

# New Beginnings Assessment Service

## Program Details for Congregations

### What is the New Beginnings Assessment Service?

New Beginnings is a service offered by the Church Growth and Transformation of the Presbyterian Mission Agency in partnership with the Church Extension office of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It assesses the strengths and challenges for your congregation as it seeks to engage in significant ministry in your community. The assessment service, along with follow-up strategic interpretation with your congregation's leaders, enables churches who have experienced decline to envision a new path for their future. In most cases, congregations in decline struggle not only with a ministry plan that fits their neighborhood, but also with deferred building maintenance, use of space, and other architectural or location issues as well. The assessment and follow-up training intend to help your congregation gain a realistic picture of your resources for ministry, your demographic strengths, your potential for change, and your potential for vital ministry in order to put you on the road to sustainable Christian witness and action in your community. The New Beginnings Assessment Service seeks answers to the question, "What is God calling your congregation to do and to be in this time and in this place?"

While originally designed for churches in decline, this process can also be helpful to congregations that are not necessarily in numerical decline but are looking for new energy, direction and focus.

This assessment and focused interpretation process helps in many ways. Your congregation will:

- Receive a comprehensive report of its current strengths and challenges as well as a description of possible directions for the future.
- Receive training on how to engage in a discernment process in order to discern a new direction for the future.
- Discover ministry opportunities available in your community.
- Learn to make a compelling case for change based on realistic options for the future.
- Discover how to discuss change opportunities in a healthy, open manner.
- Learn how to set a course for strategic and visionary ministry planning.

New Beginnings **does not**:

- Force change on a congregation: The choice for a New Beginning is always the congregation's choice.
- Develop the long-term ministry plan for the congregation: strategic visioning and planning must come after the assessment and discernment process and is best done with regional/area partners or other ministry planning groups.
- Settle conflict in the congregation. (A moderate amount of conflict is a natural part of organizational life and must be engaged in any process of change.)

### How does the New Beginnings Assessment Service work?

New Beginnings takes place in four phases:

**Phase I:** At a mutually agreed time, a New Beginnings assessor meets with an individual church for an on-site assessment. Prior to the visit, the congregation sends in profile information of its current participants. The congregation is also asked to submit financial reports for the last three years, calendar information, and insurance information. The visit entails a complete building inspection, financial review with the financial officer, a calendar review with a knowledgeable person, a windshield tour of the community, meeting with the moderator and pastor, and an Appreciative Inquiry session

with congregational members that seek to understand each church's programmatic and missional strengths. It works best if someone from the presbytery (staff member, committee member, pastor from another church) is the facilitator for the evening session with the congregation. The congregation will receive a 45 to 60 page report of this visit, including:

- ❖ Congregational demographics
- ❖ Community demographics
- ❖ Tenure of participants
- ❖ A pin map showing location of membership
- ❖ Financial history
- ❖ Building condition
- ❖ Congregational appetite for change
- ❖ Congregational energy level
- ❖ Congregational relational levels
- ❖ Evaluation of administrative, programmatic, and building resources
- ❖ Potential future stories

Before the final report is given, there is an opportunity for the pastor or a key leader to review the report for accuracy.

**Phase II:** Within a month or two of the assessment, follow-up leadership training will occur for the congregation. This Leadership Training Event, enables congregational leaders to analyze their report, discover options, begin to develop a compelling vision for the congregation's future, and strategize for how to best engage the congregation in a decision-making process.

***If the church is participating in a presbytery or regional cluster, this training happens on a Friday-Saturday event.*** In most cases, 5-8 key leaders from each New Beginnings congregation attend. This gathering also enables each congregation's lay or professional clergy to participate in a short course entitled "leading change in congregations."

***If the church is doing New Beginnings on its own, this event happens in one, 4-hour afternoon or evening.***

**Phase III:** The key leaders will lead the congregation through the discernment process in a series of small group meetings. This process will generate the conversation, prayer and idea sharing needed to explore all the options available to the congregation.

**Phase IV:** The congregation makes a "big-picture" decision about what it believes God is calling the church to do and be into the future. After this decision for a New Beginning is adopted, The Office of Church Growth will work with the congregation and its Presbytery to refer the pastor and key leaders to available mission planning resources.

#### **Phase V: Feedback**

While a congregation's *new beginning* is usually not decided upon for several months after the end of the small group meetings, there are several opportunities for feedback to be given. Follow-up conversations with presbyteries and congregations allow the New Beginnings program to be further customized to individual congregations and improved for future projects. While these conversations may take place intermittently throughout the process, scheduled discussions are normally planned for six and twelve months after the church's assessment.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1) What is our congregation's basic output after participation in this service?

Our churches will come to a decision about the particular witness they can make in their communities that will start them on a path to renewal and sustainable ministry.

### 2) What is required from our congregation?

- A complete list of participants, addresses, approximate ages, and attendance tenure
- Financial records from the past 3 years
- A filled out calendar worksheet
- Minimum of 5-8 leaders who would commit to attending the training event and sponsor the Cottage meeting(s)
- A commitment to follow the process

### 3) What is the cost?

The fee for congregations is \$2,800 (if done with a group of churches in a presbytery or region) or \$3,800 if done by one church alone. This cost covers consultant travel, time and overhead for the on-site assessment and phone follow-up, 10 printed reports, and the program expense of the leadership training event (led by one Office of Church Growth and Transformation representative). Also included are the Home (small group) Leader Manuals for the leaders of each small group—a process that leaders will be taught to engage at the leadership training event.

### 4) Who is the Office of Church Growth?

The Office of Church Growth is a part of the Office of Worship, Formation, and Evangelism ministry area of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. Contact in this office:

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## Some New Beginnings successes...(from the Disciples of Christ experience)

**RESTART:** A congregation averaged just 30 in worship every other Sunday. After developing a compelling new vision for ministry, the congregation agreed to close and commit to a plan of restarting the church. Historical documents were removed from the church, officers agreed to resign, the church was closed and reopened a month later with a new name. That congregation now worships with more than 300 in services each Sunday.

**RELOCATION:** A congregation with a building four times larger than their congregation needed sold their building and relocated with a new, full-time pastor. This right-sized congregation is growing again with a passion for ministry in their community, no longer saddled with large building payments.

**MORPH:** A good congregation was located in a community that had changed its racial/ethnic population radically. The congregation restarted as a church appropriate for the dominant culture, and moved from an average worship attendance of 11 to more than 5,000 each Sunday.

**MISSIONAL RE-VISION:** A congregation with good people and resources was able to reconsider what God had called it to do. After intentional reflection, and the development of a strong vision for the future, it moved from being a church that focused primarily on itself to a church focused on serving its community.

These are just a few sketches of congregations that chose new beginnings that made a difference in their congregational life, the lives of the new people who now participate in their congregations, and their larger communities.