

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA NEVADA CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

2010-12 CHURCH DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Goal: Become a “Vital Church Conference”, i.e. a Conference filled with Vital Churches

During the current interim period in Conference life, some of us have been rethinking the nature of church development, particularly as it relates to existing churches. It is our hope that the Conference’s next Strategic Plan will be a plan that offers church (re)development coaching and guidance to all churches in the Conference, designed so as to be appropriate to each church’s context. This is grounded in the belief that church development is not just starting new churches; it is also defined as a series of activities: faith formation, faith development, discipleship and leadership development, and organizational development. Defined this way, it is obvious that church development is the work of every church, and a Conference that focuses on aiding churches in this work is a much more valuable covenant partner than the historic mission and program of UCC Conferences. If this effort is blessed by the Holy Spirit, this can be a way to make Conference churches more relevant to each other, and to the mission field we serve together. By making the development of all SCNC churches a priority mission for the Conference, we also get several synergies in our mission to Southern California and Las Vegas:

- 1) Redefines “Church Development” as inclusive of ALL SCNC Churches
- 2) Recognizes synergy among Mission Priorities
- 3) Suggests a way in which Conference & Association staffing could be reorganized to more effectively provide essential services for each church
- 4) Addresses some of the sense of isolation felt by some UCC churches
- 5) Provides basis for another Financial Development strategy for SCNC
- 6) Leverages SCNC’s strength in church development for many other needs of SCNC and the communities we serve.
- 7) Builds the capacity for justice action by local churches and by groups of Conference churches.
- 8) Most of all, churches are better recognized and more visible when they are part of a network of churches.

a) A NEW PHASE OF SCNC'S 20-YR PLAN FOR CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

This is essentially a second phase of the series of five-year plans for implementation of the Conference Church Development Plan adopted in 2006. That Board-approved plan that was presented to the 2006 Annual Gathering called for four church-development objectives:

- i) MIX OF CHURCHES THAT REFLECT THE ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF THE REGION.** By adding seven new Latino churches, three African-American churches, a Filipino church, a Marshallese church and a Samoan church, the last five years have moved us much closer to the diversity we seek.
- ii) ADD 100 CHURCHES.** During 2006-9, SCNC has added by either planting or affiliation a total of 15 new churches, so we are on schedule to meet this goal.
- iii) & iv) INCREASE AVERAGE CHURCH SIZE TO 200, & DOUBLE UCC MEMBERSHIP.** Additional members from new and growing churches were offset by declines in membership of other churches, so that net membership in the UCC remains about 20,000, less than 1/10 of 1% of the region's population.

b) RESULTS OF 2006-10 PLAN

The church development experience of the Southern California Nevada Conference in the first five years of the plan has had considerable success in starting new churches. It has also given us several lessons that can make the work more effective in the future.

- i) Staffing Matters: Reaching SCNC's ambitious Church-Development goals calls for recruiting, training, inspiring and empowering a team of volunteers. It could never be done entirely by staff, and even if it could, it would lack the support and ownership of Conference leadership. One of the goals of the 2010-12 Church Development Plan will need to be the full integration of this volunteer network into Conference organization.
- ii) Organizational Matters: The Conference's associations have welcomed several new churches into their fellowship during this time, but in virtually every case, the process has been less than the kind of welcome the UCC would desire. In some cases, potential affiliating churches and pastors have been given the impression that Church & Ministry Committees were unaware of the ways that cultural differences can complicate communications. In others, the agenda and workload of Committees have resulted in very slow processing of affiliate applications. If the fruits of church development in 2006-10 are to be realized, and if the 2010-12 Church Development Plan is to reach its objectives, the way in which we approach this aspect of denominational life must be rethought. The Church Development Implementation Team, Church and Ministry Committees, and Association churches all need to find ways to make the affiliation process more welcoming in the future.

