

# New Church Handbook

*Nuts & Bolts for Planting New Churches  
in the Wesleyan Tradition*

by Bob Crossman



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by **Bob Crossman**

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## **“Introduction”**

*by Bob Crossman*

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***Welcome to the New Church Handbook.***

***This handbook attempts to answer 110 of the frequently asked questions about church planting. Scan the table of contents for articles that respond to your burning questions. You may also enjoy reading this handbook “cover to cover” to increase your knowledge of best practices in church planting across the country.***

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**You are about to embark on a ministry that will require more than the strength of your hands and the sweat of your brow.**

**Church Planting will require your mind to be a mind  
in harmony with the mind of Christ,  
your mouth to be a mouth through whom Christ speaks, and  
your hands to be hands through whom Christ touches your mission field.**

**You will need to be in touch with the one who said,  
“I am the vine and you are the branches.” (John 15:5)**

***Bob Crossman***

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I took the photo on the front cover of this book in October of 2017, when I had the honor of joining Bishop Gary Mueller and about 140 congregants in an open field north of Old Washington, Arkansas to celebrate the planting of Henry’s Chapel, the first congregation in the Arkansas Territory. That day we broke bread together in that holy place under the hot fall sun, remembering the 1817 new church planter, William Stevenson. Brother Stevenson had a passion to reach the people of southwest Arkansas. He also felt called by God to reach the French citizens across the state line to the southwest, the Native American citizens to the west in Oklahoma, and the residents of Louisiana to the south. Out of this congregation, Methodist laity were the first Protestants to carry the Gospel to the French (in territory now called Texas). Following the heart of Francis Asbury, William Stevenson influenced the next generation of Arkansas’ Methodist circuit riders to spread the Gospel across the territory.

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During the past five years I have had the privilege to serve as a New Church Strategist for Path 1, Discipleship Ministries (*General Board of Discipleship*). I wasn’t aware at the time, but the Lord began to prepare me for my current responsibilities more than twenty years ago.



In 1994, to my surprise one Saturday morning, Bishop Richard Wilkie invited me to his office to “inform” me that I was going to join Dr. Joel Cooper in starting a new church in west Conway, Arkansas. The wisdom, patient instruction, and friendship of Craig Miller and Steve Compton at those early Schools of Congregational Development helped me over the next ten years to witness 200 baptisms, worship attendance of 500+, and to receive 1,000 people into that new church’s family.

In 2004, after serving ten years with Joel Cooper as a church planter of Grace UMC in Conway Arkansas, Bishop Janice Riggle Huie invited me to join her Arkansas Conference staff. My new title became Arkansas Conference Congregational Minister for New Church Starts. My responsibilities, concerning the planting of new churches, was expressed in three sentences:

- *Develop and oversee a model for selecting, training, and supporting pastors to work new church plants.*
- *Develop a strong cadre of clergy and laity who have missionary hearts totally filled with evangelistic fervor.*
- *By the grace of God, be able to lead people to do what they might think is impossible.*

While Bishop Huie had great confidence in my abilities, the truth is that I was totally relying upon the power of God, not my own limited abilities, to guide the Annual Conference toward a fruitful strategy of starting new churches.

The emphasis on starting churches was new for the Arkansas Conference. I immediately began to be the recipient of questions. There were lots of questions. There were questions that I did not have quick answers for.

Fortunately, I was able to make connections with a National Network of United Methodist Congregational Developers — a group of about 30 conference staff from 30 different annual conferences scattered across the nation. *{The network has now grown to about 60 conference staff as more Conferences join the church planting movement.}* These wonderful New Congregational Developers became my encyclopedia, my dictionary, my tutors, my mentors, my source for answers, my colleagues and my friends.

To help the cabinet, clergy, laity and local churches of the Annual Conference begin to know and support the new initiative of planting new churches, I wrote a series of policy papers for the cabinet to review, amend and hopefully adopt. These policy statements helped to form a series of articles I wrote for our conference newspaper. They also became the initial documents in my growing three ring binder with the title of “*New Church Handbook*” written across the front.

That first year the Arkansas cabinet identified twenty-five pastors they perceived had the gifts and graces to plant new churches. Upon the wise advice of George Howard and Dirk Elliott, I developed a New Church Leadership Institute to encourage, train, and empower these potential planters — giving them an environment for self-discernment of their calling to be a planter. We met six times that first year, at each of

the six newest churches in Arkansas, with Steve Compton, George Howard and Dirk Elliott as visiting faculty that first year.

The following year, the South Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops began to send their potential planters to Arkansas. Very quickly I was training 75 to 150 pastors each year in the New Church Leadership Institute.

The New Church Leadership Institute was held at Mount Sequoyah, the South Central Jurisdiction retreat center, from 1995 to 2012. I was blessed to be able to recruit some of the finest faculty in the country for the Institute.

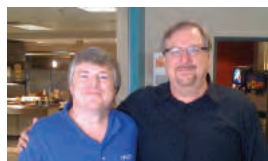
For example, the 2008-2009 faculty for the New Church Leadership Institute, included Jim Griffith, Bishop Scott Jones, Junius Dotson, Don Smith, Ruben Saenz, Bob Farr, Jacob Tsofigh, Karen Doris, Olu Brown, Mike Roberts, Elaine Heath, Steve Compton, Tom Butcher, Clif Christopher, Karen Horan, Candace Lewis, and Brad Kalajainen. New church planters on the faculty included: Mark Foster, Rob Williams, Robert Johnson, Arturo Reyna, Javier Rios, Aaron Saenz, Mike Felder, Ramiro Lizcano, Blake Lasater, Steven Blair, and Tammy Garrison.

I served as the Director and Registrar, while my wife, Marcia, served as host of the event. While these amazing faculty and practitioners were speaking, I was on the back row taking notes!

Those notes were gathered in my three ring binder, with the title *“New Church Handbook.”* It grew to some 700 pages, and was given to each registrant at the New Church Leadership Institutes. The content changed and grew each year as I learned from more and more of the best and brightest church planters in the country.

As the hundreds of graduates of the New Church Leadership Institute, were deployed by their bishops to start new congregations. They continued to stay in touch. **More than 100 of their more frequent questions, along with the content of my *“New Church Handbook,”* have formed the content of this collection of articles.**

Over the past five years I have been fortunate to be a part of the Church Planting Leadership Forum led by Ed Stetzer. This forum meets twice a year, with directors of church planting from 64 different denominations. The knowledge I share in this handbook reflects my personal experience and best practices from these denominations.



*Rick Warren and Bob Crossman attending the Church Planting Leadership Forum in Nashville.*

It is my prayer that these articles will help the next generation of planters to be more faithful and fruitful in planting new churches that make new disciples who make more new disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

