Report to the April 7 – 9, 2013 Meeting of the General Board

Title: Report of Christian Church in Ohio

Origin: Dr. William H. Edwards, Regional Pastor and President

The following is provided for information to the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). As part of a movement for wholeness that welcomes all to the Table and shares the Good News of Jesus Christ from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth, this report lifts up the Christian Church in Ohio’s accomplishments related to our common mission priorities:

- New church,
- Transforming congregations,
- Leadership development
- Pro-reconciliation/anti-racism.

Introduction

The Christian Church in Ohio’s vision as a regional church states that we are “A covenant network of congregations in mission”

_We are the Body of Christ gifted and called in covenant together as Disciples of Christ to be centers of transformation on the new mission frontier of our own communities._

We are organizing our work around three regional priorities that grow out of the vision:

- Strengthening Relationships and Building Networks (True Community)
- Leadership Development (Deep Christian Spirituality)
- Congregational Transformation and Evangelism (Passion for Justice)

Regional Pastors facilitate and resource congregations in their relationships and networking with other congregations, the development of local leadership, and the spiritual transformation and faith sharing ministries in local communities. The Regional Pastors are a central contact point for congregations relating to the Regional Church, in partnership with the Regional Elders. Regional Elders are a volunteer cadre of (mostly retired) experienced ministers who serve as an extension of Pastoral Staff in assigned Districts of the Region.
The Christian Church in Ohio is seeking to be intentional as we empower different commissions and committees to be inclusive of gender, race, lay/clergy, and geographical location in the makeup of such bodies.

The Christian Church in Ohio is actively involved in the Northeast Inter-Regional Fellowship (NIRF), which includes the regions of the Capital Area, Canada, Michigan, Northeast, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The Christian Church in Ohio has been consulting with Christian Church Foundation in establishing a Development Committee. This ministry team has developed a fund raising and development strategic plan to financially under gird the present and future ministries of our regional church.

The Christian Church in Ohio is an active and vital member of Ohio Council of Churches. Our regional church supports the work of the Council financially and through participation of members of our congregations in its programming.

New Church

The New Church Committee of the Christian Church in Ohio is beginning the second phase of our 2020 vision to add 20 new congregations in the Ohio region. We have begun this new era by re-strategizing and re-prioritizing our service to this priority ministry. The eleven new congregations that emerged and are in formation as a result of our first phase initiative are all, as anticipated, experiencing the “joys and challenges”, “frustrations and excitement” of new church planting.

In 2012, the Regional Church hosted a retreat for clergy to discern and consider a call to be a church planter. The retreat was entitled “New Wineskins”. This will be a time of discernment by listening to the testimonies of Ohio Church Planters and reviewing Demographics of the “Top Hot Spots” in Ohio for reaching un-churched people.

In 2013, based on the demographic studies, we are launching 4 new congregations using a bi-vocational church planter model. This includes an African-American congregation in Northeast Ohio, two in Central Ohio and a new congregation Northwest Ohio near Toledo.
Congregational Transformation

The Congregational Transformation Ministry Team is exploring and initiating ways that the Christian Church in Ohio can educate and train leaders, identify and utilize resources, and network congregations and leaders to share their learnings and experiences. The role of the Regional Church is to be partner to resource congregations as they discern their own unique “spiritual strategic journey” of transformation.

Therefore, the Congregational Transformation Ministry Team has developed a Regional Church model of support that will educate and train leaders, identify and utilize resources, and network congregations and pastors to share their learnings and experiences. This model of support is comprised in networks:

Network of Leaders
A key component of the model is the development of a "Leadership Network" for pastors who have covenanted to become "Transformational Leaders". The leadership network will be intentional in:

- Sharing the outcomes of congregational insights related to the use of transformation resources;
- Creating a "community of learning" through the use of "webinars", so that training and vision casting events for transformation can be held without requiring travel. (Webinars are events held with the combination of conference call and internet-based presentation);
- Writing articles on the topic Congregational Transformation for the Buckeye Disciple and sharing experiences at regional events.

Network of Congregations
Another component of Regional Church support of congregational transformation is the development and facilitation of a "resource network" among congregations who make a formal decision and a covenant with the Regional Church to become a "Transforming Congregation." The Pastoral Staff and the Congregational Transformation Team are closely monitoring the activity of the congregational network and will offer recommendations by evaluating new transformation resources and sharing the results with the pastoral and congregational leadership networks.

Network of Coaches
Coaching is an exciting way to draw out from within pastors and leaders the gifts and skills for transformation. The Congregational Transformation Team considers coaching perhaps the single most important resource for transformation and leadership development available for pastors and congregations. The Christian Church in Ohio has trained and developed a support network of coaches to work with pastors and congregational pastors committed to Transformation.
Leader Development

Children and Youth Ministries
In the area of leadership development, the Christian Church in Ohio continues to offer a variety of ministries to support and nurture congregational leaders. Through our CYF, Chi Rho and Children camping program, we reach close to 1,000 youth per year. Our curriculum prepares and encourages them to be leaders in their local churches. We have trained 16 youth officers of the Youth Commission to be servants leaders. This workshop takes place over three days in one of our regional outreach communities. In February of 2013, the Christian Church in Ohio sponsored an International Affairs Seminar, where 45 youth will travel to Washington, DC and New York, NY to learn what it means to be people of faith active in the American political process and global affairs.

