

LETTER TO THE REGIONAL CHURCH

MARCH 2009

Beloved in Christ,

“We thank God every time we remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of our prayers for all of you because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.” (Philippians 1.3-5) Indeed we are so thankful for the amazing dedication and faithfulness of our regional church over these past eight months.

Since much has happened since our October letter and since the clergy have advised us during their Consultation to send bi-monthly updates, we hope to send you a letter every two to three months concerning the region’s search and transformation processes, as well as the progress we are making on our finances. Please duplicate this letter and place it in your bulletin or have it read to your board, elders, trustees, DWM, youth group, or your church newsletter. The more who know about our joys and concerns, the more prayers will be offered. The more prayers which are offered, the more we will be able to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in our regional church. Expect the next letter to the region a couple of weeks after the Regional Board meeting on April 24. These letters will also be posted on the region’s web site at www.padisciples.org

THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

Thanks to the outstanding leadership of Rev. Rebecca Hale, our two events for listening (the Bedford conference and the Clergy Consultation) produced rich material for our newly created transformation team. Our discussions centered on these key questions:

What are the life-giving moments we have experienced as a regional church?

What are the challenges which face our regional church from within and from forces outside the church?

What does transformational leadership look like?

One of the highlights of the Bedford Listening Conference was the energy and honesty that the nearly two dozen young adults provided. After the conference was over, one of the youth said, “You folks really listened to us.” Let’s remain worthy of that compliment!

On Saturday, March 14, the newly created Transformation Team (with one or two representatives from each district) will meet face to face to continue the discernment process for our regional church. This Team will be meeting every two months and will continue their work until the 2010 Regional Assembly.

If you are interested in the notes from the Listening Conference or the Clergy Consultation, please see the region’s web site at www.padisciples.org.

THE SEARCH PROCESS

After the Transformation Team and the Executive Committee meet in March, a proposal for a Search Committee will be forwarded to the Regional Board meeting on April 25. We hope, then, that the Search Committee for a new Regional Minister will begin shortly after that board meeting. In conversations with other regions, we have been advised that the search process may take 12-18 months from the time the Search Committee is formed. Thankfully, our interim regional minister, Bill Allen, is willing to stay “until the next person arrives” which is such a blessing to us. Those of you who have had the honor of working with Bill know that he is a gift to our region in every way as a spiritual leader, a pastor, a co-discerner and as a gifted administrator.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee is another of the great blessings of our regional church. In addition to working with our regional minister in dealing with our financial challenges, the Executive Committee has created a Finance Committee to work on financial and property concerns, a Stewardship Committee to work on fund-raising, a Personnel Committee to work on job descriptions for all support staff, and the Transformation Team. Since communication was one of the top challenges lifted up at both of the listening conferences, the Executive Committee hopes to create a “Communication and Community Life Team” to assist our regional church with improving communication with all clergy and congregations, even as we work to develop deeper relationships across the region through events such as a “Disciples Church Exchange” in which pastors and church leaders will visit each other’s congregations for a Sunday worship service. Please contact Rev. Tracy Muffett Mills if you are interested in participating in such an exchange this 2009 year.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

2008 Christmas Offering has brought in just over \$20,000 which is 20% more than we received during the same period in 2007. If your church has not sent in your Christmas offering, please encourage them to do so quickly.

Capital Campaign Update – we are in the process of accounting for the past expenditures from 2006, 2007 and 2008 to bring full disclosure on the expenditure of the funds we have received to date. Since October 1, 2008, we have separated all these funds into a separate account and currently we have \$19,836 in the bank towards future expenses according to the Capital Campaign goals. We will have a complete update and report available at the regional board meeting in April and a summary in our next letter in early May.

Capital Campaign Contributions – we have received a few inquiries about whether individuals and churches should continue collecting and sending in their Capital Campaign commitments or should they divert it to the “debt-buster” campaign. After much conversation, the Executive Committee wanted to express our support for churches to honor the commitment of their donors and recommends that you continue to support the Capital Campaign. It is our desire to do some capital improvements at the Laurelview property beginning this spring and continuing into the fall. In order to complete some of the planned projects, we will need the Capital Campaign contributions to continue.

Debt Busters Contributions – We received a \$10,000 contribution this Christmas season to assist the Region in reducing our debt. We are currently working to identify additional donors who can continue to help us reduce this debt even further. If you are interested in helping, please contact Rev. Bill Allen at the Regional Office. We are in the process of closing the books for 2008 but expect that we still need \$50,000 to cover the accounts payable and another \$25,000 in a line of credit that we will carrying forward.

2008 Operating Losses – we are in the process of closing the 2008 books in anticipation of the audit which will begin late April or early May. Our preliminary loss is about \$35,000 for the past year. We will provide exact figures as soon as the audit is complete.

Nordmont Update – we are in the process of listing the Nordmont property with a realtor from the area. We will send out a flyer to each church on the property as soon as it goes on the market. Originally we were working with a gas leasing company in the area hoping to sign a five year gas lease. With the changing economy, this lease opportunity does not seem realistic in the short term so we have decided to list the property.

Finance and Property Committee – the current finance committee continues to put into place new procedures to monitor and track our finances more closely. Additionally, we are currently working on a listing of all the property that the region owns or has an interest in and will be conducting an

inventory of all the property and its current conditions prior to summer. As part of this plan, we will also be working closely with the Regional Youth Commission to identify key improvements for the 2009 camp program needed. We will be hosting some work days in May to prepare the property for the camping season.

Special Thanks – goes to Rev. Norman and Judy Hunt for their dedication to improve the kitchen at Camp Laurelview. In memory of Dennis Odgers, they have begun a fund to replace the dishwasher and bring the kitchen up to code. Currently a number of individuals and churches have contributed towards the goal of \$7,500 to complete this project in May. For more information, please contact John Owen, Chair of the Youth Commission.

BLESSING AND PRAYER

Despite the challenges that face our region and the entire world in this time of economic crisis, we remain ever hopeful in the dedication and faithfulness of our regional church and, most importantly, in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We know that a brief letter cannot answer all of your questions, so please do not hesitate to contact us with your concerns. Most of all hold us and the regional leadership in your daily prayers.

Blessings in our Lord,
Janet and Steve Hellner-Burris, Co-Moderators
(pastorjanethb@verizon.net and shellner-burris@mercybh.org)