

Regional Minister Report

3.23.2030

We are called, chosen, blessed and highly favored by a God is wonderful beyond description and deserving of praise and gratitude even in the midst of the most challenging time in decades.

It's show time. We show what we truly think, feel, and believe about God-in-Christ, about ourselves and each other as members of the one Body of Christ. Crises have a way of stripping back the layers of our performance masks. My earnest hope is that you, we and God are revealing in this time much that is good, true, and beautiful.

Disciples across our Region are stepping up and stepping out in creative and generous ways. If you have been on the weekly Zoom conferences for clergy and lay leaders, stopping in to worship online with several congregations on Sundays, reading the daily updates that have been posted on our kcdisciples homepage, or participating in the new, private Facebook page for congregational leaders, you already know about streaming worship services, you see that we are all learning to connect creatively and we are pulling together at a level I have not seen in a long time.

Before the pandemic we were already concerned about financial sustainability of several of our congregations, Tall Oaks and even of our Region. At this time those concerns are heightened. Before this pandemic has subsided, we will be looking at different models for Regional and congregational ministry going forward. It is too early to speculate what forms they may take but this current challenge has made it abundantly clear that we are more vulnerable than we had believed and more capable of creative adaptation than we have realized until now.

Among Disciples in our congregations where English is a second language, in congregations that serve populations living with the economic inequities resulting from systemic racism, unemployment rates among those in the service sector could skyrocket in the coming weeks if the current restrictions on gathering continue for more than 2-3 months. We cannot meet every need but we must give help to pastors and leaders in congregations that are doing good work alongside government, nonprofit, and ecumenical agencies to assist families and individuals to survive long enough to move out of the cycles of poverty that dehumanize and discourage people from living the abundant life Christ has promised.

Our popular consumer-based culture is also challenged and may have to become less self-absorbed and fractious and more like the kind of world that Jesus described during his earthly ministry. We who are called by his name can become better models of what that life could be.

We have much to do in the short-term to support pastors, prepare for Regional Assembly and summer church camp in whatever format will work under the circumstances. Please know that I also spend considerable time serving as chair of the General Board Governance Committee – appointed by our General Minister and President to oversee and support a major effort to revisit our Design of the Christian Church, renew covenant, and make recommendations for structural change.

One of the benefits of this is that I get to be in conversations like those happening over the past four weeks with the College of Regional Ministers and the General Board. There is some good news to report:

- Our General Minister and President has been meeting with her Cabinet comprised of the largest General units like Pension Fund and Disciples Home Missions to find out how best to offer support and all are coming through with plans to test and/or roll out:
 - Week of Compassion is treating the COVID-19 pandemic as a disaster. That means that continuity of salary grants are being explored for pastors hardest hit by a sudden loss of income (think especially co-vocational pastors who just lost their jobs)
 - National Benevolent Association is looking into grants for their partners in congregations engaged in social service work among children and the elderly
 - Pension Fund will continue to offer emergency grants via Regional Minister recommendations
 - Ideas like virtual Assemblies and new ways of being Church are being voiced as quickly as popcorn pops
 - One Region is considering Ministry Reimagination grants for congregations
 - Warren Lynn at Disciples Home Missions is building a map showing congregations that are livestreaming their worship services. By the way, have you looked at the long list of free, downloadable congregational [resources](#) at DHM lately?
 - Every Friday our General Minister and President is hosting a Zoom conference to pray for us and she and others in the office of the General Minister and President and disciples Homeland Missions are looking into offering a virtual Holy Week and Easter service
 - John Goebel, VP of Disciples Treasury Services was here in our region and we filmed a conversation about best practices for church treasurers and financial secretaries and another video session for use at a future Board meeting describing what Disciples Treasury Services does to manage our Region's financial accounting, payroll and funds. (I will edit and produce that video after finishing two for the Governance Committee.)
 - There are Worship and Wonder stories now available online, resources for graduating seniors, and online daily meetings for teens. Contact [Olivia Bryan Updegrove for more details](#)
 - Bruce Barkhauer is spearheading the [Generosity Plus Project](#)
 - Only two congregations in our Region have asked for one of the 50 Stewardship campaign kits that Donna and I purchased but these were made available because Bruce Barkhauer asked the College of Regional Ministers to go in on a group purchase which made this affordable

This pandemic definitely does have a silver lining. Even sheltering in place, more of us are leaving our "siloes" and gathering virtually and discovering that we actually do enjoy being there for and with each other. I'm not sure that we will want to go back too soon to being so separated again.

Let me end with a song by David Haas if you have 3 minutes and need a break from all the activity and information overload. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14pPevY5sd8>