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## REGIONAL ASSEMBLY NEWS - May 6, 2017

Newsletter: May 21, 2017 - Neil E. Topliffe, Editor

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### In The News:

- [Keynoter Gives Us Historical Markers](#)
- [Eugene James to move to Part Time in Fall](#)
- [Regional Funding Options Continue](#)
- [Strategic Ministry Planning to visit Congregations](#)
- [New Officers Elected](#)
- [Bylaws Amendment Approved](#)
- [Crystal 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Announced](#)
- [Commission Reports Highlights](#)
  - Personnel
  - Stewardship & Finance
  - Crystal
  - Ministry
  - Church Growth & Vitality
  - Ecumenism



*Dr. Scott Seay,  
Associate Professor of  
the History of  
Christianity, Christian  
Theological Seminary,  
Indianapolis IN.*

## Dr. Seay Gives Us Historical Markers

There are four unique contributions for Disciples from our historic roots that will give to we who are part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), direction into the future, if we draw upon them, said our Assembly Keynoter, Dr. Scott Seay, Associate Professor of the History of Christianity, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis IN.



Seay first set out the realities of our times that are challenging our ministries as local churches and regions. The drivers impacting us today include the changing social status of Christianity in our society, the continuing shift from predominance of mainline churches to evangelicals, the fundamental shift of the U.S. population that projects whites becoming a racial minority, and the growing influence

of World Christianity that tends to reflect other indigenous traditions.

Scott identified that for we Disciples one of the four primary unique contributions we maintain historically and into the future is **“the essential unity of our churches.”** He noted that Thomas Campbell, an original founder of our movement declared in 1809 that we are “essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one.” Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Alexander Campbell reinforced that unity outweighed separation or isolation, stating, “in essentials unity, in opinions liberty and in all things, love.” This sense of unity, Seay emphasized, is a key piece for we Disciples to focus upon for our future health, moving beyond a sense of going it alone.

A second unique historical contribution we Disciples offer for our future and that of the larger church is the centrality of the Bible and the freedom for

interpretation. The Campbells and Walter Scott emphasized that all church leaders maintain a central focus in Bible reading but be accepting of one another's differences of interpretation, as together they grow in their understanding of the Word. Bible study and education remained a central focus and does for our churches today.

The New Testament has a strong impact on how Disciples churches worship. This is the third unique gift of Disciples history that will be important for our congregation's health in the years ahead. For the Campbells, the only test of faith for one to become a Christian and member of a Disciples church was a simple profession of faith in Jesus



Christ. "No creeds but Christ, no book but the Bible" was a catch phrase for the early members of the Campbell/Scott tradition. Based on the New Testament, we Disciples meet around the table each Lord's Day for communion. A third worship ingredient for Disciples has been baptism. The New Testament example of immersion for a person old enough to decide became the norm of baptism. Today, Seay noted, we allow open membership, accepting those who may have been baptized as infants in other traditions.

The fourth critical contribution of our historical heritage that is significant for we Disciples continuing to move forward, Seay said, is the primacy of the local congregation as the principle expression of the church. Alexander Campbell in his leadership of the Campbell-Stone Restoration Church built his theology upon the centrality of the local church even as he in later years argued that structures beyond the congregation allowed the churches to do more together than separately. Publishing and missions were two of those larger ministries that evolved.

"How Learning from the Past can Help Disciples Shape our Future" was a fitting title of the keynote address and helped give focus to the challenges and future directions for Disciples congregations and the Region of Michigan.

## Eugene James to Part Time in Fall

“The sign of our professed love for the gospel is the measure of sacrifice we are prepared to make in order to help its progress,” was a quote by Ralph P. Martin that began the report to the Assembly by Rev. Eugene James, Regional Minister.



His written report went on to lift up the continuing financial challenges faced by the Region even as he reminded us that “Proclaiming the Gospel is the first priority of a faithful Region ... Constituent financial support of the ministries and programs of the Region is absolutely essential.”

James lifted up the reality that a large chunk of regional ministry is the cost of salaries and then, in candor and emotion said, “To set an example to help us face a different

## Regional Funding Options Continue to be Explored

The Stewardship and Finance Commission noted in their report that work is continuing to find both short and long term financial support for the regional ministries. It was reported that the Regional Board in February had approved appraisals to be made toward the prospect of selling two parcels of the Crystal Conference Center property. They also are exploring the possible sale of the regional office. It was anticipated that appraisals would be complete by the Regional Assembly but it didn't happen.

It also was expected that online donations by individual Disciples church members would be in place but delays were faced in launching this new service. Sarah Beth Simonds, new chair of the Commission is working on having a user-friendly online donation option available soon.

Frustration was expressed at the Assembly that the Commission did not have a specific proposal for action by the assembly to address the short term financial crisis.

vitality as a region, it will be necessary for me to go to half-time this fall. It is a step necessary for the financial health of the region.” He confessed that this decision comes after almost a year of reflection and conversations with the Personnel Committee and regional leaders. “I’m going to be fine ... I trust God and ask you to trust and support me,” he added.

James asked all Michigan Disciples and members to take on the same spirit of sacrifice to make “our ministry with the region stronger. Consistency and support are what we need from every congregation.”

Commission members assured those in attendance of their frustration also, after multiple phone conference calls and meetings to not have more to report but their urgent commitment to find viable financial options for the future ministry of the Region continues.

## Visits to Local Churches Planned

Focus Groups to ask local leaders their expectations

To be engaged in “Creating Encounters with Christ to Improve Lives” is one key phrase for the Christian Church Michigan Region. At least that’s what the Strategic Ministry Planning Committee has been focusing upon over the past several months, as it seeks to develop a dynamic future for Michigan Disciples.



