



**Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
General Board  
April 18-21, 2009**

**Annual Report  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in North Carolina  
John M. Richardson, Regional Minister**

*This report responds to the following three issues: 1) How our region fulfills the regions' primary purpose as stated in The Design; 2) What our region is doing in response to the four mission priorities; and 3) Comments on the work of congregational transformation.*

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in North Carolina (CCNC) fulfills the primary purpose of regions through assisting congregations with identifying and calling pastoral leadership, encouraging and nurturing individuals, who sense a call to the vocation of Christian ministry, and educating and training of licensed ministers. Our regional ministry nurtures faith and helps develop leadership skills among youth and young adults through camp, conference, retreat gatherings, and through our relationship with Barton College faculty and students, as well as with students in other colleges and universities in our region. Our camp and conference ministries have had over 500 youth participate each of the past two summers, which reflects the strength of our regional youth ministries.



**Bolenge Church, Democratic Republic of Congo**

In September 2008, I traveled with seven other regional ministers, along with Sandra Gourdet and Bob Shebeck from Global Ministries on a Global Mission Immersion Trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (RC). There we witnessed the faithful servant-leadership of the Reverend Bonanga, General Secretary and President of the Community of Disciples of Christ in the Congo (DRC) (see picture above), as he leads the long established Disciples community in his country, and the servant-leadership of the Reverend Kobele, General Secretary and President of the Disciples of Christ Church of the Republic of Congo—a church less than 15 years old. Our sister churches in both Congo nations face significant challenges due to the social, economic and political issues in their respective countries. Yet, they are each powerful witnesses to the gospel of Jesus the Christ.

Our region has been asked to consider becoming a partner in ministry with one of the places overseas where Disciples have a witness. I trust that will become a part of our region's ministry in the near future.

In 2007 we began a Regional Leadership Academy, in alternate years from our Regional Assembly. The first year over 300 individuals participated. This year the Academy will be on March 28. Similar workshops are held in conjunction with our Regional Assembly in intervening years. With Barton College, our region co-sponsors the Lay Academy, designed to enhance religious educational opportunities for adults in our congregations.

We also host a Minister's Institute each February and encourage laity and clergy participation in multiple opportunities at Christmount and Barton College. The year will complete the three year window our Regional Assembly requested all ministers with standing in CCNC participate in the Boundaries Workshop.

Our Disciples' Women ministries has experienced significant growth and increased enthusiasm over the past two years. We look forward to welcoming the Quadrennial to Greensboro, North Carolina in 2010.

On the other hand our Christian Men's Fellowship has not reflected any growth or significant increase in enthusiasm in recent years.

The CCNC has a strong partner with the North Carolina Council of Churches. The Council offers many opportunities for Disciples in North Carolina to extend our witness and serve among the people and social structures of our region. One of our North Carolina Disciples, the Reverend Sèkinah Hamlin, currently serves as president of the council. And the Reverend Dr. William Barber, another North Carolina Disciple, was recognized this year with the Faith Active in Public Life Award, for his leadership in addressing justice issues.

One significant loss this year was the death of the Reverend Brooke Schneitman. Brooke was a member of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Black Mountain, NC. She courageously battled through multiple surgeries, times of critical illness, and a year medical leave, to finally receive her Master of Divinity from Lexington Theological Seminary. Her ordination service was held in Black Mountain in September 2008 (see picture below). Brooke died a few months later. Her life and faith was an inspiration to many.



**Ordination Service of the Reverend Brooke Schneitman**

We have had 14 new church starts in our region since 2000. Most recently a new congregation led by a Filipino church planter is nesting in an established Disciples congregation in Raleigh. The First International Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is in the process of affiliating with the Disciples. The same church planter is exploring a second new church in Fayetteville, NC. We are excited about a Bible study beginning in April of this year in Wilmington. This is a seed being planted that will hopefully grow into a Hispanic new church start. A multi-ethnic new church effort is scheduled to begin later this year in Raleigh. Almost two-thirds of our congregations are currently located in areas where the population is decreasing. We need several more new congregations in the three metropolitan areas of our region—the Triangle, the Triad, and metro Charlotte.



**First International Christian Church, Raleigh, NC**

Thus far, transforming our existing congregations has been a congregation by congregation effort using Faithful Planning, through the ministry of intentional interims, and, in a few places, by the leadership of inspired congregants. In most cases there seems to be a need for significant “coaching.”

One of the inspiring stories of transformation in our region comes from First Christian Church, Charlotte, NC. In late November 2008 a member of a Jewish synagogue near First Christian Church was jogging by the congregation. He met the church's pastor in the church yard and challenged her to start a soup kitchen. He offered to be the cook for the first eight weeks. The congregation opened their soup kitchen at noon on Christmas Eve. The number of individuals served has steadily grown each Wednesday.

About the same time, a gentleman representing a Vietnamese Montagnard community in Charlotte called to ask if they might worship at First Christian Church—not as a separate congregation, but with the congregation at their regular Sunday service. In three months the average worship attendance has doubled (65 or more Montagnards worship with the congregation), new Sunday school classes have been formed, English as a second language is being taught, and a whole new understanding of what it means to be church has been born.

In addition to the Regional Leadership Academy and the Lay Academy, both mentioned above, leadership retreats are offered in local congregations. We have a strong leadership training ministry with our regional youth leadership council. And, we have experienced a renewed interest in Disciples attending Barton College, with a significant number of them considering a vocation in ministry.

During the past year we joined with our seven sister regions in the Southeast Regional Fellowship to call the Reverend Sèkinah Hamlin as Minister of Anti-Racism and Reconciliation. Rev. Hamlin is giving excellent leadership in this ministry. Our 2010 Regional Assembly will focus on the theme of reconciliation, with “teach-ins” being offered prior to the assembly to help congregations understand the importance to being an anti-racism/pro-reconciling church.

In addition to the above mentioned events and ministries related to congregational transformation, we are in the initial planning stages of hosting a regional transformational event. This effort is the result to members of two congregations that attended the Congregational Transformation event in Atlanta in early 2009. We are in conversation with staff at Church Extension about using the New Beginnings program in our region.

Finally, there was the question: “What else do you need to make your church transformation efforts more effective?” My answer is: more staff, more money and more time. In the absence of all three, I think we will rely on faith, partnerships and hard work.



**West Memorial Chapel at Camp Caroline**

**Recommended Action:**

The General Board receives the report from the North Carolina Region.