

## **REFLECTIONS OF HISTORY**

General Assembly Church of Christ Disciples of Christ International, Inc.

### **AMERICAN RESTORATIONIST ROOTS**

The Church of Christ Disciples of Christ began as an organized fellowship in America in the mid-1800s as a branch of the restoration movement. Restorationists sought to restore the church to New Testament teachings and practices by following the Bible as its rule and guide, dropping denominational contrivances such as creeds and non-Biblical rituals.

In North Carolina the preaching of James O'Kelly, Barton Stone, Joseph Thomas (the White Pilgrim), and Thomas Campbell delivered the message of Discipleship to the Carolina coast and across to central North Carolina. Churches that came out of their evangelism were the forerunners of Disciple congregations among African American believers.

### **THE AIM AND PLEA OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, DISCIPLES OF CHRIST**

In 1809, Thomas Campbell, a Presbyterian minister, became displeased with the doctrines of both the Presbyterian and Baptist Church and decided that he would oversee a new congregation at Bush Run, Pennsylvania. He organized this Church of Christ on one principle, "Where the Scripture speaks, we speak; where the Scripture is silent, we are silent." From that statement came our Aim and Plea.

Congregation:	We, the Disciples of Christ, wishing to be in complete accord and agreement with the doctrine of Christ, forth the following principles, which have been the focus of the Church for more than a century.
Minister:	General aim of the Church.
Congregation:	Restoration of the New Testament teachings and practices.
Minister:	Plea of the Church.
Congregation:	No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible; no name but the Divine.
Minister:	Where the Bible speaks, we speak.
Congregation:	Where the Bible is silent, we are silent.
Minister:	In essentials unity.
Congregation:	In nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.

*The Aim and Plea of the Church of Christ* is not a statement that seeks to define God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit, for the Bible has adequately done this. It is a statement that clarifies and reminds all Disciples who we are. This petition is scripturally sound and should be studied and learned by all Disciples.

***We, the Disciples of Christ*** - This statement identifies us by name. "So shall ye be my Disciples" (John 15:8). Christ calls us His Disciples.

***Wishing to be in complete accord*** - This refers to the unity of the Church on the matters of government as well as faith. The early Church was not divided. It was united in Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6). Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, condemned divisions in "the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

***And agreement with the doctrine of Christ*** - The Church agrees on the principles and precepts that Christ left for all of His followers (Matthew 28:20, John 7:16).

***Set forth the following principles which have been the focus of the Church for more than a century*** - We understand that the Church has a history of followers in between Apostolic times and the present day who lived and died to hold the light of Jesus (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

***Restoration of the New Testament teachings and practices*** - As the New Testament Church moved through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and into modern times, heresies were introduced by evil gain seekers (1 Corinthians 11:19, 2 Peter 2:1). The Church is first called to teach (Matthew 28:19) so that it may give insight to the blind and liberty to the captives (Luke 4:18-21, Mark 16:20).

***No creed but Christ*** - Creed comes from the Greek root credo (to believe). We do not accept human-inspired statements of belief regarding Christ. Christ is our only creed (Matthew 17:5, John 11:27, Acts 16:31).

***No book but the Bible*** - The Bible is the only rule of faith and direction that God left for the Church to follow (Isaiah 8:16, Matthew 4:4, Hebrews 4:12).

***No name but the divine*** - There is no other name by which one can be saved other than Jesus. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). Jesus Christ is divine, so His name is a divine name. We are to hear Him and His commandments (Matthew 17:5, Acts 4:12).

***Where the Bible speaks, we speak*** - We are to rely on what the Bible says instead of relying on what people's opinions are. The Church cannot shun any subject in the scripture because others may think it is controversial (Proverbs 30:56, Matthew 5:37, 2 Timothy 3:16).

***Where the Bible is silent, we are silent*** - For subjects that are not presented in the scriptures, we use the scripture as a reference, but our applications never blur the messages of any text (Deuteronomy 4:2, Revelation 22:8).

***In essentials, unity*** - In spiritual matters spoken of in the scriptures, the Church strives to be on one accord without wavering. With one voice we speak the gospel and the doctrine of Christ (Psalm 133:1-3, John 17:11, Acts 2:42-47, Ephesians 4:4-6, 1 Peter 3:8).

***In nonessentials, liberty*** - For those things that are not Biblical priorities, we exercise wisdom or our own judgment, with diligent care and concern to work out our own salvation (Galatians 5:113; 1 Peter 2:16).

