



the

Christian News

Published by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest

36th Annual School for Congregational Learning



Amy Gopp

It's quickly approaching that time of year once again. This is a brief rundown on the key points of this year's session. Mark your calendars now for Saturday, August

23. Valley Southwoods Freshman High School in West Des Moines, Iowa has generously and graciously agreed to host this event once again. Registration will begin at 8:15 a.m. Lunch will be provided and pre-registration will guarantee your lunch reservation.

Special attractions for the 36th Annual School for Congregational Learning:

- Keynote Speaker - Amy Gopp, Associate

Director, Week of Compassion. Serving as Week of Compassion's Associate Director, Amy is continuing her ministry in mission, justice, and education. Her responsibilities include social and economic development as well as reaching out to youth, young adults, seminarians, women, and ethnic constituencies.

- Two work projects . . . "Kids Against Hunger" - a hands-on experience (1,500 meals packaged by 12 people in a 45 minute period), and construction of a shed at the SCL site that will eventually accompany a Habitat for Humanity "build" by Des Moines First Christian Church.
- Inspiring worship and singing.
- Over 50 great workshops.
- Special Guests: Bob Shebeck, Executive, Mission Interpretation and Constituency Relationship, Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ and Bill Bass, our General Ministry Partner.

Early bird registration fee of \$30 payable by August 8. After this date the fee is \$40.

A detailed listing of workshop topics and presenters, and a complete schedule for the day is available on the website of the Upper Midwest Region www.uppermidwestcc.org. If internet

service is not available to you, feel free to ask you minister who will be most happy to share this information with you.

Begin making plans to bring a carload or two and enjoy a spirit-filled day!!

Celebrating 150 Years

The First Christian Church of Fairfield, Iowa will celebrate their 150th Anniversary September 27 & 28, 2008

The church will be open the afternoon of the 27th and will host a pot luck supper along with a service honoring those who have been married in the sanctuary.

After the worship service at 10:30 on Sunday the church will host a catered meal followed by a program of entertainment and comments from former pastors and members.

*RSVP for Sunday requested by August 15th to First Christian Church
207 West Burlington, Fairfield, IA 52556
(641)-472-5919*



Regional Assembly 2008

For the Blessing of All... what a statement! It is simple and yet encompasses all. We are all instruments of blessing in this world. You will especially experience this at this year's Regional Assembly where we will be sharing stories of faith as individuals, as congregations, and as a region. The Regional Assembly Planning Committee has been hard at work with their hearts open to God's leading in the planning of this much anticipated event. Many of you are familiar with the talents of musician, Bill Thomas, through his leading of music at other assemblies including our General Assembly. We are blessed to have Bill leading the music for the Regional Assembly.

West Des Moines Christian church has answered the call to host the Regional Assembly this year. This will all take place on Saturday, October 11. Be sure to write this in your calendars now to be sure to keep this date open for a time of fellowship, for worship, for sharing, and *For the Blessing of All*.

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FROM OUR REGIONAL MINISTER:

AN INVITATION: JOIN ME IN THE BALCONY

By Dr. Richard Guentert

In the book Leadership Without Easy Answers,

Ronald Heifetz discusses two arenas in which most leadership operates, "Reactive Space" and "Balcony Space."

"Reactive Space" is that timeframe when stuff is coming at leaders left and right, like a tornado almost totally disrupting their "to-do" list for that day. It is the least thoughtful space in which leaders operate . . . a space in which it is hard to think about purpose. On the other hand, there is "Balcony Space" – a vantage point above "Reactive Space" – where leaders can take the time to see the connections, to ask their questions, to get a larger more thoughtful perspective on matters. This is the hardest, but most crucial time, for a leader to create.

As this Region becomes more serious about *Congregational Transformation*, I am seeing the need for all leaders, laity and clergy alike, to spend much more time in that "Balcony Space" of prayer and Bible study, of questioning and inquiry, of theological reflection, of faith-prompted deliberation, of contemplation that grows out of the intentional daily practice of spiritual disciplines. Without it, little of significance will happen, and few things that are lasting will transpire. It is absolutely foundational to any transformative enterprise.

To put that another way, any truly transforming and vibrant community of faith must learn how to be **steady in its purposes and principles**, while remaining **flexible in its strategies**. (We've done just the opposite – taught congregations how to be steady in their strategy, and then allowed them to forget their true purpose.) During our 40-50 year journey into "dis-establishment," this has been noticeably true of main-line denominations. When we were the "established" religious voice across North America we did not need an identity or a purpose, because the culture provided it for us. But since the 1960s, as we have become increasingly "dis-established," we have become more and more adrift, with a diminished sense of our purpose, and a weakened reliance upon the core principles of our identity. We are insufficiently equipped to know who we are, whose we are, or why we are – and therefore pitifully lacking in motivation, focus, and commitment. One of the prescriptions for what ails us is spending more



time in that "Balcony Space."

