

A GUIDEBOOK FOR
**PLANTING NEW CONGREGATIONS IN
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**



Authored by the Evangelism Ministry Team
Church Development and Renewal Team

This guidebook is dedicated to all of the United Church of Christ Covenantal Partners who share in the ministry of starting new congregations:

- Planters
- Members of New Churches
- Associations
- Conferences
- Staff in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ

These pages are dedicated to you for continuing to dream dreams, cast the vision, and witness God-transforming lives.

*Never place a period where God has placed a comma.—Gracie Allen
God is Still Speaking*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Introduction	7
God is Still Speaking: Seeking Leaders	9
The Challenge of Starting a Church	9
Faithful Leaders	9
Becoming a Multiracial and Multicultural Church	10
God is Still Speaking: Stirring	15
Bible Study on Passion	14
Passion	15
Bible Study on Discipleship	16
Making Disciples	17
Celebrating worship	19
Evangelism	21
Bible Study on Core Values	22
Core Values	23
Worksheet on Core Values	24
Bible Study on Vision	25
Vision	26
Worksheet on Vision	27
Bible Study on Mission	28
Mission Statement	29
Worksheet on Mission Statement	30
Ministry Plans	31
God is Still Speaking: Equipping	33
Bible Study	32
Characteristics and Assessment of Church Planters	33
Coaching	34
Who starts new churches in the United Church of Christ?	35
Partnerships	35

United Church of Christ New Church Development Process	36	Counting and Recording Procedures	52
Buying Land	41	Additional Resources	53
A Home of our Own: When?	41	God is Still Speaking: Launching	55
Sharing God's House	42	Bible Study on Secular and Spiritual Law	54
Sharing God's House: Facilities Use Agreement	44	United Church of Christ Documents	55
God is Still Speaking: Financing	47	Local, State, and Federal Documents	56
Bible Study on Money	46	Other Important Documents	56
Building trust and common understanding	47	God is Still Speaking: Challenging	59
Generous stewards	48	Bible Study on renewal Day by Day	58
Teaching tithing	48	If the new church faces difficulty	59
Other possible sources of funding	49	Our Final Gratitude	61
Financial Procedures	51	Bibliography	62
Checking account	51	Guidebook Bible Study Scriptures	63
Building a budget	51	United Church of Christ Resources	64
		Also Recommended	64





FOREWORD

God is Still Speaking
through new
churches in the
United Church of
Christ today.

Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of Christ shall see, and those who have never heard of Christ shall understand."

*Romans 15:20–21 NRSV paraphrased
Paul's mission statement for starting new churches*

AS PAUL DID IN THE FIRST CENTURY, today new congregations in the United Church of Christ are reaching out to the large population of people outside of church. They reach out to the unchurched (“not where Christ has already been named”), and also to those who have been alienated, disaffected, hurt, rejected and disillusioned by the church. They reach out to those who are looking for a faith that connects justice and Jesus. They reach out to new immigrants looking for a welcome in a new world. They reach out to new generations seeking authenticity, meaning and community.

**God is Still Speaking, still reaching out, still welcoming,
and still creating new hope and community.**

New church development is critical to the life of our denomination, for the Risen Christ who spoke the Great Commission, to “go and make disciples,” speaks the same mandate to us. God is Still Speaking a word of evangelism, inviting us to reach out to form new communities of faith. The formation and nurture of new congregations is critical for expressing the United Church of Christ’s voice of radical embrace, witness to justice, and engaging faith for a world that is waiting to hear.

**God is Still Speaking, calling the United Church of Christ and its
congregations to start new congregations.**

Perhaps the most exciting way that God is Still Speaking in the United Church of Christ is in calling congregations to start new congregations. The wider church and vital congregations, like Paul and the apostles, are excited about reaching out to the world by starting new congregations. Today it is the work of local congregations to start new congregations, in partnership with conferences and national structures.

It is my hope that this new guidebook on new church development, the first since 1986, will inspire and inform the process of starting new churches in the United Church of Christ.

I thank the Ministers of Church Development and Renewal, the new church pastors and conference staff who have worked to compile this vital resource for the future of the United Church of Christ's witness and outreach in the 21st Century.

I pray that through this guidebook the Still Speaking God will be pleased and praised by the multiplication of new congregations throughout the United Church of Christ.

David Schoen
Minister and Team Leader,
Local Church Ministries, a covenanted ministry of
The United Church of Christ
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INTRODUCTION

For surely I know
the plans I have
for you, says the
Lord, plans for
your welfare and
not for harm, to
give you a future
with hope.

—Jeremiah 29:11

NRSV

DO YOU HEAR GOD’S VOICE speaking to you about new church development? Chances are that if you have picked up this resource, you have heard at least a whisper. Maybe you sense a burning desire to start a new church but don’t know if the United Church of Christ would trust you with such a responsibility. Maybe you hope your Conference will reach out to immigrant populations. Perhaps you have started meeting as the core team for a new church but are bewildered by the nuts and bolts of how to proceed. Whatever reason brought you to this guidebook, it’s likely you’ve been listening to the stirrings of the Still Speaking God.

The Church Development and Renewal Team of the United Church of Christ hopes you find within these pages inspiration, encouragement, and insight so you will keep listening *and keep working* toward the spread of the gospel and the support of new churches. Use this resource to discern *if* you are called to ministry with new congregations, then use it to guide *how* to proceed.

This guidebook cannot claim to tell you everything you need to know about new church development, so keep listening to God (and check out the bibliography). The Church Development and Renewal Team is that part of the United Church of Christ’s national setting with expertise in advising Conferences, new churches and their pastors about the planting, formation and nurture of new congregations. This guidebook serves as an introduction to their work. If you listen carefully you will hear how they set priorities, how they embody encouragement, and how they may keep you from making “rookie mistakes.” Think of them as your advisory board, your sage advisor, or your favorite coach. Don’t stop with the printed page. If you are active in the work of new church development, they are your ministers at the national setting. Feel free to seek their input.

The Church Development and Renewal Team is often asked what the procedure is for starting new congregations in the United Church of Christ, as if there were only one correct way. Actually, there are many ways. In the United Church of Christ it is the Association, or Conference acting as an Association (hereafter designated by the term “Association/Conference”), that oversees the chartering of new churches, so methods may differ from one area of the nation to another. As the United Church of Christ has become more multi-racial and multi-cultural, it has also become more sensitive to the ways in which the cultural environment of a new church may shape its procedures and decisions. Because of such considerations, this guidebook will offer only general guidelines. It is the hope of the Church Development and Renewal Team that these guidelines can, over time, shape a common method among

Conferences. Our advice to you at this point in time is to read these general guidelines, but rely upon your Conference staff and Conference Church Development Committee (or its equivalent) to advise you of their specific procedures for becoming recognized as a new church within the United Church of Christ.

The first chapter of this guidebook discusses the discernment of a “call” to new church development. Without a deep sense of God’s call for this work, the rigors of establishing a new faith community can become overwhelming. The chapters that follow will take you from the first days of contemplation through

the steps of how to affiliate with the United Church of Christ, to more detailed advice on how to fund your ministry and how to navigate the legal requirements of becoming an organization and an employer.

At the beginning of each chapter there are suggested Bible studies. We encourage you individually, or as a core team, to have an encounter with these devotions before turning to the subject matter that follows. The pattern of seeking God’s input, thinking about your situation, and only then seeking the advice of others helps to keep you true to the vision that the Still Speaking God is prompting within you.

