



A Vision for an *Emerged* Regional Ministry in Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin

Theological Foundations:

In the midst of the “I Am” discourse of Jesus as reported in the gospel of John, Jesus makes the statement, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b). We are called to be a people of abundance and generosity.

In the same chapter, Jesus says “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me . . . I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:14-16). We are called to be a people of welcome.

We also draw from the words of Jesus reported by Luke in Acts: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) We are called to be a people of witness to the power of the Spirit that propels us towards others.

As our Regions come to this moment, we claim our mandate to be a people of abundance, generosity, welcome, witness, and unity. When we entered into Covenant Partnership, we were motivated by the scarcity of financial resources. Now, however, we understand that our future together is one of diversity, relationships, spirituality, blessing, and abundance. We are reminded of Paul’s assertion in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life *emerges!*” (MSG) We are moving towards merger, yet more than that, we are moving towards an *Emergence*; **together we are becoming the church God wants for this world.**

The state of the Regions:

The Christian Church Michigan Region (CCMR) is a vibrant community of 33 congregations and active dialogue with one more potential affiliating congregation. The demographic makeup of Michigan Disciples is approximately evenly split between individuals of European and African American descent. CCMR owns a beautiful campground in Crystal Conference Center, which offers a growing camping program steeped in tradition and cooperation from the supporting churches.

The Christian Church in Illinois and Wisconsin (CCIW) is a strong community of 123 congregations including congregations of European, African American, Korean, and Latino descent. Several of the congregations have racially diverse membership. Walter Scott Camp and Learning Center near Effingham, IL is a vital ministry owned by the Region that houses a growing camp ministry, eco-education opportunities, and seven very popular goats.

Both Regions include significant legacy ministries in Disciples Women, functional teams and committees, and significant structure and history. While CCIW enjoys stronger fiscal stability than does CCMR, each brings strengths to the partnership.

The Regions have been living and serving in Covenant Partnership for the last two and a half years, building relationship and covenant in serving God through the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

“It wasn’t a Merger!”

When our Regions entered into Covenant Partnership, we repeatedly proclaimed an intent to remain separate. However, over the past 2.5 years, what has *emerged* is a theological understanding of a calling to live into a new vision of abundance *together* by honoring the strengths of each "Legacy Region." Rather than a merger, we are experiencing an *Emergence*.

Why would our Regions merge?

Together, our Regions are imagining how we might live into a vision of the church God wants to see in the world. The vision both builds on already-established ministry and embraces possibility for future cooperation.

Imagine a Region whose congregations feel fully connected to the Region because they know their Regional Staff Liaison by name, having seen them at least twice a year in their particular contexts. Imagine a Region where Congregational Elders learn ministries of preaching, visitation, and pastoral care in an effort to serve their churches as well as the whole church. Imagine a Region that is regularly offering Elders workshops, Diaconal training, service opportunities and more, in addition to excellent Clergy Ethics offerings. Imagine a Region where affinity groups are honored and heard. Imagine a Region where New Church starts are supported, nurtured, and encouraged spiritually and financially. Imagine a Region where Church Camp matters, and decisions about campgrounds are housed with stakeholders in the camps. Imagine a Region where youth and young adults have a meaningful seat at the table. Imagine a Region where pastors consistently list the Region on their Search and Call Circulation as a location of interest because the Region has a reputation for service, connection, and personal growth for pastors. Imagine a Region where clergy hoping to serve as Regional Ministers line up for Associate roles because they know they will learn to lead the whole church. Imagine a Region where church leaders of all levels of education are trained and given space to practice leadership. Imagine a Region where diversity and inclusion are a way of life, not just a goal. Imagine a Region that has the time, commitment, and value of connecting to and equipping each church and every Disciple.

What would this newly *Emerged* Region look like?

An *Emerged* Region would serve 156 congregations with a variety of languages and cultures, yet many of our congregations share values across the miles. While both “Legacy Regions” have a very large metropolitan area (Detroit and Chicago), the majority of the Regions (and the churches) are in less-populated areas, often rural or county seats and state capitals, which are not the biggest cities in each State. There is vast political and theological belief and practice, yet we are all welcomed at the Table of Jesus Christ our Lord.

What staff would be needed for the *Emerged* Region?

The ideal staffing pattern of the *Emerged* Region would include four full-time Regional Pastoral Ministry staff: An Executive (Regional Minister), and three Associate Regional Ministers. Ideally, each Regional Pastoral staff person would live in one of four areas (Note: it may take several years to achieve this goal):

- Southwestern (Illinois) - roughly south of Interstate 80 and in the Western half of the State
- Southeastern (Illinois) - roughly south of Interstate 80 and in the Eastern half of the State, but not including Champaign and most congregations north and East of Champaign
- Northwestern (Illinois/Wisconsin) - Congregations North of Interstate 80 and in the I-57 Chicago to Champaign Corridor
- Northeastern (Michigan)

In each area, a Pastoral staff person would serve as the primary point-of-contact and support for about 40 congregations. This would afford each Regional Pastoral staff person the opportunity to be intentionally

present with each congregation at least once per year in worship and at least once per year at a gathering such as a Board meeting.

In addition to congregational care, each Regional Pastoral Ministry staff person would carry a ministry portfolio responsibility such as:

- Administration and New Church Ministry
- Congregational Vitality and Transformation
- Youth and Young Adult Ministries
- Clergy and Lay Education Ministries

Each Regional Pastoral Ministry staff person would also have an area of specialization to address specific needs of our congregations through coaching and encouragement such as:

- Rural Ministry with Full-Time Pastor
- Urban/Suburban Ministry with Full-Time Pastor
- Rural Ministry with Part-Time/Bi-Vocational Pastor
- Urban/Suburban Ministry with Part-Time/ Bi-Vocational Pastor

With this model, each Regional Pastoral Ministry staff person has a geographical area of care, a program ministry portfolio, and an area of congregational expertise.

