

Living the Vision

By: Gary Roberts, Conference Associate for Church Development and Renewal

The Church-Development Strategy approved by the Board this May and announced at the 2006 Annual Gathering, calls for a renewed focus on church development in Southern California Nevada Conference. It envisions a day when the UCC would be a larger movement in Southern California and Nevada, and calls us all to work for that day. It assumes that, if we will boldly “Let our Light Shine,” rather than keeping it to ourselves, there are people in our communities that will respond.

The Church-Development Strategy has several long-term goals, and each goal has a 5-year plan. The goals and plans are:

- Add 100 churches over 20 years including both new church starts and affiliating churches. Start 9-12 new churches in the next five years, plus add 5-10 churches by affiliation. This is the goal that people remember, but by itself, this goal would signal that our goals and vision were just about maintaining the UCC in Southern California. Nothing could be further from the truth.
- Over 20 years, increase the average church size by 1/3 from today’s 15 members. In the next 5 years, offer all churches the tools to grow. With this, plus the addition of new churches, membership in SCNC churches would double over 20 years from approximately 20,000 today. Most of these new members are people living in our communities today who may think they know who Christians are, but have never heard of the United Church of Christ, let alone the StillSpeaking message. So this goal is about transforming lives.
- Over 20 years, develop our churches so that the diversity of Southern California and Nevada is reflected in SCNC churches. Begin by emphasizing planting of ethnic churches, but over 20 years, work for more and more multi-cultural church settings. This calls for all our churches to learn how to respect, embrace, and invite to a common table the people of all the cultures that live together in Southern California and Nevada. This is probably even more ambitious than inviting 20,000 new people with the UCC’s message of hope into our churches.

Six months later, it is exciting to report that we are on track or perhaps slightly ahead of our projections. Our first 2007 church start location is identified, and the leadership is being called. We have a series of inquiries about other possible church starts in 2007 or 2008. We have scheduled a conference for church leaders called *Equipping Your Church for the Future*, with a flyer available on www.scnecucc.org and in the mid-month mailing to all churches. Many of you are praying 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. Thank you for that. Together, we can achieve what we envision, a New Day in the life of the churches of this Conference.

Learning to live together. Transforming 20,000 lives with Christ's message of Hope for the world. As we enter the seasons of Advent and Epiphany, it is worth wondering if Christ is calling us to anything less.