

Mainline decline

Mainline Protestant churches everywhere are declining. The pews are emptier on Sunday morning. Neighborhoods have changed. Once-proud buildings show signs of wear and tear, and the cost to maintain them pulls money away from outreach and ministry.

Decline does not necessarily mean your congregation will close. But the old mission and vision – the one that worked 30, 50, or even 100 years ago – no longer fits your circumstances. It may be time to ask, “What is God calling us to do and to be in this time and this place?”

If your congregation can answer “yes” to three or more of the following, it may be time for a New Beginning:

- Less than 70 in worship
- Significant building issues (too much space, inadequate parking, putting off repairs and maintenance)
- Aging membership
- Changing neighborhood
- Trouble paying bills and/or paying off a loan

A fresh start

New Beginnings assesses a congregation's strengths and challenges as it seeks to redevelop its ministry. The goal of the process is to put the congregation on the road to sustainable Christian witness and action within its community.

The New Beginnings assessment and follow-up training give your church's leaders and members a realistic picture of your resources for ministry, demographic strengths, readiness for change, and potential for vital ministry.

“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

- Isaiah 43:19



HOPE  
Partnership for Missional Transformation

New Beginnings Assessment Service

seeks to answer the question,

“What is God calling your congregation to do and be in this time and this place?”



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### With New Beginnings, your congregation will:

- Receive a comprehensive report of strengths and challenges, as well as a realistic picture of possible future directions.
- Be trained in a discernment process to follow God's lead in choosing a new direction.
- Discover available ministry opportunities in the community.
- Learn how to discuss and implement change in a healthy, open manner.
- Leaders receive additional training on leading through change.
- Set a course for future strategic and visionary ministry planning.

New Beginnings does not force change on a congregation. It provides the information, the process, and the training to help members and leaders come together to make wise and realistic decisions about the future.

New Beginnings helps churches choose their future, instead of letting it get chosen for them.



**Finding a New Home:** A small congregation with a large building sold their facility and relocated. New Beginnings helped them see how their savings on monthly building expenses would allow them to call a full-time pastor. The right-sized congregation is growing now, with a passion for ministry in the community.

**Starting Over:** A congregation averaged 30 in worship every other Sunday. After Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation helped them develop a new vision for ministry, they decided to "restart" the church. Officers agreed to resign, and the church was closed. It reopened a month later with a new name. Today, more than 200 worship there each Sunday.

**Getting Back to Basics:** A declining congregation with capable people and sufficient resources was able to reconsider what God called it to do. After intentional reflection and the development of a strong vision for the future, the congregation's focus shifted from itself to reaching out and serving in its community.

**Embracing New Neighbors:** A congregation was located in a community whose racial/ethnic demographics had changed radically. With the help of Hope Partnership, the congregation decided to launch a new ministry that was appropriate for the culture of those living in the neighborhood. In an act of faithfulness, they shared both their facility and their endowed funds. As a result of their faithful gift, average worship attendance went from 50 to more than 300 each weekend.

### How does the process work, and how long does it take?

The process usually takes six to eight months. Phase I is an on-site assessment: building inspection, financial review, tour of the community, and meeting with the pastor and moderator. The assessment includes an Appreciative Inquiry session with congregational leaders to learn more about your strengths. After the assessment, your congregation will receive a report outlining congregational strengths, weaknesses and possible future directions.

In Phase II, we'll train five to eight key leaders within your church to interpret the report, and prepare them to guide the congregation through a discernment process. Pastors will participate in an additional training called "Leading Change in Congregations."

In Phase III, your key leaders will conduct small group meetings, moving the congregation toward a "big picture" decision about what God is calling the church to do and be. Once that decision is made, Hope Partnership will refer the pastor and leaders to available mission planning resources to help your congregation "connect the dots."

**What is the cost?** Disciples investors and donors enable Hope Partnership to offer the service at a reduced cost. The fee for a group of Disciples congregations in an area or region is \$2,800. This covers consultant travel, time, overhead for the on-site assessment and phone follow up, reports, and training expenses. Congregations may opt for a customized New Beginnings process. The fee for the customized service is \$3,800. We also offer New Beginnings to churches from other denominations — contact us for fees.

**How can we find out more?** Your congregation can host a "come and see" event for area congregations. A Hope Partnership assessor will share more about the process and answer any questions your congregation may have.

How do we get started? Contact a Hope Partnership assessor for an application, at 800-274-1883 or learn more at [www.hopepmt.org/nb](http://www.hopepmt.org/nb)

### Who is Hope Partnership?

Hope Partnership is a ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Our purpose is to empower courageous leaders as they guide the Church into life-giving expressions of ministry for this new era of God's mission.