

Reconciliation Commission report to the General Board, April 2008

Sandhya Jha – Co-Chair

David Bell – Co-Chair

If this past month's news cycle showed us in the Christian Church anything, it might have been these two things:

- 1) America has come a long way on issues of racial justice, but there are still (at least) two conversations going on in the country about race, and those conversations do not yet happen across racial divides.
- 2) America continues to fear the intersection of race, politics and religion.

No wonder. Those are scary or frustrating conversations as often as not. And that intersection is a tough intersection at which to live.

And yet, we do all live at that intersection. And we in the Christian Church continue to struggle to navigate that intersection, to have those conversations, so that we can be a whole people of God living out both God's love and God's justice.

Thank God we continue to struggle.

This was the Disciples' third year of transition and change regarding Reconciliation Mission. The office is financially more sustainable position than in the last three years. We are in a search process for Minister of Reconciliation. Additionally, the office has collaborated with others in faith to broaden connections and the influence of the work of reconciliation and anti-racism.

Last spring, following the end of all ministry positions within Reconciliation Mission (the church retained a 1/3-time administrative position, with Chandra Haskett graciously offering to continue working with Reconciliation while working 2/3 time with OGMP), the Administrative Committee and Reconciliation Commission called into being an **Evaluation Task Force** made up of people from General, regional and local expressions of the church, both supportive of and concerned with Reconciliation ministry in the Disciples. After extensive interviews and evaluation, the Task Force (headed by Dr. Tim Lee) offered a **resolution adopted by the General Assembly in Ft. Worth**. The resolution broadened Reconciliation's focus somewhat while remaining committed to the work of addressing the sin of systemic racism as an important issue for the church. It established a grant process for general ministries and partnering ministries in addition to continuing the congregational reconciliation grants provided by most regions, funded by Reconciliation Offering. It also established a process by which a Minister of Reconciliation would, over time, increasingly receive funding from Disciples Mission Fund so that the minister's salary would not be funded by a less-than-consistent offering.

The adoption of this resolution allowed the church to move forward with **hiring a Minister of Reconciliation**. The search committee, made of an even mix of Reconciliation Commission and Administrative Committee members, has met, made use of the Executive Search model, and will hopefully be interviewing final candidates for the position in May. Obviously, this minister will help reconciliation remain a central part of the identity of the church and undergird existing anti-racism teams in ways that the volunteers of the Commission cannot do fully. We are eager to move forward in this process for the life of the church. The exciting thing happening in the life of Reconciliation is the

partnering with the SERF cluster, which is hiring their own Minister of Reconciliation, who will work in direct partnership with the Reconciliation mission of the general church. We hope this model will inspire other creative ways of doing context-driven reconciliation ministry throughout the denomination.

In April of 2007, Reconciliation accepted an invitation from the Council on Christian Unity to meet with them, along with the office of Week of Compassion and the Office of General Minister and President to begin a conversation towards exploring new ways to coordinate our mission work. These initial **conversations with CCU, OGMP and WOC** led to a proposal that established a three-year period of exploration between the offices. During that time the committees of each of the four entities were trying a new approach to streamline their ministries of reconciliation, compassion, unity and justice with the goal of being more effective in mission. This conversation led to a second meeting in November. Conversations during the November meeting led the ministries to consider exploring the formation of a **Council on compassion, unity, reconciliation and justice (Council on CURJ)**. Though at this time the Council on CURJ is a “thought” that requires more assessment, it helps lay groundwork within the office of Reconciliation to seek out new opportunities and to approach its ministry holistically instead of in isolation. Opportunities such as considering an idea raised at the meeting that would lead to **moving the office of the new director of Reconciliation Mission to the ‘suite’ of offices where the Council on Christian Unity and Week of Compassion are now located** as a way to facilitate greater contact and collegially among the staff of these general ministries.

Another means of partnership and helping the church make connections about reconciliation and other forms of ministry is the other reconciliation resolution passed at General Assembly last year. **In 2008, Reconciliation Sunday and World Communion Sunday will be theologically linked in early October.** Thanks to the leadership of Council on Christian Unity and the involvement of Todd Adams to make sure we move forward, this year’s reconciliation offering materials will focus around the table as a place of unity connecting us across physical boundaries and also the racial divides we have created. It is exciting to open up opportunities for the many churches that only engage reconciliation or only engage World Communion Sunday so that they can begin to make the connections about the many manifestations of our ministry of wholeness.

During this difficult transition period for Reconciliation, the commission has kept moving forward with the work of a skeleton crew, mostly made up of people required to be there because of the position they hold in the general church (OGMP, NAPAD, Convocation, CPOHM). This spring, **the Commission has filled many vacant positions**, and those gathering in late April form a broad group from the wider church, representing the diversity of the church both racially and in terms of work within the church. This new energy paired with longstanding commitment bodes well for how Reconciliation may be increasingly relevant to the lived experience of other ministries in the church.

Despite being without staff in Indianapolis, the ministry of reconciliation continued in many exciting ways: our Core Organizer-Trainers offered anti-racism trainings in at least two parts of the country and for Church Extension as well as offering one to the staff of OGMP and the new Reconciliation Commission in late April. However, lack of staff has hampered our ability to support existing teams.

This is a time of frustration for those of us committed to helping the church claim Christ’s message of reconciliation as part of who we are. It is also a time of hope. Because we do live at the intersection, even if we don’t always like how that feels. And any struggle offers both frustration and hope. Praise God for the struggle, and praise God for the fruits of the struggle by and by.