- iii) Mission Overlap: The three Mission Priorities of the Conference have much to do with each other. It would be helpful to Church Development if the other two mission priorities, Building Community in Diversity and Youth and Young Adult ministries, were equally active and were included in an overall mission strategy. We hope this will be a key part of the Conference's strategic planning with its new Conference Minister.
- iv) Common Communities are sometimes geographic, sometimes based around common interests or situations. These *Conversations on Common Interests* are powerful church-development tools, teaching tools, and ways to build community among church leaders. A key part of the 2010-12 Church Development Plan is for both staff and local-church leaders to look for opportunities to fruitfully gather church leaders together. In some cases, this should be easier to do with the emerging use of virtual communication and community-building tools.
- v) Accounting & Financial Issues. The church planting projects of 2005-8 were based on more Conference funding than the Conference actually had available. Further, differing cultural attitudes towards money have created organizational conflicts and misunderstandings in some instances.

In addition, many church leaders in the Conference have come to equate Church Development with Conference money, even though many of our church-development projects are receiving little or no funding from the Conference. This has led to lost opportunities in both new and existing churches. Often, church leaders don't even think about development possibilities, because they believe that unless they think funds are available, new projects are not possible.

A final financial lesson to be learned is that, although it is possible to start new churches with the proceeds of sale from closed churches, no financial commitments should be made until the properties are sold.

This 2010-12 Church Development Plan assumes that this principle will be Conference Policy in the future. At year-end 2009, the Conference has approximately \$800,000 in unrestricted funds, most of which from the sale of churches and other properties. Although we will be marketing other properties in 2010-12, we assume that any funds from these potential future property sales will fund church development in 2013 and later. Further, the Conference's available unrestricted funds must help fund operating deficits in the Conference budget during 2010-12, so that the Conference's financial development efforts have time to close the operating deficit in basic conference operations.

- vi) **Still: SCNC has reached most of its minimum five-year goals for developing fifteen new churches, in only four years. And in addition, much of this has occurred because of the desire of independent and other new churches to join with the UCC. We should not miss this sign that God is blessing our efforts to develop the UCC's voice in Southern California and Nevada.**

Our 2010-12 Church Development Plan will capitalize on the energy and excitement resulting from this dozen or so new churches have created in the Conference's churches, and offer churches that want to become more vital a series of experiences

that can both empower and inspire them to do so. The Plan will also incorporate the lessons learned in our previous (2006-10) Church Development Plan, so that we can reach more ambitious goals in the future.

c) THE BASIS OF THE 2010-12 CHURCH DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The priorities for educating church leaders in this Church Development Plan are based as much as possible on the empirical evidence of what is likely to be effective in the next 5-10 years.* This evidence comes from a variety of sources:

- i) New Beginnings, a successful program of the DOC,
- ii) 2008 FACT Survey by Hartford Seminary,
- iii) Successful church-multiplication efforts elsewhere around the UCC,
- iv) Lessons learned from SCNC church-development plan for 2006-10.

This convinces us that we should focus our church-development efforts in the following areas:

- i) Training and coaching church leadership, i.e. both lay and pastoral leadership, in the art of leading churches with congregational polity.
- ii) Teaching the art of developing a common vision for the ministry of an individual church from the individual visions of pastor, lay leaders and others.
- iii) Evangelism in a series of specific areas:
 - (1) Encouraging & assisting existing churches to reach new groups of people via multiple specifically designed worship experiences in their mission field
 - (2) Encourage & assist churches to consider replicating themselves by starting new churches in other mission areas.
 - (3) Welcoming existing churches from under-represented ethnic and socio-economic groups, including but not limited to Latino & Samoan churches.
- iv) For some churches, offer an assessment of their ministry and specific alternatives for their future.

Realistically, not every one of the 140 churches in relationship with the UCC (including new & affiliating churches) will choose to participate in these efforts to help them develop. But it is possible, at least, to offer them the assistance and best current thinking about how and why to go about their own development. In SCNC, we believe many churches will receive and incorporate this coaching gratefully.

