



**June 21, 2021**

**TO:** Regional Board  
**FROM:** Regional Minister and President  
**REGARDING:** Regional Minister Report

### **Summary**

As more congregations return to gathering in person with mixed application of CDC guidelines there is a greater awareness that what was considered “normal” is undergoing a significant adaptive change. It is tempting to focus on lack, challenge, and the real weariness affecting our clergy and lay leaders, however, we may well be in the early stages of a new (digital?) Reformation and a way to make new disciples among people who are not interested in going to church. Humbled by the awareness that there is no point in preserving the whole of the status quo, we have an opportunity to take advantage of God’s invitation to be creative, to take risks, and to find joy in living more of the adventurous life of disciples of Jesus. We have yet to experience our full capacity in Christ to do and to be what God has created and called us to be. We may be surprised to learn what God can do in, among, and through us!

### **A New (Digital) Normal**

Congregations that were previously or are now offering worship, Bible study, and other gathering opportunities online are upgrading and using digital technology. Worship will likely be a hybrid onsite/online production in congregations that have the technology. Clergy are seeking continuing education and meeting together to share best practices for skills never taught in seminary. Finding volunteers to set up, monitor, adjust settings, record, and produce streaming video has proved challenging in congregations with aging populations. Greater Kansas City Disciples are signing up with the newly founded Disciples Tech Corps (at [disciples.tech](https://disciples.tech))— an initiative of the Office of General Minister and President to which I was invited along with five others to help organize. We are blessed with many younger clergy and lay leaders with skill sets, experience, and technical networks willing to consult on a volunteer or fee basis.

Not everyone is pleased with the changes made necessary by mandatory restrictions and voluntary guidelines to protect people during the worst pandemic in over one hundred years. Disciples Congregations in rural areas or worshiping communities with fewer than average financial resources may have slow or no access to Wi-Fi among their members. They may be willing but are often unable to purchase and staff the required technology to compete with what mega churches already offer online.

Many of our Disciples tell me that they check in with their home congregation but tend to worship where the music and preaching are more appealing from the comfort of their homes.

One of the unanticipated positive developments has been the number of participants in the digital ministries of a few GKC Disciples congregations. As many as 20-40% of active participants in some of these congregations live well outside the KC metro – some thousands of miles away. That poses a challenge to what we mean now by church membership. It also brings us back to the Great Commission to make and equip disciples of Jesus (which means that they may well gather, worship, learn, teach, and engage in their communities in a multitude of non-traditional ways).

Quarantines, loss of some control over behavior, lack of in-person contact and the inability to plan in-person celebrations of life for loved ones lost during the past year are just a few reasons why many congregations in our Region have experienced no small amount of conflict. The number of pastoral leadership transitions is up and there are fewer qualified clergy to fill vacant pulpits. Those transitions are prime opportunities for our Region to help congregations reassess their missions, visions, values and goals and we provide an expanded Search and Call process that seems to help meet that need without extra cost to the congregation.

Partnership initiatives are increasing – many self-organized among younger clergy. Recently lay leaders are talking about sharing staff among geographically contiguous congregations and considering one-half to three-quarter time shared pastorates. Other congregations recognize that they have more space than they can use in a week and have invited other congregations to hold activities on their campuses.

The pandemic revealed some of the inequities most of us might have overlooked had it not been higher rates of infection among some of our neighbors and lack of access to affordable health care. This has increased interest in understanding the narratives formed over four centuries that keep the artificial construct of racial hierarchies alive, influencing nearly every aspect of North American life.

Now that fully one third of adults surveyed in the U.S. believe that the presidential election was stolen, and given the radicalization that led to the January 6<sup>th</sup> invasion of the U.S. Capitol, the Church is having to look within and ask, “What are we doing to help disciples of Jesus to be truly “wise as serpents and gentle as doves?” (Matthew 10:16)

We continue to discover neglected maintenance at Tall Oaks which has required significant outlays of money, staff, and volunteer time to address. The shortage of people willing to work at seasonal and part-time jobs hit United Camps, Conferences, and Retreats hard and the first camp of the summer (Camp Encourage) almost had to be cancelled but for volunteers like Dr. Bill Drake who shut down his pediatric clinics for two days to staff the pool with an employee and employee’s adult daughter. Others have stepped up to help with general cleaning, but the summer church camp season is still in need of counselors and camp volunteers. Our Regional Camp and Conference Committee and Rev. Shandra Yost, Regional Camp and Conference Coordinator will provide their reports elsewhere, however, I want to note the hard work and extra hours they continue to invest to offer quality spiritual development opportunities for children and youth and the adults who serve and lead them.

