

Call to Unity

RESOURCING THE CHURCH FOR ECUMENICAL MINISTRY

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Council On
Christian Unity

Becoming a Multicultural and Inclusive Church

Becoming the Church God Wants Us to Be

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A recent Consultation on *Becoming a Multicultural and Inclusive Church* held at the Fatima Retreat House in Indianapolis on March 27-29, 2008, called upon Disciples of Christ to *welcome diversity* as a strength to reach out in witness to our society and world; to *embrace difference* as a mark of our unity in Christ; and, to *become the church God wants us to be* as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and inclusive community that reflects Christ's love for all persons.

Thirty-five persons participated in the Consultation, including equal representation from each of our church's constituency groups—African American Disciples (the National Convocation); European-American (White) Disciples; Hispanic Disciples; and North American Pacific Asian Disciples (NAPAD)—along with two Haitian pastors from new congregation starts. The four major presenters were Carmelo Alvarez, Raymond Brown, Tim Lee, and Newell Williams. Bible studies and worship were led by Timothy James, Huberto Pimentel, Geunhee Yu, and Sharon Watkins. The agenda included times of presentation and discussion about the histories of each constituency group and their understandings on how each constituency views Christian unity for the 21st century.

This Consultation was convened by the Council on Christian Unity in partnership with the Disciples racial ethnic ministries (NAPAD, the National Convocation, and the Central Pastoral Office of Hispanic Ministries) and the General New Church Ministry Team.

The goals for the Consultation were to address the

issue of becoming/being a multi-cultural and inclusive church; to help new church pastors and congregations have resources to understand our identity as Disciples of Christ today, especially as we claim to be a "movement for wholeness in a fragmented world"; and, to offer specific recommendations to the church to enable the Disciples to become a more multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and inclusive church.

At the closing session of the event, a draft report was developed that set forth a listing of convergences and recommendations from the Consultation participants regarding a future agenda marked by both accountability and hope. Some of the *major convergences* identified were:

1. The Consultation affirmed that all share a deep love for the the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and all believe that Disciples are defined primarily by the congregational context.
2. The participants affirmed that "God has already made us one, and thus we are called to manifest God's vision of unity. Multiculturalism is a reality to be embraced."
3. A first critical step identified for claiming our unity would be "to share our different stories, because we don't know each other's histories, and that holds us back because we make assumptions in our ignorance. Disciples need to create one history that tells the whole story."

Some *key recommendations* included:

1. The Consultation stated that "While greater multicultural awareness, openness, and

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intentionality is beginning to happen within the general church structures, this has not yet impacted most congregations; we recommend that this conversation needs to permeate to congregational and regional expressions of our church's life."

2. Prepare a "confession, statement of repentance, and proclamation" that brings together this consultation's vision for our church in the future as a truly multicultural and inclusive church.
3. Decisions that affect constituency groups should be made by/with these ministries.
4. We need a small group to be named to hold everyone here accountable for following through.

It was determined that a "mutual accountability team" from among the participants will be named to do the work of translating the suggestions into reality and action.

Some personal reflections by consultation participants regarding the event:

Yowanda Bowens, a seminarian at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, stated that, "What has inspired me in the consultation was the openness and honesty that was shared, prayed about and intentionality to make a difference and seek changes in self and others."

Vy Nguyen, a recent graduate from the University of Chicago Divinity School, shared, "We all want a church that is inclusive and multicultural, no doubt about it. But we have not taken the time to listen to the different stories from our ethnic brothers and

sisters and how they have been shaped and filled with the Holy Spirit, and how their history is also a part of our history. This consultation was the beginning of just that—of listening and embracing each other's history in a way that is truly *inclusive!*"

David Shirey, a new church pastor in Phoenix, Arizona, stated, "My being a part of our New Church efforts over the past six years has opened my eyes and heart to the new Pentecost with which the Spirit is blessing Disciples—diverse folks of many nations, races, and tongues witnessing together to the mighty works of God. My prayer is that we may truly become what we already are: *one Church.*"

Dan Henley, pastor of a new church in Memphis, Tennessee, wrote, "I believe that the sky is the limit for what we can be and accomplish as a church family if we continue! This journey will take some time; however, I believe that the Lord has given us a blank sheet of paper, and we can write our own story."

Matt Harris, Executive Director of Project IMPACT in Los Angeles, shared: "To be a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial church means we are intentional. It means we learn to settle our differences without breaking fellowship. It means that we lean together, hurt together, struggle together and overcome together . . . like a symphony, we celebrate our differences and our coming together while looking to Jesus as our Conductor. It means we take the message of God's Saving Grace off the drawing board, out of the books and journals and resolutions, and fashion it into a practical lifestyle—holding each other accountable until the message of Christ becomes *a way of life!*"

History and Development of the African American Disciples

AND HOW THIS HAS IMPACTED
THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

Raymond E. Brown

With excerpts from *Journey Toward Wholeness*
by Brenda M. Cardwell and William K. Fox, Sr.

African Americans were introduced to the Christian Church primarily as slaves enrolled by their masters as members of a particular congregation. However, there were a small number of Black Disciples, preachers and people who were free. The history of the African American church cannot be recovered accurately at this date, but from the scant fragmentary records available, a dim outline can be formed from what we have been able to discover. Black membership was in practically all of the first churches where the Disciples movement began. Therefore, one could say that the early Disciples church was a model church insofar as all people being under one shelter: the master, the freedman, and the slave all worshiped together.

Between 1830 and 1900 much work had been done culminating in support from the organized agencies of the Christian Church. After the Civil War, concern for the evangelization of Southern Blacks grew, and as Disciples saw other denominations evangelizing Blacks, they felt they should do as much. Disciples generally agreed during the 1870s that the best approach to evangelizing Blacks was to support Black preachers who would preach to the Black Community.

The American Christian Missionary Society cooperated in supporting African American evangelists. The Society employed Preston Taylor as National Evangelist. He held evangelistic meetings, established new congregations, recruited other evangelists, and gave Disciples a sense of belonging. As these evangelists organized new congregations, their success only underscored the

need for pastors trained in evangelism and in ministering to newly organized congregations.

The General Convention (white) in 1890 formed the Board of Negro Education and Evangelization with headquarters in Louisville. The Board appointed Clayton C. Smith as Field Secretary to give guidance to Black work. This operated until 1900 when the Christian Women's Board of Missions was asked by the Convention to assume responsibilities for the work among Black Disciples. At that time there were five schools for education of Blacks. There was a marked gain in the number of churches and members; from churches in five states to churches in fifteen states; from about 7,000 to approximately 20,000 members. When the CWBM took over the work in 1900, and for the next two decades, the

African American Church made its greatest progress.

In 1914 both the CWBM and the Bible School Dept. of the American Christian Missionary Society were asking for persons to serve as field workers among the women of the churches and the Bible Schools. In answer to the

request of the CWBM Miss Rosa Brown was chosen to work among women. Mr. P.H. Moss was selected to serve the Bible Schools beginning October 1. Within a short time after these two workers were placed on the field, African American work began to move forward everywhere.

Preston Taylor and Malcolm Ayers spoke often before the General Convention (White) asking for shared leadership with the White controlled missionary societies for the work among Blacks but with little results. The interest of Whites was not

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sustained at any given time which led to a certain resentment from Blacks.

Along with the growth in congregations and membership, there developed a desire by African American leaders to share in directing their own affairs, dissatisfaction with the type of education offered in schools, and the desire for a national fellowship like other church bodies were enjoying (Methodists and AMEZ).

