

A New Day

By Gary Roberts

This is the first of what I hope will be a regular column in this paper about the developing churches in Southern California Nevada Conference. We have decided to devote a little space in this UC News to this subject, because exciting things are happening in this part of our life together as churches.

When I was hired last fall, the first thing your Conference Board asked me to do was to lead them, with the guidance of Revs. Dan Romero and Jane Heckles, through a process of preparing a plan for the Conference's church-development work. That process was largely completed in May, when the Conference's Church Development Strategy was adopted by the Board. It is nothing short of a declaration that this is a new day.

This Conference was built via church development. 61 of the Conference's 135 churches didn't exist when the Conference was formed 1957. Fully a quarter of our churches are less than 30 years old. In 1965, we even spun off an entire Conference, Southwest Conference that, like us, is committed to its continued development.

Lately, however, our efforts to reach out to the people of Southern California and Nevada have had tougher going. Increasing costs and decreasing resources required for new churches, smaller and older congregations, and disaffiliating churches have caused the membership in SCNC to decline by 20% over the last 10 years, while the population of Southern California and Nevada has exploded.

The Conference's Church Development Strategy signals the end of that, and a bold vision of what our future can be. It calls for us to be even more active in church development in the next five years than we were in the 1950's and 1960's. We expect to offer tools for all congregations to start getting larger and younger, so that they can have the resources to start new ministries as the need becomes plain.

What can you do to welcome this New Day? Future columns will deal with these plans in detail, and tell stories of the fruits of this effort. If you can't wait to see details, the plan is posted on www.sencucc.org, or you can call me at (626) 797-8082, ext. 18. You can also begin to pray for the success of this plan in the new churches planted by SCNC, in the churches that are affiliating with the UCC because of our theology, and in your church. Together, we can achieve what we envision, a New Day in the life of the churches of this Conference.