

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Greater Kansas City

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Leadership

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General Board Report

In his book, *Backpacking with the Saints*, Dr. Beldon Lane writes,

“What people commonly report as most unsettling about their experience in wilderness (and yet also most healing) is its defeat of the grasping ego. It makes them aware of their inability to control anything. Wilderness becomes an accomplice in the spiritual work of deconstructing the false self.”¹

During a year that saw a pandemic, a hotly contested presidential election, and a reprise of racism, we have seen, heard and experienced the real presence of God in the creativity and sacrifices of congregational leaders, the generous encouragement and support of General Ministries, and spontaneous collaboration among congregations.

Congregations here, as they have across the life of the Church, innovated to provide online worship, discipleship formation, and pastoral care. Many have expanded their outreach efforts, participated in the distribution of personal protective equipment, or offered their campuses as sites for COVID 19 testing.

Simultaneously, coming into sharper relief, are the parts of our covenant life together that tap into something other than the Holy Spirit. Disciples of Christ are not of one accord about whether, when, or how to observe Centers for Disease Control guidelines for indoor gatherings. The fault lines between Disciples in some congregations appear to be widening about politics, antiracism, and, of all things, truth.

We are, together,

*“ . . . experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren’t crushed.
We are confused, but we aren’t depressed.”*

2 Cor. 4:8 (CEB)

At the same time, we can also affirm,

"... nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord . . ."

Romans 8:38

Congregations – 74 reporting, giving, and/or active in this Region

- **Closing**
 - In December 2020, First Christian Church of Kansas City, Kansas announced that they would close within two months. At least three additional congregations are near closure and likely unsustainable through 2021 without significant changes.
- **Opening**
 - There are two congregations that have indicated a desire to affiliate with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). One is a young Chuukese congregation based in Gladstone, Missouri and the other is an open and affirming congregation based in Kansas City, Missouri. We anticipate that they will soon be received.
- **Networking**
 - One of the most promising initiatives to emerge in 2020 among GKC Disciples is online collaboration and exploration of new ways to share resources, experience, and space. This movement is still young but already there is significant conversation underway about sharing staff and creating youth ministry events. These networks were created and led by clergy prior to the pandemic but they have grown and continued to the present.
- **Transforming and Innovating**
 - *Iglesias Alfa y Omega (MO) went immediately to work early in the pandemic and with a \$4,000 grant from our Region and help from the [Merriam Christian Church](#) and the local [Telemundo](#) station fed over underserved fifty families*
 - *Blue Valley Christian Church (KS) continues to develop ministry with senior adults and geriatric spiritual development.*
 - *Independence Boulevard Christian Church (MO) will host an alternative high school for boys and an expanding medical clinic staffed by interns from two medical schools in the KC Metro in the multicultural northeast part of Kansas City.*
 - *Community Christian Church (MO) was at the very center where many of the summer BLM rallies took place and they were instrumental in providing safe space, prayerful presence, and support for protesters and press.*

- *Independence First Christian Church (MO) is working with [Drumm Farm Center for Children](#) to create services and space for unaccompanied minors.*
- *Overland Park Christian Church leaders created a fund from donated stimulus checks to provide over \$23,000 to families in greatest need.*

Ministry Innovation

- ***New Church Cohort***

- Regional Minister for Ministry Innovation, Rev. Dr. Delesslyn Kennebrew and a Regional/Ecumenical Ministry Innovation Commission will offer an opportunity for new church planters (within and outside our Region) to gather monthly online for discernment, mutual support, and workshops in the basics of church which will culminate with participation in the New Church Ministry Leadership Academy. This work is done in concert with Pastor Terrell McTyre and the New Church Ministry team. The Commission itself continues its education in new church and transformation trends by participating in conferences and ecumenical new church networks. The cohort is open to other Regions and is led by Rev. Dr. Kennebrew with additional leadership from Disciples pastors.

Prayer

- ***Flash Prayer***

- In 2020 we learned that if we call KC Disciples to prayer online in response to special needs, many respond who would not have traveled to a physical location. After a welcome and opening prayer, participants so led offer spontaneous, composed, or published prayers for about thirty minutes. The experience is encouraging. We plan to continue and expand this in 2021.

Elders

- ***Elders Helping Elders***

- There was a time when workshops for elders were offered annually at one of the congregational campuses. Once well-attended, interest waned. During the onset of the pandemic and/or facing up to the reality of congregational sustainability, we offered elders an opportunity to meet online for mutual support, prayer and continuing education on topics that were of greatest interest to them. The tone was conversational and interactive so that elders not only shared best practices, but they also shared themselves. Four congregational elders' teams have participated to date in these second Sunday 5 pm, hour-long gatherings. Elders now have their own website with links to Disciples Home Missions and future Zoom gatherings. We plan in 2021 to invite Disciples leaders from across

the life of the Church as well as ecumenical partners from the United Church of Christ and the United Church in Canada. Of primary importance, however, is affirming the importance of the spiritual oversight role of elders and thanking those who are carrying out this ministry creatively.

