

TITLE: Report on Consultation: Becoming a Multicultural and Inclusive Church

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. At the Consultation on “*Becoming a Multicultural and Inclusive Church*” held at the Fatima Retreat House in Indianapolis on March 27-29, 2008, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was called upon *to welcome diversity* as a strength to reach out in witness to our society and world; *to embrace difference* as a mark of our unity in Christ; and, *to become the church God wants us to be* as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and inclusive community that reflects Christ's love for all persons (*see “Report on a Consultation” to the 2008 General Board meeting, and the publication of the presentations and documents from the Consultation in the off-print of Call to Unity*).

Thirty-five persons participated in the Consultation, including equal representation from each of our church’s constituency groups – African American Disciples (National Convocation); European-American (White) Disciples; Hispanic Disciples; and North American Pacific Asian Disciples (NAPAD) – along with two Haitian pastors from new congregation starts. The four major presenters were Carmelo Alvarez, Raymond Brown, Tim Lee, and Newell Williams. Bible studies and worship were led by Timothy James, Huberto Pimentel, Geunhee Yu, and Sharon Watkins.

The goals for the Consultation were to address the issue of becoming/being a multi-cultural and inclusive church; to help new church pastors and congregations have resources to understand our identity as Disciples of Christ today, especially as we claim to be a “movement for wholeness in a fragmented world”; and, to offer specific recommendations to the church to enable the Disciples to become a more multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and inclusive church.

At the closing session of the Consultation, a document was approved that identified a listing of convergences and recommendations from the participants regarding a future agenda marked by both accountability and hope.

2. This report to the 2009 General Board represents the work of a “Mutual Accountability Team (MAT)” that met on December 16, 2008, to bring specific recommendations to the church for implementation of the proposals from the Consultation. Members of that MAT included Eric Brown, Elizabeth Carrasquillo, Sarasopa Enari, Timothy James, April Johnson, Linda McCrae, Rick Morse, Huberto Pimentel, Sharon Watkins, Robert Welsh, Geunhee Yu.

In going through the report from the Consultation, there were three fundamental affirmations that the Mutual Accountability Team identified at the heart of our work --

and we believe to be at the heart of the church's work in becoming a more multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic and inclusive church:

- a. The church must be willing to let people be who they are in the dialogue; being inclusive must honor the dignity of each person and culture as each contributes to the whole from their own self-understanding and bringing their own gifts.
- b. Decisions that affect any of the constituency groups should be made by and with the constituency groups involved.
- c. The church should continue its commitment to the anti-racism process as a priority.

3. Next steps and proposals for implementation: The "results" of our work can be stated in three recommended areas for action in the coming year:

Recommendation 1: *To develop a model program of conversation, study and action for use by congregations that promotes greater multicultural awareness, openness, and intentionality.*

a. Vision: Justice and diversity are enhanced and affirmed when all expressions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) live in a covenantal relationship that honors the involvement of congregations in helping to shape what it means to be a multi-cultural, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic and inclusive church.

b. Naming conditions behind this recommendation:

(1) As a multicultural church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) remains separate racially, ethnically and culturally in most of our Sunday worship experiences.

(2) Although there are congregations that desire to reach out across difference, many lack the programmatic resources, confidence and competencies to do so.

(3) We acknowledge that relationship is critical to overcoming barriers to inclusion and access.

c. Implementation: In order to claim our call from Christ for unity, the Mutual Accountability Team will develop a congregational model for outreach that will promote community and inclusion that is experiential, centered around the "table" and includes worship. MAT proposes to adapt a program similar to "Dinners for Eight" where congregations can intentionally invite a small, balanced group of dominant and multicultural participants to a conversation of sharing histories and a meal which will also include a time for shared worship. The purpose of this program is to foster relationship across difference.

d. MAT's involvement in this process: In order to promote this program, MAT will introduce it as an education workshop at Regional Assemblies, Areas and ultimately in congregations. The initial rollout of the program will be introduced at a dinner during the April 2009 meeting of the General Board. MAT will also collect the stories shared by Tim Lee, Ray Brown, Carmelo Alvarez and Newell Williams at the March 2008 Consultation into a video resource. The video will also be shared at the General Board meeting as an introduction to the conversation for that evening's dinner.

