

GB-26-1362**Regional Report of the Christian Church in the Upper Midwest**

April 2026

The Christian Church in the Upper Midwest is a region of “Disciples Journeying Together.” 105 congregations and 219 ministers offer vital and vibrant ministry in Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. Our region provides important support and resourcing for congregations and clergy, connections for regional activities and with general and ecumenical ministries, and hospitality and programming throughout the year at the Christian Conference Center in Newton, IA.

Here are some highlights from 2025:

- “Listen! Hearing God’s Wisdom in the Struggles,” our annual regional gathering in October, invited congregational leaders and ministers to celebrate our shared ministries and recognize God’s work and support around us and through us.
- 463 campers and 103 adult volunteers participated in our summer camp programs.
- Our annual Ministers Institute in January 2025 celebrated “Joy in Ministry” for 109 ministers onsite and online.
- In 2025, 138 ministers participated in our region’s new 6-hour boundary training focused on the Ministerial Code of Ethics. The course, developed by regional staff and Committee on Ministry leaders, is rooted in facilitated small group discussion. It was offered as a one-day course onsite or online or in multiple online sessions. The feedback of has been overwhelmingly positive.
- We celebrated the new ministry of The Stable Study Church, an online gathering that intentionally seeks to free the fullness of the gospel from layers of colonialism and racism. In 2025 this ministry founded by a Disciples minister officially became a Congregation in Formation.
- Our active Committee on Ministry supported the ministry of almost 250 clergy and people discerning calls to serve as ordained and commissioned ministers. We celebrated 1 new commissioned minister in 2025.
- Our region continues to support congregations in transition, particularly through pastoral changes, times of internal conflict, and when facing significant changes to their ministry such as considering closure of ministry.
- We continue to live into our new regional structure. 2025 was the first full year for our new Regional Board and leadership structure. This has improved participation of members, significantly changed how we prepare for our annual regional gathering, and created a timeline for checkins with our recognized regional ministries. This is helping us to further broaden participation in our regional ministries and better celebrate them each year.
- Our Christian Conference Center continues to provide a home for our summer camps and many regional activities while also welcoming guests throughout the year. Our new Executive Director, Eric Lahart, began in spring 2025 and has brought excellent leadership and vision to strengthen and continue this ministry.

Here are some hopes for 2026:

- We hope to continue our strong engagement with younger people. In January and February 2026, we had 71 youth (4th-12th grades) participate in weekend retreats – our highest participation levels since 2019.
- We hope to provide visible regional teaching through recorded sermons by regional staff, as well as other learning opportunities, including a Lenten series of short videos each week on the theme, “Remember Your Baptism,” and resource sessions for congregational leaders (such as our 6-part small group course for elders).
- We hope to improve our support of clergy by the activation of a Care Unit as part of Committee on Ministry. This hope is that this group of 10 ministers will make quarterly 1-on-1 phone calls with all of the clergy in our region.

Challenges ahead:

- Sometimes, it is hard to help congregational leaders recognize changes in their ministry context. Many of our congregations offer compensation that is too low for clergy and other staff. Also, some congregations cannot afford and/or do not need their previous type/level/amount of pastoral staff, but they struggle to recognize helpful ways they can adapt. For example, we have more than one congregation in search that recognize they can only afford a part-time minister, but they have been unwilling to consider partnering with other congregations because they want to be the primary focus of the part-time minister. We continue to encourage conversations to try to shift expectations and awareness of possibilities, but these expectations lead to headaches and heartaches for congregations and clergy.
- Many congregations, clergy, and our region face financial challenges now and into the future. Declining overall participation and tighter budgets often stagnate giving. We also continue to operate our camp and conference center in a changing environment, which presents its own financial and staffing challenges.
- The sharp divisions in our culture manifest conflict in some of our congregations. Sometimes this leads to pushback on a minister’s preaching and teaching by some in the congregation. Sometimes it manifests as open conflict among congregational leaders (boards, elders, etc.).
- Search and call continues to be a challenge as there are more congregations seeking to call ministers than ministers seeking new calls. This leads to long transition times for many of our congregations and circumstances where we simply cannot make a connection – especially for small congregations in small or rural communities far from metro areas.
- Conflict in congregations

Stories of hope:

- The bed ministry of First Christian Church, Keokuk determined a few years ago that they wanted to ensure children in their community all slept on a proper bed. This year they completed and gave away their 1000th bed and they have inspired other congregations to offer a bed ministry as well.
- The cold clothing tree ministry of First Christian Church, Oskaloosa was based on a simple idea – can we find a way to help folks get winter coats, hats, gloves, etc? The tree in front of their building receives and gives all of these things throughout the winter.
- Some congregations can imagine a new future. On January 1, 2025 Faith UCC and First Christian Church, Davenport officially merged to become Faith First Community Church.

The openness by leaders of both sides, plus excellent communication throughout, made this a model church merger – which is obvious in their strong ministry as a merged congregation.

- If it works during the interim, it might work beyond. As we were helping congregations find pulpit supply, we had two unequal size congregations about 30 minutes apart whose worship times worked for one preacher. When they found a preacher both congregations liked and asked back repeatedly... who was feeling a call to full-time congregational ministry... who then served as interim for both congregations... they were willing to make this a more permanent arrangement. In 2025 First Christian Church, Muscatine and Nichols Christian Church each called the same minister as their settled pastors.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Joshua J. Patty
Regional Minister and President