

NO. 0735
REPORT OF THE DISCIPLES BENEVOLENT MINISTRIES
BLUE RIBBON PANEL

**Report of the Disciples Benevolent Ministries Blue Ribbon Panel
Direction and Vision
for the Ministries of Mercy and Advocacy through
The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada**

Where did the journey begin?

There has been a breadth and depth of ministries of mercy and advocacy in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). **The National Benevolent Association journey began in the compassionate hearts of six women in 1886**, and because of their love of Christ's ministry with the 'least of these' (Matt. 25), Disciples have been engaged in this ministry for over 120 years. Through this ministry, social services have been provided to children, teens and adults in a variety of settings and array of senior housing that was initiated, built and managed by the NBA.

This church wide ministry also has historical roots beyond the NBA through Disciples in Kentucky in 1884, Juliet Fowler in Texas in 1888, Rev. A.W. Clark in Omaha, Nebraska in 1892, Rev. Randolph Timme in Cleveland, Ohio in 1901, John and Mary Warren in Loveland, Colorado in 1901. The prayers of many persons and Disciples congregations have been a part of this journey of compassionate ministry.

Following the events of the last few years and finding the NBA in a time of transition, the NBA Board valued the relational covenant within the life and ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by seeking discernment about the future of ministries of mercy and advocacy in the life of the church. **The National Benevolent Association Board** out of its collective wisdom brought a **Resolution to the Administrative Committee in January 2006** to continue the journey of how we live into such ministries. They recommended that a blue ribbon panel be appointed by the General Minister and President and the Moderator after consultation with the Chair of the Board and President of the NBA. At our first meeting, we chose to honor that broader call by renaming the panel the **Disciples Benevolent Ministries Blue Ribbon Panel**.

The NBA Board provided the resources needed for the Panel's work by paying for the expenses associated with the process of meeting and seeking input. In order to facilitate the process, a recommendation came to the panel that we seek outside facilitation from a person who is familiar with church systems and has had significant experience in organizational transitions.

We developed a **Purpose Statement** which guided our work along with the charge given us:

Through prayer and study, dialogue and listening, we will open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit:

- *To welcome and engage a vision for benevolent caring through congregational, regional and general ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*
- *And to offer to the church a direction for this mission of care (including the future of the NBA) in response to Christ's call to serve the continuing and emerging needs of "the least of these".*

The Context

The NBA Board's call to the church for a blue ribbon panel to seek discernment for vision and direction comes in a moment rich with God's Spirit in the life and ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It is a time of imagining with God our call to be the church in the 21st Century and how to structure for that mission. At the first meeting of the blue ribbon panel, Pat Parvin, chair of the NBA Board, spoke about how our work might be a spark and model for wider church transformation.

At the July 2006 meeting, the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) established a Mediation Team and a 21st Century Vision Team to assist the General Board in its work of planning the work and witness of the church and in establishing procedures for continual renewal and structural reform for the sake of mission.

The Charge	Analysis	Recommendations
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Why form a “Blue Ribbon Panel”? The NBA Board wanted a group of persons to represent the church from a position of independence in order to bring trust and confidence to the process and the results. They desired balance with the broader mission of the church.

The Disciples Benevolent Ministries Blue Ribbon Panel met together five times between March 2006 and March 2007 and engaged in frequent e-mail and phone conversations. *(See Appendix A for details of process)* From our first meeting, a sense of hope permeated our prayers and conversations. The diversity of the panel strengthened our growing consensus about vision and direction.

Our second meeting included time with a consultant who helped us ask key questions about who we are and how we embody ministries of mercy and advocacy as Disciples. In addition to the work we did together, we also divided into four teams to do research. We shared our understandings and discoveries at the September 2006 meeting. Desiring to give the NBA Board an opportunity to engage the Panel’s work, we included time with them at our December meeting. In response to the preliminary report and conversations with the panel, the NBA Board is presently engaged in the development of a new mission statement and direction. At the final meeting in March 2007, we contemplated the discussions at the December meeting and began drafting the report to the General Board.

