saying no to this affiliation standing on basic Disciple beliefs.

This is uniquely different however from a new church in Seattle that is Christ centered, but uses Sufi prayer practices. While their practices were very unique from a common Disciple congregation, their beliefs were very Christian. They practice communion every week, they prayed to God through Christ, they sought justice in their community, but they had a deep practice in prayer borrowing from other traditions. Both of these examples demonstrate the difference between Practice and Belief.

There are unique cultural differences that emerge as new congregations are formed, particularly by first generation immigrants. As new groups come to America, they bring with them their cultural world view which can “rub” against some of the norms of Western Theology.

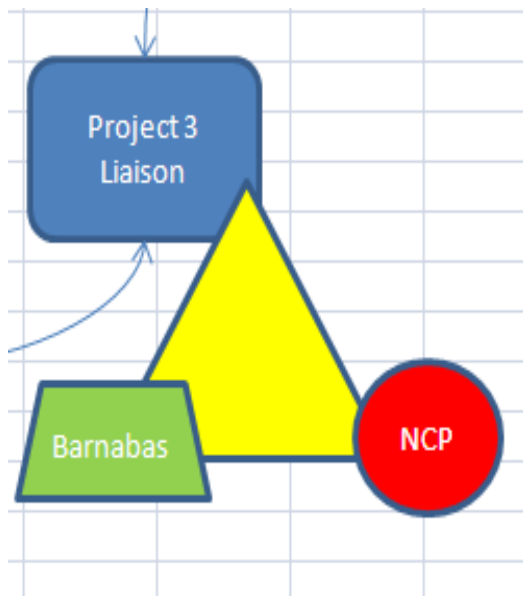
Few people can deny that Western Theology places the individual in a central position. It is from this world view doctrines such as “manifest destiny” or personal liberty are seen as anchor points for our understanding of God. This is not the world view however of people from other parts of the world, and new theologies to support those world views are emerging rapidly.

In many Asian cultures for example, the individual is at the end of the line. In Korea, it was once explained to me, the address on an envelope is first to the Country, Province, City, Neighborhood, Street, House number, Family surname, and then the individual's name. Who could argue the western view is "right" theology and that the Korean view is wrong. (Would that even be Disciple?)

In Central America, there are some new theological figures rising to prominence and interest. In the U.S. "Emergent" theology is just starting to take another world view as younger adults are starting to forge into new arenas of understanding the basic nature of the church. All of these theologies are based on a world view, with that world view's bias. As Disciples, we tend to understand that there are many paths to God and all of us find our lives enriched by a broader theological perspective that we may agree with, or not.

There are many different strategies to church planting. Not all churches will develop the same way, but will create new ways of planting, that are most appropriate for that congregation's setting. Because this is such a complex process, we are relying on coaches (Barnabas) and their accompaniment with the planter. We do need the input of the project sponsor or team member.

### THE ACCOUNTABILITY TRIANGLE:



In this example, Project 3 is a congregation that is being sponsored by 3 congregations in a region. These congregations have appointed a representative that serves on the Regional Committee or team—who is also the Liaison between the sponsoring congregations and the project.

Instead of requiring the planter (who is bi-vocational) to attend Regional meetings, and then coming to the 3 congregations for reports, the planter works directly with the Barnabas who reports the progress to the Liaison about the strategy that is being followed, and the work that is being accomplished.

This removes the pressure from the planter of attending numerous meetings that keeps them from the field— while providing enough information to the project representatives (including the Regional Minister). If the Liaison has concerns or questions about the plant, working through the Barnabas helps defuse the anxiety usually associated with those issues.

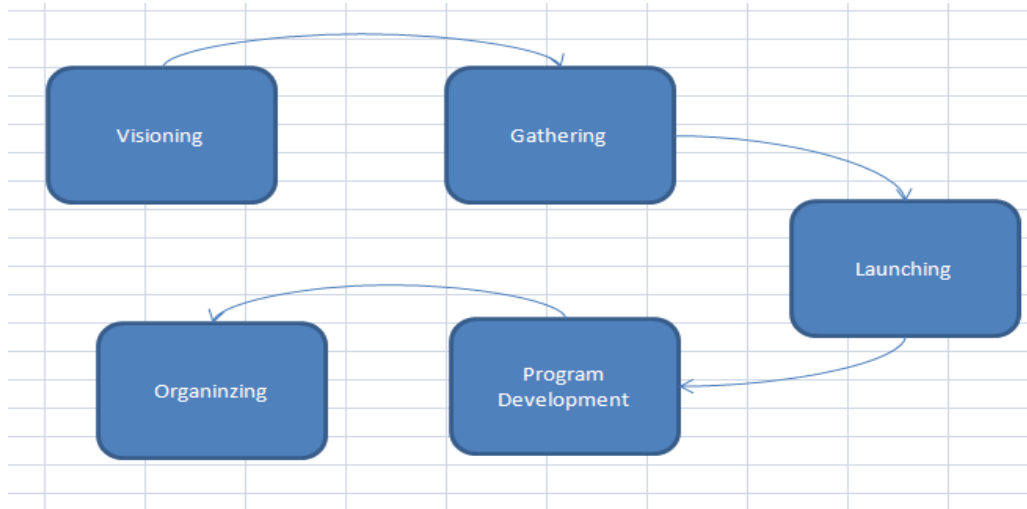
If the Liaison is attending worship at the plant at least once a year, or even meeting with the Bible study group as the congregation gathers, there should be sufficient accountability that a project is on target in its development. (Please see the unit on Phases of Development for more information).

### Best Practices for Accountability:

- 1- Be in conversation with the Barnabas. Remembering that the Barnabas is not a supervisor, but a partner in the project.
- 2- Depend on the Liaison for the accountability to the Region rather than requiring the Regional staff to keep planter accountable.
- 3- Distinguish clearly between "beliefs" and "Practices" when considering new church projects.

## Phases of Congregational Development:

While it is our motto to start, 1000 new churches, 1000 different ways, there are some basic phases of development for every congregation. These phases are usually fairly linear as demonstrated below:



- 1- **VISIONING:** In this phase, the planter begins to develop a compelling vision of a new congregation. During this time the planter studies the context for ministry, and identifies a specific target population they hope to reach. They develop a compelling vision, mission and values statement.
- 2- **GATHERING:** During this phase, the planter begins to attract a group of people who are stimulated by this new vision. These people become a core group, and develop relationships with each other. It is through the integrity of these relationships that they begin to attract others. The Gathering Phase in most Anglo congregations can last up to 18 months—during that period they may have a number of “preview” worship services. This phase is much shorter with other ethnic groups that tend to launch worship almost immediately.
- 3- **LAUNCHING:** The public launch of worship occurs when the new church has sufficient resources (leadership, and funds) to start worshipping. This launch service is done with excellence, and often times include high quality music from another church, in a rented space.
- 4- **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT:** After launching, the church begins to develop leadership that can lead in various program areas i.e. children’s ministry (if appropriate), service group leadership etc. This is based on the mission of the church, and always includes a commitment to work outside of the congregation.
- 5- **ORGANIZING:** Congregations that start with By-laws usually do not grow. A large contributor to the failing of a new congregation is also appointing “officers” or leaders in the church before it has had time to grow. New churches that focus on developing relationships, and quality programming grow faster and easier because they have a fluid leadership model without layers of approval.

## New Church Planter Development:

The Church Planter is essential for the success of a new church start. By providing quality educational and spiritual resources, we can add to a person's natural abilities to empower them to start a vital Disciple congregation. Church planters are wired uniquely from other people. Over the years we would offer the following observations about successful planters.

- 1) Planters are very relational. They live to connect people. This does not mean they are extraverts, instead it means that they know how to network using many different means of connecting people.
- 2) Planters are creative visionaries. They can always see a way to make something better, even if it is working well. Sometimes people like this are not appreciated, especially if they serve in a congregation that wants to keep everything the same.
- 3) Planters are "level 5" leaders. That is to say they are great at creating ownership in ministry with other people, and then giving it away. They can see the giftedness in others and are not afraid to let others lead.
- 4) Planters see their context for ministry as being their community. They have "kingdom" thinking which means they are not seeking to please a small group of people, but rather seeking to follow their convictions towards fulfilling God's mission. When asked about their success they will usually say "God did it".
- 5) Planters are very flexible people. They often make lists and lose them. That doesn't mean they don't have plans, it just means that when an opportunity arises they keep their options open. They can also work in an ever-changing environment.
- 6) Planters are resilient, and able to handle rejection. They are self-differentiated and know that they will have to "shake the dust" off their feet periodically. They can deal with rejection, and still carry on against all odds.
- 7) Planters have deep faith. They have to in order to take on the task of planting.
- 8) Planters are self-motivated. They do not need supervision, they want to see the project succeed and will work long hours to get it done. In fact, getting a planter to take time off is usually an issue.
- 9) Finally, Planters are risk takers...however they will never accept failure as an option.

