

Guidelines
for
Church Development
in the
Early 21st Century



prepared for
Toronto United Church Council
by
Rev. Kenneth R. Gallinger
June, 2001

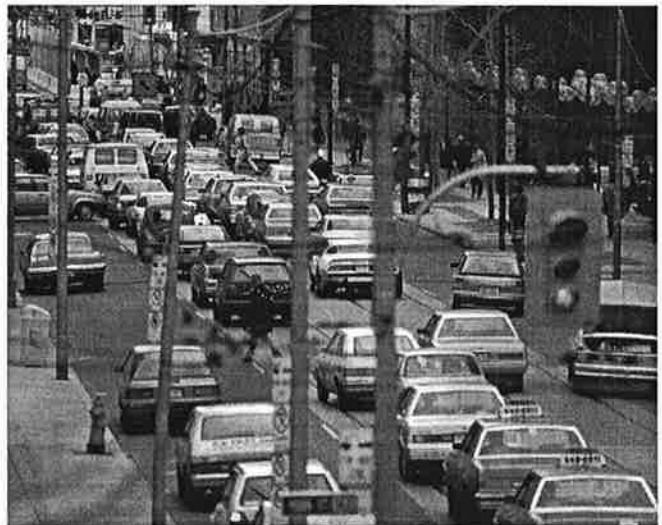
Guidelines for Church Development in the Early 21st Century

I: Background

On Monday, May 1, 2001, the Toronto United Church Council invited a group of people involved in Church Development (CD) to attend a one-day “think tank” on the changing nature of Church Development in our time. A group of roughly 25 attended, and included officers of Toronto Conference, members of regional Church Development committees, Presbytery planning officers, New Church Development pastors, and board members and staff of the Toronto United Church Council. The purpose of the day was to reflect upon the evolving nature of the Church Development process in the early 21st Century, and to establish some general guidelines by which that process might be steered in the Toronto Conference area. It was acknowledged that the amorphous phrase “Church Development” caught up many different tasks, including the two general areas of New Church Development (NCD) and Church Redevelopment (CRD). It was believed, however, that the guidelines that help shape Development, while differing in their application in response to specific needs, were of a general enough nature to be widely applicable.

1: Introduction

In the period since the Second World War, there have been two significant waves of New Church Development in The United Church of Canada. In the 1950's an overwhelming number of “baby boom” children began to hit the church, and by the early 60's, when that wave was cresting, it has been reported that the United Church was opening one new facility (a new congregation, new Sunday School wing, worship space, manse, etc.) every week. This time, fondly remembered as the “Church Extension” period, was our church's first real exposure to the phenomenon of small, rural churches being overtaken by the thundering power of urban growth. Then, in the early 1980's, the period United Church folk remember as the Ventures in Mission (VIM) era, the denomination mounted a massive fund raising drive, raising in



excess of \$25 million for Church Development. Out of that funding pool, a significant number of new congregations were planted, almost all in suburban areas around Canada's major cities. While the effort was focussed in the Greater Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton areas, almost every Canadian city can trace at least one congregation to the VIM period. As well, several works of congregational redevelopment were funded by VIM, and helped significantly reshape some ministries, particularly in urban core areas across the country.

Perhaps following the 20-year cycle, and responding to the continuing population growth and urban migration/urban sprawl in Canada, it seems to many people that the time is ripe for a "third wave" of Church Development in the United Church. Gathered up under this heading are two separate, but related endeavours:

- the birthing of new congregations in places where there was, until recently, little or no population, but which are now overrun either by urban sprawl or the relocation of "young retirees" seeking to get out of the city.
- the redevelopment of congregations located in areas of significant population change, where re-missioning has become an imperative response not only to the Gospel call, but also to the very survival of a (United) Church presence in the area.

While, at first blush, these two endeavours will sound remarkably similar to those which defined the VIM era (and to a certain extent the Church Extension era), it becomes quickly clear that much is different, even since the 1980's. Everyone involved in Church Development knows that, in significant ways, "the rules have changed" since our church last undertook the Development task in a significant, focussed way. This report seeks to name and understand some of those "rule changes" and to develop some important guidelines, which will help shape any successful Church Development project in the new century. How these guidelines will be translated into praxis in any given situation will vary a great deal of course, not only in response to local issues but also according to whether the particular "development" in question is primarily a "New" Church Development (NCD) or a Church "Redevelopment" (CRD) project. Obvious differences exist between rural and urban contexts, and the particular dynamics of ethnic congregations and communities factor into some equations as well. But the guidelines are more or less universal, and while applied differently, are nonetheless applicable to most, if not all, Church Development work in our time.

