



THE CENTER FOR
PROGRESSIVE
RENEWAL

NEW
MINISTRIES
in the
MAINLINE

NEW MINISTRIES IN THE MAINLINE:

What's Happening & What's Growing

A vibrant future for mainline Christianity depends, to a significant degree, on starting new ministries. That's why the Ecumenical Partners in Outreach collaborated with the Center for Progressive Renewal to conduct the largest study of church planting activities in the major mainline churches of the US and Canada in this century.

That two-year study of 260 ministries has just been completed, and the results are telling. If you've been charged with starting a ministry, managing a ministry for your wider church body, creating a denominational group to support a new ministry or you simply want to know more about church planting, read on to discover what is out there and what is growing and what we're learning.

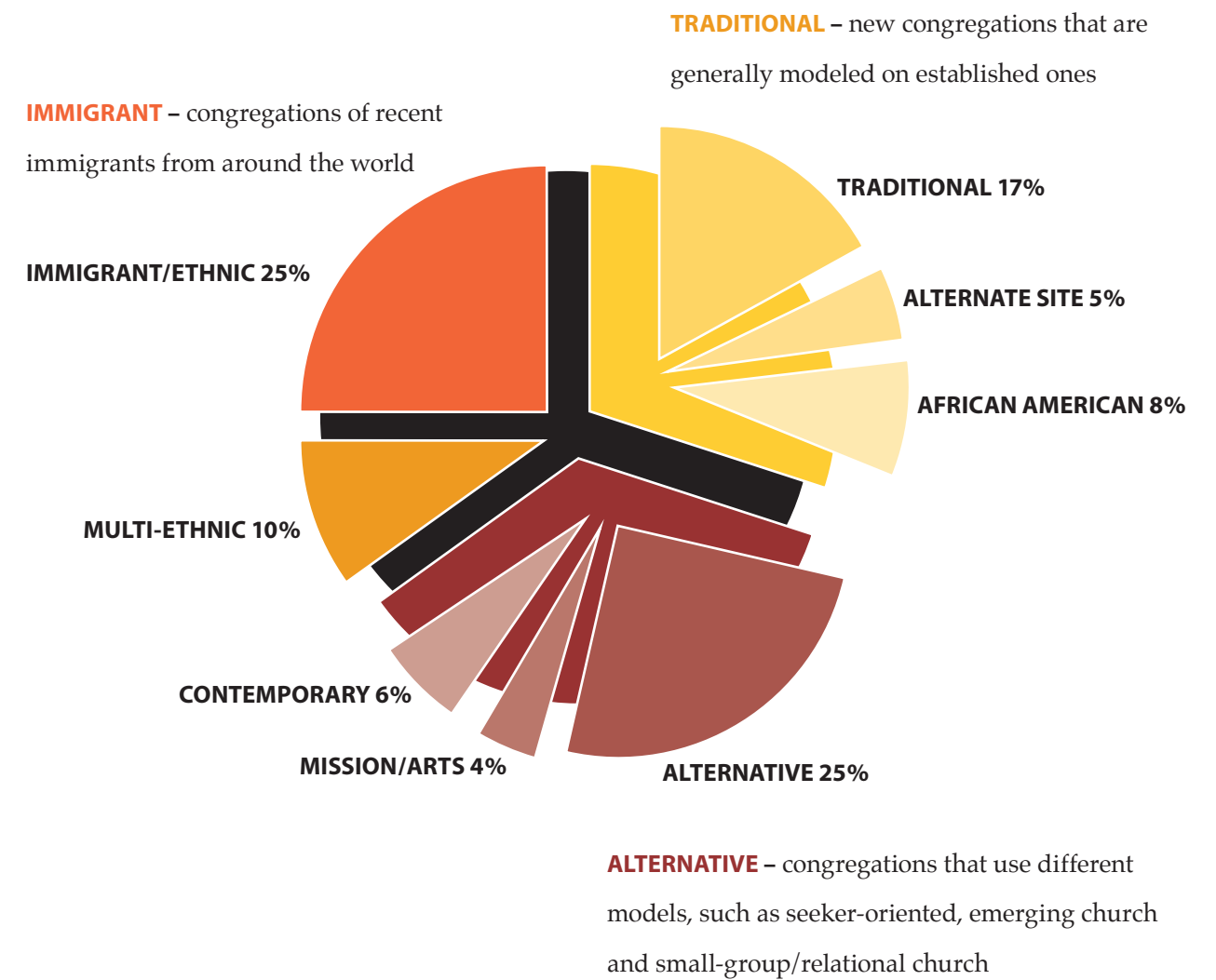
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WHAT IS OUT THERE: The Ministries

Not all new church starts are alike, and matching the type of church to the local context, leadership gifts and available resources is critical.

