



Reflections

No going back to the future!

By Rick Morse, Vice President, Congregational Services
Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation

A church in the greater Los Angeles area has a building that was built in 1928—but now is too large and too expensive to maintain. After going through Hope Partnership's New Beginnings process, they craft a Future Story that imagines the congregation selling the facility, right-sizing and creating a whole new ministry to fit the demographics of a new area. After just five years, the church celebrates moving into its new facility and living its dream.

A Future Story is a powerful tool for helping a congregation move off of dead center. The story is considerably different from a "Vision Statement" that focuses on institutional vitality and metrics to measure its outcome. A Future Story uses imagination to create a realistic dream about how a congregation might more fully connect with God's mission.

A Future Story is a written story, set in the future, that describes what a congregation is doing, who is involved and the difference that it is making.

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A Future Story is realistic because it starts with the actual and named conditions of the congregation. It utilizes dream language, rather than vision language. That is to say, the story connects with the readers' intrinsic values, rather than functioning as a "motivational vision" piece that tries to motivate parishioners into doing something they don't want to do.

A church in Texas recently used a Future Story to help identify a new mission for the community to which they were relocating. The first draft had the church operating a coffee shop in their new location that would function as their worship space and a place where they could connect with the community through "open mic" nights and community-service organizing. The congregation created a narrative that





described what it would take to build the necessary capacity for this new mission. While the church had the means to accomplish the story, through the storytelling process they came to realize that the work it would take was well beyond their passion.

I considered that a victory. The church used its imagination to create something very new and different. They didn't say NO up front. Instead, they massaged and examined the idea in detail before deciding it wasn't their story after all.

Many people who may be leaders in their industries rarely get to exercise their imaginations. That is what makes this process so delightful. Regardless of your time in the church, or how old you are, creating a Future Story calls leaders to challenge their assumptions and think about the real purpose of the church—rather than asking the two least consequential questions: “How do we get more people?” and “How do we get more money?”

Hope Partnership has helped hundreds of congregations create their Future Story through our services. Through

New Beginnings Assessment Service, an assessor actually helps a congregation write three to four scenarios for consideration, based on factual data about the congregation's condition. Leaders who are involved in The Journey are taught how to write Future Stories and practice the art during their two retreats.

After a church has a Future Story, Hope Partnership is also available to help the congregation convert that story into a reality through “capacity building,” which includes timelines, resource allocation and technical skill development.

A church building in Kentucky was recently destroyed by a fire. This church had to make a decision about whether they should relocate to another part of town, rebuild on their own site or share facilities with a church that had surplus space. By creating three different Future Stories, they were able to gain clarity on the direction they should go.

Writing a Future Story is a creative process that engages people in a discernment experience using storytelling—kind of the way the Christian movement began! ■

Does your church feel stuck in neutral?
Are church offerings going down while costs keep going up? What is God calling your congregation to do and be in this time and place?



New Beginnings Assessment Service can help you assess options for your church's ministry and make bold decisions for the future. While many congregations face tough questions about their survival and sustainability, many are also finding courage and support as they initiate a **New Beginning**.

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ENABLING SUCCESS

▶ FEATURE ARTICLE:

Partnership in many forms

Partnership in many forms:

Multiple services help a congregation prepare for mission

It's almost never simple, but that doesn't mean there isn't method to the madness. When Memorial Christian Church in Ann Arbor, Mich., was discerning what was needed to bring purpose and renewed vitality to its ministry, they figured progress would come in steps. **They started** with the New Beginnings Assessment Service, provided by Hope Partnership.

New Beginnings helps a congregation in decline do the challenging work required to answer the question, "What is God calling us to be and do in this time and place?" New Beginnings works collaboratively with a congregation to assess its current 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 witness and action that is relevant to the community the congregation is called to serve.



"... It will take miracles for all of this to succeed, and the miracles have already started happening. At the very least, it has transformed the congregation to focus on faith-life rather than survival, which is what 'church' is supposed to be about."

Memorial Christian Church courageously tackled the New Beginnings process that resulted in their decision to 1) relocate their congregation to a space that was better suited for their needs on a site closer to people who need what they felt God wants them to offer; and 2) commit as members to make mission and outreach a higher priority for the church in very concrete ways.

Step Two

of the church's revitalization brought them back to Hope Partnership and Disciples Church Extension Fund for relocation services and ultimately

building financing. Memorial received help assessing the kind of space they needed, obtained real-time demographic information about neighborhoods that were a potential match for their ministry, and benefitted by Disciples Church Extension Fund's expertise in building

planning and purchase. They sold their long-time church home and ended up buying a facility, previously the city's Girl Scout council building, in an area with a sizable population of at-risk families and youth.

With the purchase underway, the congregation continued the process of fine-tuning the vision for their ministry.

The New Beginnings assessment and follow-up training give a congregation a realistic picture of resources, demographic strengths, readiness for change and vital ministry potential so they can make wise and realistic decisions about the church's future.