While the planter is essential to an effective church plant, the planter's spouse is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most influential person to the success of a plant. In assessing planters, if the spouse is not enthusiastically engaged in the plant, we have a difficult time recommending them for the project. Those who have planted uniformly admit that their spouse had a great deal to do with their success by keeping the planter centered on what is important. This is why the coaching relationship is so important, to keep the planter from being seduced by the plant, and open to good self-care and family responsibilities.

When we consider the profile of an effective planter, it is easy to see how those of us in supporting roles can quickly become inhibitors for a new church project. When you have a highly motivated individual, who has a firm plan, and solid convictions you want to stay out of the way.

Planters are always frustrated by people asking “how many did you have last Sunday”, or “why are the offerings low?” They work with difficult circumstances, and are often times funding the start of the church plant on their own. Excessive reporting and accountability meetings do not feel supportive.

Effective managers have known for years that if you have an employee who is creative, highly motivated and is working towards a project, we need to do everything we can to empower that kind of personality, give them praise for a job well done, and encourage self-care.

We have witnessed many projects enter into power struggles between project teams that want to supervise a planter. While teams and even colleagues in ministry are well meaning, even suggestions feel like someone trying to control a project. No one wants to see the new church project succeed more than the planter.

Something to listen for in clergy serving existing congregations is their frustration with the congregation’s ability to think outside the box. There may be someone out there with this kind of frustration that is likely a church planter; they just don’t know it yet!

Given the nature of planters, we have discovered that a system that supports these kinds of behaviors can help with their process. The ministry plan for planters takes this profile seriously and provides a “principle based” approach towards planting. We teach and support the general principles of planting, but we do not teach a single method of planting. We encourage the planter to set a plan, and stay true to their plan.

The goal is to establish sustainable, reproducible, DISCIPLES congregations. If all of us as partners keep this in mind, it will open the door for many new possibilities. These include:

- An internet based congregation for shut-ins
- A prison based congregation
- A church for victims of the sex industry
- A church that works in a Pub or Coffee shop
- A church that focuses on first generation immigrants
- Or a Church that meets the needs of new suburbanites.

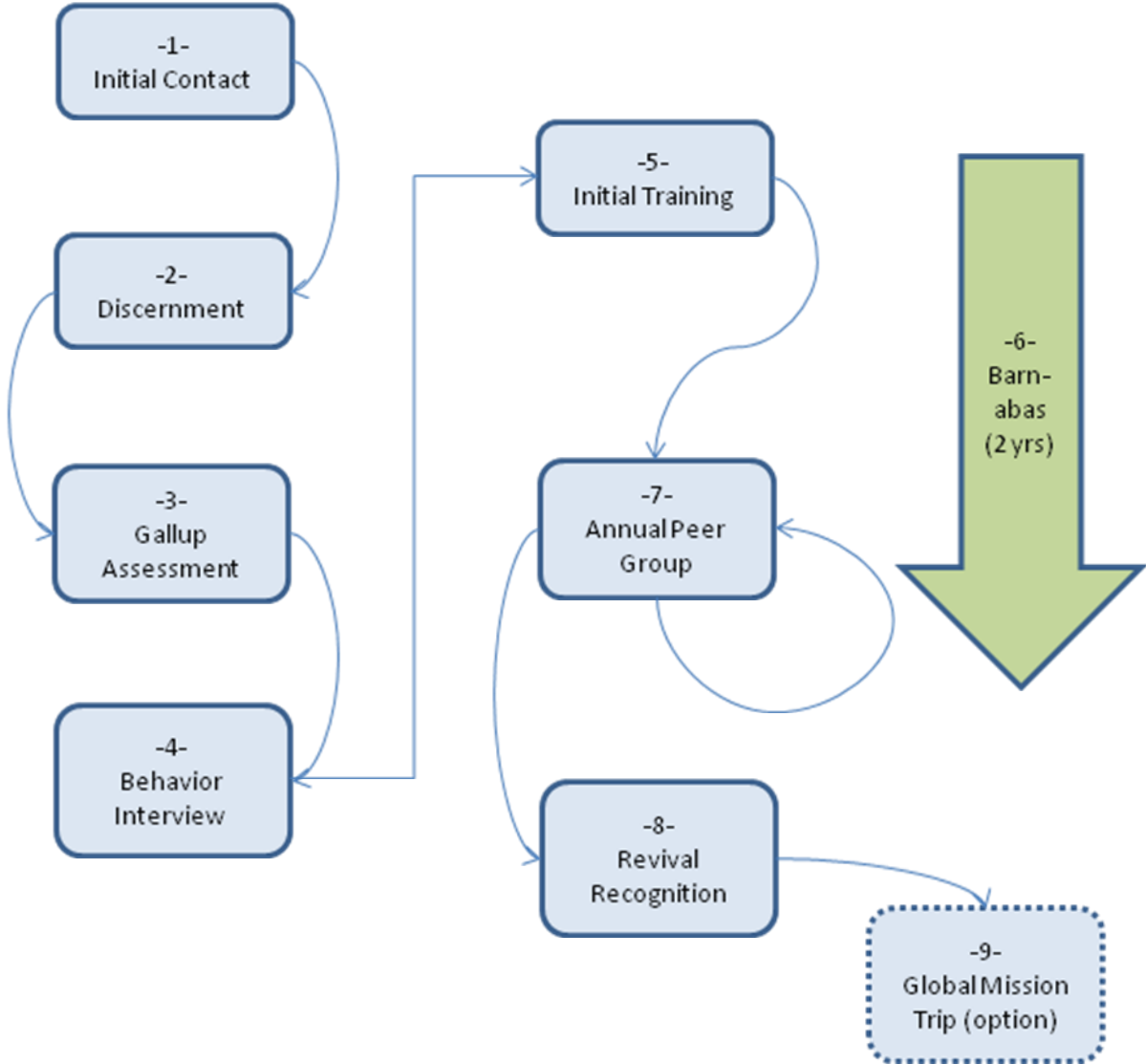
### **Steps for Planter Development:**

- 1- NCP candidate contacts NCMT. This initial contact is an informal conversation with notes that are sent to the Regional Minister. The candidate usually outlines their initial visit, or the thought they are being called to this kind of ministry (Or inquire about affiliation). The candidate is then sent a Discernment Packet unless they have already begun planting.
- 2- The Discernment Packet is a process of prayer, scripture reading and self-reflection on the call of church planting. It allows the candidate to consider this calling. At the end of the process they are encouraged to contact the NCMT for next steps or additional conversation about their call.
- 3- GALLUP ASSESSMENT: Now that a candidate is committing to planting, they are given a web address and password and allowed to take the Gallup Assessment. This tool was developed by 9 denominations (including the Disciples) and is based on profiles and behaviors of the top 400 church planters in the U.S. This highly scientific method is calibrated annually to reflect the kind of skilled candidates we are looking for. This screening tool allows us to go for the next level of interview, unless the candidate fails.
- 4- Behavior Assessment: After the screening, a candidate call into the office for a 45 minute interview with NCMT staff at an agreed upon time. The behavioral assessment reviews the screening scores with the candidate, and then enters into a conversation similar to an interview. The assessment is looking for

specific, demonstrated behaviors as well as an appetite for reaching the unchurched. It should be noted that the interviewers do not evaluate the theology or training of the planter which is the act of the credentialing committee.

- 5- Initial Training: Candidate that have passed the assessment, and we have verification that the candidate is in relationship with the region, receive an invitation to apply for planter training. Initial training is held in Indianapolis in either September or February. This week long event exposes a planter to the realities of planting, and enables the planter to develop their new congregation's identity statements. If the project is recognized by the region, the planter will begin their relationship with the coach (Barnabas). Numerous other start up topics are covered at the event such as marketing, core group development, and legal issues. Participants receive a certificate that they have completed the course.
- 6- The Barnabas relationship continues for 2 years. The Barnabas is compensated by NCM and is expected to visit the planter at their site annually. The Barnabas also maintains consistent contact with the planter and the project. If a sponsor is involved with the project, the Barnabas will also maintain some contact with the sponsor. The Barnabas will also contact regional partners when they hear of an issue of concern related to the project. The Barnabas is not a supervisor, but one who accompanies the planter in a project.
- 7- Annual Peer Group: This event is usually held in May in either in Louisville (near Cane Ridge) or Bethany, W.V. It is educational in nature usually featuring a Seminary professor or author. There is time in the event for planters to relate to each other regarding their church plants and the effect it has on their spiritual lives. There is sharing of ideas for attracting new folks, and time for planters to pray for one another as well as relate face to face with their Barnabas. Planters attend this event annually with a travel stipend for the first 2 years. They may participate longer if they desire. The event is open to any planter. (fees may apply)
- 8- Revival Recognition: When a planter enters their third year, it is marked by special recognition. They are treated to a special dinner in which their accomplishment is recognized and they are thanked on behalf of the church. The next day the planter engages in a day long workshop on leadership development and how to shift their leadership style appropriately with the congregation's growth.
- 9- Global Mission Trip: Following revival, planters are invited on a Global mission trip to learn more about how Disciples do mission, and how their church can become global in their outreach efforts. This optional trip is subsidized for their participation.

