

the Christian News

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

From the Mountaintop ... Reflections from the General Assembly

There were four of us who traveled together from First Christian Church in Ames, IA all the way to Ft. Worth, Texas to attend the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. We got as far as Osceola when our van broke down and we spent most of the day, stranded, 80 miles from home. Thankfully, there was a wonderful woman at First Christian Church in Osceola who answered our cries for help, saw to our every need, and took us downtown while we waited for the van to be repaired and then back again. The rest of the story is too long to tell here, but we give thanks to God for the kindness of "strangers." And we want you to know that if you ever get stranded in Osceola, IA. Don't worry, just call First Christian Church and ask for Terri Barcus.

First Christian Church, Ames has a week-day, daily devotional email called the E-pistle. Below is what I wrote at the close of our time at the General Assembly for the E-pistle.

"I am writing to you on Wednesday, late, because the four of us will be traveling home tomorrow. So this is Thursday's epistle written on Wednesday.

This has truly been a mountain top experience. It is such a joy to have met with over 6,000 other Disciples from across this nation and Canada. People of all shapes and sizes and colors and ages and political parties have come together, united in Christ. We are a diverse body of followers of Jesus who have worshiped together and prayed together and discussed important issues together and learned from speakers and from one another. These

kinds of gatherings are so important to help us understand the nature of our "Bigger God." The stories of God working in and through so many different people is both amazing and hopeful. As a denomination, we are becoming more diverse all the time. As I heard it put this week, "We are looking more and more like the face of America every day." And we thank God for the gift of diversity.

Sometimes we get discouraged in the church because we think we need more people or things aren't the way they used to be or we don't understand why/how things have changed. Going to the Assembly made visible the hope that is within us as a people seeking to be faithful to God in this time. Compassion, care, love, and justice were words we both heard and saw evidence of over and over. We were encouraged to become aware and to share the hope that is within us and to encourage one another in our congregations, and in our neighborhoods and communities as well.

First Christian Church (Upper Midwest Region) members and friends, what is the hope within us...within you? How can we share that good news? How can we be ones who infect the world around us with hope and love and justice and mercy for the sake of the world God created? Let's talk."

Mary Jane Button-Harrison, Minister
First Christian Church, Ames, IA
Chair, Congregational Transformation Task Group of
the Upper Midwest Region



2007 GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN THE BOOKS; MEMORIES CONTINUE

Whether or not you attended the recent 2007 General Assembly, you've probably heard of the spirit-filled worship, inspiring preaching, mission work, and fellowship opportunities that characterized the assembly. Nearly 6,100 Disciples registered for the biennial event in Fort Worth, Texas, at the Fort Worth Convention Center from July 21-25. A number of news stories and photos that help tell the story of the Assembly have been posted on the Disciples web site. To read those stories and hear video clips of evening worship speakers such as General Minister and President Sharon E. Watkins, out-going moderator William L. Lee, and preacher, author, and social activist Jim Wallis, go to: <http://www.disciples.org>

From Disciples News Service. For more news and information see: <http://www.disciples.org>.

General Assembly Chalice Exchange



When we think about sharing a feast, our thoughts turn to good food and drink, and towards a variety of tables - Communion, dinner, picnic, formal, and informal. As Disciples, we think of the bread and cup, because Communion is central to our theology. Picture if you will, hundreds of chalices of various sizes and colors, all gathered together on one banquet table. Smell the sweetness of the grape juice, the tantalizing aroma of the fresh bread. Now imagine sharing Communion with seven to eight thousand of your sisters and brothers in the faith. This is a mighty, powerful image.

Congregations brought their chalices to share this banquet feast together. Every Disciples congregation was invited to bring or send a chalice to 2007 General Assembly, which was exchanged with a chalice from another Disciples congregation. Approximately 250 chalices were exchanged at the Assembly.

From Disciples News Service. For more news and information see: <http://www.disciples.org>.