In response to the charge given to us, we offer the following analyses and recommendations:

1. *Discover whether the church desires to be involved in benevolent care ministries at the General level;*

Analysis

We heard a resounding yes. As Disciples, the vision for benevolent ministries (ministries of mercy and advocacy) is still ignited by the biblical call to compassion and justice. We derive direction from the movement of God’s Spirit within people of faith whose prayers translate into a mission of care. As church, we still claim Christ’s call to this ministry in the 21st century; however, the General ministry of engaging in ministries of mercy and advocacy needs to change to being facilitator and catalyst in the life of the church.

Recommendation

We recommend that the General church not engage in direct services and instead assume a role of catalyst and facilitator in order to empower congregations, Regions and groups within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to engage in ministries of mercy and advocacy at their doorsteps and within their communities.

A Possible Component

The renaming of this ministry that moves away from use of “benevolent”. Benevolent is a 19th century term that worked well into the 20th century, however, in the 21st century does not speak with the same power as it did in past generations and may not evoke the image needed for this ministry of mercy and advocacy within the life of the church.

2. *Envision how the church can best deliver benevolent care ministry in the 21st century;*

Analysis

Ministries of compassion and advocacy are best initiated and undergirded by a model that involves the ministry of the General church as a catalyst for grassroots empowerment in a partnership with Disciples who envision and offer these ministries locally. A large, centralized corporate bureaucracy does not provide the effective model appropriate for the 21st century. The model proposed underscores the call to congregations, regions and groups within the church to engage in ministries of mercy and advocacy at their doorsteps rather than a General ministry providing these ministries on our behalf.

Recommendation

We call upon the General Board to be diligent in its role of determining the structure for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that will empower God's mission of mercy and advocacy through us at this time. As the General Board leads us in determining this adaptive change in the life of the church, we stress the asking of essential questions about location, structure, and staff for this ministry within the life of the General church.

We call upon the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to embrace a model for ministries of mercy and advocacy that involves networking and grassroots empowerment. We recommend that the National Benevolent Association free itself of its current corporate model and institutional structure and by doing so provide key leadership for this mission driven movement by embodying an emerging model that ignites and resources Disciples communities of care among congregations and regions.

3. *Imagine the structure that will best serve the ministry and mission;*

Analysis

We are convinced that the structure for this mission and ministry needs to be collaborative, and we see many partners entering into this conversation about structuring for the mission in the 21st Century and how to empower ministries of mercy and advocacy: congregations, Disciples Care Network, National Benevolent Association, Disciples Home Missions, Regions, Week of Compassion, Church Extension, and other General ministry partners. There is a wealth of resources to develop ministries of mercy and advocacy, and the conversation and implementation of this mission and ministry must include many voices in the life of the church.

Recommendation:

One of the key defining expressions of how Disciples engage in ministry centers on our grounding in the congregation as the primary way of being the church in mission. We recommend the following elements as *essential* to a collaborative model needed to envision and provide ministries of mercy and advocacy throughout the life of the church:

- a) **Building networks** - Connect facilities/agencies/ministries through networking and the building of relationships of trust.
- b) **Grassroots empowerment and resourcing of ministries** – Envision an entity within the ministry of the General church that is scanning the larger environment, e.g., legislative awareness, resource materials to provide information, provision of financial resources for starter grants, list of experts to help prepare congregations and groups, in order to resource these ministries of mercy and advocacy.
- c) **Collaboration** – Provide training and coaching for development and implementation of vision for such ministries. This is the offering wisdom in a collaborative way. Look at Week of Compassion and New Church Ministries for possible strategies and tactics.
- d) **Articulate covenantal values, process and accountability** for encouraging ministries of mercy and advocacy.
- e) **Encourage, promote, and celebrate** ministries of mercy and advocacy throughout the life of the church.
- f) **Shape connection**, program leadership, and support to achieve a mission with the established bases of ministries of mercy and advocacy.