The study identified three major types of ministries ...



Remember: 1) no category excludes the other, 2) there are subgroups in each, and 3) another small group of churches were "Multi-ethnic": a mix of cultures and a mix of models.

TRADITIONAL CHURCHES

DEFINITION:

- Traditional model with somewhat more modern music and informal practices than existing congregations
- Worship described as traditional or blended in style
- Programs for all ages
- Subgroup 1: alternate site churches, which essentially replicate an existing church in a new location
- Subgroup 2: African-American churches, that is, “traditional” congregations rooted in African-American culture

WHAT’S HAPPENING?

- Larger budgets; rely on greater support from their own members than other models
- More likely to be started by lay leaders than other models
- Pastors tend to enjoy a challenge and have a tolerance for disorder
- More likely to use traditional gathering spaces, like the sanctuary, but many still use alternate spaces within existing churches, community facilities, or homes
- Almost half of new traditional congregations in the South
- Often planted in areas with a growing population

WHAT’S WORKING?

- Appeal to traditional churchgoers, a built-in constituency that feels positive toward church
- Emphasize ...
 - programs for children and adults
 - visibility and advertising in the community
 - follow-up with guests in the form of mail, physical visits and emails
- Invest time in ...
 - planning and leading worship
 - providing pastoral care
 - teaching people about stewardship
 - promoting a vision
 - evangelism and outreach
 - recruiting and training lay leaders
 - leading small groups
 - dealing well with conflicts and disagreements
 - discussion of wider community and demographic realities with leadership team

ALTERNATIVE CHURCHES

DEFINITION:

- Highly contextual, great variation among examples
- Self-described as seeker-oriented, relational, fresh expressions or emerging church (that is, churches adapting traditions to work in different formats, contexts, and cultures)
- Worship often informal and may not happen in a sanctuary or on Sunday morning
- General focus on younger adults and those not attracted to traditional churches and worship
- Subgroup 1: alternative worship communities of existing churches – different worship style, often combined with small groups and bible study
- Subgroup 2: affinity or missional model of ministry – community forms around music and the arts, yoga, mission and service, or shared experience or location (such as prison)

WHAT’S HAPPENING?

- More likely to be pastor-initiated
- Pastors tend to be energetic extroverts who enjoy starting things from scratch and get bored when things get too orderly
- Pastors more likely to be bi-vocational
- Alternative congregations with a higher percentage of unchurched people receive less support from denominational resources, but more support from core members, the pastor’s personal resources, and other income sources
- A third of these congregations are in the Midwest.

WHAT’S WORKING?

- Focus on young adults and unchurched people
- Spend more time on evangelism and outreach, the greatest growth predictor
- Link with new people in outside activities and then invite them to worship
- Don’t expect that increasing the congregation’s profile in the community will bring people in
- Be careful of over-eager follow-up activities, especially phone calls
- Be honest about differences from traditional churches (especially conservative ones)

NEW IMMIGRANT CHURCHES

DEFINITION:

- Highly multi-dimensional churches
- Some immigrated to the US generations ago; others are comprised of more recent immigrants.
- Some members of mainline churches in their home countries; some from other religious backgrounds (particularly Latino/as).
- Many are mission projects of existing congregations and share buildings, especially on Sunday afternoons.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

- Pastors tend to be called from within the congregation rather than through search or assignment.
- Pastors less likely to have formal theological education, sometimes in home country; leaders may get seminary training after being called.
- Some organize around a pastor and his or her family and then approach a denomination for recognition.
- Often bring worship and organization from home countries
- More likely to have multiple worship opportunities

WHAT'S WORKING?

