

Central Rocky Mountain Region, Disciples of Christ

Regional Board

Report of the Interim Executive Regional Minister

August 29, 2015

Death has cast its shadow over the Central Rocky Mountain Region in the past few months, beginning with the unexpected illness and death of former regional minister Ron Parker in July. I counted it a blessing to be able to travel to Phoenix and to be present for his memorial service on July 10.

The Region was shaken again on August 4 when we heard the news of David Woods' suicide. I have every confidence that you join me in prayer as his family, his friends, and his congregation as they work through grief, struggle to fit pieces together, and discover what *normal* is going to mean now.

All the rationalizations and pontifications about self-care and connection seem a distant buzz. Someday maybe. But for now, this is what it means to have true community and share a deep Christian spirituality. For now we pray. For now we share. For now we support. For now we encourage, even when it seems anything that we may say or do will be woefully inadequate. For now.

Travels and Connections

September 1 will mark ten months that I have been serving as your Interim Executive Regional Minister. In that time, I have visited in 31 of our 45 congregations, with visits to four more currently on the calendar. (My upcoming schedule is available on the Regional Minister page at www.cmrdoc.org.) Of the congregations that I have not yet visited or have plans to visit, I have met with the pastor of four of them.

Traveling on behalf of the Region, I have spent an average of nine days per month traveling outside the Metro Denver area, traveling approximately 13,500 miles by air and over 10,000 miles by car. Of the automobile miles, 7,000 of those have been in my personal vehicle.

When travel schedules and meetings require me to be present for the Region or to travel on Saturdays, I have started the practice of working from home one day during those weeks, generally Thursday. While working from home is not the same as a day off, only being available for emergencies on those days will help.

Staff and Office Changes

The Central Rocky Mountain Region sadly bid farewell to Jessa Decker Smith on June 2 but we wished her well as she devotes her full time energy to her family and her art. We are delighted that Lara Maerz began serving as Executive Assistant on June 15.

With this change the office schedule shifted. The regional office is now open Monday through Thursday, 9:30-5:00.

Marty Hermanstorfer is retiring effective August 31. We appreciate the work that Marty has done for the region in search and call, both as a volunteer and as a part time staff member. We are planning a reception celebration of Marty's ministry on Saturday, September 12, from 2:00 until 5:00 in the gymnasium at the Tennyson Center.

Closing Churches

Welcome Table Christian Church held its last worship service on May 31. I appreciate Marty Hermanstorfer and Georgenne Tomlinson attending this service as representatives of the Region.

Aurora First Christian Church held a worship service with closing liturgy on May 3. However, on the Friday before this service, the church was served with a lawsuit from one of its members, who also served on the church council that made the decision to close, seeking an injunction to prevent the closing. This member contended that the congregational vote to close, taken on September 21, 2014, was not done in accordance with the congregation's By-Laws.

The Region is involved in this matter because the deed to the church's property contains a clause that reverts ownership of the property to the Region in the event that the church would either close or cease to be a congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The Region also entered an agreement in 2006 that we would, upon receipt of the property when the congregation closed, sell the property and deposit the proceeds into the Aurora First Christian Church Permanent Fund at Christian Church Foundation.

A timeline of events in this matter is available for board review, and we have this before us as business for discussion and action. The current status is that a remnant of the congregation who, upon belief that the congregation never legally closed, continues to occupy the property. Our most recent actions have been an attempt to intervene in the action brought by the church member and the sending this week of a demand letter asking the group to vacate and to turn over keys and all church property to the Region. All of this has been done with legal advice and counsel from Greg Hock, an attorney and member of First Christian Church in Colorado Springs. Greg is also a member of the CRMR Foundation board.

