



Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins

General Minister and President of the
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
in the United States and Canada



PRESS KIT



Watkins - Biography

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Sharon E. Watkins, Indianapolis, Ind.

Position:

General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada since Aug. 2005.

Previous Positions:

- 1997-2005 -- Senior Minister of Disciples Christian Church, Bartlesville, Okla.
- 1994-97 -- Director of Student Services, Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, Okla.
- 1993 -- Associate Vice President for University Relations, Phillips University, Enid, Okla.
- 1992 -- Assistant Vice President for Development, Phillips University, Enid, Okla.
- 1989-92 -- Director of Church Relations, Phillips University, Enid, Okla.
- 1985-89 -- Pastor, Boone Grove Christian Church, Boone Grove, Ind.
- 1984-85 -- Interim Coordinator, Downtown Cooperative Ministry (DCM), New Haven, Conn.
- 1982-84 -- Assistant Minister (part-time), Spring Glen Church (United Church of Christ), Hamden, Conn.
- 1984 -- Interim Minister, Spring Glen Church (United Church of Christ), Hamden, Conn.
- 1981-82 -- Student Associate, Downtown Cooperative Ministry, New Haven, Conn.
- 1979-80 -- Staff Associate, Africa Department, Division of Overseas Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- 1977-79 -- Director for Adult Education, Short-term missionary (DOM), Kinshasa, Zaire



Education:

- 1992-96 -- Doctor of Ministry, Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, Okla.
- 1980-84 -- Master of Divinity, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Conn.
- 1974-75 -- Bachelor of Arts, French and economics, Butler University, Indianapolis, Ind.
- 1972-74 -- Macalester College, St. Paul, Minn.
- 1974 -- Spring Semester, Avignon, France

Publications:

- 2007 -- "A Movement for Wholeness in a Fragmented World; Recasting the Historic Disciples Plea." -- October 2007 issue of "Call to Unity."
- 2000 -- "Women and Leadership in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)." Paper presented at the third Stone-Campbell Dialogue. Published in *Midstream*, October 2002
- 1994-97 -- Contributor, *Journal of Worship Resources*
- 1993 -- "Serving Potlucks and Pulpits," *The Disciple*, May 1993
- 1980 -- "Binding Our Hands," (filmstrip) with Lani Johnson, Office of Communication, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- 1979 -- "Zaire's Women," *The Disciple*, Vol. 7, No. 5, 1979

Personal:

Born: June 12, 1954

Married: The Rev. Dr. Richard H. (Rick) Lowery, Affiliated Professor of Hebrew Bible at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Okla., and Adjunct Professor of Hebrew Bible at Lexington Theological Seminary in Lexington, Ky.

Children: Bethany, December 19, 1983 and Christopher (Chris), March 19, 1986

For more information visit the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) website at www.disciples.org. To download photos: www.disciples.org/ogmp and click on "Dr. Watkins Biography".



Watkins - Biography

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins serves as General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. She is an inspirational preacher, teacher and facilitator who shares her considerable skills in a variety of religious and ecumenical settings.

As General Minister, she is general pastor of the 700,000-member denomination, responsible for representing the wholeness of the church, for reconciling differences, and for helping the church retain its clarity of mission and identity.

As General President, she is the chief executive officer for the denomination, responsible for overseeing the work of the church's various structures. She strives to help the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) remain faithful to God's calling and to do its work effectively and efficiently. She is serving a six-year term that extends through the 2011 General Assembly.

Dr. Watkins is regarded in the ecumenical world as "head of communion" and as the chief representative of the church in national and world ecumenical councils. Disciples often speak of the GMP as the Disciples' primary leader.

Dr. Watkins has an extensive background of service both in this country and abroad. She is a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches based in Geneva, and serves on the WCC's Permanent Committee for Consensus and Collaboration. In 2006, she was a representative at the World Council's General Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

She served for two years as a missionary in the Congo, working on adult literacy programs early in her professional career. In 2008, she returned to the Congo, renewing her ties with the Community of Disciples of Christ in Congo there. In 2007, she visited several Middle East countries, focusing specifically on the plight of Iraqi refugees.

