

Foundation's support spans many denominations

The Disciples Seminary Foundation has put its mantra of “supporting emerging theological leaders for diverse Christian communities” into practice since its formation in 1960, awarding more than \$3 million to more than 700 students affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who are pursuing graduate level degrees in religion.

As the organization presses forward, it plans to help many more.

“A lot of my interest, as I visit one church after another, is who’s going to be the pastor in 5, 10 or 20 years? So our job is to find those future pastors and make sure they have the right education to be ready for that,” said Disciples Seminary Foundation President Rev. Dr. Jon L. Berquist.

The foundation is providing scholarships for 20 students in Claremont who currently attend Claremont School of Theology. Other schools the organization partners with are the Claremont Graduate University, Graduate Theological Union, Pacific School of Religion and the Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry. The scholarships are offered through the generosity of donors in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination.

Along with providing financial assistance, the Disciples Seminary Foundation helps students find internship opportunities and will guide them through the ordi-



COURIER photos/Steven Felschundneff
Jon Berquist was named president of the 50-year-old Disciples Seminary Foundation this February. The Claremont based organization provides scholarships to Disciples of Christ members who want to attend seminary school most commonly the Claremont School of Theology.

nation process in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination. The foundation also uses an endowment to fund a professor at the Claremont School of Theology.

“We’re just trying to be good partners and help the schools come up with the best curriculum and provide the best services for our students. We do a lot of advocacy for our students,” Dr. Berquist said.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination was founded in the early 1800s by Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott. The movement was started to end divisions among Christian denominations that resulted from differences. The denomination now includes more than 700,000

members in the United States and Canada.

Though the general office of the denomination is located in Indianapolis, the individual churches maintain local control. Southern California is currently where the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is experiencing its biggest growth with at least 4 new churches being established each year.

Claremont has been a good fit because the organization maintains a strong partnership with the Claremont School of Theology. Though the organizations represent different denominations (the Claremont School of Theology was founded by the Methodists), Director of Development David Coatsworth believes it provides an opportunity for the foundation to carry out

its cooperative component.

“It underscores our ecumenical nature to be cooperative with different denominations and other faiths as well,” he said. “We really embrace diversity and I think our vision is really working.”

Dr. Berquist believes the Claremont School of Theology is home to one of the best religious educational experiences in the world.

“We feel the Claremont School of Theology offers a good education,” he said. “We really believe it is important to learn within an ecumenical environment. You have people who grew up Catholic, Baptist or something else and we like the fact that people are learning in a school with people from different denominations. And you have faculty from different traditions. I want people to know that the Claremont School of Theology is a gem and one of the most innovative schools in the nation.”

While it was considered at one point in the organization’s history to become a full seminary, the Disciples Seminary Foundation found its purpose was better served at its current state as a support system. Its model has allowed the organization to create the Spencer P. Austin Fund—an initiative that will allow future pastors to also be educated in areas such as stewardship, congregational finance, church administration and governance.

“Our primary objective is to provide scholarships to students and underwrite a faculty position,” Mr. Coatsworth said. “We’re trying to become as close as we can to being a seminary without the bricks and mortar.”

For more information on the foundation and its services, call 624-0712 or email the office at info@dsf.org.

—Landus Rigby



The Disciples Seminary Foundation is located in this 2 story office building on the corner of Foothill Boulevard and Yale Avenue.