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PREFACE

The “General Principles and Policies” of the Division of Overseas Ministries (DOM), originally developed in 1977 and approved in 1981, has been revised and updated to respond to the present and future of DOM’s continued faithful response to God’s mission in the world. This revised statement has been received and affirmed by the 2012 DOM Board of Directors. It describes where DOM is in its understanding of mission and ministry, how DOM has developed and evolved to meet the ever changing needs of our world, and the board’s hope for its future work. The updated document acknowledges that since 1996 the Division of Overseas Ministries is part of Global Ministries, a common witness in mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ. This document strives to articulate both the unique contribution of the Division of Overseas Ministries as well as the common ministry of DOM and Wider Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ, manifested in Global Ministries. Therefore, when this document makes historical reference, it refers to DOM but when dealing with current and future matters, DOM/Global Ministries is used.¹

When DOM staff and board began systematic study and dialogue in 1977 it was to seek clarity for DOM itself. During the development of this document, a portion of every board meeting was devoted to these issues. The board used a consensual approach in drafting the document. The demonstrated ability of former boards and staff to respond to change was respected.

In response to the climate of the church and the world in 2010, another dialogue was begun by the Board of Directors to examine possible changes needed to sustain God’s mission and ministry as understood by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). As in the original study, the task was not approached in a legalistic way and is not presented with any sense of absolutist or authoritarian attitudes.

While this document is intended to be read in its entirety, it has been divided into three sections: theological, historical, and policy. Each of these three sections can be read and studied individually, as they each offer significant meaning and insight into what it means to be the Division of Overseas Ministries in the 21st century. When read collectively, these three sections create a more complete picture of the mission in which the Division of Overseas Ministries is called to participate on behalf of the whole church. The Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries strives to be a Critical Presence by “timely and appropriately meeting God’s people and creation at the point of deepest need: spiritually, physically, emotionally and/or

economically.”² Currently, Critical Presence is being expressed through the ministry of accompaniment, both walking with people in a variety of ways, and empowering people within their own communities.

When the original document was adopted in 1981 by the General Assembly gathered in Anaheim, California, the document became not only the “General Policies and Procedures” for the Division of Overseas Ministries, but also the guiding document for how the denomination understands mission and witness throughout the world.

As a board, it is important for us to acknowledge unequivocally that our engagement with people of all faith traditions around the globe is not with the goal of their conversion in mind, but to witness to our Christian faith in a confident and authentic way, one that lives out Jesus’ commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself”³ whomever or wherever she or he may be.

It is our prayer and hope that the updated document continues to be our “General Principles and Policies” for as long as it continues to be relevant to God’s mission in the world.

*—The Board of Directors of the Division
of Overseas Ministries
April 2012*

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) understand ourselves to be a “movement for wholeness” – for the fullness of God’s justice, peace, and reconciliation. This wholeness is called “shalom” in the Bible’s prophetic tradition. Jesus calls it the “kingdom of God” – already at hand among Christ’s followers. Through the Division of Overseas Ministries, our “movement” seeks to provide a witness for wholeness in those places of deepest need, strives to provide Critical Presence and accompaniment. This document describes how this witness is made in a 21st century context where Christianity is at its most vital in the global south, where interfaith engagement shapes world events, where food and water insecurity affect communities world-wide and where the impact of global climate change undermines decades of international development advances.

The Division of Overseas Ministries here describes, in one document that focuses evenly on theology, history and policy, how global mission is carried out in a Disciples framework in the early 21st century. Some of what we read here is familiar to Disciples: there is one mission (although for practical reasons of manageability, that mission is directed from different offices, including Overseas and Home.) One mission assumes the unity and integrity of evangelism and social action with each other. What may be less familiar is that, in the 21st century, the church is now established on every continent. The church in each country and place takes the lead in determining appropriate witness in its particular context. The church in any place may express itself through regional ecumenical and interfaith initiatives as much as through historical missionary relationships.

In these pages we are reminded that the one mission in which we engage is Christ’s mission (not ours). The responsibility to carry out that mission flows to every one of Christ’s followers. It is Christ’s mission and also our calling to participate with others in sharing God’s love in word and action on every continent of the globe. Though the challenges are many, we gratefully acknowledge that God is never left without a witness. We joyfully accept the call to be that witness in company with others seeking to embody God’s wholeness for the sake of the world.

In gratitude to the Division of Overseas Ministries for giving voice to God’s call and providing a mechanism for joining Christ’s mission, I commend General Principles and Policies of DOM to the church for reading and as a basis for action.

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THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Introduction

In the Ecumenical Conference on Mission in Edinburgh, Scotland, 1910, and all the world missionary conferences since, questions relating to the fundamental nature of Christian faith and the mission of the church have been explored. The reflections of persons involved in missionary work contributed much to the theological debates and the developing general consensus that marked the growth of the ecumenical movement.

Those debates and the understandings coming from them were reflected in the dialogue of the Commission on Restructure during the years preceding the writing and the 1968 adoption of “The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).” Fresh understandings of the Bible and a particular historical perspective required new visions of mission.

