

## REGIONAL REPORT

General Board

Business Item No. GB-08-0567

Title: Report of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in North Carolina

Origin: John M. Richardson, Regional Minister

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

Regional Staff:	James Bussell, Communications Coordinator (part-time)	M/W
	Angie Hackett, Office Staff (3/4 time)	F/W
	Sue Halford, Associate Regional Minister	F/W
	Robert Kennel, (part-time volunteer)	M/W
	Valerie Melvin, Associate Regional Minister (1/2 time)	F/A-A
	John M. Richardson, Regional Minister	M/W
	Amos Sykes, Interim Camp Manager	M/W

Number of Congregations: 317 (137 relate to the Christian Church in North Carolina, and approximately 180 relate to one of the seven Districts of the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ located in North Carolina and Virginia.)

Total Members: 22,355 (this does not include members of the 180 congregations of the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ)

States included in Region: North Carolina, South Carolina (2 congregations), and Virginia (13 congregations of the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ).

1. How our region fulfills the regions' primary purpose as stated in par. 20 of *The Design*.

(1) The region of North Carolina is actively engaged in teaching our youth. The primary place this ministry occurs is through our camp, conference and retreat ministries. We expanded our summer camp and conference program in the summer of 2007, adding horseback riding, kayaking and in 2008 forensics camps. We had just over 600 youth participate in 2007, more than ever before. Our youth retreats in the fall and winter of 2007-2008 have experienced excellent attendance as well. This ministry is enhanced by youth events held in cooperation with the general church as well as other regions in our fellowship cluster. Sue Halford is our associate minister who leads this ministry. An identified need in this area is to increase participation in the camp and conference ministry among our African-American youth.

Sue Halford and I work with the Disciples Men of our region. In many ways they function as a traditional Christian Men's Fellowship group, but with a few glimpses of creativity. For instance, the men from First Christian Church of Rocky Mount host a wonderful outreach event. Each fall, they invite men, women and youth from other congregations to participate in the gleaning of area sweet potato fields. Thousands of pounds of sweet potatoes are donated to local food banks and shelters.

The Disciples Women's ministry in our region has experienced a rebirth with the calling of Valerie Melvin to a staff position as associate regional minister. Valerie is leading the women in a renewed sense of purpose and mission that has generated excitement across the region. Since Valerie's arrival, women from the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ congregations are expressing increased interest in Disciples Women's ministries.

As an Elder of the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ and a member of St. Mark Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Valerie brings to the regional staff a stronger link in our relationship with the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ. Valerie served as the Secretary of the Goldsboro-Raleigh District of the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ for eight years, which is, functionally, a position of assistant to the bishop of that District. Under her leadership we hosted a breakfast meeting during Advent with the bishops of the Assemblies in North Carolina in

order to identify issues for further discussion. A subsequent meeting to begin addressing those issues will be scheduled this spring.

North Carolina is participating with the seven other regions in the Southeast Regional Fellowship in the process of calling a shared regional Reconciliation staff person to lead the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation ministries. When called, this staff person will work with our Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Commission in training and practice within our congregations and communities.

In conjunction with several Disciples congregations and congregations from other denominations, our Region is a sponsor in the Stop the Funeral Initiative in Goldsboro, NC. This community ministry grew out of a tragic incident where two gangs had a shoot out in the parking lot of a funeral home where the funeral of a member of one gang was to be held. A teenage girl was killed in the cross fire. The faith community, with several Disciples of Christ ministers in leadership, is now bringing together the church leaders, educational leaders, law enforcement, judicial systems, social agencies and others to work with gang members, offering to them options for a more peaceful way of life.

Our regional board is beginning to explore the possibility of a long-term prison ministry in our region. The appeal for us to consider this ministry came from Rodney Williams, a Disciples minister and a member of the Central Planning Committee for chaplaincy services in North Carolina prisons. Rodney serves as a chaplain in a high security state prison and pastors one of our congregations.

In 2007 our Leadership Commission hosted our initial Leadership Academy at Barton College. Participation by members of our local congregations was far beyond our expectation. Our keynote speaker Dick Hamm focused on issues of congregational transformation. He and several others led a variety of workshops. The next academy is being planned for 2009.

