

General Board Report of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Mid-America

Submitted February 2, 2010 by Danny Stewart, Regional Minister

Ministry Leadership:

Elected Officers: Patricia Howard, Moderator; Don Carter, First Vice-Moderator (Regional Assembly); David Sallee, Second Vice-Moderator; (Structure and Function); Jack Richardson, Treasurer

Corporate: Danny Stewart, Regional Minister and President
Kris Tenny-Brittian, Vice-President
Jack Richardson, Treasurer
Janice Legg, Secretary

Appointed: Phil Smith, Nominating Committee
Kathy Brown, Budget Committee
(vacancy), Personnel Committee;
Larry Veatch, Rickman Mission Identification and Future Mission

Commissions: Leader Development: Sharon Wooldridge, Chair
Mission and Unity: Stacey Nicholas, Chair
Order of Ministry: Dennis Swearngin, Chair
Vital Church: Bill Howard, Chair

Area Ministers:

North East Area: Area Minister: Kris Tenny-Brittian
Associate for Youth: Martha Jolly
Administrative Assistant: Leslie Robb
North West Area: Area Minister: Bill Rose-Heim
Administrative Assistant: Jan Shrewsbury
Ozark Lakes Area: Area Minister: Mike Weinman
Administrative Assistant: Jeni Brown
South East Gateway Area: Area Minister: Penny Ross-Corona
Administrative Assistant: Susan Moore

Support Staff: Martha Baurichter, Administrative Assistant, Half-Time
Rebecca Bias, Financial Services
Dorothy Hudson, Administrative Assistant, Quarter-Time

Constituency: African American Convocation, Faye Vaughn, Contract Staff
Christian Regional Youth, Cynthia Farris, volunteer coordinator,
vacancy, contract staff
Women's Ministry, contract staff vacancy

Rickman: Volunteer Management Team: Larry Neill, Joyce Keitel,

John Blosser

Recognized Organizations: Missouri School of Religion, Fran Schnarre,
Director
Woodhaven, Mark Palmer, President
Ecumenical Organizations: Missouri Christian Leadership Forum

Review of Ministry for 2009:

Regional Ministry in 2009 has been within a context formed by three major elements. The *first element* has been in play for a number of years, but emerged as a major concern in 2006. For several years, the deficits in operational budgets at the Rickman Center had been growing. Rickman Center operations ended 2009 with a deficit of \$118,165. A committee appointed to determine the future of Rickman Center determined that the operation needed to change management models. An interim step was determined to be the elimination of full-time year-round staff. A volunteer Management Team was named. This team has an anticipation of a balanced budget this year. The appointed committee is continuing its work with the Kaleidoscope consulting firm to recommend a future management strategy and structure.

Gathered in Springfield, MO. in October, 2008 for the Regional Assembly, we were on the edge of an economic crisis greater than any other downturn in 75 years. This is *the second element* that has framed part of the context for ministry in this region in 2009. This part of our context has required leadership to focus on continuing to reach toward our mission while responding to needs to reduce expenditures in light of the economic crisis. The Executive Committee, Budget Committee, Staff and Council of Areas have responded to the economic crisis with serious, responsible actions, without panic and without undue delays. Budget plans and ministry expectations have been under constant review over the past 16 months (and will be for the foreseeable future).

At the 2008 Assembly, projected receipts for the Regional Operational Budget (not including the Rickman Center operations which are handled in a separate budget procedure) based on prior years were estimated at \$413,366 for 2009 and \$415,002 for 2010 with a projected balanced budget for expenditures. Shortly after the Assembly, the economic crisis hit Wall Street. Congregations faced losses of contributions. Outreach giving throughout the church and across the country has fallen precipitously. As receipts fell, the Budget and Executive Committees made rounds of budget cuts, including line item changes and reductions in salaries and wages. When these proved insufficient, more actions were taken. By the end of the year, receipts fell short of the anticipation by \$97,375. Budget reduction actions reduced the final total of expenditures (including events) by \$57,950 with additional staff reductions planned for implementation on Dec. 31, 2009. In a meeting on January 20, the Budget Committee recommended the proposed budget for 2010 that reduces expenditures to \$299,754 with reduced anticipated giving of \$280,290. That leaves an anticipated deficit of \$19,464 to be covered by reserves in the historical account. The Budget Committee also recommended the actions already approved by the Executive Committee to conduct an Annual Fund drive in 2010 to help raise additional funds for this and other necessary expenditures. These actions were all ratified by the Council of Areas on January 30.

These drastic measures have resulted in all employees of the region being contract or part-time employees except the Regional Minister. This dramatically impacts Regional Operations and makes the transformation journey more arduous than ever.

The third element is also compelling. This element is indicated by the rapid cultural changes engulfing the globe. Generational shifts are part of this picture with declining influence of the World War 1 generation and with the waning participation of Baby Boomers. The rise of younger leadership is just beginning to appear. Responding to this element of stress for change, the Regional Minister and Area Ministers met with consultant Richard Hamm in December, 2008 to discern directions for our common futures. The Regional Minister sent a letter to all congregations calling for a time of discernment of the path forward to God's future. This discernment would begin with Listening Conferences throughout the Region in each Area. These were conducted while the Regional Minister stepped aside for a Sabbatical. After the Listening Conferences, notes of the conferences were given to a Vision Team consisting of three persons selected from each Area, the Second Vice-Moderator, the Regional Minister and Richard Hamm, consultant. That Team met for two weekends in the summer and fall and transmitted information to the Council in the October, 2009 meeting. Insights and recommendations concerning evolving a "network" model for Regional ministry were passed on to the Council, which received the indications with enthusiasm and asked the Vision Team to continue to meet.

