

No. 0112**PRESENTATION AND REPORT
FROM THE DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE ON THE
PARTICIPATION OF GAY AND LESBIAN PERSONS
IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

RECEIVED by the General Assembly

Background Information

This committee was appointed in 1998 in response to an action by the Administrative Committee. It has had meetings in Louisville, Chicago, New York, and twice in Indianapolis. The membership of the committee represents a variety of perspectives on the question. The committee currently consists of fourteen people plus a part-time staff person from the office of General Minister and President. There are seven men and seven women. Of these, there are two African-Americans, two Hispanics, and one Asian American. There are two lesbians and one gay man. Three members have identified themselves as conservative on the issue, seeing homosexuality as a sin in violation of scripture. Several members have indicated that they have much to learn on the matter. Some believe that the church should be more open.

The committee has been charged with two tasks: (1) to identify the issues for the church and (2) to develop a discernment process for congregations and others groups to use in exploring the question.

The committee has worked together very successfully. There is sincere respect for each other even in the face of serious differences of opinion, there is a willingness to listen each person's story, and members have developed genuine appreciation for one another.

The committee attempted to meet with representatives of our African-American and Hispanic churches in the Northeast Region, but was unsuccessful in its attempt. We were also unsuccessful in our attempts to meet with groups at the National Convocation in Charlotte and the Black Ministers' Retreat in Washington, D.C. The Committee continues to try to find opportunities for dialogue with representatives from these groups.

We did have a very good meeting with two members of our committee and a group of about forty people at the Hispanic Assembly in Indianapolis in the summer of 2000. There were many perspectives expressed in that group, but there was an openness to discussing the matter, even though the Assembly had taken a strong stand against homosexuality.

Two members of our committee also met with the executive board of Disciple Renewal/Disciple Heritage Fellowship in the summer of 2000. That group was very clear in its opposition to

homosexuality and specifically to the ordination of gay and lesbian Christians.

Report

Early in its work the committee developed a pattern for its work that consisted of worship, Bible study, listening to each other's stories, and sharing the Lord's Supper.

After much discussion and study, the committee has concluded that the basic question to be addressed is, "What is the Gospel message to our church as we relate to gay and lesbian Christians?"

The committee has developed a seven stage process that will be presented at the 2001 General Assembly in Kansas City. The process will include an explanation of what discernment is, rules that must be followed in the discernment process, and directions for worship, Bible study, sharing personal stories and experiences, and celebrating the Lord's Supper. The process assumes no specific outcome, but provides a means for listening to the Holy Spirit at work in the Christian community.

A workshop will be presented at the Assembly on the use of the process with emphasis on how to deal with difficult passages of scripture.

The committee's hope is that its work will contribute to the transformation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by helping people learn how to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in the church.

The committee believes that an essential element in the fulfillment of the Vision of the church is learning to listen to each other and to the Holy Spirit as a way of developing true community, a deep spirituality, and a passion for justice. The process which the committee has developed requires listening to gay and lesbian persons talk about their lives and their Christian faith as well as listening to those who believe homosexuality is a sin. There can be no true community unless people are willing to be open to each other.

The committee is convinced that the issue cannot be resolved by debates and votes. It believes that God is calling the church to a different way of facing issues, and that is listening to each other as a way of discerning what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst.

In addition to the presentation at the General Assembly, printed and video resources will be made available by the fall of 2001 to guide congregations and other groups in using the process. It is the committee's hope and prayer that this process will be widely used as our church addresses this question.