



## part three

# GOD IS STILL SPEAKING

## Equipping

God speaks  
to church  
planters

**G**OD MAY HAVE SPOKEN A WHISPER OR A SHOUT. Whichever it was, you have heard the call to plant a new church. You understand your motivations and can articulate your values, vision and mission. But what do you do next? How do you connect with the United Church of Christ? What are their procedures? Do they confirm God's call in your life? How do you make divine dreams become reality? When all the questions start to hit, it's important to remember that our faith is lived out in community. God speaks to church planters, but don't forget that God is also active in Associations/ Conferences, in the national setting of the denomination, and in the ministries of your colleagues. Reach out to them for advice, partnership and inspiration and you will learn how God has been speaking to them.

### **Characteristics and Assessment of Church Planters**

The church has a mandate to help people find and respond to their vocation. Not all are endowed with the gifts and skills that are necessary for the planting of new churches, and no church planter is gifted with every skill for this vocation either. Still, as you discern a call to develop a new church, it is important to listen to the combined wisdom of others who have served in the field. Recently the United Church of Christ took part in an ecumenical survey of more than 700 founding pastors of new church developments. Some of the learnings from that study include:

#### ***Marks of a Successful Church Pastor***

Driven by a vision	Strong faith
Passion for this new church	Strong devotional life
Willingness to risk	Gives the mission away
Can live with ambiguity	Equips the people
Self-starter	Always the vision caster
Strong sense of call	Reinvents self as church grows

The leaders most effective in developing new churches are not conformists, but catalysts. They are not marginal believers; they cultivate vibrant faith. They are not half-hearted achievers; they cast bold and risky visions—and they expect to be followed. This constellation of traits can run counter to the popular notions of leaders as “team players” or even “servant leaders.” These are leaders tremendously invested in people,

but zealously and unwaveringly invested in a vision. The paradigm for missional growth may involve inviting an aggressive, action-oriented bull into the china shop of church tradition.

Of course, these leaders do not lead in a vacuum. They have followers who make the vision manifest. This is, not a smooth and easy process. Even in the best circumstances, leading new congregations is hard work. New churches have soaring peaks and perilous chasms. These leaders have a keen understanding of self, God's call and a vision of the Kingdom of God in particular ministry contexts. Despite external challenges and the spiritual challenges of affirming Christian faith, they press on unreservedly in God's call to plant a community of faithful witness.

Just as an individual's call to the ministry needs the affirmation of the church, an assessment of a church planter can discern a good vocational match for the particular call to new church ministry. Assessment is a tool that will highlight a person's strengths and weaknesses. It also will determine the presence or absence of indicators and attributes associated with church planters. The assessment will gauge a pastor's readiness for this stressful, all-consuming, highly rewarding ministry. The Evangelism Ministry Team recommends that new church planters undergo assessment. There are a variety of assessments available, and new ones are under development. If you sense a call to plant new churches, be in conversation with your Association/ Conference to determine how to receive an assessment. If the Association/ Conference does not have a standard assessment tool, the Evangelism Ministry Team can suggest appropriate options.

## Coaching

We are not called to do this work in isolation, but in the company of others. Just as Jesus worked with the disciples, leading and mentoring them, it is of key importance that the new church pastor relies on a mentor or coach. A coach is someone a new church pastor can turn to for advice, someone who will challenge and stretch their thinking, someone who can lift up and nurture their soul. Coaches and mentors hold new church pastors accountable for their actions and keep them focused on the vision and mission of the church in development. Look for these characteristics in a coach:

- Passion to reach people for Christ
- Knowledge of skills needed for new church pastor
- Experience in starting a new church (preferred)
- Spiritually, theologically and biblically grounded
- Willingness to devote time and energy
- Ability to challenge, motivate and encourage
- Creative and strategic thinking
- Good listening and communication skills
- Ability to keep confidences



