

GENERAL BOARD

BUSINESS ITEM # GB-09-0623

TITLE: Report of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest

ORIGIN: The Rev. Dani Loving Cartwright, Regional Minister & President

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

Regional Staff:

Rev. Dani Loving Cartwright, Regional Minister & President, female, Caucasian
Andrea Faries Gantz, Administrative Assistant, female, Caucasian
Jane Musch, CPA, Regional Accountant, P/T, Contract
Rev. Jorge Torres, Director, Hispanics Ministries, male, Latino, P/T- volunteer
Nathan Higginbotham, Disciples’ Men’s Ministries, male, Caucasian, volunteer
(Brian Alexander “Zander” Gantz, Regional baby, will share our office space for 6 months! We are modeling what it is to be “family-friendly!”)

The CCSW functions through eight geographic areas and, though the Areas call their own Area ministers and work through their own boards/councils, these ministers also share ministry in the life of the Region:

Bluebonnet Area currently open
Central Area: Rev. Dr. Tony Salisbury, Area Minister, male, Caucasian
Coastal Plains Area: Rev. Herbert L. Lynskey, Area Minister, male, Caucasian
Hi-Plains Area: Rev. Charles “Chuck” Fisher, Area Minister, male, Caucasian
Rev. Ray Ramos, Associate Area Minister for Hispanic Ministries, Male, Hispanic
Rev. Paul Carruth, Associate Area Minister for Education & Emergent Ministries
Northeast Area: Rev. Coretha Loughridge, Area Minister, female, Caucasian
North Texas Area: Rev. Larry Ross, Area Minister, male, Caucasian
Rev. Irie Session, Associate Area Minister, female, African-American, P/T
Tres Rios Area: Rev. Charlotte Hoppe, Area Minister, female, Caucasian
Trinity-Brazos Area: Rev. Dr. Kenneth Hall, Area Minister, male, Jamaican
Bill Jeffreys, Area Youth Minister, male, Caucasian

Number of Congregations: 435 (+ or – , depending on the week!)

Total Participating Members: 53,749 (Participating, 2008 YearBook)

States Included in Region: Texas; New Mexico; a few congregations in the Oklahoma Panhandle; and one congregation in Liberal, Kansas

1. How has this region fulfilled its “primary purpose of: 1) extending the ministry of Christ in mission, teaching, witness, and service... and 2) establish, receive, and nurture congregations in the region...?”

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest is in the middle of a three-year long-range transformation process. We have engaged the expertise of The Center for Parish Development to assist us in this journey. The goal of the process is to enable us to support and encourage the ministries of pastors and congregations in the best way possible and to provide them strong interactive connections to the whole church. It is connecting us at the heart of who we are and what we are called to be and do as the church! This *New Day, New Direction* journey is grounded in Bible Study, prayer and conversation among congregations and colleagues around the Region. In 2008, we identified four strategic issues that we must address in moving forward: 1) Clarify the Region’s Vision, Purpose, Goals and Identity; 2) Claim the changing context for ministry and recognize the destabilizing effects of a changing culture; 3) Connectedness to one another; 4) Communication – which is central to our life together. These issues have informed the second phase of our journey in which we created a **Guiding Vision** for the Region. It is a “working document” that is used as the basis for our work as we continue to move into the future to which God calls us.

THE GUIDING VISION OF CCSW

We, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest,
are gathered by God to be a community of missional communities,
faithfully abiding in Christ as branches to a vine.

We demonstrate God’s sacrificial love for us by engaging one another in a sacrificial life together -- open, confessing, forgiving and loving relationships for the sake of God’s mission.

Compelled by our prayerful study of Scripture and urged by the Holy Spirit,
we are sent into our fragmented world to become and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Compelled by our prayerful study of Scripture and urged by the Holy Spirit,
we live out the rich diversity of humanity at the Lord’s Table by including all in worship, sharing power and accountability, and working for God’s mission of justice, peace, and equality.

Compelled by our prayerful study of Scripture and urged by the Holy Spirit,
we study together in search of deeper faith;
we do mission together to be a witness to the faith we share.

Compelled by our prayerful study of Scripture,
we recognize that we have not yet fulfilled our calling.



Urged by the Holy Spirit,
we continually seek direction and renewal,
humbly sharing with God's beloved world the gifts we have already
received: forgiveness, encouragement, and reconciliation.

