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2026 Report to the General Board Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Nebraska

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An Accomplishment from 2025

In January 2025, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Nebraska affirmed a comprehensive Strategic Plan, including a newly articulated Mission Statement:

To Build Community, Celebrate Diversity, Foster Collaboration, Inspire Creativity, and Worship Joyfully as Nebraska Disciples.

This plan emerged through broad regional input, including clergy, lay leaders, and a focused Board retreat dedicated to shaping our shared direction. Alongside this mission, we clarified core values and established measurable, multi-year goals organized through our Center Model of ministry. These goals address leadership formation, congregational vitality, mission engagement, financial sustainability, and regional infrastructure, each with defined benchmarks and accountable leadership.

Over the past year, this strategic clarity has guided our work—shaping collaborative partnerships, strengthening leadership development, deepening justice-centered formation, and aligning financial planning with mission priorities. In this season of transition, our mission has become more than words on a page; it has become the framework for our shared ministry.

A Hope for 2026

In 2026, we hope to call a Settled Regional Minister who will build upon this season of recalibration and collaboration. The Search Committee has been conducting listening sessions across the region as they develop a Regional Profile, inviting clergy and lay leaders to speak honestly about the leadership this moment requires. We approach this next chapter not with urgency born of anxiety, but with careful discernment and hope.

We also look forward to expanding collaborative initiatives such as *Neighbors on the Way*, a spiritual formation journey shared with our siblings in the Nebraska Conference of the UCC, rooted in Christian practice and oriented toward justice in public life. Designed to help individuals and congregations see, listen, remain, repair, and send with greater intentionality, this initiative reflects our conviction that formation must ground strategy. Our hope is that shared spiritual practices will continue strengthening connection across congregations and denominations, equipping disciples for faithful public witness.

We remain committed to deepening justice-centered formation and strengthening financial stewardship practices that support long-term vitality.

The Challenges Ahead

Nebraska continues to navigate the complex work of strengthening trust between local congregations, the Regional Church, and the wider General Church. Clear communication and shared covenant are essential in a season of change.

Sustainability remains a pressing concern, particularly in rural contexts where demographic shifts and limited resources shape daily ministry realities. Many of our clergy serve in part-time or bi-vocational settings, requiring adaptive approaches to leadership formation and support.

We are also reframing generosity—not as institutional survival, but as spiritual formation. Stewardship in this moment requires imagination, long-term vision, and theological grounding.

These challenges are real. They are also invitations to faithful discernment.

A Congregational Story of Hope

Three years ago, First Christian Church in Grand Island experienced a painful split. The congregation that remained in the building dwindled to roughly fifteen members. When I began serving Nebraska in August 2024, I was told they would likely close by the end of the year.

They did not.

Instead, they began asking deeper questions about identity and witness. They engaged mission, vision, and values work. They set tangible goals. They committed to gathering for shared meals after worship each Sunday. They welcomed a Hispanic Assembly of God congregation to worship in their sanctuary on Sunday afternoons. They opened a thrift store in their building—“DOC Shop”—as a way of connecting with their neighborhood and creating sustainable outreach. The work has been faithful and deeply hopeful.

Today, they worship between 25 and 30 people each Sunday and have welcomed new members. More importantly, they have rediscovered purpose.

Their story is not one of dramatic growth. It is one of quiet courage. It is a reminder that sometimes the most faithful thing a congregation can do is remain, listen, and begin again.

Your ministry’s most recently audited year-end financial statement

The Christian Church in Nebraska began contracting with the OGMP/Treasury Services for our budgeting and financial reporting in October 2018.

2026 Report to the Regional Board

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Nebraska

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Nebraska continues to live in a season of significant change.

Across our region, congregations are navigating aging memberships, shifting demographics, financial pressures, and questions about long-term sustainability. Many of our clergy serve part-time or bi-vocational calls. Rural communities face realities very different from a decade ago. These are not abstract trends; they shape daily ministry in very real ways.

We do not minimize this landscape.

And yet, this is not a story of decline. It is a story of recalibration.

In this transitional year, Nebraska Disciples have chosen not to cling to what was, nor to rush toward quick fixes. Instead, we are asking deeper questions about what it means to be a Regional Church now. We are strengthening collaboration, investing in leader formation, and creating shared spiritual resources that help congregations practice faith in tangible ways.