2: A Changing Demographic

Much has been made of the fact that, as Canada's population continues to diversify in ethnocultural and religious terms, fewer and fewer people in any given "catchment basin" are likely to align themselves with a United Church congregation. Less has been made of the perhaps more important fact that even those who are "our people" (either potentially or in fact) understand their relationship to the church very differently than did those who flooded the church during the Church Extension or even the VIM period. It is now conventional wisdom to speak of the "seekers" who are supposed to be everywhere in Canada, turning in part to the churches for meaning and purpose in their lives. What these folk are "seeking", however, in terms of their relationship to the

church, is really quite different from those who came in the Extension or VIM eras. Here is a capsule glimpse of some of those differences:

- Seekers come with almost no Biblical knowledge. They have only the vaguest understanding of the Judeo-Christian story and tradition, and their interest in “spirituality” is more often amorphous and romantic, with few if any roots in the historic faith or practice of the church.
- Seekers are far more interested in the *programs* the church has to offer than they are in the *community* life of a congregation. In the Church Extension era, it is safe to say that the primary motivation driving many new suburbanites to the church was a yearning to “belong”, to find a place and a spiritual home. Today’s seekers are happy enough to get to know other folk at church, but what they really are seeking is programming for themselves and, particularly, their children. They want to have a happy life, and are interested in anything the church can offer them and their kids to increase their sense of worth and fulfillment.
- Rooted in a culture of strident consumerism, seekers are quite accustomed to the notion of “paying for what they get”. They understand that a BMW costs more than a Chev, and they are used to making choices on the basis of a “cost-benefit analysis”. They demand excellence in programming, but understand that excellence has a cost and are willing, if not eager or in some cases able, to pay it. Possessing little church background or training in a culture of “benevolence”, however, they are less inclined to think in terms of “giving” freely to causes which do not in some way benefit themselves. They look for direct linkages between costs incurred and services offered.
- Based on their interest in good programming above community, seekers don’t especially care if their church is in their neighbourhood. They are used to driving everywhere for everything, and so what matters to them in terms of location is that a



church is easy to find and get to, and easy to park at when they arrive. Air conditioning is nice, too.

- Membership means little or nothing to today’s seekers. It was said (perhaps with generous hyperbole) that, in the Church Extension era, all one had to do was stick a sign with a United Church crest in an empty field, and folks would show up with their certificates in hand ready to build. In the VIM era people probably couldn’t find their

certificates, but with encouragement could be talked into confirming their belonging in the congregation. Today’s seekers have discovered that membership bears no relationship to the availability of the United Church programs in their lives, (“You mean, we can bring our kids to Sunday School whether we’re members or not??”) and so can see no reason to make such a commitment.

- Because they come frequently from mixed, or no, religious background, seekers place little value on denominational connection. They may have some vague sense of the United Church being “open”, and may enter our doors because they think they will be welcome here; beyond that, they know little and care less about our church’s history. If there is better programming for their kids at the Anglican Church down the street, they will go there without a second thought.
- Today’s seekers trust electronic communications more than any other mode; verbal communications come a close second, with traditional print media far behind. This is a direct inversion of the order held in the Church Extension era.
- Seekers are children of the rock generation (musically). Fewer than 3% of Canadians under 50 years old name “Classical” as their favorite form of musical expression.
- In the Church Extension era, men were the movers and shakers behind most of the development. Women defined themselves as “Auxiliary”, and discovered ways to shape the process, even if subtly and invisibly from behind the scenes. In the group of today’s seekers, women are the primary church connection and men, who are not prepared to serve as “auxiliary” sit more or less marginalized on the sidelines. Or, more likely, stay home.
- There is a whole new category of potential members for NCD’s that could be described as “young retirees”. These folk, in their mid 50’s to early 60’s, are migrating to the lower housing costs and pristine lifestyle of cottage country. They bring a church background and often “large church” experience; they enjoy the “quaintness” of rural churches, but may not be prepared to trundle off to outdoor plumbing or to freeze in sanctuaries that are heated one hour a week.

