

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 redevelop its ministry in its community. 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. The goal is 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 be in this time and this place?”

With the New Beginnings Assessment:

- 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 be trained on how to engage in a discernment process in order to choose a new direction for the future.
- The congregation will discover available ministry opportunities 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 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?

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

Phase I: At a mutually agreed-upon 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 church finance officer, a windshield tour of the community, meeting with the moderator and pastor, and an Appreciative Inquiry session with congregational and regional leaders, which seeks to understand your programmatic and missional strengths. Your congregation will receive a 30-40 page report of this visit, including:

- Congregational demographics and tenure
- Community demographics

- A pin map showing location of membership
- Financial history and analysis
- Building condition and visitor attractiveness
- Congregational appetite for change
- Potential strategies for mission

Phase II: Within a month or two of the visit, follow-up training will occur to enable leaders to interpret the report and lead a discernment process with the congregation. In most cases, five to eight key leaders from your congregation will attend a training event for a cluster 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 III: In weekly meetings, the key leaders will lead the congregation through the discernment process in a series of small group meetings. This process will enable a congregation to formally adopt a “big-picture” decision about what it believes God is calling the church to do and be into the future.

Phase IV: 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.

“New Beginnings helps churches choose their future, instead of letting it get chosen for them.”

What is our congregation’s basic outcome 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. In most cases, congregations are making decisions the likes of which they haven’t made for 50-60 years.

What is required from our congregation?

- A complete list of participants, addresses, approximate ages and tenure
- Financial records from the past three years
- Video of a recent worship service
- Five to eight leaders who would commit to attending the cluster event and hosting the small group meeting(s)
- A commitment to follow the process

What is the cost?

The fee for a congregation that is clustered with other churches in a region/area is \$2,600 (for 2010), which includes consultant travel, time and overhead for the on-site assessment and phone follow up, 10 printed reports, and the training expenses of the cluster event (led by two Church Extension consultants and your regional representatives). Also included are manuals for the small-group leaders, who will be trained at the cluster event.

In the event that a cluster is not possible, a congregation can receive the New Beginnings service on an individual basis. The fee for this customized service is \$3,600 (for 2010).

Some New Beginnings successes...

Starting Over: A congregation averaged just 30 in worship every other Sunday. After developing a compelling new vision for ministry, the congregation decided 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.

Finding a New Home: 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 expenses.

Welcoming New Neighbors: A congregation was located in a community whose racial/ethnic demographics had changed 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.

Getting Back to Basics: A congregation with capable people and sufficient resources was able to reconsider what God called it to do. After intentional reflection, and the development of a strong vision for the future, it moved from a church that focused primarily on itself to one focused on serving its community.

How can I tell if my congregation is right for New Beginnings?

If your congregation can say “yes” to at least three of these five qualifications, it may be a good candidate for New Beginnings:

- Less than 70 in worship
- Significant building issues (too much space, inadequate parking, deferred maintenance)
- Aging membership
- Changing neighborhood
- Trouble paying off a loan

How do we apply?

Call Church Extension at 800.274.1883, en español 866.534.1949, for an application.

Please note: Because the service is typically offered to clusters of congregations, Church Extension may not be able to provide the New Beginnings Assessment Service to your congregation immediately. Once we receive your application, we will notify you with an approximate time the process will begin. Thank you for your patience.

Who is Church Extension?

Church Extension is one of the general ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Since 1883, we have offered mission-effective capital funding and planning services to Disciples congregations. We seek to help congregations match their building and space needs to their own particular missional opportunities. 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 capital planning and funding services to Disciples of Christ congregations in the context of their culture and stage of life.”



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