

## **Michigan Regional Report**

### **Jon Lacey, Interim Regional Minister**

Many in our Region have faithfully relied upon the Psalms during these last years; wave after wave of quaking shocks have continued to rock our state. Our congregations have struggled to cope, even as many of them have seen tithes and offerings follow unemployment trends tanking among US states. There are many extraordinary stories of extra efforts by many to faithfully respond to the needs of local congregations, the Region, the Disciples Mission Fund, and our global partnerships. Many of our congregations have worked together to meet challenges and emergency needs. But I'd be remiss if I didn't signal to the General Board and the General church.

This will be my last report as Regional Minister. At this writing our RM Search Committee is moving ahead to recommend to the Board a candidate for selection and installation this Spring. The congregations are eagerly awaiting this Spring! As I write the snows are still falling. We're ready to celebrate Easter and New Life! We've designated our first Regional Elder—and will designate and install a number of others as we install a Regional Minister. The Region is ready to elect and install a Board which together with the new Regional Minister and Regional Elders will form a new team to lead the Region into its vision.

There are lots of challenges ahead. That we've made it this far has a lot to do with the legacy and support laid down by forebears in the Region. We've climbed a number of peaks and have more to climb. Among those:

- Developing regional/congregational stewardship and mutual support
  - Revitalizing congregational life, including conflict resolution and adherence to the guidelines for congregational behavior
  - Undergirding together congregations with extraordinary financial challenges
  - Finding new ways to undergird pastors together—a particular challenge is developing resources to justly support pastors of small, many of them ethnic, congregations
  - Undergirding two new congregational starts, one in Flint re-purposing a region-owned property and one our first Hispanic new church start in Holland/Wyoming, MI
- Before I end this let me name a particular heart-concern that I have for our clergy—which is symptomatic of the hardships our congregations and pastors are facing in the continuing recession. In some cases congregations have been forced by circumstances to make difficult financial choices—far too often the effects have been borne on the backs of our clergy. Cutbacks or non-payment of health care premiums and/or Pension Fund payments are far too common. Emergency requests to the Region are very frequent. And our resources to respond quite limited. (I want to give particular thanks to the Pension Fund for responses for emergency aid to pastors. You've been literal life savers for pastors and their families, yet that story often goes untold to preserve human dignity.) Thank you all for your prayers for our Region, for me as Regional Minister, and for our future leaders.