There are, of course, always enough exceptions to prove any good rule, and that surely applies here. But the group whom the United Church might seek to reach in this “third wave” of Development is very different from those to whom we reached out in the 1960’s, or even the 1980’s.

3: An ever-shallower resource pool

Traditionally, congregations involved in the development task have turned to the “larger” church, either regional or national, for resources of three types:

- capital funding
- funding support for day to day operations
- staff, suitably trained for the development task.

Our consultation noted, with both sadness and concern, that in all three cases the resource “pool” is getting very shallow. Or is it? Another school of thought believes that there remain more than adequate resources within our denomination, but that we have a “distribution” problem. Congregations are in places where the people no longer are, and financial resources freed up by closings and amalgamations are often absorbed in maintaining dying ventures, rather than freed up to develop new work or radically redevelop existing ministries.

Capital Funding:

In both previous rounds of post war Church Development, considerable money was available from both the regional and national church to purchase land and assist with the construction of buildings. However, much of that money was either 'given' to congregations, or loans that were made have been "forgiven" or written off as non-performing.

Therefore, the opportunity to "revolve" those funds into another round of Development has been lost. At the same time, when congregations close or amalgamate in large urban centres, there is little or no commitment to using funds from the sale of properties to facilitate development in new area or neighbouring churches. For the most part, those funds are poured

back into the amalgamated congregation, and are either employed to upgrade the surviving physical plant, or simply atrophy away a bit at a time to shore up operating expenses. Toronto United Church Council loosely estimates that something in the order of \$20 -- \$30 million might be needed to provide adequate facilities for NCD's in the Toronto Conference area over the next 5 - 7 years. This money is not available at the present time, and it is unclear what the possibilities might be for raising anything like this amount by traditional means.



Funding support for day to day operations:

Funding support for day to day operations has, in recent times, come largely through the Mission Support system of the United Church. In Toronto Conference, requests for Mission Support grants already far exceed available resources. With the progressive decline of the Mission and Service Fund, and the potential charges against that Fund which may lie ahead due to residential school and other possible litigation, it is unlikely at best that there will be any significant increase in Mission Support dollars available in the foreseeable future. Funding any significant amount of Church Development work, even to assist with start up costs through the Mission Support system, will mean the inevitable termination of other work which Toronto Conference has deemed viable and important. This will almost inevitably generate increased stress, and the possibility of deep resentment against CD ventures.

Staff, suitably trained for the Development task:

Quite a number of significant staff issues can be identified. They include:

- Successful Church Development requires leadership that is mature, experienced and trained for the particular challenges of CD. But the reality is that salary levels in CD congregations tend to be minimum or close to it, and so are not likely to appeal to these sorts of leaders.

- Repeated attempts over the years to encourage theological colleges to include CD components in their training of clergy have largely been unsuccessful.
- New congregations must have adequate staffing in place right from start up day; people are no longer willing to “grow the church” slowly, and acquire additional staff progressively as the endeavour takes root. They want it all in place “now” or they’ll go somewhere else where it is.
- There is a need for an appropriate “assessment tool”, and process for evaluating the performance of CD pastors. (Some thought that such a tool might exist somewhere, but that it was no longer in use). It was noted that the stakes are high; if the denomination invests millions of dollars into developing a ministry only to have it torpedoed by weak leadership, this leaves a legacy of reluctance in Presbyteries and other bodies to try such a venture again.
- Burn out rates amongst CD pastors are high, due to the very high level of expectations amongst the “seeker” group to whom they are appealing. The inadequate remuneration offered to CD pastors was also identified as a source of stress and burn out.
- The vast majority of Church musicians are still classically trained, and are both unable and unwilling to provide the style of music that would be most suited to most NCD’s (and, perhaps, the church in general!)

II: Church Development

Based on all of the above, the consultation affirmed the following 10 Guidelines for Church Development in the Toronto area at the start of the 21st Century:

i: When a new congregation is being considered in a particular area, the normal Development sequence should be as follows:

- 1: Define the need and viability of such a Development.*
- 2: Bank land in the area to be available if and when needed.*
- 3: If the need is shown to be real and the Development considered viable, put lots of qualified, capable staff in place right from Day 1.*
- 4: Develop a strong worshipping community and program base.*
- 5: Use available community facilities for as long as possible.*
- 6: Build only when a congregational base is in place which will be sufficiently strong as to carry (a significant portion of) the costs incurred in building.*

This principle affirms the notion that it is possible to do suitable programming for the church of our day without a building, but the opposite is not true: i.e., there’s no point opening a building if we cannot afford to staff the congregation suitably for a strong start up. There was recognition that the period of waiting for your own building can be a frustrating time; this underscored the importance of obtaining interim facilities that

are suitable and well located. Such facilities might be rented or purchased, and flexibility of funding models is necessary to allow for both options.

