



# Congregational Communicator

A service of the Communication Services Committee  
of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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- The aStore expands.
- Writers needed for “Wartime Prayers” devotional.

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## Need a night off? It’s time for dinner

By KEVIN FIEDLER

Food and worship are linked throughout the Bible. From Abraham’s luncheon meeting with the angels outside his tent in the heat of the day (Genesis 18:1), to that breakfast on the shores of Galilee after the resurrection (John 21:9), there is a connection between the breaking of bread and the presence of God.

With that in mind, Congregational Church of Randolph (NJ) began a new ministry a year ago. “The Family Dinner” was inspired by a member survey that noted members needed a night off more than extra church projects or Bible study. Like many Christians, our members had little time for friends, for reflection, for slowing down and for just plain old conversation. So our church decided to give members a night off. They don’t have to cook, they don’t have to plan, they don’t have to do anything except come and have dinner together. The meals are catered by local delis or restaurants.

Each dinner is hosted by a couple or individual. The hosts are responsible for selecting the menu, and ordering the food. We encourage everyone to be a host. It is a



Members of a church in New Jersey enjoy a night off.

great introduction to a hospitality ministry. We begin around 5:30 and serve until about 7:15. That way, families with small children can come early and those working later can still participate.

We also added some fun activities. At one dinner, everyone brought a joke. We soon discovered a whole host of new stand up comedians we never knew existed. We had a trumpet player who played Glen Miller tunes another time. It was fun to see the teenagers discover that there really was music before rock and roll.

A donation basket is put out to fund the dinners and surprisingly, people contribute. And often the hosting couple will donate part or all of the food. Combined with the donations from the basket, we have been able to fund each successive dinner. The

donations from the last dinner pay for the next one.

We have seen three positive results from this new ministry. Church members get a night off to fellowship build relationships. The church also brings in people without a church family. We have seen many people who don’t attend church come to these dinners. And it gives church members a new way to serve their brothers and sisters and the community.

Is this the perfect answer to church renewal? Not necessarily, but when you think about it, one of the central features of our Christian faith is a meal. It is a meal shared between brothers and sisters. And all who are seeking God are welcome at the table.

*Rev. Kevin Fiedler is the minister at Congregational Church of Randolph, NJ.*



**Have a question on  
church marketing?**

**Send it to [cc@nacc.org](mailto:cc@nacc.org)  
and get answers.**

### **The Question:**

*Should we do anything different if a new church opens in our neighborhood?*

### **The Answers:**

#### **Andrea Nierenberg, Networking Expert and Author:**

That is always a reason to make sure you are 'nurturing the relationships' of the people in your church community already. In secular business terms, make sure you go the extra mile in 'customer service' and taking care of your members. If not, they could be swayed to the new establishment. Be sure to touch base with the whole family--not just the parents, but the children also. Ask what special interest groups, committees, or programs they may want. Ask them to bring a friend or guest to a service to see how your church is and operates. And find ways to thank each member for supporting the church. Everyone wants to feel appreciated. Maybe send a note of thanks from the church--a 41 cent investment goes a long way.

After doing all of those basic things--reach out and do something creative--form and ask your committee--what can we do to raise the bar and bring in more membership, or stand out. Ask them to look at the mission of the congregation and why they are a great church. Not only will it get people thinking, it will create more 'viral marketing'. That equals community--what I call networking!

#### **Alan Seltzer, Communication Services Committee**

Your first step is to decide what your church's strengths and weaknesses are. Have a frank and honest discussion with leaders of your church, and with some trusted new members. The fresh set of eyes may point out things that the old-timers forgot about.

Once you do that, do what you can to correct the weaknesses. Then make sure as many people as possible are aware of your strengths. Your church isn't for everyone--no church can do that effectively--but you want to be sure everyone that would be served by your church is aware of what you offer.

*ANDREA NIENBERG heads the Nierenberg Group, a business consulting firm based in New York City. She just published her third book, Savvy Marketing: 118 Fast & Effective Tips for Business Success. It is available at the aStore at Amazon.com.*

*ALAN SELTZER is a member of Church-in-the-Gardens in Forest Hills, NY and is Past Chair of the Communications Services Committee of the NACCC.*

"Find ways to  
thank each  
member for  
supporting the  
church."