The pairing of a coach and new church pastor will utilize the spiritual gifts of both toward offering God excellence in leadership of the new church. The pair should meet regularly through email, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings. At minimum the coach should meet in person with the new church planter once every three months, and at least weekly by other means. The coach, in concert with the Association/Conference will work to keep the new church planter focused on the core values/behaviors, vision, mission and ministry plan of the congregation. The coach will advocate for the new church pastor with the covenantal partners in Association/Conference, other local churches, and the national setting. Areas that may need to be addressed by a coach include helping the pastor deal with challenges, counseling the pastor to learn from mistakes, theological reflection and dialogue, questioning the pastor's use of time and encouraging a balance between work and family life. Most importantly, a coach, working with the Association/Conference, will hold the new church start pastor accountable for good ministry and will celebrate the victories that the new congregation achieves, in the manner of Paul, who said;

*I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.*

*Romans 1:11–12*

## **Who starts new churches in the United Church of Christ?**

New congregations come to life in a variety of ways in the United Church of Christ. At times Associations and Conferences take the initiative to develop a new church.

Ecumenical Partnerships at times will initiate a new church start. Sometimes an existing congregation will birth a new congregation. At times an established congregation seeking affiliation with the United Church of Christ will be a new church start. Visionary leaders or groups of people can also effectively begin a new church. Each of these ways is acceptable and important in order for the United Church of Christ to extend the widest welcome possible as Christ's ambassadors in covenant one with the other.

### ***Association/Conference initiates***

When an Association/Conference starts planning for a new church it seeks to answer the questions of who, what, when, where and why. Through a strategic planning process the Association/Conference addresses such issues as location, leadership, support, resources, demographics, emerging immigrant communities, partnerships, training and funding. In most cases the Association/Conference appoints a New Church Start Committee or a Church Development Committee to oversee the effort. Committee members' passion for new church starts and a strong work ethic will see them through as they monitor projects and continue to develop relationships with the new congregation or congregations. Serving on a new church committee takes a high level of commitment, acceptance of challenge, and a desire to follow God's leading. By doing this work the Association/Conference will help meet the challenge of reaching out and establishing a legacy for future generations of disciples.

### ***Congregations birthing congregations***

As congregations discern the call of God to extend God's realm they begin to recapture that pioneering spirit of their ancestors to reach people not involved with a church. Established congregations find new ways of becoming God's instruments as they venture

**The established church "seeds" the new church start with people from their congregation who have a heart for evangelism and community outreach.**

forth in the mission of church planting. They may be more effective at reaching out to growing and changing communities by assisting a new church start than they would be if they tried to reach those same people with

their own program ministries. The established congregation works in partnership with the Association/Conference, and perhaps with other churches, to identify possible targeted service areas, gather demographic information, determine budget needs, and available funds. The established church "seeds" the new church start with people from their congregation who have a heart for evangelism and community outreach. Often this commitment and excitement to birth a new church brings new vitality to the established church itself.

### ***Individual or new group starts***

A third viable way of starting new congregations is for an individual or group of persons to initiate the process. Typically such churches begin with small group Bible study and prayer gatherings, and hands-on mission opportunities. As the newly formed group begins to live out what God is calling them to do and be they begin to develop relationships with the Association/Conference and with established United Church of Christ congregations in the area.

### ***Covenantal Partnership***

The in-care process taps only the beginning of the opportunities for congregations to partner with other covenantal partners in the denomination. To fully birth a church and point it to viability and vibrancy takes the work and commitment of many people. Covenantal relationships across the United Church of Christ empower strong partnerships to reinforce the ministry of new church development. The rationale for such partnerships is found in the United Church of Christ Constitution, Article III, Paragraph 6:

*Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the Church relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each expression of the church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to*

*the end that the whole church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the various parts of the structure. As members of the Body of Christ, each expression of church is called to honor and respect the work and ministry of each other part. Each expression of the church listens, hears, and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to walk together in all God's ways.<sup>9</sup>*

Through partnerships we take seriously  
our common commitment,  
"In essentials unity, in non-essentials  
liberty, in all things charity."

tion may find strength in exploring a partnership with one of the United Church of Christ's Global Mission Partners.