Further, focusing church development in these areas will allow the coaching and training to be done with excellence. And the Vitality Events has shown that, when

* We recognize, however, that evidence is historical in nature, and therefore based on what was effective in the past. So some of what we propose to do in these three years is to encourage experimentation by local churches. Those experiments, shared in community with other churches, will be another basis of church development in this Church Development Plan.

done with excellence, more and more churches are likely to be interested over time in this way of approaching a subject they all care about – their future as a ministry.

d) PROGRAMS OF THE 2010-12 CHURCH DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Programmatically, the Church Development Strategy for 2010-12 will be structured into three major elements, as follows:

a) Tell the Story

This is the important first step, in order that existing churches recapture the belief that their church has a mission, and a future. Although few churches say they have lost hope in their future, over half of them act as if they prefer to live in the past, or at least act out of the belief that the pain of changing is not worth the effort. To overcome this attitude, an ongoing public relations campaign is necessary, using all the communication resources of the Conference, including:

- i) **Connecting Voices**. At least one article every 15 days about some aspect of church vitality
- ii) **Vitality Event**: A chance to both equip and inspire church leaders to develop their own churches
- iii) **Annual Gathering and Association Meetings**: Another opportunity
- iv) **Other SCNC Resources**, including: but not limited to:
 - (1) SCNC web site
 - (2) Online social networks
 - (3) monthly bulletin inserts

We would also intend to adapt and offer these messages for other Conferences and settings of the UCC as well as our colleagues in the SW Region of the Disciples of Christ. And of course, when a story is told in this Conference, it needs to be in many languages, not just English, and in many forms.

b) New Church Development

During the previous church-development plan (2006-9), SCNC welcomed 15 new churches in a mix of new church plants and affiliating churches. During this 2010-12 Church Development Plan, we hope to welcome another 15 new churches. However, we do not plan to initiate any new church projects using a church-planting model. Instead, we will:

- i) Focus on affiliations, i.e. a Church & Ministry process that welcomes new churches that wish to join the UCC because of UCC's core values.

- ii) Focus on Churches Birthing Churches. SCNC's role is in coaching and teaching leadership skills to these churches.

Though experience has taught us that the mix of these kinds of new churches is quite unpredictable, our plan calls for a mix of new churches as follows:

Year	1 2010	2 2011	3 2012	Total 2010-12
Affiliations				
Samoans	3	1	1	4
Hispanic	0	1		1
Other			1	1
Churches Birthing Churches				
Hispanic	1	1	1	3
Other	1	2	2	5
Total Churches Started	5	5	5	15
Cumulative		10	15	15

This strategy allows the Conference to prove to all its constituents that passion for the calling, training and commitment are the essential to starting a new church. It can also show the UCC the power of actually employing a radical welcome to churches that are seeking affiliation with the denomination in Southern California and Nevada. And it can prove that, though adequate funding is necessary for starting new churches, it is most effective when it comes from multiple sources. From our experience with recent affiliating and new churches in SCNC, we plan to budget limited financial support for no more than five of these new churches. That funding will be in accordance with existing Conference guidelines, a copy of which is attached

Direct financial support by SCNC for these churches will be very limited. That should not limit our ability to start five churches per year, however. Of the new churches in SCNC during 2006-9, only about 1/3 received direct financial support from the Conference. Now and in the future, we plan to offer limited direct financial support in specialized circumstances, and counsel about other sources of funds otherwise. Our existing policy for making these funding decisions is attached, although it may require some refinement as we live into this Church Development Plan.

Churches Birthing Churches is a major interest of the Center for Progressive Renewal, so much of the assistance with identification of potential multiplying churches will be done through them. Conference Staff will continue to work with the Conference's Church & Ministry Committees to build a common process for affiliation of churches. The current draft of our policy is attached, and the February 2010 meeting of the Church Development Implementation Team has scheduled most Church & Ministry Chairs with the agenda of a refinement of this policy. This Church Development Plan is to complete this policy and the related training so that, by 2012, the processing time for an affiliating church averages 18 months, and is no longer than three years.

c) Development of Existing Churches:

This Church Development Plan includes assistance for the development of vital congregations in every church in SCNC, if they choose to make their own vitality part of their mission. We plan to do this in a series of invitations to local churches:

i) Conversations on Common Interests

This part of the plan builds on one of the surprises of our 2006-9 experience – the success of our Samoan and Latino Tables. Although they are different in structure, leadership, etc., they have gathered regularly to share common concerns and best practices, look for ways to work together, and invite other churches to join the UCC. A desire for something similar in other parts of Conference life was a highlight outcome of the Self-Study conducted in 2007-9 as part of the Conference’s interim process. With some guidance by Conference staff, these groups have the potential for peers to teach each other what is actually effective in development of their churches. These *Conversations on Common Interests* also provide a natural place to invite like-minded independent churches to work in an area of interest (e.g. immigration reform, gay marriage) that they share. On occasion, they may even act as a place where independent churches can explore the possibility of affiliating formally with the United Church of Christ (as has happened with both the Samoan Table and the Latino Table).

