

**GB-21-1169**



**Report of the Christian Church in Indiana**  
to the General Board of the Christian Church  
(Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada  
**2021**

**Richard L. Spleth, Regional Minister**  
**Julia A. Johnson, Regional Moderator**

**Indiana Identity Statement**

The Christian Church in Indiana is a diverse community of congregations called by God to act together in love.

**Regional Staff**

Richard L. Spleth, Regional Minister  
Carolyn Reed, Associate Regional Minister  
Charissa Ramey, Regional Coordinator for Camping Ministries  
Maribeth Westerfield, Regional Coordinator for Women's Ministries  
Sarah Riester, FLOURISH! Program Administrator and Office Manager  
Candace Boyd Wylie, Ministry Associate  
Sandy Kincaid, Ministry Associate

**Regional Office**

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**Congregations pivot to virtual worship**



2020 was a year like no other in the 171-year history of the Christian Church in Indiana. The global pandemic changed just about everything in the life of the Region. In impressive ways our congregations moved quickly beginning in March to virtual worship platforms. Pastors and lay leaders quickly gained skill and expertise in video editing and live streaming of their services. In short time ministers learned to preach in meaningful ways to empty sanctuaries, inviting their members to share communion around their home tables

## Regional facemasks distributed

This year changed how we dressed. In support of our pastors and lay leaders we quickly ordered and distributed 1,000 facemasks to help our clergy and leaders model for all the need to wear masks for the health and safety of everyone. All were grateful for the gift and many responded that it was their favorite mask.



## Regional office closed



In response to the COVID crisis the Regional office closed on March 16 asking our staff to work remotely from that point forward. We equipped everyone with the necessary computer equipment to assist them in doing so. All meetings, including the Regional Board, have been by Zoom since that time. One advantage is that Rick Spleth and Carolyn Reed can be pastorally present in multiple locations on the same day, increasing our reach across the Region.

## The Regional Assembly goes virtual

COVID restrictions forced the 2020 Regional Assembly to be held in a virtual format—very successfully. We had 322 persons register for the event held October 2 and 3 which represented a typical registration number.

Lisania Martinez, a Disciples of Christ pastor from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, served as the keynoter for the event and the speaker for our women's gathering. General Minister and President Terri Hord Owens offered the sermon for our worship service. A combined choir led by Chris Higgins, who also served as the technical producer for the Assembly, moved us with their anthem "By Our Love". The 4-minute video may be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y55lsFuuoPk>

*This anthem was produced as part of the Regional Assembly's event license. It will NOT be covered under other congregation's licenses, so you will not be protected if you decide to use this in your worship or post it online.*



2020 Regional Assembly  
of the Christian Church in Indiana 



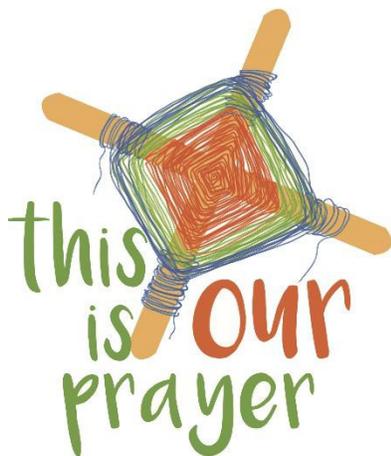
## Regional Board issues statement on racism

In response to the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, the Regional Board spent extended time in June discussing ways in which our anti-racism efforts as a Regional church needed to expand beyond education for clergy to include the whole church. A statement was

crafted committing ourselves to that task and expressing our lament for the brokenness of our society and the injustice inflicted on sisters and brothers of color. Our statement closed with these words.

**We invite** the ministers and members of our congregations to join us in humble reflection and committed action, to dismantle the structures of racism as they exist within our church and our nation,

- until all are as angry about injustice as those who have suffered its effect so long,
- until seats at the table move beyond tokenism and all God's people are equally valued, and
- until God's justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.



## Summer camps suspended and replaced by virtual campfires

We waited as long as we could, but by mid-May it was clear that we could not hold our summer camps as we have for 125 years. (We looked it up and the Region did not suspend camps in 1918 during the Spanish Flu—maybe not the best decision then.) Our Directors and counselors rallied and created virtual campfires for each camp that were held by Zoom in July. Every camper received a “camp in a box” kit with materials and curriculum they could use in their home.

The Bedford Camp used this summer to begin some needed capital improvements. From our Barbee Camp Legacy Fund, we were able to provide both our campgrounds, Bedford and Geneva, with gifts of over \$25,000 for capital improvements.

