

**Report on a Consultation:**  
***Becoming the Church God Wants Us To Be***

Prepared by Robert Welsh  
President, Council on Christian Unity  
April 12, 2008

A recent Consultation on “*Becoming a Multicultural and Inclusive Church*” held at the Fatima Retreat House in Indianapolis on March 27-29, 2008, called upon Disciples of Christ *to welcome diversity* as a strength to reach out in witness to our society and world; *to embrace difference* as a mark of our unity in Christ; and, *to become the church God wants us to be* as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and inclusive community that reflects Christ's love for all persons.

Thirty-five persons participated in the Consultation, including equal representation from each of our church's constituency groups – African American Disciples (the National Convocation); European-American (White) Disciples; Hispanic Disciples; and North American Pacific Asian Disciples (NAPAD) – along with two Haitian pastors from new congregation starts. The four major presenters were Carmelo Alvarez, Raymond Brown, Tim Lee, and Newell Williams. Bible studies and worship were led by Timothy James, Huberto Pimentel, Geunhee Yu, and Sharon Watkins. The agenda included times of presentation and discussion about the histories of each constituency group and their understandings on how each constituency views Christian unity for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This Consultation was convened by the Council on Christian Unity in partnership with the Disciples racial ethnic ministries (NAPAD, the National Convocation, and the Central Pastoral Office of Hispanic Ministries) and the General New Church Ministry Team.

The goals for the Consultation were to address the issue of becoming/being a multi-cultural and inclusive church; to help new church pastors and congregations have resources to understand our identity as Disciples of Christ today, especially as we claim to be a “movement for wholeness in a fragmented world”; and, to offer specific recommendations to the church to enable the Disciples to become a more multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and inclusive church.

At the closing session of the event, a draft report was developed that set forth a listing of convergences and recommendations from the Consultation participants regarding a future agenda marked by both accountability and hope. Some of the *major convergences* identified were:

- The Consultation affirmed that all share a deep love for the the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and all believe that Disciples are defined primarily by the congregational context.
- The participants affirmed that "God has already made us one, and thus we called to manifest God's vision of unity. Multiculturalism is a reality to be embraced."
- A first critical step identified for claiming our unity would be "to share our different stories, because we don't know each other's histories, and that holds us

back because we make assumptions in our ignorance. Disciples need to create one history that tells the whole story."

Some *key recommendations* included:

- The Consultation stated that, "While greater multicultural awareness, openness, and intentionality is beginning to happen within the general church structures, this has not yet impacted most congregations; we recommend that this conversation needs to permeate to congregational and regional expressions of our church's life."
- Prepare a "confession, statement of repentance, and proclamation" that brings together this consultation's vision for our church in the future as a truly multicultural and inclusive church.
- Decisions that affect constituency groups should be made by/with these ministries.
- We need a small group to be named to hold everyone here accountable for following through.

It was determined that a "mutual accountability team" from among the participants will be named to do the work of translating the suggestions into reality and action.

*Some personal reflections by consultation participants regarding the event:*

**Yowanda Bowens**, a seminarian at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, stated that, "What has inspired me in the consultation was the openness and honesty that was shared, prayed about and intentionality to make a difference and seek changes in self and others."

**Vy Nguyen**, a recent graduate from the University of Chicago Divinity School, shared, "We all want a church that is inclusive and multicultural, no doubt about it. But we have not taken the time to listen to the different stories from our ethnic brothers and sisters and how they have been shaped and filled with the Holy Spirit, and how their history is also a part of our history. This consultation was the beginning of just that—of listening and embracing each other's history in a way that is truly **inclusive!**"

**David Shirey**, a new church pastor in Phoenix, AZ, stated, "My being a part of our New Church efforts over the past six years has opened my eyes and heart to the new Pentecost with which the Spirit is blessing Disciples--diverse folks of many nations, races, and tongues witnessing together to the mighty works of God. My prayer is that we may truly become what we already are: *one* Church."

**Dan Henley**, pastor of a new church in Memphis, Tennessee, wrote, "I believe that the sky is the limit for what we can be and accomplish as a church family if we continue! This journey will take some time; however, I believe that the Lord has given us a blank sheet of paper and we can write our own story."

**Matt Harris**, Executive Director of Project IMPACT in Los Angeles, shared: “To be a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial church means we are intentional. It means we learn to settle our differences without breaking fellowship. It means that we lean together, hurt together, struggle together and overcome together ... like a symphony, we celebrate our differences and our coming together while looking to Jesus as our Conductor. It means we take the message of God's Saving Grace off the drawing board, out of the books and journals and resolutions and fashion it into a practical lifestyle - holding each other accountable until the message of Christ becomes *a way of life!*”