# Growth expert says we should plant churches or perish

By JAMES WAECHTER

Plant churches or perish. Stephen Compton may not be quite so direct in his book on planting churches, but he makes a very strong case for new churches being the vehicle for rekindling entire denominations. Compton's premise is this: the decline in membership of mainline churches is directly related to the decline in the starting of new churches.

Compton, who directs the office responsible for developing new churches for the United Methodist Church's North Carolina Conference, chose not to simply write a book on how to start a new church. Instead, he talks about the importance of new churches as a way to meet the needs of changing communities. This could come in two forms: an entirely new congregation, or finding ways to "rebirth" an existing organization to meet different needs.

His statistics show that the decline in the number of churches being planted annually correlates directly with the decline in church membership. On the other hand, as the North Carolina Conference has increased



New churches like Fox River CC (WI) meet the needs of changing communities.

the number new churches being started annually, membership has had corresponding increases. Even more exciting, the membership growth is not just in the new churches, it's also in the older established churches of the conference. Compton makes the point that old denominations are renewed as the percentage of new churches in their total number of church increases. Newness is clearly contagious.

***Rekindling the Mainline: New Life Through New Churches***

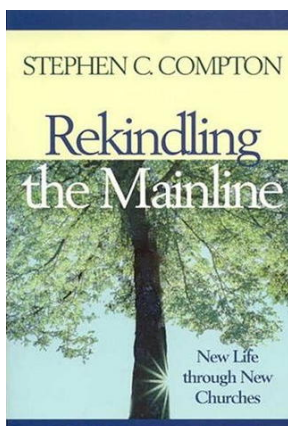
by Stephen C. Compton (Alban Institute)

**This book can be purchased on Amazon.com via the Communicator website.**

The NACCC's Congregational Church Development Division read the Compton book as a group this past year. As a result, the division invited him to speak at the annual meeting this past June in St. Petersburg, Florida. About 70 delegates and attendees attended his workshop, which was as enlightening as his book.

As a result, the New York and New Jersey Regional Association of the NACCC has invited Stephen Compton to conduct a one day workshop on Saturday, April 12, 2008, on how to actually plant churches here in the Northeast. Contact Lois Rosebrooks, Regional Moderator, at 718-624-4743 or [loisrosebrooks@plymouthchurch.org](mailto:loisrosebrooks@plymouthchurch.org)

**“Growth is not just in the new churches, it’s also in the older established churches of the conference.”**



# News and Notes

## Writers wanted for new devotional

Members of NACCC churches are invited to contribute to “Wartime Prayers”, a special edition devotional being published by the Communication Services Committee. The devotional, which will be available online only, is being published in a cooperative effort with the *Congregationalist*. Devotions for the publication should be non-political and reflect on any aspect of the effects of war. For more information, contact Dawn Carlson, the devotional’s editor, at [dawncarl@aol.com](mailto:dawncarl@aol.com).

## New book for Communicator contributor

A new book written by Andrea Nierenberg, a networking expert and a contributor to *Congregational Communicator’s* Q&A column, was just released by Capital Books. *Savvy Networking: 118 Fast & Effective Tips for Business Success* is available through the NACCC’s aStore at Amazon.com.

## Barbara Kitchen

Barbara Kitchen, who maintained the subscription list for the *Communicator* since our first issue as part of her role on the NACCC staff, was killed by a hit-and-run driver on Christmas day. We mourn her loss.



A soldier’s patriotism (above) is a possible topic for the new devotional; and (right) our contributor’s new book is now available.



# Congregational Communicator

*The Communication Services Committee encourages and assists members of local churches to communicate vibrantly and effectively with one another, with members of local churches, with participants in the work of the National Association, and with the public at large, to further the work of Christ.*



**Communication Services Committee**

**Our Web page:**

[www.naccc.org/communicator](http://www.naccc.org/communicator)

**Write to us!**

**Comments and ideas:**

Alan Seltzer, [cc@naccc.org](mailto:cc@naccc.org)

**Technical Support:**

Tressa Stein, [ttein@naccc.org](mailto:ttein@naccc.org)

A service of the

Communication Services Committee of the

National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

8473 South Howell Avenue

Oak Creek, WI 53154-0288

Phone: 800-262-1620

Fax: 414-764-0319

The Committee:

Rev. Dawn Carlson, Kate Gallivan, (chair)

Rev. Donald Mayberry, Rev. Sandy Pierson, Rev. Kathryn Rust,

Alan Seltzer (editor), Rev. Samuel Schaal

**Proofreader:** Deborah Johnston, Big Sky Text Services