New Church Planter Development Plan



### **Best Practices in working with Planters:**

- Keep all partners informed of initial conversations about a church plant. The primary partners include the Racial Ethnic executive, New Church Ministry, and the Region.
- Inform planters about the process of recognizing their credentials which can only be recognized by the Regional partner. This may take extra advocacy if English is the second language of the planter. Regions that assign a mentor to the planter candidate have greater success in getting paperwork handled in a timely fashion.
- A clearly defined process for recognition. A paper that lists the steps for credentialing is helpful for the candidate, otherwise it may seem arbitrary. Included on this list should be a proposed time-line the candidate can expect in being credentialed.
- Require planters to be assessed. NCM has increased their application requirements for training to include assessment. This should take place more than 60 days prior to training.
- New Church Ministry will only accept Planters for training, coaching or peer group that are in relationship with their region. New Church Ministry accepts up to 5 candidates who are in discernment, who have not yet committed to planting, at each training if space is available.
- New Church Ministry also accepts up to five regional participants at each training who wish to accompany a project or receive the same information that planters receive.
- Partners encourage planters to attend Peer Group. NCM provides scholarships for travel (currently) for the first two years of their project. Planters may attend however indefinitely for a small fee.

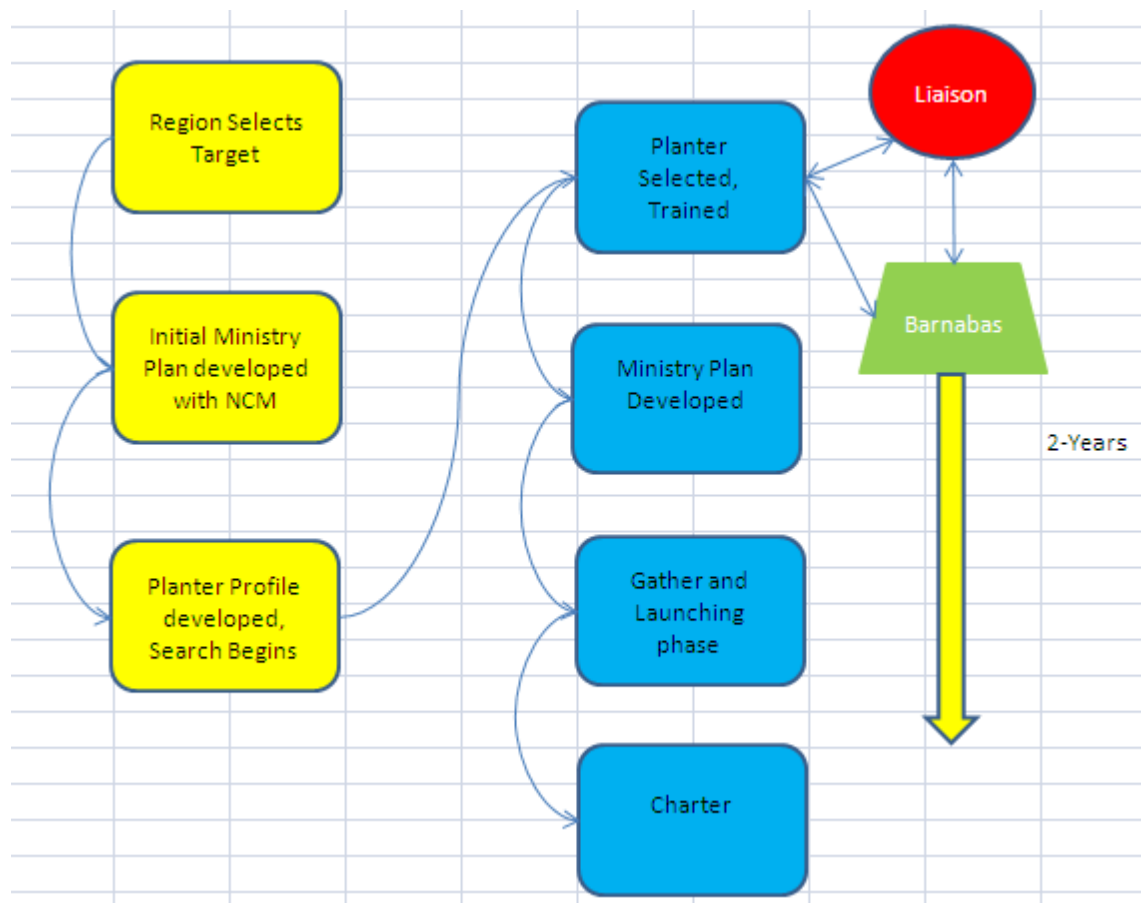
## Regionally Initiated Projects:

During the 1980's, Regionally Initiated Projects were the primary strategy Disciples used in launching new congregations. In this model, the Region would run a capital campaign, focused on launching a new church and a few other Regional projects. The Region would then call out a planter, appoint a Project Advisory Committee to give oversight, and work with the congregation through the acquisition of property and building.

The process was effective, launching more than 130 new congregations, but it was also very expensive and required enormous effort on the part of the Region to run a financial campaign, and supervise the development of a new church.

Today, only 4% of all new church starts fall in this category. While it is expensive, the model works in the right location with the right people and is still worth considering.

### Regionally Initiated Projects Flow:



In the regional model, the congregation is being planted because the region is intentional about increasing its witness either in a geographical area of great growth, or with a new population such as a Gen-X or racial ethnic targets.

Once the region has selected a target, it is a good thing to call for a no-cost consultation with NCM to assess the target and develop an initial vision, with a budget. While the plan is developed, a profile of a potential planter is developed with prospects who have been assessed are sent to the Regional Minister for recommendation. Depending on this vision, the search for a qualified candidate that meets the profile will likely take around 2 years.

Once the planter is selected, they enter the training and coaching regimen with the accountability triangle in place at the beginning. The Liaison may want to also attend training with the planter, and meet the Barnabas so they begin the journey together with the same information.

Following training, the Ministry Plan is completed with the coach, and the project enters the gathering phase. The accompaniment process continues for two years.

On regionally initiated projects it is always beneficial to have benchmarks in place that are reasonable for the kind of congregation being developed. These marks help the committee gauge the progress of the development of the church as well as the budgetary bench marks.

### **Best Practices for Regionally Initiated Projects:**

- 1- Planter, region and coach must be in good communication with each other by means of a mutually agreeable process of communication. Regional ministers and racial ethnic pastors should also be included in the loop as well as NCM.
- 2- Regions should be prepared for a long search for potential planters. It is important to get the right person, who matches the community dynamic, who has been assessed. Since there is usually a lot of funding involved in this kind of project, it is imperative that the assessment be complete.
- 3- The Liaison will highly involve in this process, attending training, and in regular contact with the Barnabas. The Liaison will also provide updates for regional publications, and be the voice that is always requesting prayer for the planter and project.
- 4- On a very public launch like a Regionally Initiated project, it is important to relieve anxiety on the sponsor's part. The will want to see immediate results, however the planter needs that gathering phase before launching, and a forced "premature" launch will lead to a much longer period of sustainable development.

## Congregationally Initiated Projects:

As the new church movement began, it was hoped that 60% of all new church starts would be initiated by existing congregations. This vision has largely been hampered by the fact that most congregations today are in decline and cannot see past the need for survival, let alone consider launching a new congregation. The majority of all congregationally initiated plants have been planted by congregations started since 2001.

The fact is that ALL congregations, regardless of their size and wealth, can be engaged in church planting—in fact almost all congregations would benefit from giving birth to a new church.

