

**GB-21-1186**



The Christian Church in Tennessee  
(Disciples of Christ)  
4006 Ashland City Highway, Nashville, TN 37218  
Tel 615/646-3705 Fax 615/646-3707  
**Rev. Dr. Christal L. Williams**  
Regional Minister and President  
[drchristal@tndisciples.org](mailto:drchristal@tndisciples.org)

**Leadership**

Christal L. Williams (F/AA) Regional  
Minister and President  
Karren Todd (F/AA) New Church Staff  
Dee Wells (F/C) Bethany Hills Camp  
Manager  
Courtney Sells (F/C) Contract Youth  
Program Director  
Sam Bartholomew (M/C) Contract Staff  
for Camp

Joan Hale (F/C) Bookkeeper,  
Administrative Assistant  
Janice Martin (F/C) Part-Time Secretary

Regional Moderators: Brandon Gilvin,  
Yolanda Foster-Smith, Kelli X

Regional Rep to General Board:  
Laverne Bobo

**2021 Report of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Tennessee**

**Number of Congregations: 63**

**Total Members: 34,000 (12,700 participating)**

**States included in Region: Tennessee and Desoto County, Mississippi.**

*“The Christian Church in Tennessee desires to amplify each church’s call to be formed by Jesus’ love by connecting the region, church to church, into an extended open table where everyone knows they can receive the unmistakable grace of God.”*

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Tennessee is a God centered region focusing on the Lives, Spiritualities and Ministries of those who are members, and affiliates within 63 congregations and beyond. After the year 2020, we remain committed to transmitting the Gospel of Jesus Christ in every sense of the imagination. Today, we are doing so more creatively, with community engagement and strategic partnerships. Our members are dedicating themselves to our 2021-2022 theme entitled, **R.I.S.E. Up!** (Relationships, Inspiration, Spirituality, Expectation) We are motivated to build new and sustaining Relationships both inside and outside the church. We will be Inspirational in our quests to learn and grow within this digital and virtual age. We will deepen and expand our discipleship and increase Spiritual capacity in our leaders, teachers, students and coaches. Finally, we are encouraged to *“Go out into the*

*world...and make disciples.*” We will do so with an even greater sense of God’s calling and deliberate expectation. We will be a stronger church, and more diverse region, as we fulfill our call to intersect with diverse communities. The compassionate love of God for all humankind; radical hospitality and soaring on a quest for deep diversity in all we do is still relevant for who we are as a regional church. We are striving to show this transparency within every document shared, programming, as well as throughout our three distinctive geographic areas. (West, Middle and East) The Tennessee region has worked, and will continue working to transform our congregations, pastors, leaders, and members through cutting-edge leadership development, timely pro-reconciliation/anti-racism conversations/trainings and new church formation as priorities. We will use our campground and other resources to solidify this plan.

We are developing leaders with a twenty-first century mindset for ministry and connection. We are unearthing the spiritual and theological depth and capacity in our clergy, youth and lay leaders. Yes, we were stretched in 2020 as were every other region, due to COVID-19. Yet, what we learned was ministry is performed in places both inside and outside of a physical building. We took ministry to the streets by feeding the hungry, clothing those who needed covering and helping the community make ends meet. Many of our congregations built the significant partnerships with community organizations. Oftentimes, inviting them to help hold us accountable to our role as God’s agents in the earth. Ministry from our doorsteps was alive and well in 2020- We have had to grow in our usage of technology. It seemed that the digital divide was wide, and the learning curve was steep. However, we were able to offer **small technology grants** to ensure no congregation was left behind. As a region we are using several virtual platforms. We continue to make significant investments in equipment to step up our Social Media presence.

In February 2020, we had a third long range visioning meeting, before having to take a break due to the Corona virus. We all left that final meeting with a renew spirit, and anticipation of what the ‘Beloved Community in Tennessee’ could look like. We are not abandoning our hard work. We are determined to pick back up where we left off and renew ourselves in 2021. The priorities are the same. However, expanded.