These groups are self-governing, but generally take someone’s initiative to get started. They don’t start themselves. The Conference’s role would be to invite a prospective seed group of pastors or churches to begin one of these regular gatherings, give it regular staff presence in the beginning, then have staff step back from leading the group as internal leadership emerges. Staff or CDIT might occasionally join those meetings after that, but would not be responsible for convening the meeting, providing lunch, etc.

These are non-geographic in that they will not need to either connect to Association structures or be limited by Association boundaries. Their geographic reach will be limited only by the interest of participants in being part of the *Conversations on Common Interests*. So they are supplemental to Association life and work, not at odds with them.

During the three years of this Church Development Plan, we can further the development of existing churches in this Conference by starting at least six of these groups, and thereby assisting 30-50 churches in developing and increasing their own vitality. Opportunities exist for *Conversations on Common Interests* around at least the following subjects:

1. Progressive Churches: The intersection of Justice and Evangelism
2. UCC but not Progressive: Where do we fit?

3. Emerging forms of worship, community and church life
4. Regaining financial self-sufficiency
5. Reaching (much) younger generations
6. Becoming a multi-cultural local church

Beyond the topics, these *Conversations on Common Interests* offer community, support and accountability to church leaders, and thereby make covenant more real. It gives substance to the concept of “where two or three are gathered in my name.”

There could obviously be a longer list of possibilities, and CDIT will be open to those suggestions. This Church Development Plan envisions that Conference staff and CDIT start two of these *Conversations on Common Interests* annually. Some will start but lose energy. But for those that continue, they can offer more covenantal connections, more on-going coaching, and more vitality to local churches. Moreover, they are a much more efficient way for Conference staff to relate to churches than by meeting them one at a time.

ii) Church Vitality Training

Previously, we have held an annual Church Vitality Event that has been very well received and well attended. In the next three years, we will expand this training to include offering year-round church-vitality training, focused in the following key areas of church life:

- (1) Developing a Common Vision
- (2) Worship & Practical Evangelism
- (3) Church Leadership, including both Pastoral & Lay Leadership & Call Formation for Laity

We plan to continue the practice of an annual Vitality Event each February. (Brochures describing the 2009 and 2010 Vitality Events are attached). In addition, however, we plan to offer additional Vitality training by webinar and seminar. When the Center for Progressive Christianity is prepared to offer that sort of training nationally, we would intend to partner with them for this training. In the meantime, our planned 2010 offerings include:

Where are you on the Life Cycle of Churches? A church-development theory that offers perspective about church issues and church vitality. Offer four times or until demand is satisfied.

MissionInsite: Introduce the new SCNC demographics package, and how can it help a local church in its planning. (Offer 2-3 times)

Who’s calling?: A call-discernment event planned for April 2010, led by Rev. Paul Nickerson of Nickerson Consulting.

Learning from our Successes: Interviews with vital SCNC (or other UCC) churches to share best practices, principles, etc. (five offerings in 2010, six in both 2011 & 2012).

Although all these offerings are primarily for a SCNC audience, they can also be shared outside SCNC, either in a partnership with the Center for Progressive Renewal or with Local Church Ministries, UCC

The goal is for SCNC to offer at least one seminar or webinar per month during the time-frame of this Church Development Plan.

iii) Local Church Assessment and Coaching

The majority of the Conference's existing churches are either on a plateau or declining in numbers, suggesting (though not proving) that most of them are in the last half of the life cycle of churches. For these churches, our church development strategy includes an element of assessment of their vitality as a church and coaching in the strategic options available to them. Tentatively called *New Awakenings*, this program is an Assessment and Coaching program to aid churches in seeing their options and planning faithfully for their future. Again, participation will need to be voluntary. Based on our study of similar programs in other denominations, *New Awakenings* will have elements of appreciative inquiry, an evaluation of church assets including its building, an evaluation of its mission field, and a report that suggests a range of strategic options to the congregation.