This is just a sampling of how each entity lives out covenantal partnership. Without the help and resources of all we cannot fully claim the unity we have in Jesus Christ. Through partnerships we take seriously our common commitment, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

Established local congregations who partner with new churches can help tell the story of exciting new birth. They can offer support in the form of church members as temporary volunteers or seeds for a new harvest. They can offer the supportive gifts of prayer and financial support. In return, the new church can challenge the commitment level of existing congregations, giving the established church an opportunity to work for renewal in its own church life.

The Association/Conference often partners in the decision of where and when a new church start will occur. It selects the Church Development Committee that will interface with local churches and the national office on behalf of the new church start. Look to this partner for help with funding and budgeting, and for assistance in securing a pastor through Search and Call. New congregations often give to the Association/Conference a spirit of holy adventure, of new possibilities. New congregations are often faithful in sharing committed volunteers for service beyond the local church. New churches also are faithful stewards who financially support Our Churches Wider Mission, the common funding source for Association, Conference and national setting ministries.

The national office is a source for information, advice and counsel, training, funding, and help in finding new church planters. Before seeking secular assistance for specialized needs, such as building assessment, loans and investment options, learn about the United Church of Christ ministries of the national setting that offer partnership in these areas.

Developing a new church in North America is often likened to serving in the mission field. Your congrega-

## **United Church of Christ New Church Development Process**

Whatever way the new faith community begins, it is important that it work closely with the Association/Conference and members of the New Church Development ministry team. It is the Association/Conference that will journey with the new congregation while it is "in-care," that is, from its initial inquiry about affiliation with the United Church of Christ until the church receives full standing as a member congregation of the denomination.

### **Association/Conference Support Committee**

To begin, the Association/Conference Church Development Committee appoints a Support Committee or individual person to guide the new church throughout the in-care process. Sometimes the group makes recommendations to the Association/Conference concerning administrative actions and expenditure of financial resources. Check with your Association/Conference to determine the scope of the Support Committee in your area.

Support Committees may also work with core teams that do not yet have a pastor. Under these circumstances, the committee encourages the core team to stay together, grow spiritually, learn about the United Church of Christ, establish core values, vision and mission, work at ministry and determine the immediate needs of the church. If the Association/Conference initiates a new church start, the Support Committee will have the additional responsibilities to discern the early questions concerning where and when to launch a new

congregation and who to call as its founding pastor. In some cases the Support Committee may even assist the new church pastor in orientation and welcome to the community.

The committee will assist in establishing a mission and vision statement, short and long range planning and a ministry plan of action for the new start. This group will serve as a liaison to the Association/Conference Development Committee, keeping the lines of communication open and clear. It will also assist in communicating with the area United Church of Christ churches and advocating for their support of the new congregation. The group will regularly report to the Association/Conference on the programs of the new church and will make recommendations regarding such matters as the continuation or termination of the new church, a change in target area, and financial support. Since there are concerns particular to the nature of the work that affect the new church pastor's job performance and family/personal life, it is suggested that the Support Committee spend time in each meeting addressing those concerns.

The Church Development and Renewal Team recommends that membership on this Support Committee be multi-disciplinary, with twelve voting members representing diverse stakeholders as follows;

- Six persons who will be charter members of the new church (or area United Church of Christ clergy and laity until a core group is formed)
- Pastor Developer
- Pastor of a Local Church
- Association/Conference Church Development Committee Member
- Person with financial skills
- Person with building construction skills
- Association/Conference staff person
- Evangelism Ministry Team staff person, non-voting member, (if church is funded by Local Church Ministries, or if requested by the Association/Conference)

Members of the new church start shall serve on this committee as soon as possible so they can develop participation as covenantal partners and exercise leadership. The committee should meet no less than once a month.

## Entering into Covenant

Local Church Ministries has outlined a common process to guide Associations and local churches wishing to establish covenant with the United Church of Christ. The following guidelines and chart of responsibilities are revised from *Considering a New Church Covenant in the United Church of Christ: A Process for Exploring, Developing, and Affirming New Relationships*.

