

Introduction to Congregational development and Church Planting within the Uniting Church in Sweden

Congregational development

The local congregation is the centre of the Uniting Church in Sweden and is the base for transformation of me, you and the world. Our congregations differ in many ways, but are united in a yearning to bear fruit and make a difference where they are situated. One of the most important tasks for the national and regional organization is therefore to support local congregations in their renewal, development and growth. This can be performed in several different ways, through a longer development process or support in specific areas of activity of the congregation.

Renewal, development and growth

Living as a congregation in renewal, development and growth means stretching beyond self and the local community. It is about a yearning to share the gospel with other people and make imprints in the world e.g. to pray for someone, lead another person to personal faith or help someone to social recovery. Ultimately, it is about the transformation of me, you and the world, through the encounter with Jesus. Therefore, each congregation has to challenge themselves and be willing to transform and realize that what is already very good can become even better in order to make a bigger impact. When renewal, development and growth are discussed, the qualitative change is in focus – not necessarily more members. Church services that are relevant to a larger number of people will attract and reach out to others.

The need for change can exist in many different areas, such as in prayer and worship, but also organizational issues such as leadership and structures. People in the congregation may have to question and challenge the way they normally act. Support from someone outside the congregation, with a different perspective, can therefore be useful.

Church Planting

Establishing new congregations is an important part of the Uniting Church's task to be a church where the encounter with Jesus Christ transforms people, societies and the whole world. Based on that task and as an expression of the participation in God's mission, new congregations/communities are planted. This is done in new places, in new contexts and environments, so that more people in our country can have the opportunity to get to know Jesus, find a faith in Him, become a follower of Jesus and discover the local congregation as a fellowship of life and service to the world.

The vision: 50 new congregations until 2025

In 2015, a working group in the Uniting Church made a joint journey called "A pioneering journey". Based on experiences and lessons learned along the way, a report was compiled which became the foundation for the new vision: to plant 50 new congregations and Christian communities within the Uniting Church of Sweden until 2025.

A church planting movement

All congregations in the Uniting Church have once started from scratch. From the mid-19th century, Christian communities were often established by ordinary people without many resources but with a devoted faith that Christian life should be lived together with others. People gathered in the homes and gradually constructed buildings for their meetings. They sacrificed time and money in various ways to express the gospel to people and to engage preachers. Since that time, approx. 2,000 congregations have been planted in the three denominations that today constitute the Uniting Church in Sweden. When a congregation had been established, it often sought the opportunity to start activities in nearby places, which eventually could lead to new congregations. It was a church planting movement.

New congregations are needed

Today the number of congregations decreases due to many different reasons. There are also good motives to look for ways to again become a growing church through new communities/congregations. In several parts of Sweden the distance between congregations is vast and the church needs to be present there and spread the good news in words, deeds and fellowship. Another reason to establish new congregations is that starting from scratch means more opportunities to think new, try new forms and adapt activities to people's needs and a new time.

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