Leaders from across the Christian traditions and around the globe gathered again in Edinburgh, Scotland, in June 2010 to reaffirm the biblical call to mission. Aware of many new and continuing concerns in the world, the conference brought forth a conviction that “a new vision of God’s purposes for creation in Christ and a renewed spirituality and mission ethos will be developed in the life of the churches worldwide.”⁴

Preamble to the Design

Basic understandings of the faith and the nature of the church are embodied in the Preamble to “The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).” Jesus Christ is confessed to be “Son of the living God ... Lord and Savior of the world.” God is “maker of heaven and earth,” initiator of “the covenant of love which binds us to God and one another,” “the One whose kingdom has no end.” It is Christ’s grace that enables “newness of life” and the unity of “the whole people of God” in the “mission of witness and service to all people.” The Holy Spirit enables persons to join together “in discipleship and in obedience to Christ,” who is “Lord and head” of the church.⁵

All people on earth belong to God’s family. The church is present wherever believers in Jesus Christ are gathered in his name. Striving to transcend all barriers within the human family, the church expresses itself in ordered communities of disciples bound together for worship, for fellowship and for service, and in varied structures for mission, witness and mutual discipline, and for the nurture and renewal of its members. While the church’s nature “remains constant through the generations,” it lives in a changing world and

“it continues to adapt its structures so that it may exercise its mission in faithfulness.” The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) exists “within the universal body of Christ.” It seeks to order its life in ways that enable it to “faithfully express the ministry of Christ made known through scripture.”⁶

In the section on Ministry, “The Design” declares: “The fundamental ministry within the church is that of Jesus Christ. He calls his church to participate in his ministry.” Every member of the church enters into the “corporate ministry of God’s people.” Every Christian is called to be “a servant of Christ sent into the world to minister.”⁷

Faith Principles Affirmed

No consensus about the nature of faith and its work had been reached or stated at the time of the adoption of the “Strategy of World Mission” document by the United Christian Missionary Society.⁸ UCMS adopted the Strategy of World Mission in 1955 as a way to begin to articulate a coherent understanding of mission for what would become the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) with the approval of the “Provisional Design” in 1968. While there is still no consensus today, there are some basic theological concepts from these documents that continue to drive the work of the Division of Overseas Ministries.

As a result of the conversations and exploration the board struggled with during its development, the following faith principles were affirmed in 1981, and are reaffirmed today:

Together with other Christian communities, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and its Division of Overseas Ministries discover our understanding of covenant and mission through the scriptures. This is always in relation to contemporary experience, the life of the whole Christian community, and events taking place in God’s world.⁹

God is the Creator, maker of heaven and earth, who made humanity in God’s own image, free even to reject the Creator. This same God is the Liberator who called a people out of slavery and involved them in God’s redemptive purpose for the world. God is also the Redeemer who loves the world and sent Jesus of Nazareth to fulfill God’s full intent and love for the whole world, particularly demonstrating concern for the weak, the marginal, and the poor. God sent the Holy Spirit to interpret and actualize God’s creative and redemptive work. The grounding of missionary commitment is in the dynamic love of God for the whole world revealed in the suffering and resurrected Christ. Motivation for witness and service, for engaging in the struggle for a new and just community, is supplied by faith in Christ’s

resurrection, the gift of eternal life, and the hope of the coming of God's Realm.¹⁰

God Never Without Witness

God has never, in any time or place, been without witness.¹¹ God who is known in Jesus Christ has been and is at work in the creation of community, the sharing of love, the seeking of freedom, the search for truth, the reactions of wonder and awe in the presence of all nature's power and beauty and creativity, and the awareness of the worth of persons.

Faith in God revealed in Jesus the Christ produces a community empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness in word and deed to God's nature (which may be described as righteous judgment, loving grace, and liberating power) and God's purpose (the redemption of all humanity, the fulfillment of all creation).

The church is the community God continually calls into being and equips to engage in God's mission. The community of faith does not exist for itself alone but for the sake of the world. "The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)" reminds us that, "the church appears wherever believers in Jesus the Christ are gathered in His name."¹² The church gathers the people of God in "ordered communities bound together for worship, fellowship, and service... and for the nurture and renewal of its members." As members of God's community we strive to "faithfully express the ministry of Christ, made known through scripture; provide Christian witness, mission, evangelism and service from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth... assure unity in Christ while respecting diversity; and work as partners in ecumenical and global relationships."¹³

Commitment to Church Unity

The church of Christ is one. All persons who confess faith in Christ are part of the one body. The divisions that historical, geographical, societal, theological and liturgical factors produce are limitations upon the proper functioning of the body. As the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we understand that God desires the church be one. This does not mean all alike, but rather a community capable of accepting with joy the enrichment of great diversity. In a world that is hungry for good news, where desperate need and oppression are massive, and where wholeness is so elusive in every dimension of life, neither a single denomination nor historic or national tradition can carry out a global mission. Commitment to evangelism, mission and justice is inseparable from a commitment to church unity.

While it is possible to speak of the church in ideal or transcendent terms, it must be recognized that it is an embodiment of Christ only insofar as it is obedient and faithful to God's will, revealed to us through Jesus, the Christ. The divine institution is also a human organization. Recognition of the dual nature of the church provides the theological basis for the distinction between the church as God intends it and the historic expressions of the church and its participation in mission.

God's Love Declared

A part from accepting God's love, people and communities continue in sin, in estrangement and revolt against God. The declaration of God's forgiving grace in Jesus Christ calls forth a primary faith commitment. Continuing difficult and often paradoxical faith decisions open people's lives to God's creative power and enable them to participate in the ongoing process of the Realm.

Confessing faith in Christ and being Christ's disciples make persons more fully aware that they belong inescapably together in the community and freedom of the Holy Spirit, and enables a witness to the ultimate hope for the world... the coming of God's Realm. Christians do not have the option of keeping the good news for themselves. The un-communicated gospel is a clear contradiction. Gratitude for God's love, the experience of the presence of Christ, and the leading of the Spirit bears fruit in the work of the Division of Overseas Ministry.

