



## **CONGRATULATIONS!**

Your congregation is in the midst of making an important decision – whether to embark on a bold and exciting journey towards a new era of ministry.

The New Beginnings program is a 12- month process. During this process, the congregation will gain a better understanding of its context, explore its options, and make an informed decision about its future direction.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is delighted to come alongside you as you discern God’s vision for the congregation. You may be considering this journey because of a concern about decline or a challenging situation in your congregation, but God has begun this work in you because there is something God wants to accomplish through this ministry.

As with any journey in life, the more prepared we are to start, the better the outcome. The following outline is designed to help you prepare for the New Beginnings program, walking you through the process and providing information on how you can be ready for each step along the way.

## **THE PROCESS: A STEP-BY-STEP OVERVIEW**

### **PHASE 1 (PREPARATION)**

This stage gathers the information needed to learn the congregation’s story and how it fits into the community around it. The gathered information forms the base data used to create an assessment of your congregation’s current situation.

To begin the process, the congregation will be asked to provide the following statistical information to Hope:

- Directory
- “Space Use Table” that outlines how your building is used by various groups
- Annual Income/Expense reports for the past three years
- List of all financial assets with current balance sheet
- Insured value
- Approximate total sq. footage
- Total property size on which the church is located

- A short history of the church, that summarizes major events in the life of the church (celebrations, building projects, mission projects, etc.)

Although gathering the statistical information takes some time to complete, the information is necessary to create a detailed and accurate Assessment Report for the congregation and building.

### **WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO TO PREPARE?**

In addition to gathering the statistical information, use this time to carefully consider how you will communicate the congregation's participation in the New Beginnings process. Remember that this will be a season of transformation and how you communicate will set the tone for the season. Communicate in a way that will help the congregation feel excited about the process and the future of the church.

During this time, you may want to develop a short sermon series that focuses on God's challenge to the church to be bold and courageous, especially when taking steps in a new direction. There are many wonderful examples of transformation throughout the Bible that occur by "letting go" to "become something new." Consider drawing from some of the following stories: Abraham and Sarah, the early disciples, Moses and the Israelites, some of the prophetic passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the story of the Apostle Paul.

As a minister and Session, you will also want to begin praying for the church and its ministry, asking God to prepare the congregation for positive change and transformation.

## **PHASE 2 (ASSESSMENT VISIT)**

You will be contacted by the Hope Network for Missional Transformation after you have submitted the above listed documents to set up a visit with an Assessor. During this phase, a Hope Assessor will visit the church to get to know you and your setting firsthand. This visit will allow the Hope Assessor to gather stories of how God has been present in the ministry to get a more complete picture of the congregation's story and situation.

During the visit your Hope Assessor will:

- meet with the Minister and Clerk of Session
- meet with your Treasurer and review financial statements
- tour your building and property to learn how the building is used and maintained
- tour your neighbourhood
- hold an open forum for church members to share the ways your congregation has excelled in meeting spiritual, missional and relational needs.
- identify the strengths of your church's ministry
- research the area demographics

### **WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO TO PREPARE?**

The Appreciative Inquiry evening sets the stage for the process and is the occasion where the congregation will begin to feel the excitement of what lies ahead. It often puts those who attend in touch with the best parts of the congregation's life and how God has been working through them. It is vital to encourage maximum participation among the congregation's members by setting the date well in advance and promoting it well. This will also help the Hope Assessor to build a more comprehensive report.

Presbytery involvement is a valuable component to the New Beginnings process. The Appreciative Inquiry evening that takes place during the Hope Assessor's visit should be facilitated by a Presbytery representative.

### **PHASE 3 (REPORT)**

Following the assessment visit, the congregation will receive a comprehensive Assessment Report. This report will serve as the base document from which the rest of the New Beginnings process will unfold. In this report, your Hope Assessor will reflect on the church's assets, current programming, context and potential future directions. The report will include:

- your congregation's demographics
- a pin map showing the location of your membership
- your community demographics and neighborhood trends
- financial history and analysis
- building condition and usage
- ministry activities and metrics of your congregation's vitality
- three narratives that suggest future directions for your congregation

It usually takes three to four weeks for the Hope Assessor to produce the report. The congregation will only be given the report during the small group process.

### **PHASE 4 (INTRODUCTION TO TRANSFORMATIONAL MINISTRY WEEKEND)**

Following the assessment visit and report, the congregation will be assigned a coach by Canadian Ministries to facilitate the next phases of the process. The coaching relationship begins with the Introduction to Transformational Ministry Weekend. The weekend will involve:

#### **Open Workshop**

The Open Workshop helps participants to understand how ministry has radically changed and to get people excited about new possibilities in ministry that have never been open before.

#### **House Group Facilitators Training**

During this time, facilitators will be trained on how to lead small groups effectively. They will be introduced to the content of the house group meetings. It is essential that house group leaders attend *both* days of the training event, as they will be provided with the necessary information to be effective group leaders.

