January 2017

Dearest Friends in Christ –

> *"Hope is a star that shines in the night, leading us on till the morning is bright."* [1]

From the Advent promise of *Emmanuel: God with us*; to the Epiphany revelation: *God-with-us-now*, we hope.

And yet, I confess, as 2017 begins, my heart is bruised by the pain and division the United States and Canada have experienced which have filtered into our communities and congregations. Antagonistic elections in the United States have upended civil discourse. Repeated public incidents of both individual and institutional racism have fractured relationships in communities. And beyond our borders, civil wars in places like South Sudan and Syria, as well as natural disasters in long-suffering Haiti, only increase the need for healing of all kinds.

Still, along with "all of creation" in Romans 8:18, we wait expectantly "for the children of God to be revealed." In fact, we hope to be among them. We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. We know God to be a God of abundance who provides enough for all and makes room enough for all.

This is the time for Disciples to shine! We have long found ways to live together in unity for the sake of God's mission. Our ability to respect (and engage!) a diversity of faithful opinions is needed now more than ever. Our emphasis on healing the rifts of racism with pro-reconciling work is foundational to moving forward in our part of the world and globally. Our shared sense of service that came through loud and clear in our Mission Gatherings of 2016 gives us some of the connections we need to start living into the wholeness God so ardently wishes for us.

Our deep hope in God's healing presence leads us to action.

Mission First!

Disciples are on the move toward new ways of being God's hands and feet in the world through our work on Mission First! The Mission Council met late last year to identify common themes arising from the mission gatherings. We found many Disciples are hearing a call to mission with and for children, youth and young adults through efforts at inclusion, speaking up for the vulnerable and addressing racism. The Council affirmed welcome and accompaniment as hallmarks of our participation in God's mission. At some of the gatherings - in the MidAmerica Region, for example - people found others who share their missional passions and formed connections to work together immediately. The Administrative Committee is preparing a proposal on how we might implement what we learned from the governance portion of the Mission First! pilot effort.

[1] Brian Wren. Chalice Hymnal. Chalice Press. #132.

Pro-Reconciliation

As called for in General Assembly resolution 1328, the Racist Language Audit Task Force presented their report in 2016. General ministries, regions and the General Board, have already started to address the issues surfaced. Governing documents are being translated, sometimes for the first time, into French, Spanish and Korean. The National Convocation, at the 2016 Biennial Session, committed to renewed support for Reconciliation Ministry and calls upon the rest of the church to do the same.

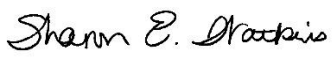
New starts

In 2017, we look forward to new beginnings with our next General Minister and President to be elected in July at the General Assembly, along with our new moderator team. We anticipate gathering once again at the Lord's Table to be united as ONE, celebrating Jesus' prayer on our behalf that the world may believe.

Called to Live in Hope

After nearly 12 years, serving as your general minister and president, I still believe we are a church whose time has come. We are a gifted people, called for such a time as this. Refining our missional focus across the life of the Church, renewing our commitment to racial justice, catching the Spirit in new ways to further our part in God's work of healing and wholeness – we enter 2017 ready ***to be and to share the good news of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving, and serving, from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth***.

With hope in Christ undimmed, I greet you in this New Year. May we all resolve to live right now in "the assurance of things hoped for!" (Hebrews 11:1)



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