

What is the New Beginnings Assessment Service?

New Beginnings is a service offered by Church Extension to assess the strengths and challenges for a congregation as it seeks to engage in significant ministry in its community. The assessment service, along with follow-up strategic interpretation with congregational leaders, enables congregations who have experienced decline to choose a new path for their future. In most cases, congregations in decline are struggling not only with a ministry plan that fits their neighborhood, but with deferred building maintenance, use of space, architectural or location issues as well. The assessment and follow-up training intend to help congregations gain a realistic picture of their resources for ministry, their demographic strengths, their potential for change, and their potential for vital ministry in order to put congregations on the road to sustainable Christian witness and action in their communities. 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?”

This assessment and focused interpretation process helps the congregation in many ways:

- The congregation will receive a comprehensive report of its current strengths and challenges as well as a concrete, realistic picture of possible directions for the future.
- The congregation will receive training on how to engage in a discernment process in order to choose a new direction for the future.
- The congregation will discover ministry opportunities available in the community.
- Congregational leaders will learn to make a compelling case for change based on realistic options for the future.

- The congregation will discover how to discuss change opportunities in a healthy, open manner.
- The congregation can 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 six phases:

Phase I: The congregation sends in profile information of its current participants. The congregation is also asked to submit video of a recent worship service, financial reports for the last three years, and insurance information.

Phase II: At a mutually agreed time, your regional or area staff and a New Beginnings consultant meet at your church for an on-site assessment. This entails a complete building inspection, financial review with the financial officer, a windshield tour of the community, meeting with the moderator and pastor, and an Appreciative Inquiry session with congregational and regional leaders that seeks

to understand your programmatic and missional strengths. Your congregation will receive a 25 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 strategies for mission

Phase III: Before the final report is given, there is an opportunity for key leaders to review the report for accuracy.

Phase IV: Within a month or two of the report, follow-up training will occur to enable leaders to engage in an interpretation and discernment process with the congregation. In most cases, 5-8 key leaders from your congregation will attend a cluster event designed to train leaders from a number of New Beginnings congregations in your region or area. This gathering enables the 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. Pastors participate in a short course entitled “leading change in congregations.”

Phase V: On either a full Saturday, or in weekly meetings, the key leaders will lead the congregation through the discernment process in a series of cottage (in-home) or small group meetings. This process will enable the congregation to formally adopt a “big-picture” decision about what it believes God is calling the church to do and to be into the future.

Phase VI: After this decision for a New Beginning is adopted, Church Extension will work with the region/area to refer the pastor and key leaders to available mission planning resources.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is our congregation’s basic output after participation with this service?

Your church will come to a decision about the particular witness you can make in your community that will start you on a path to renewal and sustainable ministry.

What is required from our congregation?

- A complete list of participants, addresses, approximate ages, and tenure
- Financial records from the past 3 years
- Video of a recent worship service
- 5-8 leaders who would commit to attending the Cluster event and sponsor the Cottage meeting(s)
- A commitment to follow the process

What is the cost?

The fee for congregations engaged in Assessment and Cluster Event Training is \$2,600 (for 2009) and includes consultant travel, time and overhead for the on-site assessment and phone follow-up, 10 printed reports, and the program expense of your participation at the cluster event (led by two Church Extension consultants and your regional representatives) which includes the Clergy workshop. Also included are the Cottage Meeting (home meeting) Leader Manuals for the leaders of each Cottage group—a process that leaders will be taught to engage at the Cluster Event Training.

Who is Church Extension?

Church Extension is one of the general ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We offer mission-effective capital funding and planning services to Disciples congregations; and have done so since 1883. While much of CE's work is with new congregations (more than 500 started since 2001), and building and remodeling projects (more than 100 congregational capital projects in 2006), we also seek to help congregations match their building and space needs to the particular missional opportunities of these congregations. Our consultants have more than 200 years of combined service with Disciples congregations. Our mission: Called by God, Church Extension, together with our investors and partners, offers mission-driven planning and capital-funding services to Disciples of Christ congregations in the context of their culture and stage of life.

Some New Beginnings successes...

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.

Who is eligible to participate in New Beginnings?

Your congregation must be able to say yes to any one of these three qualifications. Your congregation is struggling with issues of how to sustain and grow your ministry and...

1. The congregation has a significant building issue (too much space, not enough parking, deferred maintenance, etc.)
2. The congregation has a loan with Church Extension
3. The congregation has an investment with Church Extension (Contact us regarding investment opportunities for your congregation.)

How do we apply?

Call Church Extension at 1-800-274-1883, en español 1-866-534-1949, for an application.

Please Note: Good stewardship of available funds and resources means the service must be rolled out to locations with clusters of congregations. It may be a while before we can serve your congregation. Once we receive your application, we will give you an approximate time in which the process will begin. Thank you for your patience.



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Your Congregation Considers the New Beginnings Assessment Service