By World War I, Black Disciples work and program seemed dormant. Much of the evangelical zeal and appeal of earlier days was missing. Leadership was not generally available when it was greatly needed; the best known and ablest Black Disciple leaders were growing older. Only one other school for Blacks had been established, this in a rural area of east Texas named Jarvis Christian after the donors of the land.

At this point there were approximately 600 congregations comprising some 48,000 members, representing four to five percent of the total Disciple membership. Recognizing that their participation in the larger program saved them from isolation, still there was a desire for a national organization.

As a result, in 1917 two calls went out to organize a national convention; Preston Taylor sent out a call from Nashville, Tennessee, for a meeting to be held there in September. William Alphin sent out a call for a meeting to be held in Kansas City in connection with the International Convention in October. The people rallied to the call of Preston Taylor and proceeded to organize a National Convention. Many of the White leaders were present and participated in the organization of this convention. Among them were: Mrs. Anna Atwater of Christian Women's Board of Missions; Mr. Robert M. Hopkins of the American Christian Missionary Society; Mr. Stephen J. Corey of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, and Mr. J. B. Lehman, Superintendent of African American Work.

Preston Taylor addressed the convention saying: "The White Church establishment has failed in their approach in developing Black leaders because of their lack of commitment." Rather than unsubstantiated accusations, he provided statistical data to prove this. He went on: "Blacks have been participants in the Disciples of Christ movement over 100 years, but have very little to show for it. Black congregations

number approximately 600, yet there is no mention of this in the latest Yearbook. Although there are six Disciples-related African American schools, at this time none offers higher education. Furthermore, it is impossible to produce first class leaders with third class methods." Taylor further said that this was why Blacks with a vested interest must organize for work. If the development of Black leaders did not become a major focus, then he viewed the outlook for them as a dim one. "It is foolish to continue saying that Blacks are not ready. For those who hold this position should ask the successful Methodists and Baptists if they are ready."

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Several were present for the Kansas City meeting and voted approval of the National Convention, which was organized in Nashville as an auxiliary of the International Convention.

The purpose of the National Convention was to cooperate in the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; to promote the causes of evangelism; to foster and maintain a program for Christian education, missions and benevolence among the Christian Churches of the brotherhood; to perform such general supervisory functions as the best interest and work...require; and to cooperate with the International Convention, the United Christian Missionary Society, Unified Promotion, and other brotherhood agencies and boards, to work with other religious movements for the furthering of the world program of the church, and to work with other religious movements chosen by the brotherhood.

To promote a closer spirit of cooperation and fellowship among our own churches.

To provide a larger opportunity for the development of leadership and responsibility for building the kingdom of God.

To provide a cooperative medium of self-expression and development that our best contribution might be made to the work of the church in the world.

To provide a medium through which we can interpret the needs and concerns of the people.

To provide a channel for integrating the members of our churches into the total life of the brotherhood.

The work among the congregations was carried out by J.B. Lehman, Rosa Grubbs, P.H. Moss and Deetsey Blackburn. This staff expanded with the addition of William Alphin and Vance Smith.

But in 1935 Robert Hayes Peoples became the first African American secretary of All African American work. In this capacity he touched and guided many young men and women into Christian Church leadership. Soon after, Peoples was joined by Carnella Jamison (now Barnes) as the field secretary for women's work.

In 1943 R.H. Peoples resigned and recommended the following:

~That the United Christian Missionary Society and other cooperating boards (such as Pension Fund, Church Extension, Higher Education and Christian Board of Publication) employ a staff adequate to help plan and administer the program work among Negro churches and education institutions. He recommended as a minimum: a general worker, a women's worker, a young people's worker, a children's worker, an evangelist and a promotional worker.

This report was referred to a Long Range Program Committee chaired by S.S. Myers. Following the referral were meetings and conferences with Dr. Robert H. Hopkins, President of UCMS, Mr. W.M. Wickizer, Secretary of the Department of Home Missions, Mr. George O. Taylor, and Mr. Virgil E. Havens. As a result of these conferences, we submit the following report.

I. That the National Board of this convention take over such functions of the Negro Work now being done by the UCMS and other brotherhood agencies as may be agreed upon by the National Board, UCMS and such "other agencies." That the Board employ its own staff and establish its own headquarters office, location to be determined by the National Board. That the staff direct the programs of Evangelism, Religious Education, Church Development, Pension Fund, Benevolence, Scholarships, Church Extension, Higher Education, Financial Resources, Enlistment of full-time workers and the Christian Plea.

2. That the constitution be amended to allow representation from UCMS and such other brotherhood agencies cooperating, membership on the National Board.

A search went out for what R.H. Peoples had termed "general worker to handle general administration and work with the ministers and church boards." In the meantime, C.L. Parks was employed in 1944 to do part of what R.H. Peoples had been doing.

Emmett J. Dickson, a Jarvis College faculty member in 1945, was eventually chosen to become the first (and only) executive secretary of the National Christian Missionary Convention. Carnella Jamison was already serving as national women's worker. Lorenzo Evans of Atlanta, Georgia came to the staff in 1946 as the director of Christian Education. In 1949 Charles H. Webb of Winston-Salem, N.C. made his first report as the new director of church development and evangelism. Ruth Ratten succeeded Carnella Jamison, and Alva Shackelford Brown succeeded Ruth Ratten.

National Headquarters were established in Indianapolis, and then in the Missions Building.

By 1947 the principal program and promotional areas were covered. A director of Religious Education who would also promote the interest of CBP and DHE. A director of Missionary Education and organizations and promotion of the NBA. A director of Church Development and Evangelism to promote Evangelism, the program of Church Extension, and Pension Fund.

The second phase of R.H. Peoples's vision had to do with Agency relations. To further facilitate this a commission was appointed which became the Merger of Program and Services Commission which approved and recommended to the two boards the following:

1. The three program staff of the National Christian Missionary Convention be transferred from the direct supervision of the NCMC to the UCMS and that those staff persons would maintain the same professional status and relationship as other staff members carrying similar portfolios.
2. The UCMS be requested to maintain in its employ a minimum of four staff on an executive level; (Includes the Executive Secretary)

3. The UCMS be requested to set up a staff committee including Black staff members to deal with problems that may arise in regard to program services growing out of Merger;
4. Black representatives selected as board members on the policy-making boards of all church agencies, especially the UCMS;
5. The Council of Agencies, in cooperation with NCMC, be asked to create an Interracial Commission for the purpose of furthering complete integration. (Approved by both parties in 1960 and started July 1, 1960).

In June, 1961 Willard Wickizer, the UMCS Executive Secretary of the Division of Church Life and Work, was pleased to report that since July 1, 1960, Emmett J. Dickson had been employed as national director of church relations on the staff of the Division of Church Life and Work. Lorenzo J. Evans had been appointed National Director of Field Services in the department of Christian Education, following the resignation of Anna Belle Jackson. Carrie Dee Hancock was doing interim service until Lois Mothershed would become full time on June 15, 1961. At that point, no one had been secured to fill the portfolio once carried by Charles Webb, Sr. John Compton had become the first Black trustee board member of UCMS and Emmett Dickson had been seated as a member of the UCMS cabinet. The merger of program and services was underway, but the Disciples of Christ, like everyone else in Christendom, were heading into rising winds of social and cultural change that would radically change the priorities of mission at home as well as the manner in which they were to be achieved. The mammoth march on Washington declared that more than one hundred years had passed, and yet Blacks were not free. The strivings of the nation to come to grips with the tremendous issues being raised by the Civil Rights movement, plus the struggle of the National and International Conventions to find their true calling as part of the body of Christ, provided a climate for Disciples to deal courageously with the race issue.