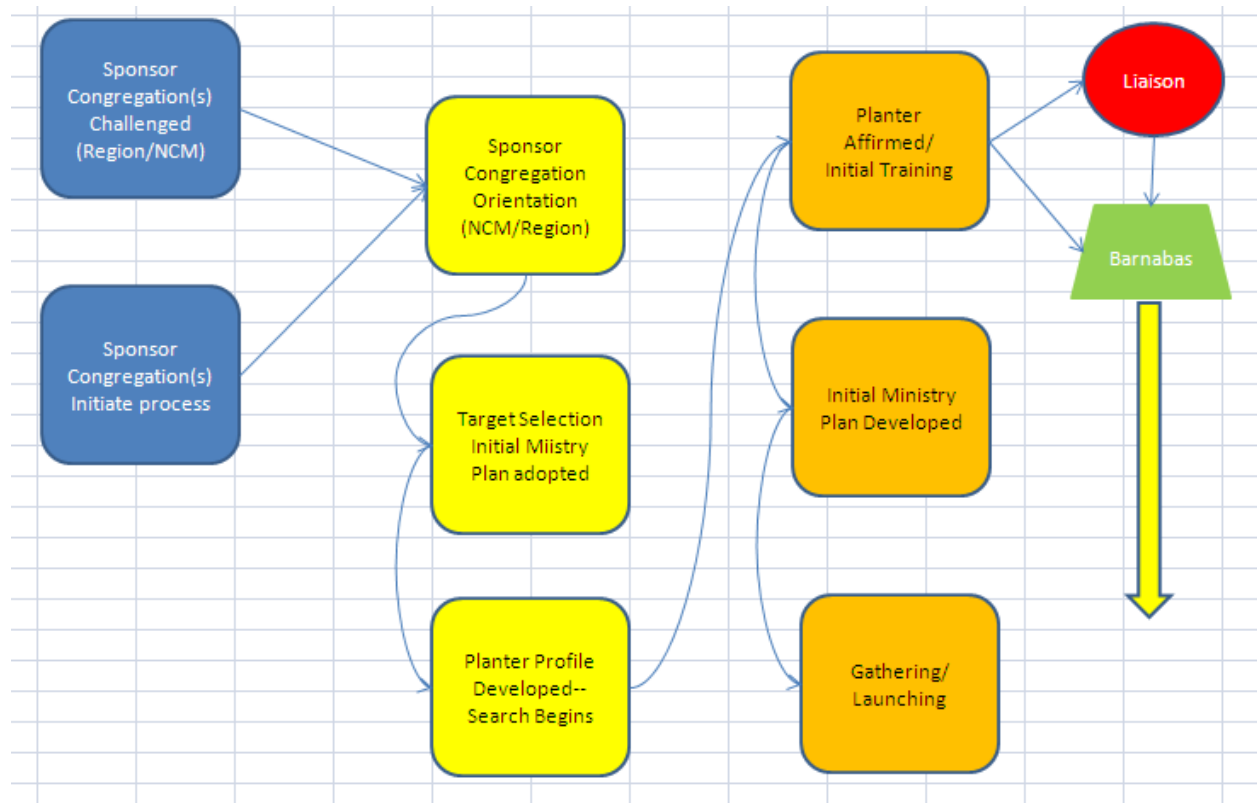
A recent study of older congregations that have experienced decline shows that they have a lot of excess space in their facilities. In fact we have seen as much as 1,000 sq. feet per single worshipper. Most of these congregations are declining because the dynamics of their community have changed, and the residents are of a different socio-economic group that the existing congregation can adequately relate.

If a church like this was linked with one or two other existing congregations, we could have an ideal convergence of resources to plant a new vital congregation.

Congregationally initiated projects work the best. When a church is started by a healthy congregation, it develops the DNA of the sponsoring congregation. If the church is seeded with members from an existing congregation it will also grow more rapidly. The gift of just 5 members to a new church will generate at least 25 new participants who would not attend the existing church. When Mississippi Blvd. Christian Church commissioned 50 members, it led to a launch of more than 400. This is what we like to call “God math”. That is when small efforts multiply in ways we cannot explain.

An excellent book that describes the process for Congregationally Initiated project is available at [www.newchurchministry.org](http://www.newchurchministry.org) under the resource tab. This book is free to Disciple congregations, and gives church leaders insights into how to sponsor a new church start. The book was written by Gilberto Collazo, whose congregations planted 8 new congregations while he was a pastor in Puerto Rico.

**Congregationally Initiated Project Flow Chart:**



It has been our experience that existing congregations do not usually wake up one day and say “hey let’s start a new church”. Most congregations do not believe they can do this kind of ministry, or are preoccupied with their own survival. It takes a trusted partner to suggest that a congregation or group of congregations consider this kind of experience.

We use the language of “challenge” on purpose; a congregation has to have a compelling vision set before them, and then have a partner who can show them that they have the ability to reach out to others in a very different way. We know that beyond any doubt, unless a congregation is challenged to do this, they will not likely volunteer. Incentives like matching regional dollars might help the process along.

The kind of challenge that works the best is a one-on-one type. Rather than a passive announcement to a large group of pastors, it works better to challenge a pastor to get a group of leaders together to begin to explore this process. It is not a hard sale. When leaders begin to see the vast numbers of people their congregation cannot reach, and that they have the ability to do it in a unique way, they are usually moved to take the leap, especially if they have a heart for evangelism.

If a congregation is willing to take an additional step in considering the future of developing a new church, NCM is happy to accompany regional partners in helping to orient the congregation. This orientation will answer questions about how to develop a target, potential costs, and how a ministry plan might be developed. NCM is also willing to accompany the congregation(s) in the development of the initial ministry plan and the development of the planter profile.

Once an assessed planter is affirmed, the process of developing the congregation will begin as a normal church start. The group of congregations that are sponsoring the project will appoint a Liaison who will work in relationship with the Barnabas as well as with the Regional committee to keep the loop of communication flowing.

**Best Practices for Congregationally Initiated Projects:**

- 1- Regional teams will be proactive in identifying future target populations, and identify existing congregations that they wish to challenge.
- 2- The team will share the work of challenging congregations, perhaps in small teams.
- 3- Regions that offer matching gifts for congregationally initiated projects have greater success in planting.
- 4- Should the congregation initiating the new church is a racial ethnic congregation; the national racial ethnic pastor should be informed.
- 5- Regional committees recognize the time it takes to find an appropriate planter, and will work together with NCM to recruit an appropriate person, and have them assessed.

## Individually Initiated Projects

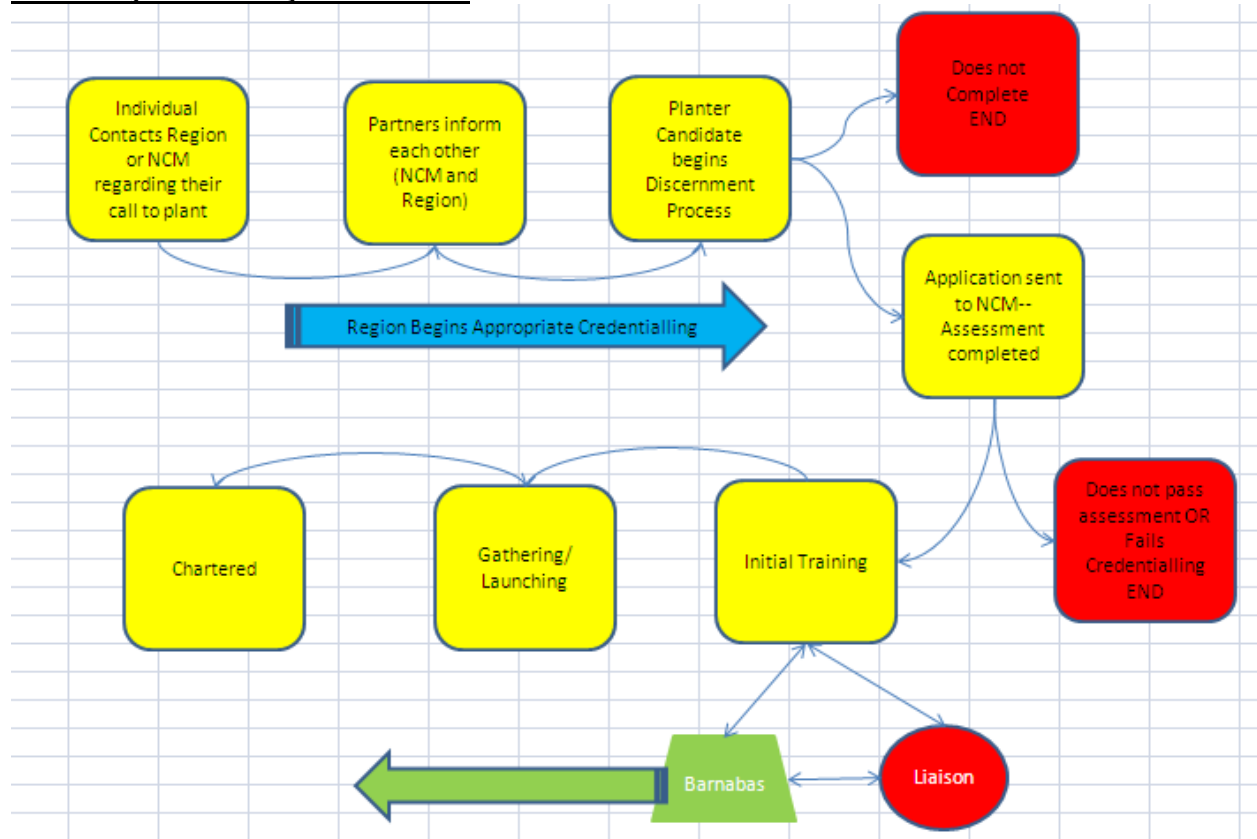
The largest strategy for new church development has been those projects initiated by individuals. These men and women have heard the call of God, and are willing to do whatever it takes to plant the church that God has put on their heart. Every week, NCM hears stories of people who sell everything they own, and use \$900 to start a new Disciple congregation. We have had individuals who have taken 2<sup>nd</sup> mortgages on their homes to do this as well. They are really committed wonderful people.

