

General Board Report for the Christian Church in Ohio (Disciples of Christ)**GB-26-1354****Prepared by Rev. Allen V. Harris, Regional Pastor & President****An Accomplishment From 2025**

One of the most meaningful aspects of the ministry of the Christian Church in Ohio in 2025 was the hiring of new staff and the expansion of the number of staff in the Regional Church Office. Rev. Allen V. Harris celebrated his fourth year of service as Regional Pastor and President in April and Jennie Stoddart Bernard celebrated her twenty-first year as Regional Administrator in September. In March David Stonebraker-Martinez, who had been serving in a temporary capacity, was hired as the settled Camp Christian Facilities Manager and moved with his wife, Keely Veatch, to live at the Camp. In August Amanda Blaine was hired as the Camp Christian Hospitality Manager working both during the camp season and year around as the use of our 93-acre facility expands. Both are life-long Disciples and devoted Camp Christian participants. In October Lisa Lautenschlager was called as our new Bookkeeper, fulfilling a promise from the major financial campaign.¹

One Challenge Ahead:

The strident divisiveness of the world around us, coupled with the diminishing understanding and appreciation for the unique covenantal theology and polity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) leads less connected congregations and leaders to more quickly dismiss, ignore, and even detach from the larger body of Christ. We have tried to address this concern in various ways. Rev. Harris has prioritized visiting congregations that have not been visited since his arrival and seeking a deeper relationship with their pastors and lay leaders. We have sought to increase channels of communication and mailed to all our churches a sheet of quickly accessed QR codes for getting communication from the Regional Church Office. To help in deepening the understanding of who we are as a movement, in recent years we have sent to all our churches a laminated copy of the beautifully scripted Preamble to the Design as well as the "Attributes of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); This year, Rev. Harris also developed a document "Benefits Of Being A Part Of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)." You can find this latest resources at: https://www.ccinoh.com/media/471131/the_benefits_of_being_a_part_of_the_christian_church_disciples_of_christ.pdf It will be shared with our congregations along with his "Love Letter To The Church" in 2026 <https://www.ccinoh.com/ccio-blog/2026/january/12/video-a-love-letter-to-the-church.aspx>²

A Congregational Story Of Strength Or Hope In Your Region That The General Board Members Can Share With Their Own Congregations:**Harmony Springs Christian Church, Uniontown, Ohio Hosted Second Annual "Guns to Gardens" Safe Disposal Event**

The growing gun violence epidemic stirred this faithful congregation to move beyond thoughts and prayers toward a real effort to reduce gun violence in their community. Under the leadership of their Lead Pastor, Rev. Joel Engman, Harmony Springs Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Uniontown, Ohio decided to organize a "Guns to Gardens" Safe Disposal Event for a second year in a row on Saturday, September 13, 2025. The event was held at the church in the parking lot, with hospitality and refreshments inside the church.

This apolitical event that is recreated elsewhere allows community members to voluntarily and anonymously surrender unwanted guns. The guns are dismantled on-site, and the parts are made into garden tools, symbolizing the words of the prophet Isaiah, *"They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks"* (Isaiah 2:4). This last year, blacksmiths from Ugglas Night Forge were on-site creating tools and works of art from the dismantled gun parts. They believe that by taking direct action, they can help ensure that unwanted guns are never used to harm.

Community members, neighbors, and members of other Disciples of Christ congregations were invited to join them at the event to show collective support for a safer community. The Regional Pastor, Rev. Allen Harris, has attended both years. Members of the congregation were present and offered to share their vision and details with other church leaders, women's or men's group, class, in a special program on the topic. By working together with other area churches, Harmony Springs Christian Church and the Christian Church in Ohio can explore organizing similar events across the Regional Church and state. This "Guns to Gardens" event provides a positive, life-affirming way to take action to reduce gun violence in our communities.

For more information or to make a donation to the event, please reach out to the congregation at g2g@harmonygrows.org or go online to www.harmonygrows.org/gunstogardens.