Sharing the Gospel with others includes "the announcement of God's Realm of love through Jesus Christ; the offer of grace and forgiveness of sins; the invitation to repentance and faith; the summons to fellowship in God's saving words and deeds; the responsibility to participate in the struggle for justice and human dignity; the obligation to denounce all that hinders... wholeness; a commitment to risk life itself."¹⁴

Church Must Identify with the Poor

Christ calls the church to identify with the dispossessed, the prisoners, the poor and the sick. The call of Christ is for the church to be with all people, everywhere. Section One of the Melbourne Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (1980) said:

In Jesus, God identified with the poor and oppressed by sending [Jesus] to live and serve as a Galilean speaking directly to the common people; promising to bless those who met the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoners; and

finally sharing death on a cross as a political offender. The good news handed on to the Church is that God's grace is in Jesus Christ, 'who though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.'¹⁵ ¹⁶

Mission implies the unity and integrity of social action and evangelism. The Melbourne Conference reminds us that, "We reject as heretical any proclamation of a disincarnate Christ, a caricatured Jesus, who is presented as not being intimately concerned with human life and relationships... Evangelism is incomplete unless deed matches proclamation. In fact, in some contexts the deed is the only possible proclamation."¹⁷

Struggle Against "Principalities"

Christ calls the church to stand against the "principalities" – systems that suppress freedom, use persons, destroy human life, oppress the many for the sake of the few and stifle the development of life. In the New Testament the "principalities and powers" are all those forces and structures which tend to dominate human life and usurp the role of God. They include the forces that wreck and undermine human existence – the sense of insecurity and fear, the absorption in things, rivalries of race and nation, selfishness – "all those things that undoubtedly exist in, influence, and sometimes dominate our lives without ever being fully visible."¹⁸ The church is called to engage in the struggle against destructive powers even as the church confesses that it sometimes participates in and perpetuates destructive powers.

God is the final source and arbiter of all human justice and freedom. Jesus, the Christ, calls the church to challenge all systems that deprive persons of their humanity. Jesus calls the church to support all who suffer on behalf of justice and freedom, witnessing always to the Gospel's declaration of the uniqueness and value of all persons as children of God.

Interfaith Relationships

Prominent in a mission of accompaniment is the idea that the church does not exist alone in the world, and is indeed part of a community. Christians have a long history of awareness of and interaction with communities of other faiths—a history that has both positive and negative episodes and narratives. In a time of instant news, the people of the United States and Canada are immediately impacted by events that take place around the world; and people, among them our partners, are deeply affected by governmental foreign policy as well as events here that offer a snapshot of inter-communal interaction, even if such interaction is not positive.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is deeply involved in interfaith relations, in multiple ways. First, the context of ministry and witness of most of our partners through Global Ministries is increasingly religiously pluralistic, and many work in Christian-minority communities. Through DOM/Global Ministries, Disciples support interfaith dialogue and work. Second, Disciples participate in interfaith dialogue in the United States through the National Council of Churches and its Interfaith Relations Commission, primarily engaging in ecumenical relationships with the Jewish and Muslim communities. Third, advocacy coalitions are increasingly expanding beyond ecumenical Christian to include (and are often initiated by) other faith communities. All of these ways of participation support the realization of the fullness of God's peace with justice and reconciliation in a fragmented world.

Mutuality in Mission

DOM/Global Ministries understands that the mission we are called to is not our mission but is God's mission. Global mission is shared by mutual participants in the body of Christ and we are invited to be present and participate in that mission. For many years, North American churches and European church bodies established, funded, and directed mission around the world. Mission was understood as going in only one direction – from our churches directed out. Mission is now understood as partnership and accompaniment. The value of these partnerships is not only in what we offer our partners, but in receiving the gifts of ministry our partners share with us. Today, DOM/Global Ministries' global church partners are independent and self-governing. Global partners set their own priorities for ministry, growth, and development based on God's calling for them. DOM/Global Ministries responds to invitations to accompany global church partners in mission. Likewise, global partners accompany us, giving gifts and insights and prayers in response to our own needs. While we celebrate the ministry of accompaniment around the global, we recognize that it is a struggle to support the ministry in the way we are accustomed to with the finite financial resources we have.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CONTEXT

Introduction

In 1948, a document entitled “The Foreign Division Faces a Decision” was submitted to the trustees of the United Christian Missionary Society, the mission agency of what would become the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Emerging “younger churches” and their movement toward unity, communist control in China, and rising nationalism all around the world were producing radically new conditions that demanded changed attitudes and ways of work on the part of western mission societies. It would be another ten years before the “Strategy of World Mission – Basic Policy of the Division of World Mission of the United Christian Missionary Society” was officially adopted by the society’s trustees.

The International Missionary Council’s 1952 conference in Willingen, Germany on “The Missionary Obligation of the Church” triggered the action of the Foreign Division. Findings of the conference were included in the first draft of the Strategy document and were important in the debates of staff members, the Board of Managers, trustees, missionaries and church constituency as the document emerged through many re-drafts. A final version of the “Strategy of World Mission” was approved by the trustees in 1959 and presented to the leadership of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in a special meeting of the Council of Agencies in 1960.

The discussions and documents produced in the 1950s were a reflection of a turning point for what was to become the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Mission had been a part of the Stone-Campbell movement since its inception, both on the frontier of the United States as well as around the globe. The UCMS, as well as other early women’s organizations, had been the principal organization for leadership and recruitment of resources for mission.