***In all things, charity*** - All works must be done in love (John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 4:8).

### **AFRICAN AMERICAN EVANGELISM IN NORTH CAROLINA AND BEYOND**

Before Emancipation, a number of free African American Disciples convened to form churches. Uniontown Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ is the oldest documented church organized and run by African Americans.

After the Civil War, three modes of evangelism worked to bring together the Church of Christ Disciples of Christ:

- (1) Free African Americans east of the Tar River sought out free and freed Africans to begin churches;
- (2) Freed slaves worked with Christian Church Disciples west of the Tar River to start congregations;
- (3) African Americans on both sides of the Tar River evangelized the unchurched and African Americans from denominational churches to become members of the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ.

The following table outlines key events in the 19th- and 20th-century chronicles of the Church:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1790 | James O'Kelly of the newly formed Republican Methodists goes to N.C. to preach Discipleship.                     |
| 1801 | Cane Ridge revival begins Barton Stone's ministry for Christian union. Part of America's Second Great Awakening. |
| 1813 | Joseph Thomas begins his evangelistic ministry as the White Pilgrim, visiting central NC.                        |
| 1833 | Thomas Campbell visits Edenton, Pantego, and Greenville, NC for five months.                                     |

### **INDEPENDENT AFRICAN AMERICANS AND CHURCH RE-IDENTIFICATION**

1849-1850 Eastern North Carolina Reports of free African Americans in Uniontown (Free Union) slaves registered as Disciples. In Pantego Church of Christ and Pungo Chapel.

1854 Uniontown Church of Christ Disciples organized.

1870 African American Congregationalists, O'Kellyites, and members of the Christian Connection rename their four-year old communion the North Carolina Colored Christian Conference.

- 1873 Disciple elders from the Martin County Convention, including Elders Robert Esom Green, Alfred Pettiford, and Joseph Whitley, are listed in the Christian Annual report on the North Carolina Colored Christian Conference.
- 1874 African American Disciple elders leave the North Carolina Colored Christian Conference due to differences in doctrine and church order.
- 1868 West of the Tar River Annual Conference of Disciples of Christ in N.C. votes to separate from black Disciples. Benevolent elders such as Dr. John J. Harper and Pastor, J. R. Winfield assist the new churches.
- 1869 African American Disciples submit funds to white Disciples to have their minutes printed.
- 1872 Alexander C. Hart and Joseph Henry Foy (white Disciples) sent by the Hookerton District to preach to African American Baptists in the west and to Stony Creek in October.
- 1872 First recorded meeting of African American Disciples Assembly minutes west of the Tar River at Stony Creek, in Lenoir County, organized by Elder Alfred Lovick, Sr., Elder Demas Hargett, and Elder Allen Chestnut.
- 1883 The Church Unites in October with a letter sent by African American Disciples from the east coast of North Carolina to those in Bentonville (west of the Tar River) by Elder Robert Esom Green, urging a merger between the African American Disciples.
- 1886 Elder Robert E. Green of eastern N.C. goes west to attend the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the Goldsboro-Raleigh Disciples at Vine Swamp Church, Lenoir County; Green was named Asst. Moderator over the session. The 1886 Minutes read: That we shall incorporate ourselves to be known as the Eastern and Western North Carolina Disciples of Christ, and that we petition the [state] General Assembly of North Carolina to be incorporated as such.
- 1887 October, first official meeting of east and west Disciples of Christ (African American) of St. Mary's Church, Lake Comfort, Hyde County.
- 1892 Elder Alfred Offie Pettiford, pastor of Uniontown and Spring Green, dies March 6.
- 1894 Western Assembly assembles at Bentonville, Johnston County, November 17.
- 1895 Elder William A. James writes for the Christian Disciples newspaper, The Watch-White Tower.
- 1898 Disciples collect pledges to build an institute in Pantego.
- 1902 Disciples purchase a printing press at South Mills, N.C., and publish a monthly publication called Signs of the Times, edited by H. F. Woodhouse.

**ORGANIZATIONAL AND DOCTRINAL GROWTH AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN  
DISCIPLES OF CHRIST**

- 1904 The Eastern Virginia Assembly adds approximately ten churches to the Church of Christ Assembly in North Carolina led by Elder J. Tom Pettiford.