In the past, we found ways to put many barriers and hoops in front of these candidate planters, so that they lose interest and never start. Today, that picture has changed, and the results are hundreds of new Disciple congregations that are meeting the needs of many people who would not participate in any faith community.

While we want to facilitate all church starts, there is a need however to assess the planter and check motivations for this project. If the planter is already ordained, there is little to doubt, however the planter will want to go through the assessment process to be sure that they are really discerning the call of God, rather than seeking escape from the existing church world.

If the planter is also seeking a license, it will be important to follow the region's process for credentialing. This does not mean that the project is on hold until credentials are completed. The process can begin and if the planter passes assessment and the region is comfortable the candidate can receive initial training and begin working in the gathering phase. Together, we would encourage the planter to hold off of launching until credentials are in place.

**Individually Initiated Project Flow Chart:**



**Best Practices:**

- 1- Communication with all partners. NCM, Regions, and Racial Ethnic pastors when appropriate. It is never too early to inform partners of the initial conversations.
- 2- Credentialling in a short but complete process.
- 3- It is important to realize that most of these projects have little outside financial support, and are largely funded by the planter, candidates need to be recognized for their generosity, but not forced through numerous additional hoops as we would do with fully funded projects.

## The Affiliation Process:

Since 2001, hundreds of congregations have affiliated with the Disciples of Christ. These congregations are usually less than 2 years of age, normally an immigrant community, and are seeking the covering of a denomination with values similar to theirs.

While some in our denomination are suspect of these new congregations, we know that they cannot be motivated to affiliate because of funding they will receive (which is virtually nothing). Instead, these congregations are aware of Disciple values, and want to be associated with this denominations movement towards unity and wholeness.

One congregation that recently affiliated did so because the pastor felt he needed to be accountable to a larger system than himself. Another congregation affiliated because their members were becoming “Americans” and they wanted to associate with longer established churches in their area. Other congregations have affiliated because of their connection to our missionaries abroad.

Often times, these congregations will affiliate in groups. For example, in Florida we did not receive a single Haitian congregation at any one time, it was numbers of congregations that were seeking to associate with the larger denomination. A sad story however was of a Spanish speaking congregation that wanted to affiliate with a region. This pastor had numerous cousins throughout the US that also wanted to affiliate, however the first region did not respond to repeated calls, and we lost the whole group.

One way to think about affiliations is to think about how a church deals with a transfer of membership. When a person who is new to the Disciples joins a congregation, they do not know all of the ins and outs of the congregation, they do so because of their commitment to Christ and the integrity of the relationships they have established with the congregation.

This is true for affiliations as well. Our hospitality as Christians makes a huge difference in the process, if we ignore them and put barriers in front of their affiliation, we start an adversarial relationship which will not be healthy in the long run.

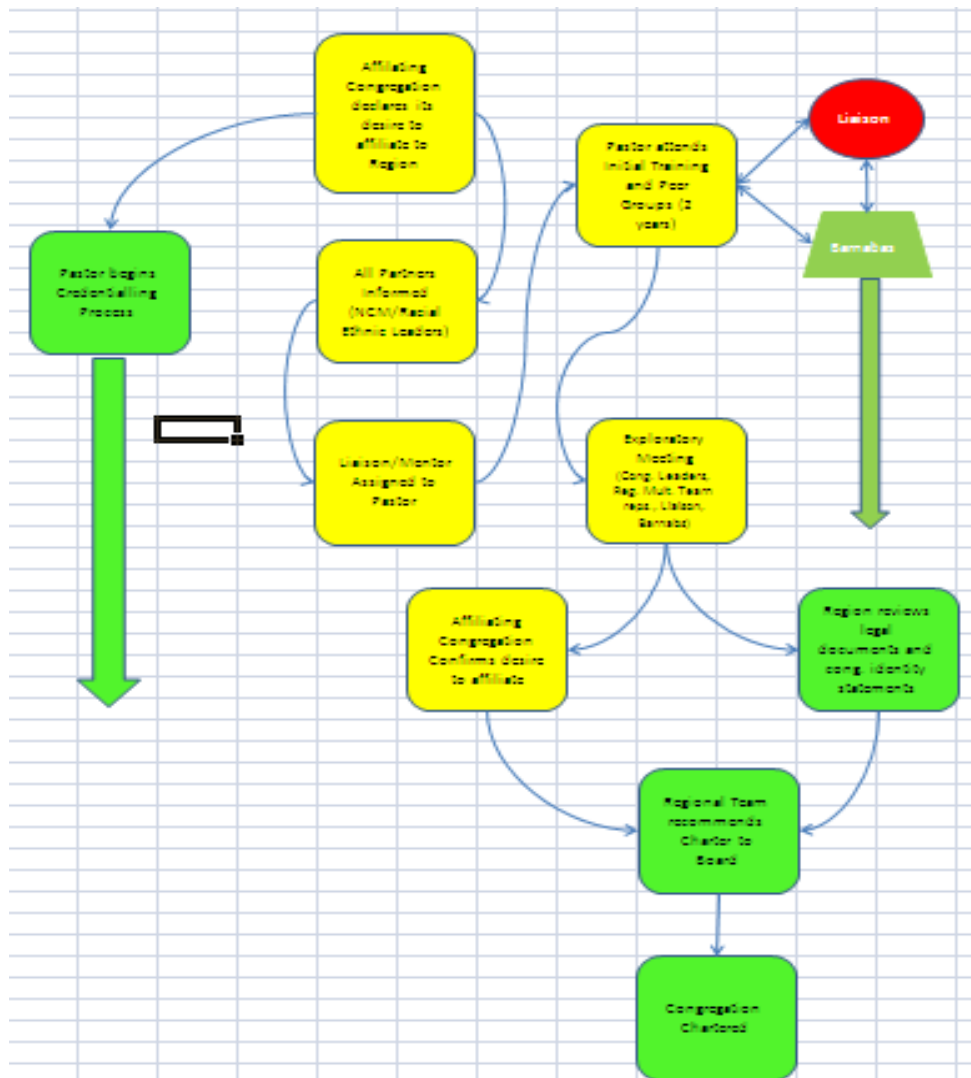
There have been numerous benefits to regions with congregations that have cultural diversity. We have a lot we can learn from each other about our faith, and the ways in which we share a common trust in Christ. The reality is, as we develop relationships we discover we have more in common than we once thought.

There are many practices as regions for how congregation's affiliate. In some cases the Regional Minister meets with the pastor and decides if they are in or not. In other cases, there is an extensive process of accompaniment with the pastor until a decision is made. One of the goals of this manual is to develop a process based on principles that leads to a more common process of adopting new congregations.

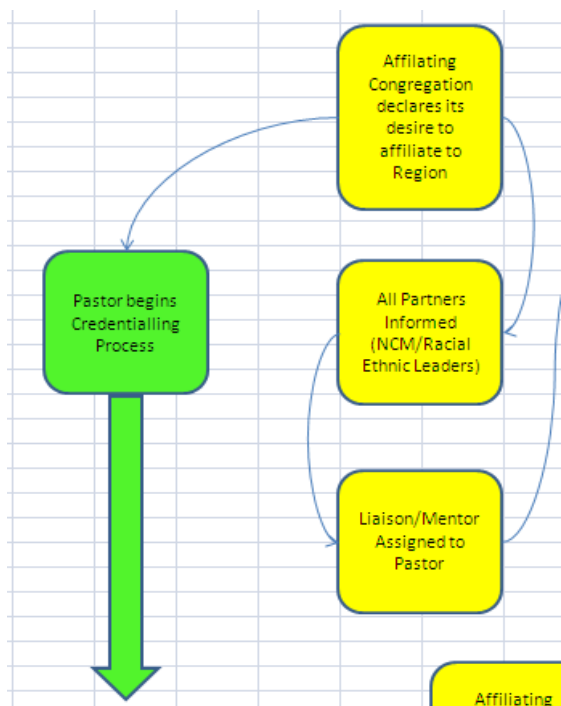
### Basic Principles for Affiliation:

- 1- Affiliation is a process for both the congregation seeking adoption as well as the region. It is not about making a congregation demonstrate its worthiness, but a conversation about our desire to associate together for the Disciple witness.
- 2- Affiliation is not a bureaucratic process where the congregation makes an application and waits for the parenting church to accept them. It is a relational process where both parties seek to understand each other, and clarify their meaning about being Disciples.
- 3- There are really two processes that must run parallel with each other, First the credentialing process for the pastor, and secondly the affiliation process of the congregation. The two processes need to be timed together so they reach completion together. Nothing is more frustrating for a planter than to receive their charter as a congregation, while they have yet to start a credentialing process.
- 4- Affiliation is a process for the whole church, not only a region. While the region is the entity with responsibility, Racial Ethnic pastors and NCM can be helpful partners in the process particularly where language skills are needed.

### The Affiliation Process Flow Chart:



The process appears complicated, in fact on first view this looks more like a diagram of a human digestive tract. The flow chart will be broken into smaller sections for discussion in this document.



