

Our Future Story

Pages 2-9

&

The Contextual Analysis of the Florida Disciples Regional Church

(A little bit of history and a view of our current situation)

Pages 10-20



Our Future Story

*Connections: Our Future as the Florida Disciples Regional Church
“Our 2020 Report to Congregations”*

The Future Story is an “imagined” report to be given to the Florida Disciples gathered at Regional Assembly in 2020. In the next five to seven years we will be working diligently to bring our ministries and priorities in line with this envisioned report. We plan to be able to make such a report to our Regional Church.

We are overjoyed to report that the Florida Disciples Regional Church is living fully into the priorities for ministry identified in 2014. With courage and confidence we are:

- ***Standing*** firm in our faith in God through Jesus Christ
- ***Seeking*** the direction of God as we respond to the call God has placed upon us
- ***Working*** to be wise stewards of the resources (financial, physical, relational) entrusted to us
- ***Affirming*** as congregations, our covenantal relationship as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- ***Building*** strong relationships through courageous, faithful dialogue
- ***Coordinating*** the activities of all our ministries (Annual Planning Event)
- ***Streamlining*** our structures and governing documents to make the Regional Church Ministry more accessible and effective
- ***Identifying and Utilizing*** the unique and powerful Spiritual Gifts of our Clergy and Laity
- ***Seeing*** our Regional Church Ministry Team as “Tenders of the Networks”
- ***Celebrating*** the joy of our faith together in all of our gatherings
- ***Honoring*** our diversity of language, culture, history and ethnicity
- ***Creating*** new ways to work and worship together that respect the past and embrace the future
- ***Communicating*** with each other using current technologies
- ***Serving*** each other through the sharing of resources, leadership and gifts
- ***Caring*** for our clergy through Pastoral Response Teams
- ***Supporting*** our congregations through Regional Resource Teams
- ***Encouraging*** collaboration in mission through Regional Affinity Networks

CONNECTIONS: OUR FUTURE AS
THE FLORIDA DISCIPLES REGIONAL CHURCH
“Our 2020 Report to Congregations”

Have you ever noticed that both perfect vision and hindsight are 20/20? We often find ourselves looking back at a point in our lives thinking, “If only I had done *x* then things today would be different.” We have good news to celebrate today. We can look back and say, “We did the right thing. We are doing the ministry to which Jesus Christ is calling us together. We are constantly being renewed by our growing common understanding of, and commitment to, Jesus Christ.”

In 2014 our Florida Disciples Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) took on a major challenge. While we had much to celebrate about the work we Florida Disciples had done together since 1874, we were also seeking ways to heal recently broken relationships. We were struggling to find a new way of doing ministry as many of our resources were diminished, and many leaders were burned out. The future was uncertain. Much of what had worked for decades no longer seemed appropriate or needed by many of the congregations in the Florida Region. Remember those days?

Jesus declared that He came to bring life and bring it abundantly. As bodies of Christ, that is what churches are meant to do – bring life. We’ve created a system of connections – appropriate for a diverse group of people around the world who all count themselves part of the body of Christ. We are all connected through Christ, and it is through Christ that we share our talents, as Jesus shares himself with all of us every day. The Christian life calls for living in community. By reorganizing the Regional Church *as a community*, it has completely changed the way we think about our congregations. We’ve become less isolated, less insular, more comfortable reaching out with a phone call, email, or Facebook message that says, “Hey, I’m just thinking about your congregation. Call me if we can do anything for you over here. Godspeed.”

There has been a strong and consistent push for the congregations of our churches to study, discern, and work on developing spiritual gifts and talents and putting them to use in important ministries. A strong emphasis has been encouraging our children and youth to utilize their spiritual gifts and use them now in the life of their congregations and in the Regional ministry. The Regional Church has recognized that putting people into positions and roles that fit their giftedness is life giving. It is worth celebrating this new way (actually, a very old way!) of being church together. This way, The Way, God’s way, is working in our congregations and in our Regional Church. Our redeveloping relationships of help and encouragement is leading us to more abundant life together. It is good!

As we have worked hard at changing our perspective of Regional Church and our approach to doing Regional ministry, we have sensed a new wind of the Spirit running through our congregations. As our congregations focus on enhancing life and spirit, focusing on *being alive*

rather than *staying alive*, there has been a sense of optimism and hope among us. We have worked hard to continue to strengthen our face-to-face gatherings, to make them even more meaningful worship, teaching, and fellowship experiences. Our last two Regional Assemblies have seen particularly outstanding and uplifting preaching and music. The workshops on congregational transformation and utilizing our God given spiritual gifts were *informative*, but even more importantly – they were *formative* for many of us.