Discussions about becoming a denomination had been happening in the academic circles of the Stone-Campbell movement since the 1920s, and seeped into the life of the entire church post-World War II. Documents such as “The Foreign Division Faces a Decision,” the work of the Commission on Restructure, as well as other influences at that time, encouraged all the agencies of the church to examine their work. The Strategy document that developed throughout the 1950s was the UCMS response to their understanding of the church’s call to mission as well as a response to the work being done by the whole denomination at that time. The “Foreign Division

Strategy” became the document to shape what would become the Division of Overseas Ministries with the creation of the denomination.

1959 Foreign Division Strategy

The new policy statement affirmed the revolutionary character of the Christian faith in its concern for human dignity, freedom and justice, and said that “bread and land” are legitimate concerns of the gospel. It accepted the fact that colonized peoples around the world were coming to a new awareness of their humanity, and faced the handicap of the identification of the church’s message and mission with the cultures and power of the white race. Imperialism, colonialism, and denominationalism, and the attitudes that characterized them, were seen as impeding the church’s mission. Missionary efforts already in process which identified more closely with the life of the people, helping develop people’s own forms of organization, worship and technology were affirmed.

The Strategy declared the church is mission; the mission is given to the whole church; the mission is given to the whole world; every Christian is an ambassador of Christ’s mission. It described the world-wide fellowship of the church, the necessity and meaning of partnership, and the critical importance of unity to the exercise of mission. The Strategy document also declared the UCMS to be committed to cooperation, and the support of partnership in united churches. It gave mobility and flexibility of program high priority. The document also restated the UCMS conviction that mission and evangelism must be understood to include service, community (*koinonia*), and proclamation.

Leaders of UCMS believed that the new era demanded the end of the old possessiveness; the mission is Christ’s, not ours; that a new kind of personnel and a new attitude on the part of the church constituency were needed. This new era also required a major shift in promotional and educational style to reflect the increasing complexities and a new commitment to mission¹⁹ as part of the structure and function of the church.

The Strategy anticipated the development of national organizations and new forms of ecumenical mission in which many non-western churches would be identifying with ecumenical structures instead of mission boards and societies. The Strategy also anticipated churches participating in ecumenical pools of money and personnel. Mission leaders were not asking for “an enlargement of what we are doing,” but blazing brave new paths into the future. They understood the Strategy to be open-ended and declared at the conclusion of the document, “There is nothing sacred about this strategy of world mission. It must grow and change with the times. It is planned

as a working basis and where it does not work, we must see that the Strategy is modified so that it does work.”²⁰

Changes in the Strategy Statement—Through 1981

In the years after 1955, the Strategy document provided guiding principles and policies for boards and administrators responsible for the involvements of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) overseas. Modifications were made, formally and informally, as conditions in the world and in the church changed. As a result of the work of the Commission on Theology of Mission, which functioned from 1958 to 1964, the document was updated in 1961 to include a section entitled “Strategy of Ecumenical Concerns.” This section affirmed Disciples overseas churches entering fully into united churches, the policy of working in and through ecumenical councils, and relating to the work of the church anywhere without regard to historic Disciples identification.

Many Foreign Division staff and board personnel shared in the debate and planning of the Commission on Restructure (1961-68), giving strong support to the more church-like and responsible structure embodied in “The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).” Soon after its adoption, the UCMS agreed to the proposal of the General Minister and President that its two major Divisions (the Division of Overseas Ministries and the Division of Homeland Ministries) begin to operate as provisional units of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In June 1972, the General Board of the Church approved proposed Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws for each of the Divisions, and they were incorporated in January 1973. The United Christian Missionary Society remains in existence as a “foundation-type” organization, managing its funds for the benefit of both DHM and DOM, exercising its responsibilities as trustee of permanent funds and endowment funds that are still being received. It does not seek funds or carry on programs.

One Mission, Home and Overseas

The organizational pattern of the denomination, adopted in 1968, provided for a Division of Homeland Ministries (later known as Disciples Home Missions) and a Division of Overseas Ministries not because there was any theological basis for a distinction between “home” and “foreign” mission, but because experience had indicated there were important practical reasons for such a division of administration and work. “The Design” made it clear that local, regional, general and international witness and service are part of the one mission.

When the United Christian Missionary Society was formed in 1919, there was no discontinuity in the overseas programs in which congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) had previously been involved. In a similar way, there was continuity of personnel and program through the period of structural change in the early 1970s, even though the changes were real and of very great significance. Overseas ministries became integral to the life of all expressions of the church, rather than the responsibility of a “society” or “agency” supported by persons and congregations as a special interest or concern, when the denomination created a new general unit to:

Enable the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to participate faithfully in Christ’s ministry of witness, service and reconciliation in the whole world, by serving as the Division through which the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) relates to overseas communities in order to:

1. Engage in forms of ministry that invite and prepare persons to receive and manifest the new life and relationships offered in Jesus Christ;
2. Develop relationships and structures through which persons and resources are shared in a mutual ministry in the world; and
3. Respond to or initiate programs which equip people to understand and foster conditions supporting health, justice, and peace.²¹

Staff and board became responsible to the plenary bodies of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and programs became dependent on the new financial procedures of the restructured church.