- Radical Hospitality/ Becoming the “Beloved Community”
- Assisting Congregations and Clergy with the Search and Call
- Pastoral Care for Clergy and Congregations
- Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism
- Ensuring each congregation has technology and access to virtual platforms,
- Using Podcasts, Storytelling as a means of deepening connection,
- Virtual Newsletters

- Camp and Conference Programs for Young People
- Forming New Churches, and Redeveloping existence of congregations

### **Plans for 2021-2022:**

- Experience God whenever and wherever we come together (including ZOOM Workshops, Virtual Camping Programs, Facebook Live worship services and special activities and Regional Assembly in Nashville 2022, Bethany Hills and our area ministers' meetings)
- Know, and share our unity (Wherever we may be gathered as witnesses to justice, as caregivers to our communities, as the family of God, worshipping as one, ensuring that our commissions are diverse, and each receive pro-reconciliation training)
- Faithfully steward our resources for God's Work in the region and the World (More Congregations involved at Bethany Hills, more events, and trainings in the Region)
- Strive in our relationships to reflect Christ's love and welcome for everyone (including all our siblings, neighbors, and friends)
- Continue building a reconciling, beloved community (All are Welcome to Christ's Table as Christ has welcomed us. We will reflect this in our memberships with NOAH, MICAH, CALEB organizations)

### **Living out this call, the Tennessee Region will Rise up with a sense of:**

- New and Formative *Relationships* with the power to live out our call with a new sense of vision (One Region-One Church)
- *Inspiring* worship services, experiences through technology and traditional means. Liberating Sermons, Talks, and Messages for our congregants and affiliates
- *Spirit* Led Structure (People over Programs) Transformative Discipleship (Deep Spirituality, and Call to Prayer and Study)
- *Expectation*- Expecting God to move in our lives, congregation and amongst our people. We will continue being passion for impactful local and global relationships (Global Mission Partnerships, and Mission Trips)

### **Affiliating Congregations:**

February 2020, the Tennessee Regional Church added three new affiliating congregations to our family. Anointed Temple of Praise, Memphis; Senior Pastor the Rev. Dr. Thomas L. Murray; the Village Church, Nashville; Senior Pastor the Rev. Kelli X, and Soldiers of the Gospel; Clarksville, Senior Pastor the Rev. Tufele. We look forward to sharing in ministry with them, while extending an invitation for denomination wide opportunities and leadership.

### **Regional Assembly: October 9-10, 2020**

The Tennessee Regional Assembly, *"Making Room at the Table; Seeking Unity in our Diversity."* It was our first hybrid/ virtual assembly. We broadcasted live from Woodmont Christian Church in Nashville, and we streamed on ZOOM, You Tube, and Facebook Live platforms. We had over 1500 persons view the assembly during the weekend. Rev. Traci Blackmon was the guest preacher. Leading up to the assembly, we offered seven workshops on different weekends from June through October. All workshops were well attended. The content was superb. The workshops are now on YouTube for viewing.

### **Tennessee Region's Clergy:**

Today, I give thanks for each clergy person in the Tennessee region. Over the last year, each one has spent time in prayer, reflection and researching how to ensure the survival of a ministry. They have gone over and above creating videos and signing up on virtual platforms everywhere to encourage membership to remain connected. We met several times over ZOOM to pray, nurture, and even cry over feelings of exhaustion, fear and confusion. Each one is deserving of time off, and a salute for how they are walking through these unprecedented times. We have had workshops on the future and what's next. We had calls on self-care and coaching. We invite the Rev. Jake Morrill, a Unitarian Pastor from Oak Ridge, Tennessee to be in conversation via ZOOM with our clergy and guests to help look at the future of ministry and the church. COVID-19 showed up in a big way here in Tennessee. Although, a small number of our clergy reported being ill with COVID-19, several in our congregations were affected. We are standing strong in Tennessee and offer thanks to God for the strength we are receiving.

**Bethany Hills Camp and Conference Center:** Bethany Hills is our region's Camp and Conference Center, located in Kingston Springs, Tennessee. This 365-acre wooded

oasis is the site for spiritual, meaningful, and life-changing experiences for youth, clergy and persons desiring to grow closer to God in nature. We have made commitments to the camp and conference commission to build programming that exemplifies who God is calling us to be as a regional church and for the wider the State of Tennessee. In 2020 a Youth Program director was hired. She worked to plan youth retreats, and the summer camping season. We were one of several regions to participate in virtual camp. We had 100 youth in attendance. Each registrant received a box, filled with items pertaining to the theme of the camp for the week. It was successful, and we will be seeking ways to incorporate both virtual and in person platforms.

Bethany Hills partnered with Rev. Justina Rivera and Iglesia Cristiana Discipulos in Nashville, to distribute food boxes provided by USDA. We are feeding families in three counties. In 2020, three Camp workdays were implemented. A few have been scheduled for 2021. We continue to have significant remodeling and building projects happening at our campground. This is being offset by the generosity of so many.

*We met with all groups virtually and will continue doing so until further notice. At the time this report was written the Corona virus is in effect.*

### **SERF Regions:**

**September** 2020, the SERF regions met to spend time with Regional Ministers, and Regional Executive teams from our eight sister regions. North Carolina was our virtual host. It was a Luau theme. We continued the conversation around ways to effectively, collaborate while sharing in time of reflection and prayers.