We continue to love getting together and sharing our stories of hope and spiritual growth at various Regional and local gatherings. Our Regional Assemblies have become real celebrations of the work of God among the Disciples of Christ here in Florida, and a testament to the ethnic diversity of our Regional Church. Our worship and workshops have sent participants home with a real sense that we are in this thing called Church together. We have expanded our ideas about what it means to be created as a single human family in the image of God—male, female, African American, Haitian, Hispanic, Asian or Anglo. No matter how we define ourselves ethnically, we’re learning to transcend labels and see each other as equal imagers of God; followers of Jesus, all called by Christ to create a real community of humans in service to each other. We are all important and necessary parts of the body of Christ. Perhaps Paul says it best in Romans 12:4-8.

“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”

It is clear now that our Regional Church and the churches that comprise this body of Disciples in Florida have embraced that advice whole-heartedly, thanks be to God!

How things have changed! We no longer view our Regional ministry as a *source*. Today we see it as a *resource*, much as we see each other and each other’s congregations as resources. We used to call the Regional office whenever we had a need, with the expectation that the Regional Minister would show up and help us fix our issues. Today though, we call the Regional office to be pointed toward someone or some group who might work alongside us as we work on a problem or try to meet a need.

This transformation was possible in part because of the creation of a Region-wide electronic communications network, using inexpensive, off-the-shelf hardware and internet-based applications. This change in communication allowed a congregation in Jacksonville to assist a congregation in Miami, with no travel time required. Our Regional ministry has helped with

recommendations for workable technology and training. Several of our congregations received grants to help assure they were connected to the Regional ministry network. Today every Disciples congregation in the Florida Disciples Regional Church has a modern computer, high-speed Internet connection, current communications software, and the aid of church techno-geeks throughout the Disciplesphere.

We do realize technology doesn't work for everything. You can't Skype camp—a retreat is about being together with people. Yet, we've learned that there is a lot that can be done without having to travel. Most of our board and committee meetings are held on the web.

Over the last twenty years the Regional office has developed quite an extensive catalogue of talents, strengths, and congregational spiritual gifts. Our Regional ministry is on the lookout for those who may have the gifts for ordained or commissioned ministry. Our Commission on Ministry is working with our Regional Ministers to nurture and train potential future pastors and other leaders for our congregations and other important ministries.

Here's one way this networking has been used. Southern Disciples Church was in some serious new trouble. The church was $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through their program year when the letter from the IRS came. The new church treasurer was nine months behind in paying payroll taxes for the church employees, and was completely caught off guard. She had been paying all the bills as they came in, and there had been no notice from the IRS. She reported the problem to her minister, who called the Regional Office. "What do we do? How can we fix this, and make sure we don't do it again?"

Well, it's not surprising that no one on the Regional Ministry Staff is a CPA, so no one there quite knew what to do to fix the problem. The Regional Minister could have said, "I don't know, you are on your own," but he didn't. Instead he sent out a quick email to folks in the Regional Church, explaining the issue without naming the church involved:

To folks in the Regional Church who might know something about Federal accounting:

Is there anyone with some expertise in this area that would be willing to help a church treasurer get things back in order and set the stage for the future?

Thank you for sharing your talents,

The RM

By the end of the day there were four responses from churches that could offer help, and ten more responses from churches also asking for "best practices" for church treasurers. The Regional Minister made the connection for the church in trouble, and then asked if the four responders would be willing to organize an online video workshop for any churches in the Regional Church

that needed help with best practices. The workshop took place two months later, and the video recording of that workshop is still accessible on the easy-to-use Regional Church website.

The Regional Minister made some critical connections between folks with a specific need and folks with some expertise. As it turns out, the church with IRS issues has a really excellent Senior Adult Ministry program, and the church with the expertise in finance was struggling to get a SAM program off the ground. The two churches are now helping each other on the journey.

Less than 20 years ago that call to the Regional office would have created a crisis. Not anymore. The Regional ministry no longer views itself as the source for every answer to every question that might come along, but rather as a resource for connections and relationships that can lead to life giving growth and lifelong friendships. The Regional ministry office acts as a communications hub that joins the various parts of the body of Christ together—in service to each other, in service to God, in fellowship and love.

One clear sense of celebration has been our Regional Church's four-year focus on small congregations. In 2014, it was clear that many of our small congregations were so focused on not dying that many of them had forgotten how to live and bring life to their members and their communities. The Regional Church made encouraging and strengthening smaller congregations an area of focus for these last four years. Special emphasis for the next four years will be on strengthening the spiritual and missional health of medium and larger sized congregations.

