

Title: Report of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Pennsylvania

Origin: W. Darwin Collins, Regional Minister and President

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

Regional Staff:

W. Darwin Collins	Regional Minister	M
Christine Johns	Administrative Assistant	F
Jean Leeper	Bookkeeper	F (1/3 time)
Ruben Burgos	Hispanic Ministry Associate	M (1/8 time)
Greg Keefer	Laurelview Camp Manager	M (1/4 time)
John Owen	Outdoor Ministry	M (1/8 time)
Melissa Yusenski	Outdoor Ministry	F (1/8 time)

Number of Congregations: 74 congregations with 16 in formation

Total Membership: 12,710 (total) 6,851 (participating)

States included: Pennsylvania, one congregation in Maryland
and seven congregations in southern New Jersey

1. How has your region fulfilled the regions' primary purpose in paragraph 20 of the Design?

...to extend the ministry of Christ in mission, teaching, witness and service among the people and social structures of the region.

The Pennsylvania Region maintains an active ministry presence throughout the Region through our financial and leadership efforts through four ecumenical agencies: The Pennsylvania Council of Churches, The Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia, The Christian Associates of Southwestern Pennsylvania and the Northeastern Pennsylvania Christian Forum. Through these agencies Disciples share in hands-on mission of summer chaplaincy at state parks, trucker ministries on the interstates, ecumenical dialogues, natural disaster response, communities against violence, advocacy efforts in our state legislature, prison and institutional chaplaincies, cable television programming, and ecumenical worship in several communities each year. In my teaching role I share in two interfaith dialogues with the Jewish and Muslim communities in Pittsburgh and Harrisburg.

As a Regional church we maintain summer outdoor ministries for some 240 campers last summer. Nearly one-third of our camp census was un-churched young people from the Pennsylvania communities served by our congregations.

Five of our Pennsylvania clergy are serving as chaplains in institutional settings extending the mission of Christ into our communities.

...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 of the whole church.

The Region offers continuing care of our clergy through the Commission on Ministry and the Regional Minister. We offer an annual clergy retreat for three days in February. This year's retreat was attended by 68 of our clergy and spouses. Special emergency funds and counseling are available to pastors in need. Presently three pastors are working with the Region in developing plans for sabbaticals. The Commission on Ministry offers workshops for

continuing education. At the June Regional Assembly there will four workshops specifically designed for clergy. I hold cluster gatherings with clergy to listen to issues and concerns and encourage more frequent gatherings of clergy for support and nurture. We have a support group in place for clergy in their first pastorate. It is led by Dr. Bruce Epperly from the Lancaster Theological Seminary and provides spiritual and practical assistance as well as community for these new pastors.

In addition, the Region provides the nurture and administrative support for the Commission on Ministry in regards to ordinations and licensing for ministry. This, ministry in partnership with our congregations, provides the foundation for our ministerial leadership into the future. In 2007, we sponsored two ordinations and five additional licensed ministers. At present our Commission oversees the standing of 108 clergy and some 42 pastors under care.

The Region offers numerous ministries to our congregations. Perhaps most visible and appreciated is the Search and Call process. I am presently working with six congregations seeking a new pastor. This requires both formal meetings and frequent telephone communications as this process unfolds. Regrettably another frequently needed service is in the area of conflict resolution or intervention. At any one time there are usually several congregations in anxiety over conflict with the pastor or with one another. I employ several of our non-congregational clergy to act as conflict specialists to intervene and seek to bring some clarity and direction toward resolution. We utilize the two processes of Bridgebuilders and Healthy Congregations.

I also lead workshops for board members, elders and diaconate. This provides practical help to these congregational leaders, but enhances my relationship and that of the congregation with the region as well. I am frequently in the pulpit of our congregations...preaching for congregational anniversaries, stewardship emphasis, and fill-in for vacationing pastors, installations, etc.

Our Disciples Women's Ministry retreats and workshops unite our regional women for support, planning and ministry. Our youth retreats and summer camps provide a special ministry across our region. In June (20-22) the region will gather in Assembly at the California University of Pennsylvania providing our members and congregations with the opportunities of shared worship, learning and community building. Dr. Sharon Watkins and Dr. Huberto Pimentel will be our featured speakers.

We also sustain an active ministry to address the mission priorities of our 2020 Vision. The Region sustains a supportive relationship with 16 new congregations (in formation). We sponsor two licensed ministry training schools—one at the Christian Church of Wilkinsburg in Pittsburgh and the other, the Christian Ministry Leadership Development School in Philadelphia. This latter ministry is primarily for our new Haitian pastors in the regions of Pennsylvania, Northeast and Canada.

2. What are some particular highlights or challenges of ministry in your region since your last General Board report?

Our primary challenge continues to be the lack of financial resources to meet the demands of our mission in supporting our congregations as they are strengthened for mission. With the continuing rise of new congregations seeking counsel and nurture within this new denominational family and the struggle of many existing congregations to be transformed for mission, our, or should I say as the sole ministry staff, I cannot keep up with the requests for assistance. We have tried through the use of volunteer transformation coaches and volunteer covenant teams to address these needs, but just the initial assessment and organization required is overwhelming for a single ministry staff person relating to 74 congregations.

The second challenge is the emotionally wrenching decision before our Regional Board on April 5 to put one of our two campsites up for sale. Diminishing attendance and huge deferred maintenance issues have necessitated this decision. Although it is inevitable, the decision has caused feelings of abandonment within the Region and a questioning of our ongoing commitment to youth ministry. I will be able to bring the results of the Board's action to the General Board meeting.

3. What are your 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.

The Region established in 2004 the 2020 Vision as our regional mission goals. As our part we set the goal of establishing 20 new congregations. Thus far we have opened or affiliated with 16 new congregations. We set a goal of establishing a relationship toward transformation with all of our congregations. Thus far we have entered into covenant with 12 congregations. We established the goal of establishing a new Lay Leaders Institute for the training of licensed clergy and lay leaders. We have sponsored the establishment of two schools of either side of the region to accomplish this task. And our goals for anti-racism/pro-reconciliation were to require the anti-racism training for all Regional staff, boards, committees and clergy. This was achieved, but will now require continued vigilance for the ongoing training of new leaders. We also will be adopting a new direction for the congregational phase of the anti-racism initiative.

4. What barriers are you experiencing in carrying out your ministry?

The primary barrier to providing a more effective and faithful ministry with the Region is the lack of financial resources. We have come to rely upon more volunteers to accomplish what paid staff once directed. I deeply appreciate the work of our many volunteers, who give excellent service, but their time is limited and they cannot be as available as staff to all of our congregations.

A second barrier is also the source of a great joy, namely, the growing diversity within the Region. Our new congregations come from various cultural backgrounds, many speaking a language other than English. Our Anti-racism Team is assisting the Region and our structures to become more inclusive in all of our ministries, but that requires more time, resources and effort to be intentional. It is a barrier to greater community, but once we are able to break down those barriers of difference with greater knowledge and appreciation, we will become a far stronger and richer community.

My final comment is to give thanks for the concern and support offered by this General Board for the ministries of Pennsylvania and the whole church. I thank you for your time, your commitment and your dedication to God's calling.