New Church

Pacific Islander Fellowship (Disciples of Christ) began to emerge as a new congregation when Micronesian Christians, who come from the Chuuk Islands, now living in Denver met with myself and Charlie Wallace of Hope Partnership last December. This emerging congregation is being led by Pastor Berry Sotam, who came to Denver from a Chuukese Disciples congregation in Sioux City, Iowa. They currently meet for worship on Sunday afternoons at Lakewood Christian Church.

Pastor Sotam attended the General Assembly along with other Chuukese pastors, and the congregation is ready to be recognized as a congregation in formation. We have that before us as a business item. The most pressing need of the congregation is to find a location for worship that is closer to where the Chuukese population lives and works.

Governance Review

I am grateful to Doug Goodwin for his leadership and to all the members of the Governance Review Task Force for their work that resulted in the recommendations made to the Regional Board last March at Evergreen. Now it is time put some meat on those bones. We have for our consideration an initial draft of what regional governance might look like moving forward.

Spring Feast Planning

Spring Feast will be held May 13-14, 2016, at First Christian Church in Colorado Springs. We have secured Denver pastor and author Nadia Bolz-Weber as the keynote speaker. Georgette Tomlinson is leading the team that is planning for what promises to be an exciting and uplifting gathering of Disciples from the Central Rocky Mountain Region. We will gather under the theme, "On Earth as It Is in Heaven."

General Assembly

Two items of interest came out of the General Assembly. One was a substantial amount of cheerleading for a new initiative called Mission First. Mission First is intended to create a new emphasis on mission in the governance of the general ministries. The General Board has suspended its meeting for 2016 in order to pilot the work of a mission council. As a beginning, the general ministry is hoping for a series of "mission gatherings" to be held. At this time, the format and process for the mission gatherings has not been developed. If the pilot is deemed successful, the 2017 General Assembly will address significant changes to the Design as a much smaller mission council replaces the General Board.

The other item was the commitment of the Time and Place report to the Administrative Committee. This action prevented the General Assembly from making contractual obligations to Des Moines for the 2019 Assembly, and in the words of Todd Adams, stops the merry-go-round of planning so that we can seriously evaluate the purpose of a General Assembly and build an appropriate, affordable, and accessible event that fulfills the purpose.

QuickBooks Conversion

Rebecca Richardson has taken advantage of available training for QuickBooks, and specifically how to use it in a non-profit environment. Because of a generous gift from a board member, we have been able to provide the training resources, and Rebecca has been able to put in the hours to get up to speed on the new software. She and I are in consultation with our auditor and with the Finance Committee as we prepare for the conversion. Our plan is to begin work on setting up the system when she returns and be ready to implement beginning with fiscal year 2016.

South Hills Retreat Center Camp Kum-Ba-Yah

The South Hills Retreat Center, also known as Camp Kum Ba Yah, is a camp and retreat facility located near Twin Falls, Idaho, and owned by the Southeast Idaho Disciples churches. Jason Koon manages the South Hills Retreat Center and is a member of Valley Christian Church in Twin Falls. He and I have been in conversation about using South Hills for some regional events, such as an elders' retreat this fall and a youth event in 2016. These events would focus on churches in the Western District but would certainly not be exclusive to them.

2014 Audit

Rebecca Richardson has begun work with Paul Smith, CPA, on an audit of the Region's financial records for the year ended December 31, 2014.

Disciples Mission Fund

Central Rocky Mountain, like most of the regions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), faces financial challenges as the long established system of Disciples Mission Fund (DMF) for mission funding across the church needs drastic change. So far this year the Region has seen a decline in congregational giving to Disciples Mission Fund; however, some of this is due to exceptional, one-time gifts in 2014 that we should not expect to see again in 2015.

Assuming that 2014 patterns hold true for 2015 and that the year-to-date trends continue, both big assumptions, the income to the Region from congregational gifts to Disciples Mission Fund will be about \$85,000. This is about \$10,000 less than we projected in the budget for 2015. Two areas, I believe, warrant further exploration.