New Church Starts, or Churches in Formation, come into being in a variety of ways:

- As a project of the Association/Conference
- As a project of ecumenical partnership
- As a satellite of an established United Church of Christ congregation
- As a self-starting group seeking affiliation with the United Church of Christ
- As an established congregation seeking affiliation with the United Church of Christ.

New Churches wishing to enter covenantal relationship with the United Church of Christ need to request and receive formal standing in an Association or Conference. The Association oversees this process of guiding Churches in Formation toward standing in the United Church of Christ.

In its formation, a New Church needs to organize its life with some official documents. These vary by state laws, but may include such items as: 501 c 3 non-profit status, a tax exempt number, Articles of Incorporation, a Constitution and Bylaws, and Officers. For guidance in securing such documents, and for collaboration in the discernment of God's mission for the local church, New Church Starts should work closely with the Association, or Conference acting as an Association.

Associations may find the following guidelines on establishing covenant with the United Church of Christ to have bearing on their processes for churches in formation. However, this section of the *Manual on Church* specifically outlines procedures to guide Associations as they work with established local churches that seek affiliation with and standing in the United Church of Christ.

## Exploring and Establishing Covenant

A local church becomes a part of the United Church of Christ by uniting with other local churches in a covenantal relationship (*Constitution*, Article V, par. 17). This relationship is one characterized by trust, mutual commitment, promises and the kind of shared experiences that are rooted in commitment to God. All settings of the Church—local, Association, Conference and wider church—participate in exploring and establishing this covenantal relationship, discerning God’s will together.

### **Responsibility of the Local Church Exploring Covenant**

By the time a local church discerns its readiness to enter covenantal relationship its members should have widespread conversation, knowledge and familiarity of the identity, history, theology, and polity of the United Church of Christ. Preparation for this step will also include active participation in the life of the United Church of Christ, in as many settings as possible.

Churches should form a Covenant Development Committee in the early stages of exploration to represent the church in its contacts with the United Church of Christ, and to ensure wide participation and knowledge throughout the congregation. This group should also plan ways to introduce their local church to the Association and make its culture, traditions, and commitments deeply known and understood.

### **Responsibility of the Association and Conference**

In the United Church of Christ, the Association and Conference play the primary role in guiding the process whereby local churches may explore and develop covenantal relationship. The Association staff or representative committee will identify a Sponsoring Church, offer guidance in organizational matters, and network the local church with consultants from the national setting of the United Church of Christ.

### **Responsibility of the Sponsoring Church**

The sponsoring church will provide fellowship and welcome to the local church exploring covenant. The sponsoring church will nurture shared experiences which will introduce the local church to the United Church of

Christ and provide opportunities for the exploring congregation’s discernment of God’s will and its development of covenantal relationships.

### **Representatives of the National Setting**

Representatives from the Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ may play a role in this process of covenantal exploration, and may be invited to participate by the Association. In certain cases a staff member from the national setting may be involved from the beginning of the exploration, working collaboratively with the Association throughout the process of exploring and entering covenant.

### **Establishing Covenant: Guidelines for the Process<sup>10</sup>**

The process of establishing covenantal relationship between a local church and an Association of the United Church of Christ has three main stages: exploring covenantal relationship, developing covenantal relationship, and affirming covenantal relationship.

The first stage is a preliminary exploration, an introductory acquaintance that helps a local church and Association decide if there is likelihood for establishing a formal relationship. Questions to consider at this stage include: What are the affinities we sense with potential covenant partners? Why is there an interest in exploring covenant with the United Church of Christ?

If both the local church exploring covenantal relationship and the Association discern there is likelihood of covenant, they enter a second stage, and agree to develop that covenant together. As with all relationships, it will take time and a wealth of shared experiences to help this covenant fully develop.

Should the development stage conclude with a request for standing, in all likelihood the final stage will be an affirmation of covenant for both parties.