She serves on the National Council of Church's governing board, based in New York City. Dr. Watkins also is a board member of Sojourners/Call to Renewal, a Washington, D.C. based group which seeks to build a movement that puts faith to work for justice. In 2009, she became the first woman to preach at the National Prayer Service as part of the inauguration activities for President Barack Obama.



She is former pastor of Disciples Christian Church in Bartlesville, Okla. where she served for eight years. In the academic world, she held positions as Director of Student Services at Phillips Theological Seminary in Oklahoma and Associate Vice-President for University Relations at Phillips University. She has been a member of the Church's General Board Task Force on Reconciliation Mission, Moderator of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Oklahoma, and part of the Stone-Campbell Dialogue Group, which looks, in part, at the traditions and history of the Disciples. She also served as pastor of Boone Grove Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Boone Grove, Ind., and Assistant Minister at Spring Glen Church (United Church of Christ) in Hamden, Conn.

Dr. Watkins has been engaged in a number of ecumenical discussions, conversations on stewardship, and has made presentations on worship, Bible study and women in the ministry. She also has served as an adjunct professor at Phillips Theological Seminary, teaching about pastoral vocation, history, theology and practices of worship as well as spiritual dimensions.

She holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from Phillips Theological Seminary, a Master of Divinity from the Yale Divinity School, and a Bachelor's Degree in French and Economics from Butler University. In 2007, she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Phillips Theological Seminary.



Who Are the Disciples?

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a community of about 700,000 Christians in 3,700 congregations in the United States and Canada. Two groups of frontier Christians came together in 1832 to form the foundation of today's Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). They shared the view that people should not be excluded from fellowship in the church because they didn't adhere to a particular human-made creed. They used to say there is "no creed but Christ." Today's Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) still thinks that way. We study the Bible to deepen our connection to God through Jesus Christ, and to discover what God wants us to do.

We believe that God is calling the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of the 21st century to be a faithful, growing church that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice. Our mission is to be and to share the good news of Jesus Christ, witnessing, serving and loving from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth. We are devoted to strengthening our congregations for this mission.

Many Disciples have conservative views. Many others have liberal views. But we share the belief that we are united in our faith that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Savior of the World.

Two really important things to Disciples are communion and baptism. We celebrate communion, or the Lord's Supper, each time we get together to praise God. We like it when there are a lot of different people at communion. We believe that Christ heals the pain of human separation around the communion table.

People who become Christians in a Disciples congregation do a couple of things. First, they say "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and I accept him as my personal Savior." Then, usually on another day, they are baptized - that is, they are dunked fully under water in a small pool right in the church. When they come up they are new people in Christ and their congregation pledges to support them and help them grow into a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ. People who have been baptized in another way in another Christian tradition are welcome. They don't have to be dunked to get in.

Disciples' congregations own their own property and have full control of their budgets and program. They decide whom to call as a pastor. Pastors may be men or women.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) does a lot to help people in need in North America and around the world. It also is very active in developing relationships and ministries that try to bring together Christians from a variety of traditions.



FACT SHEET

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Congregations: 3,714
Members: 691,190
Ministers: 7,010 approx. 3,399 clergy serving congregations

Leadership: General Minister & President
Rev. Sharon E. Watkins
Associate General Minister & Vice President
Rev. Todd A. Adams
Associate General Minister and Administrative Secretary for the National Convocation
Rev. Timothy M. James

Web: www.disciples.org e-mail: news@cm.disciples.org

Location: PO Box 1986 130 E. Washington St
Indianapolis, IN 46206-1986 Indianapolis, IN 46204-3645

ORIGINS:

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was born on the American frontier in the early 1800s as a movement opposing the rigid denominationalism imported from Europe and seeking Christian unity on a simple New Testament basis. Its founders were Alexander Campbell in the states of western Pennsylvania and Virginia, and Barton W. Stone in Kentucky. The basic principle was a fellowship built around the Lord's Table and tolerance of widely divergent viewpoints concerning "non-essentials." Counting the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ which gradually separated from the Disciples, the Stone-Campbell development represents an indigenous American religious movement second only to the Mormons in size. Both Campbell and Stone had been Presbyterians.

