

GB-21-1174
Christian Church of Mid-America

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General Board Report 2020

**Submitted by Paul Koch, Regional Minister with input by Regional Ministers Ron
Routledge and Christine K. Chenoweth**

- Values** In keeping with Ephesians 4:11-12, Mid-America Disciples affirm the core values of true community (mutual support and accountability), deep Christian spirituality, and passion for justice.
- Mission** The Mid-America Region's mission is to resource and support congregations, individually and collectively, as they seek to be more faithful, effective, and sustainable in the mission to which God calls us.
- Vision** The Mid-America Region is envisioned as a continuously developing network of relationships that includes broader and deeper participation by congregations, ministers, and laity in congregational clusters, learning communities, and shared mission and ministries.

A decision was made at the October 24, 2015 Regional Assembly in Columbia to merge the four Areas and Region to become one Region with one board and one budget, effective January 1, 2016. We have just completed our fifth year in this new model. Upon reaching this milestone, a Vision Team has been organized and is working toward evaluating our model; clarifying our Values, Mission, and Vision as we move forward; and developing a new five-year plan for our third decade in the new millennium. The Christian Church of Mid-America is a Missouri benevolent corporation duly organized, existing, and in good standing.

The year 2020 compelled our Region to look inward, reach outward, and fine-tune many adjustments irrespective of future planned Visioning goals. By February, a previously staffed Region of four Co-Regional Ministers was reduced to two upon one resignation in the prior fall and one retirement. Regional Ministers **The Rev. Dr. Paul Koch** and

The Rev. Ronald Routledge have shared responsibility for the pastoral care of congregations and clergy, as well as for search and call. In June, **The Rev. Dr. Christine K. Chenoweth** was called as Transitional Regional Minister. A prior working model of four geographic quadrants was modified to three: West, East, and South. The Vision Team will recommend, and the Regional Board will ultimately decide on regional ministry staffing models after transition and budget evaluation. The Regional Minister Team (RMT) has no “team leader” or senior Regional Minister but work in a non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal Matrix model of shared leadership.

To supplement ministry needs in the Region, **Jeni Brown** and **Susan Moore**, who have been serving for years as support staff, were recognized for their contributions and promoted to being Ministry Associates. Each Associate staffs a church-donated physical office in Springfield and St. Louis respectively, while the Regional Ministers and other staff primarily work in home and mobile offices.

The Rev. Katherine Kinnamon transitioned from chair of the Regional Commission on the Order of Ministry to being a contracted Coordinator of RCOM. She manages all process, procedures, and logistics of the ministry in heavy consultation with the RMT for policy related matters. **The Rev. Jennifer Long** was contracted as Disciples Women Coordinator. These ministers supplement three existing contacted ministry positions for Camps and Outdoor Ministries, two for Convocation Ministries (shared), one for Older Adult Ministries, one for Communications, and one for Older Adult Ministries.

Each Regional Minister carries a specific Regional and Wider Church outreach portfolio, where authority and accountability rests. **The Rev. Dr. Paul Koch** is responsible for youth and outdoor ministries, leadership development, older adult ministries, Mid-America Men & Friends ministries, Convocation, Anti-Racism / Pro-Reconciliation Justice Ministries (ARPRJM), and Wider Church relations which includes serving on the College of Regional Ministers and ex-officio on the General Board. **The Rev. Ronald Routledge** is responsible for new church development, rural church, and church vitality. A major endeavor he shepherds is At The Same Table, highlighted below. He also provides support for our Disciples Care Team, Global Ministries, disaster preparation, volunteers in mission, budget, personnel, and is President of the Corporation. **The Rev. Dr. Christine K. Chenoweth** is getting to know and working with congregations and pastors in the southern third of the region (some who have had three regional ministers in four years) and works with the Vision Team, the Regional Commission on the Order of Ministry, Disciples Women, promoting and shepherding Disciples Mission Fund, other Stewardship and mission endeavors.

Mid-America is a Global Missions Region. Our congregations are raising money in partnership with Global Ministries to help support **The Rev. Dr. Larry and Debbie Colvin**, who are serving in Peki, Ghana in health and higher education ministries and **Elena Huegel** who is serving in Chiapas, Mexico and is working with indigenous folks to uplift cultural heritage. We hope to schedule a people-to-people trip to Ghana in 2021 or 2022.

COVID-19 Ministry Adjustments and New Opportunities

Mid-America Regional Assemblies are held every two years with prior plans for our 2020 one being held October 1-3 at the Lake of the Ozarks. In early summer, the planning team in consultation with the host congregation, Lake Ozark Christian Church, decided that the physical three-day Assembly could not happen due to COVID-19 so our gathering was held virtually over Facebook and You Tube. Worship, reports, Bible study, welcoming of new ministers, postcards from Global ministers, a mechanism for necessary voting, plus some fun and games were transformed into a 100-minute pre-recorded production. Our Theme “Better Together – a Strong 3-Fold Cord,” inspired by Eccles. 4:12b, helped unify our triad message of General | Regional | Local unity, Trinitarian unity, and Regional geographic unity.

