

Church Development and Renewal on schedule and making progress in diversity of UCC churches

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

At the 2006 Annual Gathering, Janet Vandevender, Southern California Nevada Conference Board Chair, reported that the Board of Directors had adopted a plan for church development. Since then, we have taken our first steps in implementing that plan. Our plans were to:

1. **Offer Church-Development Conferences for all churches' lay & ordained leadership:** In February, the first of these conferences was held in Ontario, CA, with approximately 150 people attending. A similar conference is being planned for early 2008.
2. **Develop leadership for New Church Starts:** A process has been put in place and one person has been identified and trained for the planned 2007 new church start in Moreno Valley.
3. **Plant new churches:** The Strategic Plan called for one church in 2007. **Fiesta Cristiana** in Moreno Valley is in the final planning stages, and will start gathering a congregation soon.
4. **Encourage existing churches to sponsor a new church, either on-site or in a separate location:** There is preliminary interest from at least three SCNC churches to start a new church.
5. **Encourage UCC affiliation by existing churches with similar theologies:** As of this moment, there are three churches considering UCC affiliation in Southern California, two of which are currently on the campus of existing UCC churches.

As a result, the Strategic Plan for church development is on schedule to meet its five-year goals:

- **New Churches > # Closures:** In 2006-7, New Creation closed, and **Fiesta Cristiana** has been started.
- **# Affiliations > # Withdrawals:** In 2006-7, **Fairview Community Church** affiliated with Southern Association. No churches withdrew during this year.
- **Average Membership begins increasing:** There are hopeful signs: there is significant growth occurring in the **UCC churches in Redlands, Riverside, and Pomona**. Also, the new churches planted recently by SCNC (**Centro Familiar in North Hollywood, Northwest Community in Las Vegas, and Immanuel Latino Ministry in Los Angeles**) continue to grow at 20-30% rates. Many other churches report going home from the Congregational Vitality event in February with better ideas about how to grow their congregation.
- **Increasing Diversity in/of SCNC Churches:** This is probably the most significant, and certainly the most challenging, of the Strategic Plan's goals. And

it is actually two goals: increasing the diversity of SCNC churches, and increasing the diversity within SCNC churches.

We are making progress in the diversity of SCNC churches, because all of the church plants and new affiliates mentioned above are either O&A churches with significant GLBT membership and program or ethnic churches. Creation of a **Samoan Ministries Table** and similar planning to encourage development of Latino churches should help increase the numbers of these churches in SCNC.

Encouraging ethnic diversity within SCNC churches is a longer-term goal, but there are both plans and hopeful signs in this area as well. Rev. Rosario Ibarra has been hired as Pastoral Assistant for Building Community in Diversity, and part of her job description calls for creation of a discernment process for churches considering how to reach out to the diverse community around them.

In addition, there are a series of churches in the Conference creating multi-cultural campuses, where more than one UCC church shares the same property.

Finally, the SCNC Board continues to review and refine the Strategic Plan itself. This Spring, the Board has reviewed the financial plans required for implementing the Strategic Plan, and made a series of adjustments. The Board has also begun to consider ways to incorporate more development of existing churches into its Strategic Plan, and will continue to reevaluate the Strategic Plan in the future.