## **FLOURISH! Program also moves on-line**

Like everything else our FLOURISH! program addressing clergy financial education and indebtedness moved online and the Financial Literacy Academies, held spring and fall, and peer groups all continued in a virtual platform. With grants



from the Lilly Endowment Inc. and the generous support of Indiana Disciples we have been able to award \$852,000 to 49 pastors who have completed the program. Another 25 are in process and will potentially receive together \$306,000. As helpful as those grants are to our pastoral families, the participants indicate that the education they receive, which builds their sense of confidence and competence, is the greatest benefit. A new 5-minute video which captures some of the energy of this project can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwEDfOlpbQ4>

## **“Mexico Initiative” trip postponed**

As borders began to close in the spring due to the rapidly spreading pandemic, we made the decision to postpone the planned Regional trip to Los Fresnos, Texas and the Mexico border. It is hoped that we will be able to re-schedule that trip in 2021 or 2022 and renew and continue our effort to gain insight into the life and work of Disciples in Mexico and the immigration crisis on our border.

## **Staff changes**

We give thanks for the work of April Scott, who served as our FLOURISH! Program Director for two years, and Nathan Kibler, who served as our youth ministries coordinator for three years, who completed their service with us at the end of the year. Sarah Riester has now assumed responsibility as the administrator of the FLOURISH! program in addition to serving as our office manager.

## **Support provided to the Ohio Region**

In 2020 we continued to support to the Ohio Region in their time of leadership transition. Regional Minister Rick Spleth is covering 25 congregations on the western side of Ohio, and along with Regional Ministers from Michigan, Kentucky, and West Virginia/Pennsylvania providing support to the Regional Council, Regional Elders, and Moderator of our sister Region. It is anticipated that this support will conclude in early 2021 when a new Ohio Regional Minister is called.



## Indiana Disciples represented in the Festival of Trees

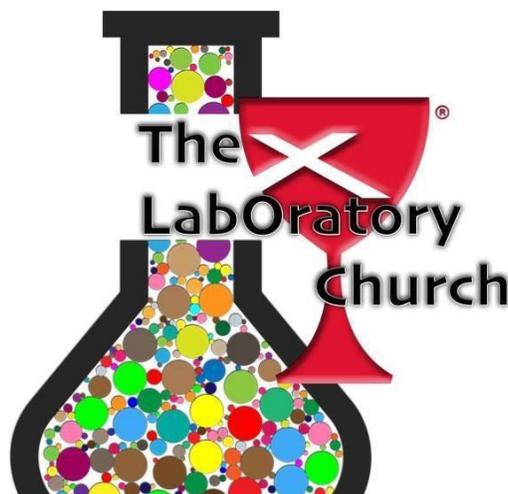


Central Indiana Disciples congregations collaborated to decorate a tree for the annual Festival of Trees at the Indiana Historical Society in Indianapolis. Entering a Disciples tree in the festival was the idea of Rev. Glenda Survance, pastor of First Christian Church, Mooresville. A frequent attendee of this event, she noticed that there were no trees sponsored by church groups. Glenda's vision was to represent the "All means All" welcome that our congregations extend. She said "While 'All means All' includes LGBT+ individuals and families, it also includes those who are looking for a place where they can work out their faith especially if they are deconstructing/reconstructing what they believe. In our corner of the world, it also especially includes those struggling with mental illness . . . It is a message of welcome so many don't get to hear." That message is symbolized by a variety of hands on the tree representing all manner of

sub-groups of the human family, a ribbon that proclaims, "All means All," and a Disciples chalice tree topper.

## New church launched

Of all years to start a new congregation, Rev. Amie Vanderford picked a good one. The LabOratory Church, a new Disciples of Christ congregation began in the Fountain Square area of Indianapolis in January and then just weeks later, like all other churches, had to go virtual. Amie and her husband, Thaddeus Shelton, co-founder and Minister of Mental Health, understand their congregation to be particularly focused on those who have experienced trauma. They think that in 2020 that is everyone. The new church is also focused on food security and has been able to launch a community garden even during the pandemic.



### And if COVID wasn't enough, we had a flood!

In May our office suite, which we share with the Indiana-Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ, had a major flood due to a burst pipe. The repairs were covered fully by the insurance company for the Indiana Interchurch Center, where we are located, but it required that we completely move out of our offices for several weeks. Since we were already working remotely it did not result in any work disruption, just some extra work packing and unpacking.



### Christmas Offering and finances



Most Indiana congregations reported that their income held steady in 2020 despite gathering for worship, thanks to the faithful giving of their members. The Indiana Region itself exceeded its budget income expectations in every line in 2021—Disciples Mission Fund, Annual Fund, and the Christmas offering, and due to travel restrictions had decreased expenses. Following the

theme for this year's Christmas offering we created a 2-minute video of people in the Region declaring how the Region made their heart rejoice which may be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmOuiBWuY4>

We give thanks for the many blessings we have discovered this year and the opportunity to be the church in this time.

Richard L. Spleth, Regional Minister

Julia A. Johnson, Regional Moderator

### Campgrounds

Bedford Camp and Conference Center  
RR 15, Box 1026  
Bedford, IN 47421

Geneva Camp and Conference Center  
5282 N. Old US 31  
Rochester, IN 26975