

**General Board****Business Item # GB-09-0602**Title: **Report of Christian Church in Georgia**Origin: **W. Ray Miles, Regional Minister**

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

**Regional Staff:** (Listing by name, with gender, whether ethnic minority)

Ray Miles, Regional Minister - male

Michael Weeks, Associate Regional Minister

&amp; Executive Director Camp Christian Conference Center - male

Betty Brewer-Calvert, Director of Women's Ministries (part time contracted) - female

Pam Mikovitz, Administrative Assistant – (part time) - female

Brooke Ostberg, Financial Administrator (part time contracted) - female

**Number of Congregations:** 65**Total Members:** 17,302 total, 12,110 participating, per 2008 Yearbook and Directory**States included in Region:** Georgia, and one congregation in Alabama

The mission statement for the Christian Church in Georgia states “*Our Mission is to be Christ's witness in the Georgia Region, growing, building and equipping vital faith communities*” In fulfilling this, the Region has focused on the equipping and nurturing of congregations, relating them to one another, and helping them be transformed towards the vision God has for them. The emphases of the Regional ministries have been directed towards consolidating the Region and fulfilling the Regional mission.

The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) reads “*The primary purpose of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in regions is twofold:*

*(1) to extend the ministry of Christ in mission, teaching, witness, and service among the people and social structures of the region;*

Towards this part of the purpose of regions, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Georgia has continued a partnership with the Christian College of Georgia for providing training and education for those seeking to enter licensed ministry. This also assists those seeking to deepen their leadership capacities. These courses of 18 contact hours are provided by qualified instructors and seek to cover the ministerial competencies outlined in current and contemplated Ministry documents. It is anticipated this will meet the requirements for commissioned ministry as it is phased in.

The Region continues a strong teaching component in camping and youth ministries. Responses and reflections indicate these are powerful educational and formative experiences in the lives of our church members. A variety of other workshops offered or facilitated by staff of the Region continue to emphasize our commitment to extending ministry.

Women's Ministries continue to do the work of teaching and of leading in service to the world. Through their retreats and workshops they train a cadre of women to help the church be transformed. Their work of education brings a more accurately informed leadership to congregations as they view world and societal issues.

*(2) 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.*

The Region continues work in the establishment of new congregations. Rather than initiating new congregations The Region works to support and assist new congregations which are being established. Our goal, in partnership with New Church Ministries, is to provide training and support for church planters, and

to encourage newly forming congregations to connect with those support networks. At present we have 2 new congregations directly relating to our New Church Task Force and are engaged in conversations with 3 other new congregations exploring Disciples of Christ affiliation. This task is hampered again by the severe financial restrictions we face.

The bulk of the Region's ministries are in nurturing existing congregations and helping them become what God has called them to be. Our camping and youth ministries are opportunities to nurture faith in our younger members and include an intentional component of leadership development. The Youth Advisory Commission is essentially a leadership development ministry. We are working to enrich the opportunities for youth sponsors and youth ministers.

Women's Ministries also focus a major portion of their efforts on leadership and faith development workshops offered in 6 different locations around the Region.

Significant work assisting congregations is done through ministerial transition and helping congregations and pastors discover the working relationships in which they live out God's call. This year we have moved from what seemed like an unending high number of ministerial transition to the point where we currently have only three congregations seeking new pastors.

Regional Staff serve as resources to congregations in conflict management, transformation, future visioning and planning, and resources, as well as training, etc. Pastoral care and support continue as an emphasis and priority for the Region. We meet with clergy individually and in cluster groupings, to support and offer a listening pastoral ear. This year saw the formation of one additional pastoral cluster meeting regularly. Again our partnership with Christian College of Georgia enables us to offer quality retreats and continuing education opportunities for our clergy. We continue to use electronic media more than print to share information and resources.

We have one Global Ministry Mission Interpreter trained and soon will have others. This year staff and members of the Region have participated in three People to People Pilgrimages which have enriched and deepened our understanding of the church overseas and how we might be true partners. Additionally we have had many congregations involved in hands on mission projects both in the United States and other countries.

Our promotion of DMF continues to be emphasizing and supporting the whole ministry of the Disciples of Christ. This past year saw an increased amount given to the work of the regional ministries although DMF giving slipped a little.

A major emphasis continues in connecting congregations and clergy with one another so we do not see ourselves as isolated. The tendency toward isolation is part of the culture which works counter to our attempts to promote a holistic view of church.

Challenges to the ministry continue. Our finances drain energies and limit what we can do. We end up spending excessive time on fundraising and financial administration instead of ministry touching people's lives. We also face a continuing challenge of trying to successfully draw all racial and ethnic aspects of the Region together into a sense of being one Region.

### **What is your Region currently doing to work towards the goal of transforming 1000 congregations by the year 2020?**

We hosted a church-wide event for transformation in January of 2009. Another emphasis is to link congregations intentionally working towards transformation, so they might be resources and support to each other. We are currently working to develop two different clusters of congregations working on this. One of those is intentionally ecumenical. Our Associate Regional Minister, Michael Weeks, during sabbatical, took training to be certified as a congregational coach and is working with one congregation as a coach in this process. Currently 5 congregations are intentionally identifying themselves as in a transformation process.

**Which church transformation resources have you found to be helpful in those efforts?**

Currently congregations are using the resources offered by the Columbia Partnership and those offered by the Center for Parish Development. Also one congregation is using the “Unbinding the Gospel” resources as a resource in their efforts. Additionally our People to People experiences, through Global Ministries, are directing us towards the spiritual basis for any transformation. Some congregations are pursuing an intentional spiritual deepening and development with their members, in order to spark transformation similar to the churches we have seen overseas.

**What else do you need to make your church transformation efforts more effective?**

At the present time the two areas we need more intentional work are in motivation towards transformation and overcoming the fear associated with transformation. If more congregations could launch on the spiritual journey then we would have more results but change is frightening to many in the church. The second area we face is the need for resources which we can devote to transformation in the form of grants and incentives to congregations to make the moves needed for change.

**Recommended Action:**

The General Board receives the report from the Georgia Region.