- 1909 Elder Edgar Stonewall Lapidoth Whitefield writes A Message to the Negro Disciples of Christ of Eastern North Carolina.
- 1910 Goldsboro Christian Institute opens Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup>, in Goldsboro, NC with forty pupils. Elder Edgar Whitefield was the principal.
- 1910 General Assembly reorganized into two districts: Quadrennial Assembly instituted the names Goldsboro-Raleigh and Washington-Norfolk Assemblies.
- 1913 Elder William A. James prints a defense of feet-washing as an ordinance of the church.
- 1914 First Quadrennial General Assembly convened. Elder William A. James named Chief Elder of the General Assembly for life.
- 1922 Elder Charles R. D. Whitefield writes a combination history and theology, Brief History of the Negro Disciples of Christ.
- 1923 Chief Elder William A. James passes.
- 1926 Teacher J. H. Battle writes a historical and theological treatise, The Colored Disciples of Eastern North Carolina.
- 1931 Elder Clinton Whitefield begins publication of the Christian Reformer, which becomes in 1932 The Disciples' Herald, with Elder Oscar S. Lucas of the NEDA as editor.

#### **NORTHERN AND INTERNATIONAL EXPANSON**

- 1925 Elder Charles Cordon and Elder Oscar S. Lucas organize St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia.
- 1929 St. Mary Church of Christ organized in Brooklyn.
- 1932 Northeastern District Assembly Church of Christ, Composed of Disciples incorporated.
- 1940 Title of Chief Elder replaced by Bishop.
- 1944 Elder Charles R. D. Whitfield passes, July 17.
- 1948 The Union Assembly established under the leadership of Bishop W. M Hopson.
- 1954 Disciples resolve to use Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ in their official name.
- 1959 Elder William Joseph Barber completes research and thesis for The Disciple Assemblies of Eastern North Carolina, the Church's first critical history, published in 1966.
- 1961 First General Assembly held in the North Eastern District Assembly convened at Shiloh Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ. Resolutions and Bylaws Committee submits reconstituted regulations approved by the church.
- 1970 First edition of General Manual: The Disciples' Guide to Christian Living published, dealing with doctrine, ethics, and polity.

- 1972 Ministerial ordination for women confirmed as a General Assembly standard.
- 1977 Beryl Smith Garrett publishes A Disciple of Christ Church Manual on history and polity.
- 1987 From Glory to Glory, a book of systematic theology by Bishop William C. Gillams, published posthumously, by his granddaughter Dr. Sheila H. Gillams.
- 1988 All Souls Winning Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ in Liberia adds Nineteen churches. Mission in Guyana, South America begins.
- 1993 United Fellowship Assembly rejoins General Assembly.
- 1999 Eleven churches from Ghana join the Goldsboro-Raleigh District.
- 2000 Mission in Panama begins.
- 2005 Two-Thousand Disciples convene for their first convention in Togo, West Africa.
- 2007 Washington-Norfolk District Assembly returned in fellowship with the General Assembly under the leadership of Bishop Robert Ross.
- 2009 On May 24, General Vice Bishop Alton A. Smith was elected to serve as the ninth General Bishop to lead the General Assembly Church of Christ Disciples, International at the General Assembly convening at the Goldsboro Raleigh District Assembly Headquarters in Goldsboro, North Carolina.
- 2009 May – Elder Malcolm S. Johnson was consecrated as Bishop.
- 2010 On May 21, a Testimonial Dinner Observance was held at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Virginia Beach, VA, in honor and in celebration of General Bishop MacDonald Moses, who served as the eighth General Bishop for twenty-six years of Ecclesiastical Service to the General Assembly Church of Christ
- 2010 The Southern Assembly Churches of Christ and the Southeastern District Assembly rejoined the General Assembly. Presiding Prelates were Bishop Robert E. Jones and Bishop Edward L. Pollock, Jr.
- 2010 An official newsletter of the General Assembly “The Spiritual Reflector” was published, editor Sister Verlene Leonard.
- 2011 On February 26, the following Bishops were consecrated: Bishop Cleveon Bryant (WNDA), Bishop Cleave Cutliff (UFDA), Bishop Mack Freshwater (WNDA), Bishop Marcus Louis (Union Assembly), Bishop Darryl Rouse (NEDA).
- 2011 Implementation of the 2021 Disciples, a Ministry, which was organized to teach, mentor and to prepare leaders of the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ for the next generation.
- 2012 May 17 - 19th - General Assembly Retreat held at Sheraton Dover Hotel in Dover, Delaware. Theme: “Redeeming the Time – Facing the New Frontier”