- Build relationship with young adults and unchurched people
- Get involved and known in surrounding communities
- Gain support from sponsoring congregations
- Pay attention to social media and the internet
- Giveaways and small gifts are a nice touch, but be careful of over-eager follow-up activities, especially phone calls to people who are unchurched

WHAT IS GROWING:

The Impact

There are lots of ways to measure impact and growth. Most of the new ministries reported that they're making a difference in their communities and that people are experiencing spiritual transformation and conversion.

Those aren't the only signs of life. The study paid special attention to general growth and to growth among both young adults and the unchurched—two groups the mainline churches struggle to embrace. How did new ministries fare on these fronts? It seems that who you successfully embrace—and who you unintentionally alienate—may have a lot to do with the leadership, methods and models at work in your ministry:

CONNECTING WITH THE UNCHURCHED? THESE STEPS COULD HELP ... PROGRAM & PLANNING:

- Engage in informal conversations with community residents
- Host adult programming, community events and special services with outside speakers
- Beef up social media presence, but don't rely too heavily on traditional advertising
- Go light on the talk about stewardship

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP & PARTNERSHIPS:

- Engage a pastor with roots in the area
- Consider a woman pastor; their churches have slightly higher proportions of unchurched people
- Be aware that experience as a senior pastor may be less helpful than you expect
- Be aware that being skilled in small group development is not a magic bullet;
- Nurture links to a sponsoring church, especially if you're growing a new immigrant church

CONNECTING WITH YOUNG ADULTS? THESE STEPS COULD HELP ...

PROGRAM & PLANNING:

- Get savvy with social media
- Encourage programming, especially in alternative congregations
- Forego the traditional advertising buys and follow-up phone calls; they may actually scare people off
- Spend time on small groups and young adult engagement

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP & PARTNERSHIP:

- Call a younger pastor – age of the pastor was the strongest predictor of young adults in alternative congregations
- Be somewhat careful with pastors who come with senior experience; it may inhibit relationship
- Shore up partnerships with other churches, especially sharing money and space

AIMING FOR GENERAL GROWTH? THESE STEPS COULD HELP ...

PROGRAM & PLANNING:

- Locate in the South (strongest growth), followed by the Northeast
- Take care relying on traditional evangelism techniques, though traditional churches showed some bump after advertising, mail and email follow-up, and info packets
- Invest in programs for children
- Use the internet, especially Facebook
- Be generous devoting pastor time to these activities, especially in traditional and immigrant contexts:
 - Plan and lead worship
 - Host fundraisers and teach about giving
 - Take care of administration
 - Lead small groups
 - Tend to pastoral care

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP & PARTNERSHIP:

- Engage pastors who have comfort starting groups from scratch and have been connected to prior church planting experiences
- Encourage pastor-initiated churches, which had higher overall attendance and more young adults and unchurched, too
- Be somewhat careful with pastors who come with senior experience
- Get the pastor into a monthly peer group
- Spot pastors with communications and public relations in their skill set
- Lean on sponsoring churches for financial support, lay members and curriculum, especially if you're a traditional or immigrant church

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING:

Some Insights

The study unearthed a trove of wisdom that may prove useful for new ministries and also for existing ones. We've grouped those insights into eight categories:

1. **Expect the Unexpected**
2. **Give It Time**
3. **Focus on Vision**
4. **Tell the Story**
5. **Get Out**
6. **Give New Leaders a Chance**
7. **Worship Matters**
8. **Partners Needed**

Each section closes with a piece called "Looking Ahead." Stay tuned: researchers are continuing to gather even more targeted study responses, and those results will help us to explore and share more insights in the near future.

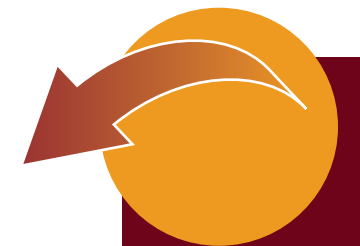
INSIGHT #1: EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Most factors that predicted new congregational growth in the past no longer do so, do so only weakly, or do so only among more traditional congregations.

THIS MEANS ...

