

GB-21-1178
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
In the Northern Lights Region

Contact:

Northern Lights Region
PO Box 23819
Federal Way, WA 98093
(253) 893-7202
E-mail:

Office@northernlightsdisciples.org

Website:

www.northernlightsdisciples.org

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/northernlightsdisciples>

Leadership:

Sandra Messick, Transitional Regional Minister
Amber Saladino, Office Manager
Chris Snow, Youth and Children's Ministry Coordinator

Report to the General Board
February 2021

2020 marked the inaugural year of the new Northern Lights Region. Created from the former Northwest and Montana regions, and approved by the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in July 2019, the Northern Lights Region covers 4 states and three time zones! We are 52 congregations in Alaska, Washington, N. Idaho and Montana. We had great plans for our first year together including winter retreats, camps, and our first Regional Assembly as a new region. And then.....COVID.



Northern Lights Region
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Western Washington was one of the first places in the United States to feel the coming impacts of COVID-19. By the second week of March, some of our Seattle area congregations were suspending in-person worship. Within two weeks, nearly all of our congregations were worshipping virtually. Now, nearly a year later, most of our congregations continue online, with others carefully and with many restrictions returning to in-person worship. Some congregations have moved back and forth between in-person and online worship with the rise and fall of COVID cases in their communities. As new realities faced our congregation, regional leadership was faced with the question of how best to support our ministers and congregations as they faced unprecedented challenges. Our response was to return to the basics of what we believe

is regional ministry: Connections. Connecting congregations and pastors to each other, to the wider church, and to the resources they need to connect with their communities.

Connecting congregations and pastors to each other: With a sense of isolation setting in, we quickly formed online support groups for congregational pastors, chaplains, and Fireside Chats for the region at large. These groups have been a source of sharing, communication, and resources for constituent groups within the region. Relationships across the new region have been formed and nurtured. They have been so well-received that we anticipate these groups continuing after COVID becomes a memory. One of our pastors in Anchorage, Alaska, noted how much he appreciated the increased connection with other pastors and congregations these groups allowed.

With the vast geographic area of the region, our ministry teams and Regional Board were already prepared to meet via Zoom so those gatherings continued unabated. However, our planned camps and Regional Assembly had to be reconsidered. In-person camps were cancelled, but an online camping experience was held in the summer. Our virtual Regional Assembly, with the theme, "Shine", was held in November with excellent attendance. Participants reported they felt connected to each other in ways they might not have had they been in person and only interacting with people they already knew. Out of these online experiences, a virtual regional youth group has started and there is conversation of a virtual pastor's class led by several pastors. This is allowing congregations with fewer youth to connect with a wider group of peers for fellowship and learning.

Connecting congregations to the wider church: We re-vamped our website to include COVID-related resources from the various communities and from the General Church. We were able to share information about grants and educational opportunities offered by our General Ministry partners and to recognize that the whole denomination, indeed the whole world, was learning to do ministry in new ways.

Connecting congregations to the resources they need to connect with their communities: In addition to pointing congregations and pastors to grants available from the General Church, we also initiated several regionally sponsored grants to assist congregations and individuals. The Tech Solidarity grants provided funds to help congregations upgrade their technology to be able to provide on-line worship experiences. The Barnabas Grants were designed to offer financial support to congregational members who experienced financial hardship due to COVID-19. We also provided resources around the nuts-and-bolts issues of online life such as copyright and streaming licenses, and Healthy Boundary training that focused on social media, and pastoral issues in a virtual world.

As we move into 2021, there are many questions about how the year will shape up. Will we be able to gather in person? And when? How will congregations recover from their extended time away from the building and what new opportunities for ministry might arise from this experience? We have learned that we can gather online in ways that we did not imagine before. We have learned that important relationships can be

built and nurtured without being together in person. We have learned that much of our regional work can be done in ways that decrease the need for travel and increase the possibility of wider participation. One of our new initiatives for 2021 is "Second Saturdays," a monthly workshop held on Zoom and focused on one of three priority areas: congregational transformation, justice ministries, and spiritual growth. These Second Saturdays are open to all including those beyond our regional borders. More information can be found on our website: <https://northernlightsdisciples.org/second-saturdays/>. Financially, we weathered the COVID storm in good shape. Despite a decrease in DMF, thanks to significant legacy gifts and our funds invested with the Christian Church Foundation, we approved a balanced budget for 2021 that allows for an increase in ministry and outreach. We look forward to the gifts this next year brings as we continue to grow into our new identity as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northern Lights Region.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra M Messick
Transitional Regional Minister

Non-Regionally Owned but Affiliated Campgrounds

Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center
1019 Central Avenue
Great Falls, MT 59401-3784
(406) 564-1887
Email: contactus@caneridgewest.org
Web site: www.caneridgewest.org
Ruth Lindabury, Manager

Gwinwood Christian Conference Center
P.O. Box 3445
Lacey, WA 98509
(360) 491-0195
Email: info@gwinwood.org
Web site: www.gwinwood.org
Kate Ayers, Executive Director