

**Report to the Tres Rios Area
From Area Minister/President
Rev. Charlotte J Hoppe
May 1, 2010**

In 2006, with the calling of a full time Area Minister, the job description for that position, delineated the priorities for Area Ministry:

- *Revitalization of local congregations*
 - *Establish significant pastoral relationships*
 - *Assist churches in reaching their potential in their community*
- *Rapport with congregations*
 - *Search and call*
 - *Conflict management*
 - *Facilitating communication between larger church and local congregations, which includes serving on the staff of the Southwest Regional Church*
 - *Preaching and participation in installations/ordinations and church milestones*
- *Developing leadership and mission*
 - *Serve as a facilitator for developing or rekindling congregation vision and purpose*
 - *Church leader training*
- *Pastoring the pastors*
 - *Counseling and advising*
 - *Development of cluster collegiality groups*
- *Office*
 - *Normal office work (correspondence, communications, event publicity, supervision of office staff)*
 - *Fiscal responsibility (signing checks, supervising the preparations of the financial statements, receiving and expending funds)*

In the past four years the area has tried several models of bringing information for and supporting congregational revitalization. Our first attempts were traditional learning events. Some were well attended, some were not. Geography is always a factor in attendance, but our understanding of what is foundational to congregational transformation has grown. The answer does not lie in the next speaker, with the latest idea or technique. **We have come to understand that transformation begins with the spirit and with the leaders.** So our efforts are now focusing first on the spiritual nurture and support of our clergy – while attempting to build supportive collegial relationships. Which, surprise or not! leads us to two more priorities – that of leader development and pastoring the pastors. Pretty smart of us from the beginning, huh?

The last priority refers to the administration that it takes to support a ministry, programs and all that it takes to work our priorities. We've seen changes in our administrative work, too. From heavy reliance on an administrative assistant with interim and part time Area ministers, the Area claimed the importance of professional and spiritual leadership for our ministry together. Over the past year, we have downsized administration quite a bit, closing the offices, doing without an administrative assistant, learning to take care of administrative tasks in new ways. We have also stabilized our financial situation, with facing the reality of donations and budgets head on, no heads in the sand for us, for 2010 we have a balanced budget that we can actually sustain!

The current focus of Area ministry, is aimed at our clergy. We are developing the practice for our clergy to gather at least quarterly for relationship building and sharing in the life and work of ministry, but we are doing all of that in the context of spiritual nurture and support – in time away, in silences, in reflection, in worship, in prayer, in sharing. The revitalization of our churches lies in the hands of their

pastors, who with strengthened spirits and souls, can lead their leaders and their congregations in their own spiritual renewals... I have spent some time coaching one congregation directly in transformation work – working with a group of congregational leaders who are leading their own congregation. One congregation - there are over twenty more that could, if they wished, benefit from the same kind of coaching.

I spend many hours with most of our congregations, helping them search for new pastoral leadership or mediating some tough issues that resulted in conflict. As new pastors are called, I am present to welcome them to our area and begin to build a pastoral relationships with them. However, we still find much of our relationships in the Area only two way – between the Area Minister and the individual pastor and congregation. Some of our pastors and congregations are still isolated, not participating in any significant way with the other Disciples congregations, even in their same city. Unity of relationship and in mission together is still beyond our reach.

Finding our way in mission together is coming along very slowly. At the January TRA board meeting we witnessed new efforts in new church establishment and sharing in the support of our licensed minister education and nurture program. With two new active committee chairpersons for those committees, the area is beginning again to share together in the work of our ministry. We have begun direct financial support of Viente de Gracio, a new church nesting in FCC, Santa Fe, pastured by licensed minister, Rev. Moises Colmenero. New Church Committee Chair, Jamye Ward, has just returned from a meeting in Dallas with other area New Church Committee Chairs. We hope to begin to move forward in a more assertive manner in establishing new Disciple congregations in our area. TRA Committee on Ministry Chair, Tracey Miller, TRA Moderator-Elect, Steve Digby, and I met with our counterparts in the Hi Plains Area, the panhandle of Texas in mid April. We have some exciting new plans developing for 2011 for sharing clergy nurture with the HPA. We are developing a comprehensive plan for several weekend events, for both ordained and licensed clergy. There is still the dream before us of some mission uniting us –on our border with our neighbors in Mexico, with Native Americans in our Area, or other groups in need. First Christian Church, El Paso, is making plans to grow their neighborhood ministry into a mission center, attracting mission groups from around the country to serve on the border. How will God lead all of us together to serve our fellow New Mexicans and West Texans? – we don't know yet.

With the distance we've come and possibilities for ministry still stretching before us down a long road – we have just about reached our limit in our own ability to faithfully follow God in the direction he would want us to go. It is time to open our hearts and minds to new possibilities in structure, function, resources, staffing and who knows what else – to be able to enlarge our ministry on behalf of Christ's church in this area.

In this desire to grow in ministry, we have a neighbor who shares the same hopes - our neighbor to the east, the Hi Plains Area, led by their Area Minister, Chuck Fisher. Some initial conversations, one example of which you read above, and dreaming have begun – the two Area Ministers share a strong collegial relationship and both believe God is calling us in new directions, together. However, that's not the way God calls the church forward – through just a couple of individuals. God calls a whole church to respond.

I believe it is time for us to add as a priority to our Area ministry and mission – that of exploring new ways to move into the future – for the future of vital congregational life and ministry – and the mission that God calls the churches of the Tres Rios Area and the Hi Plains Area to in this part of our world. To move forward with our current priorities, we need to find new ways and new resources for our mission and ministry. It is time for other Area leaders to join in these conversations, in these dreams – to represent the Area in this time of discerning. We have had a good start over the past few years in our region-wide discernment process. We have a vision and a beginning of a plan that reflects all of our Areas' best wisdom and prayerful reflection. We now have an opportunity to begin to explore how to put flesh on the bones of a new body – a new body of Christ for ministry and mission in New Mexico, West Texas, with our partners in the Panhandle of Texas.

The Area has affirmed by official board action, its intention to move forward with conversation with the Hi Plains Area and any other Area that might wish to join us, and to begin to make some specific plans so that we might engage more of our Area leaders in this discerning conversation.

I continue to have high hopes, enthusiasm and energy for the ministry we are called to – together here in the Tres Rios Area. I am looking toward a future of vital connections between all the churches here in the western part of our Region – in service of Jesus Christ through the most holy calling we have – to be the body of Christ to our world. If you have any dreams or visions for our ministry together – I would love to share a cup of coffee face to face, a phone conversation or even an e-mail exchange or facebook chat!

God is at work among us, let us keep our eyes and ears open to discover how and where - and our arms and tongues ready to share in that Good News!