Recommendation 2: *To convene a conversation with Disciples young adults to solicit their perspectives and input to the question, “What does it mean to be a multi-cultural and inclusive church?”*

a. Vision: Justice and diversity are enhanced and affirmed when all expressions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) live in a covenantal relationship that honors the experiences of young adults as they engage in the reality of shaping a multicultural and inclusive church.

b. Naming conditions behind this recommendation:

- (1) MAT is challenging our whole church to become a more multi-cultural and inclusive church, and we understand that young adults are a critical voice to be listened to as they offer their unique experiences in this area;
- (2) MAT does not look to youth and young adults as “the future of the church,” but rather sees them as an integral part of the church for today; and,
- (3) MAT affirms the witness of young adults to the changing landscape of our nation and world and the hope they offer and represent at this critical moment in our life as a church and a nation.

c. Implementation: The Mutual Accountability Team will invite the Young Adult Commission of the church and the Higher Education and Leadership Ministries (HELM) to work in partnership with the National Convocation, NAPAD, the Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries, New Church Ministries and the Council on Christian Unity to design a conversation (perhaps a consultation similar to the one that took place last March) that will solicit the input and experience of young adults regarding what it means to be a multicultural and inclusive church in the 21st century.

d. MAT’s involvement in this process:

- (1) to offer those young adults who participated in the March 27-29 Consultation as resource persons to shape an invitation to the Young Adult Commission and to help in planning for this conversation (or consultation) among young adult leaders in the life of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ);
- (2) to request that there be young adult leaders named from and in partnership with the three constituency groups in the church (NAPAD, the Convocation and the CPOHM) to be included in this conversation process; and,
- (3) to help secure the financial resources that will be needed to enable this conversation/consultation to take place (funding to be sought from the CCU, the three constituency groups, the New Church Ministries program, and the Young Adult Commission).

Recommendation 3: *To initiate a churchwide process that will evaluate our requirements as a church for ministerial standing to make the process open and sensitive to persons experiencing a call to ministry from a diversity of cultural and racial backgrounds.*

a. Vision: Justice and diversity are enhanced and affirmed when all expressions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) live in a covenantal relationship that honors the cultural differences within the church in relation to its understandings and practices related to ministerial standing and ordination.

b. Naming conditions behind this recommendation: MAT is aware of a wide diversity of practices within different regions regarding its credentialing standards and requirements for persons coming from different cultures or nationalities. This is especially true for those pastors of new or affiliating congregations. These differences within Disciples Regions have included the following:

- Reading requirements (in English) of Western theology
- Psychological testing of people whose culture is suspect of this kind of testing
- Educational requirements for those whose cultures do not value higher education
- Bias for western theology over emerging Latino or Eastern theology.
- Testing that requires fees beyond the immigrant pastor's ability to pay
- These standards are not standard even within the boundaries of some Regions.
- For example, in the Northeast Region there are three different standards applied to individuals seeking ordination in different commissions on the ministry related different geographical areas.

While the MAT is not opposed to the creation of standards for ministry, these standards should be universal within our church system.

c. Implementation: MAT will invite the General Commission on Ministry (GCOM) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to engage in a conversation about this issue, with the hope that they might develop some common "guiding principles" for use in regional Commissions on the Ministry that offer standardization of the process of ordination that is more culturally, racially and ethnically sensitive to diversity within the life of our church.

d. MAT's involvement in the process;

- (1) to offer several members of MAT (e.g., Rick Morse, Huberto Pimentel, and Geunhee Yu) to meet with GCOM to help in identifying the issues and concerns within the current practices of different regional Commissions on the Ministry and to develop a strategy for moving to common, standardized principles to be shared with all regions; and,
- (2) to provide a sounding board to GCOM as it pursues its work on this task, offering feed-back and input – especially as the process moves to implementation by the regions.

Recommended action: the General Board receives this report and affirms the three recommendations for action and implementation in the coming year.