As our Regional Church has helped link congregations into relationships we are finding that every congregation has valuable strengths. Our churches are **teaching each other** new, and often better, ways of doing church and engaging our communities. The creative nature of God is alive in the connections of our relationships. The beauty of this is that all of our churches, large and small, and everything in between, have something to teach others. Every congregation is an important partner in this Regional ministry we share together.

We have been intentional about broadening those connections and relationships, especially in enhancing and encouraging each other's diversity. The Florida Regional Church is multi-cultural and multi-lingual, and the Regional ministry team has been purposeful about developing cross-cultural connections. We are growing in our understanding that we are Disciples of Christ together before we can be and do anything else as a body. We can only be the body of Christ together, never alone. Changes that honor diversity have come about through courageous conversations among our members. While these conversations have sometimes been difficult, they have resulted in deeper understanding of our varying ways of being church and a growing respect for being one church with many traditions. Barriers have been broken and bridges have been built.

Our Assemblies and other Regional gatherings reflect this unity in more and more ways. All of us are learning new styles of worship that bring glory to God. We are welcoming each other in

common ministry and leadership across the Regional Church's work as Church. We will always be strengthening these relationships – by learning more about each other and by working together more often. We believe God is constantly at work reconciling the Divine-human relationship. We believe we honor God when we also work on reconciling our human-human relationships. Our unity in diversity is seen online, in camps, conferences, common mission projects, and meetings where we plan and share our life and work together as Regional Church.

Fifteen years ago our connections and relationships were mostly geographical. Our districts and areas met and worshipped together on some sort of schedule. Today some of our districts that were not functioning well in 2014 have given way to a network of relationships based on common interest or common need. Many of the churches that are working together on projects and training are not geographically close.

The Regional ministry team has encouraged the clergy across the Regional Church to develop a program of collegiality. Every time a new person takes on a ministry in the Florida Regional Church the Regional office puts out word to other pastors in the general area. At least two pastors are encouraged to make an official but personal face-to-face welcome (even if via Skype or another video program) to clergy new to the Regional Church, and to offer an orientation to the area and the Florida Disciples. The Regional Church has also strongly encouraged our pastors and chaplains to participate in peer groups for encouragement and support. These “Covenant Groups” meet once a quarter via an online meeting program.

Our Regional Church gave its backing to a group of clergy to seek grants from the Lilly Foundation and others in a partnership with the Georgia Regional Church to help reestablish a Regional clergy support network. So far we have had two Regional Church-wide all-clergy events to help launch a peer support system. The groundwork is laid and some groups are meeting monthly. Some are geographical; others are based on common interest and need. The Regional Minister signed off on the grant applications and encouraged the endeavor from interested and invested clergy from several parts of the Regional Church. Regional ministry staff members are in groups with other clergy, but they are not in charge of them.

The new Pastoral Response Team has also been a winner. Based on the old district concept, at least one person has been recruited and trained to represent the Regional ministry when there is a need in their geographical area. Several of the Pastoral Response Team members are retired clergy. When a call comes to the Regional office, for example, that a pastor or her/his spouse is in the hospital, the Regional Minister calls the nearest Response Team members to make a visit in quick time, when geographical distances mean the Regional Minister cannot.

Our Regional Ministry Team has become in some manner the “Tenders of the Network” that the Regional ministry has become in the last several years. The Regional ministry staff helps make

and nurture connections that help our congregations and Regional ministries to be spirit-building, life-giving, bridge-building, barrier-breaking and unifying sources.

Our constituencies such as Disciples Women, La Convención, Disciples Men, and Senior Adult Ministries are all still going strong. Other groups have been thanked for their service and have been disbanded, having completed their important work. New groups have formed around common interests. A new group for mutual support of non-parish ministers is very active. Disciples chaplains, church social workers, and administrators are developing mutual support teams around areas of common interest and need. Youth leaders are working together on a number of projects across the Regional Church, including new options for retreats and outdoor ministries. One group is designing paraments, banners, and stoles for special seasons of the church year and for special Regional gatherings. Their work is beautiful, and they represent the variety of cultures within the Florida Disciples Regional Church. Patterns are offered freely to anyone who requests them. A network of church musicians and a gig board has been created. Almost all of these groups—new and old, meet regularly using online tools.

The Retreat at Silver Springs (also known as the Christian Church Conference Center) is being marketed in a whole new way. In addition to the long-standing camps, conferences, and retreats for Disciples, The Retreat at Silver Springs is available to a wide variety of groups and organizations. As our Regional Church recognized several years ago, the programs and facilities would need to become self-sustaining. As the development of a permanent fund with the Christian Church Foundation has grown along with expanded use of the grounds and facilities, The Retreat at Silver Springs is now a self-sustaining entity, having done better than “breaking even” the last two fiscal years.