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It is understandable that against the backdrop of the turbulent social currents, the 1963 National Convention appointed a committee to develop a design for renewal and growth. The report of this committee outlined program goals and strategies in evangelism, church establishment and development, Christian education materials and methods, recruitment of ministers and state and national organizational relationships.

Out of the discussions of program and structure, which produced the Design for Renewal and Growth, interest was expressed for a merger of all National Convention structures. Thus, a Joint Committee on Merger and New Brotherhood Relations was formed in January 1966 for the express purpose of getting the two concentrations together. In July of the same year the following commitment was agreed upon:

In recognition that the ultimate unity of the International concention of the Christian church (Disciples of Christ) and the National Christian Missionary Convention is one essential purpose, we recommend to the International Convention of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Christian Missionary Society and the National Christian Missionary Convention the following:

1. That all business procedures of the National Christian Missionary Convention move to unification with the International Convention of the Christian Churches by 1968; however,
2. That other functions vested in the present annual gathering of the NCMC shall continue under a new name, such as National Christian Missionary Fellowship for the purpose of fellowship of program service and development;
3. And that the newly named organization meet biennially on years other than those years that the International Convention, or its successor, holds its General Assembly.

The mood of the moment in the Black communities and churches across the country was Black empowerment and self-determination. Thus, there was much discussion of the issues raised by members of the Joint Committee. Some advocated an open debate in order to safeguard the unity of the Fellowship. Others felt it was a waste of time.

After extended discussion, the report of the Joint Committee was accepted by the Board of the National Convention as a “progress report,” and instruction was given for the committee to further work on the proposal and bring it to the next annual session of the National Convention.

The Joint Committee on merger continued to meet, and it developed the following for consideration by the National Christian Missionary Convention meeting at Jarvis Christian College in 1968:

1. That the National Christian Missionary Convention and the International Convention take enabling action at their 1968 meetings to provide for the merger of the National Christian Missionary Convention’s business functions with the International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) or its successor . . .
2. That the National Christian Missionary Convention become the National Christian Church Conference which shall be directly related administratively to the International Convention of Christian Churches and shall meet for purposes of providing a forum for the discussion of pertinent issues related to Negro life in the context of the total church life; program promotion; leadership training; fellowship; and such other general purposes as shall support and strengthen the congregations involved in the total mission of the church.
3. That, with the mutual agreement of the National Christian Church Conference and the United Christian Missionary Society, the International Convention shall employ an administrative secretary . . . whose responsibilities shall include:

- a. Serving as administrative secretary of the National Christian Church Conference.
- b. Bearing national administrative responsibility for developing consultations with states/areas to the end that state/area structures, programs and services be effective to Negro congregations in each state/area . . .

The National Convention Board of Trustees meeting in Hawkins, Texas, April, 1969 received the report of the drafting task force, and developed

the following merger recommendations to be forwarded to the final meeting of the National Convention in Lexington, Kentucky, 1969:

1. The name of the organization shall be the “National Convocation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).”
2. The General Office of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) should proceed with the necessary steps to name an administrative secretary with executive portfolio to carry responsibility for the National Convocation of the Christian Church.
3. Whenever naming such an administrative secretary, the general office shall consult with the executive committee of the National Convocation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the administration of the United Christian Missionary Society.
4. The establishment in the General Office of the position of Administrative Secretary for the Convocation should include an adequate job description . . .
5. Negotiations shall be conducted between the General Office of the Christian Church and the United Christian Missionary Society regarding the funding of the new office, but *programming for the Convocation School of Faith and Life should continue to be developed through regular program channels!*
6. Consultations should continue to determine the future administrative focus and resources of the “Star Supported” program in order to preserve its value and to increase its effectiveness.
7. Specific legal procedure for continuing the legal integrity of the National Christian Missionary Convention Corporation have been developed with legal counsel.
8. Upon approval of the Articles of Operation by the National Christian Missionary Convention Assembly, the National Christian Missionary Convention Assembly should adjourn *sine die* (indefinitely), and the first meeting of the National Convocation be convened to elect officers under the Articles of Operation.
9. The General Office of the Christian Church should proceed with implementation of the

merger dealing with employment, appoints and elections.

In order to clarify the provision in the merger agreement that “the legal integrity and the purposes of the National Christian Missionary Convention, Disciples of Christ, Inc. be preserved,” some additional stipulations were added under item two in the original document. These recommendations were brought to the 1969 session where they received a unanimous adoption.

During the historic final session of the National Christian Missionary Convention held on the campus of Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, President Raymond E. Brown greeted those attending with these words:

We meet representing what may be called a predominantly Black Convention seeking to implement a merger with what may be called a predominantly white convention. We meet at a time when it is unpopular for Black people to be anything short of proponents of separateness; when it is popular to create unrest; when tensions between peoples are mounting higher and higher; when there are those who want to be where the action is, and yet be true, faithful, and just to the principles and heritage of those who established both the church and the National Christian Missionary Convention; but more especially to Him whom we have committed our lives.

The president’s greeting had aptly described the socio-religious conditions within which the final session of the National Christian Missionary Convention convened.

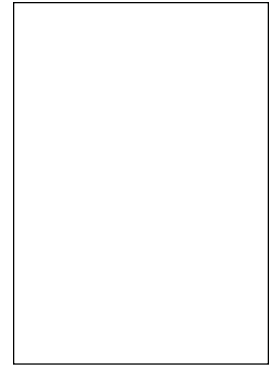
The early 1970’s were the years when Black Disciples of Christ set their mission sails for the holy task as peer Christians in the whole church and the whole world. Acting within the institutional body of a Christian church which was striving to be true to God’s high calling was a very new thing for most of the National Convocation leadership. However, they marched then and still march to a goal articulated very well by Dr. Emmett J. Dickson:

1. To share in the administration of Brotherhood agencies by being on policy-making boards and committees . . .
2. To share in the work and employment at all levels . . .
3. To share in the drama and exhibition of the work of the church as performed by the organized life of the Brotherhood . . .
4. To share in the financial support of the causes and concerns of the church . . . and
5. To share faithfully and loyally in the activities, fellowship, and aspiration of the Brotherhood as we move toward complete integration.

From Coerced Liminality to In-Beyond the Margin

A Theological Reflection on the History of Asian-American Disciples¹

Timothy S. Lee



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In theologizing about Asian-American experiences, scholars have often used the trope of marginality. Thus *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* is the title of a widely-used book by late Jung Young Lee, a Korean-American theologian known for promoting this concept. *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* is another volume in which this trope serves as a framework, a volume edited by Jung Young Lee. In a more recent work, *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*, Sang Hyun Lee, another Korean-American theologian of note, has contributed a chapter titled “Marginality as Coerced Liminality: Toward an Understanding of the Context of Asian American Theology.”²

Both Lees, in their distinctive manners, argue that Asians in the United States have been marginalized by the dominant center because of their race, even though they yearned to be full participants in American life. They also posit that since Jesus himself was a marginalized figure in his own time, the margin constitutes a suitable site for theologizing. With varying emphasis, both Lees offer observations on the relation between margin and center—on a marginalized person’s position vis-à-vis the center. Jung Young Lee asserts that an ideal position is not in-between margin and center (it can cause one to become culturally schizophrenic) or both-and (such a position may not be acknowledged by the dominant) but in-beyond, where “The

condition of in-between and in-both . . . [are] harmonized for one to become a new marginal person.”