In most cases, this Assessment will need to be followed by coaching from people trained in church development or renewal. We plan to train a group of SCNC clergy and laity in both *New Awakenings* coaching and *New Awakenings* assessments.

Some elements of this program will need to go through a planning & training period in 2010. Others will need to recognize that implementation of some churches' plans will require funding that is unlikely to be available from SCNC until 2012 or 2013. These program elements can continue planning and discerning how and where to best implement them until the time when Conference funds are available. For this reason, the financial projections of this Church Development plan do not extend beyond 2012. Instead, the plan assumes that CDIT (or its successor) and the Board will prepare those budgets when funds are available, i.e. when the Santa Barbara property's sale is completed, in accordance with the Conference Strategic Plan to be completed in the meantime. During the three years of this Church Development Plan, we can still complete *New Awakenings* assessments and related coaching to between 20 and 40 Conference churches.

iv) Churches becoming Multicultural Settings

The cultural diversity of Southern California and Nevada gives both special urgency and special issues to all churches in the Conference. This makes all the more important the work of those churches in the Conference that choose to make becoming a multicultural church their mission. In addition, churches with this understanding of their mission are important resources for the Conference

to reach another of its mission priorities, that of Building Community in Diversity.

For that reason, this Church Development Plan includes training for church members to be more effective witnesses in culturally diverse settings, and to rethink their evangelism, structures, and programs in order to move a typical mono-cultural church toward their goal of becoming a multicultural church. We intend to do this in partnership with the Kaleidoscope Center, located in Silver Lake, CA and led by Rev. Eric Law, beginning in 2011. The Church Development Implementation Team is still considering, with Kaleidoscope Center and other experts in this subject, exactly how to offer this assistance to churches.

WHO WILL IMPLEMENT THIS CHURCH DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Church Development Implementation Team will need to expand its responsibilities, and add volunteers to the Team. When fully functioning, the Team will include people with three general areas of interest and training:

- i) New church starts, including both affiliation and church multiplication
- ii) Vitality of existing churches, plus
- iii) Coaches for New Awakening Churches

Each of these groups within the Team will need at least five volunteers in order to fulfill the mission it has undertaken.

In addition, the Conference will be a major partner of the Center for Progressive Renewal, for both leadership training and for church multiplication. The terms of this relationship are currently being developed into a partnership agreement, which will be incorporated into this plan when completed.

THE BENCHMARK GOALS OF THIS CHURCH DEVELOPMENT PLAN

We have identified seven specific benchmarks by which we will measure our progress towards our goal of becoming a Conference of Vital Churches:

- 1) Add Fifteen (15) new churches by either affiliation or churches starting churches.
- 2) Processing time for an affiliating church averages 18 months, and is no longer than 3 years.
- 3) 5% growth in UCC membership in SCNC, from 20,000 to a total of 21,000 members.
- 4) Reach every pastor and church leader with at least one story per month about church development in SCNC.
- 5) Start two new *Conversations on Common Interests* each year, in order to engage at least 30 churches in one or more *Conversation on a Common Interest*
- 6) Offer at least one seminar or webinar per month for vitality training of all SCNC churches.
- 7) Complete *New Awakenings* assessments and related coaching in between 20 and 40 Conference churches.
- 8) Every church in SCNC is engaged in at least one aspect of church vitality and development.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PLAN FOR SCNC LIFE

A church-development program that is done with excellence and addresses the key question in most SCNC churches' lives, i.e. how to live into their future, will take some time to fully implement. But fully implemented, it could have profound effects on many aspects of Conference life. Although it is somewhat speculative how this future would appear, here are some possibilities:

a) For Covenant with & among SCNC Churches

Bringing churches together in *Conversations on Common Interests* around areas of common interest could potentially build more helpful networks between churches that have mission and program in common. And by offering connections with other churches that have similar issues, both learning and covenant relationships can be strengthened.

b) For Church & Ministry Processes

Learning how to be welcoming to new churches, often from a different culture, will be a key to the success of the plan, particularly the new churches seeking affiliation with the UCC. This would be both helpful and congruent with the desire of LCM's Parish Life & Leadership group to make the process more welcoming.