Transitional Pastor Bob Brite explains, “We’re installing a laundry facility for homeless individuals and families, working together with a nearby family homeless shelter and will be serving dinner once a month at that facility. In addition, we’re setting up a gathering space, scheduled to open in the fall, that we’re describing as a safe haven for bullied youth, many of whom are of GLBT orientation.” In short, he says, “We hope to offer our church as an opportunity for missionally minded people to do life ‘in proximity’ to others.”

Next is Step Three – equipping their new space to support their mission. Renovating areas for worship and fellowship, mission and faith development has transformed the space from “office-like” to a warm, multi-purpose gathering space, with design, furnishings, equipment and technology that invite people in and engage them in community-building. A loan from Disciples Church Extension Fund has enabled the congregation to remodel a portion of the building that will produce rental income from community groups and others to help fund their ministry. The loan also includes low-interest funds from Disciples Church Extension Fund’s Accessibility Loan Fund to remove physical barriers so the space can be open to all people.

Memorial Christian Church, which has changed its name to Journey of Faith Christian Church, is already showing signs of new life and growth, especially in the area of youth ministry and general congregational growth. Says Pastor Brite of the process the congregation went through to go from standing still to moving forward in mission, “The church made the intentional decision before calling me to take some huge leaps of faith in the directions of congregational life. It will take miracles for all of this to succeed, and the miracles have already started happening. At the very least, it has transformed the congregation to focus on faith-life rather than survival, which is what ‘church’ is supposed to be about.” ■

We celebrate Ketty!



Hope Partnership celebrates our friend and colleague, Ketty Santos, who recently retired from her work as Minister for Coaching for Hope Partnership. After seven years with our ministry, Ketty continues her passion for new church ministry by starting a new church near Atlanta, Ga., close to family and countless friends. Gracias por tu servicio, Ketty! A Dios sea la Gloria!

Repair the roof?
Or repurpose our space?
Or relocate?

**Where
do we
start?**

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that will help your church develop a
building plan that makes sense.



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A NEW THING

FEATURE ARTICLES:

You're never too old for spit and polish

Sometimes food. Sometimes shelter. Sometimes Legos.

You're never too old for spit and polish!

Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation reinforces the truism that transformation can and does occur in leaders of every age and stage of life. The ministry's Senior Empowerment initiative, championed and facilitated by former Church Extension President Jim Powell, guides seniors through a process of discovering new and valued ways to serve in "retirement" that can transform their lives and the lives of others. Joan Sidell, a former Church Extension director and board chair who attends North Chevy Chase Christian Church in Chevy Chase, Md., describes the empowerment she has discovered in taking the lead to fill a need in her church.

"I am 89 years old and have been chairman of the Property Department of my church longer than I can remember. The hardest job I had was to find a satisfactory cleaning service to clean the building. After firing two cleaning services for poor work, I felt like God was calling me to do the job. That was when I was 81 and I am still cleaning the church!



The building is large and has 12 restrooms. When I started cleaning, we did not have many people using the building and now we have about 500 people entering our doors every week. These are community members who use the church on a daily basis.

I do have some help. A man mops the floors of our two large meeting rooms. Cleaning a church building could not be any harder than taking care of a baby, as Abraham and Sarah did at an old age. I think my job might be easier! **"**

Joan Sidell

Visit <http://disciplesintersection.org/page/senior-empowerment> for more information about Hope Partnership's Senior Empowerment process.

Sometimes food. Sometimes shelter. Sometimes Legos. Mission takes different forms.

By Guido Niel Climer, Pastor, Disciples of Christ-Visalia, Visalia CA

Guido Niel Climer is pastor of Disciples of Christ-Visalia, a new church he started in Visalia, Calif. A former participant in Hope Partnership's new church planter training and a strong advocate for the new church movement, Guido enthusiastically shared the following story with Hope Partnership staff at the 2013 General Assembly in Orlando, Fla., after attending the education track about missional transformation.

In January 2010, a college student demonstrated a robot for the citywide leadership class I was attending. He built this robot using the Vex (think Erector Set with motors). The rest of the day, I thought to myself, "My son's elementary school could do that."

Tulare County, our church's mission field, is one of the poorest areas in the United States, with demographics that are comparable to Appalachia and southern Louisiana.





Local schools struggle to provide opportunities wealthier schools take for granted. In 2010, funding across the Visalia school district was slashed, and I asked the principal of my son's school, "Can we start a robotics program? I don't expect any funding. We will fund the start of this project." She said, "Yes, but you must use Lego robots." With that, we started our adventure in FIRST LEGO League (FLL). (www.usfirst.org/fll)

technology. We give of ourselves and teach core values of FLL that speak to how to be part of a larger community. We have retooled Paul's theology of the Body, and teach community as bricks, not body parts. It takes all the pieces to



create a robot. It takes all of us to be a team. This program is expanding and we are working with the school district to have a varsity robotics team. (www.usfirst.org/frc)

Our church is measuring our success by the numbers of schools reached. In the beginning, the church asked me,



"When are we going to see the kids on Sunday?" I answered, "We have to go to them during the week." The church responded by becoming mentors to the students, providing them support during the week. This summer we invited families of our robotic teams to Vacation Bible School. We used robots and LEGOS to tell the grand story of God, "Building Bricks of Faith."