The gift of \$82,500 from Blue Valley Christian Church and sales of property owned or deeded to the Region have kept our financial picture stable for now. Future pending sales will help but they will not

address the trend toward deficit spending in congregations and Regions and the lack of a robust practice of the spiritual discipline of stewardship. We need to identify an inspired leader for a fully functional Stewardship and Development Commission. There are great materials available through our [Disciples Center for Faith and Giving](#) and the [Christian Church Foundation](#) that could help congregations now.

Our Regional Executive Committee continues to work prayerfully and carefully through innumerable challenges. We are blessed by the leadership of this Board and by that of the Tall Oaks Board.

A Sabbatical Regional Minister will be called to serve part-time during my sabbatical leave September 1 – November 30, 2021. My thanks to the Personnel and Executive Committees for hours of interviews with two candidates – both retired Regional Ministers who live close enough to be present when needed in person. While the Board refocuses its work to adapt to new opportunities and challenges, the Sabbatical Regional Minister will help to “hold the center” (keep the basic administrative and pastoral functions running) and will offer fresh perspective and assistance to the Board in its strategic planning.

There is so much more to share but for now, please review some of the data that provide more context for the current state of our Region

- Data
  - **47 Congregations Providing Financial Support to Region/DMF**
    - January-May 2021
      - Regional Support **15**
      - Tall Oaks **7**
      - Disciples Mission Fund (41% returned to our Region) **25**
  - **17 Congregations in transitions**
    - Kansas
      - Bonner Springs FCC – Pastor search
      - Shawnee Community CC – Pastor search
    - Missouri
      - Blue Ridge Boulevard CC – no longer worshipping, financing loan to another church purchasing campus
      - Independence Boulevard CC – Major renovations, hosting Ryoku Soccer Academy High School, expanding community engagement) / Ripples for Change
      - La Gloria de Dios – Leaving the denomination
      - Living Water – Interim Pastor search
      - New Song Christian Church – selling campus
      - Family of Faith Christian Church – may end ministry in September
      - North Oak CC – Pastor search

- Park Hill CC – Pastor search
  - Pleasant View CC – no pastor, lay leadership
  - Raymore CC – Pastor search
  - Woods Memorial CC – decisions about their building, small remnant worshiping
- **4 Congregations in or may be in financial difficulty in 2021**
    - Kansas
      - Emerson Park CC
      - First Christian Church, KCK
    - Missouri
      - Pleasant View CC
      - Woods Memorial CC
  - **8 (Known to us) Congregations in Positive Transformative Processes**
    - Improving and upgrading online presence/capacities (known)
      - Community Christian Church
      - Country Club Christian Church – 100-year anniversary
      - Fairview CC – nesting Ethiopian and Filipino congregations
      - St. Andrew Christian Church – Anti-Racism continuing education and activity in the community
      - Longview Chapel Christian Church
      - Merriam Christian Church
      - New Vision Christian Church
      - Overland Park Christian Church
  - **2 Congregations in Formation (not yet approved by Regional Board)**
    - Faith Community Christian Church (Chuukese)
    - Filipino Christian Church (nesting in Fairview CC)
  - **1 Congregation Considering Affiliation**
    - Broadway Church (Rev. Amy Shoemaker)
  - **Congregations Overdue for Certification as Chartered DOC Congregations** requiring a formal action of the Board upon the recommendation of the Ministry Innovation Team
    - Alfa y Omega (looking to start a new church in Belton)
  - **Clergy**
    - Sabbatical
      - Overland Park CC – Laura Phillips
        - June – August, Mark Harmon Sabbatical Pastor
      - Community Christian Church - Shanna Steitz
        - June – August, Cara Gilger, consultant
      - Lee’s Summit CC - Matthew Silvers
  - **Candidates for Ordination**

- Allison Bright – Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University - Rhonda Hetzel – Central Baptist Theological Seminary
- Karen Palmer – Central Baptist Theological Seminary - **approved**
- Madison Peterson – Eden Theological seminary, St. Louis - **approved**

Thank you for the privilege of serving with you.