To illustrate our dilemma further, one of those core principles to which we've become less attached is "**unity with diversity**." And for that reason we confuse consensus with agreement. Christ calls us into community and therefore calls us to live in consensual relationship. As our core principle reminds us, our unity is in Christ, not in "agreement" about every issue that comes down the pike. Without understanding this it is hard to reverence the only glue that can bond us amidst such problematic topics as immigration, sexual orientation, interfaith dialogue, abortion, racism, sexism, political governance, international relationships, interpretation of scripture, globalization, cultural diversity, economic dilemmas, energy, poverty, hunger, global warming, etc. If the church's life were contingent upon "agreement" in regard to all of these issues, it would have been dead in the water long ago.

But for Disciples of Christ, this list of issues is not the foundational stuff on which we seek consensus. Our unity is in a common relationship to Jesus Christ! And because of our consensus in Christ we can live in harmony. And because of our consensus in Christ harmony is NOT singing a single-lined melody. HARMONY IS BEING ABLE TO LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER WELL ENOUGH THAT WE CAN EXIST SIDE BY SIDE IN MUTUALLY ENRICHING WAYS. Harmony always includes multiple lines of musical endeavor which stand in relationship to each other and mutually reinforce each other. That is "**unity with diversity**" the Disciples of Christ way –

with our consensus being in Christ (represented by the breadth of a Welcoming Table). It is Christ who sustains our fellowship, despite a plethora of diverse and important opinions swirling about us.

Living only in "Reactive Space" allows us to forget this. The divisiveness of the polarizing world around us dominates the agenda, and rupture-prompting sensationalism rules the media, which assaults our senses every hour of the day. Only "Balcony Space" can help us differentiate, distinguish and discriminate. Only "Balcony Space" can help us avert such schism. Only time spent in "Balcony Space" can reconnect us with the significance of that historical Disciples mantra: "*In essentials, unity; in non-essential, liberty; in all things, charity (love)!*" And that one "essential" for us is Jesus Christ! All the other issues are important to engage, but not important enough to justify fragmentation and division.

Because we are "one in Christ" we can stay in relationship with one another when *Congregational Transformation* leads us out of our depth, outside our comfort zone, through cumbersome conditions, into messy moments that make us ill at ease. Because harmony in Christ truly **is** a core principle, we can afford to be inventive and creative; to yield to the Holy Spirit's ad-libbing and extemporizing in our midst. All this is possible in these exciting and life-giving days which lie just ahead . . . because of our consensus in Christ. So I welcome you to join me - - - IN THE BALCONY!!

Camp Stories 2008

I know that camp has not even started as I write this, but the stories have! Yesterday a repairman came in to fix a machine in the kitchen, but as he entered he had that look of deep remembering. He explained to us that when he entered the gates to Holy Ground he had to quickly call his sister on the cell phone and say, "You won't believe where I am! I am at the Christian Conference Center - The place we went to camp together!"



He explained to us that he had gone to camp at CCC through high school when he was a member at Park Avenue Christian Church. I asked if he had kids and he said yes. "Wouldn't it be great to give your kids the same experience?" I asked? We found his picture on the online archive of camp pictures and he seemed very happy to remember his time on Holy Ground and may have given him reason to reconnect with the church he grew up in as well...

The same day a mother of two girls showed up randomly to show her daughters where she went to camp. May there many more stories like these this summer

Bill Spangler-Dunning

New Creations

A Column about New Church Development in
the Christian Church in the Upper Midwest
Rev. Gary Sneller
(Regional New Church Unit)

“Success and Failure in the Emerging Church”

New church development in a post-modern, post-Christian, digital world is moving along a much different trajectory than in the past. The ways in which new congregations are emerging is much different—more grassroots efforts, a variety of styles, settings, and structures—and the way we measure success and failure is much different. Many new congregations will emerge as small worshipping groups of 10-12 people meeting in homes, free or rented worship space, and in faithfulness to what God is calling them to be and do in mission, they may not grow larger than 25-50 people. But in terms of true community, deep Christian spirituality, and a passion for justice/Christian action, they are viable and vibrant congregations of believers. Other new congregations will grow dramatically from a small core group of people to a large worshipping community, and in terms of true community, deep Christian spirituality, and a passion for justice/Christian action, they too will be viable and vibrant congregations of believers. Numbers truly are not the measure of

success in a post-modern world, but rather the marks of a faithful church—true community, deep Christian spirituality, and a passion for justice/Christian action.