Helping shrinking churches to become healthier might also reduce the number of churches with internal conflicts requiring intervention from Church & Ministry Committees and/or Conference staff.

c) For Search & Call

It may be possible for interim periods when churches are between called pastors to be re-designed to allow a re-development of the church to occur during and after the interim process. This process needs time for planning, but could be implemented as early as 2012.

d) For Financial Development

Churches that are able to focus their vision, be more effectively led, be more culturally competent, and grow in either spirit or numbers (or both) should be on sounder financial footings as churches. If this new vibrancy were assisted by SCNC programs, it is reasonable to expect that these churches would be more generous with per capita and OCWM funding. It would even be possible to offer some of these programs on a fee-based basis, with discounts for churches that support Conference ministries generously.

e) For Conference Staffing & Organization

Full implementation of this plan will imply that both the Conference Minister and the Conference Board see development of both new and existing churches as their primary responsibility. It also implies that all or most SCNC churches see their own development as a primary part of their calling. This is a major change from 'the way we've always done it.' Historically in the UCC, church development has been the responsibility of an Associate Conference Minister, or a committee, if it is done at all. False dichotomies have been constructed, such as the idea that church growth is antithetical to being a progressive church, or that evangelism is a 'conservative' activity unbecoming a UCC church, or even at odds with a church focused on a gospel of justice.

A change this profound will take time to fully absorb, let alone fully implement. But in our view, it is essential to the future of many SCNC churches. And more importantly, it is the unique mission of the UCC in Southern California and Nevada.

NOW IS THE TIME

The next 2-3 years (2010-2012) are also an ideal time to undertake implementing this plan to prepare SCNC's churches to lead this coming New Reformation. Reasons include:

- i) **We are looking for leadership.** The Conference Minister transition will be occurring at the same time, of course, but the Conference Minister also needs to feel called to actually lead this New Reformation.
- ii) **We can afford to do this, now.** Funds from LCM and from SCNC's cash on hand are currently available to implement this church development strategy. By

focusing on training and coaching of existing churches and continuing the process of developing our welcome started by StillSpeaking, we can afford to do this.

On the other hand, if SCNC waits to implement this strategy, the funds are unlikely to be available 2-3 years from now. SCNC cash will be depleted, and matching funds from LCM will be unavailable.

- iii) **We can't afford to continue the way we have.** The first five-year plan depended heavily on a church-development budget of between \$500,000 and \$800,000 per year.
- iv) **We will learn to be better stewards of whatever funds are available for Conference Mission Priorities in the future.** When markets allow SCNC to resume selling property, we will have learned valuable lessons for future church development strategies.
- v) **We have some of the leadership now.**
 - (1) The Church Development Implementation Team has had considerable training and experience in current church-development theory & practice, and could implement this expanded plan.
 - (2) Staffing models should be dictated by mission goals and priorities, not the other way around. Still, we have staff competent to implement this plan right now, and may or may not be able to find a similar skill-set 2-3 years in the future.
 - (3) The newly formed Center for Progressive Renewal, with significant financial support from LCM during its start-up phase, can bring high-quality teachers and consultants to support various parts of this plan within budget and with a solidly UCC background. By working with them during the start-up phase of their life, SCNC and this group can help each other prove the effectiveness of this approach, and build a working relationship that can promise excellence in church development for the rest of the denomination into the future.
- vi) **Many Conference churches should not wait** The longer a church waits to address its development issues, the more difficult it is to agree upon a strategy and then implement it. By waiting, some churches may also lose vitality to the point where recovery is virtually impossible.
- vii) **Other UCC conferences need our example** As urgent as this vision for Southern California Nevada Conference's future is, we are fortunate to have the leadership, commitments, partners and resources to make it happen, with God's blessing. And showing other conferences the way will be gratefully received by many of them.