Changes in Overseas Churches, Ecumenical Councils

Not only the structures of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), but the structures and work of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., had changed in the previous twenty-five years (late 1950s – early 1980s). The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been a member of both ecumenical bodies from their beginnings and had a growing share in their programs. Church bodies to which the Disciples relate in various parts of the world had been changing. Many that were denominational in origin and attitude were now part of new united churches (the Church of Christ of Congo, the Church of North

India, the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, the United Church of Christ of Japan, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, and the Church of Christ of Thailand). As understandings of mission and missionaries changed, local leaders succeeded missionary leadership nearly everywhere. In addition, strong regional ecumenical structures had emerged (the Christian Conference of Asia; the All Africa Conference of Churches, the Pacific Conference of Churches, the Caribbean Conference of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, the Latin America Council of Churches in Formation). Churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America were represented in ecumenical councils in larger numbers and spoke with greater power. These churches were bearing witness to a new dynamism, self-confidence, and will to find their own way into tomorrow's world.²²

The Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church, 1962-65, opened new opportunities for relationships around the world and contributed new insights into the nature of the church and its mission.

Western theological presuppositions and methodology were called into question by theologies developing in Asia and Africa, and particularly by the "liberation theology" developed in Latin America.²³ By the end of the period, however, it was generally admitted that, in spite of efforts to change the situation, there had been a further westernization of theological training and the production of leaders even more removed than their predecessors from the ordinary life and activities of the churches. There was confusion about direction for the future.

Religious, Technological, Political Changes

The time between the adoption of the Strategy and the approval of this revised document saw many changes: religious, technological and political. During this 30 year period, ancient religions revived and expanded throughout the world. In the west, new cults found acceptance by large numbers of people, and the "electronic church" captured the allegiance of many. Within American Christianity a new dichotomy was emerging between conservative, restoration-focused Christians and those who focus more towards the social gospel. While these two ideas within Christianity are not mutually exclusive, they have often been portrayed that way. More theologically and socially conservative churches began to emerge, often not connected to any denomination, and generally opposed to the ecumenical movement. The diversity of understandings within Christianity about mission was a constant challenge.

The third quarter of the 20th century saw the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the first of many wars in the Middle East. Commercial jet travel began, and supersonic warplanes were built. Intercontinental ballistic missiles with multiple nuclear warheads were deployed by the Soviet Union (now Russia) and the United States and both nations created stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Space exploration was begun, the electronics industry exploded, the computer industry was founded, satellite communications systems were established and nuclear power plants were put into operation.

During this period new nations came into being and sought their places in the world community. As governments became openly autocratic, national church leaders and missionaries felt their oppressive power. Transnational businesses continued to multiply, and some of them had larger budgets and more power than all but a few national governments. During the last years of the 1970s, the energy crisis helped produce a world-wide economic crisis. World population continued to grow and food became a political weapon. The gap between rich and poor grew wider and deeper than ever.

Western Change Intensified

The purchasing power of U.S. and Canadian dollars in the countries overseas where the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is involved was radically reduced during the decade of the 1970s with increased receipts falling far short of even meeting U.S. and Canadian inflation rates, to say nothing of the much higher inflation figures nearly everywhere in the developing world. This became one of the major reasons for serious reduction in programs supported by the Division of Overseas Ministries at that time.

During this period all the major institutions of western society were challenged. In the U.S. critics predicted the death of the institutional church and wrote books on the “academic revolution.” The Civil Rights Movement led to marches, demonstrations and confrontations, and to new laws, new patterns of public education and political participation. The continuing emergence of women as a powerful spiritual and political force in society created a movement demanding equality and justice for women. Urbanization continued at an increasingly rapid rate on every continent, accompanied by the birth of a new understanding of traditional tribal and family lifestyles, the loss of generally-accepted moral standards, and the secularization of value systems.

Political, Religious, and Technological Changes Since 1981

Since the adoption of the General Principles and Policies in 1981, major events have occurred in the world such as the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991; the end of apartheid in 1994 with the election of Nelson Mandela, a former political prisoner, as president of South Africa; and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is considered one of the most devastating public health problems in recent years with nearly 40 million people living with AIDS and the death of more than 25 million since 1981. Approximately 67% of people living with AIDS are in Sub-Saharan Africa, an area that is suffering from the impact of poverty and disease.

The series of attacks by al-Qaeda upon the United States on September 11, 2001, and the U.S. response to these attacks led to rapid change in how the United States, and U.S. citizens, relate to the rest of the world: politically, socially, and religiously. The attacks of September 11 shaped the war on terrorism and influenced policy regarding immigration and human rights. World events have heightened xenophobia in the U.S. and around the globe.

Change in the life of the church and the world is not new. As technology becomes more advanced this rate of change, and the radicalism that is often perceived to go hand and hand with rapid change, will continue to accelerate.

The center of the church is no longer Europe and North America. With phenomenal growth of the church in Africa, Latin America and Asia and a corresponding decline in the global north, the center of Christianity has steadily moved south over the past 100 years. If the trends continue, it is forecast that the geographical heart of Christian churches will be located in Northern Nigeria by 2100.²⁴ With mutuality in mission and the shifting landscape of Christianity, it is increasingly appropriate that mission is to everywhere from everywhere and that former “mission churches” are now sending missionaries to the United States and Europe.

Globalization has become a common term in regard to economics, technology and communication. There has been an integration of national economies with the international economy in terms of trade and foreign investment, which is illustrated by the financial crisis that began in 2007. This crisis was triggered by a liquidity shortfall in the United States banking system and is considered by many economists to be the worst financial crisis since the depression of the 1930s. It has resulted in a number of European bank failures and in a decline in various stock indexes and also has had a major impact on emerging economies. This financial crisis has impacted Global

Ministries funding as the return on investments and giving beyond the local congregations have also decreased.