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FROM OUR REGIONAL MINISTER:

CHRISTIANS AND IMMIGRATION

By Dr. Richard Guentert

Like the whole population, I've been struggling with the issues of immigration ... and in the process, seeking to notice which of my perspectives are more conditioned by the culture, and which are more conditioned by my faith. It is a significant faith issue, as well as a political issue, for we Christians who reside here in the Upper Midwest. So I invite you to join me in my wonderings for a few moments today.



I ask myself: Were the pilgrims who settled in Jamestown legal immigrants? And when Jesus, Joseph and Mary fled into Egypt ... did they have the right papers? Are we approaching this issue in ways that honor the faith we espouse in the church? And does God really care about all our borders anyway?

This I know: We are to do justice because God has proffered justice to us. We are to be peace makers because God in Christ has broken down the dividing walls of hostility. We are to be benevolent because God has been compassionate toward us. And the divine philanthropy (God's love of ALL humanity) manifested in Scripture is a recognition of our universal kinship – all humanity having derived from the same creator God.

At the same time all of us live out of, and have been shaped by, two very different stories – the American cultural story and the Judeo-Christian faith story. So which, do you suppose, is meant to be more determinative of our views and our practices?

As I wrestle with immigration issues I also ask whether my faith is supposed to be about discerning THE Truth on this matter, or is it about identifying and noticing the MANY FACETS of Truth on this matter like the many surfaces of a shiny gemstone. And along with that consideration, I'm faced with the realization that if we are all finite, sinners with mortal limitations ... **then** the notion that any one of us can determine ultimate truth with finality is pretty preposterous. Have the Scriptures not said that God's ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts?

But even Christians face the quandary of living by, and advocating, conflicting value systems. On the one hand we Americans advocate those words on our Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." We have taken pride in calling ourselves "a nation of immigrants."

But on the other hand, we let our lives be motivated by **fears** and controlled by **oughts**: If all those illegal immigrants stay, **we fear** it will compromise our identity, and we will lose our jobs, we will be taken over, and we might have to let go of life as we know it (a "kind" of death we are not prepared to accept). And besides, those immigrants **ought to** pay their own way like the rest of us. They shouldn't be able to evade paying taxes and then expect a free ride. There are dues to be paid if one is to enjoy the benefits of living in the United States of America.

What many of us fail to realize is how we have exploited the very people who we now want to "send back home." And that is a theological issue, as well

as a political and ethical one. Materialism exploits for purposes of economic advantage. Corporations take advantage of immigrants and the poor. God will judge us for gaining a "future" at the expense of another's "future." All of this has come about because we Americans have made a god out of property and prosperity. And if that is not enough, we are in denial about the extent to which we have cherished this value in the American culture. We are so protective of our self-sufficiency that it feeds our excessive pride in who we are. And we have built a "cultural gospel" on the foundation of scarcity thinking, when the "Gospel of Christ" calls us to abundance thinking (as illustrated in the feeding of the 5,000).

So where has this "rounding up of the undocumented immigrants" left us this "sending back home" of those who our corporations have used-up and profited-from in the process? It has left them with no rights, no medical care, the loss of their homes, the forfeiture of their jobs, the elimination of their incomes, the separation of their families.

What I must acknowledge as a Christian is that our theological identity is over-laid with a geographic identity. I must also recognize BOTH the necessity of boundaries AND the negativity of boundaries. Perhaps God is even making us mindful of the need for permeable boundaries.

But my faith as a Christian calls upon me to look at the issues about immigration through a different set of lenses. The Scriptures teach me that we are to welcome the widow, the refugee, the stranger the alien, and the sojourners (Exodus 23:9). Paul teaches us that the task of the Gospel is reconciliation ... which always calls for "breaking down dividing walls of hostility." He also teaches us in 1 Corinthians 13 that "Love does not insist on its own way." Jesus admonished us, according to Matthew 25 to "feed the hungry and clothe the naked." He also taught us about how hard it would be for us to "deny ourselves." Galations chapter five declares what the life of "freedom" is like, when we are no longer shaped solely by

"the law."

