



WRITING A NEW CHURCH MINISTRY PLAN





New Church Ministry Plan

By Rev. Cameron Trimble

When starting a small business some years ago, a mentor took me aside and offered this insight— “everyone gets somewhere in life — it is a rare person who gets somewhere on purpose.” That nugget of wisdom has stuck with me as my ministry developed in the following years. While much of church planting feels spontaneous and unpredictable, strong new church starts actually begin with detailed blueprints and a clear vision from the very first day. In the United Church of Christ, we need churches with clear vision who “are going somewhere on purpose.”

As a participant in the New Church Leadership Institute, we expect that you will leave this training with the ability to develop a sound, articulate and comprehensive Ministry Plan for your new church. If you are participating in our coaching program, this NCD Ministry Plan will be the blueprint that will guide and define the conversations between you and your coach in the first year of your new church. This Ministry Plan will also be a helpful tool for your conference to gauge the ways that they might further support your work.

What is Included in a Ministry Plan?

In a similar format to a business model, we are looking for:

1. A compelling statement of vision and mission,
2. Location and demographic research of your planting area,
3. General summation of your launch team,
4. A detailed, “best-guess” time line of development and implementation including the number of people you hope to have in worship at the 6 month, 1 year, 2 year, 3 year and 5 year intervals,
5. A detailed, narrative budget of years 1, 2, 3 and 5
6. Fundraising strategies

Certainly this document will change as you better understand your context and mission field. However, as in any new venture, you need a starting place. Your NCD Ministry Plan helps you find where to begin.

I’ve witnessed church planters having measurable goals, a thorough ministry plan, and beginning to build strong relationships with their conferences and associations. This coaching relationship has allowed me to be in prayer and celebration with some of the finest new pastors that anyone could be acquainted with.

- Rose Wright-Scott,
UCC Coach

Vision and Mission

Vision

Church birthing begins with your personal conviction:

- ◆ You recognize a need that exists – *Inspiration*
- ◆ You ‘see’ the solution – *Vision*
- ◆ A conviction grows within you that this need must be met – *Determination*
- ◆ You take steps to begin the solution – *Action*

Mainline and non—denominational churches are popping up everywhere across the nation. A “new church” in town does not necessarily mean you will receive interest or an enthusiastic welcome from the people living in your community. Chances are that people have a lot of questions about your church, and you will need to be prepared to articulate clearly the vision of your new church.

Their questions might include:

1. Why do we need another church?
2. What is the UCC?
3. How is your church different from all the other ones we already have?
4. Why do I need to go to church?
5. What is your church like?

You will be largely responsible in leading your leadership team to ‘seeing’ the vision and ‘doing’ the mission. Therefore it is incumbent upon you to build your case for why this church — your church — is needed in the community and will change their lives.

In this section of your Ministry Plan, you will want to include two separate visions sections. The first should be your conversational response. This is literally what you would say to someone who says, “tell me about your church.” This statement should be short, succinct, and give them the basic information they need to see the vision of your church.

Tell Me About Your Church:

Your job as the church planter is to convince the community not just that your church *could* exist but that it *should* exist.

There is a moral imperative to this ministry.

- Cameron Trimble,
NCLI Director

When you have that basic statement completed, you will then want to flesh it out a bit more. You might include some of the values of your new church and important statements that define how you want your church to be known. These should be specific — words that provide clear pictures of the uniqueness of your church. Avoid words like “friendly” or “kind”. Every church wants to be friendly and kind. You want to be distinctive. How is your church different from all of the others in the neighborhood? How can your church change lives? Why does your church matter?

What is your written Vision for your church? How can you make it memorable?

Mission

A Mission Statement is an outcome oriented value statement that seeks to respond to the why of your congregation’s existence. It describes *what you will strive to accomplish* through the grace and help of God. Although it arises from your vision and core values, it leads us beyond ourselves into the world.

This statement can be the basis of future sermon series, Bible studies, theological discussion groups, etc. You will want to hold this statement before your people constantly as a reminder of why this church exists.

Mission statements are about “how.” How are you going to accomplish your vision? How are you going to build a progressive Christian community?