#### **Sunday Service**

During the Sunday morning service, the coach will preach during worship and will take part in a covenanting service with the congregation. This act of public worship consecrates the process and asks for God's blessing upon the unfolding journey. You will be asked to provide pulpit supply to the coach.

#### **WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO TO PREPARE?**

The house group facilitators will play a vital role in the process. Start to think about who would make a great house group leader in your church. Ideally, this is someone who can not only commit the time and dedication to facilitating a house group, but someone who can also inspire others to embark on the exciting new journey that the church is taking. For more helpful advice

on what qualities to look for in a house group leader, visit <https://ministryadvice.com/small-group-leader-qualities>. Make sure to inform the house group leaders about the time commitment and expectations.

It is important to have the training facilities and resources prepared before the event. Make sure you have a projector and sound system set up in the room where the training will take place and remember to prepare photocopies of the assessment and the House Leaders Training Guide to give to house group facilitators on Friday evening.

The training weekend is an essential piece of the New Beginnings process. You will want to make sure that there is committed participation from the congregation. Secure the dates of this event as soon as possible to ensure maximum attendance. Promote the Open Evening as an inspiring, motivational and eye-opening event that will encourage the congregation to participate in the next phase of house group meetings.

## **PHASE 5 (SMALL GROUP OR “HOUSE MEETINGS”)**

Following the Introduction to Transformational Ministry weekend, the congregation will have a four-week period to reflect on the Assessment Report in a series of small group meetings which may be held in members’ homes. Each “House Meeting” group will consist of 8-12 people. These groups provide participants an opportunity to engage in meaningful and often exciting conversations, to wrestle with the challenges of ministry in your context and to pray together about the future to which God may be calling the congregation.

House meetings include:

- an opportunity for every member of the congregation to participate in a relaxed environment. Members will be able to absorb each portion of the Assessment Report—its implications and opportunities— in an intimate setting.
- an opportunity for your facilitators to lead your congregation through honest and exciting conversations about what God is calling you to do next in ministry.
- an opportunity to “pause” in the New Beginnings program, where members and facilitators can exchange thoughts and ideas before rushing to solution. Studies have shown that people who are most successful in allowing God to transform their lives spend time in thoughtful reflection.

### **WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO TO PREPARE?**

House groups are expected to begin shortly after the leadership training weekend. In order to help this process run smoothly it is recommended that you identify a four-week period when the groups will take place and recruit house group leaders that are available to commit during the identified time. This ensures that the groups all start and finish at the same time.

Immediately following the training, you should begin promoting the house groups to your congregation. The more participation you have at this stage, the more buy in you will have in the implementation phase. Prepare sign- up sheets that are posted available during coffee hour, promote the house groups in the bulletin and speak about the groups regularly during the announcements.

## PHASE 6 (DISCERNMENT & DECISION)

During this phase, your house group facilitators will meet together to share their information and to discern the underlying themes and directions. At the end of the small group process the facilitators will gather the comments into a report which will then be shared with the congregation. The ideal place to share the report is at an information session for the congregation. At this meeting the congregation is given an opportunity to identify priorities from within the report – not to rewrite the report! - and affirm a future direction for the congregation. At this stage the congregation receives the report and sends it to the Session to develop an action plan.

### WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO TO PREPARE?

As the house group process is coming to an end select a date for the information session. Make sure to have house group leaders share the date with their group members and to promote the event in the church bulletin and during announcements. This should be fun and exciting event where the congregation is rallied and encouraged in a new direction.

## PHASE 7 (IMPLEMENTATION & COACHING)

At this stage, the Session will need to give leadership to the group who will develop a plan for implementation. It could be the Session itself, the house group facilitators or a new implementation team in conjunction with the minister. The implementation team is responsible for developing an action plan in consultation with the session. It is important that the congregation understand the role of the implementation team and receive regular updates from them.

As you shepherd the congregation through the implementation process, you will receive six coaching calls with your coach to help you move forward in the direction God is calling you. These coaching calls will take place between the entire implementation team and the coach. At the end of each coaching call, the next call should be scheduled in order to maintain momentum.

This is a time for celebration! The congregation has made a decision about where they feel God is calling them in the future and a team has been gathered to put this new future into motion. Consider throwing a party or some other fun way of acknowledging what has taken place.

## TIMELINE

Congregations planning on taking part in the New Beginnings process should ensure that they allow enough time to go through the process. Below are three suggested timelines for you to consider as you plan your New Beginning.

<b>Assessment</b>	March	September	November
<b>Introduction to Transformational Ministry Weekend</b>	Late April	October	January
<b>House Meetings</b>	May	November	February
<b>Discernment &amp; report writing</b>	June	January	March
<b>Implementation Team Develops the Action Plan and Takes first steps towards a New Beginning</b>	September	February	May

## **QUESTIONS?**

At any point along the journey, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is available to provide support, encouragement and resources to you and the congregation. We will also commit to praying for your church during this exciting time of change and transformation. Please do not hesitate to contact us at [jdecombe@presbyterian.ca](mailto:jdecombe@presbyterian.ca) with any questions about the New Beginnings program or process.