The process begins when an affiliating congregation has declared their desire to affiliate with a region. This declaration is made directly to a Regional Minister or Area Minister who guides the congregation through the initial stages.

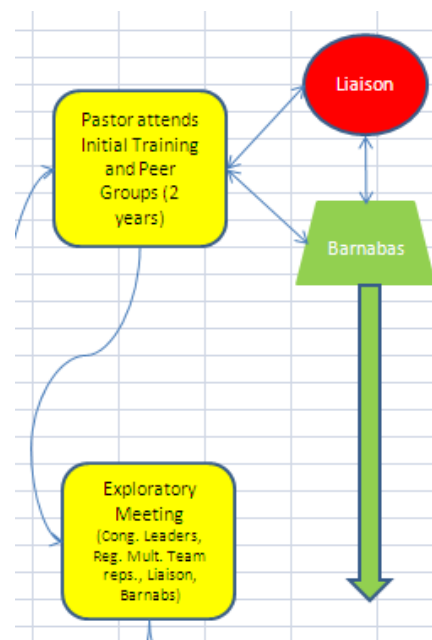
Since the credentialing process can take awhile, a first step is to introduce the pastoral candidate to the region's commission on ministry.

A second step is to inform all partners in the church that a congregation is seeking affiliation. At this point, Racial Ethnic pastors, and NCM would want to make further contact so contact information would be welcome. Partners can informally assess the motivation of the congregation affiliating on the region's behalf.

A third step would then be to assign a mentor to the congregation. A mentor is someone who becomes a friend and advocate to the affiliating pastor and their congregation. This "person of grace" will spend time in developing a relationship where honest conversation can take place. The mentor would also make reading materials available to the

affiliating pastor about Disciple identity for later conversation. The mentor would also bring the affiliating pastor to clergy group meetings, and regional gatherings.

Once the relationships are in place the Region should send the affiliating pastor to Initial Training with the mentor and Liaison if possible. While the affiliating congregation has already started, training is a great way for the pastor to begin to discover the practices of Disciples as well as meet other pastors who are in the same process. A great deal of Disciples ethos training occurs at these gatherings. This puts the pastor in relationship with a Disciples coach, and begins to help the pastor with the process of growing their new Disciples congregation.



At the end of a year or two, a formal gathering of the key parties should be held to explore the final decision of the congregation to become a fully recognized Disciples congregation. This meeting involves:

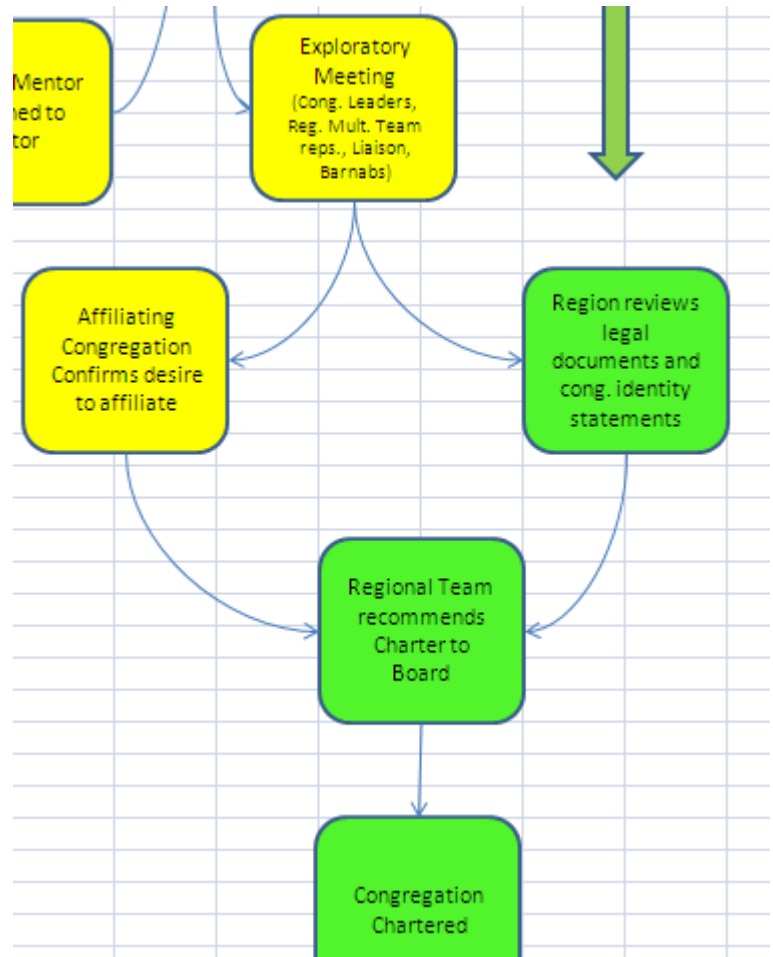
- The Regional Minister
- The Mentor
- The Barnabas
- The Liaison
- Affiliating Pastor
- Affiliating Congregational leaders

The conversation could follow the agenda listed below:

- 1- Opening prayer, devotion and Greeting from the Affiliating Pastor
- 2- Greeting from the Regional Minister
- 3- A report from the Mentor regarding his/her experience in getting to know this community
- 4- A statement from the Affiliating pastor about what he has learned about the Disciples
- 5- Questions from the Regional representatives
- 6- Questions from the Affiliating Congregational Leaders
- 7- Outline of next steps from the Regional Minister
- 8- Closing prayer led by the Regional Minister

Following the exploratory meeting, the affiliating congregation is asked to meet with its congregation and confirm their desire to affiliate with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The Region's multiplication team then collects legal documents from the congregation (i.e. Const. By-laws, articles of incorporation) for review. They may make recommendations for the congregation to consider. The team then makes a recommendation to the Regional Board to grant a charter to the congregation.



### **Best Practices for Regions:**

- 1- Regions that have the best results with affiliations keep the process relational rather than bureaucratic.
- 2- Regions should seek consistency with all affiliations regardless of their racial ethnic background.
- 3- Regions that involve Racial Ethnic pastors and NCM early in the process can measure affiliations motivations for affiliations.
- 4- Region's that utilize the services of a mentor have greater success in fully assimilating the new congregation into regional life as well as developing trust with the congregation. Careful selection of the mentor leads to greater success.
- 5- In discussing Disciple identity, be honest about beliefs and practices. For example, do not paint the picture that all congregations view scripture the same way, or that we require uniformity of belief on salvation, etc.

## Legal Issues for Disciples Congregations:

### Three Legal Documents Needed:

- 1) FEIN Number: Before you open a church checking account, you need to secure a Federal Employee Identification Number through the IRS.
  - a. Go to <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=98350,00.html>
  - b. Click "Apply on-line" and follow instructions
  - c. You will receive your number immediately
  
- 2) Non-profit status: Before donors to your church can receive credit for their charitable contributions to your church you must receive non-profit status. There are two ways to achieve this; a) by getting listed in the Yearbook for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or b) by applying to the IRS for a 501-c-3. We recommend listing in the Yearbook as it is easier, and has no fees. The 501-c-3 however requires about \$500 in fees to file and is fairly complex, especially if your church has been in existence for a while.

To get listed in the Yearbook requires recognition of your project by your Region. Each Region has a different process for congregation recognition, and your Regional Staff will be happy to inform you of their process. Generally, we would recommend you write a letter to your Regional Minister (or Area Minister) and request "Congregation in Formation" status for your church so that you can be listed in the Yearbook.

This status may take up to a year to receive. However, any gifts given during the year of application are considered charitable contributions by the IRS regardless of when the status is achieved. (For example if a congregation applies in January, and does not receive status until December, all gifts given during that year are considered charitable.)

You have a responsibility to report to the Yearbook every year. In January you will receive a form that asks some very basic statistical information about your church. This is the denominations report to the IRS, and you put your donors at risk by not filling out the form.

- 3) Articles of Incorporation: New Churches need to file Articles of Incorporation with their state of origin. This document names the organization, and some officers who are associated with the organization. It also names the relationship with the Disciples of Christ, and deeds the assets of the organization to the Region in the case of dissolution. This document is either filed with the Secretary of State, or State Attorney General's office in your state government.

To write the document, you could hire an attorney, however it is much cheaper and equally effective to pattern your articles after an existing document from an existing church. Use their language, and place the names of your officers and church in the proper places. Cost of filing after you write it is usually about \$25.

### **Other Legal Considerations:**

Liability & Liability Insurance: Up until 2003, new congregations that were in Regions with UCCIB insurance were covered under the Region's liability coverage. This changed in 2004 when the UCCIB changed carriers. The change states that only congregations that have more than 50% of their income coming from the Region are covered with liability coverage. That means that 99% of our new congregations are no longer covered under the Region's umbrella.

New congregations are encouraged to seek liability coverage. This can be done through the UCCIB (United Church of Christ Insurance Board) or other companies such as Church Mutual. Rates vary by states widely and by the amount of coverage you seek.

This kind of coverage may be required when a congregation leases space. A landlord may require additional insurance coverage for liability as well. Generally speaking, liability coverage can cost from \$300 to more than \$1000 per year.