Sometimes, new congregations will emerge from a small core group of believers, but for a variety of reasons they are not able to sustain themselves as viable worshipping communities. In the past, this was often viewed as failure—a failure of effort, of resources, of ability. However, in a post-modern, post-Christian, digital world, failure is not defined in terms of outcome, but rather in terms of initiative. Failure is not viewed as the inability to achieve desired results, but rather as the inability to act. Trial and error, success and failure are all part of the process of action, and as Jesus taught us in the “parable of the talents” (Matthew 25:14-30) and the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-9), it is our **action** for the kingdom of God that is important not simply the outcome. The reality is that some emerging congregations will not be able to sustain themselves

as viable worshipping communities. When this happens, it is not a failure. The kingdom of God has still been enriched. Lives have been touched in the name of Christ. The Spirit of God is still at work in the world.

In the Upper Midwest Region, we have experienced this truth in the ministry of two emerging congregations that have come to the discernment that they are no longer able to sustain themselves as viable worshipping communities. Grace Christian Church and Community of Grace Christian Church, both emerging congregations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, have made this decision. Their public ministries may be over, but the work of the Spirit of God continues in the lives of those they touched. And the work of the Spirit of God is continuing in other emerging congregations in the Upper Midwest!

Please keep all of our “congregations in formation” and “emerging congregations” in your prayers—Primera Iglesia Cristiana Agape, Ames; Spirit of Hope Christian Church, Pella; Peosta Worship Center, Peosta; Iglesia Cristiana Nueva Jerusalem, Huron and Alpine, South Dakota; Minnesota Dordom Korean Church, St. Louis Park, Minnesota; and New Life Christian Church, Granger. Other new church projects are in the dreaming stage. May the Spirit of God energize the ministry of all congregations, both established and emerging.

Blessings By The Box

First Christian Church Spencer impacts 146 different families in first month of new ministry! Just a short while ago the congregation realized their need to make a better effort for outreach and evangelism in their community.

After watching food prices dramatically increase, and after learning from their local school district that as many as 42 percent of students were on free and reduced lunches, they decided that Angel Food Ministries was right for them.

Angel Food Ministries is a nearly-nationwide ministry based out of Monroe, GA which partners with local congregations to provide a low-cost food ministry for their communities. Each month people have the opportunity to buy a box of groceries for \$30, groceries which would ordinarily cost more than double that amount at the store.

This ministry provides a way to meet the needs of the community, get people in the doors of the church, build relationships, and creates opportunities to share the gospel. Additionally, for each unit of food sold, the church receives one dollar for their local outreach fund.

In their first month, First Christian Church of Spencer impacted the lives of 146 different households from theirs and surrounding communities. Additionally, a Lutheran congregation in Terril, IA and an Assembly of God congregation in



Sioux Falls, SD, partnered with them to bring this ministry to their communities, too. Altogether the three congregations sold 403 units of food this month, with Spencer contributing 344.

Pastor Dan Mayes shared his praise for this ministry, saying, “We’re so excited about what God is doing here! Obviously, a great need is being met through this ministry and we anticipate that it will continue to grow. And we pray that it will provide us with many opportunities to share the good news of God’s love with many more people.”

To learn more about how your own congregation can be a blessing through Angel Food Ministries visit www.angelfoodministries.org

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Of Flood and Faith

A Pastoral Letter of Presence and Encouragement

As I write this note the National Weather Service has issued alert number 528. The rains and the rampant threats of flooding across various parts of Iowa seem to just continue unrelentingly.

As your Regional Minister I want to assure you that my heart goes out to those who have been the casualties of those flood waters. Likewise I have received phone calls and communications from other Regional and General church leaders across the denomination.

In a phone call to me yesterday, your General Minister and President, the Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, offered her attention and prayers as she is mindful of our situation. She wants you to know of her personal concern as we struggle with this disastrous event.

Businesses and churches have been inundated in varying degrees of seriousness in those run-off and lower lying areas – as have residences. People have been heartbroken as they watch treasured places of

residence and work be submerged by the engulfing waters. Farmers are helpless as they watch seeded crop lands be submerged by the muddied and swollen streams.

The death of four scouts and the hospitalization of 40 others who were fellow campers put an exclamation point on a season of tragedy and sorrow for many families in this Region.

Many volunteers and community workers are exhausted – mentally, physically and psychologically – as they have worked valiantly to address the emergency and safety concerns of residents. Many have worked hard but lost the battle to the forces of nature. Many will continue to battle the elements, in striving to preserve as much as possible of what remains after the flood.

Community leaders, disaster relief workers, and denominational church leaders are already giving attention to those relief efforts that will need to follow on the heels of the flood when it finally subsides. Pastors have called the Regional Center wondering about volunteer work teams that can be

organized to go into those areas following the aftermath. I've had similar inquiries from Regional Ministers in the surrounding Regions.