All of these Scriptural admonitions come into play when we are contemplating this issue as with the mind of Christ. Faith values are the necessary corrective to cultural values if we are to welcome the stranger, love the neighbor, treat others as we want to be treated, exercise hospitality, do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God, and truly believe that we are all created in the image of God. Then we can begin to exemplify standing in solidarity with the immigrant in the same way that God has been there for us in Christ.

The Disciples of Christ can have a unique contribution to the national discussion of this issue. We are, after all, the people of the open and welcoming Table. We are, after all, an "immigrant" church with Scottish roots. We were founded, after all, as ecumenists ... those who abhor denominational, cultural, sexual, ethnic and racial boundaries. We are, after all, a church whose focus on anti-racism is about seeking to eliminate boundaries. We are, after all, a church that celebrates God's boundless mercy by embracing ALL the populations God created. We are, after all, those who warmly engage, and freely receive with the right hand of Christian fellowship, all who believe Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God.

I realize that there are no clear cut solutions. There will continue to be tensions between the two sets of loyalty – the loyalty to this country (to uphold its laws and keep its borders secure) and the loyalty to the New Creation of our God and Christ (to uphold the principles of that New Creation and keep its life securely focused on grace and reconciliation). Ultimately there needs to be some mediation between the two. Not all borders can be opened up. Nor can we seal the border in ways acceptable to Christian values. We Christians need to manifest humility, to exercise prayer, and to trust the rich practices of our faith in the midst of such controversies. And we should do so in such a way that our theological identity is never subjugated to our geographic identity. God bless us in this undertaking!

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ON-LINE ORDERING INSTRUCTIONS FOR SPECIAL DAY OFFERING AND STEWARDSHIP MATERIALS

Due to a computer database system change at Church Finance Council in Indianapolis, it is now imperative that every congregation place its standing order for Special Offering and Stewardship Materials. The instructions for placing that order have been provided by CFC and are printed below.

PLEASE NOTE: YOUR CONGREGATIONAL PIN NUMBER IS YOUR USER ID.

Please call the Regional Church Center 515-255-3168 or email Don Hiscox at dh@uppermidwestcc.org or call Enid Arey at Church Finance Council 317-713-2444 or email earey@cfcdisciples.org for any questions or to receive your PIN number. However, the six-digit PIN for your congregation is listed in the Yearbook and Directory, in the second column from the left, the top number...Iowa PIN numbers begin with 160 _ _ _; Minnesota PIN numbers begin with 240 _ _ _; and South Dakota PIN numbers begin with 420 _ _ _ .

1. Go to www.churchfinancecouncil.org – this takes you to the Church Finance Council's home page
2. Click on any area that says DISCIPLES MISSION FUND
3. On the CFC Greetings page, look at left margin
4. Click on New!! ONLINE ORDERING FOR SPECIAL OFFERING / STEWARDSHIP MATERIALS
5. You have been directed to the "login page," first time users look to left side REGISTER HERE
6. Click REGISTER HERE and scroll down until you see information area to fill in
7. Complete information and click the register button
8. A box with your PIN and password will appear, close and move to order page
9. You should see the names of individual Special Offerings, click on those for which you wish to place orders
10. Carefully fill out the quantity information
11. Scroll down; check and correct, if necessary, your mailing address information
12. Click on UPS or USPS (postal delivery)
13. If you have any special delivery instructions, please write them in the box provided
14. When complete place order on the right lower side of screen by clicking on that button
15. You will return to the Special Day Offering list, proceed to next offering and repeat this process
16. When done, click "Place This Order" on the Special Day Offering page and you will move to the Stewardship area which is the logout area. Look at the very top of this page to the right you will find the word LOGOUT. Click on this to close the system. (If for some reason, the system doesn't take you to the Stewardship area, please feel free to use the X in the upper right corner of your screen to exit the system.)
17. If you feel you have made an ordering error or duplication, please contact St. Clair Press at 1-866-369-0169. They will make the correction for you.
18. You will receive confirmation of your orders via e-mail from support@myargosy.com. Please print these out for your records.