Some Possible Components:

1. Utilize the Christian Church Foundation in the creation of a foundation for providing seed monies for new ministries.
2. Have an annual conference similar to the Christian Church Foundation development conference to provide networking and collaboration, training, expert information, ideas and support for these ministries

3. Create a resource of ministries of mercy and advocacy organized according to what kind of ministry and make them known by publishing the information. Telling the Disciples story (stories) will impact the church.

4. *Vision new relationships of responsibility and respect;*

Analysis

In order to build new relationships of responsibility and respect, we must work at empowering local leadership and connections.

Recommendation

At the present time, there is not a General ministry that meets the criteria for ministries of mercy and advocacy underscored in this report. We recommend to the General Board that it consider what structure is needed within the General church to reflect this vision of grassroots empowerment and collaborative partnership.

Some Possible Components:

1. Develop a written resource that reflects Disciples Covenantal Values for ministries of mercy and advocacy to provide clarity and accountability. Such a resource would provide guidelines to answer the following questions: Who are we as Disciples and how do we do ministries of mercy and advocacy? What are the elements of a covenant drawn together for any project supported with resources? What are potential points of accountability? What are there other points of connectivity?
2. Connect with new ministries of mercy and advocacy through coaching and consultation.

5. *be a bridge for healing;*

Analysis

Much hurt and anger still surround the National Benevolent Association and ministries of mercy and advocacy of the church. We call upon brothers and sisters within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to acknowledge and move into a time of releasing the hurts of the past. We will be unable to live out the legacy and faithful action of the many Disciples who have gathered in prayer and responded with ministries of mercy and advocacy if we long for the past or live in the confines of reprisal.

Recommendation

It is time for us to listen to the call of Jesus Christ to forgive each other and free ourselves from the heaviness of the past. Let us turn our face as a church toward the present and future, so that we may envision and live out the mission of mercy and advocacy where God is now calling us.

6. *Operate efficiently and quickly with a singular focus.*

Analysis

This has been a humbling experience to be entrusted with this work. We have met and centered our life as a Panel in prayerful openness. We have sought input from many sources within and beyond the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and we have remained focused on the mission and ministry of the present and future that we might speak a word of direction and hope. We kept before us the charge given to us by the NBA Board and the Mission Imperative of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): *to be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from our doorsteps to the “ends of the earth.” and to strengthen congregational life for this mission.*”

Recommendation

We offer our gratitude to the NBA Board for initiating and supporting this process. We thank the church for its prayers and care. With the deep hope that we may find our way together into new ministries of mercy and advocacy as Christ’s disciples, we submit this report.

Prayerfully offered,

Mary Jacobs, Chair, Tempe, AZ
Past First Vice Moderator, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
2006 completed term as Member of the General Board, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and
completed ministry as Interim Redevelopment Pastor, Foothills Christian Church, Phoenix, AZ

Ben Bohren, San Ramon, CA
Regional Minister, Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ) of Northern California – Nevada

Bob Cooper, Denver, CO
MSW, Chief Executive Officer
Tennyson Center for Children

Cheryle Dyle-Palmer, St. Louis, MO
Chief Operating Officer,
Parents as Teachers, National Center Inc.
Former NBA Vice President for Children and Family Services
Moderator, Centennial Christian Church, St. Louis, MO

Charisse Gillett, Lexington, KY
Immediate Past Moderator, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and
Lilly Program Director, Transylvania University

Brandon Johnson, New Haven, CT
Student, Yale Divinity School

Bill Lee, Roanoke, Va.
Moderator, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and
Pastor, Loudon Avenue Christian Church

Jim Powell, Indianapolis, IN
President, Church Extension
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Indianapolis, Ind.

Paul Rivera, Brooklyn, NY
Past Moderator, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and
Vice-President Beys Specialties Inc. (a general construction company)

Ted Waggoner, Rochester, IN
Past Vice Moderator, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and
Attorney, Peterson & Waggoner LLP

Sharon Watkins, Indianapolis, IN
General Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Appendix

The Process

The Disciples Benevolent Ministries Blue Ribbon Panel's work has had a grace-filled and God directed grounding about it, so the challenges were minor ones that did not distract us from our purpose.