Our Regional ministry has come to recognize that church buildings can be both a blessing and a curse. We are encouraging our congregations to stop allowing buildings to steal life and vitality from our churches and leaders by limiting vision/mission AND draining valuable time, spirit, and money from their ministry. In the past many of our congregations have felt the need to choose buildings over mission and investing in needed ministerial leadership. The Regional ministry has begun to offer encouragement and links to denominational tools and resources to help our congregations explore new ways of examining the relative value of buildings for community ministry. A few of our congregations have sold their buildings in order to be freed up spiritually and missionally to engage in the community ministry to which their churches have been called and in order to be relieved of the burdens of building ownership and maintenance.

A high percentage of the Disciples congregations here in Florida have worked together to support a significant mission project. We have worked together to support a new clinic for farm workers in the heart of citrus growing country. We have helped complete the clinic building with a percentage of the funds from our recent Regional capital campaign, which also helped with

upgrades to The Retreat Center at Silver Springs, the Regional office, and two of our churches who are rebuilding from a recent hurricane.

The congregations of our Florida Disciples Regional Church are experimenting with a variety of ways of *doing* and *being* church. Some are traditional; others are more modern. Many of our congregations are moving more deeply into partnerships with other congregations of different denominations and backgrounds to engage in effective local mission. Whether partnering together with other churches to build homes with Habitat for Humanity or establishing local food banks, our congregations are doing the faithful work of God's people under a variety of names. Florida Disciples are erasing the borders that too often divide us and prevent us from doing God's work. In fact, more and more of our churches see mission as God's work, not Disciples' work. We join with whoever will work with us to engage the work we are called to do. We are reclaiming our heritage of ecumenical leadership locally and regionally.

As the Regional Church has become stronger with improved communication and connections, we have also developed stronger connections with the General Church. Members of churches in the Florida Region serve on most of the boards and commissions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at the national/international level. Because of the improved ways we share information with each other, those serving at the denominational level are sharing information in a timely way with others in the Regional Church. Partly as a result of this, more Floridians than ever are attending General Assemblies, taking part in Global Ministry work, attending Disciples colleges and seminaries, helping in recovery efforts after disasters around the nation, and giving substantially to Disciples work. Work within the congregation, the Regional Church and the General Church is seen as a seamless continuum of being Disciples.

Let us celebrate what our Regional Ministry has become and is becoming, constantly shaped and reformed by God the way a gentle stream eventually wears the rough edges away from a craggy rock. Step by step, patiently and always trusting God, our Regional Church has become a new, life-giving creation. We are learning and living a transformed way of doing and being Regional Church together. We are learning and living a transformed way of doing and being Church together. We are living examples of the Gospel story of transformation. We are following Jesus where he is leading us.

Let's be Disciples.

(Thanks to Dan Webster, Michael Junkroski and Margaret Marquis for drafting this document and to the Transformation Vision Team for editing and contributing ideas)

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Florida
Contextual Analysis
Fifth Draft, March 27, 2014
Dick Hamm, consultant

This Analysis of the current situation of the Florida Disciples Regional Church was created out of information gathered from many sources, including the Yearbook and Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), but perhaps more notably from interviews and conversations that took place at our Transformation Area Events conducted around the region in the early part of 2014.

Under the leadership of regional minister Juan Rodriguez, and the regional board, a Regional Church Transformation initiative has begun. This analysis is a first step in the process of understanding our context, discerning God's desired future for the Region, and becoming the Regional expression of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that we are called to be. This is a "living document", which means that information may be added or corrected as the transformation process unfolds and new information is discovered.

In 1874, Disciples congregations in Florida began meeting with Georgia congregations in southern Georgia for mutual support. In 1881 the Florida congregations formed their own annual gathering, which came to be known as the Florida Christian Cooperation. In 1892, at a gathering at the Ocoee congregation, D.M. Brecker was called to be the first "state evangelist". In 1910, the name was changed to the Florida Christian Missionary Society and then, in 1967, it became the Florida Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), intended to be an association of congregations rather than of individuals only. In 1974, the organization became the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Florida and began meeting in biennial assemblies. Thus the Region went from being an association of interested individual Disciples to a cooperation of congregations, to a convention of congregations, to a regional expression of one church in the US and Canada.

The title of the executive changed from "state evangelist" (1892) to "secretary-director" (1942) to "state secretary" (1950) to "regional minister" (1977) showing the typical (church-wide) regional pattern of moving from an emphasis on starting new congregations to tending the health and administrative needs of existing congregations. This can be seen as a positive natural progression of institutional maturity, but can also be seen more negatively as being partly a move from mission toward maintenance.