I Love This Place: Stories from Camp

"Technicolor Stories" were abounding this summer during our camp ministry together at the Christian Conference Center. Technicolor Stories was our theme for this summer's camping experience but it took on a life of its own and created stories in all our hearts.

He was 11 years old and when I found him sitting on the stairs of the back porch he had his eyes focused on the wind lightly moving through the trees. He appeared to be crying as his cheek had streams of tears dropping onto his shoulder. I sat down beside him and even though there must have been 20 people milling around behind us getting their snack for the day, in those few moments it seemed like it was just the two of us suspended in time. Moments like these at camp, well for that matter anywhere, are cherished like gold. So I put my hand on my chin and just sat there beside him for a few moments.

Finally, I asked him if he was ok. He replied, "Yes, I just love this place!" I replied back, "I love this place too!" We sat there together looking at the wind moving through the trees and I was sure what we do together at the Christian Conference Center is worth the time, energy and money. Time resumed and people moved in and out of our space on the porch, my walkie-talkie began to squawk and I was called away. So how do I know that moment was real? As he was leaving he sought me out and gave me hug and said, "See you next year BSD!"

This year we established the Disciples Together Scholarship Fund. Several individuals and churches contributed over \$3000 to this fund to make sure every youth who wanted or needed to spend a week on Holy Ground could do so. The money was used in full! However, another powerful trend happened alongside this fund. Churches reached far beyond their walls and into their neighborhoods and beyond to find youth who needed a safe place to learn about the love and grace of God. I firmly believe that this outreach ministry on the part of the congregations is the primary reason that camp numbers soared by 100 over last year. At the time of writing this article the total number of campers who came to Holy Ground this summer is 985. Our Standard camps 2nd grade –12th grade were up by 42 this year; our specialty camps (Equestrian, Trec, Family, Dig Camp, Couples Canoe) were up by 14 and Grand camps were up by 35 this year. And if that is not enough of bewildering Technicolor Stats, counselors volunteered early and in such numbers that we rarely had to seek out counselors this year.

A few more "rainbow-ish" stories would come in the form of discovering yet new ways to reach beyond the camp's physical limitations with regard to youth in wheelchairs. Everyone deserves a week of camp! We are not perfectly set up to make it all work but with great counselors, fantastic youth and a staff willing to do almost anything to be open and welcoming to all, we adapt our physical limitations into moment of joy for all. We need each other and I believe that the story of Jesus reaching out beyond his own people and community served as a model for the campers this summer.

What more is there to say about this summer and our ministry Together at the Christian Conference Center but that I, Bill Spangler-Dunning, am proud to continue to serve as your Associate Regional Minister for Youth, Camp and Conference Center Ministries. Let's dream for next year's ministry together!

DISCIPLE WOMEN'S NEWS

Greetings from your Cluster Reps!!! We felt it prudent to clarify a few points:

1. Are you a woman, a girl or a female?
2. Are you a Disciple?
3. Do you attend a Disciple Church?
4. Are you a circle member?
5. Are you NOT a circle member and have no desire to be part of a circle?

If you answered yes to 4 of the 5 questions above then you are a Disciple Woman! Confused? Then let me explain. The Upper Midwest Disciples of Christ is divided into clusters, each cluster has a representative, these women make up the Disciples Women's Unit. Our job as your representatives is to provide spiritual enrichment opportunities, act as a resource/information center/support on home church activities and mission projects; most of all, we work with you to better serve our Lord. Before I get into our upcoming activities I would like to ask – Are you a Disciple Woman?

WOMEN'S FALL RETREAT is September 28-30 in Paynesville, MN. This is a guaranteed great time. Registration forms can be found on the Upper Midwest website; go to www.uppermidwestcc.org, click on the Disciples Women link to download the registration form or call Carol Archer (College Avenue Christian Church) at 515-255-0570; she is the co-chair for this event. Remember, this event is bragged about all year long by those that attended so register early and bring a friend.

