

## RECONCILIATION MINISTRY

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### BACKGROUND:

Reconciliation Ministry started 2008 in a search for a Minister of Reconciliation. In July of 2008 I began my call as Minister of Reconciliation filling a two year vacancy of leadership in the Office. The environment I encountered upon my arrival was one of expectancy and relief. I was pleased to find continued enthusiasm for the mission of Reconciliation and numerous partners throughout the Church willing to advance the conversation in their respective expressions. At the time of my arrival, materials for the annual Reconciliation Offering needed to be launched, the biennial sessions of each of our racial ethnic ministries were gathering as were Regional Assemblies, and dormant priorities and structure to those priorities needed much attention. Below please find tangibles with regard to the work of Reconciliation Ministry for 2008.

#### **1. What has been the role of Reconciliation Ministry in fulfilling the four priorities of the Church?**

Reconciliation Ministry is the priority of the Church which addresses historic and systemic fragmentation in our Church which stems from the sin of racism. It is the primary role of this ministry to empower each expression of the Church to build awareness and skills to confront and eliminate vestiges of this sin in their institutions. This is no easy task to accomplish in a few months! Therefore with the understanding that this work is transformational, Reconciliation has re-engaged the journey toward wholeness by establishing relationship with the leadership across our four priorities in order to plan and program together innovative approaches to address our mutual goals. As Minister of Reconciliation, I continue to work with Regions, Regional Transformation Teams and congregations to preach and teach transformation as our clarion call for advancing the gospel in the 21st century. During this period, I have consulted and visited with the IL/WI Region and teams, Pacific Southwest, Northwest A/R Team and 1st CC Tacoma to name a few. Participating in the visioning and mission of A/R teams, Regional Transformation work, as well as preaching has been paramount in advancing these inter-related and mutual priorities.

Reconciliation joins Rick Morse, Church Extension, as a ministry partner in our committee work on the Mutual Accountability Team (a sub-committee of the Multicultural Consultation called in the Spring of 2008). Our work on this committee brings perspectives and actions relevant to how to prepare new and existing congregational leaders to address the changing face of our church and the communities they serve. As a Committee, we are thrilled to present to the General Board our recommendation for a congregational model to serve as an entry point into building both relationship and leaders across racial/ethnic differences.

#### **2. How is RM partnering with other expressions of the Church?**

It is the joy of the ministry for the Minister of Reconciliation to have both invitation and audience with our Pro-Reconciling/Anti-Racism teams in the Division of Homeland Ministries (DHM), Church Extension, Christian Theological Seminary and Office of General Minister and President (OGMP). These teams are actively pursuing justice while critically examining their institutions and applying the analysis of anti-racism to insure welcome and inclusiveness. DHM has shared with Reconciliation their anti-racism audit and challenges for implementing its recommendations. Their team, like all of our General Ministry teams, is undaunted with the task of becoming a pro-reconciling and anti-racist institution. Reconciliation Ministry remains available as consultant and partner through our Office and resources (Core Trainers).

Church Extension has offered their model for implementing structural change to Reconciliation Ministry as a resource. Reconciliation Ministry and its Commission is working with Regional expressions of the Church to promote awareness training, namely Sandhya Jha and Ron Parker as Commission members working in the capacity of either trainer, consultant or team member where required. Mid-America Region has emerged as both a leader and partner in working with areas for innovative awareness trainings drawing increasingly more participants at each event. Might I add, through attention and intention with their own resources, they increased their offering by 24% for the ministry. In addition, Reconciliation and its Commission partners with the Council on Christian Unity, Week of Compassion, OGMP and National Convocation as members of the Pastoral Table on Compassion, Unity, Reconciliation and Justice (CURAJ).

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

Reconciliation has been actively involved in developing congregational resources and visiting congregations to listen to their visioning and mission objectives. In the congregations where I, as Minister of Reconciliation, have had the privilege to sit in Sunday School classes as well as preach, there has been a consistent refrain for the need to be relevant in their emerging communities. During these opportunities, I offer Reconciliation Ministry as a programmatic resource, instead of an invitation for awareness or skills building training. Here is the critical mission of Reconciliation around the need for developing relationship that leads to relevant interaction. Here also, we as a Church are compelled to understand the generational nature of the work of Reconciliation in that relationship requires time and commitment. It is the challenge of Reconciliation Ministry to empower our churches to remain "at the table" in the awkwardness of maintaining a posture of mutuality across difference.

In November, Reconciliation Ministry put out a call for sermons around the historic election of the first African American to the office of President of the United States and its relevance to the 80th anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birth. The sermons are in the review phase, a copy editor has been retained and publication of a small resource is expected by June of this year, in time for General Assembly. Also, the sermons will be available on the Reconciliation Ministry website.

### **4. What are Barriers/Challenges to Your Ministry?**

We live in a time of instant messaging, Twittering, webcasting and electronic social networking. These are really good communication tools and in some ways, provide for 'real time' ministry. The ministry of presence continues, however, to have real value in this Church's current context. The art of duplicating 'myself' as Minister of Reconciliation was challenging but no longer presents itself as a barrier. Initially, promoting relationship, while promoting the Offering, while establishing an Office was complicated by the awkwardness that my predecessor was not in position to pass the baton. While the transition was awkward at best, time, that funny thing that has the character of schizophrenia in a period of instantaneous exchange, has become a friend of the ministry. In time, events that went without representation from the ministry have found new invitations extended and new ways to resource those events and invitations. The Reconciliation Commission is a working board and thanks be to God, its membership understands what that means with regard to advocacy and the ministry of presence. New ministry partners are emerging through relationship building, for example with Robert Welsh and the Council on Christian Unity, Edward Wheeler and the faculty at Christian Theological Seminary and Amy Gopp with Week of Compassion. The ministry had a void of paid leadership for two years. There was a real need for urgency to address dormant priorities simultaneous to the need to be still and listen. The urgency remains, yet the ministry is experiencing increase.