

## General Board 2008 Annual Report

### Canada Region

1. The Canadian Region addresses paragraph 20 of The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through planting new churches with the assistance of New Church Ministries and a newly formed partnership with the Michigan Region. Through this partnership, now in its' earliest stages, we hope to mutually assist churches to revitalize. At this time, we are exploring the possibilities of a "cross-border" church plant in Windsor, Ontario, the previous location of a vital Canadian church.

The region has unfortunately experienced two churches having to "fold their tents". However, in both situations, this has relieved the financial burden thus forcing the churches' ministries inward. These two churches will continue their witnesses in their respective cities in ways that will reach largely secular communities without the concern of diminishing funds. Once again, New Church Ministries assisted one of these churches in their decision-making process enabling church members to come to a fully informed decision.

New church plants include: Word of Life Christian Church, a primarily Rwandan/Burundian congregation, nesting with Hillcrest Christian Church in Toronto and Happy Family Christian Church a Hispanic congregation in Calgary, Alberta. In partnership with New Church Ministries we are working toward a new church plant in Vancouver, British Columbia. The pastor of Word of Life Christian Church is laying the groundwork for future Rwandan congregations in Hamilton, Ottawa and Edmonton.

The region is currently finalizing an Affiliation Policy that will guide a church from a "church in formation" into full affiliation as a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation. Pastors and congregations will have clear developmental goals to attain so they may feel in full fellowship with our denomination. The policy emphasis is Disciples history and polity and a general understanding of the wider church. The process is not intended to be cumbersome but lend credibility to affiliation.

Visits with churches in formation and churches attempting to better understand their Disciples of Christ identity have been a focus in the past year in the Canadian region. Pastors as well, have undertaken studies with their congregations to facilitate understanding of our core values. Workshops have been offered in leadership and conflict resolution.

Canadian churches across Canada are engaged in various forms of outreach within Canada. From Teddy Bear ministries to Mitten Tree Ministry, our churches are in direct contact with those in need. This year two individuals attended the Women's Blitz Build in Texas in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity.

2. Visiting with our churches and identifying the needs of pastors and church members has been a highlight of my second year in office. The three streams of Christianity in Canada are more pronounced than in other regions and identifying the specific needs of each church has been both professionally challenging and fulfilling.

As a region we have seen an increase in ministerial candidates desiring to relocate to Canada. However, as in other regions, some churches call pastors "off the street" foregoing the Search and Call system. This gives rise to liability issues as well as Disciples identity.

The loss of Pension Fund participation remains unresolved. Though the Pension Fund is paying pension dues from their overage while this issue is resolved and has recommended that churches in Canada set aside equal pension dues for when a pension fund is established in Canada, there is concern that some entities have not done so. It is apparent that when a pension fund is established in Canada, it will not match the outstanding performance of the U.S. Pension Fund. It is necessary to explain the pension situation to ministerial candidates when a desire to relocate to Canada has been expressed.

We greatly appreciate the diligent work of Jim Hamlett and his staff as well as the Canadian Trustees, Ray Cuthbert and David Nicholson.

It is my hope as Regional Minister that the Canadian Region will continue to increase connection with the wider church in the U.S. Approximately 15 Disciples attended General Assembly in Fort Worth. Our new churches strongly desire connection to the wider church and their vitality in this area is a fine example of our potential connection.

Our churches struggle mightily to thrive within their communities and often this is reflected in DHF contributions. It is my hope that through the years we will be able to increase our participation in offerings to the wider church in return for the support and assistance given to our region. As a region we will continue our efforts to strengthen our General Ministries.

The region is currently drafting a proposal for ministerial training. Currently there are only two ministers holding the M.Div degree from non-Disciples seminaries. The remaining ministers serving Canadian churches: do not hold an M.Div degree, hold a four-year non-Disciple Bible College degree or do not have any college. However, geography and language difficulties in Canada create tremendous obstacles to acquiring education. Thus, options are being developed that will avail potential students of on-line educations through Disciples Seminary Foundation, distance on-line M.Div courses and regionally sponsored lay-ministry schools. We are also fortunate that the College of Churches of Christ, an entity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada makes available scholarships for students desiring to enter seminary.

There is great potential for new church starts in all areas of Canada. Our three areas, the Maritimes, the Ontario (Central) and the Western Christian Fellowship are fertile lands for new churches. The areas surrounding the northern borders of Michigan and those areas within the borders of Michigan are promising territory for partnership. Little effort is needed to focus on the critical issues of both the Canadian and Michigan regions but by intentionally visioning together; I believe we can fulfill the mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to spread the gospel from our doorsteps into all the world.