Two examples of how this might function in practice:

1. Regional Associate Minister for Youth and Young Adults might care for churches centered in Northern Illinois and become a specialist in Urban/ Suburban Part-time Ministry.
2. The Regional Minister might live in Bloomington and care for churches in Southeastern IL, manage New Church and Administration for the Region while becoming a specialist in Rural Full-Time Ministry.

In addition to the above Regional Pastoral Ministry staff, the *Emerged* Region would continue to have full-time support staff of Administrator, Director of Development and Communication, and Director of Information and Technology. Additionally, program staff for Disciples Women, NAPAD churches, and National Convocation churches would serve part-time on a contract basis.

What program ministries would be priorities for the *Emerged* Region?

Both CCMR and CCIW are blessed with well-established and active Disciples Women ministries. Disciples Women could create their own cabinet and structure to allow for a hybrid model that equips Area or Legacy gatherings, retreats, and events to continue while also developing Region-wide offerings.

NAPAD and National Convocation pastors would work with their own advisory committees to build programs, education events, fellowship opportunities and other events as those teams deem appropriate. Over time, an Obra Hispana program associate could be added.

What about the campgrounds?

Both of our campgrounds already operate on separate budgets under the umbrellas of the respective Regional Board. Each campground also already has advisory boards in place. The new structure would incorporate those boards and budgets with the additional requirement that the advisory boards be made up of stakeholders in the particular campground, and that all property transitions (purchase, sale, remodel, or investment) for the campground must be initiated by the Advisory Board for that specific campground.

How would the *Emerged* Region handle Assemblies?

The proposed three-year cycle for in person General Assemblies brings both opportunities and challenges (CCIW has historically held biennial Regional Assemblies on the “off year” of General Assembly; while Michigan holds annual assemblies.) Under the proposed GA cycle, the newly *Emerged* Region could use the two years when the General Assembly does not meet in person to meet in a Regional Assembly one year and Area Assemblies the other year. Areas would be encouraged to meet more frequently but would be expected to gather at least every third year.

What would all of this cost?

To start, it is important to get a sense of the overall budget of the two Legacy Regions:

The Covenant Partnership calls for financial support from Michigan to Illinois/Wisconsin in the amounts of \$30,000 per year for Regional Ministry support and \$18,000 per year for Administrative and Support Ministries. In addition to those funds, Michigan currently operates on a budget for programming and other ministries of \$54,000 per year. Crystal Conference Center has a separate budget but does receive some regional financial support.

The Christian Church in Illinois and Wisconsin has a \$687,000 annual budget, which includes contributions from the Michigan Region as per the covenant agreement. \$518,000 of this budget supports a staff of nine. New Church Ministries and Walter Scott Camp and Learning Center have separate budgets, with the latter receiving funds from the Region.

The combined budget of the *Emerged* Region, without changes, would be about \$741,000 plus an influx of investment income anticipated to be approximately \$25,000 a year from a newly endowed fund for a total of \$766,000 with a staff cost of approximately \$575,000. Obviously, these are rough numbers and do not allow for inflation but are meant to give a snapshot of costs. This budget would leave program ministry and expense funds of about \$200,000 per year (more if congregations became stronger supporters of Disciples Mission Fund).

In essence, the budget would sustain the proposed staffing plan.

What are the most likely next steps?

The Regional Boards of both CCIW and CCMR have voted to bring a motion of Intent to Merge to the Regional Assembly on Oct. 18-19, 2024. The vote at the Regional Assembly, if passed, will bring a flurry of initial activities, the most important of which is the seating of a Guiding Documents Team, representing both Regions, which will give formal shape to the programs and structures of the *Emerged* Region.

Once the Guiding Documents drafts are complete, each Legacy Region will ratify the draft documents. Each Region may choose to set aside their respective Constitution and ByLaws in order to operate for a period of one year under the Provisional Guiding Documents. The Assemblies would elect an initial set of Provisional Officers to lead through the year. This will allow us to identify any problem areas in the Provisional Guidelines and make revisions.

After the initial year, the revised documents will be presented to a joint assembly of the Legacy Regions. Once adopted, the new Guiding Documents and combined budget will be in full operation.

The final step under the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada is approval of Regional Boundary Changes by the General Assembly. By this time, we anticipate the General Assembly will meet annually and could approve the *Emerged* Region on very short notice.

What is the likely timeline?

- May 2024: Joint Regional Board meeting (virtual) with one agenda item: Resolution for a motion to the Regional Assembly to begin intentional work to create a newly merged Region
- May to October 2024: Listening and Q&A Conferences held throughout both Regions with recorded feedback on the basics of the proposed Intent to Merge.
- October 2024: Both Regions regions ratify a resolution of Intent to Merge the Regions and a document team is formed.
- 2024-2025: The following year would be filled with updates and lots of cluster group listening and reporting conferences and conversations, so everyone remains well-informed while excitement and optimism build.
- Summer/Fall 2025: CCIW special assembly, CCMR special assembly to suspend the ByLaws and begin operating under Provisional Documents. All committees will be fully integrated, consisting of members from both Legacy Regions, and the Region will operate under a united budget. Around this time, a new name will be selected for the *Emerged* Region. Also at this time, we hope to extend a call for the New Regional Minister.
- October 2026: Joint Regional Assembly to review and revise Provisional Guidelines and Nominate Officers for a fully United and Functional Board. Finally we would submit a motion to the General Assembly for final approval of the new boundaries and name.