

Tri-Region Discernment Conversations

June 24-26, 2007 Meeting at the Lindenwood Retreat Center in Donaldson, Indiana

Context

Some 25 representatives of the Illinois-Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan Regions met together in a second meeting of the three regions (the first meeting involved 12 representatives at Pokagon State Park near Angola, Indiana on February 12-13). Dick Hamm of The Columbia Partnership again facilitated the meeting's process.

Members of the CCIW team present included: Ellen Rechenbach (Moderator), Eddie Griffin (Past Moderator), Ed Morris (Chair of Congregational Transformation Team), Alan Terlep and Kerry Waller (Young Adults Constituency), Al Wilks (Chair of Finance Committee), Steve Workman (President of Communion of CCIW Clergy), and Clergy Staff Herb Knudsen, Beth Dobyns, Christal Williams, and Scott Woolridge. Moderator Elect Donna Martin was unable to attend due to a previous commitment.

The meeting was good spirited and people enjoyed getting to know one another. Each day was begun with significant worship experiences and a spirit of discernment was lifted up (where we were encouraged to discern what *God* may want for our regions rather than merely thinking about what *we* may want). There was a fairly good mix of regional staff, clergy, lay, men, women, young adults, ethnicities, etc. A primary resource for the meeting and advance reading was Hamm's helpful new book, Recreating The Church (CBP, 2007). Conversation was lively; and participation, disciplined and steady.

In the course of conversation about how we might work together to enhance the ministries of our regions, we found the three regions are in different "places" regarding their current felt needs. Illinois-Wisconsin is facing a reduction in staff due to financial stresses and feels some urgency about how the three regions might work together. Michigan is in the last half of a re-visioning process and is awaiting word from a thorough audit, and thus wishes to finish their processes before going much further with this dialogue. Indiana has experienced some improvement in finances in the past year and is feeling less urgency.

The following **Summary Statement** was created by the group as its public communication about the substance of the meeting:

Claiming our unity and our common mission as servants of Jesus Christ, leadership from the Illinois/Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana Regions have gathered to explore how we might enhance our partnership in the work of the Gospel. In a spirit of worship, prayer, study, and discussion, we have been listening to God and to one another as to how God is calling us to share in the joining of our gifts and our passions in the equipping, work, and future of Regional Ministry.

With gratitude, we celebrate a consensus among us, that an emerging vision for vital partnership that extends beyond traditional boundaries can be claimed by these three Regions. While not feeling led at this time to pursue a radical systemic change such as structural merger, we do claim that the Holy Spirit is moving us to pursue practical ways in which we can be faithful stewards of the resources and dreams we

share for ourselves as God's people and as a part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Our time of discernment has challenged us to consider sharing life together in some important ways, which are shaped around these questions:

*Will it increase the quality of our ministry and life as Regions?
Will it require less energy and other resources than it produces/generates?
Will it empower local people to claim their rightful role to "be the Region?"*

God has gifted the Church with diversity and equipped it in a variety of ways to build up and strengthen the people of God in their witness, service, and worship so that all of creation might know the depth and power of God's Love. The pursuit of this partnership enhances and renews our ability to speak a word that is both faithful and relevant to the time and world in which we live.

Next Steps

The group did agree to a growing partnership working together in the following areas as a way of moving forward:

Mission Partnership in the Congo. Congregational Transformation.
The Program of Regional Elders. Young Adult Ministries. and
Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism programming.

The group also agreed to explore possible ways of working together in the work of the three Commissions on Ministry.

The following additional agenda was also identified:

1. The three Regional Ministers and Moderators will engage in a Conference Phone Call in the Fall to see how next steps are progressing.
2. An interactive Blog will be established to provide a place for ongoing dialogue among the participants and regions.
3. A balanced (gender, ethnicity, age., etc.) Steering Committee will be developed by the Regional Ministers and Moderators to give oversight to any emerging partnership(s).
4. Another meeting like this one (or larger) may be convened within the next two years.