Several leaders from across our region actively participate in the ministries of the North Carolina Council of Churches. One of our ministers, Sèkinah Hamlin, serves as the current president of this strong ecumenical organization which addresses many political, social, and humanitarian issues from the perspective of our common faith communities.

We also participate in periodic dialogue gatherings of ministers from the United Church of Christ, the Alliance of Baptists, and the Disciples of Christ from across North Carolina.

An observation: these examples indicate that much of our energy is spent in doing ministry in the areas of nurturing faith and leadership, addressing racism, and sharing in ecumenical ministries. More is needed in each of them, but they are three important areas for regional ministry to be involved.

(2) We set a goal of establishing 50 new congregations in our region by 2020. We have established 12 new congregations to date. One of them, a Vietnamese congregation, is now affiliated with the Baptist Church. Our new congregation planting slowed down about two years ago. However, Bob Kennel, a volunteer staff member, has brought energy and endless enthusiasm to lead our efforts. We currently have several new starts and affiliations in process, including Hispanic and Filipino congregations. The potential of beginning several new Hispanic congregations is a significant step in our new church ministry, since North Carolina has one of the fastest growing Hispanic populations in the country.

We will also experience a significant population growth in military families over the next few years due to planned expansions at Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, NC and at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, NC. How can we improve our ministry to members of the military and their families? This is an important question for us to answer.

We have no ministry among the immigrant farm workers, although this is significant work force in our region. Currently we have one former military chaplain whose is working toward establishing this ministry for our region.

The regional staff has worked with several congregations in the Faithful Planning process. Some have found the process helpful in discovering a new vision and have planned new ministries. We plan to work with Church Extension's New Beginnings ministry beginning in the fall of 2008. Approximately one-third of our congregations

could benefit from this program. Considering that New Beginnings works with congregations in the late third quadrant and/or fourth quadrant of their life cycle, this is a sobering reality of what our region might look like in the future.

Working with congregations searching for ministers is a growing challenge. We consistently have approximately 10-15 percent of our congregations in the search process. The most difficult challenge is filling the empty positions in congregations who can only afford a part-time minister.

Our ministers find themselves in continuously increasing stressful situations. I found it particularly distressing to learn of two good ministers who submitted their resignations with no plans for what they were doing next. They were simply worn out. Where we will find sufficiently trained ministers and how we will care for them in is huge challenge that we must address.

## 2. Highlights and/or challenges in our region since last report.

Some of the highlights of our region are: 1) the celebration surrounding the calling of Valerie Melvin and the gifts she brings to our regional staff; 2) successfully working through a financial and communication crisis regarding the support and ministries at our regional camp facility; 3) the relationship between our region and Barton College, which has been renewed and strengthened under the leadership of president Norval Kneten; and 4) the growth we have experienced in participation in our camping ministry.

Some of the challenges in our region are: (1) the ongoing ambiguity of how we relate to the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ congregations and districts within our region; (2) how to transition regional staff from what they were called to do to that which is expected of them today; and (3) the majority of our congregations are located in communities where there is a decreasing population, and we do not have enough congregations in communities where the population is growing.

## 3. Current goals related to the mission, vision and priorities of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Our intent is to structure all our ministries around the priorities of establishing new congregations, transforming existing congregations, nurturing leadership and addressing is sin of racism. Sometimes we accomplish this, at others times we do not.

Our moderator-elect has recommended that we complete a revision of *The Design* of the Christian Church in North Carolina by the end of his term as moderator, bringing the document up to date with our functional processes and practices. We will also work toward establishing goals and priorities for the coming years during a planning process which is intended to help us focus our mission for the coming years.

## 4. Barriers we experience in our region in carrying out our ministry.

I do not think we experience any barriers that are unique to our region. The most challenging issue we face is the reality that most of our congregations are located in geographic areas that are different from the geographic areas where significant population growth is occurring in our region. Many of these congregations do not appreciate the need to establish new congregations in areas of population growth.

## 5. Financial information.

We have an independent audit conducted by a CPA firm each year. A copy of the latest audit of fiscal year October 1, 2006- September 30, 2007 has been sent to the Administrative Committee of the General Board.