

GB-21-1175
Christian Church in Nebraska

2020 Regional Ministry Report
General Church Board
Rev. Christopher B. Morton



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General Board Report 2020

The Christian Church In Nebraska has invested a significant amount of time and energy to exploring an overarching question that reaches into every expression of the Regional Church and that question has been *"What does it mean to be the Christian Church In Nebraska today, tomorrow, and in 2050?"*

The Region's planning efforts were slowed by our need to adapt quickly to the emerging realities pressed upon us all by what became the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the **CoronaVirus/COVID-19** swept across our nation, including affecting Nebraska, with significant impact in communities like Grand Island where there are meat packing plants, the Regional Church shifted nearly all of its energy and capacity to supporting our Local Churches. Specifically, the Regional Church is:

- ✓ Providing Weekly Clergy and Chaplain Conversations and Times of Prayer;
- ✓ Preparing Monthly Letters to our Local Churches along with resource lists and guides (March 31st, April 27th, May 29th, June 24th, and September 6th);
- ✓ Providing support to access and utilize technology for worship, study, and fellowship;
- ✓ Provided support for how to set-up and encourage members to use on-line giving tools;
- ✓ Providing *Technology Pooled Fund Grants* for Local Churches to improve their use of technology to reach a broader audience with improved quality technology;
- ✓ Providing up-to-date information on financial assistance for Local Churches through the CARES Act; and
- ✓ Providing up-to-date information on financial assistance for Local Churches and/or clergy available through:

- ❑ National Benevolent Association
- ❑ Disciples Pension Fund
- ❑ Week of Compassion
- ❑ Disciples Church Extension Fund

Regional Church Planning

The Christian Church In Nebraska’s Regional Board began its planning conversations at its August 2019 meeting where we used the image of the **Life Cycle of the Church** superimposed with pictures of people who were in various forms of swimming.

Members of the Board said that the Christian Church In Nebraska, our Regional Church, is ***someplace between Floating/Treading Water and being Re-Energized.***

But, with my arrival only having been 18 months earlier, the Board expressed a cautionary note about the Region being “re-energized,” because it sounded similar to a Local Church feeling a sense of new energy that comes with having a new minister.

Other **cautionary notes** included:

- ❖ Local Churches in our Region are struggling to remain open;
- ❖ The last new churches were established 15 years ago; and
- ❖ Regional Churches are changing both in function and form (purpose and structure).

In March 2020, before the beginning of COVID-19, the Regional Board worked through a series of questions about both its FORM and FUNCTION before landing on both the following question, and four areas of possible future focus:

What Would An Awesome Region Look Like?

- Openness to Learning & Growing with Each Other
- Engaging in Mission
- Facilitating Linkages Between Churches
- Engaging Youth in the Local, Regional and General Church

Tri-Region Partnership Initiative:

In April 2020, as part of our work on long-term sustainability of the Region, the Budget & Finance Committee and I began to explore the concept of what a partnership with other nearby Regional Churches might look like. Conversations with colleagues in Regional Ministry and with our General Minister and President led me to talk with the Greater Kansas City Region and the Christian Church in Kansas. The three Regions of Kansas City, Kansas, and Nebraska began exploring the possibility of partnering so that we might better fulfill our stated purpose as captured in *The Design*. On August 31st, a Steering Committee made-up of three representatives from each of the three Regional Churches, plus the four Regional Ministers began to meet. Rev. Mike Njus, Meg Proffitt, and Rev. Daryl Lauber are the three representatives from Nebraska.

Cotner College Educational Ministries:

Cotner College, an extension of the Regional Church's mission to provide education to both clergy and lay leaders, entered into its own planning process that led to the following conclusions thus far:

Purpose of Cotner College Educational Ministries:

DRAFT: *Provides opportunities for people to cultivate learning and to grow in their faith.*

Purpose of Education for Leadership Ministry

DRAFT: *Cohorts of people who seek to grow in their faith, participate in community, and learn together.*

The work that lies ahead for the Cotner College Board is to discern whether they will be one, or more of the following options that surfaced as possible future directions:

- A. Convener of Cross-Denominational Discussions (e.g., programming);
- B. Host Continuing Educational Opportunities (e.g., ELM);
- C. Sponsor/Seed Creative Ideas (e.g., expert speakers on emerging issues; grants to ministers and/or congregations for specific trainings; behavioral health issues in pulpits and pews; curator or clearinghouse for continuing education opportunities);
- D. Establishing Multi-Denominational Churches (as the "new normal"); and
- E. Re-Imagine Church Leadership While Preventing Churches from Closing.

Youth Ministries and Camp:

Youth & Outdoor Ministries Commission adapted to the realities presented by COVID-19 and developed an on-line, virtual camp experience utilizing the curriculum that was planned to be used during the 2020 Camp Season.

Youth Ministries was also engaged in its own planning including contracting with United Camps, Conferences & Retreats (UCCR) to conduct a viability study of Kamp Kaleo, the joint camp and conference center between the United Church of Christ Nebraska Conference and the Christian Church In Nebraska. The next steps towards viability are being determined.

Racism in Nebraska:

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic America's sensitivities to the suffering of African Americans in our country, as well as other communities of color, was heightened by the murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis. On June 19th, the day that marks the celebration of the last slaves to be freed, or Juneteenth, I wrote and distributed a letter to our Local Churches. In part, below is what I wrote:

Into *that* not-yet space, though, [we are] faced with another reality. Another transition. *Another* not-yet space. We experienced the murder of yet another Black man by Minneapolis police officers, and by the department that is their, and our system. In the wake of police shooting and killing Breonna Taylor in

March 2020, and vigilantes killing Ahmaud Arbery in February 2020. In the wake of Minneapolis/St. Paul police shooting and killing Philando Castile in July 2016, and Jamar Clark in November 2015, a few weeks ago we heard about, and we again experienced another murder, this time of a Black man named George Floyd. Then, a few days after George Floyd was killed, a Black man who was protesting in Omaha was shot to death by the owner of a business. History has taught us that Black people in this country have experienced the “lynching mobs” made up of vigilantes and police forces joining together to kill African American men and women. And here we are, again! This is a part, and only one part, of what I understand, and know to be systemic racism that surrounds us all on a daily basis. Mr. Floyd’s murder has shattered our defenses, barriers, and distancing --- may it be so!

Every other Tuesday of our weekly Clergy Zoom Calls is dedicated to the study and discussion about the book titled, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity In Racism*. The book was chosen for two reasons: 1) it is explicitly about the Church; and 2) it is written by a historian who has dedicated his life to the Church, specifically the evangelical wing of the Church (a more conservative perspective and experience).

As a part of the 2020 Virtual Regional Assembly, three clergy facilitated a Conversation on Racism in Nebraska.

Related/Affiliated Organizations

Camp & Conference Center

Kaleo on the River (KOTR)
(a separate not-for-profit organization)
46872 Willow Springs Road
Burwell, NE 68823
(308) 346-5083
Web Site: [Home | Kaleo on the River \(kampkaleo.com\)](http://kampkaleo.com)