### **Stage One: Covenant Exploration**

At this stage, a local church that seeks standing in the United Church of Christ initiates contact with the Association or Conference in which it is located. Informal discussions focus on history, polity and practice, as well as the reasons for exploration and help determine whether a formal, intensive process will follow. Since a substantial initial knowledge is needed, this phase may take from six months to a year, depending on previous knowledge and the pace of the exploration. This initial acquaintance

should be comprehensive enough to provide an answer to this central question: Is it likely that a covenantal relationship will result from further exploration?

As deeply and sincerely as the United Church of Christ welcomes local churches, it also recognizes the importance of discernment between potential covenantal partners. Careful preliminary discussions should reveal God's will for a suitable relationship. Sometimes a local church and an Association of the United Church of Christ will decide to remain ecumenical colleagues but not to continue exploring covenant, at least for the present time. When this is the discernment of either partner in exploration, the United Church of Christ affirms its solidarity in Christ with all who believe, and celebrates ecumenical unity even though exploration of covenantal partnership ends at this stage.

If the discussion reveals the likelihood of a covenantal commitment, the partners move on to further develop their relationship. The local church and Association then enter into a stage of "Covenant Development."

### ***Stage Two: Covenant Development***

During this stage the local church and the Association enter into a formal relationship. Associations may vote to grant the local church a specific status as a "Church in Covenant Development." This status recognizes the commitment that both the local church and the Association have made to deepen and broaden their knowledge of, and appreciation for, one another.

A Church in Covenant Development is granted voice without vote at Association and Conference meetings for the duration of this stage of establishing covenantal relationship. The local church sends representatives to the meetings as an important way to develop the local church and the denomination. Typically a full meeting of an Association takes place once a year and a Conference conducts an annual meeting, so for that reason alone this phase of the process may last one to two years. Another factor that requires planning and ample time is the need to involve many members of the Church in Covenant Development, the Sponsoring Church and the Association in this stage of developing covenant. The Church in Covenant Development will want to provide means for the Association to become involved in its congregational life in ways that will assist the discernment process.

The Church in Covenant Development and the Association will remain in this relationship until both are comfortable that ample time and effort have been devoted to discerning God's will.

Until these final decisions are made, standing remains an option, and discernment is not concluded. Throughout this stage, a positive attitude toward standing is paired with a concern to honor the time and space for a faithful discernment process.

There are two possible outcomes of this formal period of developing covenant, each of which affirms the particular nature of the covenant developed by the local church and the Association:

**Determination not to seek standing.** The Church in Covenant Development, the Association, or both, separately or mutually, may discern that it is not God's will for the Church in Covenant Development to seek standing. If this determination is made, the United Church of Christ affirms its solidarity in Christ with all who believe, and celebrates ecumenical unity even though exploration of covenantal partnership ends at this stage.

**Determination to make a formal request for standing.** Together the Church in Covenant Development and the Association affirm that it is God's will for the local church to seek standing in the United Church of Christ.

### ***Stage Three: Covenant Affirmation***

During this stage the Association receives the formal request from the Church in Covenant Development and acts upon it. If the request is approved, the Association formally accepts the request and grants standing in the United Church of Christ to the local church. The timing of this vote will usually be determined by the Association's meeting schedule, but will be taken within a year of the formal request.

The Sponsoring Church will be thanked for its ministry during the discernment process and may play a role in the celebration of the covenant affirmation.

The Association, with its newly received local church, will consecrate the establishment of covenantal partnership by the worship of God and in celebration of the Church's oneness in Christ. See the Supplemental Materials section of this manual for suggested worship materials for use in planning such a service of worship.

