

General Board

Business Item # GB-09-0595

Title: REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA

Origin: John Mobley, Regional Minister

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

Regional Staff: Regional Minister - John Mobley (male)
Associate Regional Minister - Dale Braxton (male, African American)
*Minister of Anti-Racism and Reconciliation - Sèkinah Hamlin (female, African American)
*Shared with the seven other Regions in the Southeast Regional

Fellowship (SERF)
Women's Ministries Staff Person - Betty Wright (female)
Youth Ministries Staff Person - Nisha Warbington (female)
Director of Young Adult Ministries - Diane Wood (female)
Administrative Assistant/Office Manager - Susan Henderson (female)

Number of Congregations: 61 (including two congregation in formation)

Total members: 7,702

States included in Region: (2) - Alabama and the panhandle of Florida

This report to the General Board is in response to requests for information in three specific areas:

1. INFORMATION REGARDING HOW YOUR REGION HAS FULFILLED THE REGION'S PRIMARY PURPOSE AS STATED IN PARAGRAPH 20 OF *THE DESIGN*.

Our goals are to continue to fulfill the mission that is given to regions in the Design:

- To extend the ministry of Christ in mission, teaching, witness and service among the people and social structures of the Region; and,
 - 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 and witness of the whole church.

We strive to be faithful to the mandate given to Regions in the design by addressing specific priorities in our programming. These areas, as stated in an Regional Assembly-approved

“Statement of Mission Priorities,” include: Spiritual Growth and Faith Development, Ministerial Support, Leadership Development, Youth Ministries, Congregational Vitality, New Congregation Establishment, and Communication. A process is currently underway to evaluate these priorities and to adopt new priorities for the next decade.

In addition to the development of a wide variety of programs that help the Region fulfill its mandate, our dedicated and hard-working staff provide expertise, counsel, and encouragement to members, ministers, and congregations as they seek to be faithful to the mission God is giving them..

2. INFORMATION REGARDING WORK TOWARD THE FOUR MISSION PRIORITIES – NEW CHURCH, TRANSFORMATION, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, AND PRO-RECONCILIATION/ANTI-RACISM – AND TOWARD THE MISSION IMPERATIVE OF STRENGTHENING CONGREGATIONAL LIFE FOR OUR MISSION.

Since the General Board report of 2008 ...

...the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region has launched its second new Hispanic church start. This new church effort is in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. The Region has approved another Hispanic church start in the Birmingham area. A Project Advisory Team has been formed and is in the process of seeking a church planter to give leadership to the effort.

...the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region has sponsored a second major congregational transformation event. The first congregational transformation event was held on February 8-9, 2008, and drew more than 300 persons. Dr. Fred Craddock and Dr. Richard Hamm were the primary leaders. The event included worship, a variety of workshops, and resource tables. The second event was held on February 20-21, 2009, and featured Dr. Sharon Watkins and Dr. Rick Lowery as primary leaders. Once again approximately 300 persons were in attendance.

...the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region has sponsored leadership development retreats for youth, young adults, men, women, and senior adults. We have offered a ministers and mates retreat, and we have offered continuing education workshops for clergy. In partnership with the Tennessee Region, Disciples Home Missions, the Pension Fund, and the Oreon E. Scott Foundation, we have offered a ministry of Clergy Colleague Groups for 2009. The focus for these groups will be wellness and self-care. We continue to support a leadership training ministry for persons either in lay ministry or formal ministry roles. This ministry, called PEPP (People Energized, Prepared, and Productive) currently involves more than twenty students. Three persons graduated from PEPP in September of 2008, bringing the total number of graduates to 49.

...the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region called a Director of Young Adult Ministries, Rev. Diane Wood, to oversee Regional efforts to develop ministries to and with young adults. This staff addition reflects the Region’s commitment to finding new ways to develop leadership among young adults.

...the Alabama-Northwest Florida has celebrated the new ministry of Rev. Sèkinah Hamlin as the SERF Minister of Anti-Racism and Reconciliation. Rev. Hamlin has worked with the Region’s Anti-Racism Team and has visited each of the five Districts in the Region. The Team is developing a “True Community” guidebook for congregations wanting to be intentional about anti-racism/pro-reconciliation ministries.

The Region had a Regional Assembly in April, 2008, in Mobile, Alabama. The theme was “And You Shall Be My Witnesses.” Special guests included former moderator William Lee, Kay Northcutt, R. Wayne Calhoun, and Bob Shebeck. Plans are underway for the 2010 Regional Assembly, which will have “...to the Ends of the Earth” as its theme. Amy Gopp and Sandra Gourdet will be among the leaders in 2010.

3. INFORMATION RELATED TO CONGREGATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

- What we are currently doing**
- What resources have we found to be helpful**
- What we need to be more effective**

- What we are currently doing

As stated in a previous section of this report, the Region is putting a great amount of energy into Region-wide church transformation events, encouraging all of our congregations, in whatever state of health they are in, to become involved. We had more than 300 people in attendance at the February, 2008, event called “Can You Hear Me Now?” (Discerning God’s Call to Transformation). We had a similar number in February, 2009, for the second gathering, called “Matters of the Heart (God’s Transforming Love).” These large gatherings are an important time for persons from our congregations to gain a sense of being part of a movement toward transformation in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). They are provided with helpful resources and information at the workshops provided. They participate in the synergistic dynamics of being a part of a large gathering. Our committee which provides oversight to our congregation transformation efforts believes these gatherings provide the starting point. Then, as specific congregations choose to request an outside partner for their specific needs, we are in a position to provide that or direct them to places where they may find help. We have three persons within the Region who are trained as transformation coaches and ready to work with individual congregations and lay and/or clergy leaders.

The Region is also committed to being a Global Mission Region and encouraging our congregations to become Global Mission Congregations. Our goal is to be intentional in our mission efforts, both locally and around the globe, so that our identity becomes more mission-focused than institution-focused. No amount of balanced budgets or debt-free status will do us any good if we are not engaged in mission. Authentic transformation, we believe, comes through a courageous commitment to a mission that is consistent with the life and teachings of Christ.

- What resources have we found to be helpful

The Region has observed the efforts of two of our congregations that have found The Columbia Partnership to be helpful in their transformation process. Another four or five congregations have found that the Unbinding the Gospel series provides an excellent foundation for transformation efforts. Another couple of congregations have used Listening Conferences, sponsored by the Region, as a way to move ahead into transforming ministries. One congregation has found some success through applying the principles of Natural Church Development.

- What we need to be more effective

What we need to be more effective is prayer and encouragement. The tools and innovative ideas are readily available to our congregations. All we need is the work of the Spirit to create a readiness and willingness to move into the future faithfully, accepting the inevitable changes that will be required.

Recommended Action:

The General Board receives the report from the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region.