Other elements of the Assembly were also modified. Our keynote sermon from Dr. Richard Ward (ret. Craddock Professor of Homiletics from our partner seminary, PTS) was delivered for congregational use and personal devotion for the Sunday before. Most of every planned workshop became an offering for “Better Together Thursdays,” a one-hour interactive forum over Zoom that occurred every Thursday over four months. General, Regional and Local ministers all shared incredible wisdom on a variety of church resource topics. The recordings and shared resources were preserved on our website for further resourcing. Exhibit Hall displays became an interactive webpage with links provided.

Our 15-member Regional Board conducted Mid-America’s business over Zoom as did our Regional Commission on the Order of Ministry and Commissioning Ministry Teams. The time efficiency and cost-saving benefits were duly noted as we plan what a post-pandemic Regional ministry will entail. In working with Treasury Services, we applied for and received federal Payroll Protection Plan (PPP) loans and are working to qualify these loans as grants.

Mid-America Anti-Racism / Pro-Reconciliation Justice Ministries (ARPRJM) moved their annual training online twice which proved to be a highly engaging and creative vehicle.

In-person Boundary Trainings were replaced by engaging with The Lewis Center webinar downloads on boundaries and sexual ethics.

Sadly, the always anticipated Assembly fellowship gatherings and meals could not be held virtually; some other planned events, fellowship, and recreational activities ended up having to be cancelled. In addition, our spring Convocation gathering, Disciples Women gatherings, Disciples Men retreats, installations, and all summer camps had to be cancelled. Some virtual alternatives were in place but cannot be considered as replacements. Each ministry is gearing up to what will work should the pandemic continue well into 2021.

We were saddened to lose two clergy to COVID-19 (one active, one retired) and are aware of around a dozen clergy who reported to have the virus. As the pandemic worsened in terms of infection rates, the Regional Board decided on Nov. 21 to encourage congregations to worship digitally or with other safety protocol modifications and that all regional ministers and staff shall not travel to congregations until infection rates are within CDC recommended guidelines.

Common Mission Priorities Progress Report

New Church:

Mid-America is comprised of 236 congregations. Our clergy are organized into 23 clusters, which are continuing to be supported and strengthened. Mid-America currently has four congregations in formation. Each continues to grow in average worship attendance and outreach:

1. The Chuukese Christian Church (St. Joseph) – Pastor Nerleb Likisap.
2. New Hope Community Christian Church (North St. Louis County) – The Rev. Rhonda Aldridge, founding pastor.
3. Oasis Dinner Church (Corder) – The Rev. Matt Limback, founding pastor, which launched Oct. 6, 2019.
4. The Connecting Grounds (Springfield – a social services/human needs worshiping community) – Founder and Pastor Christie Love, June 15, 2020. Chuukese Christian Church is helping in developing a second Chuukese church in Noel. Another pastor is consulting on a possible additional congregation forming also in southwest Missouri.

Transforming Congregations:

The forum, “At the Same Table – the Future of Mid-America Ministry” was first convened in 2015 and was ready to begin the next phase at Regional Assembly. This

takes a critical and also celebratory work of the value and contribution of Commissioned Clergy. Mid-America has 61 Commissioned Ministers presently serving congregations. Sadly, this forum had to be postponed due to the pandemic. At the Same Table ideals and patterns will continue to be a focus in 2021.

Leader Development:

The Mid-America Commission on the Order of Ministry (in partnership with mentors and congregations) works with and nurtures ordination candidates. Currently, there are 18 eighteen candidates under care, who are preparing for ordination. In addition, four geographically deployed Commissioning Ministry teams work with and nurture commissioned ministers on behalf of the Commission. There are currently 61 commissioned ministers serving in ministry across Mid-America. All active ministers with standing in our Region are required to complete a minimum of 15 clock hours of continuing education annually. This is in addition to boundary training and AR/PR training required every three years.

Mid-America also continues to offer training to congregations for older adult ministries through gerontologist, Jan Aerie. An NBA grant helped immensely for this ministry to continue and thrive online. Four study videos for congregational use were produced along with Bible studies especially for Older Adults and dozens of useful links.

Pro-Reconciling/Anti-Racism initiatives:

Each of our Regional Board meetings are opened with an AR/PR moment. All Regional Ministries from Summer Camps, to Mid-America Men & Friends, to Disciples Women etc. show great intention to recruit persons of color for operations and activities plus evaluate ministry endeavors to include multiple perspectives.

The Mid-America Pro-Reconciling/Anti-racism/Justice Ministries Team offers awareness and organizing training to our congregations. The Regional Commission on the Order of Ministry requires that training for all Mid-America clergy. Two online training sessions to meet standing requirements were offered in the fall and deemed highly effective in the virtual format. An Eden Theological Seminary Contextual Education student was secured to help our ARPRJM team, in particular to help develop further intersectionality training.

Gender Equality:

Mid-America has made great strides in 2020 to form an active Regional Alliance Q network in consultation with General Church Alliance Q. They meet regularly to resource and strategize for growth. Two Better Together Thursday workshops were

devoted to Gender Inclusion ministries, each with above-average participation. To our knowledge nine (9) congregations have declared themselves to be Open and Affirming.

Please visit our website at: www.mid-america-disciples.org and Facebook

Benevolent Institution with relationship through the Mid America Region:

WOODHAVEN LEARNING CENTER
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