

Disciples have big year with new churches: Denomination doubles its goal

News in the [February 24, 2004](#) issue

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) started 82 churches last year—the highest number in almost a century—and is well on its way to planting 1,000 new churches by 2020, church officials said.

The Indianapolis-based denomination more than doubled its goal of 38 new churches in 2003; the projected increase of 1 percent more than doubled to 2.16 percent, said Rick Morse, director of New Church Ministry. “You have to go back almost 100 years to see this kind of growth in Disciples congregations,” Morse said. The last year with a comparable increase was 1953, when 76 churches were launched.

Since the initiative began in 2000, the Disciples have started 187 new churches—172 of which are still active, Morse said, for a success rate of 92 percent. In the same period, overall membership declined from 820,286 in 2000 to 788,965 in 2002. Morse said the membership figures represent only about three-quarters of Disciples congregations and do not include the new churches.

Of the 82 new churches planted in 2003, 27 were started by Haitian immigrants. Racial and ethnic minority congregations are a focus of the initiative. The flagship congregation in the program, New Direction Christian Church in Memphis, Tennessee, is predominantly African-American. It started with 60 people in 2001 and now claims 2,700 members.

Next year, officials are hoping for 38 more congregations and 1 percent growth—and are hoping to double that figure by 2006, with 2 percent increase and 76 new congregations.

Other mainline churches have similar goals. The Episcopal Church, through its 20/20 initiative, hopes to double Sunday worship attendance by 2020. And the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is planning a \$40 million appeal to plant new churches

at home and abroad. -*Religion News Service*