The Region and the Week of Compassion personnel have already been in touch with each other about relief monies to help in some of these arenas. Help will be forth-coming from them as we get clearer assessments about need.

Let me encourage all Disciples across Iowa to make over and above gifts to Week of Compassion – designated/annotated for the Iowa Flood Relief effort. Those can be sent to the Regional Church Center, Box 41217, Des Moines Iowa, 50311-0504, if you desire congregational credit for your gift. They will be forwarded in a timely manner to the Week of Compassion for this specific usage.

In the meantime, what can we do? We can live-out the very vision around which we have gathered in this Region for a number of years: We are "DISCIPLES TOGETHER, SHARING IN THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S TABLE, FOR THE BLESSING OF ALL!!" Now is the moment to demonstrate the depth of what those words really, really mean!!!

1. We can lean on each other. The community relationship we experience with friends, family, and neighbors means everything in such moments.

2. As "DISCIPLES TOGETHER" we can render thanks for the health and well-being of family and friends. Possessions may be lost, but the gift of "life and breath and being" means that there is always "possibility and promise" for starting over again.

3. We, as "DISCIPLES TOGETHER" can Pray. Give thanks for the life-sustaining faith that was imbedded in your hearts and souls in the most formative moments of your life. (You may want to re-read – and pray – that powerful testimony to faith and hope that is recorded in Romans 8:18-38.)

4. We, as those who are "SHARING IN THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S TABLE" can gather in worship to sing together, to pray together, to hear the word together, and to be sustained by Communion together. Therein is the spiritual sustenance that will buoy us sufficiently to endure the immediate circumstances.

5. We, as those who exist "FOR THE BLESSING OF ALL" can hear God's word of encouragement from Romans 5:3-5. ". . . ³We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

6. And we, as those who exist "FOR THE BLESSING OF ALL" can share our resources, our time, our energy, and our monetary blessings through the Week of Compassion, to help our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

In the meantime, know that your Regional and General church is walking alongside you and holding you close in their thoughts and prayers as well.

May God bless and strengthen us each one for the journey!

Dr. Richard Guentert,
Regional Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest

Former CTS President Has Died



Rev. Dr. Richard D. N. Dickinson

It is with deep sorrow that Christian Theological Seminary reports the death of Rev. Dr. Richard D. N. "Dick" Dickinson, the former president of the seminary.

Dickinson was 78 when he died on Saturday, May 24. According to Dickinson's wife, Nancy, he suffered an unexpected, acute aortic rupture while they were visiting their son in Michigan. A memorial service will be held on June 14 at 2:30 p.m. at First Congregational United Church of Christ located at 7171 North Pennsylvania Street in Indianapolis.

Dickinson served as president of CTS from 1986-1997. Prior to becoming president, he was the academic dean of CTS from 1974-1986. He also taught classes at CTS as a professor of Christian ethics from 1968 until his retirement.

Dickinson was a member of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ, and the first non-Disciple to lead CTS, which is affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). When CTS participated in Project Understanding from 1972-1974, he was the CTS director of this effort to fight racism in Indianapolis churches and synagogues.

As dean of CTS, Dickinson played seminal roles in reforming the Master of Divinity curriculum and developing a training program in inner-city ministry. Dickinson created Chrysalis, a Lilly Endowment-funded, four-year program that brought international professors to CTS and provided students with overseas educational experiences. Dickinson was also a member of the task force that oversaw the design and construction of Sweeney Chapel and the east wing of the seminary from 1985-1987.

Dr. D. Bruce Roberts, a retired professor from CTS, had been working closely with Dickinson. "I have been working with Dick on a proposal dealing with the extent of clergy debt issues," said Roberts. "Dick was attacking the work with his characteristic energy and focus. I was very much enjoying working with him and looking forward to completing the grant proposal together. His sudden loss is stunning."

CTS President Edward L. Wheeler has extended the seminary's deepest sympathy to Dickinson's family. "Dick was a gracious man who gave most of his life to fulfilling his ministry here at CTS. He was a respected scholar in the field of ethics. He was an ecumenist who had a global perspective and an appreciation for the value of diversity before it became popular. Therefore, he actively sought out persons of color for the CTS faculty and worked to retain them. Committed to issues of social justice, he was supportive of causes that were consistent with these deeply held values. His death comes as a profound shock and a personal loss. My prayers go out to Nancy and to the Dickinson family," said Wheeler.

CTS is a fully accredited ecumenical seminary and is affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It offers eight graduate-level degree programs, including theology, ministry and counseling, with specializations in ministries that emphasize the arts and programs for life-long learning. More than 40 denominations are represented among faculty and students.