The world is much smaller today than it was in 1981. The progress in technology has resulted in the development of global information systems such as the internet, communications satellites and cellular telephones. While many changes have occurred in the world within the last 30 years, some things have become progressively more challenging. Issues such as the gap between the rich and poor, food insecurity and lack of potable water have only increased in importance. Other issues, such as the environment, have become a center point for discussion around the world. In an increasingly interdependent world, it is more and more obvious that the use of resources, how resources are obtained, and scarcity of resources must be addressed.

POLICY GUIDELINES

Ecumenical Relationships in a Global Context

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), seeing itself as part of the larger community of the People of God, has been historically committed to ecumenical life and work. Its world mission leaders and programs for more than a century have demonstrated such a commitment. This commitment means the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is called to work in partnership with a variety of churches and institutions in mutual ministry and mission. Many of these organizations are themselves ecumenical or union bodies and some were not historically developed through Christian Church mission activities.

The Division of Overseas Ministries respects the integrity of other churches in the U.S. and Canada, as well as around the world. It assumes that the basic “planting” of the church has been accomplished – that is, the “foreign missionary movement” in conjunction with national efforts established the church on every continent, in nearly every nation. An era of “world mission” now exists in which the churches in each country and place in the world must engage in witness and service appropriate to their particular contexts. The churches in all parts of the world have differing gifts to share with the rest of the Christian community. Finding ways to share mutually in common tasks is crucial for the future of the church and the faith: God’s mission takes place on six continents and every place is an arena for God’s work, including the United States and Canada.

The primary work of United States and Canadian churches is in their own countries, but no true witness and service is ever merely local. Without global concern, linkages and interaction, U.S. and Canadian churches will lose sight of the nature of the gospel and the nature of the church. Witness in any place is apt to be distorted by the powers of that place and culture. No church can afford to be disconnected from the churches in other locations. Engagement in a variety of ministries with partner churches around the world is essential if we are to be effective in mission in our own place. Cross-cultural and cross-national exchanges are critical for the church’s witness to the universality of the gospel, and an important corrective for local and national limitations and perversions of the faith. Loyalty to Christ requires us and enables us to be with each other for the sake of the world.

Participation in National and International Ecumenical and Interfaith Structures

The partnership and mutuality in ministries of witness, service, nurture and reconciliation essential to global mission, are best accomplished by taking seriously the denomination's membership in the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and Church World Service in the United States of America and the commitment it represents to the larger world, regional and national ecumenical structures. For the Division of Overseas Ministries, this means encouraging staff to give the necessary time and energy to cultivate and nurture ecumenical and interfaith relationships; participating with funds and personnel time and energy in commissions and programs of the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ and Church World Service; fully sharing in whatever ways are possible in the regional councils of churches such as the All Africa Conference of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, the Latin American Council of Churches, the Caribbean Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies around the world that cross creedal and polity lines; engaging in interfaith dialogue through the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S. Interfaith Relations Commission and through both Christian-Jewish and Christian-Muslim dialogue, as well as participation in various coalitions. Responsible consultation with counterparts of other denominations, both North American and overseas, and participation in ecumenical decision-making whenever possible, are expected of all executive staff.

Participation in the Common Global Ministries Board (Global Ministries)

After decades of ecumenical dialogue, resolutions and joint work experiments, in 1996 Global Ministries became the formal partnership in global mission in which the Division of Overseas Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Wider Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ share common staff, common budget, common programs and common governance in our presence and witness throughout the global community. Global Ministries has a 46-member Board of Directors, including 20 appointed by each denomination and 6 international partners representing the different areas of the world in which we are engaged in ministry. The Common Global Ministries Board (CGMB) of Directors is led by a chair and vice-chair, both of whom are elected from the membership of CGMB; and its daily operation and programs are overseen by Co-Executives: the President of the Division Of Overseas Ministries (based in

Indianapolis, Indiana, at the Disciples Center) and the Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries (based in Cleveland, Ohio, at the UCC Church House).

Global Ministries' fundamental mission commitment is "to a shared life in Christ and to an ecumenical global sharing of resources and prophetic vision of a just, sustainable and peaceful world order, joining with God's concern for the poor and oppressed."²⁵ This mission is carried out through reciprocal relationships with some 270 partner churches and organizations in over 70 countries.

The five guiding principles of Global Ministries are:

- A. We commit ourselves to share life, resources and needs, in Christ, within covenantal bonds with other partner churches and ecumenical bodies throughout the world.
- B. We affirm our commitment to share persons in mission as part of the ecumenical church and in response to particular historical and geographical contexts.
- C. We commit ourselves to discovering and sharing exciting new ways to sing the song of faith... hearing, telling and participating in the story of God's love in Jesus Christ.
- D. Relying upon God's grace, we commit ourselves to share in God's healing of God's continuing creation.
- E. Recognizing the freedom of God's spirit to act in diverse ways, we commit ourselves to engage in dialogue, witness and common cause with people of other faiths and movements with whom we share a vision of peace, justice and the integrity of creation.²⁶

Critical Presence is the mission priority of Global Ministries. Relying on the leading of God's spirit and responding in faith to the challenges of a rapidly changing world, Global Ministries' strategic approach emphasizes Critical Presence in all phases of its mission. We understand Critical Presence to be timely and appropriately meeting God's people and creation at the point of deepest need, spiritually, physically, emotionally and/or economically.

