

I See a Church . . .
An Invitation to a conversation on alignment for mission.

*. . . we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,
from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as
each part is working properly,
promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.
Eph. 4:15-16*

Dear Church,

Grace and peace to you in this most exciting time to be Disciples of Christ!

In April 2008, the General Board, in response to calls from congregations, initiated a process to help Disciples take the next steps in being a mission-focused church.¹ The initiative is for greater transparency in accomplishing our mission. It builds on nearly a decade of clarifying vision and mission priorities under 2020 Vision. It represents next steps following the 2005 downsizing of the General Board and the 2007 streamlining of general ministries through the merger of Church Finance Council into the General Assembly.

The General Board initiative is for a plan of mission alignment to be proposed to the General Assembly in 2009. There are three desired outcomes: 1) clarity about the general board's responsibility for the mission of the church, 2) progress in embracing growing racial/ethnic diversity in one church, 3) more effective equipping of congregations for mission through a focus on the four stated mission priorities: the formation of 1,000 new congregations, the transformation of 1,000 current congregations, forming new leaders and becoming a pro-reconciling/anti-racism church.

The plan will be developed through a process that will invite involvement from all expressions of the church.

The process is being led by the Mission Alignment Coordinating Council (MACC) appointed by Moderator Newell Williams and me at the request of the General Board. At its first meeting in June, the MACC worshipped, prayed, and studied scripture. They imagined a church fit and trim for mission. Guided by the three desired outcomes and seven principles of mission alignment (which can be found by visiting www.disciples.org/macc) the MACC has outlined a model for mission alignment that it now offers to the church as a basis for conversation over the course of this summer. This model is only the first stage in developing a proposal. Based on the input of the wider church, the process may result in a very different design going to General Assembly next year.

Specific conversations will be scheduled with the leadership of North American Pacific Asian Disciples, Hispanic Ministries, National Convocation, Disciples Home Mission, Higher Education and Leadership Ministries, Disciples Benevolent Services, and Church Extension. Other conversations will take place with college and university presidents, Disciples Care Network, and the College of Regional Ministers, as well as with other ministries who wish to give

¹ for more information please visit www.disciples.org/generalboard/documents/2008/08COMMUNIQUE.pdf

input. Individuals and congregations may offer input to Newell Williams at macc@ogmp.disciples.org

In September the MACC will convene again to process the feedback, ideas, suggestions, concerns, dreams, hopes, and prayerful responses of the various boards and the wider church. At that meeting, they will draft an initial proposal for the 2009 General Board and General Assembly.

Between September and November, the ministry boards will again be consulted for further input before the MACC moves toward a final recommendation for General Board review and General Assembly vote in 2009.

This conversation is one the Church has been asking for. The expected result is a general church organization that is more transparent to congregations in how mission is delivered. It anticipates better stewardship of mission funds as less is spent on organizational infrastructure and more on actual ministry. It imagines a church focused on mission.

In 2003, Rev. Bill Thomas, then music director for the General Assembly, wrote a song: *"I see a church with a vision. I see a church on a mission . . ."* The invitation is now to all of us to "see" that church in some detail, to imagine how we can be fit and effective in organizing our life to achieve the mission God has given us for this time and then to begin to create that church.

In so doing, may we "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ". . . May we be "joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly". . . May we promote "the body's growth in building itself up in love."

To God be the glory.

Sharon E. Watkins
General Minister and President