

GB-26-1348 – Mid-America Region Annual Report to the General Board**Rev. Dr. Paul Koch, Regional Minister****An accomplishment from 2025**

The Mid-America Region is very proud that our submission of General Assembly resolution [GA-2512](#) – **Concerning Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Congregations Receiving a Silver Chalice Designation** passed near unanimously. This was a movement years in the making and the fruits of awareness of ministry with and for older adults in our congregations are still prospering. God keeps revealing ways this ministry of caring is a justice issue that includes equitable housing, food distribution, elder abuse, health care, employment, age discrimination etc., and opportunities keep springing forth.

Also at General Assembly, resolution **GA-2513 – Concerning Disability Justice and Inclusion in all Ministries within the Christian Church**, that also passed soundly, was the result of efforts by one of our Mid-America associate ministers. These are on the heels of the passage of **GA-2341 - Calling the Church to Oppose Christian Nationalism** that was led by another Mid-America Pastor at the prior assembly.

We are quite proud of this and other leadership that shapes our wider church. The findings through our participation in the Church Narrative Project in the prior fall took shape in 2025 and help set our regional goals for the remainder of the decade and these above are helping meet our goals.

A hope for 2026

For the past few years, our region has been intentional to honor and better support our rural congregations and their pastors, of which many are commissioned and bi-vocational. We hear repeatedly how rural communities feel like “second-class citizens and estranged from the mission goals of wider church.” Incidentally, Rural & Red describes our entire region between Kansas City and St. Louis on the borders, except Columbia and some of Springfield.

Our Rural Ministry Network continued its focus of outreach and connection, and for two years received Oregon Scott Grants to catapult this ministry. They have had numerous Threads of Joy gatherings in rural churches to provide information, resources, and care while uplifting Rural Genius. The leadership team is especially dedicated and committed. Last year, the Heartland Fellowship of Regions agreed to become RMN partners.

In looking at who our commissioned pastors are, we confirmed what we thought. Many have been serving for years in faithfulness, readiness, and competency. Furthermore, our regional requirements for commission are as stringent, more in some ways, than requirements for

ordination. Perhaps the biggest or only difference is completion of the Master of Divinity degree. Many of our commissioned ministers have achieved certificates from the rigorous Philips Theological Seminary Center for Ministers and Lay Training and predecessor institutions. Adhering faithfully to the TPFCOM requirements for Non-traditional Ordination, we provided additional cohort education and training and in the fall of 2025 have ordained 15 remarkable servants, including four with Master of Theological Studies degrees who could not enroll in an MDiv program through completion. In nearly completing this ordination celebration journey through the spring of 2026, we realized how these effort are indeed justice – especially for women ministers, low-income ministers, and ministers of color. Our hope for 2026 is that dividends of these affirmations and imprints will open up the Gospel in exciting and unforeseen ways through Church Vitality.

Challenges ahead

We have begun working with the Christian Church Foundation and Treasury Services to help us identify ways to secure our fiscal future that are less-reliant on DMF or special offering giving. We detected a number of dormant designated accounts that could be spent down for the time being. We are blessed through ancestors to have several foundation accounts to draw from. Foremost is our Lester Rickman Legacy Foundation. This was established by the sale of our Rickman Center and fortified by CCF investment. In November, we had our first Rickman Legacy Fund Gala to encourage more bequests to this fund established to support youth, camps, and leader development. Our second (renamed) Mid-America Ministry Legacy Fund gala will be a part of our Regional Assembly banquet in April 2027.

A congregational story of strength or hope in your region that the General Board members can share with their own congregations

On May 16, 2025, our regional landscape significantly changed forever. The regional minister, an associate regional minister, and leaders of our Anti-Racism / Pro-Reconciliation Justice Ministries were gathered in Jefferson City to discuss plans for follow-up after our workshop on Christian Nationalism with authors Beau Underwood and Brian Kaylor. Missing was Mrs. Pat Penelton (Ms. Pat), who opted to stay home so she could fix meals for the houseless through Centennial Christian Church's feeding ministry. Those returning home to St. Louis from our meeting were cautioned that storms were forecast and to drive safely.

While on the road, our beloveds learned that a tornado was striking St. Louis. The resulting damage was beyond comprehension. It cut a swath of destruction from Forest Park, to Delmar and Union Boulevard, and continuing through the Fountain Park neighborhood. We quickly learned that our Union Avenue Christian Church and headquarters of the National Benevolent Association (NBA), Urban Mission, and Be the Neighbor had its roof blown off; holes were

throughout the sanctuary ceiling, and 80 windows were blown out. The pastor had to take cover under her desk during the traumatic situation when her office windows shattered.

Worse yet, our historic and beloved Centennial Christian Church was destroyed. The formidable bell tower had collapsed and more tragically, fell on Ms. Pat who was in the doorway warning her two helpers to evacuate. Their floor gave way and all fell one-story down. The helpers had minor injuries but Ms. Pat lost her life doing the Lord's work feeding the hungry and trying to save others. There were no tornado sirens so she returned to Centennial to warn them.

The strength of hope of Centennial and Union Avenue leaders, the community partners, Disciples Regional Mission Partner Isaiah 58 ministries, and the presence of our General Minister and President, Week of Compassion, National Convocation, NBA, Disciples Home Missions, the Regional Minister, Associate Regional Minister, and sister churches made a bold statement that God will lead our rise from the rubble.

Bold plans to rebuild Centennial in Fountain Park were laid out with a campus of buildings and green space functional for their mission of outreach and worship by Centennial Interim Pastor Rev. Dr. Dietra Wise Baker. This includes a clinic, mental health center, low-income and transitional housing, community center (that will double as a sanctuary) and feeding ministry kitchen and dining room. Eden Seminary also benefited from Ms. Pat's ministry input and rededicated and named their community garden for produce distribution in honor of her. Florissant Valley Christian Church in nearby North St. Louis County opened their doors and welcomed Centennial to worship in their space as long as needed at no charge.

Eight St. Louis congregations and missions are in substantial transition, but all listen faithfully to what God has in store for them. The two aforementioned congregations are among them and they have inspired all to think, pray, and act. The landscape has created a new painting.

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Our 2025 financials from Treasury Services are attached to the sending email.