Another option that presents real possibilities in some situations is the purchase and renovation of pre-existent buildings, such as mothballed schools, retail facilities and so on. These facilities are often located in the “right place”, with easy access and good parking, and can be purchased for a much lower cost per square foot than new construction. Once again, such a possibility depends on new flexibility with respect to funding sources and cooperative arrangements between Presbyteries, Conference, TUCC and other stakeholders.

ii: No Development task should be undertaken unless an adequate level of qualified and suitable staff can be put in place, right from the start, to carry it through.

Today’s seekers are not prepared to tolerate mediocrity of programming, nor are they prepared to wait for good programming to develop slowly over a period of years. The consultation emphasized that, with respect to staffing, we are dealing with questions of both “quantity” and “quality”. Pointing to high burn out rates among CD staff, it was repeatedly emphasized how unfair it is to put one person in place, and hang the success or failure of the Development task on him or her. It was also established that “excellence” amongst CD staff was a standard to be aimed for, and that such excellence was primarily the result of two components: experience and training. Some participants felt a “10 year standard” should be imposed: i.e. that persons without 10 years or more experience in ministry should not be “turned loose” on a CD project. This means resisting the temptation to fall into “We need a young minister with energy”; it was noted that, in today’s church, there is little evidence to suggest a linear connection between age and energy levels! Others emphasized the importance of training, and encouraged the National Division of MP&E to work towards the endowment of a “Chair of Church Development” at one of our theological colleges. Many wondered whether the church, at the General Council level, would be prepared to establish a fund to subsidize the salaries of ministers engaged in CD, so that both the quality and quantity of leadership necessary could be put in place. Finally, it was suggested that a national “Strike Force” or “SWAT Team” might be established to go into CD situations and mobilize the folks “on the ground” in that area (there’s something about CD people that makes them just *love* military language!)

A corollary of this concern about staffing was the concern about music. Part of the staffing component *must* be musical leadership who can provide a repertoire and style suitable to the community where the Development is happening. Budget provision must be made for the hiring of such leadership right from the very earliest stages. There was little optimism, however, about finding such leadership -- one participant reported that he had hired a bar band and written repertoire for them, because that was the only way he was able to find people who would play music suited to his constituency and United Church theology.

Finally, concern was raised about both the support needs of CD staff, and the processes available to the church for holding such staff accountable. Traditional congregational models, such as an M&P Committee able to do annual performance reviews, are often not available in CD situations. And no Presbytery in Toronto Conference currently has a “critical mass” of workers involved in CD to provide an adequate support network for each other. Presbyteries will need to do some creative thinking about how to exercise both their pastoral and oversight roles in the CD environment.

iii: Land Banking is an appropriate task for groups like TUCC to undertake.

Given the Development sequence outlined in (i) above, it was clear that parcels of land would need to be acquired far in advance of their actual usage. These lands might have to be held for a long time, as long as 10 - 20 years before a firm decision was made whether or not to actually build on them. The consultation felt that this merely constituted good Stewardship and good planning, and if in the long run no building was required and the United Church made a profit on the sale of the land, that was fine, too.

At the same time, it was noted repeatedly that UCC congregations will need to serve an immensely larger geographical area and population base than once considered



appropriate. This places a premium on acquiring land which is accessible from major roads, and in locations which conform to existing traffic patterns. One participant noted “Look for the Home Depot, and buy next door”. A corollary of this is the acknowledgment that suitable parcels of land are expensive -- often considerably more so than locations designated by developers as “church sites”. The latter are often relatively cheap because they are

buried deep in cul-de-sacs and accessible only by helicopter. Note was made of the number of NCD’s from previous waves that have been established in places that “you can’t get to from here”, and have, as a result, never flourished. It is better stewardship to spend good money to purchase good sites, than to throw away “bad money” on sites doomed to fail.

iv: Any church buildings constructed in our time must be multi-purpose. They must be located in positions of high visibility in the community, easily accessible from any direction, and designed so that a wide variety of community uses is not only possible but also visibly encouraged.

