

Title: Report of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ Northeastern Region

General Board Report

From: Mary Anne Glover

The Christian Church, Disciples of Christ Northeastern Region has organized its interim period around three areas: regional healing and reconciliation, reaffirming the Northeastern Region's covenant with Disciples of Christ history, identity, polity and covenant, and polity, and envisioning the future regional possibilities.

First, to name the reality that the Northeastern Region has been in a state of transitioning challenge for about twenty years is pivotal; the retirement or resignation of regional pastoral staff has allowed facets which were for years lingering unaddressed to surface. The major issues include:

1. the diverse nature of this region's constituency is not embraced as a gift but rather as an issue of "who will control and direct the region";
2. the Northeastern individualistic cultural dynamic, is reflected in the lack of network or fellowship, "community," between and among congregations and pastors (the Haitian fellowship is the most unified network), thus the Northeastern Region reflects the Northeastern's "neighborhood and cultural racism" facets;
3. Disciples of Christ identity and ecclesiological is not embraced or affirmed by key pastors; the most accepted form of being church is the more individualistic or independent "Baptist" model;
4. regional communication remains a challenge; most of the region desires immediate and up-to-date information, but there is a lack of continual commitment to communicate or leaders to make intra and inter communication happen;
5. the regional finances continue to be a challenge; however, the first Northeastern Regional Leadership Campaign was successful.
6. there is the request of La Convencion to be its on region;
7. exclusion or "acceptance" of G,L,B,T persons in regional leadership remains an issue.

The Northeastern Regional Commission on the Ministry and the Regional Church Board initiated a required, annual one day ministers training. Key lay leaders are invited to attend the training. To date, seventy five per cent of the ministers have completed the 2009 training which focused on the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ History, Polity and understanding of covenant. The facilitators for the 2009 training were Rev. Dr.'s Daisy Machado, Richard Sturm, and Darryl

Trimiew. The final 2009 “Grace” date is February 27, 2009; ministers who have not completed this training will lose standing until they complete the training. (It has been confirmed that there are a number of Disciples of Christ pastors who are serving congregations who have not ever had Disciples of Christ History and Polity). A one day training as orientation for new ministers and make up for persons who have missed the previous training will be offered each year. The 2010 training theme is Healing and Reconciliation; the facilitator for 2011 is the Rev. Dr. Willard Ashley; the 2011 theme is Anti-racism Pro-reconciliation.

This one day training also serves the dual purpose of initiating conversation among ministers and key lay leaders about possible networking and fellowship. During the trainings, there are conversations about initiating area gatherings and fellowships.

The first step in initiating regional healing and reconciliation was to name a Regional Discernment Ministry Team to discern God’s will in the matter of the “Proposal and Determination” dated April 5, 2009 from La Convencion and to make a recommendation to the Regional Board concerning its response to La Convencion’s request. The Proposal and Determination is La Convencion’s official request to separate from the Northeastern Region and to become their own region. After several start up delays, the Regional Discernment Ministry Team has meet at least twice monthly; the initial meetings were to develop its team identity and reviewing the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ identity and theology by reading several documents and to determine its process of discernment.

The Regional Discernment Ministry Team process has been to understand La Convencion’s official petition and its grievances with the region toward the aim of initiating healing and reconciliation between the Northeastern Region and La Convencion. The Regional Discernment Team decided to invite the leadership of La Convencion to a face-to-face meeting; a series of invitations and responses ensued, for at each point various issues, objections, and/or questions were raised by La Convencion, among them, most critically, the agenda and location of the meeting. The leaders of La Convencion have reiterated the firmness of their resolve to become a separate region and only reluctantly accepted to include the second item of the agenda: our desire to work toward healing and reconciliation. La Convencion also strongly objected to a Regional Executive Committee decision to have a meeting with all Hispanics in the region. La Convencion sent out a notice stating for La Convencion Latinos not to attend the December 5, 2009 meeting. The stated purpose of this December 5, 2009 called meeting was to initiate a Latino “in-house” healing and reconciliation process. (Note: La Convencion is not inclusive of all Latino congregations and Latino persons in the region). The Latinos who are not active in La Convencion continue to meet for support and fellowship.