In 1947, the Florida Christian Men's Fellowship was formed out of previous men's programming. In 1949, the Florida State CYF formed. In 1950, the Florida Christian Women's Fellowship followed suit. Also in 1950, C. Manley Morton (after whom a campground is named in Puerto Rico) started the Florida Timothy Association for young people intending to enter the ministry.

Geographically, the Region extends from Key West north 500 miles to the Georgia state border and west to Tallahassee. The panhandle west of Tallahassee is part of the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region.

Culturally, Florida is a very complicated state. The East coast was populated by many from the Northeastern states in the early to late 20th century, with a large influx of Hispanic people (especially from Cuba and Puerto Rico) and other Caribbean people (including Haitians). The West coast was populated by many from the Midwestern states in the early to late 20th century, with a significant Cuban-American population. Until the 1960's, and the arrival of Disney World, the interior of the state was Old South until settlements of retiring northerners and various immigrant groups created a mix of Old South, Hispanic and various Northern cultures. There are native Floridian African Americans, some of whom have roots that go back to Civil War days, and those who have migrated to Florida from the North for economic opportunities in recent decades. Jim Crow was alive and well in Florida into the 1960's and the state still struggles with systemic racism and de facto segregation in most communities (both racial and ethnic). Rural interests dominated the Florida legislature until the US Supreme Court reapportioned the state in 1967.

Agriculture is still a huge industry in the interior, though much of the Citrus Belt has been given over to amusement parks, retirement housing and associated development. Tourism remains a predominant industry especially in the coastal areas and in the Greater Orlando Area (Disney World opened in 1971 and scores of other parks and attractions have clustered near Disney in order to benefit from the collective draw of visitors). There is a high tech corridor on the East coast (Space Coast), though some economic decline has come to that area since the diminishment of the US space program.

Though Florida's population was only about a half million in 1900, and 5 million in 1960, more than 19 million people call Florida home today, due to air conditioning, mosquito control, and increased migration within the United States and from beyond. Many are of retirement age, but many are young people (especially among immigrants). However, only about 13,000 are members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), partly because denominational efforts to start new congregations diminished in the mid-1960's (just as the Florida population was exploding), and because there has been much decline in most Anglo congregations during the past 50 years.

According to the US census, in 2010, Florida had a population of 18,801,310. In terms of race and ethnicity, the state was:

75% white (including about 17% white Hispanic)

16% African American

2.4% Asian American

22.5% Hispanic and Latino of all races

Florida's [Hispanic](#) population includes large communities of [Cuban Americans](#) in Miami and Tampa, [Puerto Ricans](#) in Orlando and Tampa, and Central American migrant workers in inland West-

Central and South Florida. The Hispanic community continues to grow more affluent and mobile. As of 2011, 57.0% of Florida's children under the age of 1 belonged to minority groups.

State Religious affiliation:

26% Roman Catholic, Florida is 26%

48% Protestant

9% Baptist, 6% Methodist, 3% Pentecostal

3% Jewish

16% "None"

Florida Disciples congregations are predominantly Anglo, Puerto Rican, and Haitian, with a few African American congregations. The Regional Minister, Juan Rodriguez, says,

"From the issues of race and national identity of post-Civil War America to the issues surrounding sexual orientation and globalization of post-modern America, the FDRC includes congregations that reflect the sweeping change of the last 130 years of American history.

- *One of our oldest congregations is housed in a historical church building on land donated by an officer of the Confederate army around 1883. One of our newest congregations, launched in the spring of 2013, is meeting at a YMCA facility right alongside high tech exercise equipment.*
- *Migrations from the Caribbean over the past 30-40 years have resulted in the addition of a good number of Haitian and Puerto Rican congregations to the predominantly Euro/English speaking FDRC with its sprinkling of African American congregations.*
- *What was once a 'missionary society', with State Evangelists and State Secretaries, has evolved into a 'regional church' with Regional Ministers who successively reflect the growing openness of the FDRC to racial, gender and ethnic diversity."*

In regard to the fellowship/collegiality of ministers in the Region, the regional minister feels there is a yearning for connection for prayer, study, dialogue and fellowship (especially among bi-vocational pastors). North District, West Central District and some Southern District pastors meet for prayer, mutual support, and resource sharing. The SE Convencion leaders, Southwest District men, Seniors Ministry Group, Christian Women's Fellowship, and Christian Church Conference Center Commission meet with some consistency for work and retreats.