As much as people may yearn for something that “feels and looks like a church”, it was stressed that the diversity of demands being made upon faithful congregations in our time call for diversity of structure, ease of access and egress, and high visibility to the entire community. Even changing worship patterns make the allocation of significant amounts of space to a “designated” sanctuary unwise or impossible. Seating must be flexible. At the same time, some investment needs to be made into adequate acoustics in any space intended for public worship. Musical instrumentation must be flexible, modern and open to a range of participant skill levels.

v: While Church Growth models from other countries and cultures may seem seductive, it is important for the United Church to ensure that its “core values” are upheld faithfully in any Development it undertakes.

The consultation moved quickly to note that this is a tricky one, especially when one gets right down to naming precisely what those “core values” are! However, while it may defy precise definition, The United Church of Canada *does* have a particular ethos, style and set of convictions. Words and phrases like

“radical inclusivity”
commitment to justice
historical-critical approach to scriptures
respect for other religious traditions
respect for children and youth
commitment to gender justice
discipleship of all believers

and many others help to understand, but do not define that ethos. The concern named here, however, was that today’s seekers are the products of a “consumer” society, with all its behaviours and values, and we cannot simply adopt those behaviours and values for the sake of growing a congregation. It is not enough to “give them what they want”; our task is to lead them to radical discipleship, which may contradict many of the values with which they are most comfortable.

vi: Church Development is not primarily for the sake of the institution; it is for the sake of the world.

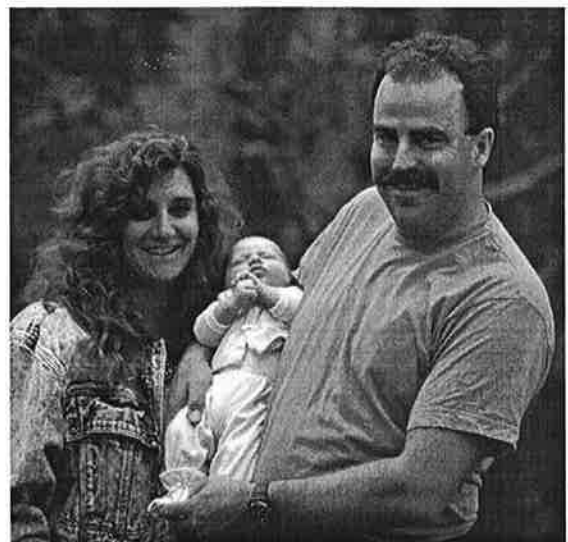
In practical terms, this may mean something as simple as developing patterns of giving to the M&S Fund right from the start of an NCD’s life. In CRD projects, this often implies a radical refocusing of congregational life and energy, away from institutional survival and back in the direction of “Mission” in and for the community and the world. Being “in a development phase” cannot be an acceptable excuse for ignoring the church’s primary purpose, which is to offer gospel to a hurting and needful world.

vii. The Structure of The United Church of Canada, and the paralysis which prevails amongst most of our church courts, have become major impediments to NCD/CRD. In the absence of any real hope of reforming/revitalizing those courts in the foreseeable future, people committed to CD must find ways to work around and without them.

The Church Development task depends on leadership from church courts -- perhaps particularly in NCD situations where there is no congregation already in place. At the moment, most courts of the United Church are wallowing in dysfunctionality. Critical decisions about the reallocation of resources, the realignment of congregations, deployment of staff to new areas, and the raising of an adequate funding base for CD are all victims of this systemic dysfunctionality. Many participants felt that we have reached a point in our church life where "less is better than more" -- we need fewer rules and more freedom to respond to the Spirit, a greater willingness to let go and let God, and a radical new willingness to use the resources we have to venture into the new rather than shore up the old. Local congregational initiatives will need to be encouraged, and supported by neighbouring congregations or regional clusters. The hope was frequently expressed that existing, resource-rich congregation might think about moving, either entirely into new locations where a presence is needed, or in part by spawning satellite congregations in areas of need. Churches involved in CRD will need to forge new partnerships, including with community groups and the business community. This will demand a flexibility on the part of Presbyteries and other church courts to "think outside the box" in the stewardship of the church's capital resources.

viii: Worship is the touchstone to which participants in CD's return again and again for strength, guidance and inspiration. Therefore it must be theological and culturally appropriate to the context in which the Development is taking place.