### **Mission and Outreach:**

In 2020-2021, The Christian Church in Tennessee had a tornado, flood, COVID-19, and explosion. Thanks to the generosity of congregations, individual and organizations donations we were able to give \$16,000 in relief to organizations, churches, clergy, individuals needing support. Our region continues to work on helping those who are in need of our support through our “**Doorstep Grant Program.**” This opportunity is extended to individuals, congregations and other Non-Profit agencies with a mission helping youth, children, and those who are at risk, and in need. We offer these grants, and other supplies throughout the year to assist families, congregations and businesses affected by any disasters. In 2020, the Christian Church in Tennessee also offered financial support to DHM for the work of Natalie B. Teague, as she works with immigration.

**The Tennessee Disciples Women Ministries:** This thriving group of women, provide excellent opportunities for worship and fellowship throughout of the entire region. They

met through ZOOM and help to put forth our inaugural ***The Leadership Apprentice Program***: The LAP Program is new to us, and we were excited. The Tennessee Disciple Women under the leadership of Rev. Debra Reid collaborated with Dr. Megan Lowe to host this program. We were able to support and encourage ten women from around the state to learn and grow in their understanding of church leadership. The Women met several times on ZOOM. They incorporated a book club, and other activities that invited the ladies to communicate with a diverse group of Women of Color Leaders from around the denomination.

**The Commission on Ministry** of this region continues to support and encourage candidates for ministry through the ordination and commissioned ministry process. Thoughtful, engaging interviews encourage the candidate to bring forth their best as they enter the context of the ministry to which they feel called. The Commission meets in Memphis and Nashville on a regular basis throughout the year. In 2020, two candidates were ordained. In 2021, we have had one virtual ordination. In conjunction with New Direction Christian Church, we will invite twenty or more lay pastors to our commissioning process this year.

**The Disciples Divinity House** at Vanderbilt provides a lively setting for the support of ministerial students. In November of 2020, the Rev. Beth Pattillo, concluded her ministry as interim Dean of the Divinity House. Rev. Mark Calvert Rosenberger stepped in for a time to help transition the house as they make a call to the new dean. We have been working on ways for the Regional Office and the House to continue strengthening their partnerships.

**The Regional Elders Program**: The Christian Church in Tennessee has six active regional elders who have been strategically placed around the Region to help assist pastors, clergy and others as an additional layer of care and ministry.

**One Region-One Book**: We adopted the one region one book to assist us as a region in a collective study throughout the region. The 2020 Book was, "*The Color of Law*" by Richard Rothstein

#### **2021-2022 CLERGY/LAITY EVENTS:**

Elders Retreat- March 2021

Tennessee Youth Spring Fling Virtual Retreat: March -April 2021

Tennessee Disciples Women Virtual Spiritual Journey Retreats: March-April 2021

Clergy Retreat-May 2021

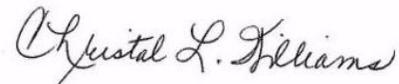
**Parker Palmer “Circle of Trust retreat”:** 2021, the Tennessee region will offer its second retreat in 2021. This will be open to all in the Tennessee region, as well as any other friends, and colleagues from other regions.

**Deepening Disciples:** Since March 2020, we embarked upon a regional prayer group. This prayer group which consists of 20 members from around the region meets every Saturday morning at 8 am on ZOOM. Spending time in quiet reflection, Scripture readings and theological conversations opens the door for a refreshing time of weekly prayer. The prayer group also receive special prayer requests from clergy and others affiliated with our region and beyond.

**Healthy Boundaries Workshops:** In 2020, there were three Healthy boundaries workshops offered. Each was well attended, and more are to be expected in 2021. This will include the 201 classes. We are also offering Train the Trainer events.

**Pro-Reconciliation Workshops:** The Tennessee Regional Assembly voted to make Healthy Boundaries and Pro-Reconciliation workshops a priority. Every five years our clergy must have these class to maintain standing. Currently, all seminary students, commissioned and ordained clergy are included. Our Pro-Reconciliation team held three virtual workshops in 2020, reaching over ninety clergy. There will be several trainings held in 2021 that will include laity.

Submitted by,



Rev. Christal L. Williams  
Regional Minister & President,  
January 31, 2021

### **Camp Ground**

Bethany Hills Camp  
1080 Bethany Hills Road  
Kingston Springs, TN 37082  
(615) 952-9184  
Dee Wells, Manager