

GB-2109

Disciples of Christ Historical Society
7229 Main Street
PO Box D
Bethany, WV 26032
(615) 327-1444
Email: info@discipleshistory.org
Website: <http://www.discipleshistory.org>

Staff

Richard H. (Rick) Lowery, President
Shelley Jacobs, Archivist
Jim McMillan, Archival Consultant
Missi Kemp, Executive Assistant

Report to the General Board 2021
Rick Lowery, President

The months since our last General Board meeting have been challenging and fruitful. COVID-19 has required us to adapt our normal patterns of work to accommodate the new realities of life in a time of global pandemic. There is a high comparative rate of COVID-19 infection and death in our area (1 in 11 people have been infected in Brooke County as of February 1, and 1 in 457 have died from the disease, a much higher rate of death than in the US overall and nearly double the rate of West Virginia as a whole). So we have temporarily closed the archive to the public and paused tours of the Campbell Mansion, which we normally manage. Our work continues, however, under strict observance of CDC guidelines regarding masks, social distancing, and hand sanitization. We have restricted the number of people in the building at the same time. Regular cleaning of the facilities by Bethany College staff occurs more frequently and follows the strict COVID-19 protocols established for the college.

The financial health of DCHS continues to be very strong (see our statement of financial position posted on our [website](#)). We take a prudent draw on the endowment income that funds much of our work, we continue to balance our budget each year, and we live well within our means. Treasury Services in the Office of the General Minister and President keeps our books and provides for annual audits under their umbrella. Christian Church Foundation invests and provides for the management of the bulk of our endowment funds and, with Treasury Services, helps us establish a prudent annual draw for each year's operations. We collaborate with Disciples Church Extension Fund on the financing of our property, and we provide pension coverage for full-time staff through the Pension Fund of the Christian Church. Our partnerships with the financial ministries of the church are, therefore, integral to the operation of our ministry. Our Board provides diligent oversight of our finances.

We have received substantial gifts in the last year that have been invested as endowed funds to help provide ongoing support for the work of the Society and to assist us in our work of digitizing selected materials in our collection and storing materials that come to us in digital form. One very generous gift has allowed us to subscribe for the first time to Digital Commons, an online platform widely used by academic institutions where we can host journals and various digital presentations and short courses, publish e-books, and store a variety of images and materials for greater accessibility to researchers around the world. We are particularly excited about exploring the possibilities for programming and publication afforded by this new venue for us.

In the meantime, we continue to receive a number of inquiries and shipments from people and churches who, in this time of pandemic, are cleaning out their garages, attics, and storage rooms and shipping their records and other artifacts to DCHS. So our archival collection continues to grow. We are only able to store certain kinds of things. Though we have an explanatory list on our website, we strongly urge people to call and/or email the office beforehand for more specific guidelines and instructions and to let us know generally when to expect shipment, a more pressing need in the uncertainties of pandemic. Phone and email information is published on the website: <http://www.discipleshistory.org>

DCHS is by its very nature in the business of history, and this time in the life of our church is truly historic, unprecedented in our lifetimes. Even as we continue the nuts-and-bolts work of processing, cataloging, and preserving documents and artifacts and figuring out new ways to share the living story of our distinctive tradition, we will not lose sight of our calling also to be a “sentinel” (Ezekiel 3:17 and 33:1-9), seeing, recording, and proclaiming history as it unfolds in our time, before our very eyes. For this reason, we encourage individuals, congregations, regions, and general ministries to document the various ways their life and work is affected as we all adapt to the realities of the pandemic and we ask them to send us their stories for preservation for future research which most certainly will occur on this historic period in the life of the church and the world.

I am particularly happy with our growing digital outreach. Through the course of the year, we have geared up our electronic newsletter to keep our friends and supporters informed of our activities. Edited by my executive assistant, Missi Kemp, a link to the monthly newsletter is sent on a monthly basis to folks on our Constant Contact list, an email service we have engaged in the last several months and are continuing to find new ways to use. Let us know if you wish to be added to the list.

I am especially gratified we have launched the 2021 inaugural issue of *Journal of Discipliana*, the online-only, open access successor to *Discipliana*, our quarterly print magazine that was suspended in 2014. The *Journal* offers a venue for original scholarship that explores issues related to all aspects of thought and religious life and practice within the historical or contemporary Stone-Campbell Movement. The slight name change underlines the scholarly focus while maintaining continuity with the

previous iteration of the periodical first published in 1941, the year the Historical Society began operations. I am thrilled that we have recruited Dr. Mark Toulouse, noted Disciples church historian, to serve as General Editor. Our Archival Consultant Jim McMillan serves as Managing Editor, providing staff support. I serve as Publisher. Articles and book reviews are “peer reviewed” by scholars of Disciples and broader Stone-Campbell Movement history, theology and practice. We have recruited an editorial review board of scholars from all three major streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement, reflecting gender, “racial-ethnic,” age, and national diversity. The board is divided into staggered three-year-term classes to provide continuity, diversity, and growth in perspective and reach. The *Journal* will carry an annual enumeration which will allow us to post new articles and book reviews as they are received and approved by the editorial board through the course of the year. I am very pleased to report that the relaunch has been greeted with enthusiasm from scholars and interested students of Stone-Campbell history around the world, a response that is due in significant part, I believe, to Mark’s scholarly stature in the field.

