

Statement to the General Board of the Christian Church concerning the Ohio Region Tom Stephenson, Moderator

The story of the Christian Church in Ohio is a cautionary tale for the whole church. I pray you listen carefully, think critically, and act courageously, as this body and the whole church move forward on our General Minister's vision and the structural/systemic issues we must face together as a church.

How many of you are either from Ohio and/or have served in Ohio? For generations, the Ohio region was strong, vital, growing, and influential in the life of the whole church. Like financial institutions in 2008, it was thought by those within and beyond the region that Ohio was too big to fail. That reality, or perception of reality is no more. The reality: the Ohio is broken fiscally and relationally. Some think irreparably. I am not in that camp, but I am here to speak the truth that there is much pain, distrust and confusion among Buckeye Disciples. Over the past year, we have been intentional about researching our woes, digging up our skeletons, and opening doors and windows to let the light of truth and transparency illumine our darkness.

There is so much that is wonderful about our region, its history and ministry, but for at least 20-30 years, we have been guilty of the sin of hubris. We came to believe that the general church needed us but that we didn't need the general church, and now, many among us within Ohio have come to believe they don't need the region.

We have done all we can to reduce expenses and increase revenue; we have cut staff and programs, visited throughout the region, cast deadly policies into the pit of hell, written and are writing new policies based on best practices, and began to share openly the good, the bad and the ugly about who we are, where we are, and why we find ourselves in this position.

First, I want to say thank you to our General Ministry partners who have been gracious, prayerful and supportive in spiritual and pragmatic ways. We are especially blessed by these covenant partners.

Second, I am here primarily to say this: as the fiduciary body of this church, it is well beyond the moment when we as the General Board need to take seriously our fiscal and structural issues. The time is now to address our brokenness. I began by saying, this is a cautionary tale. Take heed. While this sounds very pessimistic, I remain an optimist, and am convinced we cannot only recover but will discern new vitality within our church. But, we cannot continue as church under this rubric, so may the Lord guide and bless us in these deliberations.