As the DWU, we are struggling with the 21st Century- a world of communications. We have realized that times have changed and so has the way we need to communicate. For those of you who are not into email yet, don't worry – we won't leave you behind or forget about you; for those of you who are email savvy we are building a database and need your help! Please give us your contact information: name, email, home church, and phone number. Our #1 goal this year is to inform you-WE NEED YOUR HELP! Please email Inga Brown at ibrown@dsmhomes.com or Wende Barrett at barrettcvm@hotmail.com.

Finally, are you interested in being on the DWU? Would you like to get more involved or know someone who would? Please let us know, we are looking for re-

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Global Ministries in China — An Interview with the SEARLES

Since 2001, Doug and Elizabeth Searles have made their home in China, where they have raised a family while teaching at the Sichuan TV and Radio University in Chengdu. The Searles will be itinerating in the Upper Midwest Region this fall, talking about the outreach of Common Global Ministries (CGM) to people in China.

What do you do in Chengdu?

We teach English and train teachers who reach minority students across the country from large cities to small villages. Helping teachers improve skills and adopt new teaching methods is important, because all students must pass state exams in English to advance in school. Our work is rewarding because training one teacher helps countless future students. We also enjoy following up by visiting teachers in their communities and classrooms.

What brought you to the mission field?

We believe that all of us are called to serve our neighbor – to “Go into all the world” (That) can be next door, in another part of town, in another part of the country, or beyond our own borders. We felt called to build bridges between countries, cultures, and between faiths, especially to reach out to Tibetans, as well as other Chinese, partly because we had cross-cultural experience.

What’s a typical day like?

Few of our days are typical, but during the week, we

catch the bus to a campus outside the city limits. Classes number 30 to 120 students. Each class meets once a week, for two or three hours. “Siesta” is strictly observed until 2:30 p.m., so in the early afternoon we catch up on e-mail, prep for classes, mark papers, connect with (our son) Mick, or swim. In the afternoon, we teach again, meet students on campus or in our home, attend meetings, home-school Mick, and go about the business of daily living in China.

What was your biggest surprise about life in China?

We thought there would be a smaller gap between rich and poor. It has been shocking to discover how very poor the poor continue to be, and how rich a few have become. There are people driving cars and people riding donkeys or walking. Almost everyone has to pay something to go to school. Also, we were surprised at how vibrant the church is and how quickly it is growing. Another happy surprise is that, when CGM helps with a greenhouse or a women’s cooperative, for example, people from other towns and counties come look at what’s being done and try to start another on their own. This ripple effect multiplies the impact.

How have your experiences affected your worldview?

The longer we live in China, the more we recognize similarities and differences in our cultures. It can be frustrating when people outside China do not understand the differing needs and challenges of people living in a country of 1.3 billion, with scarce resources. Those of us raised in a culture of plenty can hardly fathom the realities of life in a culture of want.

How has your work affected your faith?

The more we know, the more we recognize that Christ’s message of love, forgiveness, and service is critically important to help each of us bridge divides, when so much can keep us apart. The world needs people who are willing to step beyond their comfort zones and reach out with arms open to connect, accept, heal, forgive, love, and serve. Christ’s message helps us step out and reach out, even when connecting may seem futile, or impossible, or frightening, or even downright danger-

ous.

What do you want Disciples to understand about your work?

First of all, please understand that the work is really “your work” – the work of folks reading this right now and people in the pews. Without senders, we could not step out and reach out. Second, it’s important to think about people more than programs, and relationships more than quantifiable results. We do our work because we think capacity building is important. More important, though, is the daily struggle to find ways to walk with others – side by side, living together, working together, and sometimes praying together.