Church Considering Covenant	Sponsoring Church	Association
<p>1. The leadership of a local church wishes to explore standing in the UCC will approach the Association in which it is located through a staff person or other member of the Association.</p> <p>3. Undertake exploration of the UCC, including meeting with designated representatives of the Association.</p> <p>4. Determine whether exploration has shown a <b>likelihood</b> that further development of relationship will result in a covenantal bond.</p> <p>5a. If not: agree to remain ecumenical colleagues. <b>OR:</b> 5b. If so: begin Developing Covenant stage: receive from Association designation as a Church in Covenant Development; name a working group to represent the local church; and to meet with leaders of the Sponsoring Church.</p> <p>6. The Covenant Development Committee and other church leaders assure widespread conversation, knowledge, and familiarity with the UCC.</p> <p>7. In consultation with the Association, determine readiness to enter into covenant with the United Church of Christ.</p> <p>8a. If not: agree to remain ecumenical colleagues. <b>OR:</b> 8b. Make a formal request for standing in the UCC.</p> <p>9. Plan, celebrate and consecrate covenant with the Association.</p>	<p>5b. Accept invitation to sponsor the Church in Covenant Development and meet with leaders of the process from both the Association and the Church in Covenant Development.</p> <p>6. Become familiar with the Church in Covenant Development, introduce that church's members to local church life in the UCC, and accompany its leaders to Association, Conference, and wider church events. Assure ample opportunity for developing and deepening a relationship.</p> <p>7. Provide feedback to all other parties about the opportunities for relationship development that have been pursued.</p> <p>8a. Agree to remain ecumenical colleagues. <b>OR:</b> 8b. Affirm its relationship with the local church, as is appropriate in the Association's process.</p> <p>9. May help plan and celebrate the covenant.</p>	<p>2. The Association, through an appropriate committee, will meet with and welcome representatives of the exploring church and provide initial information, and support to help the church in its discernment.</p> <p>3. Designate a contact person or working group to assist local church in its exploration. Receives information about the church that is exploring.</p> <p>4. Determine whether exploration has shown a <b>likelihood</b> that further development of relationship will result in a covenantal bond.</p> <p>5a. If not: agree to remain ecumenical colleagues. <b>OR:</b> 5b. If so: begin Developing Covenant stage: designate the local church as a Church in Covenant Development; name a working group to represent the Association; designate a Sponsoring Church and introduce its leaders to the Church in Covenant Development and to the Association contacts.</p> <p>6. Assures widespread conversation, knowledge, and familiarity with the Church in Covenant Development. Invite consultation and collaboration, as appropriate, with Conference and wider church leaders.</p> <p>7. In consultation with the local church working group, determine whether the leaders and membership of the Church in Covenant Development have adequate understanding and appreciation of the UCC to enter into covenant.</p> <p>8a. If not: agree to remain ecumenical colleagues. <b>OR:</b> 8b. Receive and vote on the formal request for standing. Thank the Sponsoring Church.</p> <p>9. Plan, celebrate and consecrate covenant with the local church.</p>

## Buying Land

Sometimes the Association/Conference New Church Development Committee or the core leaders of a new church want to “nail down” a piece of real estate as a way to help the congregation in its earliest stages of formation. This practice is called “land banking.”

Unfortunately, such a property decision made too soon can create unforeseen problems for the new congregation. Do not rush into purchasing a plot of land before the new congregation has clarified its values, vision and mission.

### **A Home of our Own: When?**

Every new church must choose a place for its ministry to be housed. Often, in the beginning, this place is a compromise, with the adequacy of the building or location balanced against the cost. Whether the church is sharing space with a more established congregation, or renting a storefront or a school auditorium there is often much tedious work involved in setting up for worship and storing items afterwards. It's no wonder people tire of it and long for surroundings that are familiar, controlled by them, and available to them at any time. One of the primary functions of the Office of Local Church Building, a part of the Evangelism Team of Local Church Ministries, is to assist churches in their planning for the day when this dream can be realized.

When a church begins to dream about a building for their ministry, they often overlook compelling reasons to continue waiting, and do not completely consider the alternatives, such as moving to another location they can rent. The Evangelism Team recommends patience on this front. Consider the following reasons for new congregations to hold off on becoming a “home owner.”

### **Let God shape the church's ministry**

One unique opportunity of a new church is to let the ministry of the church be shaped by the people who respond to the invitation to be with the church. In any church with a long-term commitment to a church building, these possibilities for ministries are less appar-

ent, since the church must also maintain the building. The desire to fully use the building, or the space limitations of a building, can cause a church to overlook ministry opportunities that do not fit easily into their existing space.

