



NATIONAL CONVOCATION
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
26th Biennial Business Session

Virtual
Business Session

BUSINESS ITEM

Report of the Administrative Secretary

Presented by | Rev. Dr. Timothy M. James

**VIRTUAL BUSINESS SESSION
26TH BIENNIAL SESSION OF THE NATIONAL CONVOCATION
CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA**

August 15, 2020

ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY'S REPORT

Rev. Dr. Timothy M. James

To President Donald Gillett, to our General Minister and President, Terri Hord Owens, Officers and Members of the Board of Trustees and to all who have gathered here in this Virtual Meeting,

I thank God for you, and I can truly say, "It's so good to be together one more time." We are the National Convocation, the African American expression of faith in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We are the forum for the discussion of pertinent issues and concerns related to the Black community and the Black Church. This year has provided pertinent issues for us. The brutal murder of George Floyd which reminded us of so many more unarmed African American men and women killed by police gave more purpose to the BLACK LIVES MATTER movement. The COVID 19 virus has proven to be more deadly disproportionately, infecting African Americans, other persons of color and poverty-stricken persons lacking adequate health care. We are grateful for the response of our pastors, congregations, general ministries and church leaders in the face of this pandemic. We have stood strong and together in the face of these difficult days. Today we have come and handled the business of the National Convocation in order to move on into the future.

The last time I gave a report to the full Board of Trustees was December of last year. I concluded that report with these words: "I am confident that with your prayers and support, this coming year will be blessed, favored and unforgettable." The year surely began with blessing and favor, specifically, the support and collaboration for the 2020 EXPERIENCE "ITS REAL!" planned in Ft. Worth, Texas on

the campus of Texas Christian University. The blessing came with the collegiality, comradery, cooperation and trust from the National Pastoral Office of Hispanic Ministries, led by Lorie Tapia and the North American Pacific Asian Disciples, led by Chung Seong Kim and the National Convocation. To host and implement this combined national event, was not an easy decision for either of our boards. It was after prayer, much discussion and consideration, each of our boards came to the common decision to have the EXPERIENCE! We truly felt God's presence in our efforts and plans for a Spirit-filled event. As a united front we observed the favor of God through the financial support and sponsorship from our General Ministries, vendors had purchased all the booth space in the exhibit area. The favor continued with cooperation and organizing from the Local Arrangements Committee, the Region of the Christian Church in the Southwest, the Texas Christian Missionary Fellowship and the meeting planners and staff of Texas Christian University; the stage was set for 2020 EXPERIENCE to be inspiring and enlightening. And I also indicated that this year would be unforgettable. Well, with the arrival of the novel coronavirus COVID 19 pandemic everything has changed, and we will not be the same when we will have come through this period containing so much death, sickness and uncertainty.

The National Convocation has been in step with the church in response to the pandemic. Since the middle of March, our board and committees have held virtual meetings. We have witnessed our own creative and innovative steps in getting together and sharing communications on various social platforms. I want to thank our Ministry Associate, Brenda Rossy, because of her, we have done so much with Zoom, constant contact, webinars and other media platforms. We have participated with the General Ministries to refer our pastors and congregations to the resources offered by our General Ministries, to help our congregations facing challenges from the pandemic. It is marvelous how the General Ministries work together supporting congregations through the traumatic experience of this world-wide pandemic. It has been most encouraging to see the Regional Ministers take care of their pastors and congregations with advice, counsel and prayer. The leadership of the church, beginning with our General Minister and President, have been responsive with compassion, information and care for such a time as this. We may thank God and praise God for such leaders at a time like this.

The National Convocation fully identifies with the vision of the church; “To be a faithful, growing church, that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality, and a passion for justice. (Micah 6: 8).” (Mission Imperative of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)). In this time of doubt, fear and anxiety, we may follow the example of our General Minister and President, Terri Owens. She has prayer time with our ministers and church members weekly. Our GMP encourages the whole church to pray with expectancy, specificity and confidence. The National Convocation responded to the need for our Clergy to gather in prayer for one another and established Prayer Meeting on the first Tuesday of the month. I am deeply encouraged to know that most of our churches, large and small, have continued to receive financial support from the membership while social distancing. This is a great sign of faithfulness.

The protests for BLACK LIVES MATTER, against police brutality and for human rights has given many a Disciples of Christ the opportunity to stand up and speak out for these causes. It is very encouraging to see the diversity of people actively protesting the death of George Floyd and so many other persons at the hands of aggressive police. This symbol of unity presented here is a blessing to behold. Our support for the Poor Peoples Campaign informed us that we face another pandemic, poverty and racism along with corona virus, has literally snatched the covers off of an ugly truth that has persisted in this country for four hundred years. The Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciling initiative has become even more meaningful for us as church. Therefore, my African American brothers and sisters, let us be open and available to participate in the conversations taking place online, on Zoom and conference calls. Your presence is needed, and this is a great opportunity for growth and learning. We remember with sadness and pride, the life and legacy of John Lewis and Elijah Cummings. These Congressmen were important to the Civil Rights Movement and followed the philosophy of non-violence. As these icons for justice and peace have moved on up to glory, room has been made for Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, straight folk and LGBTQ+ persons step up, stand up, speak out and as John Lewis would say, “Get in some good trouble!”

I want to thank our President, Don Gillett, our Parliamentarian Jackie Compton Bunch and our reader Britanni Bullock for their help and assistance in the preparation and presentation of the Amendments to the Articles of Operation. I thank the Board of Trustees of the National Convocation for your time and commitment to work for this meeting today and your work through the year. My appreciation goes out all of you gathered for this virtual meeting. Thank you for your attention and participation in this meeting today. I want to thank our Merger Staff, at first by congratulating Sheila Spencer, Interim President of Disciples Home Mission and (soon-to-be former) Director of Christian Education and Faith-Formation; R. Wayne Calhoun, Director of Evangelism and Congregational Vitality; and Chesla Nickelson, Program Director Disciples Women. Your help and support for the National Convocation and our broader church activities has been tremendous. And as I close, I offer my prayerful and full support to my successor, the next Administrative Secretary. For such a time as this God has called you to serve. May you lead and serve in such a way that glorifies God.