Through many communications, some items were slowly and painfully negotiated, but complete agreement on the terms of a meeting was not achieved. The invitation to a meeting to be held on

December 13 at La Segunda (a Latino congregation which supports both the region and La Convencion) was not accepted in a timely fashion and without condition and the Regional Discernment Team was forced to cancel the meeting.

The Regional Discernment Ministry Team has recently reviewed its progress and discerned the Holy Spirit's guidance concerning the next steps of its process. In light of Disciples identity and the yearning for reconciliation if at all possible, the team decided to continue communications with La Convencion and to pursue scheduling a face-to-face meeting with them. After meeting with the leadership of La Convencion, the Regional Discernment Ministry Team has set a timeline for other steps that it deems important prior to being able to reach consensus on a recommendation to the Regional Board. Other intentions on the team's list are to have a conversation with Huberto Pimental, the National Hispanic Pastor, to hear from the Hispanic pastors and board chairs within the region, and clarify points of references with persons who were mentioned in La Convencion's report. The goal is to have a Northeastern Regional Board recommendation by May, and a Regional Church Board decision made by the beginning of June, 2010.

While all of these special meetings and activities have taken considerable regional time and energy, the regular facilitating and resourcing of congregations in their relationships and ministries with other congregations, the development and active participation of local leadership, and the spiritual transformation and faith sharing ministries in local communities have continued. The concept of equipping the people and congregations to live out their calling to be servants of Jesus Christ means the Regional Minister has intentionally shifted her ministry tasks from being totally responsible for making ministry happen in the Regional Church to being the equipper of leaders from within the Regional Church who very capably carry out the Regional Church's ministry.

In September, 2009, the Northeastern Region held its first bi-annual Northeastern Disciples Day. Several persons who have been in the Northeastern Region have stated that this was the first regional gathering in twenty years where there was not an open fight or argument. The attendance was over-flowing with participants from the Metro and Boston areas; it was a day focusing on regional healing and reconciliation, lay leader development and congregational resourcing. (It was noticeable that the La Convencion members were not present, and the Western area constituents' participation was nominal).

In the midst of all of the positive ministries, the regional ministries continue: all sections of the Regional Commission on the Ministry are now functioning with the three section chairpersons meeting monthly; CWF had its annual fall retreat; New Church Committee, Intercessory Prayer Team, and Trustees are functioning, the Anti-Racism Pro-Reconciliation Team is revived and

expanding its team membership, with the 2010 goal of training its team; the Communication Ministry starts and stops as does the other regional ministries.

The Regional Futuring (Possibilities) Ministry Team is now meeting to envision the possibilities of the Northeastern Region.

In spite of all the good, there is still an underlying spirit of divisiveness and masking which permeates most of the Regional Ministries. This is due partially as a result of this region's geography, but more to the inner woundedness of pastors (who refuse to become open to healing) and renew or initiate relationship with each other. There have been numerous intense congregational and pastoral emergencies (conflicts); the spirit of apathy and fighting seems to live and thrive within the Northeastern Region.

So what is the current summation for the Northeastern Region? In the Southeastern part of this country there is an old saying, "If the leadership would straighten up and fly right, then the flock would follow in flight." Working toward healing and reconciliation is hard work; listening, praying, conversing; it is daring to stay in relationships and rebuild relationships even in the midst of being wounded and misunderstood, and not understanding. God has and will bring unity out of chaos and confusion.

Regional Staff

Rev. Mary Anne Glover, Interim Regional Minister (African American female)

Socorro Dias, (Latino, female) Part-time

Number of Congregations 120 Active 50

Total Members 6,312

States included in the region: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey,
New York