When calling to request a quote, you will want to have a specific worship place in mind, along with the value of your equipment. There may also be requirements in different states for employee insurance.

Encourage Safe Behavior: New churches are frequently held together with "duct tape". Because new congregations are strapped for cash, they often take short cuts which may produce hazards for participants. An unsupervised child is a common mistake that often leads to property damage as well as injury. The congregation could be liable for inadequate supervision.

Building hazards are another issue. Overloaded circuits, lack of fire exits, tripping hazards etc. are all very common in some rental properties. The new church needs to be vigilant in eliminating these hazards for the safety of those attending. Common sense and an eye for these details is important.

## Assigning Status to New Congregations:

The only person who can change the status of a congregation is the Regional Minister. They inform the Yearbook office when there is an affiliation in process or a congregation in formation. These assignments are not only necessary, but essential for a new congregation as they grant a congregation non-profit status by virtue of the Disciples blanket 501C-3.

While regions are reluctant to sometimes assign status to a congregation, a delay can impact a newly forming congregation in a bad way. When a congregation has non-profit status, it allows the church to raise funds from donors as tax-deductible gifts. If a congregation does not have that status it will limit large gifts. Since there is little denominational financial support for most projects, it is important to get this status completed soon. In Disciples initial training, planters are taught to seek the status early on in the process.

Status is retro-active. That is, once a Regional Minister grants status to a congregation, it covers giving that the congregation has received back to January 1<sup>st</sup> of that year.

### **What status should I request for new congregations?**

- (F) When a congregation is in formation it should be granted “F” status (Congregation in Formation). This is appropriate when the congregation has a planter in the field that is actively gathering a faith community. Even though the congregation has yet to worship, it is fulfilling the basic activities of a congregation (worship, prayers, education). When a congregation receives an “F” status, it will be listed in the Yearbook at the last part of each region’s congregational listings. Some Regional Ministers require their Regional Board to approve F status for congregations.
- (E) Emerging Status is a status that Regional Ministers can grant to a congregation that is in formation, but cannot yet be recognized. For example, if an individually initiated project approaches the Regional Minister in November, E status can be granted without other approval sources. This gives the congregation non-profit status, while not printing the congregation’s name in the Yearbook. (The congregation is listed on an addendum which is given to the IRS). E status is only good for one year and cannot be renewed.
- (A) “A” status (Affiliating) is granted to a congregation that has just started the affiliation process. It is also listed on the Addendum to the IRS and does not appear in print in the Yearbook. The congregation retains this status until the Regional Minister informs the Yearbook Office that its status has changed.
- (Y) “Y” (Yearbook) status is granted to all congregations that are fully recognized. Once a church charters, it should be granted this full status. This puts the congregation in print (in the case of an A or an E) in the normal listing section for congregations.

### **When Does NCM Count A New Congregation:**

Tracking new congregations is like keeping track of worms in a can. They move, change addresses, phone numbers and even names within a short period of time. NCM has worked hard to keep track of new congregations so that Planters can participate in training opportunities. We also use the count to track our progress as a denomination.

NCM counts a congregation if it meets 2 conditions:

- There is a planter actively gathering a faith community in a target area
- The planter is in relationship with the region (regardless of status)

It has been agreed that NCM counts differently than some regions prefer—however it has been important that we use a consistent method across the country. Therefore, when there is a General Assembly, NCM circulates the list of congregations to be recognized to each Regional Minister for approval. The list also includes projects that have died. This is to continually track our sustainability rates. Dead congregations are not reported to the General Assembly.

The NCM Resolution at the Assembly is for the purpose of celebration only, and is not official recognition of the congregation. It is meant to focus the attention of the Assembly on new churches and to pray as a body for the planters who are working across the entire church.

### **When should a Region Charter a New Congregation:**

The goal of the New Church Movement is to develop Sustainable, Multiplying, Disciples of Christ congregations. In that spirit we would suggest that regions adopt a policy for Charter that keeps several things in mind:

- 1) Does the congregation demonstrate its association with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
  - a. Did it support the Disciples Mission Fund this year?
  - b. Are leaders in the church present at Regional gatherings?
  - c. If it is a racial/ethnic congregation, is the congregation engaged with activities associated with those ministries?
  - d. Has the pastor attended NCM training events?
  - e. Did the congregation fill out a Yearbook report?
- 2) Is the congregation becoming self-sustaining?
  - a. Self-sustaining congregations can support a pastor (either part time or full time)
  - b. Self-sustaining congregations have sufficient income to pay rent on a facility
  - c. Self-sustaining congregations have sufficient funds to provide a variety of programs
  - d. Self-sustaining congregations are missional in the approach, providing organized volunteers to the community and mission funding.
- 3) Does the congregation have its legal instruments in order
  - a. Do the articles of incorporation name the Region as recipient of assets should the church close?
  - b. Does the church have an FEIN Number with the IRS?
  - c. Does the church have sufficient by-laws and constitution in place so that the church could 1-replace a pastor or 2-provide a financial accountability system that demonstrates good practices.

*Some regions provide a covenant form that is signed by both the Region and the Congregation at the time of charter. This covenant has been adapted to outline the commitment of the Region to a newly forming congregation as well.*

## CHARTER COVENANT

Having been led by God into the communion of churches known as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we the leaders of the \_\_\_\_\_ Region and the leaders of \_\_\_\_\_ Christian Church agree to live in covenant with all the congregations and expressions of the Disciples of Christ. We will exercise the responsibilities and privileges of being Disciples together:

As a congregation:

- We will support the entire church through contributions to the Disciples Mission Fund.
- We will participate in appropriate Area and Regional workshops, retreats and assemblies.
- When possible we will participate in events of the entire church including General Assembly and Quadrennial Assemblies for Women and New Church Ministry Events.
- We will continue to learn about what it means to be a Disciple, and help our members and participants learn about our common values.
- We will pray for other Disciples congregations, leaders and missionaries.
- We will fill out annual reports for the Yearbook and submit them to the appropriate place.

As a Region:

- We will work to invite and include the congregation in all workshops and assemblies.
- We will seek to include congregational participants as officers and volunteers in the Region's structure.
- We will provide Regional counsel when the congregation enters into periods of transition, and accompany the congregation through its difficulties.
- We will encourage our local congregations to recognize your church, so that you can be in relationship with one another.

## RESOURCES

### Housing Ministry Today

Many congregations today have excess space. On Sunday mornings, many Disciple congregations utilize about 50% of their facility on average. During the week that usage is below 15% (based on a 16 hour day). Many congregations today spend around one-third of their income maintaining these places of worship. Since churches were built to expand the witness, it seems logical that nesting new congregations can be highly beneficial to both the new church and the existing church.

Regions can be very helpful in brokering relationships between new churches and existing congregations that have excess space. If these relationships can be developed with sensitivity and honesty, it can be long term and beneficial. If these relationships are based on a landlord-tenant agreement, then the relationship will be fraught with frustration on everyone's part.

Several studies, conducted by Church Extension reveal some shocking facts about housing ministry of congregations into the future. First of all, building costs have skyrocketed disproportionately over the past 2 decades. A building that once cost the equivalent of 6-8 household incomes, now can cost four times that amount. This means that no matter how large a congregation gets, purchasing property, and a building will be out of touch for most new congregations that are developing in metropolitan areas and suburbs.

Another study demonstrated that declining congregations only utilize a small portion of their facilities, and that they struggle under the cost of maintaining a facility. The cost per worshipper is well beyond their expected income.

Clearly, nesting is going to be an important strategy for success in the development of many of our new congregations.

Not too long ago, we were working with developing a nesting relationship with a church that had a 60,000 sq. foot facility, and 1500 seat sanctuary that could not reach agreement on joint usage of the facility. In this case it was not a condition of race, but the kind of new congregation that was emerging that was the cause of concern. As I thought back on this it occurred to me where the conversation went wrong. The congregation did not accept the new congregation as a diverse Disciple congregation, but spent their efforts in evaluating the new churches theology.

If Disciples truly believe that God can save anyone, by any means (as our Commission on Theology once claimed), then the nesting conversation cannot be about approving specifics about another groups theology, but by claiming our freedom and diversity. If we use these kind of litmus tests in evaluating the potential of a relationship, few of our congregations today would be in any kind of relationship with each other.

Another way to think about the nesting relationship is to begin to think about population segments. We are doing extensive research now at Church Extension with congregations that are relocating, and matching them to areas where they have the greatest socio-economic connection. In this work, we are starting to discover that while there are 60 distinctly different socio-economic groups in America today, most congregations only effectively reach 3-4 groups. While they might claim they have a great deal of diversity within a congregation, the reality is their members largely have similar educational levels, similar banking habits and ideas about money, they watch the same kinds of programs on TV etc.

By nesting another congregation, it allows the facility to be used by another 3-4 groups in their community. It is about expanding the Disciples witness.