- 2012 A review committee of the Constitution & By-Laws of the General Assembly Church of Christ Disciples of Christ International, Inc. was formed. Dr. Cynthia Buck, chair.
- 2013 May 16 -18th - General Assembly held at Marriott City Center in Newport News, VA. Theme: “Declaring Christ the King – True Worship”
- 2013 General Bishop Alton Smith was elected to serve a second term as Presiding Prelate for the General Assembly, Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, International at the Marriott Hotel in Newport News, Virginia.
- 2013 The first edition of the General Assembly Directory was published and included Bishops, Elders, Evangelists, Ministers, Deacons, Mothers, Trustees and Laity, General First Lady Doris B. Smith, Publisher.
- 2013 A General Assembly delegation traveled to Ghana, West Africa for the Consecration Service for Bishop Ebenezer Sefah and to affiliate the newest District Assembly to join the General Church, the Refreshing Hour International Assembly. The delegation was composed of General Bishop Alton A. Smith, General Vice Bishop Malcolm S. Johnson, Bishop Chester L. Aycock (*Trip Coordinator*), Bishop Andrew J. Boomer, Bishop Leonard E. Brown, Bishop Cleveon Bryant, Bishop Marcus Louis, Bishop Edward Pollock, Bishop Robert D. Ross, Bishop Anthony Terrell, Elder (*First Lady*) Shirley Ross, Sister Juanita Simms, Dr. Dennis Royal, and Dr. and Mrs. David Parker.
- 2014 May 15 -17th - General Assembly Retreat held at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Theme: “The Disciples Mandate: A Greater Call”
- 2014 The Revised Constitution and By-Laws of the General Assembly, Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ were ratified.
- 2015 February - Consecration of the following bishops: Bishop Johnson Hazel (WNDA), Bishop Stanley Hicks (UFFA), Bishop James Pearson (Union), Bishop Curtis Wilder (Southern), Bishop Michael Mitchell (SEDA).
- 2015 The Revised Ministry Manual of the General Assembly, Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ was published for distribution.
- 2015 May 12 -16th -The 25th Biennial session of the General Assembly held at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Williamsburg, VA. Theme: “The Disciples’ More Excellent Way - Re-examing and Polishing the Badge” A Gala Banquet was celebrated. The Keynote speaker was Dr. James A. Forbes of New York, NY.
- 2016 May 12 -14th - The General Assembly Retreat held at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Virginia Beach, VA. Theme: “Disciples Continuing in the Word... Focus: The Purpose, the Challenge, the Plan, the Conclusion.”
- 2016 The second edition of the General Assembly Directory was published and included the Churches of the General Assembly.

- 2017 The 26<sup>th</sup> Biennial Session held at the Goldsboro Raleigh District Assembly Headquarters Building in Goldsboro, NC. – May 17-20. Theme – “Disciples...United with One Accord.” Focus – Unity and Service. (*John 17:23 and Acts 1:14*) General Assembly Election Year. General Treasurer, Elder John Pearson, retiring after twenty years of service. General Bishop Alton A. Smith was re-elected as General Bishop to serve for a third term.
- 2018 General Assembly 2018 – May 16 – 19<sup>th</sup>, presenting the GA Ushers and the 15<sup>th</sup> Biennial Retreat. Held at Four Point by Sheraton in Richmond, VA. Theme – “Disciples Standing Firm in the Presence of the Enemy.” Focus – His Promise. (*2 Peter 3:17, 18.*)
- 2019 “The Bishops’ Book of the General Assembly Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ International, Inc.” was published and presented at the 27<sup>th</sup> Biennial Session, held at the Holiday Inn and Conference Center in Virginia Beach, VA, May 15-18<sup>th</sup>. The Bishops’ Book featured their biographies, spiritual history and their very own selected sermon. Our theme for the May 2019 Assembly was “Disciples (Talmidin) Living in his Image and Likeness.” Focus – Your Ministerial Calling. (*Romans 12:1-2*)
- 2020 First time in our history. Cancellation of General Assembly 2020 – May 13-16. “An Act of God.” The Coronavirus, COVID-19, Federal, State and local governments prohibited the assembling of groups ten or more. A stay at home in effect for most states until April 30<sup>th</sup> and continuing. The uncertainty of this pandemic also cancelled our Youth Retreat for July 2020.