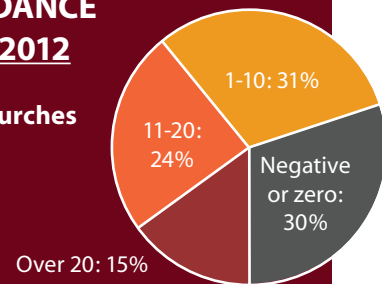
- Strategic planning in five- to ten-year cycles doesn't work in a fast-changing, networked age like the one we live in.
- Senior pastoral experience and even professional ministry is not a predictor of success as a new church leader.
- More skill in church polity/organization and traditional evangelism may hinder relationship, especially in alternative congregations and among the unchurched or young adults.
- Money may be necessary, but it is not the magic bullet.

LOOKING AHEAD: *Stay tuned for more results to the question, "What do you think was the biggest factor in the success or lack of success of this new ministry?"*

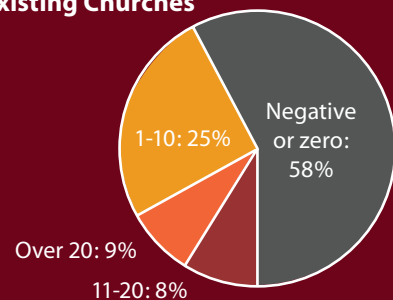


CHANGE IN ATTENDANCE 2010-2012

New Churches



Existing Churches



Average Attendance at New Churches in 2012

55 people / week
8 guests / week

INSIGHT #2: GIVE IT TIME

Overall, growth of new congregations is slow, with many taking eight to ten years to become viable in terms of finance and membership.

THIS MEANS ...

- Expectation of viability in one, three or even five years may be unrealistic and may create unfairly negative assessments of new ministries.
- Communities comprised of younger people with fewer financial resources will take more time to become financially viable.

LOOKING AHEAD: *How much time and money does it take to get to "viability"? What are the experiences with intentional partnerships between denominations and partnerships with more financially resourced congregations? What other measures do we need to factor in – the survey asked about transformation of lives, but can we further calculate this impact?*

INSIGHT #3: FOCUS ON VISION



Impact of Time Spent on Vision

contributes moderately to general growth in traditional and new immigrant churches

Casting a vision for both the type of ministry and the group you seek to embrace can make all the difference. This advance work helps the congregation to focus its efforts on connecting with and involving specific groups.

THIS MEANS ...

- New church planters should avoid the common mistake of premature launch. "Investors", sponsors, and virtue capitalists may pressure church planters to produce asking, "When is your first service? When will we see people?" Don't give in to the pressure.
- Church planters need time to develop vision and grow their ministry leadership team. This time needs to be included in the developer's budget and the financial supporters' expectations.

- A clear vision and ministry team provides a strong basis on which to build, and helps to engage new people. It also helps to avoid early mission drift and expending precious energy on efforts that are actually outside of the vision.

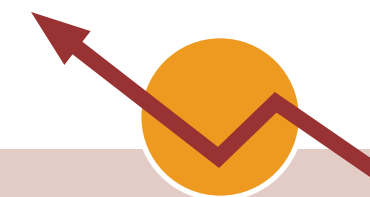
INSIGHT #4: TELL THE STORY

Communications matters, in every form. Use of the Internet helps congregations grow and reach out to young adults and the unchurched, regardless of ministry type.

THIS MEANS ...

- Use of social media is particularly important in reaching young adults and the unchurched.
- Generally, leaders with experience in public relations and communications see greater success.
- The telephone is less and less helpful for connecting with new members: every group reported a negative correlation between phone follow-up and growth.

LOOKING AHEAD: *What forum and content works best for training leaders in communications and social media?*



INTERNET & GROWTH

- contributes to growth among unchurched (in traditional churches), young adults (in alternative churches) and general growth (in immigrant churches)

SKILL AT PUBLICITY & PUBLIC RELATIONS

- contributes to general growth
- contributes to growth with unchurched (in traditional churches)
- contributes to growth with young adults (in new immigrant churches)

ACTUAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

NEW CONGREGATIONS:



- 50% use mail



- 85% use email or text "sometimes"

- 85% have a website



- 77% use social media

EXISTING CONGREGATIONS:



- 68% use mail



- 34% use email or text "sometimes"



- 71% have a website



- 38% use Facebook



USE OF PASTOR'S TIME

Average time in area (scale of 1-4):

worship: 3 (new), 3.25 (existing)

vision: 3 (new), 2.75 (existing)

outreach: 2.8 (new), 2.2 (existing)

pastoral care: 2.4 (new), 3 (existing)

administration: 2.5 (new), 2.8 (existing)

INSIGHT #5: GET OUT:

New church pastors spend more time in outreach and promoting a vision and less in pastoral care than do pastors of established congregations.

