

General Board

Business Item # GB-10-0661

Title: **Report of Christian Church in Georgia**

Origin: **W. Ray Miles, Regional Minister**

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

Regional Staff: (Listing by name, with gender, whether ethnic minority)

Ray Miles, Regional Minister - male

Michael Weeks, Executive Director Camp Christian Conference Center (1/2 time) - male

Betty Brewer-Calvert, Director of Women's Ministries (part time contracted) - female

Troy Tatum – Director for Regional Youth Ministry (part time contracted) - male

Pam Mikovitz, Administrative Assistant - (part time) - female

Brooke Ostberg, Financial Administrator (part time contracted) - female

Number of Congregations: 63 plus 3 congregations in formation and 3 other starts in process

Total Members: 17,844 total, 12,252 participating, per 2009 Yearbook and Directory

States included in Region: Georgia, and one congregation in Alabama

The mission statement for the Christian Church in Georgia states *“Our Mission is to be Christ's witness in the Georgia Region, growing, building and equipping vital faith communities”* In fulfilling this, the Region has focused on the equipping and nurturing of congregations, relating them to one another, and helping them be transformed towards the vision God has for them. The emphases of the Regional ministries have been directed towards consolidating the Region and fulfilling the Regional mission.

There continues a strong response to the call into ministry by people in Georgia congregations. Nurturing and guiding these people through the process towards ordination or license is a priority of the Region and takes time and energy. We are involved in reworking our documents both to bring them into current practice and also to fit them into the new documents passed by the General Assembly.

Towards one part of the purpose of regions, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Georgia has continued a partnership with the Christian College of Georgia for providing training and education for those seeking to enter licensed ministry. This also assists those seeking to deepen their leadership capacities. These courses of 18 contact hours are provided by qualified instructors and seek to cover the ministerial competencies outlined in current and contemplated Ministry documents. It is anticipated this will meet the requirements for commissioned ministry as it is phased in.

The Region continues a strong teaching component in camping and youth ministries. Responses and reflections indicate these are powerful educational and formative experiences in the lives of our church members.

Women's Ministries continue to do the work of teaching and of leading in service to the world. Through their retreats and workshops they train a cadre of women to help the church be transformed. This year they are intentionally working on a revisioning process and we anticipate it will assist the whole Region in the work of identifying the vision for the Regional church.

The bulk of the Region's ministries are in nurturing existing congregations and helping them become what God has called them to be. Our camping and youth ministries are opportunities to nurture faith in our younger members and include an intentional component of leadership development. The Youth Advisory Commission is essentially a leadership development ministry. We are working to enrich the opportunities for youth sponsors and youth ministers. We are intentionally expanding the opportunities for lay leadership in congregations to get training to assist in their ministry roles.

This year income for the ministries of the church declined. Both DMF support and designated giving dropped by between 8 and 10%. The financial restrictions imposed by the declining revenues forced us to cut back on staffing which had helped to facilitate the ministries of the Region.

The Associate Regional Minister position was eliminated and that person is now serving exclusively as the director of the camp ministry in the Region. That position is funded by the camp operation with subsidy from the Regional operating budget.

The Director of Women's ministries position had its funding source modified. The position is now no longer supported out of Disciple Mission Fund dollars and is limited in its hours and scope. It is funded by women's groups and individuals from around the Region as over and above their DMF giving.

In order to provide assistance to the regional youth ministries, which was formerly part of the Associate Regional Minister role, a part time director was contracted. Funding for the position comes from the regional operating budget and the registrations for Regional Youth Assembly.

These changes have meant changes in the kinds of ministry offered by regional staff and we are able to do less. The way regional ministry will eventually look is still in process. The differences are things not being done in some cases or are being picked up by volunteers, officers of the Region and the newly organized Regional Elders. Additionally, this staffing reduction means the ministries of the Region are under continual evaluation as to which ones fall into our mission and which are things we no longer can do.

Involvement in efforts to be a part of the movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

The partnership with the Christian College means that we are involved in exploration of distance learning and how that can and will be used in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Our volunteer webmaster has been involved with other institutions of education in the Church as well as with HELM in the conversations about implementing distance or web based learning, and eliminating duplication among regions. Part of this is the emphasis that we are one church not 33 different regional churches.

Another approach we have been dealing with has been to recognize the fragmentation of the Region. Most congregations have developed an isolated approach to ministry. The Region has implemented a Regional Elders program which is specifically aimed at renewing the sense of connectedness and covenant between congregations and each other, as well as between congregations and the larger church. The aim of the Regional Elders will be to help congregations feel cared for as part of the larger body and to help them discover ways they can be involved with each other in helping or providing help.

Another phase of movement for wholeness is our work with congregations coming from other denominational backgrounds who wish to become part of the Disciples. Our willingness to accept and include them has shown the hospitality we are trying to implement and encouraged them to be part of a larger and connected body rather than remaining independent non connected congregations. At the current time we have three situations, all non Anglo ethnicities, which are working to become recognized Disciple congregations

We continue to emphasize our connections with the church around the world. Again this year people from the Region participated in experiences visiting and discovering the church in other cultures through the People to People Pilgrimages. Individual congregations also participate in mission trips outside the Region and outside the country, which develop the connectedness that links us to wholeness in the world and the church

Another example of developing wholeness was the experiment of streaming the worship services at Regional Assembly live on our regional website. People who could not be present responded by indicating how grateful they were to be included in that way and not excluded by their inability to be physically present. Rather than fragment, we were able for a couple of hours to make the church more whole and inclusive.