Global Ministries walks with church partners and ecumenical organizations in critical situations through a variety of ministries of accompaniment, being present in various forms and modes, including: pastoral ministries related to fear and hopelessness where people are desperate for meaning; dangerous or life-threatening situations related to social, economic or political realities; partners living in countries where the Christian faith is a minority faith; supporting, encouraging and accompanying inter-faith relations;

conflict transformation and resolution; capacity-building and health care; facilitating the engagement of local congregations and other church settings in global mission and ministry; and/or exploring and implementing economic alternatives which empower the powerless within the human community, giving priority to the poorest communities and those in turmoil.²⁷

Global Ministries appoints mission personnel to serve in situations where Critical Presence is needed, with a primary focus given to ministries of capacity-building (leadership and community social infrastructure development leading to self-sufficiency) and health care.

Persons in mission appointed by Global Ministries include the following categories: fully supported missionaries (3-4 years with possibility of renewal); long-term volunteers (a year or longer); short-term volunteers (less than a year); Global Mission Interns (young adults serving 1-3 years, supported in partnership with Week of Compassion); missionaries to the United States and Canada (sent by our global partners); Missionaries-in-Residence (summer camp youth leaders sent by our global partners); and Overseas Associates (persons serving overseas in a recognized ministry, but affiliated with other organizations). Although not appointed by Global Ministries, participants in People-to-People group mission pilgrimages also are recognized as persons in mission.

Programs Initiated by Partners

The Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries rejoices in the growing strength and self-reliance of former mission churches around the world, the development of national leadership, the growing determination to “do theology” at the grass roots level.

The time for western domination of the church’s life and witness around the world is past. Partnership and mutuality, servanthood and sharing are the words descriptive of world mission today. Part of DOM/Global Ministries work is enabling the sharing of resources and personnel from partner churches for the benefit of the mission of the church in the United States and Canada.

The Division of Overseas Ministries recognizes that rates of development vary from place to place around the world, that generalities can scarcely be drawn about the nations and churches of one continent, let alone all six. Situations and problems must be dealt with separately, and lessons learned in one place cannot always be transferred and applied to another. The priorities of the people and places need to be understood contextually and respectfully considered.

Programs Involving Mission Personnel

Most program initiatives come from partner churches, though the Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries also initiates programs from time to time, with collegial consultation in all cases. Respect for persons and their rights to dignity means programs (including theological education) sponsored or funded by DOM should be related to the goals of self-development and self-reliance so that dependency attitudes and relationships may be brought to an end.

Often DOM/Global Ministries staff and board are faced with decisions about new and difficult programs of witness and service. Sometimes they are costly in terms of both personnel and funds. A willingness to become involved in new mission witness, accepting the risks of failure, is essential if there is to be a creative response to the leading of God's Spirit. In program evaluation, Global Ministries is fully aware of the difficulties of establishing clear criteria in matters of the Spirit, in the growth and development of communities and relationships.

The stance of Global Ministries is a dialogical style in terms of approach to those of other faiths and ideologies in every area of the world. Responsible dialogue includes a positive Christian witness.

Programs Involving Advocacy

The political and economic issues of international life that relate to justice, liberation and peace inevitably affect the church in its mission. For the most part, the churches in Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Middle East, are churches among the poor. Mission in these areas is clearly and primarily mission of and with the poor. The economic imbalance is seen by churches in those areas of the world to be the result of an exploitative and oppressive system which churches in the global north should work to change for the sake of the majority of the world's peoples. The global north is asked to dissent from consumerist life styles, express solidarity with the poor in their struggle for liberation and justice, share resources, and help create the political will for a just and sustainable order.²⁸

The Division of Overseas Ministries addresses concern for many issues in the life of the United States and Canada because attitudes and actions related to those issues affect the whole world. There can be no respect for the church, no willingness to hear its proclamation in other places, if it is not witnessing to its faith in its own situation. Without sharing in advocacy programs here, the church cannot engage in mutual ministries and mission with partner churches overseas with integrity.

The Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries encourages all expressions of the church to speak to pertinent issues of global affairs as often as possible in response to a direct request by global partner churches. It joins with appropriate ministries of the church to prepare recommendations and reports on such issues as peace, justice, human rights, food production and distribution, development issues and international business and trade policies in both general and specific terms. Study and preparation of such recommendations is usually related to, and informed by, world or national ecumenical deliberations and statements. Assembly action is proposed only after approval by the Board of Directors.

DOM seeks ways of enabling the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to be with the poor and oppressed, believing that responding with a commitment to justice is not an option but a constitutive dimension of Christian faith.

Education and Interpretation in the United States and Canada

Experience indicates that the Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries has a serious educational responsibility in the congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. The church expects DOM to help keep all the expressions of the denomination alive to global responsibilities and opportunities. For the Division of Overseas Ministries and Common Global Ministries, Critical Presence through education within the context of the United States and Canada means to facilitate the engagement of congregations, regions, constituency groups and other church settings in global mission and ministry, thus affirming our identity as a true Global Mission Church: a church that understands itself to be inter-related with all of God's creation, across all physical and human-made barriers, and that is committed to timely and appropriately meet God's people and creation at the point of deepest need. As approved in the 2009 General Assembly Resolution: "Be A Global Mission Church," the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) calls for a commitment to hear the cries of people around the world; to find the energy and enthusiasm to reach out and respond with grace; to proclaim the joys as well as denounce the suffering of God's people; to seek wisdom and guidance in building global connections in the life of all settings of the church; to be immersed in the church's work for the healing of the nations.