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representatives in the following areas: Sioux City/Estherville (Cluster 2 & 14); Ames/Marshalltown (Cluster 4); Cedar Rapids/Vinton (Cluster 5); Davenport/Iowa City (Cluster 12). These positions are a two year commitment. We meet two times per year in addition to the Spring Workshop. We also welcome anyone who wants to know more (no commitment necessary) to join our fall planning meeting. We would love to have your ideas—please call Wende Bristow Barrett at 515-210-1514 if you would like to come.

Spiritual Enrichment Day Be on the lookout for this, more information will be forth coming. So far we can tell you it will be on Saturdays in April in five different locations. For those seasoned Disciples Women, this is not your mama’s SpiritFest, nor is this your Grandmama’s SpringSpree---This is *new, exciting, totally different, completely worth it!* And most importantly it is for EVERY WOMAN! Come catch the spirit with us!

God Bless and keep movin’ in the Light!

Inga Brown, Cluster 8

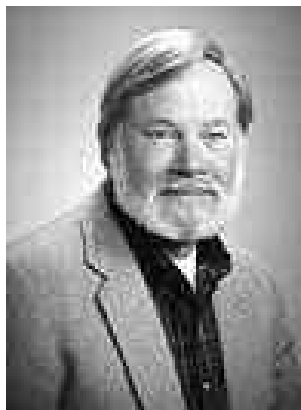
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Doug Searles



Liz Searles

Notes on Licensed Ministry

By Darold V. Snow LMSN

In 1969 I was a 32 year old traveling salesman who was doing well but something was missing in my life. My wife, Mary, and I talked about my going to seminary. We knew it would be a big step but decided to talk to someone about it. I made an appointment with Clint Wolfe at the Regional Office of the Christian Church in Des Moines. We talked for about an hour. Finally Clint leaned back in his chair and looked at me for a few minutes and then spoke, saying something like this: What we really need is someone to help with the small churches who have limited leadership. Many are having to close because they can’t afford a seminary-trained preacher. You are making a good living for your family. Instead of going to seminary, how about doing this new training course we are just starting and you will be serving churches in need. You will not make much money, if any, but it will be the best thing you will ever do! My reply: “When do we start?”. Clint told me to buy the gospels by Charles A. Barkley and start studying them. Clint’s next question was: “By the way, could you preach this Sunday at a church in southern Iowa?”. After 37 years I can tell you that you will never find anything that will fulfill your spirit like reaching out and doing God’s Work! Today Training for Licensed Ministry is hard, complex, and more challenging but the results are still; “this is the best thing you will ever do! You will not make much money if any but it will be the best thing you will ever do!” Have you ever wondered if Licensed Ministry is something you should consider? Could I really make a difference? Is there really a need for this service? The answer to all these questions is YES! Now ask yourself if you are willing to answer God’s call - Whom shall I send? Here I am Lord, send me! Talk to your minister, pray with him/her, and if you are ready for the most rewarding task you will ever perform for others and God - then talk to the region about Licensed Ministry. If you are like Moses and say, “God, I really don’t speak very well” then put your faith in God and let him lead you where He needs you. Remember there are areas of ministry other than being the minister of a church. Ask yourself: Galatians 3:5, “Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard”? God Bless and enjoy a new challenge!

Putting a Face on Mission

This is a follow-up to the article, “A Message from the Searles Family,” in the June 2007 issue of The Christian News.

For six years Liz and Doug Searles have served on our behalf with Global Ministries in China. They work as English teachers and teacher trainers at Sichuan TV and Radio University in Chengdu, China. The Searles and their 14-year old son, Mick, will be visiting our Region September 9 – November 4, 2007. They are looking forward to meeting with church groups of all ages and sizes. They will put a face on mission as they share news about how God is at work in China and how China is changing.

There are still a few open dates available to schedule the Searles. Check out the possibility of the Searles visiting your congregation by contacting Hal and Donna Rusk, itineration coordinators. Contact the Rusks at home (515) 277-7574, cell (515) 321-6972, or by email h.rusk@mchsi.com