Asian Disciples before 1965: Coerced Liminality

In elaborating his view of marginality, Sang Hyun Lee states, “The in-between-ness of the Asian Americans’ marginality is neither a temporary nor an entirely voluntary situation. Asian Americans are forced to remain in between, pushed to stay there . . . the Asian American in-between-ness is a forced in-between-ness.”⁵ Such characterization would befit the lives of all Asian-Americans—the Disciples included—before 1965, be they foreign- or U.S.-born. Ronald Takaki amply documents

Since Jesus himself was a marginalized figure in his own time, the margin constitutes a suitable site for theologizing.

this truth in his landmark volume, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Among the many stories he tells in it is one about a U.S.-born Japanese who sought to purchase a house in Los Angeles, only to be told 114 times out of 119: “You cannot live here. Your money is not good enough. The deed has a racially restrictive covenant, and only members of the Caucasian race may reside here.”⁶ There were other racist regulations—from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, to the National Origin Act of 1924 (which prohibited outright South and East Asians from immigrating to the United States), and to the Executive Order 9066 (which authorized the internment of 120,000 or so Japanese immigrants and their children). Maureen Osuga, a U.S.-born Disciple who suffered internment with her family at Heart Mountain, Wyoming recalls her experience:

When World War II broke out, our family was allowed to take only what we could carry to the concentration camp. Vultures swooped down on my father's two drug stores, jewelry store and five and ten cent store, swindling him out of his life's work.⁷

When it comes to racism against Asians, Christians of the center could hardly claim to be innocent.⁸ On the other hand, it cannot be denied that churches were also among few institutions that expressed genuine concern for Asian Americans. Such concern led to the founding of Asian-American Disciples communities in this period—all eight of them. In 1891, for example, First Christian Church of Portland, Oregon, collaborated with Christian Woman's Board of Missions and Chinese denizens of the area to found Portland Chinese Christian Mission. This was the first Asian Disciples community to be founded in America, led for a while by Drake-trained Chinese pastors, Jeu Hawk and Louie Hugh, before they returned to China, most likely repelled by the racist environment of the West coast. In 1907, CWBM worked with other Disciples to found Chinese Christian Mission in San Francisco. In 1908 similar work was done with Japanese immigrants in Los Angeles, leading to the founding of the first Japanese Disciples churches—Japanese Christian Church—which became the precursor of All Peoples Church (later Center) and West Adams Christian Church. Three other Japanese Disciples communities were established in California—in San Bernardino, Imperial Valley, and Berkeley—and one more in Rocky Ford, Colorado.⁹ In 1933, collaboration between European Americans and Filipino immigrants resulted in the founding of the first Filipino Disciples congregation, also in Los Angeles. These churches served as centers of their respective marginalized communities—orienting their members to the divine, caring for the weak and elderly, educating the young, and providing solace and meaning for them.

Asian Disciples after 1965: Striving toward In-Beyond

Had such “coerced liminality” persisted unabated beyond 1965, it is doubtful many Asians would have remained to identify themselves as Disciples at the end of the twentieth century. Yet by 2006—the year the fourteenth biennial Assembly of the North American Pacific Asian Disciples was held in

Berkeley, California—eighty-three Asian-American churches and communities were identified as Disciples. And these churches represented eleven different ethnic groups: Burmese, Cambodian, Chin, Chinese, Filipinos, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Samoan, and Vietnamese. How did this come about? What is NAPAD? What went right?

To answer these questions adequately is beyond the scope of this essay, but even a brief answer would have to concede that during the past fifty years something had happened in American society and church (Disciples included of course) such that—*pace* Sang Hyun Lee—the marginality of Asian-American Disciples had become less coercive. Societally, the obvious turning point was the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1965, which allowed Asians to immigrate on the same basis as Europeans, enabling the long overdue influx of immigrants from all corners of Asia. Just as important was the civil rights movement of the era, which impelled members of the dominant society/church to rethink how they related to the marginalized in their midst.

One has to attribute it to grace that Disciples have had their share of leaders thus impelled. And if only one of them could be mentioned as having had a significant impact on the Asian-American Disciples community, the person would have to be Harold Johnson. Johnson served as director of evangelism in the Division of Home Missions in the 1970s and retired in 1990. An Asian-American Disciples newsletter issued in April 1990 dedicated a section to him:

Harold Johnson is advocate of...listening intensely before regarding and accepting deserved criticisms, notably by minorities of the 'majority.' He has been instrumental in getting policies changed...at DHM...that put into practice the goals of the minority leadership in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In this specific connection, AAD has been greatly privileged to have Harold Johnson serve as one of them, as well as in his roles of able advocate and faithful guide these many years.¹³

Johnson is beloved by Asian Disciples because as a person of the center—as Jung Young Lee would say—he has had a knack of identifying with the marginalized, especially the Asians.

These churches served as centers of their respective marginalized communities—orienting their members to the divine, caring for the weak and elderly, educating the young, and providing solace and meaning for them.

Of course, not even Johnson could have revitalized the moribund Asian-American Disciples ministry alone. The rest of the *powers that be* in the restructured Disciples communion had to be willing to listen to him when challenged to commit resources to the Asian ministry. More important, there had to be Asian-American Disciples who would be willing to work with Johnson, matching him in faith and just plain doggedness. In both respects, Disciples have been fortunate. For Johnson not only found support from sympathetic General Ministers of the denomination (beginning with Kenneth Teegarden) but also found partners in a number of Asian-American leaders—each of whom matched him in passion and ability, ounce for ounce. These leaders included Grace Kim and Janet Casey-Allen, Maureen Osuga and JoAnne Kagiwada, John Lau and Jaikwan Ahn, Luz Bacerra and Itoko Maeda, Manuel Tamayo and Royal Morales, and David Kagiwada and Soongook Choi. David Kagiwada and Choi had been especially important partners of Johnson in integrating the marginality of the Asian community with the Euro-American center of the denomination. Kagiwada was a second-generation Japanese American, had suffered internment during the Second World War, and was a passionate advocate of justice. Choi was an articulate leader of the Stone-Campbell Movement in Korea and Korean-America and was a dauntless spokesman of Asian Disciples causes.

Thanks in large part to the dedication of the Johnson-Kagiwada-Choi trio, the Asians succeeded in integrating with—not assimilating into—the rest of the church. In 1979, a General Assembly formally recognized them as American Asian Disciples, a bona-fide group of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).¹⁴ In the following

year, AAD held its first convocation, holding it biennially thereafter. Upon David Kagiwada's untimely death in 1985, a scholarship was established in his name to support Asian-American Disciples seminarians (later a similar scholarship was established in Choi's name). In September 1993, Kagiwada Sunday and AAD (later NAPAD) Ministry Week were officially declared to be annual observances in the church calendar. A year before, the position of Executive Pastor for North American Asian Ministries had been established, housed in the Division of Homeland Ministries, with the aim of providing leadership for the care and growth of Asian-American Disciples churches. And during the first decade of its first (and current) occupant, Geunhee Yu, the number of Asian churches multiplied from eight to over eighty. In 1996 AAD changed its name to North American Pacific Asian Disciples to better signal its inclusive aspirations, and by 2000, Korean churches within NAPAD had grown numerous enough to form a sub-group called the Korean Disciples Convocation.