**Developing real estate, as difficult as it is technically and financially, is nowhere near as difficult as developing a community of people doing God's work.**

### **Keep costs down**

There are many financial obligations associated with building purchase and ownership that are often overlooked by a new church. Maintenance expenses, utility bills, and the necessity that church leaders pay more attention to building management are all costs that are often overlooked by churches without buildings of their own.

Worldly thinking about rent also can mislead a church. It is true that rent is an expense to a congregation's ministry. But so is interest expense on a mortgage. Interest is just another form of rent. Before a church can faithfully consider purchasing a building, it must be able to afford a substantial equity in the building, as well as the diversion of significant funds from hands-on ministry.

### **Stay focused on growing the church**

Growing and developing a new church is hard work. It is joyful work, since people are being brought into a new relationship with our God, but still, it is natural to wish that the work were not so hard. Developing real estate, as difficult as it is technically and financially, is nowhere near as difficult as developing a community of people doing God's work.

Sometimes, a church will turn to real estate issues because the real work, the ministry and mission, is just too hard. Or too personal. It involves meeting new people, learning to live in community with them, and building personal relationships. Working with building materials, money and building plans, may seem preferable. When this is the real reason for a church's building purchase, it never results in a strong, vital, and growing ministry. It is like a couple deciding to have a baby before they have built a strong relationship with each other.

### ***Let your church's image in the community grow with you***

The longer a church waits to purchase a building, the more resources they can bring to the purchase, and the more architecturally appealing the building can be. A church building makes a statement to visitors about the nature of the church community they are visiting. A church building can also assist in inspiring its members to new understandings of their faith. But this is rarely inexpensive, and so a small church building, such as a converted residence, is almost never a good idea.

As a church grows in membership and in discipleship, it gains an important financial resource—the congregation's willingness to contribute to the financing of its ministry including the buildings necessary for them. The longer a church waits to purchase a building, the better the building they can usually purchase.

### ***Be financially self-sufficient***

New churches are often started with the assistance of financial resources from outside partners. In the United Church of Christ, this may include Leadership Subsidies from the denomination and from the conference. It also may include assistance from other churches in the area, and additional financial assistance for specific needs as the church goes through its first few years of development.

Before a church undertakes the long-term obligations of a building and its financing, however, the new congregation needs to be fully responsible for its own financial future. The financial resources of the church, and the mind-set of the church's leaders, must develop to the point where they are truly ready to become an independent church in the United Church of Christ before they take on the obligation of a building loan.

### ***Be faithful to scripture***

God called Israel out of Egypt with a vision of a wonderful future. God promised to be with them always, and to give them a wonderful land in which to be God's people. So of course, the Israelites wanted their promised land, immediately! But that was not God's way. God kept the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years before they crossed the Jordan into their promised land.

Today, most new churches do not need to wait that long for a building. Still, the decision to purchase a building requires more discernment, and more patience

than many new churches realize. The Evangelism Team of Local Church Ministries can be your partners in that time, helping you in prepare for the day when you move into your church building.



### **Sharing God's House**

Locating space for a new church is one of the more important elements in its development. The temporary quarters a new church uses can make or break the new church start. Not only does the new church need space for worship, it also needs office space, and enough

room for meetings and fellowship. Most new congregations move several times before they own their own space. Until that day comes, sharing space with another congregation is one possibility.

Church buildings do not belong to a congregation, they are places that have been dedicated for the explicit use of expressing God's love and grace to the community in which they are located. Sharing God's House in order to expand ministry to the community offers a wonderful opportunity for established churches to be good stewards of God's gifts. Oftentimes an established church will share space with a new church start that focuses on reaching an ethnic group within the neighborhood.

