

**Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Transitional Interim Regional Minister and President
General Board Report April 2009**

This report starts by responding to question #3 from Dr. Sharon Watkins:

In response to interest expressed at the January College of Regional Ministers' meeting, as appropriate, please comment on the following questions:

- a) *What is your region currently doing to work toward the goal of transforming 1000 congregations by the year 2020?*
- b) *Which church transformation resources have you found to be helpful in those efforts?*
- c) *What else do you need to make your church transformation efforts more effective?*

The Northwest Regional Christian Church is committed to helping congregations have the conversations necessary and to developing the habits and practices required for faithful and effective ministry in the 21st Century.

Nearly forty percent of NW congregations are in intentional processes of change and transformation and these are primarily processes initiated by the region and the general church. These congregations are gaining clarity about their mission and vision and from that clarity making courageous decisions. It is not easy for churches that have become comfortable with "the way life is" to move into a risky, more forward leaning way of being church, but we are seeing this happen in these congregations in ways that are inspiring and hopeful.

The NWRCC has contributed staff, energy, focus and financial resources to these congregations. In addition, the region has cultivated an ethos of expectation that congregations would be "forward leaning" in seeking to understand God's call on their lives. We have been, through Bible Study, prayer, worship and conversation, very clear that the church does not exist for the comfort of its membership but in order to love the world that God so loves.

In addition, the region as a body has also been faithful in offering itself up for transformation. We are in the third year of our regional transformation process, "RISE" and continue to work with the Center for Parish Development as our partners in this process. One of the strengths of the work in the NW region has been that the region is engaging in the same kind of work in relation to understanding our call and role that we are asking congregations to engage in. This has meant that we are speaking the same language with one another, taking similar risks, and accompanying one another in both the joys and struggles of this kind of journey. This synergy is life giving and has begun to set a new table of conversation and expectation concerning what we will be about in the region.

The New Beginnings ministry of Church Extension has been extraordinarily helpful in working with small membership congregations, many of whom had not made significant decisions about the direction of their ministries in years. A number of congregations participating in that ministry made deeply faithful decisions to re-orient their resources and ministries. The staff of CE who are leading this ministry are doing a fantastic job. It must also be said that New Beginnings required a redistribution of regional energies (including the focus of staff and ministry leaders) in ways that were not predicted, but have been fruitful.

Our regional statement of vision and mission (see below) is giving direction to our regional life and at our May 16th Regional Assembly we will adopt a ministry plan with a 5-10 year horizon and a new regional organizational structure to give life to that ministry plan. At that assembly, the region also hopes to call a new regional minister to journey with them as they give their ministry a new shape and new life.

In terms of what else the region might need to make our church transformation efforts more effective – there may be a couple of things.

- One is a general church that in ever increasing ways takes on the task of transformation for itself so that the organizational structures of the general church are accompanying regions and congregations in this risky, hard, rewarding, chaotic and yet faithful journey.
- Two is some sort of general church support structure, that is dedicated to helping regions, units, and congregations work towards transformation. Ideally this would include a Minister of Transformation.

Questions 1 and 2 from Dr. Watkins: “Please include in your report information regarding how your region has fulfilled the regions’ primary purpose as stated in paragraph 20 of The Design.” And, “As appropriate, please comment on your work in regard to the four mission priorities of New Church, Transformation, Leadership Development and Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism and the mission imperative of strengthening congregational life for mission.”

Woven into all of this work related to transformation is the understanding of the primary purpose of the region in which we are called to both extend the ministry of Christ and help congregations do the same. Many of our congregations are at a place in their life where clarifying mission and identity is an absolute must if they are going to survive and thrive in this context. The NWRCC has taken that seriously enough to organize its primary ministry around helping congregations understand and name this context for ministry and then move forward in mission. We have also said that this is not work done in isolation from one another, but from a place of relationship and with other partners both inside and outside the region. The NWRCC has articulated an understanding of region as a **community of communities “doing together that which by God’s design cannot be done apart.”**

The NWRCC welcomed Ciudad de Dios as a congregation in formation and is currently working with five additional congregations in formation. We are motivated for engaging in this work by our commitment to the mission priority of the whole church to start new churches, by our understanding of the Great Commission, and by our affirmation that we need each other in all our diversity in order to be the church God calls us to be for this day. A huge challenge is the work of weaving a new kind of regional life with those congregations as part of the tapestry, this is a work in progress and an essential task as we lean into the future of God's church.

The transitional issues of the Office of Reconciliation Ministries in the general church in the past couple of years is echoed in our own pro-reconciling/anti-racism team. There has not been a clear focus for our regional work in this regard for a couple of years, nor has there been a strong regional team in place. Rev. April Johnson visited the NWRCC and met with the team in January 2009 and we hope to have more positive forward movement in the months ahead. That said, the work of the team has served as leaven in our region helping us move towards greater representation of persons of color in our regional structures and cultivating new lines of relationship with our ethnic congregations.

Strengthening our ties to the worldwide mission of the whole church, the NWRCC will become a Global Mission Region at our assembly in May 2009. We already have a strong common global ministry team that is a shared work of the NWRCC and our UCC conference and we have a partnership with the Presbyterian Church in South Korea. The people-to-people mission trips sponsored by Global Ministries for Regional Ministers have been fantastic in helping renew appreciation for and understanding of our shared work around the world.

There is a spirit of hope and expectation in the air in the NW region as the region prepares to welcome a new regional minister. Regional leadership has faithfully and effectively sought to address core challenges and embrace a strategy for mission and ministry that is forward leaning. Relationships across the region have been reinvigorated for sharing God's good news with a fresh voice.

With Much Hope,

Rebecca L. Hale
Transitional Interim Regional Minister and President

Recommended Action:

The General Board receives the report from the Northwest Region.

Mission & Vision

of the
Northwest Regional Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)

Mission

Called by God and sent by the Living Christ, we the Northwest Regional Christian Church intentionally engage with one another rejoicing in our diversity and shared gifts, deepening our spiritual life, building true community, acting courageously in ministry and mission, and sharing God's good news with a fresh voice and a new song. We seek to "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8)

Vision Statement

Called by God's grace to do together that which by God's design cannot be done apart, and led by the movement of the Spirit of God,
we proclaim the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
to be a community of communities,
valuing our strength in diversity,
honoring and acknowledging our various gifts,
offering them in faithfulness and service to the entire body.

Filled with the joy of God's presence with us
we share together in hospitality, worship and praise
enriching our lives with scripture and prayer
singing songs of hope, faith and celebration
joining in the gifts of loaf and cup
inviting our neighbors to experience God's abundance.

Created by God as part of the body of Christ in this place
we join together in ministry
strengthening our bond to one another and to God
honoring and supporting those who guide us in God's new doings.

Challenged by the Word of God to live into God's purpose and promise
we embrace ministries of justice and service
provoking one another to love and good deeds
bringing good news to the poor, freeing the oppressed,
healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked.

Inspired by the faith that moves mountains
we pour ourselves out into mission
caring for the earth and her creatures
listening anew for God's Word in each moment
living forward with courage and compassion.

The Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), with God's help, is living into God's purpose today, and trusting in the promise of God's tomorrow.