At the same time, there are huge gaps between the various racial-ethnic groups.

As the regional minister says, "The FDRC is like a solar system with cultural and theological planets revolving around the same sun but '*worlds apart*'." Some of this is due to language differences, of course, but there are also significant differences between and within the various groups regarding theological issues (including but not limited to sexual orientation), and style.

The congregations can be described as follows:

Listed as “in formation”

African American	4	0
Brazilian	1	1
Euro/Anglo	52	2
Haitian	25	25
Hispanic/Latino	<u>18</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	38

New Church

There has not been a concerted new-church development effort in Florida for some time. Several of those congregations listed as “new” or “congregations-in-formation” were actually already in existence and have been “adopted” by the Region.

It is worth noting that in 1981 there were 83 congregations, 32 of which were started between 1949-1964. Congregations die of natural causes, but more often of self-inflicted wounds. Some congregations leave the denomination (a too frequent occurrence among Disciples in the 1930’s, 1950’s and 1970’s). Regions must add annually approximately 3% of the number of congregations they currently have in order to stay even (that’s about 2.5 new congregations annually). Growth in numbers of congregations requires more starts even than 3%.

50 years ago, in 1963, the Region was comprised of 63 congregations and 20,392 members. There were 778 baptisms and 1745 transfers of membership into the Region that year. In 2013, there are 100 congregations (including those not yet chartered – “in-formation”) with 13,425 members (35% fewer than in 1963). There were 193 baptisms and 363 received by transfer of membership (78% fewer new members than in 1963). So, there are fewer members in more (but smaller) congregations on average, which are baptizing and receiving fewer members. In part, these are “signs of the times” as mainline Protestant churches are shrinking in most places. On the other hand, there are so many people today who would love to be a part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) if they only knew we exist. Our emphasis on maintenance over mission, for whatever reasons, is slowly killing us!

Ministers

There are 265 Disciples ministers listed in Florida (the following list needs to be clarified or corrected to some degree): 202 are listed as ordained, 62 are listed as Commissioned (plus one undesignated). Of these 265, the following categories are identified:

- 20 are listed as Associate Ministers
- 2 Christian Educators
- 2 serving non-Disciples congregations
- 3 Disciples Ministers serving UCC congregations
- 1 serves in General Ministry (NBA)
- 3 serve in Higher Education
- 1 Federal chaplain
- 18 institutional chaplains
- 2 Ministers of counseling
- 3 Music Ministers
- 17 Non-parish Ministers
- 10 Other profession but preaching
- 86 Pastors of Congregations
- 2 Regional Ministers
- 1 Conference Center Director
- 21 Retired Active
- 72 Retired Inactive
- 2 Student Pastors

Structure and Governance

The Region meets in assembly every two years with a typical attendance of about 300-400. The Region is divided into five “districts”: North, Central, West Central, Southwest, and Southern. The regional board is comprised of 16 voting and 8 non-voting members, and meets twice a year (attendance is usually about 80%). An executive committee (moderator, moderator-elect, the regional minister, associate regional minister and the five district moderators) responds to matters that need attention between board meetings. A Commission on Ministry and Stewardship Commission are presently functioning.

The regional staff has decreased in recent years from 3 full-time ministers and 4 support staff, to 2 full-time ministers and 1 part-time support staff person.

Currently, the region has a regional minister (Latino), an associate regional minister (Anglo), an executive assistant (Anglo), and a director of the Conference Center (Anglo). The regional offices are leased and located near downtown Orlando (1800 Pembroke Drive, Orlando, FL 32810), with easy access to Interstate I-4. The Conference Center is located at Silver Springs (6455 E. Silver Springs Blvd, Silver Springs, 34488).

The Region has no debt, but has guaranteed loans for congregations amounting to \$13 million. The region owns the Conference Center at Silver Springs.

The Conference Center (established in 1953) has a rich history in the life of the Region, especially among Anglo congregations). The land for it was contributed by the owners of the Silver Springs attraction, Mr. Davidson and Mr. Ray. It has a bed capacity of 120 and is the site of the Region's camp and conference program. As the regional minister says, this *"beloved facility is the location of our most palpable piece of regional ministry – our summer camping program for children and youth. There is a long list of ministers, even general ministers 😊, who have been nurtured into faith and ministry at this sacred place."* However, the conference center is one of the major stewardship challenges of the Region.

Ecumenical Relationships

Ecumenically, the region partners with the United Church of Christ to do boundary training and to host Global Mission missionaries on furlough. The UCC conference minister was a member of the last regional minister search committee. In 1947, the Region was a co-founder of the Florida Council of Churches and has continued to participate in it. The regional minister has signed public statements on various issues.

