

GA-1721
(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION MINISTRY

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has committed to be a pro-reconciling/anti-racist church through the adoption of General Assembly resolutionsⁱ, the 2020 Vision and its Mission Priorities; and

WHEREAS, this conversation, which started in the early 1960s as an open dialogue and church-wide prophetic commitment to the eradication of racism in all its forms; has become at times, a marginalized topic despite our continued efforts to include this as an imperative goal for the body of Christ; and

WHEREAS, in Resolution 6919 we affirmed the “oneness of all [hu]mankind demonstrated by Jesus Christ in his respect and self-giving for every person, regardless of the distinctions imposed by the social system” and acknowledged that “that despite our resolutions and pronouncements, our churches, have, with rare exception, failed to demonstrate a race-less Christianity, a community of once alienated persons reconciled and made one in Christ. We repent of our racism. We pledge ourselves by God’s grace to bring forth the fruits;” and

WHEREAS, Disciples have prophetically affirmed that we are one body of people (Romans 12:5), gathered at the Welcome Table who are commanded to love one another (Matthew 22:37-40), be reconciled to God and to each other (II Corinthians 5:16-21), and be a witness of God’s power to break down walls which separate us (Ephesians 2:14b); and

WHEREAS, we must reaffirm that the struggle against racism is not an optional endeavor but an intrinsic mandate we all must share; and

WHEREAS, we have seen the progress that the establishment of the Reconciliation Ministry office has made in advancing the church towards better providing minority groups with a clear focal point for community with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); and

WHEREAS, one office and a single funding source cannot expect to meet the challenge of dismantling racism alone, but rather all three expressions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) must join together as one to eradicate that which destroys the image of God reflected in all humanity;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting in Indianapolis, IN, July 8-12, 2017, urges all expressions of the church to re-commit to “dismantle the pervasive evil of racism that keeps the community broken and fragmented [and] reconstitute the

table into a place where healing, remembering, and reconciliation take place”ⁱⁱⁱ; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly urges congregations, regions, and General expressions of the church to renew their support of the Reconciliation Ministry Offering and to explore the implementation of the recommendations of General Assembly resolution 0731 (attached) so that the funds allocated to Reconciliation Ministry will continue to sustain this ministry by providing sufficient support for a full-time staff person with administrative support and contracted professionals to provide on the ground training and education during pertinent moments of racial upheaval and reconciliation opportunities, as well as funds to support the pro-reconciling/anti-racist priority of the church; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Reconciliation Ministry, in consultation with the Office of General Minister and President, establish metrics that can narratively and numerically demonstrate progress toward becoming a pro-reconciling/anti-racist church and report back to the next General Assembly; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly acknowledges that race is still an issue within our ministry context, affirms the removal of the marginalization of this work, fully expresses support for the office of Reconciliation Ministry and the mandate of its work and calls upon Disciples to provide the necessary pastoral and financial resources to move the church to become a Pro-Reconciling/Anti-Racist church where institutional and interpersonal sins of racism will be fully eradicated; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that until then, Reconciliation Ministry will be absolutely necessary.

Centennial Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) St. Louis, MO
Webster Groves Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), St. Louis, MO
Memorial Blvd Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), St. Louis, MO
New Vision Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Kansas City, MO
Woodland Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Columbus, OH East
Sixth Street Christian Church, Oklahoma City, OK

**The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
ADOPT GA-1721. (Discussion time: 12 minutes)**

ⁱ Resolutions about pro-reconciliation and anti-racism that were adopted by the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) include, but are not limited to: No. 6919, No. 6920, 6922, No. 8122, No. 9144, No. 9720, No. 0121. Reports have also been received by the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that include background information and strong abhorrence to racism include, but are not limited to: No. 7148, No. 0113, and No. 0116.

ⁱⁱ No. 0113 Report from the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Received by the General Assembly (Year Book Pages 247-250).

NO. 0731
(OPERATIONAL BUSINESS ITEM)
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING RECONCILIATION MISSION¹

A Brief Background to the Formation of the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee

By early 2003, its existing funds expended, the upcoming Reconciliation 2005 Offering became the only source of funding for Reconciliation Mission.² Hurricanes Katrina and Rita aggravated the financial stress, for as a result of the ensuing devastation, our congregations understandably gave money to assist our sisters and brothers in the Gulf Coast region, thereby limiting their resources for other offerings. In the aftermath of these disasters, the Reconciliation offering dropped by twenty-five percent.

The continued insufficiency of funding resulted in staff reductions and severe curtailment in trainings. In light of this circumstance, Reconciliation Mission Commission formed an evaluation committee to assess its mission and make recommendations regarding its future. The Committee thus formed consisted of thirteen persons, plus General Minister and President as ex officio. The Committee included five women and eight men: five African Americans, two Asian Americans, one Hispanic American, and five European Americans.