Equipping the Saints

- ***Biblical and Theological Study***

- A subscription to the video series The Work of the People has made it possible to offer online gatherings for viewing presentations by well-known and emerging church leaders. We began with [Materiality](#) which featured interviews with theologian Walter Brueggemann. We will offer a series in Lent combining [Don't Be Afraid of the Dark](#): a Visual Liturgy Lenten Benediction series with [America's Unholy Ghosts: Racist Roots of our Faith and Politics](#).
- We encourage participation in all the many excellent offerings coming from Reconciliation Ministry, the Office of the General Minister and President, National Benevolent Association, and other General Ministries.

Communication

- ***Moving to Video***

- The trend is clear, interactive, and graphically rich communication is emerging as one of the greatest opportunities and challenges of Regional Ministry. Challenges include staff time and levels of expertise, sufficient graphics and audio libraries and software to do a better job of telling stories of lives changed and communities impacted by the work of individual Disciples, congregations, and other expressions of the Church.

Clergy Vocation

- ***Under Care***

- We are pleased to support the ordination discernment process for Allison Bright, Karen Palmer, Rhonda Hetzel, Madison Peterson, and Jeff Stegner
- There are 250 Disciples clergy living in the KC metro.

- ***Reorganizing Clergy Support and Credentialing***

- This year we reorganized what was the Ministry of Clergy Oversight to a Regional Commission on the Order of the Ministry in hopes of better supporting clergy and representing the rich diversity of our Region. A brief [video](#) overview was used to describe the approved changes to members of our Regional Board.

- ***Search and Call***

- A new [webpage](#) for Congregational Search Teams now provides instant access to a video overview of the Search process and materials offered by the General Commission on the Order of the Ministry.
- Another webpage features [listings of open positions](#) in our Region that include:
 - Congregational Profile
 - Demographic information from MissionInsite
 - Additional information and promotional videos featuring members of congregations.
- ***Regional Ministry***
 - We celebrate the call of Rev. Josh Patty, formerly pastor of Eastgate Christian Church, to serve as Regional Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest.

Regional Assembly

- Our 2020 Regional Assembly took place online in September with a theme: Renew from Psalm 51. It featured a message from our General Minister and President, a panel of published authors in our Region, several workshops and a worship service that reflected the rich diversity among KC Disciples.

Summer Church Camp

- Working with help from the Association of Disciples in Outdoor Ministries we were able to offer summer church camp opportunities online. Our Camp and Conference Coordinator, Rev. Shandra Yost Soltani and Chair of Ministry with Young Disciples, Rev. Dr. Lara Blackwood Pickrel

Disciples Women

- Following CDC guidelines, GKC Disciples Women meet in hybrid fashion (online and in-person) twice a year for evening meetings. They had planned two retreats for 2020 – both of which they had to cancel out of an abundance of caution. Jan Brooks is the Regional DWM President. There is not currently a Regional Disciples Women's Ministry Coordinator on staff.

Antiracism

- Our Becoming Beloved Community Team was awarded two grants to translate the Reconciliation Ministry one-day workshop handbook for use in LatinX congregations and to offer our Region's first online Juneteenth celebration which featured an "interview" with a local pastor who told the life story of Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer.
- A team of five of our Regional trainers and one from the Great River Region and another from the Missouri Mid-South Conference UCC began work with Reconciliation Ministry core trainer Rev. Yvonne Gilmore to offer a one-day

antiracism workshop via Zoom to fifty-five members and staff of St. Andrew Christian Church in January 2021

- During the Black Lives Matter rallies and other faith-based community organizing events of the summer, KC Disciples participated in every major initiative and financially supported the Poor Peoples Campaign virtual march on Washington and local organizations active in antiracism initiatives.
- We used a part of the Reconciliation Ministry grant to build a website for first-time antiracist activists to find organizations engaged in justice work that would welcome their skillsets. That [site](#) will be launched in February 2021 and will be open to all antiracists in the KC Metro.

Tall Oaks Camp and Conference Center

- In August, we began an agreement with United Camps Conferences and Retreats to manage operations. While expenses were reduced, so was income. Two fundraising efforts (with gracious assistance from Rev. Kirby Gould of the Christian Church Foundation) helped to offset some of the expensive maintenance. The deficit accrued before and increased after the onset of the pandemic is in six figures and is covered by our Region.
- We sold to an adjoining neighbor eighty of the over three hundred acres of the campus to help cover part of the deficit.

Tall Oaks Camp and Conference Center

12778 189th St, Linwood, KS 66052

(913) 301-3004, <https://www.talloaks.org/>

Tri-Regional Partnership

- Our General Minister and President's call:
 - It is time for us to be the church we say we are: to seize the opportunity of this wilderness moment and to move forward with courage, permission to change, and freedom from fear, to imagine a church that bears witness to God's limitless love.
 - Part of our response was to begin a three-way conversation with the Regions of Kansas and Nebraska about ways to collaborate creatively to better serve our congregations. Each Region is splitting the cost for a coach and monthly meetings are drawing us closer into relationships of mutual respect to explore what is possible when we bear witness to God's limitless love.

¹Lane, Belden C. Backpacking with the Saints (p. 228). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.