This was seen as a matter of availability both of resources and suitably trained personnel. Again, much of the focus was upon music. One participant noted that "classical music, badly done, is killing worship in most NCD's" to which several others echoed "Classical music is killing worship in most of the church". There were no dissenters on this point! But the focus was broader than music. Acknowledging that today's seekers come without Biblical toolkits or ecclesiastical



heritage, it was emphasized that worship in CD settings must be contextually appropriate; it must teach rather than assume about the Bible; it must help people make linkages between faith and life that might be self evident the "old church"; it must be at accessible times and places; it must equip for the future, rather than exult in the past.

Worship in CD contexts cannot assume a familiarity or comfort level with traditional Christian cultus; new folk may not know the Lord's Prayer, so inviting them to participate without printing the words for them only serves as a reminder that they don't belong.

ix: Ministry with children and youth is critically important. It must value them as persons of appropriate faith in their own right, and provide opportunities for them to both express and develop the faith that is indigenous within them.

If there's one thing today's seekers place above their own needs, it would be the needs of their children and young people. Developing congregations need to recognize and honour the priority which the spirituality of the young demands in our time. Again, this is a question of leadership, of allocation of resources, of the availability of suitable materials, and above all, of the recognition of the authentic spirituality that the young bring as seekers in their own lives.

x: Participants in CD congregations need to be taught the financial responsibilities which travel with membership in a Christian community. In return, the financial life of the community must be transparent.

It was noted that just as most seekers have little experience reading scripture, they have no experience reading church financial statements. They do not have any idea "what is expected of me", by the church much less the Gospel, and need help not only to begin the journey of Stewardship, but also to continue to grow and develop in their Stewardship commitments.

Closing Comment

Participants in the consultation came to the day well aware that Church Development in our time is a daunting task, to say the very least. Nothing in the day's discussions reduced that sense.

This report is offered as an "interim" document.

Some have asked, "Will these Guidelines really change anything?" There may be no clear answer to that, but the guidelines certainly do suggest that "we're in a whole new ball game" with respect to Church Development. Whether the church will find the will to proceed in the directions described here will depend on our ability and desire to translate theory into praxis.

Guidelines

- i. *When a new congregation is being considered in a particular area, the normal Development sequence should be as follows:*
 - 1: *Define the need and viability of such a Development.*
 - 2: *Bank land in the area to be available if and when needed.*
 - 3: *If the need is shown to be real and the Development considered viable, put lots of qualified, capable staff in place right from Day 1.*
 - 4: *Develop a strong worshipping community and program base.*
 - 5: *Use available community facilities for as long as possible.*
 - 6: *Build only when a congregational base is in place which will be sufficiently strong as to carry (a significant portion of) the costs incurred in building.*
- ii. *No Development task should be undertaken unless an adequate level of qualified and suitable staff can be put in place, right from the start, to carry it through.*
- iii. *Land Banking is an appropriate task for groups like TUCC to undertake.*
- iv. *Any church buildings constructed in our time must be multi-purpose. They must be located in positions of high visibility in the community, easily accessible from any direction, and designed so that a wide variety of community uses is not only possible but also visibly encouraged.*
- v. *While Church Growth models from other countries and cultures may seem seductive, it is important for the United Church to ensure that its “core values” are upheld faithfully in any Development it undertakes.*
- vi. *Church Development is not primarily for the sake of the institution; it is for the sake of the world.*
- vii. *The Structure of The United Church of Canada, and the paralysis which prevails amongst most of our church courts, have become major impediments to NCD/CRD. In the absence of any real hope of reforming/revitalizing those courts in the foreseeable future, people committed to CD must find ways to work around and without them.*
- viii. *Worship is the touchstone to which participants in CD’s return again and again for strength, guidance and inspiration. Therefore it must be theological and culturally appropriate to the context in which the Development is taking place.*
- ix. *Ministry with children and youth is critically important. It must value them as persons of appropriate faith in their own right, and provide opportunities for them to both express and develop the faith that is indigenous within them.*
- x. *Participants in CD congregations need to be taught the financial responsibilities which travel with membership in a Christian community. In return, the financial life of the community must be transparent.*