Regional Programming

The Region has not offered any anti-racism/pro-reconciliation training - a General Church emphasis that is part of 2020 Vision for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Regional programming includes summer camp and conference; Women's Fellowship retreats; Men's Fellowship retreats and work projects; Senior Adult Ministry retreats and travel; and Southeastern Convencion assemblies and retreats.

The Region has not had a congregational vitality/transformation initiative, but an initial Hope Partnership Missional Transformation Event has been scheduled for November, 2013.

Communications

Information about Regional events, news, prayer requests, and business are communicated via the website, electronic mass e-mailings, and a Facebook page. Telephone and e-mail are the primary modes of communication for pastoral and congregational concerns until a congregational visit or face to face meeting is indicated. Regional leadership is beginning to expand their understanding of and approach to "communications" to include mission interpretation and more interactive streams of communication.

Regional Finances

Disciples Mission Fund giving from Florida congregations has declined from about \$350,000 in 2005 to about \$225,000 in 2012 (the Florida region receives 50% of the DMF monies given by Florida congregations. The special offerings at Christmas (100% of which go to the Region) have remained fairly steady at \$15,000 to \$19,000.

The 2013 Florida Regional budget calls for \$247,800 of income (including \$118,500 in investment income) and \$326,809 of expenses (including a \$5,293 loss at the Conference Center) for a total deficit of \$79,009. This deficit is being covered by drawing on unrestricted assets. Though this is a serious deficit, it is by far the smallest deficit of the past 4 years due in large measure to cuts in staffing (the following deficits were incurred in recent years: 2011 - \$117,214; 2012 – \$231,888; 2012 – \$227,289).

The Region is carrying no debt and has investments of \$1.78 million with Christian Church Foundation and \$100,000 with Church extension.

The Region has often “co-signed” for loans made by new congregations from Church Extension. Currently (September, 2013), the Region has \$10,576,501.00 in 14 such loan commitments, of which 4 loans totaling \$4,298,935 are currently in default.

Conflict

Five Hispanic congregations have disassociated within the past two years because of issues of disagreement regarding the involvement of gay and lesbian persons in the life and work of the church. There are another 7 or 8 congregations considering similar action.

The Region has been rather pastor-centered in its approach to life and ministry (“pastor-centered” is technically descriptive organizational term and not intended as a judgment). This approach (as is true in congregations) makes it very difficult to overcome crises of trust that are brought on by the ethical misconduct of staff, such as the recent misuse of funds by a former regional minister. The region has been left with reduced credibility and authority.

Juan Rodriguez comments, *“Since January, 2012, I have experienced our Region as an organizational system broken by betrayal and confused by the relentless flow of global post-modern change. However, I believe this broken system can and should be re-created via a process of prayerful discernment that seeks to hear God’s call for us as Disciples, here, now.”*

As one leader has described it, *“The FDRC has an informal family style approach to regional Ministry work and relationships. The balance that should exist between being a ‘loving Christian family’ and an ‘effective Christian organization’ tends to tip toward the former.”*

As Juan Rodriguez says, *“From the issues of race and national identity of post-Civil War America to the issues surrounding sexual orientation and globalization of post-modern America, the FDRC includes congregations that reflect the sweeping change of the last 130 years of American history.”* This means, in part, there are a number of very different perspectives operational in the various congregations and no one ethos operational in the Region as a whole. This has the potential to divide (and often has), but also has the potential to generate a rich fellowship in which all individuals and congregations can learn from each other and all be better for it.

The Region (as seen in the following chart) has congregations in all four organizational sizes (family, pastoral, program, corporate – as described by Alban Institute). Each of these sizes of congregation has somewhat unique needs which must be taken into account when thinking about how the Region can best help its congregations.

Congregations of the Florida Region By Size

	Active	Average	Average
	Members	Attendance 2012	Attendance 1992
Family Size <75 active members			
Bartow First	35	35	(47)
Bradenton Central	70	45	(155)
Gainesville, First	62	62	(90)
Hollywood, Faith	45	34	(65)
Homestead, First	25	20	(24)
Jacksonville, Arlington	47	31	(80)
Jacksonville, Lynnwood	50	27	(90)
Lehigh Acres, First	45	33	(76)
McIntosh	10	16	(20)
Miami, Iglesia Christiana	59	50	(100)
Ocoee	54	43	(69)
Orlando, Iglesia Christiana	70	55	(60)
Ormond Beach, First	70	40	(52)
Sebring, Primera Christiana	35	70	(96)
Winter Haven, First	48	44	(131)
Winter Park	28	30	(83)
(16 congregations)			
Pastor Size 75-150 active members			
Brandon	150	85	(132)
Clearwater Central	-	104	(234)
Daytona Beach First	75	70	(68)
Deland, First	120	65	(100)
Deltona	141	103	(110)
Deltona Iglesia Christiana	100	100	(90)
Fort Myers CC	110	106	(106)
Jacksonville, Edgewood	111	70	(83)
Jacksonville, St. Nicholas Park	122	50	(80)
Jacksonville, Southside	75	60	(113)
Jacksonville, Springfield	95	50	(78)
Kissimmee, Iglesia Christiana	115	85	(-)
Lakeland, Bethany	108	76	(62)
Miami, Liberty	75	55	(175)