In an effort to understand the Regional Board's support and understanding of DMF, I looked at the regular congregational giving to Disciples Mission Fund by the congregations represented on the Regional Board. These twelve congregations represent just over half of the participating membership in regional churches. The giving to DMF from these congregations ranges from the strongest giving churches to some whose giving is negligible or non-existent.

Some responsibility for interpreting the ministry of the Region and how that is supported by Disciples Mission Fund rests with members of the Regional Board. We should explore ways to provide resources that will help board members interpret the work of the Region and Disciples Mission Fund to their local congregations.

The Central Rocky Mountain Region might consider looking into the way Disciples Mission Fund dollars are allocated to the Region. Funding for regional ministry from Disciples Mission Fund is based on criteria that were established at least ten years ago. Each region receives a percentage of Disciples Mission Fund dollars that were given by churches and individuals in that region. The percentage varies from region to region, and the allocation to the Central Rocky Mountain Region is approximately 53%. In other words, when a congregation in the Region gives \$100 to DMF, \$53 comes back and supports ministry in the Region. This does not consider Special Day offerings or designated gifts to DMF.

When the allocations were established, the Central Rocky Mountain Region consisted only of churches in Utah, Wyoming and Colorado. Since then, we have welcomed churches in New Mexico and Idaho. Each of these congregations is more than 500 miles from the regional office. While our need for resources increased, the allocation of funds from Disciples Mission Fund remained the same¹.

The Region can, while remaining in covenant with our partners, request an alternative allocation to the one approved by the General Board. We might consider what such an allocation might be, considering the changes that have occurred, and decide whether to go ahead with a request for an alternate allocation. Although not a long-term solution, this would allocate resources from congregations in a way that better reflects the increased geography of the Region and the support required.

¹ The allocation from the South Idaho churches began at the South Idaho allocation; however, that allocation is being reduced in three equal steps so that by 2018, the allocation from these churches will be at the current allocation for Central Rocky Mountain of approximately 53%.

Congregations in Transition

We currently have four congregations active in the search process: two in Colorado, one in Idaho, and one in New Mexico. We also welcome three new ministers to the Region: Dan Weaver, Dan Mayes, and Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson.

- **South Broadway Christian Church in Denver** has received ministerial profiles and is conducting initial interviews with candidates. Neil Allen is serving as the interim minister.
- **First Christian Church in Fort Morgan** is receiving minister profiles. Paul Porter is serving First Christian as their interim minister.
- **Bethany Christian Church in Farmington** is developing their congregational profile. David Evans is serving as the interim minister.
- **First Christian Church in Idaho Falls** has completed the New Beginnings assessment, and the search committee is interviewing candidates for a missional redevelopment pastor.
- **First Christian Church in Salida** has called Nestor Gomez to serve as transitional minister.
- **Central Christian Church in Pueblo** has called Dan Weaver. Dan comes to Central from Humboldt, Tenn., and began his work at Central on June 15. I am grateful for the work Don Sarton did as the interim at Central. I participated in Dan's installation service on August 23.
- **First Christian Church in Cheyenne** has called Dan Mayes. Dan comes from Spencer, Iowa, and he began his ministry in Cheyenne on August 15. Mark Pumphrey recently concluded a short-term interim at First Christian. Dan's installation service is set for October 18.
- **Cairn Christian Church in Lafayette** has called Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson to serve as associate pastor. She began her ministry at Cairn on July 1. I will participate in her installation service on September 6.
- Marcia Meier was installed as the pastor at **United Church of Kanab-Fredonia** on May 30.
- **Village Christian Church** in Colorado Springs is not only in a time of transition but also in a time of shock and grief. I had my first meeting with the elders and search committee on the Sunday following David's death and have continued to meet regularly with them. We are working on a plan to help the church transition to the point where they are ready to form a search committee and shift their focus to the future life and ministry of the congregation.

Respectfully submitted,

Dean Phelps
Interim Executive Regional Minister