

General Board

Business Item No. GB-10-0655

Title: **REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN ALABAMA-NORTHWEST FLORIDA**

Origin: John Mobley, Regional Minister

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

Regional Staff: Regional Minister - John Mobley (male)
Associate Regional Minister - Dale Braxton (male, African American)
*Minister of Anti-Racism and Reconciliation - Sèkinah Hamlin (female, African American)
*Shared with the seven other Regions in the Southeast Regional Fellowship (SERF)
Women’s Ministries Staff Person - Betty Wright (female)
Youth Ministries Staff Person - Nisha Warbington (female)
Director of Young Adult Ministries - Diane Wood (female)
Administrative Assistant/Office Manager - Susan Henderson (female)

Number of Congregations: 61 (including two congregations in formation)

Total members: 7,744

States included in Region: (2) - Alabama and the panhandle of Florida

This report to the General Board is in response to the question, “How are you a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world?”

At a recent planning meeting involving leaders in the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region, participants were reminded of the 2007 Disciples identity statement “*We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.*” Participants were asked to name the marks of fragmentation that exist in the world. The following things were mentioned (in no particular order):

Homelessness, poverty, domestic abuse, violence, lack of trust, economic segregation, systemic/institutional racism, addictions, sexual immorality, elder abuse, bullying, war (internal), war (external), generational fragmentation, stress in prioritizing, misunderstanding/miscommunication, congregational conflict, power struggles, satisfaction with the status quo, greed-materialism, being too busy (not saying “no”), failure to listen to/hear God, unrealistic self-expectations, playing to others’ expectations, dishonesty, betrayal, fear-prejudice, secularism, disconnection

Participants were then asked to consider the ministries of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region and to name elements of the Region’s ministry that relate to the fragmentation that exists in the world. The following aspects of the Region’s ministry were named (in no particular order):

Encouraging prayer (public and private), emphasis on unity (all are One in Christ), ministries of compassion, promoting community that is counter-cultural, anti-racism/pro-reconciliation ministries, advocating true community (welcome and inclusion of all), counseling ministries, funding for those in need, stewardship education, modeling mutual accountability within the organization, education/training to guard relationships, promoting ethical behavior in ministers/congregations, encouraging meaningful worship and small group ministries for spiritual growth, offering time apart to focus on God, making facilities available for community ministries, communication, hands-on mission work, setting an example of healthy relationships and practices, faith in action, promoting diversity through new congregation establishment and intentional relationship-building, public policy involvement, advocacy for the poor and marginalized, speaking for those who lack power, proclaiming the good news and being the good news, generational affirmation/inclusion, love and encouragement, commitment to listening to one another and honoring diverse opinions, using rituals and traditions as vehicles for nurturing the spirit.

This exercise was an attempt to help Regional leadership see the Region's ministry within the larger context of the world and its fragmentation. Claiming to be a movement for wholeness, Disciples must evaluate their ministries in light of the world's need.

At the heart of the Region's commitment to being a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world is the commitment to healthy and strong congregations. Healthy and strong congregations have the ability to impact the communities where they exist so that healing and hope emerge from fragmentation and despair. The Region invests in healthy congregations by partnering with them in leadership development, assisting them in finding suitable ministerial leadership, promoting spiritual growth and vitality for their members through the Region's programs, encouraging spiritual and missional formation for children, youth, young adults, and older adults through camps, conference, retreats, workshops, and mission trips. Congregations benefit through the Region's formal training program which equips ministerial and lay leadership. The Region also helps its congregations pay attention to larger issues of fragmentation that exist far beyond their local communities. Encouraging congregations to look beyond themselves to give to other entities of the church and to support the needs of the world is a task of the Region which promotes healthy congregations.

Regional gatherings are opportunities for spiritual growth for all who participate. Such spiritual growth addresses personal and collective fragmentation directly. Regional gatherings are opportunities to promote unity, to affirm one another, and to challenge one another to greater faithfulness in the name of Christ.

The Region provides pastoral care to clergy and lay leaders. It partners with congregations to help them clarify and claim a mission for today that is relevant in the communities where they live. The Region encourages the establishment of new congregations and the nurturing of affiliating congregations so that they can develop the best practices for becoming healthy instruments of mission in their localities and far beyond. The Region is present with congregations when they veer off-track and get mired in polarization and conflict. Similarly, the Region administers processes of discipline with clergy, providing much-needed accountability so that those who lead congregations can be at their very best as they engage in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

In these ways, and many others, the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region engages in meaningful work that gives witness to our calling to be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