The large issue is that congregations tend to think of themselves as parishes. That is to say, they think that they serve all the Disciples that live in a particular community. This notion had some weight in the 1950's, but really hasn't been true since the invention of the automobile. Congregations are largely segments of a socio-economic group. That means multiple congregations, with a different emphasis and program can work out of the same facility.

An example of this would be a church of mostly seniors in a segment known as "Steadfast Conservatives". They have a unique world view, see God in a different way, and need a host of unique programs. They prefer certain kinds of music, and tend to view the world dualistically. You could easily develop a congregation of "Affluent Urban Professionals" in the same building with little impact on the existing church. They would worship differently, use different kinds of music, need a broader world view, and would like want to be engaged in community activism.

The reality is that people from both segments live in the same neighborhood today. The Affluent Urban Professional would never return to a congregation of Steadfast Conservatives. Why not use the same facility to expand the witness to a new segment?

Communities shift much more frequently than they have in the past as well. One of the reasons many congregations are declining today is the fact that the church has not adapted to the shifts in population in their context. Another CE research fact is that of congregations started in the 1950's, only 8 are viable today—because of this phenomenon. A look at a segment of those congregations (1950's starts) demonstrates that the majority of congregants drive in from another community.

Most congregations seeking a nesting relationship today are first generation, immigrant congregations. Because of their language and cultural issues, their relationship with a nesting church requires sensitivity.

#### Sensitivity issues for Hosting Congregations:

##### Language

The majorities of new church planters as well as the people they tend to reach do not speak English in the home. The leaders have a wide range of English skills from partial understanding, to only picking up a word or two. Asian leaders with limited English skills have even more difficulty since there are few words in either culture that are similar. Most communication difficulties in nesting congregations occur because of language skills. While oral communication is difficult, it is sometimes better to have communication in brief written statements.

##### Education

The leaders of ethnic congregations tend to be commissioned ministers. They may have had intensive training in a Biblical Institute. In Asian and Hispanic church contexts, the laity are invited to develop their own hermeneutics.

For many cultural groups, Seminary is not an option, especially for those without a college education. In some cases the planter may have a college degree from their country of origin that is not recognized by stateside schools. In some cases even if the planter wants to attend seminary and has the resources to attend they cannot because of their language skills. The planter's education is not an issue for their congregations.

The planter likely has a family and must be bi-vocational in order to support their families and the new church start as well. The opportune time for education is not likely. We are starting to see however, that these same pastors have high hopes for their children, and in some cases their children have gained opportunities for the education the planter could not afford. Today, we have a number of well-educated 2<sup>nd</sup> generation leaders who are thankful for the fact their parents had the opportunity to serve in a church.

## Cultural Considerations

Attending a church is a cultural event. Even in different parts of the US with well-established churches there are unique and distinctive cultural differences. Attending worship in Texas is different than anywhere in San Francisco—EVEN with Disciple congregations.

We have differing regional and cultural views about the nature of God, and how we as people worship. This is largely true with different cultural groups who may wish to nest in a congregation. If you think about it, if a group of American English speakers were working in China, they would likely gather on Sunday morning for worship. It would be in English, sing music from home, and end with a potluck of American food.

As immigrant groups immigrate, they also need opportunities to get out of the majority culture, and reclaim the parts of their culture that were so important to them. That would include singing music with the instruments they used at home, in a volume that they are used to.

It also means that their church is an important social hub. They will want to gather for birthday parties, bridal and baby showers, weddings and receptions...and they will want to linger for long hours. They will cook the food of their homeland, which will often leave a lingering odor.

Racial ethnic congregations are usually theologically and socially conservative. They will dress modestly, and will have conservative values related to recreational drinking, smoking and dancing. This is not unlike European immigrant communities in the 1900's as they formed their congregations.

There are a wide variety of spiritual practices, particularly with Haitian and Hispanic congregations that may be foreign to most Anglo congregations. Anointing services, prayer times in which people come forward, kneel, and pray at the altar, and sometimes even praying simultaneously (loudly and passionately). Many congregations can expect an altar call in which there will be personal ministrations with those who come forward.

Many Asian congregations tend to be very formal, and focused on worshipping in the right style. They will practice hymns to be sure they are sung properly; they will have planned prayer experiences and will wear their very best clothes to worship. Korean congregations in particular will worship more than just Sundays, and want to have the church available for prayer early in the morning.

The financial stability of these congregations will fluctuate greatly. When the economy turns sour, many in these congregations will be the first to lose their jobs. When there is a big disaster at home, participants in the congregation will be supporting family members back home directly.

For immigrant congregations, giving is a spiritual discipline. These congregants will practice tithing even though their paychecks are considerably smaller than others who live in the community.

We cannot possibly write about all of the nuances or differences between different cultural groups and the ways they express their faith. Today, Disciples worship on Sundays in many different languages and in many styles. We now have Disciples that speak languages native to African dialects. We have Chin and Zo congregations from tribal groups in Myanmar. We have a Mongolian immigrant congregation and numerous congregations from all over the world.

The bottom line is that if a congregation expects the nesting congregation to look, worship and act like they do, it will be a difficult relationship. If the congregation embraces the Disciples value of Freedom and Diversity, it will be challenging, but rewarding.

### **BEST PRACTICES FOR NESTING:**

- 1) Develop a covenant for ministry. In order to avoid a landlord/tenant mentality, it is recommended that a partnership committee be established to draft an agreement that recognizes that both congregations are in partnership in developing the Disciples witness in your community. (See a sample at the end of this section). A preamble of the covenant should reflect a theological understanding of shared ministry, and translated in the language of both congregations.
- 2) Remembering that the church belongs to God, the covenant should provide for a equitable use of space. For example, if the host congregation is averaging 20 in worship, and the nesting church is at 300, perhaps the host congregation would consider moving worship to the “right sized” chapel.
- 3) Scheduling needs to also be reflected in the covenant. A master calendar should be established and used by both congregations.
- 4) Signs and décor need to be understood at the beginning. Both host and nesting congregations have a right to identify themselves and their worship times in their own language. Placement, size, style and wording of the signs should be mutually agreed upon. Internal signage indicating the locations of sanctuary, restrooms and nursery also need to be bi-lingual. Each congregation should be able to use symbols of worship such as banners. Musical equipment on the chancel should also be understood at the start.
- 5) Expected contributions should be named as well. If the congregation is just starting, it would be a great partnership if the host church could be generous in the nesting congregation’s contribution towards building costs. If the agreement could outline a formula for calculating building use fees as the congregation grows it would help both churches.
- 6) Legal Arrangements should also be considered. Both the host and nesting church need to carry adequate liability insurance. Policies for new congregations that are in nesting arrangements are available through the United Church of Christ Insurance Board (UCCIB)\* [Toll Free Tel: 1-800-437-8830, Fax: 216-736-3239, Address: 700 Prospect Avenue 5th Floor Cleveland, OH 44115] for several hundred dollars a year. The congregation should also have status with the Region (granting the church non-profit status) and be incorporated.
- 7) Security Issues should also be covered in the agreement. Both churches need access to the facilities, and have a responsibility for keeping the building secure. No keys are to be duplicated. This would also be a place to list cleaning responsibilities.
- 8) Supervision of children and youth will also need to be clearly covered. This is the number one complaint of host congregations. Unsupervised children are a huge liability for both congregations and are discussed in detail planter training.
- 9) A communication process should also be outlined. The partnership committee should establish an ongoing process for clear and honest communication. The covenant should address:
  - a. A process for regular evaluation
  - b. A process for dealing with adjustments or changes desired by either host or nesting congregation.
  - c. A process for third-party intervention in the event of a disagreement that cannot be resolved by the host or nesting congregation.
  - d. A process for renewal or termination.
- 10) Finally, the covenant should be signed in a worship setting by representatives for both congregations. This bi-lingual worship setting will allow leaders from both churches to demonstrate their commitment to one another, and set the tone for how the covenant is lived out by both congregations. It would demonstrate that this is not a business agreement, but a commitment to God and each other.

Finally, both congregations would benefit programmatically if they would consider sharing children or youth programming, ESL classes, a common food bank, fellowship dinners, work days on the building or for social justice, etc.

## *Preamble to a Covenant on Shared Ministry*

We, members of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Churches commit ourselves to the ministry of Christ in \_\_\_\_\_ and across the world. We joyfully covenant together to support the mission of our two congregations through the sharing of facilities and cooperative ministry.

We affirm that we are all part of the Body of Christ, endeavoring through different languages, cultural patterns and styles of ministry, to be instruments of God's love in our community.

We praise God for those who have gone before us to enable us to have a community of faith and a church facility as a tool for Christian ministry. We affirm that the church building is indeed a gift of God to be used in ministry, that it is not the probate possession of any one person or group, but it is the house of the Lord and is for the use of all people.

We also commit ourselves to the care and upkeep of the facilities to enable them to continue to be available as tools for the ministry of the Body of Christ.

We pledge ourselves to support the ministry of our two congregations, separately and together, of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Church Universal. We seek to live our faith in witness and love in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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