Also in the last year, I contributed introductory biblical commentary and prayers on behalf of DCHS for the book, *Wellsprings of Hope: Prayers for a Prophetic New Vision for Disciples*, published by Chalice Press, a book of weekly prayers for a year based on Isaiah 35. The prayers are written by leaders and staff of the general ministries to lead the church in its reflection about what lies next, beyond the conclusion of the multiyear “2020 Vision” that has guided us for the last several years. I conceived and edited the book which includes a foreword by our General Minister and President, Terri Hord Owens. Originally intended to lead us into and then out of General Assembly this year, the prayers necessarily took on new meaning as the COVID pandemic set in and upended so much of our church life, including the cancellation of this year’s General Assembly. The themes and images of Isaiah 35 from a community of exiles going to their ancestral home by crossing a barren desert that suddenly begins to flow with water and blossom with life-giving vegetation seems particularly *apropos* in these still perilous yet cautiously hopeful days. Here is the [video conversation](#) I had with Chalice Press Publisher Brad Lyons about the book, Isaiah 35, and the relevance of this beautiful ancient poem for the “in-between” times in which we find ourselves today.

Unfortunately, the pandemic made it impossible for us to have our former Interim Executive Director John Imbler deliver the scheduled Reed Lecture at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as originally scheduled last fall. We are publishing the lecture, however, in the *Journal of Discipliana*. It is not yet clear when we will be able to schedule the next Kirkpatrick Lecture, which under ordinary circumstances would occur this year.

Though COVID has prevented us from refreshing DCHS’s Oscar Haynes Exhibit on African American Disciples History at National City Christian Church in Washington, DC, as planned for 2020, our Archivist Shelley Jacobs has worked to identify and organize materials in our archives related to African American Disciples Education, the next focus of the exhibit. Hopefully, conditions will improve in the coming months to an extent that Shelley can travel safely to DC later this year to set up the new exhibit. Shelley also has

worked through records and journals from the 19th and 20th Centuries to identify materials related to African American Disciples history and put them in a digital format that can be easily accessed for research. Jim McMillan who handles things IT and digital for us is also, among other things, digitizing journals related to African American experience, practice, ministry, and witness among Disciples and others in the broader Stone-Campbell Movement.

In 2020, DCHS participated in a successful Reconciliation Ministries grant proposal with Bethany College, Bethany Memorial Church, and the West Virginia and Pennsylvania Regions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to hire a trained communication expert to review our current external communications, print materials, websites, and videography and help us create a communication guide to ensure that our communication is anti-racist and pro-reconciling. The goal is to improve the effectiveness of communication with racial/ethnic communities and to provide a guide for staff now and in the future. We have contracted with the Rev. Yvonne Gilmore, Interim Director of the National Convocation, to lead us in this project and to prepare the communication guide. She has already begun to work with the grant group and with DCHS in particular via Zoom.

Regarding future publications, it is my hope that DCHS will spearhead biographies of key leaders from historically underrepresented Disciples communities, leaders such as Sarah Lue Bostick, Preston Taylor, Dr. Jeu Hawk, Rev. Domingo Rodriguez and others.

In the past year, we received many of the elegant stained glass windows depicting key persons and moments in Disciples history, windows that were recently removed from the DCHS building in Nashville which we sold to Vanderbilt University when we moved the archive to Bethany. Our plan, postponed for a while by the pandemic, is to frame some of the glass pieces and hang them on walls of the building in Bethany. We are working with a professor in the region who teaches stained glass design and preservation. He helped us properly store these masterpieces and will, when the time comes, work with his students on framing the ones we have identified for public display.

The pandemic has slowed work on our ongoing project of digitizing the card catalog and materials in the archive. Jim, fortunately, has been able to work from his home in Illinois to digitize journals from his own personal collection that replicate many of the journals we have in our collection. So useful work on that front continues without interruption.

Two new members join the DCHS Board this year, the Rev. Janae Pitts-Murdock, Senior Pastor of Light of the World Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indianapolis, and the Rev. Hector Morales, Community Regional Minister for Hispanic Ministries in the Southwest Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude for the DCHS staff, for my colleagues in general ministry, for the ongoing support of our General Minister and President Terri Hord Owens, for the informed and engaged participation of the Board in the oversight, promotion, and support of this ministry, for the generous financial support of our

members and friends, and for the persistent prayers of the church for this important ministry to preserve and proclaim the story of this movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. We are truly blessed.

With much gratitude,

Rick Lowery, President, Disciples of Christ Historical Society

Board by class

2021

Thaddaeus Allen	WV	C	Disciples	O	50-59
David Ayres	TX	C	Churches of Christ	O	40-49
Marsha Smith	SW	C	Disciples	L	60-69
Rebecca Hale	TN	C	Disciples	O	50-59

2022

Archie Jenkins	GA	C	Disciples	L	70+
Mary Lou Kegler	GKC	AA	Disciples	L	60-69
Peter Morgan	IN	C	Disciples	O	70+
Valerie Melvin	NC	AA	Disciples	O	60-69

2023

Heesook Yoo	WA	A	Disciples	O	40-49
Jamey Gorman	TN	C	Christian Churches	L	30-39
Janae Pitts-Murdock	IN	AA	Disciples	O	30-39
Hector Morales	SW	H	Disciples	O	60-69