

General Board

Business Item No. GB-08-0548

Title: **REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA**

Origin: John Mobley, Regional Minister

The following is provided for information to the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Regional Staff: Regional Minister - John Mobley (male)  
Associate Regional Minister - Dale Braxton (male, African American)  
Women's Ministries Staff Person - Betty Wright (female)  
Youth Ministries Staff Person - Nisha Warbington (female)  
Administrative Assistant/Office Manager - Susan Henderson (female)

Number of Congregations: 61 (including one congregation in formation)

Total members: 7,618

States included in Region: (2) - Alabama and the panhandle of Florida

This report to the General Board is in response to three requests for information:

**1. INFORMATION REGARDING HOW YOUR REGION HAS FULFILLED THE REGION'S PRIMARY PURPOSE AS STATED IN PARAGRAPH 20 OF *THE DESIGN*.**

Our goals are to continue to fulfill the mission that is given to regions in the Design:

- To extend the ministry of Christ in mission, teaching, witness and service among the people and social structures of the region; and,
  - To establish, receive, and nurture congregations in the Region, providing help, counsel and pastoral care to members, ministers, and congregations in their mutual relationships, and relating them to the worldwide mission and witness of the whole church.

We strive to be faithful to the mandate given to regions in the design by addressing specific priorities in our programming. These areas, as stated in an Regional Assembly-approved "Statement of Mission Priorities," include: Spiritual Growth and Faith Development, Ministerial Support, Leadership Development, Youth Ministries, Congregational Vitality, New Congregation Establishment, and Communication. In addition to development of programs that help the region fulfill its mandate, our dedicated and hard-working staff provide expertise, counsel, and encouragement to members, ministers, and congregations as they seek to be faithful to the mission God is giving them..

**2. PARTICULAR HIGHLIGHTS OR CHALLENGES OF MINISTRY IN YOUR REGION SINCE THE LAST REPORT.**

Since the General Board report of 2007, the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region has sponsored leadership development retreats for youth, young adults, men, women, and senior adults. We have offered a pastor's retreat and a ministers and mates retreat. We have offered three boundary training events all across the Region in areas geographically convenient to all of our congregations. Similarly, we offered workshops on the Stewardship of Accumulated Resources, in partnership with the Christian Church Foundation. We have had visits to each of our five districts from Elena Huegel, the Region's Global Mission Partner. In October, 2007, we celebrated the graduation of seven persons from the PEPP (People Energized, Prepared and Productive) program, which is a leadership training program for persons either in either lay ministry or formal ministry roles. We have also begun three new PEPP groups which include approximately 20 students.

A major congregational transformation event was held on February 8-9, 2008, which drew more than 300 persons. Dr. Fred Craddock and Dr. Richard Hamm were the primary leaders. The event included worship, a variety of workshops, and resource tables. The Region is excited about its upcoming Assembly in April, 2008, in Mobile, Alabama. The theme will be "And You Shall Be My Witnesses." Special guests will include former moderator William Lee, Kay Northcutt, R. Wayne Calhoun, and Bob Shebeck.

The Region continues to make new congregation establishment a priority. Currently we have a Project Advisory Team (PAT) giving oversight to the formation of our first Hispanic congregation, Primera Iglesia Cristiana Hispana en Anniston. Another PAT is giving oversight to another Hispanic congregation that is envisioned for Birmingham. A third PAT is giving oversight to the affiliation of Discovery Christian Church, a new congregation in Warrior, Alabama. There are three additional possibilities for new churches, one an affiliation and the other two new church starts.

Recognizing the urgent need to develop ministries to and with young adults, the Region has made a decision to add a Director of Young Adult Ministries to its staff in 2008. This part-time position will work with a newly-forming young adult ministry cabinet to oversee ministries to and with young adults.

### **3. CURRENT GOALS RELATED TO THE MISSION AND VISION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST). PLEASE GIVE PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO YOUR REGION'S GOALS IN FULFILLING THE CHURCH'S PRIORITIES.**

We are seeking to be faithful to all of the priorities of the church. As stated in the previous section of this report, we have been aggressive in establishing new congregations and giving oversight to the affiliation of other congregations (less than 10 years old). We do more than simply stand back and watch these efforts emerge. We establish Project Advisory Teams which provide the kind of guidance necessary for these new congregations to become fully informed and participatory in all aspects of the church. In most cases, we also are able to provide start-up funding for these new and affiliating churches.

As stated in the previous section of this report, the Region put a great amount of energy into a church transformation event in February, 2008. The event was named "Can You Hear Me Now?" (Discerning God's Call to Transformation). This gathering was an important time for persons from our congregations to gain a sense of being part of a movement toward transformation in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). As part of the Region's commitment to transformation, the Region is paying for four persons to be trained as transformation coaches. These four persons are receiving training in several modules through the Pastoral Institute in Columbus, Georgia. These four persons are located in geographically-convenient areas of the Region so that they can be accessible to transforming congregations that may wish to partner with the Region in working with a transformation coach.

The Region's commitment to leadership development for a faithful, growing church is expressed in many ways. The PEPP program has already been mentioned, as well as leadership development retreats for clergy, youth, young adults, men, women, and senior adults. The Region is in partnership with the Tennessee Region in preparing to offer Clergy Colleague Groups for Wellness and Self-Care in 2009. This ministry would cover expenses for 48 of our clergy to meet monthly in 2009, in group of eight persons, for a peer learning experience that will emphasize wellness – spiritual, physical, and mental – and disciplines of self-care. Currently we are seeking funding for this ministry. The Committees on the Ministry in both Regions believe that the wellness of our clergy will have a direct impact on the health of the congregations they serve.

The Region has an Anti-Racism Team that gives oversight to the Region's commitment to being an anti-racist/pro-reconciling ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We are part of an effort with the Southeast Regional Fellowship (SERF) to call a Director of Reconciliation and Anti-Racism Ministries who will work with the eight SERF Regions as they address this priority. It is envisioned that momentum for anti-racism and pro-reconciliation will build within SERF by having a person in this position who can relate in a special way to each Region, building trust and accountability for this ministry.

### **BARRIERS TO CARRYING OUT MINISTRY (?)**

We are not experiencing any barriers which prevent us from pursuing the ministry to which we are called.