Given the above account of Asian-American Disciples since 1965, one might suppose coercive liminality no longer applies to them. That would be an unwarranted assumption. Many Asian Disciples still linger at the margin, though no longer owing to racist laws or attitudes (at least not explicit ones) but to their limited facility in English and their constrained economic circumstances—a reality readily seen in the life of NAPAD congregations “nesting” in Anglo churches. Nonetheless, it would be correct to say that Disciples have come a long way since 1924 or 1942. Now a Disciple is closer to becoming one “*who overcomes marginality without ceasing to be a marginal person.*”

Notes

- 1 “Asian-American Disciples” is used here as shorthand for North American Pacific-Asian Disciples.
- 2 Jung Young Lee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). Lee coedited the second volume with Peter Phan, a prolific Vietnamese-American theologian (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1999); and Sang Hyun Lee, edited by Fumitaka Matsuoka and Eleazar S. Fernandez (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003). *who overcomes marginality without ceasing to be a marginal person*.³ Sang Hyun Lee also sees a redemptive—transformative—potential of a marginalized position, but he is more concerned to analyze its context, which he characterizes as a coerced liminality. In contemplating the one-hundred-plus-year history of Asian-American Disciples, these two perspectives offer a good frame of reference. For coerced marginality characterizes Asian-Americans’ relationship with the Disciples’ center before 1965 and is relevant even afterward; on the other hand, post-1965 years evidence new developments wherein the Asians and the larger church strive together to achieve a more fully integrated—in-beyond—relationship for both.⁴
- 3 Italics original, p. 62.
- 4 In 1965, the United States finally adopted a racially-neutral immigration policy. It is worth noting that for Asian-American Disciples, 1965, rather than 1968 (the year of restructure), was the watershed year of the decade.
- 5 Sang Hyun Lee, “Marginality as Coerced Liminality,” 13.
- 6 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 218.
- 7 “Justice,” in Kagiwada memorial Sunday and NAPAD Ministry Week Materials for September 12-18, 1999; Homeland Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), page 5.
- 8 In a UCMS-produced pamphlet for Sunday School, Ben Watson, director of Japanese work in the Pacific Area, wrote, “there are real problems for them [Japanese Americans] and that Christian people are more or less responsible for the problems. We say that prejudice is responsible and that it is due largely to ignorance.” Watson’s article is titled “New Americans—Our Opportunity.” The pamphlet, whose title is unavailable to me, is archived at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.
- 9 Ben E. Watson, A Story of the Japanese

Christian Churches in the United States as Adventures, Discoveries, Achievements, Aspirations, published “Under the Home Department of the United Christian Missionary Society” (n.p., n.d.). Despite the solicitude that led to the founding of these churches, it could not be denied that Asian-American Disciples found themselves in a marginalized existence, coerced to be dependent on the dominant church. The flow of power was clear—missionary work was done to Asians by well-meaning white Disciples, often represented by the United Christian Missionary Society. Decisions were made for them by UCMS. This fact became painfully clear when the dominant church experienced financial distress or societal forces seemed to disfavor the marginalized. Given this reality, perhaps it is not surprising that seven of eight Asian Disciples churches suffered closure before 1965, though one of them managed to reconstitute itself.¹⁰ The closure of Portland Chinese Mission was the subject of the following announcement which appeared in the February 1924 issue of “World Call,” the leading Disciples magazine of the time; the announcement was made by a local advisory board entrusted with supervising the Chinese mission:

On account of peculiar conditions among the Chinese, such as the decreasing Chinese population, the inability to secure trained native leadership . . . and the consequent small attendance at religious services we do not feel it wise to spend so much missionary money for the results obtained In view of the existing conditions among the Chinese of Portland, Oregon, and the policy and program under which we seem compelled to carry on the work of our mission among them, we recommend to the home department of the United Christian Missionary Society as follows: . . . That the Chinese Mission at Portland, Oregon, be discontinued, effective February 1, 1924.

The most important of the “peculiar conditions” left unsaid in this notice was stated forthrightly in a UCMS pamphlet: “Chinese exclusion laws and bitter race prejudice caused the depletion of the Chinese community. Therefore, in 1923 [ibid], it seemed best to close the mission.”¹¹ In time, San Francisco’s Chinese Institute also closed,

and when the Executive Order 9066 was issued, what was left of the five original Japanese communities, too, disbanded.¹² Only the Filipino church escaped closure and thrives to this day.

- 10 In 1948 the disbanded Japanese Christian Church was reconstituted as West Adams Christian Church (DOC). Joe Nagano, one of the original members, wrote, "And only after considerable pleading was our church allowed to begin as the West Adams Christian church." Mr. Joe Nagano's letter to Dr. Geunhee Yu (n.d., North American Pacific Asian Disciples Ministries, Division of Homeland Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)).
- 11 "Where We Have Shared," March 26, 1953.
- 12 For informative anecdotes on All Peoples Church—what became of the Japanese

Christian Church after 1942—see Dan B. Geunung, *A Street Called Love: The Story of All Peoples Christian Church and Center, Los Angeles, California* (Pasadena, CA: Hope Publishing House, 2000).

- 13 AAD News, April 1990. Also see Janet Casey-Allen's article "Disciples of Asian Origin Vie for Their Place," in *The Disciple* (May 1994): 8-12.
- 14 By this time, the group's name had changed from American Asian Disciples to Asian American Disciples, upon the suggestion of Itoko Maeda, who had served as missionary in Latin America and argued for the more inclusive connotation of the latter term. Marilynne Hill has written a biography of this remarkable Disciple, *Itoko Maeda: Woman of Mission* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997).

Hispanic Disciples in the US: Identity and Presence

Frontier Mission Strategy and Hispanic Disciples
Carmelo Álvarez

When the movement known as *the Christians*, or *Disciples*, emerged on the American socio-political scene, the United States was going through a process of growth and expansion. A wave of European immigrants strove to live in a land of freedom and to forge new opportunities. Frontier spirit was expanding the territory through new conquests and colonization. Some historians, like Frederick Jackson Turner, hypothesized that the expansion of colonial borders determined the growth and progress of American society in the first half of the nineteenth century. Commercial and economic expansion made the transformation of North America a dynamic one, allowing the United States to become a political and economic force beyond its territorial borders, particularly by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Liberal capitalism and a market economy were developing fully in this new landscape. In addition to the pioneer spirit and the thirst for land, the spirit of adventure in North America was piqued by an eagerness for profit, especially as people searched for precious metals like gold and silver. The result was a demographic explosion, the extermination of native peoples, and the black trade that created a system of slavery leading ultimately to the Civil War (1861-1865) that split the country and left its mark on United States history.

The process the United States was experiencing reflected what was also happening in Europe. The Industrial Revolution was at its apex, and people anticipated an era of progress. Other factors

influencing people of this era were new contributions by science, a common-sense philosophy, individualistic ideas of the Enlightenment, and fresh currents of empiricism and pragmatism. Some other important philosophical strains stimulating growth and dynamism were constitutionalism, the English Age of Reason, deism, positivism, liberalism, and a democratic spirit with its dream of freedom and individual volunteerism.

An inevitable result of all these new philosophical drives was the tendency to question all hierarchies and principles of authority. The social environment was infected by a *laissez-faire*, hands-off, or “let them do it” attitude. A common belief was that the meaning of freedom was emancipation from tradition and authority.

The religious sector was not immune from these influences. Independent thought stimulated diversity in the life of the churches and allowed for the emergence

of new religious movements and expressions. A new religious tolerance arose with the development of denominations.

The expansion of the western borders had encouraged the proliferation of volunteer associations, which created new churches. Marked individualism, with optimism and confidence in new discoveries and advancements, created new ironies. On one hand a social awakening, with its high regard for stability, influenced the ethical-religious environment. Optimism awakened the idea that moral perfection and total sanctification were things that could be achieved. Thus, Puritanism and Holiness

One of the most important results of Manifest Destiny was that evangelization became seen as a civilizing process.

movements influenced the *civil religion*. On the other hand, mainline religious movements found agreement clearly challenged by popular revival religions in which personal experience was essential.