ORGANIZATION:

The Disciples have a history of congregational government although in 1968 they adopted a structure that sees the church in covenantal relationships in congregational, regional and general ministries. Each expression is considered equal rather than pyramidal and each has its protected rights and identified responsibilities. Each is in covenantal relation to the others and calls or dismisses its own staff and handles its own finance and property. The general ministry is called general rather than national because both the United States and Canada are included in the structure. There are 33 regions, many of them encompassing all of a single state.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

The representative body of the church meets biennially and may involve 6,000-10,000 persons, about half of them official voters from congregations and regions. All persons who register have the right to speak. The voters include all ministers, two lay persons from each congregation (more from larger congregations), regional representatives and the church's General Board. The General Board is a 75-voting-member-body with 50 ex officio non-voting members that meets annually. A 20-member Administrative Committee meets twice annually.

RACIAL/ETHNIC AND GEOGRAPHIC DATA:

Disciples of Christ membership includes approximately 40,000 African Americans and 440 predominantly African American congregations, about 7,500 Hispanics and 155 congregations, some 5,000 American Asians and 85 congregations, and smaller numbers of Native Americans. There are Disciples congregations in 46 states, the District of Columbia, and five Canadian provinces. The Greater Kansas City region has the highest concentration of Disciples. However, the Southwest region, which includes Texas and part of New Mexico, has the highest number of members and congregations. The next most populous regions are Indiana, Mid-America (which includes Missouri and part of Illinois), Ohio and Kentucky.



Vision - Mission - Identity

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

OUR VISION

To be a faithful, growing church, that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice. (Micah 6:8)

OUR MISSION

To be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from our doorsteps “to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

STATEMENT OF IDENTITY

We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.

OUR IMPERATIVE

To strengthen congregational life for this mission. (Ephesians 4:11-13, 15-16)

To accomplish this, we shall:

- Become the Good News:
 - * Nurturing faith
 - * Practicing and teaching the spiritual disciplines
 - * Fostering Disciples identity
 - * Renewing congregational life
 - * Developing leaders
- Share the Good News:
 - * Emphasizing ministry with children, youth, young adults and families
 - * Doing evangelism
 - * Establishing new congregations
 - * Creating ministries with older adults
- Serve from "our doorsteps to the ends of the earth":
 - * Engaging in ministries of reconciliation, compassion, unity and justice.

OUR COVENANT

In accepting our Vision, Mission and Imperative, we affirm our need to: be a pro-reconciliation/anti-racist church, strengthen relationships among all manifestations of the church, share mutually and more fully the stewardship of God’s gifts of our life in Christ, encourage our growing diversity within our church family and community, work with our many ecumenical and global partners to heal the brokenness of the body of Christ and the human community.



Preamble to The Design

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The following is the preamble to *The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. It's not a creed, nor is it meant to be a substitute for a creed or a test of fellowship of any sort. But many Disciples use it as a way of expressing their understanding of the faith.

- **As members of the Christian Church we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.**
- **In Christ's name and by his grace we accept our mission of witness and service to all people.**
- **We rejoice in God, maker of heaven and earth, and in the covenant of love which binds us to God and one another.**
- **Through baptism into Christ we enter into newness of life and are made one with the whole people of God.**
- **In the communion of the Holy Spirit we are joined together in discipleship and in obedience to Christ.**
- **At the table of the Lord we celebrate with thanksgiving the saving acts and presence of Christ.**
- **Within the universal church we receive the gift of ministry and the light of scripture.**
- **In the bonds of the Christian faith we yield ourselves to God that we may serve the One whose kingdom has no end. Blessing, glory and honor be to God forever. Amen.**

The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a document adopted in 1968, spells out how the church is organized. It recognizes three expressions of the church: congregations, regions and general units. The three live in covenant to carry on the ministry and mission of the church.