1. *Scheduling meetings*
2. *Short time frame for the work – the desire for something to happen within a short time frame*
3. *Focusing on discernment and not evaluation of what was. This challenge was overcome within the first meeting. People stayed focused on future and did not let the past determine responses, but let the best of the history of NBA inform the future*
4. *How to offer a vision and direction without engaging in detailed tactics*
5. *Determining process for sharing work of panel with the NBA Board*

March 31 – April 1, 2006, St. Louis

We met with Pat Parvin, NBA Board Chair, to get a sense of NBA background and history, to clarify direction and scope of our task as a panel and to build relationships to be a cohesive team for doing the work before us. We spent time in worship and conversation as we began to discern our purpose and direction and name some concerns and hopes. We determined at our first meeting to invite Dr. William McKinney, President of Pacific School of Religion, member of the United Church of Christ, and keen observer of the cultural and church landscape, to come to our second meeting and provide the context for considering the next steps of our work together.

At the meeting, we received the following charge:

- *Discover whether the church desires to be involved in benevolent care ministries at the General level;*
- *Envision how the church can best deliver benevolent care ministry in the 21st century;*
- *Imagine the structure that will best serve the ministry and mission;*
- *Vision new relationships of responsibility and respect;*
- *Be a bridge for healing;*
- *Operate efficiently and quickly with a singular focus.*

July 8-9, 2006 Indianapolis

Dr. McKinney joined us at this meeting where he spent a several hours providing general insights and offering clarifying questions about “**Who are we as Disciples, and how do we organize to express who we are in mission?**” His time with us moved us to a key question “**How does the answer to who we are shape the way we engage in benevolent ministries?**” **One of the key defining expressions of who we are centers on our grounding in the congregation as the primary way of being church.**

As we seek answers to these questions, the Mission Imperative for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at this time provides clarifying focus for us: **Our Mission to be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from our doorsteps to the “ends of the earth.”** and it directs us to **Our Imperative to strengthen congregational life for this mission.**”

We spent time naming and refining core values about benevolent ministries as well as beginning to identify our ministry partners that we will need to engage in this conversation. We determined teams of two and three to work together and gather information to bring to our September 9-10 meeting:

- **Team 1 – Definition of benevolent care**
- **Team 2 – How are other Christian denominations and other faith based groups doing benevolent ministries?**
- **Team 3 – How do we appropriately encourage, support, empower benevolent ministries in congregations and among Disciples?**
- **Team 4 – What might the Disciples connectivity and covenantal relationship look like?**

July 22-25, 2006, Indianapolis

Brief report of work was given at the General Board.

September 9-10, 2006, Indianapolis

Prior to the meeting, each team spent time in direct and e-mail conversation about the work they had undertaken. As we met, we shared the information and thoughts from each team and noted questions and points of emerging consensus and vision.

Team 1 – Definition of benevolent care

***The Questions:** What are benevolent ministries? What do they look like? How do they speak to root causes and do justice while loving kindness? How do they reflect the ministry and vision of Jesus and who we are as Disciples?*

***The Method:** Dialogue about Biblical understanding
Survey of Regional Ministers about ministries of care by congregations and Regions*

Points of Consideration:

- 1. What are the covenantal values for this ministry? They focus the ministry on:
 - Biblical mandate – sense of “holy urgency” not driven by fear or bounty
 - Vision and passion of the 6 women who began this ministry
 - How we answer the question, “Who we are as Disciples of Christ?” determines the manner in which we do this ministry*
- 2. The term “benevolent” for these ministries is a 19th century term that worked well into the 20th century, however, in the 21st century is an outdated term that does not speak with the same power as it did in past generations. Call it what? Disciples Christian Services? Disciples Compassionate Care Ministry? Disciples Communities of Care? Steer away from use of “benevolent” to address both outdated image and possible connection with recent history.*
- 3. The received responses from Regional Ministers about Regional and congregational ministries of care along with additional collection of information could provide an empowering resource of what kinds of ministries are already taking place while providing a network of support for those who are seeking to undertake ministries of care.*