To carry out its task, the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee devised two surveys on reconciliation ministries of the church. Each survey consisted of ten questions, one geared toward regional and general leaders, the other toward congregational leaders of the church. Each Committee member then used one or both of these surveys to interview up to four active leaders of the church. Consequently, a total of fifty-one survey results were collected. In addition to these surveys, the Committee consulted the Shank Study, commissioned by Reconciliation Task Force in 2004. This was an online quantitative and qualitative study based on 668 responses, the majority of which came from lay members throughout our Church. Recommendations in this report reflect opinions expressed in these data gathering efforts, with particular emphasis on the fifty-one in-depth surveys. The Evaluation Committee has met several times by telephone conference and once in person. Subcommittees met to help design the survey and draft the recommendations.

¹ This version of the document represents the edits and adaptations of the Reconciliation Mission Commission, which reviewed and adapted the Evaluation Committee's recommendations on March 30, 2007.

² For a more extensive background, see "Report of the General Board Task Force Administrative Committee January 2005 (abbreviated)," and "Reconciliation Mission Seeks New Approaches For Its Work," *Disciples News Service* (April 28, 2006).

WHEREAS, in the year 2001, the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, approved the 20/20 vision for our Church, which included the mandate for the Disciples to become an anti-racist/pro-reconciling Church. This mandate was in accord with the original mission of Reconciliation, whose antecedent was established in the wake of significant urban unrest following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and affirmed our commitment to live up to a core Disciples value—unity—which cannot be achieved unless we value and practice diversity, which in turn necessitates that we value and embrace persons of all races—and keep ourselves and our institutions free of racism; and

WHEREAS, after focused and prayerful deliberation, informed by the above resources, we, the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee, believe that racism—especially institutional racism—remains a formidable force in our church, and that the resources the church has thus far provided to combat it have not been equal to the task. God calls us in Jesus Christ to “break down the dividing walls that is the hostility between us.” (Ephesians 2:14b) Yet, the walls of racism have locked us into a hostile system that blocks us from achieving the unity we fervently desire; and

WHEREAS, in the light of this reality, we, the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee, conclude that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) continues to need a ministry whose sole purpose is to guide the whole Church in eradicating the sin of systemic racism. We heard again and again that this is a priority of the church. We therefore recommend that the Reconciliation Mission Commission restructure and augment Reconciliation Mission, so that it may more effectively combat racism in our midst. In such restructuring, the Commission should keep in mind that the relationships between the congregational, regional, and general expressions of our Church are covenantal, and that this justice ministry deserves the support of the whole Church working in covenant, holding each other accountable. While 2007 is a very different time than 1968, we are aware that Reconciliation’s original purpose remains to be fulfilled, that purpose being the end of systemic racism and therefore we continue to work on that mandate;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Reconciliation Mission now be called Reconciliation Ministry and that the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative housed in Reconciliation Ministry be known as the Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism Initiative. Reconciliation Ministry should carry out its work under the direction of the Reconciliation Ministry Commission, which in turn should be supervised by the Administrative Committee of the General Board; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Reconciliation Ministry focuses much of its work on networking in collaboration with regions. To this end, we recommend the following steps be taken:

- a. Regions of the Church collaborate with each other to carry out the work of racial reconciliation, possibly focusing on the existing five clusters or with other regional configurations.
- b. The clusters should consider sharing staff for the work of racial reconciliation.

- c. The regions should assume primary leadership in enabling congregational involvement in the work of racial reconciliation.
- d. Regional boards and clusters should be held accountable for the work of racial reconciliation, accountability determined with measurable benchmarks such as the number of congregations with active teams involved in the work of racial reconciliation.
- e. Reconciliation Ministry maintain an office in the Office of the General Minister and President so that it may equip general ministries and educational institutions for the work of racial reconciliation and liaise between these ministries and institutions and regional clusters.
- f. Reconciliation Ministry, housed in the Office of General Minister and President, develop resources and supervise core organizers and trainers and be available to regional clusters and other entities of the church.
- g. Reconciliation Ministry, housed in the Office of General Minister and President, collaborate with regions to promote the annual offering; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Reconciliation Ministry better communicate the significance of its works among the congregations. Towards that end we have formed an interpretation task force whose purpose is to translate Reconciliation Ministry to people who have not experienced the anti-racism training and to aid the incoming Minister of Reconciliation in developing a strategy for ongoing communication regarding Reconciliation Ministry with the wider church; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Reconciliation Ministry obtain/develop varied resources for its work. To this, end we recommend the following measures be taken:

- a. Reconciliation Ministry identify multiple models for addressing systemic racism, recognizing that no one model will meet all needs.
- b. Reconciliation Ministry develop and resource the development of preparatory materials for racial reconciliation training; such materials should include models congregations can use to engage in the work of racial reconciliation.
- c. Reconciliation Ministry develop materials and opportunities that support and encourage congregational, regional, and general ministries, particularly clergy, to engage in the work of racial reconciliation.
- d. Reconciliation Ministry develop resources that can be used to educate Disciples about the nature of systemic racism, white privilege and power, and internalized superiority and inferiority.
- e. Reconciliation Ministry strengthen ecumenical partnerships for the elimination of systemic racism; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we recommend that funding for Reconciliation Ministry be revamped and augmented. To this end, we recommend the following steps be taken:

- a. that general Reconciliation Ministry be supported by the Disciples Mission Fund. The Mission Funding Task Force will need to develop a timeline and mechanism for phasing in this budgeted item which will initially be funded by the Reconciliation Offering with the burden shifting over time to Disciples Mission

Fund. The Mission Funding Task Force will report back to the General Board in 2008.

