

REGIONAL REPORT

General Board

Business Item No. GB-08-0556

Title: Report of Great River Region

Origin: Barbara E. Jones

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

Regional Staff: Rev. Dr. Vivian B. Bryant (A, F); Rev. Dr. Michael E. Elmore (C, M); Rev. Richard E. Hamilton (C, M)

Number of Congregations: 120

Total Members: 15,008

States included in Region: Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi

The Great River Region, in its sixth year of existence, is living out the life of many six year olds. Our worldview is rapidly expanding, as we continue to move from a “me” based existence toward a realization of our interconnectedness to the world in which we live. The ministries of the regional church are gaining a stronger sense of identity as we live out the merging of constituent group ministries, and wrestle through the growing pains of clergy care and credentialing, blending of youth ministry traditions and practices, and the retirement of three state coordinators for women’s ministries.

Our biggest initiatives in “mission, teaching, witness, and service” still surround the hurricane recovery efforts from Katrina/Rita. These historic events continue to shape and define our ministries. However, in a strange turn of events in the last year, it was a Katrina affected church which was among the earliest responders to Tornado affected communities in Kansas. This underscores the heart of the Gospel message to not only hear, know and receive the Good News, but to then become the Good News.

The Great River Region continues to strive to be a “Missional Church”. The Mission on Our West Bank, centered at West Side Christian Church of New Orleans/Algiers, Louisiana continues to be a highlight ministry. To date almost 3,500 volunteers from throughout the United States have visited, served, and “seen God” through the long term recovery center we have established through a partnership with the region, the congregation, and Week of Compassion. In seeking to serve from our Doorsteps to the Ends of the Earth, congregations in the Great River Region have sent mission groups to Central America, South America, India, and South Africa.

New Church Starts continue to move along, with a total of eight new congregations now functioning in Bentonville, Eureka Springs, Little Rock and Rogers, Arkansas; Clarksdale and Moss Point, Mississippi; and Shreveport and New Orleans, Louisiana. Of those starts four are Spanish/Bi-Lingual; two are predominantly African American, and two are predominantly Caucasian congregations. One start is being adopted into the active ministries of the “Mother Church” to become Spanish Church at Kings Highway in Shreveport.

Regional Staff remain directly involved in Justice Ministries through our active partnership with the Clinton Center for Leadership and Education and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Reverends Barbara Jones and Vivian Bryant have both participated in dialogue groups on gender and racial equality.

It is the goal of the Great River Region to utilize the remainder of 2008 to review and revise our structure and systems of operation to “best practices” for Non-Profit and Religious Organizations. We see one of our primary callings to be that of a new model and mode being Regional Church. To achieve that end, Reverend Barbara Jones is pursuing a PhD in Non-Profit Administration using the Regional design and structure as the primary project subject. We continue to evaluate committees structures and systems in that light.