

1 **NO. 0923**

2  
3 **(OPERATIONAL BUSINESS ITEM)**

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5 **CALL FOR AN OPEN MEETING POLICY FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)**

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7 WHEREAS, in recent years, the General Board, the General Assembly, and leaders of the Christian  
8 Church (Disciples of Christ) have heard from Disciples throughout the church about the need for greater  
9 transparency and accountability and have acknowledged this need; and

10 WHEREAS, after the Chapter 11 bankruptcy of the National Benevolent Association — a general ministry  
11 of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) — the NBA Task Force appointed by the denomination’s  
12 General Board to review the bankruptcy called for “More frequent open and transparent  
13 communication among General Ministries, regions, and congregations” (NBA Task Force Report, May 8,  
14 2006, p. 9); and

15 WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a member of the National Council of Churches of  
16 Christ (NCCC) USA, whose General Assembly adopted in 1990 an open meeting policy for its General  
17 Assembly, committees, and subcommittees, and is in a process of revising said policy; and

18 WHEREAS, mainline denominations and ecumenical partners including the Evangelical Lutheran Church  
19 in America, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Episcopal Church in America, and the United Methodist  
20 Church have similar open meeting policies; and

21 WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is organized on many democratic principles, and  
22 democracy relies on free access to the workings of government and to information, so much so that the  
23 federal government, as well as states and municipalities, have established “Sunshine Laws” and open  
24 meeting legislation that entitles the public and the press to attend government meetings and to obtain  
25 information about the operation of those entities; and

26 WHEREAS, the Disciples’ first moderator, Ronald E. Osborn, opposed the attempted closing of the 1969  
27 General Board meeting in the face of controversy, writing later in *The Disciple*, “The ugly alternative to  
28 openness is getting our information from a grapevine of gossip that keeps a favored few ‘in the know’  
29 and the vast majority in the dark”; and

30 WHEREAS, open and transparent communication has been essential to the building of trust and thereby  
31 essential to the health and faith of Christian communities for centuries, even as Jesus said in Luke 12:3,  
32 “there is nothing secret that will not become known.”;

33 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
34 meeting in Indianapolis in 2009 — in the spirit of openness and accountability — call for the  
35 establishment and implementation of an Open Meeting Policy for the General Assembly, including its  
36 General Board, Administrative Committee, and the task forces, advisory groups, standing committees,  
37 councils, and working groups that these elected bodies may form; and

38 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly, in making that call, direct the Moderator and the  
39 General Minister and President to work with the submitters of this resolution to convene a task force  
40 that would be accountable to the General Board to develop said Open Meeting Policy and return it to  
41 the General Assembly for approval in 2011; and

42 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that said task force develop and propose a policy according to the principles  
43 outlined herein and recommend a process for establishing and implementing the policy to the General  
44 Board in 2011, which would then forward the policy and recommendations to the General Assembly for  
45 approval in 2011; and

46 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that such a policy should be informed by the principles of open meeting  
47 policies established by other mainline denominations and the National Council of Churches, and by the  
48 basic premises of an open and democratic society, such as:

- 49 - "Open to the public" means that business is conducted in open session in a location that  
50 accommodates visitors and press, the location and date of meetings being made known prior to  
51 meetings, and material pertinent to the meeting being made available to visitors and press.  
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- 53 - Closed sessions should be permitted only when certain criteria are met, such as 1) the closed  
54 session is authorized by a vote of two-thirds of those present and eligible to vote; 2) the vote to  
55 authorize is taken during an open meeting and recorded in the minutes; 3) the reason for the  
56 closed session is stated publicly; 4) the closed session is limited to matters permitted to be  
57 exempt from an open meeting (suggested below); and 5) decisions made in closed session are  
58 publicly announced following the meeting.
- 59
- 60 - Subjects that may be considered in closed session should be limited to real estate matters;  
61 negotiations, when public announcements may be harmful to the negotiating process;  
62 personnel matters; pending or potential litigation or collective bargaining; deployment of  
63 security personnel or devices; presentations wherein real or apparent danger may jeopardize  
64 the life or liberty of the presenter; and the evaluation of clergy standing.

65 and;

66 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the policy that is established be interpreted liberally by the General  
67 Assembly and its legislative bodies, i.e. restraint being used in closing meetings, closing them as seldom  
68 as possible; and

69 FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the resulting policy be strongly recommended to all general and regional  
70 ministries, congregations and higher education institutions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),  
71 and to recognized and "other" organizations that affiliate with the denomination.

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Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) — Indianapolis, IN  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) — Tucson, AZ  
DisciplesWorld, Inc. — Indianapolis, IN