Beginning in 1845, the ideology of Manifest Destiny, which portrayed the United States as a nation chosen to fulfill a great mission in the world, spread through all levels of American society, including churches. It was broadly influential in the missionary movement and many times confused the Gospel with American culture, something never seen before in the history of missions. Other social movements, such as those of students, women's societies, faith missions, independent missionary groups, and institutions for theological education were also catalysts for mission work. Liberal theology and its expression in social evangelism also influenced church life. By the grace of God, and despite much cultural imperialism, many lives and countries were reached for the true accomplishment of mission.

Westrup was a talented musician, well-known to this day in Latin America and the Caribbean as "The Father of Mexican Hymnody."

One of the most important results of Manifest Destiny was that evangelization became seen as a civilizing process. The progress mentality propitiated by liberalism defended the assumption that humanity was moving toward a higher stage of development—that of the European and American cultures. Ideally, this more highly developed civilization should extend throughout the world and among all cultures. The chosen people would become the chosen culture.

However, other autonomous cultures with characteristic values existed, and do exist, requiring respect, even while sharing the Good News of the Gospel. The lessons we learn from the history of missions are of incalculable value in this endeavor.

Disciples of Christ in Mexico

The Disciples of Christ mission in Mexico was initiated by the Christian Woman's Board of Mission (WBM) in 1895. Mr. M.L. Hoblit was assigned to explore and establish missionary work there. He went initially to Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua and

later to Monterrey. Hoblit was able to open a school and a print shop, emphasizing education during his tenure as missionary. Mr. and Mrs. A.G. Alderman replaced Mr. Hoblit in Monterrey and founded the Christian Church in 1901. Unfortunately, Mr. Alderman passed away in 1903, and Mr. Tomás Westrup, who was very fluent in Spanish, took over that missionary post. Westrup continued to follow a strategy in which music, publication of educational materials, and preaching were the main task. He was a talented musician, well-known to this day in Latin America and the Caribbean as "The Father of Mexican Hymnody." Many hymns were translated by Westrup to Spanish over the years. His son, Enrique T. Westrup, followed in his father's footsteps. In 1905 Samuel G. Inman joined Westrup in Monterrey and became a leading voice and an influential mind because of his knowledge of Mexican and Latin American history and politics. He founded the People's Institute at Piedras Negras and the Mexican Christian Institute (Inman Christian Center) in San Antonio. This institution was very instrumental in assisting Mexican immigrants during the turbulent years of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917).

The comity among the mainline denominations divided the Mexican territory, assigning the Disciples of Christ to Central Mexico (Aguas Calientes and San Luis Potosi). In Aguas Calientes the Disciples of Christ continued the social work started by the Methodists. A crucial decision had to be made; the Methodists established schools and Disciples of Christ continued their work. But the Mexican Revolution promoted new reforms including a profound educational reform. The churches needed to comply with the new laws, and no religious instruction was allowed in public institutions, particularly the churches. The critical financial situation of those schools was another pressing issue which prompted the closing of many Protestant schools at the time. Maintaining schools that would compete with public education and complying with a curriculum that prohibited religious instruction was another serious challenge.

Disciples missionaries continued developing new strategies and making adjustments to the new situation. They transformed the schools into social centers to serve the poor in the 1930's. Juarez Social Center in San Luis Potosí opened in March, 1937. Another area of tension and challenge was the planting of new congregations. The two larger

congregations in Aguas Calientes and San Luis Potosí achieved self-support, and for many decades were the strongest local congregations in the denomination. The congregations in the countryside were very poor and remained isolated, including the ones in Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí. Other congregations included those started in Texas under the supervision of Disciples of Christ missionaries in Mexico.

Hispanic Disciples in Texas

The Disciples of Christ started new congregations among Hispanics in Texas during the last two decades of the 19th century. Missionaries who were sent to Mexico crossed the border and preached to the Hispanic population, primarily Mexican, with the help of bilingual *tejanos*. The first Mexican Christian Church was established in San Antonio, Texas in 1899 by pastor Y. Quintero. By 1916 the State Mexican S.S. Convention was founded with seven congregations (two in Mexico, two in San Antonio, one in Sabinas, one in Lockhart, and one in Robstown). These congregations were unstable due to the dependence on missionaries from Mexico or itinerant and bilingual preachers and pastors. One key issue was the lack of interest in preparing Hispanic leaders to become pastors in local congregations. This is today a high priority, equipping pastors for ministry.

Daisy Machado traces the contradictions posed by the missionary work and planting of Hispanic congregations in Texas. She stresses that the Disciples in Texas did not provide the necessary financial resources to support the planting of new congregations. They depended on Mexican pastors supervised by Disciples of Christ missionaries in Mexico and failed to offer theological education to empower Mexican-Texan Disciples leaders. They remained marginalized and excluded, foreigners in their own land.

Hispanic Disciples in New York City

Puerto Rico is the home of a distinctive Stone-Campbell community. At the end of the nineteenth century Puerto Rico was experiencing a significant transition. Having become a U. S. colony as a result of the Spanish-American War, it received many Protestant missions from the United States beginning in 1898. The Disciples of Christ came to the island on April 23, 1899. J.A. Erwin and his family were assigned to the northern part of Puerto Rico,

in the city of Bayamón, as part of the comity agreement among Protestant denominations that established missions. The first Disciples congregation was founded in 1901 in Bayamón. From Bayamón the Disciples moved to the countryside, starting the first Protestant rural congregation in Puerto Rico. Dajaos became, and still is, the Mecca of Puerto Rican Disciples.

The first missionaries experienced the misery and desperate needs of the Puerto Rican population and decided to respond by establishing two orphanages in Bayamón.

The first missionaries experienced the misery and desperate needs of the Puerto Rican population and decided to respond by establishing two orphanages in Bayamón to educate and protect orphan children of the vicinity. By 1914 the missionaries had decided to change their strategy for mission in Puerto Rico. They closed the orphanages and concentrated on planting new congregations and on evangelism. Many children were transferred to the Polytechnic Institute of the Presbyterian Church in San Germán. The process of establishing new congregations resulted in Disciples expanding their influence, particularly in the northwestern part of Puerto Rico.

The first major crisis among Disciples of Christ in Puerto Rico erupted when, in 1933, a group of laypersons started prayer circles at noon in Calle Comerío Christian Church. A charismatic movement spread like fire in all of the churches, creating what is known in Puerto Rico as *El Avivamiento del 33*. The revival included glossolalia, dancing in the Spirit, fasting, aggressive evangelism, and a contagious enthusiasm that even affected other denominations. But the missionaries decided that the revival was not according to the "Disciples way" and tried to suppress and even stop the movement. A serious confrontation that lasted ten years provided the opportunity for Puerto Rican Disciples congregations to declare self-support and to rely on the tithing and offerings of the poor members of local congregations. Disciples of Christ in Puerto Rico developed a unique model of mission. It is a strongly charismatic denomination, but it expresses creative diversity in worship. Puerto Rican Disciples have a deep appreciation for solid intellectual and theological education of their pastors.

The experience of Pablo Cotto, a Puerto Rican Disciples Pastor, is the story and pilgrimage of a pioneer of the Hispanic Disciples Diaspora in the US. It is a wonderful model of what the missionary effort is about, combined with a solid theology of mission, with an ecumenical commitment, embodied in the life of this faithful man. He was baptized in 1920 by Vere C. Carpenter, a Disciples missionary from Kentucky, the founder of the Dajaos Christian Church, the first rural congregation in Puerto Rico of any Protestant denomination on the island. Pablo felt at that young age that something special was awaiting him. In a persistent and continuous search, Pablo discerned God's calling to pastoral ministry. It was during the Awakening of 1933 among the Puerto Rican Disciples that Pablo was convinced: Pastoral ministry was his life. The *Avivamiento*, as they called this unique blessing of the Spirit in Puerto Rico, molded him and gave him the initial impulse to become a lay preacher.