THIS MEANS ...

- New churches remind us that outreach and vision are essential to vitality and growth. Perhaps pastors at all stages of church life (new, stable or declining) should prioritize reaching out.
- More established churches may spend more time in pastoral care because members are older.

LOOKING AHEAD: *How do new churches build teams to handle the various internal tasks to make church possible, especially as the congregation matures?*



LINKS BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND GROWTH

- Slightly negative correlation between senior pastor experience and growth among all groups (young adults, unchurched and general population)
- Strong relation between church planting team experience and growth in alternative churches
 - Some positive link between Bootcamp/Planting 101 courses, meeting monthly with a supervisor or with a peer group

INSIGHT #6: GIVE NEW LEADERS A CHANCE

Previous pastoral experience generally is not related to growth in attendance and is actually negatively related to attracting the young or unchurched.

THIS MEANS ...

- New ministries and the denominational bodies that assist them need a variety of approaches for preparing new leaders. These indicators proved more useful than some others:
- Experience as part of a church-planting leadership team
- Training, especially more in-depth and comprehensive programs (especially for ministry with traditional churches)
- Support from a supervisor or peer group

LOOKING AHEAD: *What kinds of trainings and support networks are most effective for leaders of new congregations?*

INSIGHT #7: WORSHIP MATTERS

Time spent on worship relates strongly to growth, at least among traditional and new immigrant churches. Among alternative churches trying to link with young adults, there was some negative relation.

THIS MEANS:

- Worship is still one of the first and most important elements of how people encounter God and Christian community. Worshiping well leaves people with a strong positive experience that can bring them back to experience the rest of your church's life.
- Too much attention to worship may take away from time to nourish other elements of church life, especially parts that appeal to young adults (like one-to-one relationships)

LOOKING AHEAD: *Do particular kinds of worship – a variation of “traditional” or more experimental, fresh expressions worship – tend to grow more than others?*



TIME SPENT PLANNING AND LEADING WORSHIP

- Traditional churches: strong link to general growth
- New immigrant churches: strong link to general growth
- Overall sample: weak link to growth among young adults



FUNDING AMOUNTS AND SOURCES

TRADITIONAL CHURCHES:

- Avg. \$108,000 received
- 22% from denomination, 44% from core members

ALTERNATIVE CHURCHES:

- Avg. \$70,000 received
- 32% from denomination, 29% from core members

NEW IMMIGRANT CHURCHES

- Avg. \$33,500 received
- 60% from denomination, 18% from core members

INSIGHT #8: PARTNERS NEEDED

In 2012, new congregations raised an average of \$77,316, with a huge amount of variation in the amount of funding and the sources.

THIS MEANS ...

- New immigrant churches tend to pay their leaders less money, which requires these leaders to work a second (or third) job and may also indicate greater need for physical, emotional, and spiritual support.
- Alternative and traditional churches draw more equally from both denomination and core membership. They're also more apt to pull funds from other sources like foundation grants and partner churches.
- Partners matter: at least a third of new churches have a sponsoring church and 21% have two or more sponsors. These churches offer everything from prayer and office equipment to property and lay people.

LOOKING AHEAD: *What stewardship and fundraising resources are available for immigrant churches, and what spiritual and emotional care is available for their leaders to ward off burnout? Are denominations prepared to continue to contribute significantly to new church development, especially considering how long it takes for most to grow to viability?*

Based on the New Church Initiatives Study, conducted as a collaboration between the Ecumenical Partners in Outreach and their member denominations—The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Canada, and the United Church of Christ—and the Center for Progressive Renewal.

Highlights report created in October 2014 by Stephanie Spellers and Sara Wilcox, Senior Consultants with the Center for Progressive Renewal, and drawn from the “New Congregational Development in an Age of Narrowcasting” comprehensive report by Marjorie H. Royle.