

Let me begin by expressing my great joy at being here. Being in Georgia, being among the churches here in Georgia, being at this Assembly. I cannot express how wonderful it is to be a part of this all. Wendy and I have been made to feel welcome and wanted. Thank you so much.

Becoming a New Creation means we need to first discover where we are. When I was a teacher I was often told that it didn't matter what the curriculum said we were to do, we had to begin where the kids were. It is so true of the church as well. To move ahead into God's vision, we need to be aware of where we are.

One goal for the first year I am here is to "listen, learn and lead". The listening part comes first. To do that, my priority has been to get into the congregations and establish relationships.

Let me share some of what I have heard and experienced as a way of establishing where we have been. I share these with a caveat that I haven't been everywhere yet nor have I heard it all.

1. I have learned that we have a good staff in this Region. Your staff is competent and committed to the ministries of this Region. That commitment and desire for us to be successful and faithful in our ministry has meant self sacrifice and extra effort. To each of them I extend my appreciation. I invite them each to stand and be recognized and I and invite you to share your appreciation and thanks to them as well.....
Michael, Betty, Pam, Brooke
2. I have found the Region to be a hospitable place. Congregations have welcomed me. They have done for me the kinds of things that make visitors feel welcome. Most congregations want to grow and some are willing to do what it takes to grow and attract others
3. I have discovered this is a diverse Region. We are already on the way to God's vision of a church that embraces all God's children. We have ethnic diversity and congregations reaching into various ethnic communities, Haitian, Chinese, Korean, Hispanic, African American and Anglo; We have geographic diversity; small town rural and city, cultural diversity; metro and "Old South". The Christian Church in Georgia will not be monolithic but a wonderful mosaic of the cultures and people who make up the body of Christ.
4. This Region has a lot of talent and desire but it is diffused and scattered. The events of the last 5 or 6 years have left us without the focused energies it takes for the Region to launch forward in God's new creation.
5. The congregations have learned over this time span to do things on their own. Congregations are without any real sense of connection to one another. In the same town Disciple congregations have no more

connection to one another than to Methodist and Baptist churches. In some places those local connections are stronger than the ones with other Disciples of the Region. Too many of us also feel disconnected from the larger body of the church.

I have also discovered we are a Region which has great needs that need to be met as we move into being the new Creation God has in mind.

- Currently we are working with 14 different search committees in this Region. There is a desperate need for leaders. Fortunately, we have leaders in the pipeline. Currently there are 27 Disciples men and women from Georgia in seminary. They need to feel the support and encouragement of the Disciples especially where they attend seminaries whose historic ties are not Disciples of Christ.
- We live in a Region where congregations need renewal. Many of us in urban or rural areas are holding on, wondering if we can survive. Those congregations need a sense that God is present and active in them. They need a new dose of God's Holy Spirit, they need conversion and renewal, and they need to be transformed and renewed. They look to us, the body of Christ to help them make that move.
- We live in a Region which has financial needs. None of these needs are to be seen as reflecting upon Zena McAdams and the interim work she did. She came in and helped us move through the great relational difficulties, dealt with the anger and the mistrust and restored to us a sense of church. Now as we move ahead we need to address how we finance the Region and its ministries. Currently on my desk is a list of people who can help the Region move ahead. In the near future we will have a consultation to develop financial plans.

Now is the time for us to move ahead and realize that God is creating something new. We are being transformed if we will allow God to do that work within us.

How do we see ourselves being transformed?

- We will get our feet under us financially and develop not only a plan for financing the ministries of the Region but a plan for doing so from a broader base with additional streams of revenue.
- We will continue to provide the strong programming in women's ministries, youth and camp ministries. They are what we are doing well. In 12 Keys to an Effective Church Kennon Callahan suggests the way to expand and grow is to build on the shoulders of the strong areas. So we will be looking at the shoulders of these programs a spring boards for new ministries.
- We are going to be putting programming back into the hands of the members of the Region. More things will be directly involving people from congregations and less depending upon the efforts of your Regional Staff. Our structure and work will be determined by what we understand God to be calling us to do and to be.
- We will continue to work with clergy and the development of clergy. A skilled, dedicated and passionate clergy will move the church ahead. As we recruit

people for ministry we will stress that. As we develop continuing education events they will be to uplift and strengthen our clergy so that they can be the best possible. We are also emphasizing the training and theological education for lay people and especially for those who see the licensed ministry as their route to ministry.

- We will set up a pilot program so congregations can work toward being renewed and transformed. The congregation is where ministry touches lives most dramatically, and we need to help congregations be outposts of living vital and relevant Christian faith that enables God to transform lives.
- We are going to resume our intentional work towards starting new congregations. We may use different means and ways to do that but we will again be intentional about the emphases on beginning new congregations to touch the new communities. We have diversity and will continue to reach to ethnic communities but also reach intentionally to age groupings who have not found the Disciples of Christ to be relevant to them and their particular needs.

Behold a new creation is coming for the Christian Church in Georgia.... It is going to be a wonderful thing. God has promised us new life. God is waiting to transform us and make us new. Let's look ahead and fix our eyes on what is going to be and what the Christian Church in Georgia can be.

AMEN