A Hope For 2026

The hope we have, in all of this is the same hope the Apostle Paul had for the churches he served, that, *"with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power."* (Eph. 1:18-19) Our hope is in the love and the power and the righteousness and the presence and the justice of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Anything we do completely reliant upon ourselves is doomed to fail, or be inconsequential. Anything we do completely reliant upon God in Christ Jesus surely has a chance to transform the world. May our hope always be in Jesus Christ.³

The Christian Church In Ohio General Board Report

In 1852 The Ohio Christian Missionary Society (OCMS) was established to organize and support Disciples of Christ mission work throughout the state of Ohio. Today, the Christian Church in Ohio (Disciples of Christ) still endeavors to inspire, equip, nurture, network, innovate, and celebrate the rich and diverse mission and ministry of over 130 congregations, 325 clergy, a multitude of lay leaders, thousands of members, friends, and secular, ecumenical, and interfaith partners in Ohio and beyond. Led ably by a strong Regional Church Council, Regional Church Staff, and active and faithful Commissions, Committees, and Teams, guided by our Regional Minister, the work of Jesus Christ throughout our Regional Church is strengthened and amplified. In Christ's name and by Christ's grace we seek to embody the love of God, the call of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit for all those whose lives are impacted by our ministry.

Attached with this report is a full accounting of the mission, ministry, and work of our Regional Church in 2025, especially through the lens of our Regional Pastor & President, the Rev. Allen V. Harris. Here are a few highlights:

Significant Joys, Accomplishments, Successes, Opportunities Fulfilled:

Strong And Faithful Leadership Inspires Innovation and Cooperation

Under the faithful and steady leadership of Pastor Brenda Sanford, Regional Church Moderator, Rev. Beckie Linn Gregory, Regional Vice Moderator, Lena Van Buskirk, Regional Church Treasurer, Rev. Erica Brown, Brown, Personnel Committee Chair, and Rev. Betty Sivils, Vision Committee Chair, working alongside our Regional Minister, Rev. Allen V. Harris, the Executive Committee has guided the Regional Church Staff, Council, Elders, and Commissions, Committees, and Teams well in 2025.

While a great deal of inspiring mission and ministry has taken place, several highpoints include: A strong Ohio participation in the July General Assembly in Memphis, Tennessee. The ordination of Rev. Ashray Kumar Matha in August. Also in August all Regional Elder positions were filled and thus a more comprehensive network of support and communication is now in place. Rev. Harris joined former Regional Elder, Rev. Tom Stephenson (now in North Carolina) in leading a General Assembly workshop on Regional Elders. Rev. Harris helped to plan and attended the Miracle Day at the historic Campbell Mansion in Bethany, West Virginia on September 20. The Congregational Renewal Team bringing Rev. Dr. Erin Cash and Rev. Dr. Cory Wilcoxson to Ohio to lead a day-long workshop on their book, *Thriving Church: What We Can Learn From Faithful Congregations* in November. These are only a few examples of the many wonderful ministry opportunities happening in the Christian Church in Ohio!

Search And Call Expands Use Of Congregational Cafés

In 2025 sixteen congregations were actively in the Search & Call process and ten clergy were called to either interim or settled pastor positions during those twelve months. Rev. Harris, building on the work of Rev. Bill Spangler-Dunning, Regional Minister of Virginia, began using Congregational Cafés more extensively as a means of helping congregations begin the Search & Call process in a more celebrative, informative, and public manner. Rev. Harris led three and helped two Regional Elders lead two others during the year. More are planned in 2026.

The Regional Church Council approved at its November meeting the authorization of the Personnel Committee to finalize the job description for a part-time Administrative Assistant for Vocational Ministry to assist Rev. Harris in the database and administrative management of both the Search & Call program and the Commission On Ministry processes. It is expected this person will be hired in the first quarter of the new year. This will increase needed connection with both Search and Call Committees and Candidates for Ministry.

