

THE HISTORY OF THE NORTHEASTERN DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a vast number of African Americans began to migrate northward. Many members from the General Assembly of the Disciples of Christ of the Norfolk and Washington and Goldsboro and Raleigh Districts were counted in the number of those who moved from the eastern counties of North Carolina and Virginia to the northeast.

Elder Charles Cordon of Bath, North Carolina, organized the first Disciple church north of Washington D.C.—St. Peter Church of Christ in Philadelphia in 1925. Along with Elder Oscar Samuel Lucas, these two ministers set out to create an assembly patterned after the Goldsboro-Raleigh and Washington-Norfolk district churches. In 1930, Elder Lucas called Elder William C. Gillams, Elder Henry T. Williams, Deacon James Baum, and Sister Ruth Ebron Gibbs for an organizational conference in Philadelphia, which brought about the merger of St. Peter Church of Christ and St. Mary Church of Christ (organized in 1929) and various Disciple missions to form the Northeastern District Assembly. Elder Charles Cordon was elected Chief Elder and Elder Oscar S. Lucas was his assistant. The other five Council Board Elders were: Elder E. G. Gibson, Elder Henry T. Williams, Elder William C. Gillams, Elder J. J. Gregory, and Elder William M. Johnson.

In 1932, the Assembly was incorporated with the name Northeastern District Assembly, Churches of Christ, Composed of Disciples. The first three subsidiaries that came into existence were the District Union, to evangelize and to aid churches in financial distress, the Women's Home Mission (later renamed the Home Mission Convention), and the Sunday School Convention. The Disciples of Christ thrived at this time, challenging the dominance of longstanding congregations in the area.

Upon Chief Cordon's demise in 1944, then Acting Chief Elder William C. Gillams was elected Chief Elder. In 1945, the General Assembly ruled that the title of Bishop would be used for all District Assembly Chiefs. In 1951, the name of the Assembly was changed to the Northeastern District Assembly

Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ (NEDA) according to the order of the General Assembly.

Bishop Gillams' administration was a time of great expansion for the NEDA. During his tenure, the Assembly Chorus, Ministerial Conference, Ushers League, and The Disciples Herald newsletter came into existence. The first Mid-Year Assembly, set up to handle Assembly business, was held on April 1965 at Shiloh Church of Christ, which was the Assembly's headquarters.

In 1955, Bishop Gillams was elected Bishop for life, which ended with his death on February 17, 1972. Bishop William M. Johnson, who served as Vice Bishop during Bishop Gillams' tenure, took the reins of the bishopric. Bishop William Johnson was a stern leader with a keen business sense. His famous saying was, "It's holiness or hell." When everything seemed to be falling in place, Bishop William Johnson died in October 1973.

In 1974, Bishop George W. Johnson became the fourth Bishop of the Assembly. Bishop G. W. Johnson was a mild-mannered man with a vision to unify the NEDA. He appointed Bishop Lander E. Brown as Building Fund Chairman. Organizational changes came forth with the creation of standing committees for housing, hospitality, nutrition, transportation, and fundraising. He was an avid supporter of women preachers and pastors.

In 1986, Bishop Harold N. Foy was elected Bishop. Bishop Foy was a talented businessman and fiery preacher. He led the pastors to examine their legal standing and incorporation, instituted the Learning Center for biblical instruction, chaired by Elder Ella M. Johnson, and focused on youth ministry.

In 1994, Bishop Marvin Creech became the Bishop. Bishop Creech was a soft-spoken leader, with a longstanding ministry within the NEDA. Bishop Creech installed eight pastors within the NEDA in his 12 years as Bishop. The Marvin Creech Male Chorus was formed under the direction of Deacon Luther Brown. Bishop Creech chose not to run for re-election in 2006.

With the 2006 election, newly elected Bishop Leonard E. Brown began a series of radical structural changes: setting curriculum guidelines for ordination and relicensing of ministers, promoting transparency and accountability of good stewardship for the Assembly and its subsidiaries,

forming the NEDA Board of Deacons and Board of Mothers, and rising to become the first Prelate to visit Togo, which became a part of the NEDA in 2009.

Dedicated women of God added structure and insight to the development of the NEDA. Sister Ruth Gibbs and Elder Eva Lane were key church planters in the 1950s and 1960s. Elder Eliza Brown and Elder Lucille Markum were exemplars within the pastoral office. Dr. Loreatha Jones served several administrations as District Assembly Secretary, bringing administrative expertise. Among the subsidiaries, Sister Annie Sutton Jones, Elder Martha Ellis, and Elder Claudia Pearson were singular leaders in the Home Mission Convention; Sister Sadie Tallie served mightily as a Sunday School Convention president; and Sister Annie Smith started the NEDA Ushers League.

Bishop Andrew J. Boomer, Jr., was voted in as the Presiding Bishop for 12 years, beginning in year 2010. Bishop Boomer's motto is, "Do the right thing because it is the right thing to do." As Presiding Prelate, Bishop Boomer created the Board of Foreign Missions, the Men's Conference, and the Women's Conference. He expanded the board structure within the District Assembly, directed funds for the building of an edifice in Togo, and spearheaded the renewal of the NEDA Constitution and Bylaws. Presently, the Northeastern District Assembly Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Inc., comprises the areas reaching from the District of Columbia to upstate New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania with missions in Togo, Jamaica, and Trinidad. The twenty-one churches of the NEDA, headquartered at Mt Hebron Church of Christ in Brooklyn, seek to extend the saving grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ throughout the world.