- b. that funds allocated to Reconciliation Ministry be sufficient to provide for a full-time staff person with administrative support, and to develop educational, promotional, and training resources.
- c. that the Annual Reconciliation Offering, implemented in partnership with regions, be continued and that promotional costs should be shared.
- d. that the Annual Reconciliation Offering that is collected be allocated among regions and Reconciliation Ministry and that the regions and Reconciliation Ministry negotiate an arrangement that will enable the regions to receive 50 percent or more of the offerings, to be negotiated with the awareness that some clusters may even choose to invest in cluster Reconciliation staff.
- e. that the Annual Reconciliation Offering be used primarily to make grants to congregations, regions, general and institutional ministries for projects that focus on racial reconciliation. Congregational and regional grants will be allocated by regions. General and institutional grants will be allocated by the Reconciliation Ministry Commission as soon as the burden of funding the office of Minister of Reconciliation begins to shift to Disciples Mission Fund, and reported to General Board for approval.
- f. that the Annual Reconciliation Offering be used for anti-poverty works only if such works contribute directly to the work of racial justice and reconciliation. We understand that poverty and racial inequity often correlate, and that as racial equity is achieved, poverty will decrease. We likewise recognize the biblical mandate to address poverty as a justice issue. We therefore encourage the church to find means to address poverty issues that are not directly related to race through additional venues (local, regional, general, and ecumenical); and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Fort Worth, Texas, July 21-25, 2007, join in prayer that may God bless this ministry as we serve together for all of God's people. "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Current Glossary

Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative: An initiative announced in the 1999 General Assembly to combat racial injustice; it has included training Transformation (anti-racism) Teams to work within various expressions of the church.

Anti-Racism Commission: This oversight body was formed in 2001 to give direction to the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative.

Reconciliation: The ministry that began in 1968 when the General Assembly adopted the urban Emergency program. Its mission was to work to dismantle racism in our church and society. In 1972, Reconciliation was reaffirmed as a permanent ministry of the church. “Reconciliation” has sometimes been used in a general sense to refer to the church’s work to combat racism and promote reconciliation.

Reconciliation Committee: For many years this Committee oversaw Reconciliation Fund and made grant decisions for Reconciliation at the level of the general church as well as working with the Director of Reconciliation to develop policies. In 2001, it and the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative came together under the Reconciliation Mission. In 2005, it dissolved.

Reconciliation Mission Commission: Established in 2005 by merging the work of the Reconciliation Committee and the Anti-Racism Commission, the Commission is responsible for oversight of Reconciliation Mission and thus the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative. The Commission is constituted by and accountable to the Administrative Committee and the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Reconciliation Evaluation Committee (also known as the Evaluation and Assessment Working Group): A committee created in 2006 by Reconciliation Mission Commission to evaluate the church’s work to dismantle racism and promote reconciliation. (Both this committee and Reconciliation Communication Committee were created in response to the termination of Reconciliation Mission staff in 2006 in order to discern and promote new ways of doing this ministry.)

Reconciliation Communication Committee: A committee (not mentioned in this recommendation) created in 2006 by the Reconciliation Mission Commission to develop ways to interpret more effectively and fully the work of Reconciliation Mission to the church.

(Both this committee and the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee were created in response to the termination of Reconciliation Mission staff in 2006 in order to discern and promote new ways of doing this ministry.)

Reconciliation Mission: A ministry created in 2001 to encompass both the Reconciliation Committee (the long-standing group overseeing the Reconciliation Fund and grant allocation at the general level of the church) and Anti-Racism Commission (charged with intentional organizing, educating and advocacy). In 2005, Reconciliation Mission was restructured, no longer awarding grants at the general-church level (therefore dissolving the Reconciliation Committee) and maintaining and focusing on the Anti-racism/Pro-reconciliation initiative (the former task of Anti-Racism Commission). This ministry is under the supervision of the Administrative Committee through the Reconciliation Mission Commission. In 2006, due to declining funds, its staff was let go.

Reconciliation Evaluation Committee:

Eric Brown, Ken Hall, Bob Hill, Chris Hobgood, Timothy James, Sandhya Jha, Jane Lawrence, Marcus Leathers, Tim Lee (Moderator), Janet Long, Noemi Mena, Regina Morton, Ron Parker/Sharon Watkins (ex-officio), Chandra Haskett (administrative assistant)

The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
ADOPT Business Item No. 0737. (Debate time 24 minutes).