Major Fundraising Campaign Builds Momentum:

One of the most significant accomplishments of 2025 was the movement of our ***If Not Now, When? If Not You, Who?*** major financial campaign into the public phase. Led very ably by Rev. Jim Bane, Campaign Coordinator, Rev. Roger McKinney, Campaign Committee Chair, Rev. Allen Harris, Regional Minister, as well as a dedicated Regional Staff, Campaign Committee, and Sub-

Committees, the campaign began working with clergy and lay leaders to offer “mini-campaigns” in congregations across the Regional Church. A comprehensive Campaign Packet was developed and mailed to all of our 130 congregations and is available online (www.ccinoh.com/campaign) Multiple Cluster Meetings, innumerable speaking and preaching engagements, emails, phone calls, text messages, social media posts, and in-person conversations and gatherings moved the campaign forward.

This faithful effort seeks to make the Christian Church in Ohio more effective in meeting the needs of our congregations and leaders, especially by making our largest physical asset, Camp Christian, which also houses our Regional Church Offices and Archives, sustainable and even more useful for the mission and ministry of Christ in the 21st century. Through at least two part-time staff (a Bookkeeper and an Administrative Assistant for Vocational Ministry), a full-time conference center program director and promotions/reservation person, as well as a fully accessible pool with a pool building and pavilion, we hope to move Camp Christian from simply being our beloved summer camp and occasional retreat and meeting facility to a year round, fully accessible Ohio Regional Ministry Center.

The campaign, as part of our covenant with the General Church, is also already contributing to three ministries: construction of a counseling center in Zambia through Disciples Overseas Ministries, a new pole barn at Hiram Farm, and renovation of the gymnasium at The Centers’ HOPE Campus (formerly The Cleveland Christian Home).

Stable And Expanded Staff Expands Ministry:

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Financial Responsibility Increases Trust

An addition meaningful aspect of last year was in how the Regional Church Council took seriously its fiduciary responsibility, especially in light of the uncertainties and economic challenges that came with the new year. At its May meeting it chose to pause the start of construction of the new pool, pool house, and pavilion at Camp Christian until there was enough funds received and pledged to be able to pay the costs and not put the Regional Church in danger financially. By the November meeting over \$1.25 million had been received and pledged, with a significant number of congregations still planning mini-campaigns in 2026. This allowed the Regional Church Council to vote to authorize start of construction as soon as the weather permitted and for the Finance Committee to negotiate a loan with Disciples Church Extension Fund.

Through attentive oversight by the Regional Church Treasurer, Lena Van Buskirk, and Finance Committee our Regional Church Budget ended the year balanced and the Camp Christian Budget reduced its deficit by \$90,000, primarily due to increased usage for non-summer events and the addition of the Heartland Conference Camps and Retreats. The Christian Church in Ohio continues to strengthen trust in the financial oversight of its resources through transparency, careful budgeting, good stewardship, and inspiring generosity. Each month our financial reports from Treasury Services are posted on our Regional Church Website, as are our budgets and policies: <https://www.ccinoh.com/about-us/regional-church-council/ccio-financial.aspx> The Finance Committee, which has been meeting monthly, reviews and approves every single purchase and expense.

Additionally, as part of our effort at transparency, our Regional Pastor and President, is open about his compensation package: Rev. Harris' base salary for 2025 was \$67,106 and his housing was \$25,000 and a \$250 year-end/Christmas bonus (as all staff receive). In addition to this he is gifted with 14% Pension Fund dues (\$12,495 total for 2025). He received 4 weeks of vacation, 1 week of continuing education, and will be eligible for three months of sabbatical after 5 years. He has a supple auto mileage/travel reimbursement at the IRS rate. All staff were granted a 3% cost of living increase for 2026.