Sharing space requires more than the use of the facilities. It requires that the host congregation nurture the new congregation towards self-sufficiency. Maintaining a joyous sense of mission allows the established church to aid a new church that does not have adequate financial resources. Sharing space is one way to live out good stewardship. It also presents an opportunity to model anti-racist behavior and establish cooperation between different racial/ethnic groups.

Care must be taken to attain and maintain good communication as the host and developing congregations discuss the possibility of sharing space. Do not be afraid to broach issues in the beginning that could affect the relationship later on.

A committee composed of representatives of both congregations and representatives from the Association/Conference should be formed to assure clear lines of communication are established and maintained. The Church Development and Renewal Team strongly recommends that a Facilities Use Agreement be negotiated early on.

Kitchen use, growth in numbers of participants and expectations of children are examples of issues that can threaten a host congregation and cause a budding relationship to be terminated. It is wise to clearly negotiate shared use agreements and then work diligently with each other. Listed below are some issues that have surfaced when congregations share space:

- Differences in culture, worship style and theological understanding
- Scheduling for use of the building, including priority for special events and procedures to employ during emergencies
- Whether or not to meet separately for Sunday worship
- What space is to be shared, and what space is to be used by each church
- Use of kitchen facilities, including methods of food preparation
- Financial arrangements between the churches, including insurance coverage
- Janitorial arrangements
- Having a written or verbal agreement
- Whether or not the new church is considered a part of the established congregation.



## Sharing God's House: Facilities Use Agreement

This is a sample agreement between two churches entering into shared space of facilities. Adapt it for your particular situation.

### I. Host Church

#### Contact Persons

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### II. Developing Church

#### Contact Persons

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### III. Schedule Agreement

\_\_\_\_\_ covenants with \_\_\_\_\_ to share the sanctuary, all-purpose building, educational space, parking space, and grounds beginning on \_\_\_\_\_ for a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_ covenants that \_\_\_\_\_ will use the facilities each Sunday between the hours of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (Other days and times to be listed here, plus special days and programs that you know will be up coming.)

### IV. Insurance

State here how the host church provides liability and personal property insurance coverage. For what amount will the new church be responsible? How will insurance be purchased? Can it be done through the Conference?

### V. Calendar

There will be a master calendar to guide the program activities of both congregations. It is very important that both churches notify each other in advance of any change in programming as soon as possible. List here the procedures for working together on scheduling events.

## V. Video and Sound Equipment

List in this article the details of who, what, where, when and how concerning use of sound equipment.

## VI. Kitchen Guidelines

List similar details for kitchen use.

## VII. Cooperation and Communication

A joint committee shall meet regularly, at least monthly, to review the calendar and make changes as appropriate. At least once every three months the pastors and two lay persons from each congregation shall meet to share each church's ongoing mission, and to resolve any problem areas that may be of concern to either congregation. The pastors have a mutual responsibility for developing a collegial relationship. This Facility Use Agreement will be reviewed every six months and will be subject to change and renewal at that time.

## VIII. Signatures

Sign and date

### Host Congregation

Council Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Office Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Pastor \_\_\_\_\_

### Developing Church

Council Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Office Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Pastor \_\_\_\_\_

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### Notes

8. Wood, H. Stanley. Final Report to Lilly Endowment. 2002.

9. Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ,

10. Considering a New Church Covenant in the United Church of Christ, PLL304.

11. Wesley K. Willmer quoted by John and Sylvia Ronsvalle in *At Ease: Discussing Money and Values in Small Groups*, Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1987, p.55.

## Bible Study on Money

(see page 47)

*Matthew 6:19 (NRSV) Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Did you know that the words “believing” or “believers” appear 272 times in the Bible, “pray” or “prayer” occur a total of 371 times, “love” or “loving” 714 times, but “possessions” and “giving” appear a total of 2172 times? 17 of Jesus’ 38 parables are about possessions.<sup>11</sup>

When you hear the word “money” what feelings does it surface for you? How do you feel about money? Does it have positive or negative qualities for you? Does money excite you? Confuse you? Trouble you?

How would you put these words of Jesus into your own words: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”?

Can you name the things you treasure the most?

What will your new church treasure the most?