What is your mission for your church? Write it below:

We will live into our vision by...

I tell you, look
around you, and see
how the fields are ripe
for harvesting.

John 4:35, NRSV



Demographic Research

It goes without saying that knowing the community in which you hope to plant a church is critical to ensuring the success of your efforts. Demographic research is a helpful first step in providing insight into the lives of the people in your mission field. As a church planter in the United Church of Christ, you have access to a number of demographic research tools:

- PERCEPT reports are available to you through your conference office or the national setting,
- UCCvitality.org has an online demographic tool,
- Local census data available through your county government website.

With this information, you will have statistical data that paints a clear picture of potential church members. You will have data about their income, race, gender, family structures, social concerns, age, religious affiliations, political interests and preference of worship styles. If you are prone to enjoy research, you can amass tons of demographic information with very little effort.

Yet this is only the beginning of your demographic research. Reports generated by outside organizations are not enough to give you the connections and insights you need to plant your church. You now need to take this information that you have found through your private research and verify it by talking with the people in your mission field. Go walk the streets, talk to neighbors, meet shopkeepers and store owners, and talk to other local church pastors. Ask them the following or similar questions:

- Why do you love living in this community?
- What kind of social and political organizations do you belong to?
- What concerns do you have for your community?
- Do you think this neighborhood would embrace a new church?
- Do you currently attend church? Which one? What do you like about that church?
- What kind of church would you be interested in attending if you don't attend a church now?
- If we were to plant a UCC church in this neighborhood, would you come?
- Do you have any friends that would also be interested in being part of a UCC community?
- Who else should I talk to? Can you give me their contact information and/or introduce me to them?

What are some other helpful questions that you could ask?

Remember that the success of any new church is based upon our ability to match *model* with *mission field*-- we must use a church planting model that most effectively responds to the expectations and needs of the people in your community.

These conversations often become the foundation upon which you determine your church planting model, find your team members and meet the community leaders you need to know as you build your church. Remember that the success of any new church is based upon our ability to match *model* with *mission field*—you must use a church planting model that most effectively responds to the expectations and needs of the people in your community. Our strongest new churches are those which are birthed in the hearts of the people who live in the community. The people living in your mission field will tell you what kind of church they need. Your job is to listen, pray, discern and together build the church God is calling into being.

Summation of Your Launch Team

Church planting is a contact sport. You cannot plant a church by yourself. You will need a team of people to help you network, organize, gather and train those who respond to your invitation to be part of a new church. This team should come from your mission field and be a group of people who shares your conviction that this church *should* exist. They are willing to give sacrificially of their time, talents and treasures to ensure that this church is a success. In most cases, they will be among the first members of your church.

I would encourage you to be discerning about who you put on your launch team. Pay attention to their motivation, health and skill sets as you anticipate future needs of your new church. Your launch team should consist primarily of spiritual "worker bees" - people with deep faith and strong leadership skills willing to work tirelessly to plant this church. They should be team players committed to embracing and executing God's vision of this new church as expressed through the discernment of your group. They should also respect your position as church planter and help you respond to points of resistance as a united front.

Your launch team ideally will also bring helpful skill sets to the team. Perhaps someone is a graphic/web designer and could help you with your technological needs. Perhaps someone is a business person in the community and can help you network with important leaders. Perhaps someone is a member of the local PTA board and can introduce you to parents and teachers. Perhaps someone is a real estate agent and can help you meet new people who move into your community. Your launch team should be willing to draw on their skills, networks and social connections to get people involved with your new church.

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Timelines and Benchmarks

Setting goals for the development of your new church helps both you, your leadership team and your conference supervisory body measure the success of your church planting efforts. In the end, church planting is about numbers — the number of contacts you make per week, the number of people who visit your church and the number of people who stay after the first visit. Knowing what to measure and how to measure your progress helps everyone determine appropriate next steps as you develop a church.