But ultimately, the committee believes some of its ideas need to be tested with



you and other leaders and pastors of our local churches. The plan is to visit with small groups of leaders in as many as possible of our 40 plus churches in the next 3-6 months. They will be asked to “suspend preconceived notions” as we call for their honest opinions on possible visions, strategies and actions to re-engage our partnerships as congregations and region.

A slide presentation was shared with Regional Assembly participants. That and a time for discussion is the format planned with local Disciples churches. The Committee would welcome your church contacting it to set a time for a Focus Group visit with your congregation as soon as possible. Contact the Regional Office, giving 2-3 dates and times when we can visit you for this one hour session.

## New Officers Elected

Eleven new officers, chairpersons and members at large were approved at the Regional Assembly, joining six continuing representatives to the Michigan Disciples Regional Board.

New and re-elected officers include Mitzie VanDongen, Vice Moderator; Rick Modglin Green, Secretary; Sarah Beth Simonds, Treasurer. The Moderator position is to be filled by the Regional Board, following the resignation of John Martek at the end of the assembly.

Sarah Beth Simonds will chair the Finance and Stewardship Commission. Other newly elected or



*Rev. Dr Robert Cornwall, Senior Minister, and members of Central Woodward Christian Church, Troy, hosted the Assembly.*

re-elected Commission chairs include Russ Tiller, Sr., Crystal Commission; Julie Drews, Personnel; and Jerry McAllister, Ecumenism. Continuing are Robert Cornwall, Ministry; and Brenda Etheridge, Church Growth and Vitality.



Members at Large re-elected are Randall Bertrand, Isaac Etheridge, and Barbara Hemphill; joining continuing at large member Richard Harmon. One At-Large position remains to be filled by the Regional Board.



The Rev. Richard Boyd has accepted the chair position for the Reconciliation Committee.

## Bylaws Amendment Approved



the Regional Assembly. The revised approved motion made the action inclusive of all real property owned by the region.

A Bylaws revision brought to the Assembly by the Crystal Commission generated spirited discussion and ultimately, with an amendment, it was approved. The original amendment called for no action to be taken on the sale of any Crystal Conference Center property without prior approval by

The action taken amended the Region's Bylaws at section II.B.7 by adding a sub-part a. that reads:

*"In no case shall the Regional Board nor the Executive Committee nor any others, sell or encumber any real property of the Christian Church Michigan Region without a 2/3 vote of the Regional Assembly's voting delegates." (ed. Note. Term "delegates" should be "voting representatives" per Constitution Article IV. 3.)*

## Crystal 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Announced

Put the dates in your calendar now to not miss out on a terrific celebration at

Crystal Conference Center, Frankfort.

July 6-8, 2018.

Tim Murtaugh along with his committee are busy planning a weekend for campers of all ages to join in experiences fondly remembered even as we look forward to touching future generations of youth and adults in fun and faith development.

You can help. Promote the dates in your churches and with other campers. Send ideas to Tim Murtaugh [timdmurtaugh@gmail.com](mailto:timdmurtaugh@gmail.com) of what you want to be sure is included in the festivities. Watch for more details coming soon.

Russ Tiller, Crystal Commission Chair also reported work in expanding services and developing a viable financial plan that will allow Crystal to be financially viable in the next two to three years. The first step was taken



this year with the launch of the Conference Center becoming a wedding venue for the area. Efforts are underway to promote this and other rental uses for the Center. Plans also are underway for outside help in promoting the Conference Center beyond only camps and conferences, as well as identify areas of cost savings in the operation of the facility.

### Three Ordinations Scheduled

Bob Cornwall, chair of the Ministry Commission, announced the ordination of two Disciples pastors. Vickie Wright of Bethany Christian Church was ordained May 7. Kevin Greenwald of Saginaw First Christian Church West will be ordained sometime this summer. Steve Carigon of Cascade Christian Church also has been approved for ordination yet this year.

Commissioned Minister status has been granted to Susan Menko of Central Woodward Christian Church for a ministry in Christian formation. Congratulations to all these leaders in Christ's ministry.



### Bob Oliveira Named Regional Elder

Robert "Bob" Oliveira, recently retired minister at Cowden Lake, was installed during the Regional Assembly to serve as a Regional Elder in Western Michigan. The Regional Elders program that provides pastoral support to congregations on

behalf of the Region is in the process of transition and refocus.

### Biblical Leadership Workshops Scheduled

Two workshops have been scheduled for this fall on Biblical Leadership for the Work of Ministry. The first will be September 30 and the second October

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7. Brenda Etheridge, chair of the Commission of Church Growth and Vitality told Regional Assembly representatives that the workshops will be led by an Ohio Regional Elder and retired pastor.

Plans also continue with scholarships being available for the September Preaching Camp, September 11-12 at DeWitt, MI. The Commission also hopes to co-host the Central Woodward Perry Gresham Lectures in the fall.

## Mission and Education Events

The Ecumenism Commission of the Michigan Region includes the ministries of Gospel in Action and STEM, the continuing education opportunities for lay leaders, commissioned and ordained ministers.

Gospel in Action – Detroit, the original mission program, continues in partnership with Rippling Hope. They now have renovated their “Center for Mission & Service” and continue work in Detroit neighborhoods. Dedication of the new Center will be June 3, 5-8 pm at 12801 Joy Rd & Appoline, Detroit. Visit the Rippling Hope website for more information – [Click here.](#)

Gospel in Action – Flint continues and plans are underway to establish a third mission in Benzie County, the county where Crystal Conference Center is located.

STEM, our regional ecumenical educational training program with the United Church of Christ, has 10 classes scheduled during 2017 in Biblical studies, preaching, ethics and pastoral care. Contact [Anne McCauslin](#) for a full schedule and costs.