Joining a group of Puerto Ricans in an independent store-front congregation of Manhattan, Pablo began organizing his second congregation as a pastor.

He established in 1933, with a group of enthusiastic Puerto Rican Disciples, Hato Tejas Christian Church, in Bayamón. But the precarious economic situation in Puerto Rico pushed Pablo to emigrate to New York. It was a critical time of frustration and desperation, but Pablo knew he needed to support his large family. The New York City experience was difficult for displaced Puerto Ricans—an experience which led him to a second conversion.

Joining a group of Puerto Ricans in an independent store-front congregation of Manhattan, Pablo began organizing his second congregation as a pastor. They named the congregation La Hermosa in 1939 and became a Christian Church in 1943, the first Hispanic Disciples congregation in New York City. He also helped establish a second congregation in The Bronx: Second Christian Church. Later on Pablo founded the Association of Hispanic Pastors of New York City. Before long, however, Pablo felt called to move to Texas.

Hispanic Disciples Diaspora in the United States

David Vargas has written an insightful and interesting article on the historical background of the National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship, founded in 1981. He stresses that Fellowship was inspired by two key principles: *growth* and *unity*. It is rooted in the pioneering effort of the first Mexican Christian Church in San Antonio, 1899. "The search for unity has always been an essential factor in that historical process." The main emphasis Vargas expands in these hermeneutical principles is "Hispanic identity," *Identidad Hispana*. *Obra Hispana* is a process and effort to reclaim the distinctive Hispanic/Latino culture and ethnicity in the context of the US.

The process of becoming a national entity called the National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship started early in the 20th century. The process begins with the *Convenciones* (Conventions) in different regions: the State Mexican S.S. Convention established in 1916, the Northeast Convention in 1958, and Midwest Convention in 1978. Later on *Convenciones* were established in Arizona, the Southeast, Southwest and Pacific.

For Vargas the *Presencia Hispana* (Hispanic Presence) was aimed at having "la unidad Hispana" (Hispanic unity) in the larger context of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). To be recognized and accepted as active participants in the denomination, within the manifestations of the Church at the local, regional and general levels, was the main goal.

This *Presencia Hispana* needed a concrete national organization that would provide a space for retreats, conferences, planning meetings, support to the *Convenciones*, and advocacy and assistance to Hispanic congregations in the regions, in order to respond to the specific pastoral and spiritual needs of the Hispanic Disciples. The culmination of this process was the founding in 1981 of the National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship with the *Caucus Hispano* (Hispanic Caucus) as the Executive Committee. The Fellowship and the *Caucus Hispano* were the instruments to continue in the struggle towards the fulfillment of the *sueno de los Discipulos hispanos* (the dream of Hispanic Disciples): a body that represents, advocates, communicates and shares the collective interests and aspirations of *Obra Hispana* in the context of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada.

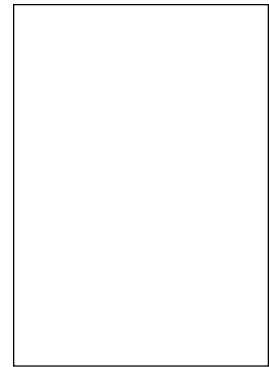
After many years of having a Director for Hispanic and bilingual congregations under the Department of Evangelism of the Division of Homeland Ministries, the decision was made to establish a new office to serve *Obra Hispana* more efficiently and directly, under the leadership of Hispanic pastors and lay persons. The new office, called the Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries, under the direction of a National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, was established in 1991. David Vargas was the first part-time National Pastor until 1993. Lucas Torres

became the first full-time National Pastor until his retirement in 1999. Pablo Jiménez became the second full-time National Pastor and, more recently, Huberto Pimentel.

Hispanic Disciples are a vibrant and growing community within our larger Disciples fellowship, integrating and advancing in different regions with a sense of commitment and enthusiasm, and facing the multiple challenges of being part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as it moves towards the 21st century.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) A Reformed North American Mainstream Moderate Denomination

Newell Williams



The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a Reformed North American Mainstream Moderate Denomination. To grasp the history and identity of this denomination requires unpacking each of the terms in this one-sentence description.

Reformed

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a *Reformed* denomination. The Christian Church divided into Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism in the eleventh century. In the sixteenth century, Western Catholicism divided into several reforming traditions: Lutheran, Reformed, Radical, Catholic, and Anglican. The Reformed tradition is associated with Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, John Calvin in Geneva, the Reformed churches of Germany and the Netherlands, the Presbyterians of Scotland, and the English Puritans. This Reformed tradition has emphasized God's grace made known in Jesus Christ. It has also emphasized right belief and right order. Stressing right order, Reformed churches have successfully resisted government domination.

Reformed churches have not been as successful in maintaining unity. Differences regarding belief and order have frequently led to division. This is where the story of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) begins. Believing that God wills the unity of the church, Barton W. Stone, a fifth-generation American, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, immigrants from Northern Ireland, and Walter Scott, an immigrant from Scotland, decried the divisions they had experienced in their nine-

teenth century Presbyterian churches. Having observed creeds and confessions used to divide the church, they refused to accept as terms of fellowship statements of belief other than the simple confession that Jesus is the Christ. Believing that believer's immersion for the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and every Lord's Day celebration of the Lord's Supper for the spiritual up building of believers would further the renewal and unity of the church, they sought to restore these practices which they viewed as apostolic.

For Stone, the Campbells, and Scott, Christian unity was about more than a mere organizational union. It pointed to the very nature of the church which, in the words of Thomas Campbell, was "essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one"; it was the means by which the world would believe that the Father sent the Son and God would usher in Christ's earthly reign of peace and justice. Uniting their efforts

in 1832, followers of Stone, the Campbells, and Scott (a close associate of the Campbells) formed what scholars now identify as the Stone-Campbell Movement.

Stone, Thomas Campbell and Scott had preferred the name Christian, eschewing distinctive names for the "family" name found in Acts. Alexander Campbell had preferred the "more humble" name, Disciples (or learners) of Christ, to identify what he saw as a distinctive movement for the restoration and unity of the church. In the nineteenth century, congregations were referred to as Christian Church or Church of Christ, while the movement was often

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identified as the Disciples of Christ. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), along with two other groups, the Churches of Christ, and the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, is a contemporary North American expression of this movement.

The fact that there is more than one contemporary North American community of the followers of Stone, the Campbells, and Scott, is a potent reminder of the challenges of seeking Christian unity!

North American

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a *North American* denomination. North America has long been racially and culturally diverse. It has also long been characterized by white racism and the privileging of Anglo culture. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) participates in the racial and cultural diversity of North America, including in its membership European Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans. It has also participated in white racism and the privileging of Anglo culture and, no doubt, continues to do so, despite efforts to become an anti-racist, pro-reconciling church.

African American Disciples. The earliest congregations of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Barton Stone's Cane Ridge congregation, in Bourbon County, Kentucky, and Thomas and Alexander Campbell's Brush Run congregation, in western Pennsylvania, included both European American and African American members. A Colored Christian Church was organized in Midway, Kentucky in 1834—just two years after the union of followers of Stone, the Campbells, and Scott. Thus, African Americans have been part of this denomination from the very beginning.

In 1917, a general church African American ministry was formed: the National Christian Missionary Convention. This organization was a result of the determination of Preston Taylor, a former slave, who was minister of the Gay Street Christian Church in Nashville, Tennessee and a successful entrepreneur. The purpose of the National Christian Missionary Convention was to empower the witness of black Disciples as members of the whole church through a partnership with white Disciples that recognized black leadership in an era of blatant white supremacy and paternalism.

