HIGHER EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP MINISTRIES
REPORT TO THE GENERAL BOARD OF
THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

Submitted by
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INTRODUCTION

Higher Education and Leadership Ministries works with wider church and higher education partners to develop and nurture Christian leaders who are transforming church, society and world.

Two and a half years ago, HELM entered a transitional period of leadership along with a period of discernment by the HELM board in considering the current and future state of HELM. Following a number of key changes to the ministry, there continues to be considerable optimism regarding the future of HELM.

The leadership of HELM continues to focus its efforts in four main categories:

- Financial Equilibrium –
- Program and Staff Assessment
- Relationship with Higher Education Institutions
- Board Development and Participation

FINANCIAL EQUILIBRIUM

In the past two years, HELM has gone from experiencing three consecutive years of deficits to reducing the deficit, projecting a balanced budget, and proposing a budget with a significant surplus. This has been achieved through changes to HELM’s staffing...
configuration; cost savings in the leadership fellows program and the seminarians conference; restoral of funding from the colleges and universities; downsizing HELM’s offices in St. Louis and relocating the offices to Disciples Center in Indianapolis. This financial equilibrium has enabled HELM to shift more of its funding to program activities and increasing support for participants in HELM’s programs. It has also positioned HELM to begin paying down a sizeable balance on its loan debt and enabled HELM to begin looking at reducing the annual draw on its investments.

**RELATIONSHIP WITH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

The relationship between HELM and the higher education institutions of the church have been dramatically improved. This has also led to significant interest between the colleges and universities and key ministries of the church in working more closely together. Funding from the colleges and universities to HELM has been restored. HELM has partnered with Disciples schools to host the leadership fellows retreat and the HELM board meetings. High-level conversations are taking place to move toward establishing more ways to work collaboratively with chaplains and other staff on ways of nurturing young leaders. These changes follow what was recommended in the HELM planning report from 2014. However, because of the stronger relationship with the schools, HELM is not only working with campus ministries, but is engaged in deeper conversations with the presidents and the senior administration of the schools.

**PROGRAM AND STAFF ASSESSMENT**

There is greater clarity around the structure of HELM’s unique offering of leadership development programs and their potential impact. The leadership fellows program addresses leadership development at the collegiate level. The seminarians conference has the potential to address leadership development at the graduate theological education level; and DLI addresses leadership development at the young adult level. The program assessment conducted last year has given us a better sense of how each of these programs relates specifically to HELM’s mission and what the opportunities for improvement are.

The Leadership Fellows Program has been restructured around four key themes (community, transformation, global awareness, and mentoring) for each of the participants for years in the program. This is in line with the recommendation from the HELM planning report from 2014 to develop, test, and refine a pedagogical approach to leadership development. The stated model of “leadership education through collaborative diversity” is still operative, and we have significantly increased the diversity of the leadership fellows program through strategic outreach to the racial ethnic constituencies of the church and a more progressive and efficient application process.

Through partnering with other ministries, HELM is now able to support an international trip as part of the HELM leadership fellows program and HELM is in a position to make
a three-year commitment to Disciples Leadership Institute. The seminarians conference has also been restructured and we are in the process of changing the funding model to overcome some of the challenges it has faced for well over 30 years now. With the current momentum, it has the potential to be transformed from a general ministry "show and tell" to a true leadership development gathering. The seminarians conference is also being moved from Nashville, TN to Indianapolis, IN. This will reduce costs and provide opportunities for participants to more effectively engaged the general church.

In terms of staffing, HELM has undergone dramatic changes. Following Linda Plengemeier’s retirement the accounting support was outsourced and this freed up resources to be applied toward program management, technology support, communications coordination, and development support. The further change from a single full-time administrative support person to part-time support that is more specialized is leading to lower personnel costs and increased efficiency. It remains a work in progress, but the overall improvement has been significant.

BOARD DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATION

HELM's board of directors has been strong throughout the years. HELM continues to bring on faithful, skilled, committed board members. HELM has also provided the board with key development opportunities in understanding organizational financing & funds management, as well as overall board governance & responsibility. By having the board meet on the campuses of our higher education institutions, the board has been able to understand the work of our higher education partners and see first hand the work of our schools and campus ministry staff. The board is more deeply engaged and involved in supporting and leading HELM.

With gratefulness to God and enthusiasm for continued commitment to ministry, HELM hereby submits this report to the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Yours in Christ,

[Signature]

Bernard “Chris” Dorsey

The General Board has reviewed GA-1711 from Higher Education and Leadership Ministries. The report is submitted to the General Assembly for presentation and discussion. No action is required. (Discussion time: 12 minutes)