In addition, we connected the larger Church to the FLL teams through

sponsorship of a robotics tournament by Week of Compassion. Week of Compassion had provided an emergency relief grant to one of the participating schools, which is the poorest school in California. The impact on that school? They are taking an unused space to create a technology lab because they were inspired by robotics.

Reggie McNeal spoke at General Assembly about the missional focus of the Church. He said the easiest place to impact a community is in the schools. We are reaching more people and more communities than I ever had in any other church. Robotics is an avenue for us to connect with people. We initially invested \$2,000 and lives have been changed. From our modest beginning of four teams to the 25 teams we have now, we expect more than 200 students in our county will be part of robotics teams this year as a result of the seeds we have sown in the last four years. ■



Starting in September of 2010, 20 kids from my son's school who didn't have a clue about robots joined the adventure. Our church, Disciples of Christ-Visalia, did not have a youth program, so this group of kids became our youth program. We have reached more than 100 kids across the county in the last three years using FIRST LEGO. My wife and I have become coaches, tournament directors, site coordinators, fundraisers, funders and champions of this program. The vision is that we can change our community by providing students opportunities to interact with

Annual Report Goes Online

Always striving to be good stewards of our (and your) resources, the 2013 annual report for Disciples Church Extension Fund and Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation will be published online later this spring. Please call 800. 274.1883 or email info@disciplescef.org to request a hard copy of the report.



MOBILIZING RESOURCES FOR MISSION



FEATURE ARTICLE:

Congregation stays put to move toward God

Congregation stays put to move toward God

When Hope Central Church, Jamaica Plain, Mass., applied for a loan from Disciples Church Extension Fund (DCEF) for heating system replacement and asbestos removal, they were asked to explain how the loan project fits into the mission of the congregation.



“First, we found it interesting as we began discussion about replacing the boiler, pipes and radiators that we first had to have a discussion about staying in this building. Because Hope Church, a Disciples start-up congregation, had moved from rental space to rental space during its formation, that group of people raised the question if we should be in a building, and why would we want to replace the furnace? The results of the discussion were a consensus and agreement that we are now part of a congregation, in a building, in Jamaica Plain, doing ministry in this place, and that is where God calls us to be. So, we will be staying, and this is where ministry radiates out from and we will fix the boiler system so we can be here where we are called.

“Second, we would call attention to ... our mission that is currently going on in the community. [Their loan application included a lengthy and varied list of their ministries.] Obviously our ministries are growing and expanding. Continuing to be here in this community allows us to continue expanding and exploring ministries here.”

According to Disciples Church Extension Fund Advisor Maribeth Westerfield, who worked with the church through the loan process, the new Disciples congregation has brought new life into the established United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation with which it merged and in whose old building they now operate. She observes, “This is a congregation that understands that their building is meant to serve their ministry and not the other way around. Therefore, they wanted to ensure their facility is in good working order so it can function as an effective and efficient mission center.”

Maribeth notes that the loan Disciples Church Extension Fund granted Hope Central contained lower-interest Green Loan funds designated for energy improvements. She explains, “By choosing to replace their old boiler, pipes and radiator with a new energy efficient furnace and adding insulation, they accomplished two important things: First, they can be confident they are providing a safe and comfortable environment for the audiences they serve, including the pre-school children in the Mosaic School.” She adds, “Second, and maybe more importantly, they are saving thousands of dollars a year in energy costs, which is money that can be channeled directly into ministry. That’s a lot of ministry!”

And, a lot of impactful ministry is Hope Central Christian Church’s priority. In addition to the Mosaic School, their practices include:

- ▶ Giving away 10 percent of their plate offering and pledges to Boston Faith and Justice Network, Campaign for Southern Equality, St. Paul’s Clinic in Kenya, City Mission Society, Disciples of Christ and UCC Global Ministries, among other organizations
- ▶ Giving away 10 percent of the income from their rentals and parking spaces to community groups
- ▶ Providing reduced rent space to their sister congregation, Iglesia Hispana, a mission church of the UCC, by being a community center for a Buddhist Sangha, 12-Step groups, theater and opera troupes and choirs and kids’ play groups. (There are currently 20 community groups using their building.)
- ▶ Participating in the work of refuge and respite for a congregation that already participates in the community doing anti-racism work, social activism, social work,






medical care, church work and the work of living in poverty in the world, as a person of color, a GLBT person or a mentally ill person.

- ▶ Participating in climate change activism, including hosting weatherization workshops and practices to ease their carbon footprint, and a “plastics fast” this Lent.
- ▶ Teaching compassion, vulnerability and resilience by teaching how to care for the material and pastoral needs of their congregation’s members.

Rev. Laura Ruth Jarrett says of the loan process, “We’re so grateful to DCEF for our loan. Because we’ve gotten the loan, because we’ve already done the insulation in the sanctuary ceiling which we can feel, you’ve given us a boost of confidence and movement that is very, very good for our congregation.” ■



Leading

tomorrow will be different from today, so I must lead differently.

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