

**GB-21-1180**  
**The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Oklahoma**

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**Leadership**

Pamela G. Holt, Regional Minister  
Michael Davison, Associate Regional  
Minister  
Marilyn Bohlender, Disciples Women  
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Dwight Weber, Disciples Men's  
President

**Report to the General Board**  
**Prepared by Pamela G. Holt, Regional Minister**  
**December 21, 2020**

**Continuing to Connect, Empower, and Equip**  
**Oklahoma Disciples to Love & Serve Like Jesus**  
**In a Pandemic**

**Administrative**

The Christian Church in Oklahoma continues to be served by staff: Rev. Pamela Holt, Regional Minister; Rev. Michael Davison, Associate Regional Minister; Ellen Spleth, Executive Assistant. Jennifer Gallaway, Administrative Assistant departed in August of 2020.

The Christian Church in Oklahoma is called to connect, empower, and equip Disciples to love and serve like Jesus even in a pandemic. Since March, the year has been a challenge for regional programming. We are grateful for the Region's investment in technology which has allowed us to continue to serve creatively and in new ways.

Oklahoma's Disciples continue to be generous in their support of the ministry of the wider church even through the pandemic. Giving was surprising and strong in 2020. In addition to DMF and Special Day Offerings, the Christian Church in Oklahoma receives financial support from generous donors through the Oklahoma Annual Fund, and distributions from endowment funds invested by saints of the Church with the Oklahoma Disciples Foundation and the Christian Church Foundation.

**Ministry in Extraordinary Times**

No one has been exempt from this unprecedented season of a pandemic. Life began to change rapidly in mid-March and all aspects of ministry changed for clergy and congregations. The grief, from transitioning to on-line worship and deaths, is real and deep and feels unending. We've seen in clergy and congregations stages of denial, anger, tears, frustration, depression. It is difficult to get to the healing stages of grief because we are still in the midst of such pain.

However, this pandemic has also revealed our determination and commitment and love of serving Jesus. In mid-March, within a week, pastors and congregations figured out how to worship on-line. Worships around the Region are so creative! Some congregations cautiously figured out how to return to the sanctuary. Others continue to worship on-line. Some found worshipping outdoors to be particularly meaningful.

As time marched on, ministers and members found new ways to connect with their flock. Leadership teams stepped up to do more connecting with their people. While it is not the same and while still longing to be together, folks still have their eyes fixed on Jesus giving thanks every Sunday, taking communion virtually, and offering gifts electronically.

Oklahoma congregations have found ways to continue their ministry in the community by feeding the hungry, preparing and serving hot meals and delivering, making backpacks, making activity bags and delivering to doorsteps, hosting drive bys for a celebration of a birthday or a graduation, renovating the pre-school areas or children's areas, providing school for struggling students, paying attention to the health care workers and chaplain colleagues, taking a special offering for their neighbors or Week of Compassion. They altered their witness and care for one another the best they could when they could not be physically present with one another, especially in sickness or in death. Oklahoma Disciples have picked up the essentials and are still witnesses to the love and grace of God. It is hard and challenging us at every level. And, it is beautiful.

### **Disaster Relief**

Oklahoma is not new to disasters. From the 1995 Murrah Bombing to almost annual violent tornados to wild fires, Oklahoma has a well developed system of care through VOAD, the Medical Reserve Corps, and Stress Response Teams. The pandemic, however, has given new meaning to disaster care. Realizing the deep grief, the OK Region partnered with the United Methodist Church to provide a series of webinars called "Caring for Your Congregation and Community During Crisis." This series ran from the end of September through December. It was so well received, that this partnership and series will continue into 2021 and will be called "Caring in Crisis: Tuesday Briefs. These webinars will run February through May.

Oklahoma has also established a Covid-19 Disaster Fund to help Disciples struggling through this continued pandemic. Grants will be available in 2021.

### **Welcome to Ministry**

The Commission on Clergy granted standing to 213 clergy which include 151 ordained ministers and commissioned pastors; 62 of which are retired active and inactive clergy. The Region currently has 12 on the journey towards ordination or commissioned ministry. The Commission on Clergy approved the ordination of 2 candidates into Christian ministry in 2020: Cece Jones-Davis at Edmond Trinity Christian Church, Edmond; Gregory Chambers at New Hope Christian Church, OKC. The Region also serves 140 congregations. The 2020 Regional Assembly welcomed Simplicity Christian

Church OKC as a recognized congregation. The Region continues to nurture 2 congregations in formation as Disciples of Christ.