As you begin plotting the timeline for your new church, pay particular attention to articulating numeric goals including:

- Monthly attendance goals of prospect members,
- The number of contacts per week made by the pastor,
- The number of contacts per week made by the leadership team,
- The number of active prospects you are nurturing,
- The number of small groups you have running,
- The number of people participating in small group gatherings,
- The number of small group leaders you have trained,
- Anticipated offering levels,
- Budget requirements for each phase.

This timeline and the goals that you attach to it will serve as your guide in working with your leadership team, your conference and your coach. This document is not set in stone — rather, it is a working document that deserves editing and adaptation based upon changes in context.

Budget

Planting a church takes a lot of money. Maintaining a church takes even more money. Careful planning is the key to responsible stewardship. Having completed your timeline, you now want to build a budget around your anticipated steps for development. You will want to be sure to include the following:

- Pastor and staffing salary packages,
- Outreach marketing and promotion,
- Printing and office supplies,
- Computer equipment and software,
- Worship supplies and equipment,
- Facility and office space,
- Fellowship and discipleship events.

In the end, church planting is about numbers — the number of contacts you make per week, the number of people who visit your church and the number of people who stay after the first visit.

Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...

– Matthew 9:37, NRSV

You also need to include an income section in your budget. What income do you anticipate receiving? Is your conference offering you matching funds or seed funding? Are other local churches willing to provide financial support or donate some of the needed supplies? How much money do you anticipate raising through fundraising? How much money might you receive through grant writing? How much money do you anticipate the participants in your new church contributing each month?

With this beginning budget in place, you now have a clear picture of the financial opportunities and challenges that your new church faces. You will want to share this document with your conference, your leadership team and your coach to receive their feedback and their support.

Fundraising Strategies

Every effective church planter is also a skilled fundraiser. Raising money for the support of your new church will require a significant amount of energy on the part of the pastor and the leadership team. A common mistake that many church planters make is assuming that giving from those attending the church will be sufficient to support the needs of the growing congregation. You will need an infusion of cash in the five years that is often greater than the giving levels of the congregation. You need to plan for this gap in funding so as to avoid the classic mistake of a premature launch.

You will want to plan in three basic phases: a start-up budget, an operational budget, and salary support. Breaking the financial needs down into these three categories is beneficial when it comes to raising support. For example, some people give financial support based on relationship. These individuals will most likely be drawn to give to support the planter's salary. Other individuals like to give a gift to meet a concrete need, like a LCD projector or drum set. The leadership team and growing number of attendees will likely want to give toward the ongoing operation of the new church. Dividing gifts—giving—into these three categories organizes the needs into manageable categories.

A start-up budget consists of those things required for launching a new church. These items include initial marketing strategy, worship equipment, nursery and preschool equipment, rental deposits, insurance, signs, letterhead, etc. Some of these items will be included later in operational costs, but are also part of the initial start-up cost. The operation budget consists of those things that recur and make up an annual budget.

These items should fall into such categories as missions, personnel, facilities, administration, and ministry. It is important to build good financial systems from day one.

Here are some possible fundraising outlets:

- Virtue capitalists who make one time large donations because of personal relationships with a participant in the new church,
- Friends and family letter campaign,
- Online donation campaign,
- Granting organizations,
- Partnerships with other local churches.

What other fundraising outlets can you identify?

People need a reason and opportunity to give. People with resources are often looking for a good reason and opportunity to give. They have lived their entire lives making good use of their resources and are looking to invest their resources in credible ways that will make an impact in the lives of other people.

Give them that reason!

Summary

Once completed, this NCD Ministry Plan becomes the blueprint for the birth of your new church. The details and timelines will change as you get further involved in the planting process. These changes should be made with your leadership team, partnering churches and conference staff. This plan is a starting place as you begin the courageous work — the holy work — of building sacred community. You are embarking on a journey that will change your life and the lives of the countless who will join you. Keep the faith, and remember that you are not alone in this work.

If you have any questions about this process, be in touch with your conference staff or contact Rev. Cameron Trimble at ctrimble@secucc.org.

Go therefore and make disciples
of all nations, baptizing them in
the name of the Creator and of
Redeemer and of the Holy
Spirit... And remember, I am
with you always, to the end of
the age.

– Matthew 28:19–20, NRSV

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