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No. 8949

## REPORT ON THE PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PRIORITY

RECEIVED by the General Assembly

### Background Information:

The General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in October 1987 in Louisville, Kentucky approved the resolutions concerning the Priority for the Christian Church. The resolutions called for a Churchwide Planning Conference in 1988 "which will bring together congregational, regional and general unit leadership 1) to examine current programs and resources in terms of congregational life, 2) to explore the needs of congregations, and 3) to project future programs along with the leadership and resources which will be needed."

The General Minister and President appointed a broadly representative group to design the planning conference and invited anyone who was interested to participate.

The planning team identified a process whereby participants in the conference would "break open" the priority through the ten Biblical images described in the Priority resolutions.

In June 1988, each of the 675 participants in the conference selected one of the "Biblical images" of a dynamic faith community and worked during the conference to understand the realities and needs of congregational life in the context of that image.

Small discussion groups of 15 to 25 people allowed opinions and concerns to be heard; clustered groups translated thoughts and dreams into particular ideas and suggestions.

The intention was that the product of the Conference would become a basic resource for the General Board in 1988 as it further developed the implementation of the priority.

The Churchwide Planning Conference proved to be a very helpful and valuable experience, but it did not identify any developmental process or framework for the implementation of the priority.

A process was developed for the 1988 General Board which would attempt to prioritize the material from the Churchwide Planning Conference. The intention was that this would begin to give some focus and direction to the substance of the implementation of the priority.

In our structures the General Board is responsible for "establishing"

## Recommendations:

- I. That in planning we use existing structures, redesigned as needed, with an eye to effectiveness and financial economy.
- II. That there is a need for greater coordinated planning and implementation of church-wide priority and programs, and the proper location of this responsibility, in accordance with *THE DESIGN*, is the General Board.

Key to the effective work of the General Board in the function of planning would be the work of a smaller group to oversee this task. The Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee (composed of the three moderators, four Administrative Committee/General Board section chairs and the General Minister and President) augmented by four members of the Council of Ministers shall be that body. (This planning body shall fulfill the functions anticipated in the concept of a Priority Council.)

The General Minister and President is asked to work with the Task Force on Renewal and Structural Reform to reformulate the agenda, working style, and consider the size and composition of the General Board in order for this body to carry out this coordinated planning responsibility more effectively.

- III. That the Council of Ministers shall be given a larger and more formal role in the process of long-range planning, especially by serving as a place for theological reflection on the life of the church. This means, among other things, the persons involved in the Council of Ministers reaffirm their responsibility to be teachers of the Christian faith, and to be ministers with the whole church.
- IV. The Council of Ministers shall be defined and formally recognized as that body in the church where persons charged with particular leadership responsibilities\* gather for the sharing of information, for pastoral and strategic reflection, theological thinking, common deliberation, for seeking counsel and consensus with regard to the most critical and serious issues facing the church. When consensus is reached in the Council of Ministers it will be offered to the General Board to inform, advise and give counsel in planning for the mission of the church. The General Minister and President shall preside.

\*The current composition of the Council of Ministers is:

General Cabinet  
Regional Ministers  
Select Representative Women  
Seminary and Foundation House  
Administrators

- V. That the Church shall seek to integrate the Council of Ministers, Administrative Committee, General Board and Commission on Finance into a consistent process of decision making/funding.
- VI. That the General Board, upon recommendation of the augmented Executive Committee, will determine the focus of implementing the priority, and in consultation with the units of the Church, will assign responsibility for resource development to a specific location in the church. The General Assembly has defined a priority "as a concern of vital importance for the whole Church which merits first attention and should be proclaimed by its leadership and addressed by its general units, regions and congregations." This would encourage the three manifestations to reorder their lives, in order to give first attention to the focus of the priority.
- VII. Regions will have the primary role of implementation with congregations, giving "first attention" to the focus of the priority.
- VIII. That the General Board reaffirm the foundational focus of the first years of implementing the priority to be: Leader Development for Mission and Ministry:
  - a. The need for spiritual/faith formation and leadership development for clergy which must include questions like:
    - What is the nature and purpose of Christian corporate worship, and personal spirituality?
    - What does it mean to bear witness to and proclaim the Gospel, and be a redemptive community?
    - What is the shape of a theology of Christian stewardship?
    - What are the elements of Christian ministry which make it come alive?

b. The need for spiritual/faith formation and leadership development for laity which must include questions like:

- What does it mean to be a Christian?
- What does it mean to be a "Disciple"?
- What does it mean to be a member of the whole family of God?
- What does it mean to be a steward?
- How does one live out one's faith?

IX. That the primary group initiating the implementation of the focus identified in Recommendation VIII will be the Leadership Project Team of the Division of Homeland Ministries, which is broadly representative with persons of expertise from congregational, regional, and general life.

The Division of Homeland Ministries' Project Team on Total Congregational Leader Development has been working since 1985 to create a churchwide program of congregational leader development. The Council of Ministers, in February, 1989, recognized the significance of this group and its work towards the initiation of the first phase of the priority.

The work of this project team states that Leader Development is rooted in the Biblical values of covenant, the church as koinonia (communion), authority, giftedness and servanthood. Leader development best takes place in three dimensions: **foundational** (Biblical, spiritual, historical, stewardship), **general skills** (such as communication, group development, polity, conflict utilization), and **specific skills** for ministry in the church and world (such as "how to's"). If only one or two of these dimensions is happening in the congregation, maintenance will be the task. A strong **foundation** leads to the identification of one's Mission as the first step in understanding the role of leaders in the congregation.

**Leader Development for Mission and Ministry** is a program that will engage congregations in a three-stage process of **establishing a faith foundation, identifying mission and strategy, and forming an appropriate continuing leader development system.**

**We commend Leader Development for Mission and Ministry** to all congregations, regions and general units as a first concern in fulfilling the goals of the priority and encourage the utilization of the resources and energies of this program.

X. That the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee explore ways for the other general units to work with the Leadership Project Team in appropriate areas of resource development and implementation.

XI. That as part of the implementation of the first phase of the priority, the General Minister and President prepare a document which attempts to identify:

- a. Those things which keep Disciples from being vital faith communities.
- b. The vision of our mission and ecclesiology which compels us to be vital faith communities.

This text should draw on the various resources, including the regional listening conferences, the CTS Conference, "Christians Only, But Not The Only Christians", and the Lexington Church-Wide Planning Conference, and appropriate ecumenical consultation. The text would be shared with the 1989 Council of Ministers (December 3-5, 1989, Bethany College, West Virginia) and, after revision, directed to the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee to inform the implementation of the priority.