

Title: **Report of Christian Church in Arizona**

Origin: Dennis L. Williams, Regional Minister and President

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

Regional Staff: Dennis L. Williams – M; Kim Behm – F; Job Cobos – Hispanic M; Carol Friesen – F
Tricia Garrett-F; Lea Nessmith – F; Jennie Shirey – F; Lyn Saint-Erne - F

Number of Congregations: 21 + 8 in formation and affiliation

Total Members: 3810

States included in Region: Arizona

HOW DOES THE ARIZONA REGION FULFILL THE REGIONS' PRIMARY PURPOSE AS STATED IN PARAGRAPH 20 OF THE DESIGN?

1) How does the region extend the ministry of Christ in mission, teaching, witness and service among people and social structures of the region?

The Anti-racism/Reconciliation ministry of the region has hosted two Mission/Racism Awareness trips to the Gulf Coast. These trips have provided opportunity for Arizona Disciples to participate in hurricane recovery work in that area and to engage in conversation and learning about how systems of racism and poverty are involved in that setting and in our own settings. The ministry has also created an "amigos program" that develops understanding and partnership for congregations of different ethnicity who share church facilities.

Our Regional Hispanic Ministry is working with several Arizona congregations, and some Disciple congregations in other regions to provide financing and labor to construct a sanctuary and education space for our partner congregation in Nogales Sonora, Mexico. This congregation has grown from a five year partnership between Arizona and Mexico Disciples sensing a call to respond to the many faith and humanitarian needs on both sides of the border.

Our Women's Ministry has focused both its retreat and women's fair around the theme's of Caring for God's Creation, creating awareness and providing options for women and congregations to be more intentional stewards of all God's creation.

2) How does the region establish, receive and nurture congregations, providing help, counsel and pastoral care to members, pastors and congregations in mutual relationships, relating to the worldwide mission and witness of the whole church?

The Arizona Region takes seriously the call to establish new congregations. It currently has eight congregations in formation. These congregations are diverse, including Hispanic and Haitian congregations, a joint UCC-Disciple start and a UCC congregation seeking joint affiliation. Current New Church Ministry priorities involve partnering with these congregations as they seek to develop a calling of their own and to develop as congregations that are faithful to the identity and covenantal relationships of Disciples. Further priorities involve providing resources to help congregations move from newly formed congregations to ministries that are increasingly vital and sustainable.

The nurture of congregations in the Arizona Region involves several ministries. The Region is partnering with Church Extension and six congregations in the New Beginnings process for congregational assessment and discernment about future mission and ministry. The Region's Staff, Congregational Vitality Team and Church Extension will continue to resource these congregations as they make decisions ranging from Mission Revision to Merger to Relocation. This region also does this work through its programs of training, resourcing, support and sharing for clergy and lay leaders in the region. Twice yearly gatherings of pastors and regional representatives from each congregation provide opportunities for sharing resources, offering training, raising concerns and three way sharing between the region,

congregations leaders and from congregation to congregation. This past year these gatherings have included “Disciple Ministries and DMF 101” and a Month of Ministry emphasis on “Caring for Your Pastor: Resources for Assessing and Nurturing the Relationship between Pastor and Congregation”.

This sharing is extended through a monthly web-based communication Pastor-Rep.Net. This site provides a sharing and networking of resources, programs and ministries and a forum for congregational and regional information, questions and concerns.

Pastoral care and training for clergy has been provided during the past year through four monthly Clergy Covenant Groups. These groups were launched around the study of Gay Rees book “Unbinding the Gospel” and involve time for sharing, support and prayer. Four additional clergy gatherings are set for all clergy training, continuing education, respite and support. This years meetings include a mid-Lenten mini-retreat and respite with Rita Nakashima Brock and two day retreat with Dr. Scott Cormode on “Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters”

PARTICULAR HIGHLIGHTS OR CHALLENGES

As is often the case in Arizona Highlights and Challenges come together.

The region has been working with two recently chartered congregations in moving toward construction of their first buildings. One recently celebrated the dedication of their new worship and ministry building after nine years in temporary space. Growing regulations, land and building costs have increasingly made this a time and energy consuming challenge for new congregations and the region as it partners in their development.

The Arizona Region also journeyed with a closing congregation as its members sought to be faithful stewards of their heritage and resources. The region assisted as they sold the building, closed the congregation, found new church homes and finally made significant gifts for work in the community and many ministries within the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

As the population of Arizona continues to grow and become even more diverse this becomes both a gift and challenge to the region and its congregations. The challenges include the ones created for many of our ethnic congregation as its numerous members and pastors deal with changes in immigration laws. Additionally, this growth provides a challenge in developing resources of money and leadership for growing ministry.

Changing needs and resources have challenged the region to design a new staffing configuration. We are in the final stages of implementing a new pattern that will be more fitting for our mission and more sustainable for the future.

CURRENT GOALS RELATED TO THE CHURCH’S MISSION AND VISION

The Mission of the Arizona Region is “To create an environment and relationships in which leaders and congregations are called and equipped for congregational ministries that are transforming, growing and faithful.” We have understood this as an echo of the Mission and Vision of the whole church. As the region seeks to do this mission, we have this year affirmed some guiding principles and values around this mission. Two of these are:

1) One Mission, One Vision, Many Ministries. We are working intentionally to be One Region with a common mission and vision throughout its many ministries and not a region made up of a number of semi-autonomous ministries proceeding with differing goals and visions. Our Mission Focus Team is responsible for calling all ministries to this principle. In response to this principle the region has purchased translation equipment so that we can have retreats, assemblies and meetings in more than one language. It has called for us to provide resources and communications in more than one language. It means continuing to covenant with each other to understand how the Mission and Vision relate to different constituencies and how we bring these into a variety of ministries.

2) Called to be a People Sent- Understanding the ministry of the region and its congregations as “missional people sent by Christ into the world. This has been the focus of our work with congregations, new church starts, planning and transformation processes. Over the past six years 90 % of our congregations have been involved in numerous programs and ministries, calling and equipping them for their mission as a people sent to be and share the Good News.