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Christian Church in Kansas (Disciples of Christ)

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February 2021 General Board Report

The past few years have been interesting and, in many ways successful. Following a 3-year visioning process, the region has adopted *"Together we Connect & Equip"* as the overall mission for our shared ministries. Three goals were established as well. The Region continues to transform as we have left the formal top-down organizational plan behind and replaced it with what we call a "leadership round table." This has opened the doors for new initiatives which are not necessarily staff driven.

Ken Marston and Steve Martin share the regional minister responsibilities. Renee Bridwell retired at the end of 2019 and we did not seek a replacement but took steps to provide new leadership. We established a part time director of communications, Steve Hart. For the first time, we have a director of Men's Ministries, Luis Mendez. The staff now number 10 and we have leadership spread in all the right places.

Like every region, the COVID outbreak did us few favors. We canceled our camp program and all other conferences at Tawakoni. Clergy meetings and administrative meetings all took on the Zoom platform. In some ways participation may have been increased. Yet like everyone else, we continue to miss the face-to-face encounters which bring meaning to our work relationships.

Kansas participates with Nebraska and Greater Kansas City regions in what we call **Tri-Regional Conversations**. The primary goal is for the three regions to know each other better, and “*discover ways to strengthen the connection and vitality of the Church in its Local, Regional and General expressions.*” These conversations include each of the regional ministers and three “non-staff” members from each partner. The group have invited an outside facilitator to work alongside the steering committee. Zoom calls are monthly and are just beginning to allow us to envision the future possibilities.

A new venture is **New Church Ministry**. The support team is currently interviewing six candidates for a 3-year position to serve as director of this work. The hope is that this effort will not only discover new models of church but will also lead and inspire existing congregations to find new ways to revitalize their ministries.

Disciples Center at Tawakoni lost nearly all paying guests from 2019. Fortunately, we are blessed with many who made additional gifts to the camp, and we are blessed to have reserve accounts from which we could borrow to cover the debt of operations. We did celebrate with the first on-line Gala & Auction which raised nearly \$10,000.

Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation team has been gathered. In 2020 this group had several zoom meetings where they discussed Ibram Kendi’s book *How to be an Anti-Racist* and they went through Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciling training with the help of the office of Reconciliation. Unfortunately, one of the key leaders has moved from the region and we need to reassemble this group. They will be meeting again the first part of February of 2021 to pick up and continue this work.

Our Ministry Commission continues to be busy with guiding seminarians and others seeking to serve in ministry. Currently we have 10 who are in the ordination track, and 11 who are Commissioned Ministers. We are grateful to Phillips Theological Seminary for offering courses for the Certificate in Ministry program for laity including the Disciples History & Polity course. Boundary Training for clergy continues. The current emphasis is on “Living Healthy Life-styles” which will focus on ways to manage stress so that clergy make better ethical choices. Clergy with Standing are required to participate every three years.

Spiritual Formation - In 2020, the last in-person gathering was our annual Regional Spiritual Retreat which was led by Bill Rose-Heim, Regional Minister of the Greater Kansas City Region. We have been experimenting with other ways of doing this work for most of 2020: a weekly prayer circle via Zoom; Spiritual Growth Affinity groups are being organized (we are in the middle of the second offering, which is focused on the practice of prayer journaling, as this is being written.)

Youth ministries in the region have taken a solid “hit” during pandemic. Last summer’s camp season was canceled, although we offered virtual camps. Only a few participated in these. Typically, each spring we have a youth retreat, and it has been canceled. The Youth Cabinet have been put on hold. Our longstanding and beloved International Affairs Seminar (IAS) has been canceled with little hope of offering it again. This

summer's camp program will be offered with 50% fewer beds due to COVID restrictions. Kansas has always had a strong, vibrant program and without a doubt we will be rebuilding the program once the COVID restrictions are lessened.

Monthly Clergy meetings continue via Zoom. Unfortunately, the participation is far from when we met in person. Throughout the Region there is a strong sense of support and participation. The Kansas version of clergy Bethany retreats could not happen in 2020 but has been a very nurturing time for our clergy who have participated in them.

Finances: The region continues to be blessed with earnings from faithful disciples of the past. A new finance committee will assemble to make recommendations regarding endowment earnings and the General Fund. The Kansas Plan returns to the general church 52% of all offerings. In addition, we are fortunate to know the support of many for special projects and for the operations at Disciples Center at Tawakoni. The total sent for the larger church mission is \$346,296 which reflects a decrease of 3.29% compared to 2019.

Disciples Women: Like all other ministries, Disciples Women was faced with a challenge in 2020 to find a way to keep our women uplifted, connected, and inspired.

In lieu of an in-person retreat, we held our first virtual retreat in 2020. Our theme was "Contemplating Spiritual Disciplines." Seventy women attended.

Our big project for 2020 was the creation of "Dining with Disciples" cookbook. The project was created to give net proceeds to the Jones Lodge construction fund at Disciples Center. At the close of 2020, we had contributed \$7,200 to the fund.

Other projects included in 2020 were: 1) KDW Moments, a posting of a devotion, poem or personal reflection by Cabinet members on the Disciples Women Facebook page. 2) Cupcake Chatter. An opportunity for women to gather weekly virtually to share joys, concerns and prayer.

Disciples Men: In 2020 we had to cancel our annual Men's Retreat due to Covid-19. This year we are planning a retreat (Odyssey Project) in April, a Kansas Disciples Men's endeavor to intentionally help boys, their father figures, and men in general, to develop Christ-like character.

We also have a Fall Men's Retreat for September 24-25. Our guest speaker will be, Alex Ruth. The theme is: "Beyond Brotherhood" (Friendship as a model for growing Men of Faith) John 15:15.

Communications Office - One of our goals under our new Vision/Mission of "Connecting and Equipping each other for Mission and Ministry" is substantially increasing our communication abilities. To this end, we have been expanding our social media presence to various platforms (Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat), and now to utilizing a text messaging application. This is in addition to our traditional communication conduits of our Regional Web page, monthly email of the "Kansas Messenger" newsletter, and Facebook pages for both the region and our camp facilities.

In addition, we are working on plans to upgrade regional technology hardware and how to partner with our congregations on their upgrades. Finally, we will once again offer a series of four workshops for pastors, church secretaries, and other congregational communication people to help them improve their newsletters, internet web presence and other electronic means of communication.

One of the challenges we face as a region is overcoming the diversity of technological access that exists between our diverse community of congregations. Some of our congregations are in rural areas where there is no high-speed broadband internet service provided. Others do not have the financial resources to invest in the UpToDate equipment to run some of the programs for connecting electronically. Then there is the challenge of overcoming the generational attitudes of the use of this technology.

It has been rewarding to accept every back-step, like cancellation of Regional Assembly and church camp, with a team spirit of, "If that won't work, what can we do?" The never give up attitude, and the willingness of the church to provide us with new communication tools as we need them has been uplifting and helps us continue battling.

Cooperating ministry of the region

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