***An emerging image:** Disciples Communities of Care - Partners in Restoring Wholeness:
Micah 6:8 – Justice
Luke 4:16-20 – Liberation
Matthew 25:42-45 – Compassion
James 2:14-17 - Action (Advocacy)*

Team 2 - How are other Christian denominations and other faith based groups doing benevolent ministries?

***The Questions:** What is their working definition of benevolent ministry/care?
In what kinds of benevolent ministries are they engaged?
What models are being used?
How is the way they are doing benevolent ministry working? Not working?
How do they fund these ministries?*

***The Method:** Contacted the following groups and compared with the manner in which we have been doing this ministry:*

*The United Methodist Church
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The Presbyterian Church USA
The United Church of Christ
Roman Catholic Social Services*

*Jewish Family and Social Service
Vineyard
Willow Creek Church
United Church of Canada*

Points of Consideration:

1. *Comparing ministries in other denominations shows similar ministries as Disciples, but they are carried out in different ways. We noted three different models:
Corporate model – our present model
Umbrella model – network with corporate connection
Many cells – grassroots focused
Those contacted seemed to be more network driven with a web of connections for empowerment, leadership and advocacy and with a focus on local groups and congregations engaged in ministries.*
2. *The United Methodist Church Social Creed and Principles document informs benevolent ministries in the UMC and maintains similar understandings and accountabilities regarding care ministries. We are aware that the development of a written resource that reflected Disciples Covenantal Values to provide clarity and accountability would be very valuable for the future. (e.g., a book like Methodists but done in Disciples manner) Such a resource would attempt to answer the following questions: Who are we as Disciples and how do we do benevolent ministry? What is benevolent ministry? Who offers it? How is it done?*
3. *Is it necessary for this ministry to be a General Ministry Unit? Where does this mission/ministry fit within the church's structure? Keep fluid with present conversation about structuring for mission. Is NBA to remain? Regardless of what happens to NBA, how do we want to do this ministry?*

Team 3 – How do we appropriately encourage, support, empower benevolent ministries in congregations and among Disciples?

The Questions: *How do we challenge ourselves to continue Christ's work of mercy and advocacy? How do we lend support to such ministries? How does church get involved in grassroots?*

The Method: *Dialogue and consideration around what is taking place in the life of the church*

Points of Consideration:

1. *How to support grassroots involvement of congregations and local communities providing benevolent ministries - resourcing and connecting from the bottom up and becoming partners in ways that help equip the saints for doing ministry*
2. *Possible outcomes:*
 - *Annual conference similar to Christian Church Foundation development conference to provide networking and collaboration, training, expert information, ideas and support for benevolent ministries*
 - *Create a resource of ministries of mercy and advocacy organized according to what kind of ministry-make them known by publishing the information. Telling the Disciples story (stories) will impact the church.*

Team 4 – What might the Disciples connectivity and covenantal relationship look like?

The Questions: *In the first quarter of the 21st century, how will we be connected and appropriately supportive and empowering to mission and ministry? What is the connectivity between church and local ministries of mercy and advocacy? Who gets involved in Disciples network? What are the issues? Who would be connected? How? What kind of networking might be created and affirmed? What forms of accountability might be put in place?*

The Method: *Dialogue and considering other models are already present in the life of the church*

Points of Consideration:

1. *Important to engage in a relationship of empowerment instead of directed oversight - calling forth and empowering ministries of mercy and advocacy*
2. *Web-based discernment process for beginning care and web-based drawing together of those with similar ministries of mercy and advocacy ideas*
3. *Important possible components:*
 - *Is there a foundation possibility for providing seed money that acts as catalyst rather than providing sustaining funds?*
 - *Facilitating Ministries through:*
 - ✓ *Coaching- Coaches to assist with and support the emergent ministries of mercy and advocacy*
 - ✓ *Training for those seeking to initiate such ministries clustered around particular kinds of ministries*
 - ✓ *Sponsorships*
 - *Possible models to draw upon:*
 - Week of Compassion*
 - New Church Development Program – “1000 new churches in 1000 different ways”*
 - *Mission driven not money driven*
 - *Continuing conversation:*
 - Defining Covenantal Values by looking at the 4 Parts of Covenant*
 - ✓ *Who are the participants?*
 - ✓ *What are the terms/expectations of the covenant?*
 - ✓ *What are the results of being in covenant?*
 - ✓ *What are the issues of security...of being held accountable and feeling connected and not alone?*
 - ✓ *What are the elements of a covenant drawn together for any project supported with resources? What are potential points of accountability? Are there other points of connectivity? This continuing conversation will clarify covenantal values and accountability for written resource and distinguish between covenant and legal responsibilities.*

Time around the meeting table combined with the work of teams and input from the consultant guided us toward an emerging consensus. The following questions provided the framework:

1. Who are we?

- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- Ecumenically open
- Congregationally empowered
- Covenantal people
- Grassroots movement
- mission focused
- Church in transition – opening to Spirit – 21st Century church
- People of diversity

2. What are we trying to do?

- Offer compassionate care and justice seeking advocacy by ministering with others as we call forth communities of care in the 21st century which remains faithful to a Spirit-heritage that created NBA mission driven services 120 years ago
- Engage in relevant ministry
- Build trust and connection between three expressions of church in order to empower, sustain, inspire congregations and grassroots groups to engage in ministries of mercy and advocacy.

- Empower local congregations to be mission outposts.
- Support these ministries through promoting and sponsoring by the General Church.
- Clarify core values of this ministry with those we are called to serve.
- Claim a model that offers a common definition which connects with covenantal values and puts into place what is needed for accountability

3. How are we going to do it? How will vision translate into structure? What is the best structure to carry out ministry?

The elements of a model for this ministry that we want to underscore are:

- **Building networks**
- **Grassroots empowerment** and resourcing of ministries
- **Collaboration**
- **Articulate covenantal values, process and accountability** for encouraging ministries of mercy and advocacy.
- **Encourage, promote, and celebrate** ministries of mercy and advocacy throughout the life of the church.
- **Shape connection**, program leadership, and support to achieve a mission with the established bases of ministries of mercy and advocacy.

4. What are the resources for doing it?

- Passion and desire for this ministry
- Faith resources
- NBA resources *How will assets of NBA be used for ministries of mercy and advocacy?*
- Disciples Mission Fund
- Knowledge/experience of previous NBA related facilities and staff and existing Disciples benevolent ministries (non-NBA) and present NBA staff
- Possible locations/resources within church – NOT IN OGMP!!!!
- People resources and expertise
- Government funds and other non-Disciples resources

November 9, 2006, Phone Conference

December 1-2, 2006, Phoenix

Panel members met on Friday to consider recommendations and to prepare to meet with the NBA Board the next day. The NBA Board and two staff persons joined us to consider the direction and vision that was emerging from our work and prayer. We engaged in open and helpful conversation with discerning questions being asked.

January 12-13, 2007, St. Louis

Mary Jacobs along with Sharon Watkins and Paul Rivera (who serve both on the Panel and the NBA Board) met for further discussion and clarification with the NBA Board.

January 23, 2007, Phone Conference

March 18-19, 2007, Indianapolis

The panel met to review and finalize recommendations for preparation of a report for General Board in April 2007. Plans for communication and inclusion of ministry partners in the conversation were included.

April 28-31, 2007, Indianapolis

Report with recommendations given to the General Board.

The General Board reviewed Report No. 0735. The report is submitted to the General Assembly for consideration and discussion. No action is required. (Debate time 12 minutes).