

Now is the time to act

BY SHARON E. WATKINS

The time has come to move from information gathering to action." This is the word I have received from church members and leaders over the three years that I have served as the Disciples' general minister and president.

In my January letter to the church, I said that the General Board had asked that we begin work to reduce our infrastructure in order to enhance our mission. I described how I was hearing from the church some common themes — we should organize our work according to our mission priorities, honor our imperative to strengthen congregational life for mission, increase our institutional flexibility so that resources follow the Spirit's leading edge of mission in our time, and live into our increasing diversity with grace and joy.

The Mission Alignment process, announced by the General Board in April, is designed to address institutional barriers to making these themes a reality. The process is based on our emerging clarity about our mission priorities: new church development, congregational transformation, nurture of leaders, and becoming a pro-reconciling/anti-racism church.

Now is the time to shape up the body to do the work of mission! We who claim Christian unity as our core need to embody ourselves the wholeness that we proclaim as God's desire for the world. We need to clarify what it means to live in covenant with one another. Most of all, we need to move forward in mission with new organizational transparency. Now is the time to shape up the corporate body we call the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Of course, this is part of an ongoing

ing process. Forty years ago, Disciples restructured our common life. It was a time to solidify practices that had developed over time. It was a time to shape the church's organizational life according to an emerging theology of church. Our new structure reflected that theology as much as it could at the time.

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Today, we can and must take it to the next level. We can be more fully one church, even amid the diversity of ministries we are called to. We can reallocate our financial and human resources to serve ministries that are evolving and shifting into new life and energy. It is time for us to organize ourselves more effectively in order to accomplish the ministry God has set before us. Here is some of what I hope we will accomplish through the process of Mission Alignment:

1. The church will be organized in order to fulfill its declared mission and mission priorities.

2. The theology implicit in *The Design* — our governing document — will provide a framework for structural realignment.

3. We will prioritize our call to equip congregations for ministry, even as we remain committed to our ecumenical and global partnerships throughout the world.

4. The General Board will fully embrace its responsibility for the mission of the church, making changes where necessary to be good stewards.

5. The church's growing ethnic, racial, and generational diversity will be honored and celebrated as we move to be more fully one church.

6. Regional and general ministries will recognize knowledge and expertise in congregations and regions.

7. Reducing organizational redundancies for the sake of good stewardship will be a priority.

8. We will reallocate resources to support the priorities and mission of the church.

In 1968, we acknowledged that we were "church," bound together by our love of God and of one another. In 2008, we are called to be good stewards of that church, renewing and reorganizing it as necessary for the glory of God, who has called us to be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. ❧

Sharon E. Watkins is general minister and president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