	Active	Average	Average
	Members	Attendance 2012	Attendance 1992
Mount Dora, Central	94	56	(75)
Naples, First	100	104	(151)
Orlando, Pershing Avenue	139	68	(101)
St. Petersburg, Bay Point	146	110	(118)
St. Petersburg, Palm Lake	197	85	(255)
Sarasota, Beneva	95	80	(250)
Sarasota, First	154	90	(204)
Sebring, First	84	69	(125)
Summerfield, Galilee	100	80	(20)
Vero Beach, First	94	78	(50)
West Palm Beach, First	152	110	(152)
Wildwood, First	150	74	(53)
Zephyrhills, First	150	85	(192)
(27 congregations)			
Program Size 150-350 active members			
Coral Gables	180	230	(62)
Coral Springs	263	179	(321)
Fort Myers, Unity	200	106	(106)
Haines City, First	159	107	(300)
Jacksonville, First	245	155	(135)
Jacksonville, Riverside	295	135	(151)
Kissimmee, Primera Iglesia	-	160	113
Melbourne, First	156	119	(235)
Neptune Beach, First	300	225	(250)
Ocala, First	298	149	(293)
Orlando, Central	155	110	(145)
Tampa, Peninsular	285	232	(207)
Venice, First	231	255	(126)
(13 congregations)			
Corporate			
Casselberry, Iglesia	391	393	(146)
Davie, Parkway	370	185	(197)
Daytona Beach, Drive In	986	537	(510)

	Active	Average	Average
	Members	Attendance 2012	Attendance 1992
Palm Beach Gardens, Tropical Sands	325	350	(138)
Wilton Manors, First	425	250	(375)
(5 congregations)			
Congregations-In-Formation			
Brooksville, Suncoast	23	25	(28)
Dade City, Primera	-	80	(90)
Hollywood, Primera Iglesia Hispana	started January, 2014		
Homestead True	no record		
Jacksonville, Faro de Esperanza	-	35	(34)
Lauderdale Lakes	-	40	(28)
Miami, Christ Is My Rock	no record		
Miami, Eglise Evangelique	-	55	-
Miami, El Ghanna	no record		
Miami, La Primere	-	45	-
Miami, New Bethel	-	40	(20)
Miami, Salem	no record		
Miami, Second Alliance	-	60	(60)
Miami, The Grace Center	-	120	-
Miami, Tabernacle of Christ	no record		
Miami, Unity	no record		
Miramar, Schekinah	-	120	-
Naples, Ebenezer	-	40	-
North Miami, Salem	-	80	-
North Miami Beach, Good Shepherd	-	430	-
North Miami Beach, Redemption	no record		
Oakland Park	-	39	-
Orlando, Arise	-	80	-
Port St. Lucie, Combattan	-	50	-
Port St. Lucie, Eglise Chretienne	40	29	-
Port St. Lucie, New Jerusalem	-	50	-
Riverview, Renovacion	-	65	(27)
Sarasota, Cathedral	75	90	(40)
Tallahassee, Blessings	-	35	-
Tampa, Unidos	-	25	-
West Palm Beach, Maranatha	-	75	(120)
(31 congregations)			

The Region's Current Vision, Mission and Goals Statements

"The vision of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Florida is to be God's faithful people, empowered by the Holy Spirit, evangelizing and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, respecting diversity and working in community with other faiths."

"Our mission is to fulfill the Great Commission by Training, Empowering, Affirming and Motivating congregations for disciples-making ministry."

"The five goals that enable us to accomplish our mission are: Leadership Development, Education, New Church Starts, Communication & Technology, and Resourcing."

As one who was raised and mentored in the Christian Church in Florida, I am delighted to be working with you and excited about the potential I see here and the leadership of Juan Rodriguez. God bless this transformation process.

Dick Hamm

Additional Issues:

How does the Florida Region include and meet the needs of the considerable number of retired clergy and those serving in non-congregational ministries?