

COMMUNICATION MINISTRIES

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1. Knowing that the current priorities of the church are to start new congregations, transform existing congregations for mission, nurture leadership for these new and renewed congregations, and become a pro-reconciling/anti-racism church, what is the role of your ministry in fulfilling any of these priorities?

Communication Ministries (CM) works to lift up the priorities of the church through a variety of communication tools, including news, print communications and video. As a division of the Office of General Minister and President, Communication Ministries continued its role of working closely with the General Minister and President to articulate the Church's vision and mission to all expressions of the church, as well as the four priorities.

Disciples News Service, the e-mail news alert that is distributed twice a month to all subscribers, grew in subscriptions in 2008 by about 3.1 percent. DNS is intentional in highlighting news and information that speaks to the four priorities of the Church. In 2008, DNS also included a monthly pastoral letter written by the General Minister and President as well as a monthly History "Moment" provided by the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.

One key accomplishment in 2008 was the implementation of the new Disciples.org website that utilizes new content delivery and management technology as well as an updated design and content structure. A new content management system was placed into production that provides means for OGMP/CM staff to maintain and create content on the site.

The new site acts as a portal to the general, regional and congregational expressions of the church by linking to all areas of the Disciples online presence. A new "whole church" search function utilizes Google technology to search information across all general ministry web sites with a single query, thus improving the quality of search results and simplifying the task of locating information for the web user.

While initial reaction to the new web site was very positive, Communication Ministries is continually working to discover ways to improve all areas of the site. CM has received positive and constructive feedback on ways to enhance the site and provide resources that are helpful to all expressions of ministry in the church.

CM also became more intentional about utilizing new and emergent media in 2008. Disciples communities were established on YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook to better connect Disciples and our partners around the globe. Using emergent media technology, Communication Ministries also established links to and between online social networking groups who are exchanging information and praying for the 2009 General Assembly. CM also is exploring other ways of effectively communicating to the wider church through the use of blogging, interactive web streaming, text-messaging and micro-blogging (such as Twitter.)

Another major accomplishment for CM in 2008 was the creation of a 10-minute video that explores the church's history, vision, mission and progress on the four priorities. Copies of the video were sent to every congregation for use in new member classes and basic church orientation. The video also was made available through video streaming on both YouTube and the Disciples.org website. Additional copies of the video are available to congregations for a nominal fee. Positive response to the video has led to discussions about making the resource also available in Spanish.

Early promotion efforts highlighting the 2009 General Assembly created opportunities for CM to network at several regional assemblies as well as the biennial meetings of the church's three racial/ethnic ministries. Our work in this area included booth and brochure designs and the creation of multi-lingual materials.

2. In what ways are you partnering with other expressions of the church and with other general ministries?

Key to the work of Communication Ministries is the goal of highlighting the mission and outreach of ministries throughout the church. Our news and information efforts through Disciples News Service strive to be as inclusive as possible about all ministries in covenant with the church. For example, DNS carries information about the General Minister and President's vision for the church, but also includes news and information from colleges and universities, financial and program ministries, and numerous other church-related organizations. In addition, the work of church-wide visioning groups such as the Mission Alignment Coordinating Council, was disseminated to the Church through DNS.

The CM staff continued to assist selected general ministries in redesigning and updating their web sites, and providing limited website consultation to congregations. The CM staff also continued to host an on-line web discussion forum for a community of over 300 people who utilize the forum to exchange ideas, create websites, or find more innovative ways to maintain their current one.

3. How have you been involved in congregations to fulfill their mission and ministry?

CM takes advantage of every opportunity to visit local congregations, to listen to their needs, attempt to address communication-related concerns, and evaluate communication strategies. As part of her work, CM's Executive Director visited Disciples congregations in several states in 2008.

Congregational input was important in the completion of the church-wide video, as well as in implementing social networking technologies such as Facebook and in updating and maintaining basic brochures, like "Discover the Disciples."

4. What barriers do you experience in carrying out your ministry?

New technologies challenge our staff to stay current with the rapidly growing world of online communities. The two professional staff (the Executive Director and Director of Digital Media) work to stay informed through involvement in professional groups, conferences and input from congregational leaders in this area.