### **Called to Serve in Oklahoma**

Believe it or not Search and Call for new ministers continues! Tulsa Harvard Avenue called Rev. David Emery to serve as Lead Minister. Lawton FCC called Rev. Paul Appleby to serve as Senior Minister. Pawnee FCC called Rev. Richmond Adams to serve as Senior Minister at Pawnee FCC. Norman FCC called Rev. Dr. Tom Lyda to serve as Associate Minister. Duncan West Side called Rev. Ron Motley to serve as a Bi-Vocational Pastor. Nowata FCC called Rev. Elizabeth Grasham to serve as Minister. Southern Hills called Rev. Dr. Rob Crawford to serve as Senior Minister.

### **2020 Regional Assembly**

Due to the pandemic, the 2020 Regional Assembly scheduled for May was cancelled and rescheduled for a digital format in September of 2020. This meant a reorganization of the whole event including being in compliance with Oklahoma's Constitution & Bylaws. On September 26, 2020, Oklahoma offered the Regional Assembly partly pre-recorded, partly live both on Zoom and YouTube, thanks to a gifted tech team.

### **Stewardship**

Stewardship in congregations around the region is healthy. Congregations were eligible for the Payroll Protection loans which helped ease financial anxieties, and faithful giving reportedly has been steady to increasing. The Region purchased the resources from the Center for Faith & Giving for 2020 for every congregation to have access and recently Oklahoma Disciples Foundation hosted webinars on Essentials for Giving during a Pandemic with Bruce Barkhauer, the executive director of the Center for Faith & Giving. Stewardship is vital to our faith, especially in a time such as this. It is one of several ways we give thanks to God for God's steadfast love and amazing grace which the Psalmist says follows us or pursues us all the days of our lives.

### **Pro Reconciliation Anti-Racism**

The Commission on Faith in Action partnered with the Commission on Clergy in 2019 to offer Pro-Reconciliation Anti-Racism training for Oklahoma ministers. PRAR was required for 2020 Standing. To date, 98% of Oklahoma ministers have taken this training. We know that a one day training does not "fix" systemic racism but it is the beginning of a new way of seeing how our hurtful words and actions can be transformed to bring healing and wholeness.

This past year has given clergy ample opportunity to be advocates for social justice standing with, speaking out, protesting and advocating for justice as we witnessed the veil ripping to expose and reveal many heartbreaking moments of systemic injustice.

### **Mission Beyond our Borders**

Oklahoma is a strong proponent of mission beyond its borders. Mission in Caminante, an organization working in the city of Boca Chica in the Dominican Republic. While

there are usually two mission trips to Caminante, there was no travel in 2020. However, the financial support of this ministry continues through Global Ministries.

Mission with Reach Beyond Mission was cancelled, yet Oklahoma continues to financially support RBM.

### **Camp & Conference**

One of the most heartbreaking and painful decisions in the Spring was to cancel International Affairs and the whole summer camp and conference ministry. This created yet another layer of grief for both the campers, parents and volunteer adults who love camp and conference. However, in wonder and amazement, Michael Davison, with the help of the Commission on Children, Youth & Young Adults, created a virtual camp experience for youth. In addition, Michael, with the help of some other ministers, created a virtual vacation bible school experience for Oklahoma and the denomination's use.

### **Refugee & Immigration Ministry**

Despite the pandemic, Oklahoma has received a second family into our Region. This family has been well received and cared for by several of our congregations committed to Refugee & Immigration Ministry.

### **New Technology Opportunities**

In the fall of 2020, the Oklahoma Disciples Foundation provided technology training for clergy and congregations. This training will continue into 2021 to help our congregations continue to strengthen their on-line presence to their congregants and beyond.

The Region has established a video library of sermons by Regional staff and other clergy and Phillips Theological Seminary professors. These are designed to be available to clergy and congregations when a day of rest is much needed or a pulpit supply need.

The Region is also in the process of establishing "podcasts" which continue to highlight our leadership and clergy in the Region.

### **Priorities for 2021**

There are two priorities for the next two years:

First, is to get the Regional Office and its tenants moved from 301 NW 36th Street. The Region's 60 year lease with FCC OKC comes to an end in November of 2023. The Region is planning to launch a fund raising opportunity for a move.

Second, is to covenant once again to serve as and be Disciples of Christ. What does this mean? That we covenant with one another to make communities where justice happens. That we covenant with one another to love our neighbor more than we love ourselves. That we covenant with one another to be messengers of the Divine image in the world bearing God's love and amazing grace, and God's kindness and care for all of creation.

The Regional Board continues to express their gratitude for the Regional Staff — Ellen, Michael and Pam — for their continued commitment, passion, and joy-full work on behalf the Region and the larger church. We all have learned how to work remotely and are still determining what is essential for this day and time.

Peace & God's Grace,  
Rev. Pamela G. Holt, Regional Minister

### **Camp Grounds**

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### **The following are recognized partners in ministry in Oklahoma**

Oklahoma Disciples Foundation  
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Disciples Retirement Community in  
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