Ministry since the October, 2009 meeting

After the conclusion of the October, 2009 Council meeting, actions taken in the meeting were implemented. These actions included the elimination of the full-time, year-round positions at Rickman, reduction of administrative staff positions in the Regional Mission Center to half their previous status, additional spending reductions, instructions concerning the Transformation process, elimination of the Rickman Commission, assignment of the Rickman Management Team and a number of other actions.

All changes were implemented by December 31, 2009. The management Team at Rickman has been working steadily and all operations continue. The Regional Mission Center is operating with new hours of Mon-Thurs, 9-Noon and 1-3. Workers are present at other hours, but these are the hours we can cover the phones with the reduced support staff. The Messenger has been replaced with a Web-letter to be published regularly using Constant Contact Services. The Regional Minister is currently serving as editor and web-master. Periodic ministerial and leadership updates are also written by the Regional Minister.

All partnerships and commitments to ecumenical and General Church partners have continued. All commissions, committees, constituencies continue to be resourced. The context of economic stress and transformational stress has occasioned a period of adjustment that is on-going as we settle into new patterns and open ourselves to the calling of volunteers to assist in many operations. At present, a search process is underway for the Women's Ministry Coordinator and for CRY Coordinator. The process for discerning a region-wide youth ministry strategy continues with current emphasis on the coming summer camp program.

The Regional Minister has represented the Region at gatherings of the College of Regional Ministers, the General Board and Governance Review process, the General

Church Transformational Leadership Summit, Woodhaven Board, Division of Overseas Ministries/Common Global Missions, UCC Mid-South Conference, Missouri Christian Leadership Forum, MO Christians Against Racism and Poverty, and Impact Legislative Breakfast. The Regional Minister has worked with the Assembly Committee, Commission on the Order of Ministry, Vital Church Commission, Pro-Reconciliation-Anti-Racism Team, Mission and Ministry Commission preparations, Leadership Commission and Elders Institute, North West Area Board meeting, Rickman Management team, Executive and Budget Committees, Mid-America Foundation meeting and SEGA Board and Mega-Cluster. There have been numerous telephone conferences and pastoral visits about search and call, personal concerns for clergy and leaders. The Regional Minister has conducted meetings with members concerned about the actions at Rickman Center.

PROPOSED MINISTRY FOR 2010

The year ahead presents special problems and opportunities for our shared ministry. First is the expectation of continuity and maintenance. All commissions, committees and constituencies continue to operate and service valuable ministries. These represent the core values and shared issues of interest embodied in our structure and in Regional Assembly mandates. They represent: 1) a deep and abiding concern for the integrity and vitality of leaders—as clergy and as lay leaders in the congregation who need to be identified, nurtured, developed and held accountable; 2) a deep and abiding concern for the integrity and vitality of congregational ministries; 3) a deep and abiding concern for faith and leader development for youth; 4) a deep and abiding concern for Global mission and witness; 5) a deep and abiding concern for the unity of the Body of Christ and for representation in that unity; 6) a deep and abiding concern for equality and justice as God brings about reconciliation in a shattered world; and 7) a deep and abiding concern that we dwell with one another in connectivity and mutual passion for Christ.

The key phrase of our Vision/Mission/Identity statement that defines our work is: “We strive to connect, nurture, challenge, affirm and serve” all those seeking to live out the Gospel in three specific avenues. There are hundreds of people involved in Christ’s ministries throughout the geography for which we exercise ministerial responsibility. This brings us to the second arena of problems and opportunities in our plans for ministry: Regional transformation is as much about claiming that mission as it is about restructuring things to be more efficient or economical. *This means we will be stretched even more to keep the current structures and operations stable and reliable while reaching toward new ways of being and doing.*

The most daunting aspect of transformation is that we must realize that some parts of the current organizational structure will have to be adjusted, de-emphasized, or eliminated as we make room for new ministry efforts. Our Visioning Process will need to move into a second stage and beyond. Already, some new efforts have been identified. Those new efforts include: 1) the Vision/Structure and Function Process which will continue in the coming year; 2) the continued process for evolving a region-wide youth ministry strategy; 3) the development of a Regional Elders Ministry; 4) the Rickman Future process; 5) the Annual Fund drive mentioned earlier; 6) electronic communications assisting the development of connections; 7) development of volunteers in the Mission Center. These are major efforts suggested by the Vision Team, yet each

requires significant attention which will shift attention from the established ministry structure.

These are not the only new elements, but they are the most obvious at this time. The coming years will present us with choices about how to accomplish these many ministries in a world that has suddenly seemed to be living in the context of scarcity rather than plenty. All of these efforts and ministries are being played out under the dynamics of the three major stress elements of our current context. It may appear to be chaotic, but we thank God that we serve the One who brings forth order out of chaos, light out of darkness and new life where death seems to abound.

The primary discernment of the Vision Team thus far is the determination that our model of doing ministry has become stuck in a hub and spoke model that served us well for 50 years, but no longer fits who we need to be. A network model that emphasizes volunteer connections and responsibility with constant interactions that render the entire process of ministry to be characterized by unity and accountability is the direction in which we are headed. This means we are moving away from a corporate model for our identity and merging into a movement model for our identity. That is, interestingly, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.