From this guiding vision, a mission statement has come and is in its final editorial stages with a writing team. The mission statement and Key Result Areas will be circulated around the Region for feedback and conversation. In addition, we have begun the final phase of the journey which is Design & Implementation Phase. The Design happens in the work of four "teams": Formation, Common Life, Resources & Structure. Our plan is to have the work of the Design Teams shared and tested by the Regional Council in August followed by feedback loops around the whole Region. We anticipate transition planning and implementation to begin by the end of December 2009 and continue through 2010. This process is already enhancing ministry across the whole Region and we are excited by how God is leading us into the future!

2. In regard to the four mission priorities of the Christian Church, (New Church, Transformation, Leadership Development, and Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism) comment on your work.

As we do our work through eight geographic areas, we are discovering that there are possibilities for both new congregations and transformed congregations in each locale. Each area has 3-10 new congregations within its borders, and each is creatively discovering ways to nurture these congregations, ensuring that in their formative moments that they are born with Disciples DNA. We are delighted that most of these congregations are non-Anglo and are embracing the welcome of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Our whole Region is involved in Transformation, but congregations are individually working in several different and varied arenas to be transformed by God's Spirit. Many attended the G.P.S. event in Oklahoma City recently, some are working with *New Beginnings* out of Church Extension, some have worked with Spiritual Strategic Journey materials, and others are finding new and creative ways to breathe in God's Spirit in their life and work. Overall, there is a sense of calling to the future and newness in who we are as God's people with an incredible mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Leadership Development happens in the CCSW in many ways. Each of our geographic areas hosts a Leadership event once a year inviting from 100 to 400 people to be a part of a one-day experience and training. In addition, our Disciples Men's leadership team and our Disciples' Women's leadership team are constantly providing opportunities for leadership training, growth and development. Finally, our Christian Youth Leadership Seminar is offered each summer to high-school youth who feel called to Leadership in the life of the church. Leadership Training is provided, as well as an opportunity for some first-hand conversation and prayer and thinking about God's call on one's life.

Many of our current pastors have experienced an affirmation of God's call in this particular training environment!

At our most recent *New Day, New Direction* meeting, six persons from the Southwest Hispanic *Convencion* and six persons from Texas Christian Missionary Fellowship were included in the planning and conversation. Our future is multi-cultural and we are working intentionally to be certain that our planning for that future is not done in only an Anglo process, but is multi-cultural in our approach and in our work. Three areas are working to provide an Multi-cultural camping experience that helps high-school youth to talk about and learn from their own cultural bias and build relationships with persons whose cultural experience is different. That will happen in the summer of 2010.

3. What is your Region doing toward the goal of transforming 1000 congregation by the year 2020? What resources are you using?

Transformation is the mode of a majority of congregations in the CCSW right now. Piggy-backing on our Regional process is the intention of congregations being able to do some of their own transformational work.

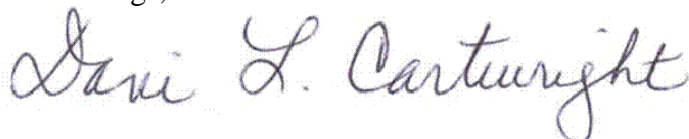
The resources of the Center for Parish Development, the resources of Alban Institute (particularly Holy Conversations by Alice Mann and Gil Rendle), and the G.P.S. resources have been helpful. The *New Beginnings* materials have helped some congregations to recognize the need for transformation, but has fallen short in helping folks know where to turn next if transformational change is needed.

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

As we move forward in our *New Day, New Direction* work – we know we are woefully understaffed to guide an in-depth transformation process AND carry on the ministries that congregations and pastors have come to expect. And yet, we are discovering new ways to accomplish ministry and the un-used “people resources” that are abundant in this Region in order to journey through this transition in the best possible ways. Congregations are finding ways to discover “resources” of people and people-power that they have not enjoyed before.....and it is like breathing new air in many places!

God continually calls us to be a church for today and for tomorrow – meeting our neighbor in mission, sharing together in worship and praise that finds its center at the Lord's Table, reaching out to those in need nearby and around the world, and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in creative and challenging ways! We are delighted to be your partners in this journey!

Blessings,



Dani Loving Cartwright
Regional Minister & President

P.S. We invite you to join us on Thursday night of the General Assembly as we share fellowship and conversation together!

Recommended Action:

The General Board receives the report from the Southwest Region.