



Program Details for PC(USA) Presbyteries

What is New Beginnings?

New Beginnings is a service that resources congregations to assess their strengths and challenges as they seek to engage in significant ministry in their communities. The service enables congregations who have experienced uncertainty about their next season of ministry to envision a new path for their future. Just as the world around our churches changes, so should our ministry and mission goals. In fact, it is estimated that churches should have a transformative conversation about their ministry every five to seven years to keep up-to-date with their community's current needs and conditions. For some congregations, this sort of conversation has been so far in their past that they don't remember how to plan for the future. This may lead to decline in many areas of their congregational life. For other congregations, a structured format for this type of conversation may be necessary as previous methods have not brought meaningful results.

The assessment and follow-up training intend to help congregations gain a realistic picture of their resources, their demographic strengths, their potential for change, and their potential for vital ministry in order to put them on the road to sustainable Christian witness and action in their communities. The New Beginnings service seeks answers to the question, "What is God calling our congregation to do and to be in this time and in this place?"

This assessment and focused interpretation process helps in many ways. Each congregation will:

- Receive a comprehensive report of its current strengths and challenges as well as a description of possible directions for the future.
- Receive training on how to engage in a discernment process in order to discern a new direction for the future.
- Discover ministry opportunities available in the community.
- Learn to make a compelling case for change based on realistic options for the future.
- Discover how to discuss change opportunities in a healthy, open manner.
- Learn how to set the stage for strategic planning.

New Beginnings **does not**:

- Force change on a congregation: The choice for a New Beginning is always the congregation's choice. (In order to support that commitment, Hope Partnership will ask presbyteries whose churches are using New Beginnings to honor that part of the process.)
- 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 do presbyteries facilitate a cluster of New Beginnings congregations?

Step One: Exploration of New Beginnings

Presbyteries have differing individuals or groups tasked with congregational transformation, and these people are among the first to be educated about the process before individual congregations are introduced to it. A representative of Hope Partnership can be made available to meet with these persons/groups in order to explain the theory and process of the program at no charge to the presbytery. It is important that these groups take time to engage the ideas that drive the New Beginnings program in order for them to serve as guides for the congregations that will take part.

Step Two: Commitment to New Beginnings

While Hope Partnership is responsible for providing program support for New Beginnings, the Presbytery must assume the responsibility for providing support to their congregations as they engage the various steps of the process. This requires a commitment from the Presbytery to be the supportive agent to the clustered congregations, both through the persons or bodies tasked with congregational care and within the whole structure of the Presbytery. It also means the Presbytery promises to support the congregations but not interfere with their decision making processes.

The Presbytery is responsible for organizing and advertising the follow-up Cluster Leader Event, described below. Guides for scheduling, planning, and advertising this event are available. At this event, usually hosted by a local congregation, the presbytery representative leads worship and provides support to the congregational participants.

After the training and subsequent house meeting session in the congregations, the presbytery's role varies. In some presbyteries, the role might be more hands-on, if invited to help a church strategize its particular future; in other regions, the role may be more of a quiet partner, lending encouragement as requested, but always joined in prayer for the mission of the congregation.

This commitment to action creates a supportive network both for and between New Beginnings congregations that is necessary for the program's success.

Step Three: "Come and See" for Potential Congregations

Once the necessary people/groups in the Presbytery are familiar with and committed to the process, a "Come and See" event is arranged for potential congregations. Planning for this event begins with promoting the program to congregations and inviting them to come hear more about what is involved. Experience shows that the more time and care spent on this aspect of the process leads to a better response rate by congregations. Program processes, ideals, and commitments are presented to potential congregations in a way that congregational representatives can further discuss their potential involvement. No commitment is necessary at this event, but a deadline for enrollment application submission is decided in advance.

Step Four: Congregational Process

New Beginnings takes place in the congregation in four phases:

Phase I: ASSESSMENT: At a mutually agreed time, New Beginnings assessors meet with individual churches for an on-site assessment. Prior to the visit, congregations send in profile information of its current participants. The congregations are also asked to submit financial reports for the last three years, calendar information, and insurance information. The visit entails a complete building inspection, financial review with the financial officer, a calendar review with a knowledgeable person, a windshield tour of the community, meeting with the moderator and pastor, and an Appreciative Inquiry session with congregational members that seek to understand each church's programmatic and missional strengths.

Presbytery is responsible for providing facilitators for the evening session with the congregations. Congregations will receive a 45 to 60 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 future stories for the congregation

Before the final report is given, there is an opportunity for the pastor or a key leader to review the report for accuracy.

Congregations are invoiced for service after the assessment visit.

Phase II: TRAINING: Usually, a month to six weeks following the assessment, follow-up leadership training will occur for all New Beginnings congregations in the presbytery. This event, called the Cluster Leader Training Event, enables congregational leaders to analyze their report, discover options, learn about the next steps in the process, and strategize for how to best engage the congregation in a decision-making process. This event runs from a Friday afternoon to a Saturday afternoon: Friday afternoon enables each congregation's lay or professional clergy to participate in a short course entitled "leading change in congregations;" Friday evening's session is an overview of the changing congregational and cultural/societal contexts for being Church, and is open to any enrolled congregation's participants that wish to attend; the Saturday session is specifically oriented for potential house meeting leaders.

Phase III: DISCERNMENT: Leaders will lead the congregation through the discernment process in a series of four small group meetings. This process will generate the conversation, prayer and idea sharing needed to explore all the options available to the congregation.

Phase IV: DECISION: The congregations make a "big-picture" decision about what they believe God is calling the church to do and be into the future. After this decision for a New Beginning is adopted, Hope Partnership can work with the Presbytery to refer the pastor and key leaders to available mission planning resources.

Phase V: Feedback

While a congregation's *new beginning* is usually not decided upon for several months after the end of the small group meetings, there are several opportunities for feedback to be given. Follow-up conversations with presbyteries and congregations allow the New Beginnings program to be further customized to individual congregations and improved for future projects. While these conversations may take place intermittently throughout the process, scheduled discussions are normally planned for six and twelve months after the church's assessment.

1.) What is a congregation's basic output after participation in this service?

Congregations will come to a decision about the particular witness they can make in their communities that will start them on a path to renewal and sustainable ministry.

2.) What is required from each congregation?

- A complete list of participants, addresses, approximate ages, and attendance tenure
- Financial records from the past 3 years
- a completed calendar worksheet
- Leaders who would commit to attending the Cluster event and sponsor the House meeting(s)
- A commitment to follow the process

3.) What is the cost?

The fee for each congregation engaged in Assessment and Cluster Event Training is \$3,500 (if done with a group of churches from one presbytery). If done by one church alone, the cost is \$5,500.

This cost covers assessor travel, time and overhead for the on-site assessment, electronic congregational assessment reports, and the program expense of your participation at the cluster event (led by a Hope Partnership representative and hosted by the Presbytery) which includes the Clergy workshop. Also included is the electronic Home (small group) Leader Manuals for the leaders of the small groups – a process that leaders will be taught to engage at the Cluster Event Training.

4.) Who is the Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation?

Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation is a partnership of five denominations, with partners from multiple church organizations that work together to create courageous leaders for this new era of God's mission. Hope began within the Disciples of Christ denomination, which quickly brought other partners to the table to create, develop and deliver processes that would lead to the development of transformational leadership.

Hope serves congregations in the United States and Canada. It is not a consultative business, but a non-profit organization funded by contributions, grants and service fees. It has more than 50 facilitators that have written books, articles, and work with hundreds of congregations each year.

Contact in this office:

Michael Whitman
New Beginnings Associate
mwhitman@hopepmt.org
317.713.2533