



CONNECTIONAL GIVING HELPS THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE PLANT NEW COMMUNITIES OF FAITH ACROSS FLORIDA

As Florida's growth rate continues to climb at an ever-increasing pace, our Connectional Giving dollars are being put to use to underwrite the cost of starting new communities of faith across the Florida Conference.

Since 1995, the Florida Conference has led the United Methodist Church in the U.S. in the category of new church starts, planting approximately 90 new communities of faith. Apportionment dollars have helped to train clergy for the challenge of starting a new congregation and have provided pastoral compensation during the first critical years in which a church is being established. Under conference guidelines, new congregations are expected to become financially self-sufficient within three-to-five years of their launch date.

According to Dr. Mont Duncan, executive director of new church development for the Florida Annual Conference, we expect to launch as many as 24 full and part-time communities of faith during 2006-2007. "Ideally, we should have a church for every 23,000 residents," he said.

Because the cost of land is becoming less affordable in many urban areas, new congregations are being launched in less traditional settings. "We have traditionally used schools and community centers for worship," Duncan said, "but now we also use storefronts and warehouse space, and even movie theaters."

The conference also looks for other efficiencies. "We are developing models that allow us to build on the experience of our new church clergy and lay leaders," Duncan said. "We want each new church to start another new congregation so that the momentum goes on and on," he explained. "In fact, we expect our new churches to begin another new church within the first seven years."

In the past, churches were launched in developing or fast-growing regions under a model called a "parachute drop." The conference and district worked together to secure a site, and appoint a pastor. Today, new church development relies more heavily on a grassroots approach.

"The mother-daughter model is becoming more and more prevalent in the Florida Conference," Duncan said. Under this plan, an existing church helps a new

church get started by providing financial support and/or lending an associate pastor and other leaders to work with the new congregation.

The conference has created a “discernment” process to help clergy and lay leaders determine if they have the spiritual gifts to work in new church development. “As we train more and more spiritual leaders for our new congregations, we will have to ability to appoint a pastor to a large urban area where he or she may be asked to start a series of new faith communities over a period of years,” Duncan said.

The conference also is studying a regional approach to new church development, whereby we plant a single large church to serve a broad geographic area. Using three pastors instead of one, the congregation would grow more quickly and, hopefully, incorporate greater diversity, according to Duncan.

The make-up of the Florida Conference has become more and more diverse as the state’s population increases, Duncan said. “Our ethnic congregations, particularly Hispanic and Haitian, are among the fastest growing areas of ministry,” he added.

To learn more about Connectional Giving and the ministries it supports, please visit the Florida United Methodist Foundation web site, www.fumf.org.