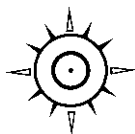


# Initial Findings for New Church Development in the Twenty-first Century

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**W**HY ARE SOME NEW CHURCHES successful and others not? Why do some churches grow? Is it worth investing a lot of money in new churches? Why do some fail? If leadership is important, does it matter who the leader is or what the leader does?

These and other questions became the impetus for a multidenominational study called New Church Development in the Twenty-first Century. Beginning as early as 1996, church-development staff from several denominations began an initiative to study successful new church starts. Each denomination gave \$25,000 to the study, and a Lilly Foundation Grant was written and received. Dr. Stan Wood of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, became the project manager. The seven participating denominations are the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in America, the Episcopal Church, and the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod).

Each denomination researched its new church starts from 1980 to 1995. A successful new church start was one that reached 250 or more in worship (or membership) in its first seven years. Successful new churches were sent a questionnaire addressed to the founding pastor, the current pastor, and three to five members of the initial core group. The founding pastors were invited to a focus group to share insights and learnings. In May 2002 the United Church of Christ Church House hosted a national gathering to share the initial results and findings of the study. Seventy-five participants from all of the denominations were present, including about twenty-five from the United Church of Christ (Conference, national, and local church).

The study will continue and more information will be available by October 2002. Focus groups have been conducted for Euro American church planters, women church planters, and Hispanic church planters. Focus groups will be conducted for African American/ Black, Native American Indian, and Asian church planters. Following the events of September 11, Middle Eastern church planters have decided not to meet.

Keith Wulff (Presbyterian Church U.S.A.), research coordinator, has issued preliminary findings based on results from five of the seven participating denominations. Episcopal Church and Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) data were not yet compiled.

Strongest among the findings is that successful new church starts utilize the following:

- A shared vision
- The involvement of the laity
- Asking people to join
- Laity training
- A focus on the unchurched
- Location in areas of significant growth

Additional information was shared comparing this study with the Faith Communities Today (FACT) survey of Hartford Seminary ([www.hartsem.edu](http://www.hartsem.edu)) and will be available in the next few months.

## **Keith Wulff Report of Preliminary Findings**

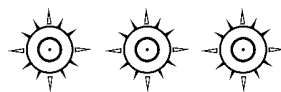
The findings below are based on the combined results from the questionnaires sent to the Christian Reformed Church, the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ.

The results for each question are presented for congregations who had an average worship attendance of 75 or less, 75–125, 126–225, 226–400, and 401 or more at the end of their seventh year of existence. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Christian Reformed Church do not have attendance figures, so membership figures were used. The following assumptions were made in adjusting the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Christian Reformed Church membership figures to match the attendance figures: 75 percent of the members of a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation regularly attended worship and 25 percent of the Christian Reformed Church members regularly attended worship.

Below are the strongest of the preliminary findings.

- Pastors and congregations have to share the same vision. Twelve percent of the pastors of the smaller congregations compared to 37 percent of those of larger congregations reported that church leaders shared the same vision for the church's future.
- Involve the laity. Fifty-eight percent of the pastors of larger congregations compared to 33 percent of the pastors of smaller congregations said the statement, "Lay leaders and members were directly involved in ministry activities," describes their congregations exactly.
- Pastors have to ask people to join. Forty-nine percent of the pastors of smaller congregations compared to 35 percent of the pastors of larger congregation said that they had not assisted anyone in making a first-time commitment in the last six months, while 4 percent of the pastors of smaller congregations compared to 23 percent of the larger congregations said they assisted twenty or more persons.
- A laity with training when they join is important for growth. One question asked the pastor's perception of how much training the original lay leaders had in ten different areas. In three areas there were significant differences between the smallest and largest congregations. These areas were: outreach programs (6 percent of the smallest, 24 percent of the largest), organizational development (8 percent to 24 percent), and business management (14 percent to 30 percent).
- Focus on the unchurched. Twenty-three percent of the pastors of small churches compared to 42 percent of the pastors of the largest churches said the following statement describes them exactly: "The focus of our ministry was reaching those not active in a church."
- Location, location, location. Ninety percent of the largest congregations compared to 54 percent of the smaller congregations are located in areas of significant population growth.



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