For over a half-century, this convention, which

provided for the participation and support of white Disciples leaders, conducted annual gatherings in which participants received in-service training in Christian education and leadership, program information, and inspiration for fulfilling their mission as Disciples of Christ. During the year, convention leaders and staff visited congregations and helped to plan and promote regional events. Because of the partnership with white Disciples, white Disciples staff members were often involved in these events, as well.

*For Stone, the Campbells, and Scott,
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In the late 1960s, the program and staff of the National Christian Missionary Society merged with other general Disciples organizations. The Administrative Secretary of the Convention became a staff associate of the General Minister and President and program staff members were integrated with the staff of Homeland Ministries (now known as Home Missions). At the same time, a new organization, the National Convocation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), was lodged in the Office of the General Minister and President. The purpose of Convocation, which conducts biennial assemblies that address issues relevant to African Americans and the mission of the whole church, is to further the realization of one church which, in the face of continuing racism, empowers the witness of all of its constituencies. In a denomination that numbers around 3,800 congregations with a total membership of about 700,000, the National Convocation embraces over 400 congregations and more than 60,000 Disciples of Christ.

Hispanic Disciples. Hispanics have been numbered among Disciples since the last years of the nineteenth century. Until recently, however, growth in the number of Hispanic Disciples has been slow. By 1969, there were only eighteen Hispanic and Bilingual congregations in all of the United States. Dominant culture Disciples had assumed that Hispanics in North America would quickly assimilate to Anglo culture. Therefore, little effort had been made to develop Spanish language resources.

In 1969, Domingo Rodriguez became director of

the Office of Programs and Services for Hispanic and Bilingual Congregations in Homeland Ministries. Rodriguez called a conference of Hispanic ministers which created a Committee on Guidelines for Strategy and Action. The Committee morphed into a board, then a conference, then another committee, and finally the Hispanic Caucus which, in 1980, developed the National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), which held its first Assembly in 1981. In the early 1990s, tensions between the emerging Hispanic leadership and Homeland Ministries led to the establishment in 1991 of a new general ministry called the Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries that reports directly to the General Board. The Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries has three objectives: to provide programs and pastoral care to Hispanic leaders and congregations; to advise the different regional and general ministries of the church on Hispanic ministry; and to be an advocate for Hispanic Disciples. The National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries has oversight of more than 200 congregations with a membership of over 6,000 Disciples of Christ.

Asian American Disciples. As with African American and Hispanic American Disciples, the growth of Asian American Disciples has been influenced by the attitudes and actions of members of the dominant North American culture. Late in the 19th century, the Disciples' Christian Woman's Board of Missions opened a mission to the Chinese in Portland, Oregon. It was enormously successful, and a Chinese minister, Jeu Hawk, was called to lead the work. In 1907, the CWBM started another Chinese mission in San Francisco. Both missions were closed in 1923 due to anti-Asian hostility reflected in the Chinese Exclusion Acts. In 1901, a small group of Japanese came into contact with the Christian Missionary Society of Southern California. By 1908, a Japanese Christian Church had been organized in Los Angeles. By 1942, the number of Japanese Christian churches had increased to nine, when all were closed with the internment of Japanese Americans. After their detention, former Japanese Christian church members founded West Adams Christian Church in Los Angeles. In sharp contrast to the Chinese and Japanese stories, Filipino Christian Church was founded in Los Angeles in 1933 and has had an uninterrupted ministry to this day!

A great wave of new immigrants from Asia to the United States began with the Immigration Acts of 1965. In 1976, Wilshire Korean Christian Church became the first Korean Disciples congregation. In July of 1978, the first consultation on Asian ministries was held in Indianapolis, through the efforts of Harold Johnson, evangelism executive of Homeland Ministries. The purpose was three-fold: to affirm the unique identity of Asian American Disciples; to raise the consciousness among Disciples of their presence; and to help Disciples attend to the needs of the growing Asian American population. Out of this consultation, the Fellowship of Asian American Disciples (FAAD) was organized. In good Disciples fashion, FAAD was renamed the American-Asian Disciples (AAD) a year later. At the 1979 General Assembly in St. Louis, AAD was formally acknowledged as a constituency. The first AAD convocation was held in October in 1980 in Indianapolis, with 16 Asians and 3 General staff participating. The group decided to hold biennial convocations on even years alternating with the General Assembly.

An October 1989 Homeland Ministries consultation on Asian ministries called for: developing ministerial leadership, establishing congregations, fostering Asian representation on boards of the church, and posting an Asian staff person within Homeland Ministries for American Asian ministries. Koreans were to be the initial target because of the rapid growth of Korean immigrants and the growth of Korean Christianity. The 1991 Tulsa General Assembly approved this initiative, directing Homeland Ministries to create a position exclusively focused on American Asian ministries. Geunhee Yu was called to the position. At the time, there were eight churches. In 1996, AAD was renamed the North American Pacific/Asian Disciples (NAPAD) to be more inclusive. Today, there are 90 NAPAD churches, totaling more than 6,500 Disciples of Christ. Approximately 75% of the congregations are Korean. Others are Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Samoan.

Mainstream Moderate

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a Reformed North American *Mainstream* denomination. Sociologists have defined Mainstream religious groups as those that "identify with and contribute to the definition of the society's core

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values.” Given this definition, the designation “mainstream” does not narrow the description of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) very much, as many American religious groups fall in this category. Greater definition is achieved by modifying Mainstream with the term *Moderate*.

Mainstream religious groups may be classified along a liberal to *moderate* to conservative spectrum according to religious, social, and political views. On the left is the Jewish community. Just to the right of the Jewish community are liberal Protestants, identified as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and the United Church of Christ. In the center are Catholics and *moderate* Protestants, identified as Methodists, Lutherans, Northern Baptists, the Reformed churches, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). To the right of center are Black Protestant Denominations. To their right are conservative Protestants, such as Southern Baptists, Church of Christ, Nazarenes, Assemblies of God, and Churches of God.

Please note: For the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to be classified as moderate does not mean that all Disciples hold moderate views on all religious, social, and political issues—views somewhere between liberal and conservative. On the contrary: In contrast to conservative churches where most members, or at least most of the leaders, might be assumed to hold the same position on an issue such as homosexuality, in the moderate churches, such as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Methodists, you can expect to find at least two if not more positions significantly represented on this and every other controversial religious, social and political issue. In other words, differences of opinion among members of moderate churches can be notable!

Denomination

Finally, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a Reformed North American Mainstream Moderate *Denomination*. Denominations are identified by their testimony, traditions, name, institutions, and relationships. With Christians everywhere, this church *testifies* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and proclaims him Lord and Savior of the World. Our *traditions* of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are ecumenical. While practicing believer’s immersion, most congregations affirm the baptisms of other churches. The Lord’s Table is open to all who follow Christ. Our *name* combines the family name Christian with the distinctive term, Disciples of Christ, which points to our identity not as those who have attained to the fullness, but are yet learners. Our *institutions* are accountable to Christ. Our *relationships* as congregations, regions and general ministries affirm the unity of Christ’s church.

All of these markers point in one direction: to our fundamental commitment to the oneness of the Church. At the heart of our life as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is what we identify in the Preamble to the *Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* as “God’s covenant of love which binds us to God and to one another.” Because of God’s covenant with us, we are in covenant with all Christians. As Stone, the Campbells and Scott affirmed, Christian unity is what it means to be church; it is a means to the world’s belief that the Father sent the Son and the ultimate coming of God’s reign of peace and justice. In the words of the identity statement recently prepared by the Twenty-first Century Vision Team appointed by General Minister and President, Dr. Sharon Watkins, “We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.”