We carry grief for what has changed. We give thanks for what remains strong. And we are learning that resilience in this moment looks less like expansion and more like faithfulness—steady worship, shared leadership, courageous conversations, and a willingness to reimagine inherited structures.

The challenges are real. So is the Spirit's work among us.

By God's grace, we are still here. And we are committed to becoming the kind of Regional Church this moment requires.

Resilience Through Faithful Collaboration

For Nebraska Disciples, that faithfulness is increasingly collaborative.

The era of isolated regional ministry is passing. The questions before us—leadership sustainability, congregational vitality, financial stewardship, and public witness—are larger than any one region can address alone. Rather than guarding autonomy, we are practicing interdependence.

Nebraska participates in a monthly Tri-Regional Partnership with the Regions of Kansas and Greater Kansas City. Together we are exploring adaptive leadership strategies, shared ministry initiatives, and long-term possibilities for collaborative staffing and resource development. In August 2025, more than 100 Disciples—ages five to eighty-five—gathered in Kansas City for an Intergenerational Day of Service, embodying the kind of shared witness that becomes possible when regions work together.

We are also reimagining ministry alongside our United Church of Christ siblings, particularly in Youth and Outdoor Ministry, exploring new models that honor both traditions while strengthening the formation of young leaders. These conversations move beyond program sharing; they represent a commitment to mutual investment in the future of the Church.

Neighbors on the Way has become another expression of this collaborative spirit. Developed in partnership with colleagues in the United Church of Christ, the Lenten spiritual formation initiative is now engaging more than 150 participants across congregations in Nebraska. Rooted in Christian practice and oriented toward justice in public life, the journey offers weekly Scripture, prayer, reflection, and podcast-style conversation designed to help individuals and congregations see, listen, remain, repair, and send with greater intentionality.

Its growth has confirmed what we are discovering more broadly: when we collaborate across regions and denominations with theological clarity and mutual trust, participation expands and isolation decreases.

Collaboration for us is not a temporary strategy. It is a theological conviction. We believe the Spirit is inviting us beyond inherited silos toward deeper partnership—across regions, across denominations, and across generations.

Nebraska Disciples are increasingly recognizing that justice work cannot be episodic or reactive. If it is to be faithful, it must be formative.

Justice as Formation, Not Reaction

In October, the region co-hosted, with Nebraska Disciples Women, *All God's Children: A Christian Response to Immigration*, a one-day learning event that brought denominational leaders and congregational members together for theological reflection and practical conversation. The strong attendance—and the continued engagement that followed—made clear that our congregations are not seeking easy answers; they are seeking faithful ones. The conversation continues, not as a single event, but as ongoing discernment about what love of neighbor requires in our communities.

This year also marked the return of Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation training within the region after many years of sending ministers elsewhere. Hosting this training in Nebraska was more than logistical convenience; it was an affirmation that accountability and reconciliation belong in our own soil. The response was overwhelmingly positive. We likewise offered in-person Healthy Boundaries training within the region, strengthening our shared commitment to ethical and healthy leadership.

Through the Center on Church in Mission, we are asking deeper questions about how justice, reconciliation, and public witness take shape in Nebraska's particular context—rural and urban, agricultural and corporate, long-settled and newly arriving. Justice for us is not abstract ideology. It is discipleship practiced where we live.

We are learning that formation must precede strategy. If we are to serve our communities well, our leaders and congregations must be shaped by Scripture, accountability, and courageous conversation. Justice work, in this sense, is not an addition to our ministry. It is part of how we follow Christ.

Building the Structures This Moment Requires

Faithfulness in this season also requires clarity about how we organize our shared work.

Over the past year, Nebraska has continued to live more fully into a “Center Model” of regional ministry. Rather than operating primarily through standing committees, our work is organized through focused Centers that create space for collaboration, participation, and shared leadership. This model has allowed us to align structure more directly with mission and to invite broader engagement from clergy and lay leaders across the region.

The Center on Church Leadership continues to nurture candidates under care, walk alongside clergy in varied ministry contexts, and ensure that leaders are equipped for healthy and sustainable service. As more of our congregations are served by part-time and bi-vocational ministers, this work has become increasingly vital. Leadership formation in Nebraska is not theoretical; it is responsive to the realities our congregations face.