Ecumenical Partnership Deepens And Expands Ministry

A particularly exciting aspect of 2025 was the deepening of our Ecumenical Partnership with the Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ and the four Associations that make up the Conference. Rev. Harris has a particularly strong working relationship and friendship with the Rev. Dr. David Long-Higgins, Conference Minister for the Heartland Conference. For several years we have worked well together with our shared Interim Ministry training and nurture, but in 2026 we shifted that to a new paradigm with a "Transitional Ministry Training" model, recognizing all ministers are doing the work of transitional ministry in our day. We also celebrated our second year of sharing the planning and leadership of Adult Conference, our summer adult faith formation event. New this year, in addition to the shared promotion of Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ camps, conferences, and retreats, we have been doing since 2023, we welcomed three of the UCC camps for children and youth and three adult retreats to the Camp Christian facilities now that the Heartland Conference does not own its own camp facility. By almost anyone's estimation, the sharing of our facilities went fantastically well and plans are to expand shared use in the future.

Challenges and Possibilities Ahead In 2026

As with all of Regional Churches of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and like that of almost every other judicatory, the Regional Church leadership struggles with nurturing and maintaining relationships and healthy lines of support and communication with all of our congregations, clergy, and lay leaders. With a significantly smaller paid staff, both pastoral and administrative, than we enjoyed only nine years ago, both volunteer and paid staff are stretched thin trying to communicate, maintain trust, and deepen relationships that are so essential to a healthy Body of Christ.

²Similarly, the strident divisiveness of the world around us, coupled with the diminishing understanding and appreciation for the unique covenantal theology and polity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) leads less connected congregations and leaders to more quickly dismiss, ignore, and even detach from the larger body of Christ. We have tried to address this concern in various ways. Rev. Harris has prioritized visiting congregations that have not been visited since his arrival and seeking a deeper relationship with their pastors and lay leaders. We have sought to increase channels of communication and mailed to all our churches a sheet of quickly accessed QR codes for getting communication from the Regional Church Office. To help in deepening the understanding of who we are as a movement, in recent years we have sent to all our churches a laminated copy of the beautifully scripted Preamble to the Design as well as the “Attributes of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); This year, Rev. Harris also developed a document “Benefits Of Being A Part Of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).” You can find this latest resources at:

https://www.ccinoh.com/media/471131/the_benefits_of_being_a_part_of_the_christian_church_disciples_of_christ.pdf It will be shared with our congregations along with his “Love Letter To The Church” in 2026 <https://www.ccinoh.com/ccio-blog/2026/january/12/video-a-love-letter-to-the-church.aspx>

Strongly linked to this disaffection and disaffiliation is the failure of the Church for generations, perhaps for more than a millennium, to maintain the prophetic and counter-cultural necessity of faith that is so incredibly powerful in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, particularly in the preaching and actions of Jesus. Looking only at the last generation or two, and primarily in the Mainline Protestant and predominantly white church, the replacement of prophetic preaching, advocacy for “least of these,” and speaking truth to power with comfort, familiarity, and complacency has made the modern church impotent to address many of the issues of our day, from misogyny, to white supremacy, to ableism, to homophobia and transphobia, to the rights of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. For more on this point, read Rev. Harris’ Martin Luther King, Jr. day sermon <https://allenvharris.wordpress.com/2025/01/25/reigning-in-empire-with-everyday-acts-of-love/>

However, excitement is growing as we expand staffing, even if in limited ways, to help both of our senior staff fulfill the ministry to which they are called. With a new Bookkeeper already on staff, our Regional Administrator is finding more time, and higher quality time, to do the tasks she was called to do. Similarly, when a new Administrative Assistant for Vocational Ministries is hired and trained our Regional Minister will be relieved of some of the administrative tasks that are so incredibly important to Regional Ministry. In future years, the new conference center program manager will relieve all of the staff from much of the responsibilities for programming coordination, marketing, and registration for the Ohio Regional Ministry Center at Camp Christian, thus ensuring its ability to host and offer high quality programs and ministry year-round to more people.

³The hope we have, in all of this is the same hope the Apostle Paul had for the churches he served, that, *“with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.”* (Eph. 1:18-19) Our hope is in the love and the power and the righteousness and the

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Amen.

Rev. Allen V. Harris (he/him/his)

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