

**ITEM D.202
FOR INFORMATION**

New Beginnings Update

www.whatisourfuturestory.com

New Beginnings is an assessment-based discernment process for churches that seek to make a bold decision about their future. It was originally designed for use by churches struggling with issues of viability and sustainability but it has also proven helpful to those that, while still viable, are stuck in a pattern that leads to decline. It is designed to take roughly five to eight months from start to finish, though many of the churches are taking longer than that. It happens in four phases: assessment, leader training, discernment (thru small groups), and decision-making. Churches participate in one of two ways; either on their own or with a cluster of churches sponsored by a presbytery.

1. Number of churches that have gone through New Beginnings:

Previous years:

2010 - 7

2011 - 39

2012 - 90

2013 - 92

2014 - 167

This year, we have worked with 43 churches to date. Looking ahead -- There are 12 scheduled that are confirmed. We estimate an additional 30 or so based on the confirmed clusters or inquiries that look solid. So our lowest estimate for 2015 is around 90, with a high estimate of 110.

The pattern in the numbers above is interesting. Initially the number of churches signed up for New Beginnings grew fast; we had two years with a similar level of work, and then we had an explosion of demand in 2014. It would have been even more that year except that we shut down our work with individual churches in the first part of the year because we could not keep up with the demand. We reopened that end of the work mid year and the requests from individual churches is beginning to pick up again. The level of work was never going to be on a straight-line pattern and 2015 is where we see the first slow down happening. Our work in 2015 is likely to be about a third less than 2014.

We are seeing some presbyteries where we have already run one cluster of churches through New Beginnings come back and ask to run a second one with some churches that did not do it the first time. That tells us good things are happening through its use, as they would not come back for more if they were not.

At some point in time we will saturate the population of churches wanting to use this tool, though I think we have a long way to go before that happens. It is very difficult to predict the rate of demand, so managing the up and down will be the challenge.

PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY BOARD
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2. Actually making New Beginnings happen:

2014 was the year we had to slow things down (early in the year) due to our inability to keep up with demand. By the end of the year we had developed a cadre of contract folk to help us with the training events as well as developed a group of New Beginnings Decision Coaches. Early this year we recruited and trained more assessors.

We began work in 2014 on clarifying the financial picture of New Beginnings, work that is on-going. We have financed the cost of providing New Beginnings in part through the fee we charge for using it. This year will be an important year for looking at issues such as pricing and what amounts to sustainable costs associated with the program.

3. New Areas of Development

We are partnering with San Gabriel Presbytery to do a pilot project using New Beginnings with the presbytery itself. This began in 2014 and is on-going. The 'word on the street' is that other presbyteries have already expressed interest. If the final result is productive, then we will be able to offer that service as well.