The Center on the Regional Church has strengthened infrastructure, financial oversight, and stewardship planning. Over the past year and a half, we have deepened financial transparency, continued the use of a Narrative Budget to tell the story of shared ministry, and begun laying the groundwork for a Legacy Society that will support long-term sustainability. These efforts are not merely administrative; they are expressions of spiritual stewardship and collective responsibility.

Structure, for us, is not preservation of institution for its own sake. It is the scaffolding that allows collaboration, justice, and congregational vitality to take root. We are working to ensure that our organizational life reflects the same clarity and courage we seek in our mission.

The Tensions We Continue to Navigate

We continue to navigate the delicate work of strengthening trust between local congregations, the Regional Church, and the wider General Church. In a season of change, clarity and communication are essential to sustaining shared covenant.

Sustainability remains a pressing concern, particularly in rural contexts where demographic shifts and limited resources shape daily ministry realities. We are committed to supporting congregations without imposing one-size-fits-all expectations.

We are also reframing generosity—not as institutional survival, but as spiritual formation. Stewardship in this moment requires cultivating imagination and long-term vision, not merely meeting annual budgets.

Finally, leadership pipeline realities demand attention. As fewer full-time congregational positions exist and more clergy serve in part-time or bi-vocational roles, we must continue adapting how we recruit, form, and support leaders for the Church we actually have.

These tensions are not signs of failure. They are invitations to faithful discernment.

What We Are Learning

This year has clarified several convictions for us.

First, regions function best not as regulators or program providers, but as conveners and catalysts. When we create space for collaboration—across congregations, across regions, and across denominations—energy multiplies and creativity expands. The future of regional ministry will depend less on centralized control and more on relational trust.

Second, formation must precede strategy. Congregations do not need quick fixes; they need practices that root them more deeply in Christ. Whether through justice conversations, clergy training, or shared spiritual initiatives like *Neighbors on the Way*, we are seeing that durable change grows from theological grounding, not managerial urgency.

Third, collaboration is no longer optional. Financial pressures, leadership realities, and cultural shifts are not temporary disruptions; they are the context in which we now serve. Partnership—denominational, inter-regional, and ecumenical—is not a compromise of identity. It is an expression of interdependence.

Finally, we are learning that sustainability is spiritual work. Stewardship, legacy planning, leadership accountability, and structural clarity are not merely administrative tasks. They are ways of practicing trust in God's ongoing work among us. If resilience in this moment looks less like expansion and more like faithfulness, then our structures, partnerships, and priorities must reflect that truth.

We do not claim to have solved the challenges before us. But we are committed to asking the right questions, together.

Looking Ahead

As we move into the coming year, our commitments remain clear.

We will continue strengthening collaborative relationships—denominational, inter-regional, and ecumenical—trusting that shared leadership will be essential for long-term vitality. We will deepen investment in leadership formation, particularly for clergy serving in part-time and bi-vocational contexts. We will continue the work of justice as formation, ensuring that love of neighbor is not abstract but embodied in Nebraska communities.

Financial stewardship and sustainability will remain priorities, including the continued development of a Legacy Society and the strengthening of transparent, mission-aligned budgeting practices. We understand that clarity in structure and accountability is part of faithful witness.

This fall, the Region anticipates calling a Settled Regional Minister. We approach this next chapter not with urgency born of anxiety, but with careful discernment and hope. The work of this transitional season has not been about maintaining stability alone; it has been about preparing the ground for faithful leadership in the years ahead.

Nebraska Disciples are not standing still. We are learning, recalibrating, collaborating, and building. By God's grace, we look toward the future with steadiness and trust.

How You Can Pray for Nebraska

Pray that we would continue to discern courageously and lead collaboratively in a changing ecclesial landscape.

Pray for our congregations and clergy—particularly those serving in part-time and bi-vocational contexts—that they may be sustained with wisdom, creativity, and deep joy.

Pray for the work of justice and reconciliation in our region, that our public witness would remain rooted in Christ and shaped by love of neighbor.

Pray for the call of a Settled Regional Minister this fall, that the Spirit would guide both the Region and the one who will serve, and that this next chapter would be marked by clarity, humility, and hope.