Through Ministries and Mission Interpreters Training events and other educational opportunities, the Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries helps equip all expressions of the church to enter into a transformative journey by allowing God to extend their mission and world view to the ends of the earth. The goal is to transform every single congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) into a true Global Mission Church: a church that prays regularly for partners, missionaries and the world; a church that educates its members about global issues from preschool age to adult; a church that seeks justice for the “least of these” in the international community; a church that receives the gifts of the global church; a church that gives to the work of global mission; a church that sends its members into the world to share the Good News; a church that grows in sharing the story of God’s mission with others.

Education for global awareness is conducted in cooperation with regions, with ideas and leadership provided by cooperative efforts crossing ministry lines. The presence of former mission personnel in nearly every region, together with regional ministers and other staff with significant overseas experience results in important initiatives for mission education being taken at the regional level. Continuing evaluation of its educational activities seeks to help the Division of Overseas Ministries find its unique role in serving with other ministries of the church working to increase awareness and understanding of global issues and responsibilities.

DOM/Global Ministries provides for congregational visitation by executives and program staff, missionaries on home assignment and former mission personnel and members of the Board of Directors as such visits are requested and personnel are available. It encourages staff and mission personnel to share experiences in written form and is experimenting with new ways of making such materials more widely available. From time to time, staff executives are invited to share in lectureships in seminaries. The Division of Overseas Ministries gives such opportunities high priority.

When available, special funds are allocated for a variety of projects and experiences to enable leaders of the church to have first-hand contact with churches in other parts of the world, including participation in People-to-People Pilgrimages, financial assistance for short-term study in another country, and arranging for visits of representatives from overseas partner churches to regional and general assemblies.

Like many of our sister ministries, the Division of Overseas Ministries is continuing to develop new and creative ways of engaging local congregations, and regions, in the work of accompaniment. As the world continues to rapidly change, so too must the connections between DOM, congregations and regions continue to evolve. Congregations, regions, missionaries, Ministries and Mission Interpreters (MMIs) and other constituents, are each vital voices in how we tell the stories of the work each of us is doing to meet people at their point of deepest need.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the most significant statements in the 1955 Strategy document was its “Last Word:” “There is nothing sacred about this strategy of world mission. It must *grow and change with the times*”

As we have reflected on our guiding principles and policies we have seen that the Division of Overseas Ministries has grown and changed with the times. We have become part of the Common Global Ministries and have organized our mission and structure around those things we have determined to be a current priority. We have used the understanding of accompaniment to guide our work. Our world continues to change and we must continue to challenge ourselves to understand Christ’s ministry here on earth. The guiding principles and policies are a starting point; however, by themselves they are not enough. There is great work to be done, and great opportunity to do it.

We seek to remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to be faithful stewards of the responsibilities with which the church has charged us.

*Board of Directors
Division of Overseas Ministries*

ENDNOTES

- 1 While this paper reflects the general principles and policies of the Division of Overseas Ministries for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) we recognize that programming, education, interpretation, and advocacy are all joint efforts of Common Global Ministries, and without such partnership these ministry opportunities would not be possible.
- 2 Common Global Ministries Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ. Standing Rules (November 2004), 3.
- 3 **Luke 10:27.**
- 4 “About Edinburgh 2010.” Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today. World Council of Churches. 21 July 2010.
<<http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/about-edinburgh-2010.html>>.
- 5 The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). (Indianapolis, IN: 2005). Paragraph 1.
- 6 The Design. Paragraph 1.
- 7 The Design. Paragraph 4.
- 8 The United Christian Missionary Society is the precursor to the Division of Overseas Ministries and the Division of Homeland Ministries.
- 9 Phillip Potter, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, in an address at the Melbourne Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, May 12-24, 1980.
- 10 In the 1981 General Principles and Policies document the term “Realm” was written as “Kingdom.” Current theology reflects the term “Realm” to be a more accurate rendering of the original meaning of the term and will be used throughout the entire document.
- 11 Acts 14:17; Romans 1:20.
- 12 The Design. Paragraph 1.
- 13 The Design. Paragraph 3.
- 14 “Confessing Christ Today,” Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches. 1975.
- 15 2 Corinthians 8:9.

- 16 Report of Section 1. "Good News to the Poor." Melbourne Conference on World Mission and Evangelism. May 12-24, 1980.
- 17 Report of Section IV. "Christ-Crucified and Risen-Challenges Human Power." Melbourne Conference on World Mission and Evangelism. May 12-24, 1980.
- 18 Albert van den Heuvel, *These Rebellious Powers*, pp. 40-41
- 19 This commitment was again affirmed in Resolution No. 0916 brought to the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by DOM, and adopted, in Indianapolis, Indiana, July 2009.
- 20 United Christian Missionary Society. "1959 Foreign Division Strategy."
- 21 Articles of Incorporation, Division of Overseas Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
- 22 Thomas F. Stransky. "Occasional Bulletin." April, 1979.
- 23 Over the last 60 years liberation theology has given rise to people from many different parts of the world giving theological voice to their own unique situation and context. Liberation theology is often identified specifically with Latin American writers and theologians, while there are many contextual theologies found throughout the world.
- 24 Multiple sources offer statistics which illustrate the shift in Christianity's geographic context including <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0018.html>, accessed 28 February 2012 and Todd M. Johnson and Sun Young Chung, "Tracking Global Christianity's Statistical Centre of Gravity, AD 33 - AD 2100." *International Review of Mission* 93 (2004): p. 166-181.
- 25 Standing Rules. Page 2.
- 26 Standing Rules. Page 2.
- 28 Modification of a statement by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., Conference on Mission, Montreat, North Carolina, 1978.