Advance Ministries
Advance Ministries (young adults 19-29) is a point of leader development as young adults (19-29) choose programs and themes that enhance both their gifts as leaders, provide opportunity for community, and deepen their spiritual growth. Advance meets for 2 weekend retreats each winter and spring and then for a full week of conference each summer. Several Advance participants around the Region gather regularly for Bible Study, conversation and to pray together. Many go on to be pastoral and lay leaders in their congregations and in the Region.

Adult Conference
This lay led event is into its 76th year in 2013 continuing to build leadership and relationships. The theme this year is “Living in the Spirit, Touched by Grace.” Visiting staff this year will include Dr. Margaret Ralph, Director of the M.A. Program for Roman Catholic Students at Lexington Theological Seminary, and Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Regional Minister of Pennsylvania. Throughout the week there are mission opportunities in area nursing homes as well as a special offering at the closing consecration service which is divided among several ministries including: Week of Compassion and Church World Service among others.

Disciples Fellowship Retreat
This group of over 100 is completely led by lay people. They have two retreats a year a Labor Day and Memorial Day. This retreat is for everyone often has more than one family with 4 generations. They gather for fellowship, mission and worship. This year their mission is working with the New Congregation in Delaware both pack up and then put back out their material for the Free Store at our Camp Christian.
Commission on Ministry
The Commission on Ministry of Christian Church in Ohio has reorganized to be more intentional in communicating and supporting all candidates and congregations the New Order of Ministry. The Commission on Ministry relates to 282 Ordained Ministers, 45 Commissioned Ministers, 14 Candidates on track to be Commissioned Ministers, 14 Candidates on the Apprentice Track, 13 in Seminary seeking to be Ordained Ministers, and 5 Candidates ordained in other traditions seeking standing with Disciples of Christ. The Ohio Regional Church Office proudly ordained 6 ministers in 2012.

Ohio Disciples Men
Mission continues to guide our Men’s gathering as we work to redefine ourselves. We are currently building work teams throughout the Ohio Region to help local church ministry and work with Disciples Volunteering. We continue to lift up the 4 General Ministries supported by “Men Cooking for Mission.” As a whole we meet twice per year. In the spring this is a work retreat for the mission of supporting our Camp Christian by preparing it for its summer program. This fall we gather for fellowship and learning as our speaker will be Rev. Dr. Rick Lowery.

Ohio Women’s Ministries
In addition to two annual events, Fall Retreat and Women’s Convocation, Ohio Women’s Ministries held a successful luncheon at the Regional Assembly of the Christian Church. We continue to encourage and expand ministries by and for women across generations in Ohio, and to offer opportunities for worship, study, and mission. Ohio Women’s Ministries will continue to provide opportunities for learning and leader development throughout the year.

Spiritual Life Ministries
This group plans a yearly retreat for Pastors and spouses who are able to come. This year’s theme “Pathways to Center” explores the many different ways to strengthening one’s spiritual life. They continue to work at building a network of Spiritual Directors at can be used for both clergy and lay leaders alike. In the fall, they sponsor a time of Silent Retreat for both lay and clergy.

Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation
The Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Commission continues to offer anti-racism training to clergy and other regional leaders, along with congregations as we seek to become an anti-racist/pro-reconciling church.

After more than a decade in existence the Anti-Racism commission’s commitment to helping the Christian Church Ohio reach its goals of true diversity and inclusivity continues. At the same time we are evaluating the structure and work of the Commission so that the resources and the most helpful strategies for reaching our goals
are achieved. The Commission also continues to meet with clergy in districts to inform and support clergy and church leaders as we all discern ways to live out our call to be a diverse and anti-racist/pro-reconciling region and church.

The questions we will be asking clergy remain the same as in previous years:

1. How do you welcome people ethnically or racially different then the majority of your congregation?
2. How do you welcome people who are ethnically or racially different into church membership and into the power/leadership structures of the church?
3. How can the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Commission help you and your church move forward in the process?
4. What are the barriers preventing you and your church from moving forward?

Closing
In all of these ministries we are working to carry out our Regional Priorities of:

- Building Relationship and Networking Congregations
- Leadership Development
- Congregational Transformation and Evangelism

We look forward with great anticipation of what God will do through us as ministers of the Gospel and leaders in Christ’s church in the days ahead.

May God’s Blessings be with you,

Regional Staff:
Rev. Dr. William H. Edwards, Regional Pastor and President (African-American, Male)
Rev. Stephen Bentley Regional Associate Pastor (Anglo, Male)
Rev. Dr. LaTauny M. Bynum Regional Associate Pastor (African-American Female)
Rev. Dr. Brenda Webster, Regional Program Minister (African-American Female)
Joanne Arnold, Executive Assistant (Anglo, Female)
Jennie Stoddart, Office Administrator (Anglo, Female)
Rich Haines, Interim Treasurer (Anglo, Male)
Sally Wears, Financial Clerk (Anglo, Female)
Al Channell, Camp Christian Superintendent (Anglo, Male)
Doris Woodson, Camp Christian Food Services (Anglo, Female)

Number of Congregations: 180
Total Members: 42,331
States included in Region: Ohio

Recommended Action:

The General Board receives the report from the Christian Church in Ohio (Disciples of Christ).