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 General Board Report 2026
 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Virginia
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1 Cor. 12: 14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body.

Things to lift up from 2025:

1. New Church has regained a foothold in the Virginia Region and "The Ministry Church" is now a new church in formation in the Richmond Virginia. This church is supported by the region and many congregations around the Richmond area. Rev. Laticia Lee (Newly Ordained in 2025) has a heart for people on the fringe and are often unseen or ignored by others. This church currently meets in a "bike shop" meeting room because it is located where the people she hopes to serve, live. The new church/ministry developed from the passion and discernment of an individual pastor, the support of the new church committee willing to say yes and local churches that have provided space in their worship communities for her to tell her story and then give their time and money to this new holy adventure.
2. We live in a time in which Christian Nationalism and blatant racist behavior is on the rise. We continue to have a strong team of individuals, led by Marilyn Whitacker, whose primary ministry is to provide a counter experience to the hatred that lives and breathes in our communities across Virginia and constantly finds its way into our churches. This ministry seeks to bring people of all races together to talk about the uncomfortable topic of racism. Yet they do in such a way that both they, the team and individuals who join in the conversations are infused with a desire for a better future together. These are hard conversations that people clergy and laity are choosing to engage and though we are not able to solve all the issues, I am proud of this team and this region for their willingness to do what they do. We are able to support this ministry with a fund that underwrites their efforts.
3. Sent a mission experience of over 90 people from 38 churches to walk alongside those continuing to struggle after the effects of the hurricane that devastated areas in North Carolina and beyond. We are able to support efforts like this through a mission fund for interchurch and beyond regional efforts.
4. We celebrate that congregations in Virginia continue to give strongly to DMF and other ministries across the church. In addition, it is worth noting and a goal of this region to increase both physical engagement and financial support from all congregations in the region. This takes a great effort over time to build trust and relationship across the 11 districts and 120 congregations. Last year we reported that 80% (96/120) congregations have a strong enough relationship and covenant understanding with the wider DOC that they contributed to wider church causes in some way. This year we only gained 2 more but

believe that we are getting closer to capacity. Of the other 22 congregations who do not support financially, 12 of them participate in some way in the whole of the church. The goal for 2026 will be to make contact with those other 10 to determine if they are closed or no longer interested in being Disciples.

5. We celebrate that our Regional Youth Council has begun to rebuild and begun to nurture young leaders across the region. Our partners in the Piedmont Christian Convention have also begun to rebuild their youth and camp programs. The goal for 2026 is to continue connect and nurture these two amazing efforts.
6. As regional minister, I celebrate my ability to have visited nearly everyone of the 120 churches in the region and now in my second 6-year term, have started to cycle through again, and with it continue to see growing connection/relationship between myself, them and other churches throughout the region.

Hope for 2026:

Our hope for 2026 lies in the growing connectedness of our churches. There is a stronger sense this year that we need to be together. We are finding new ways to gather together for ministry and support. As we find sacred space to be together relationships are built so that when we do disagree with others while facing troubling societal division and atrocities, we are more likely to have the capacity to stand together against them. If we don't practice being a movement for wholeness during the gentle times, we will not have the communal fortitude to model a different way of being to the fragmented world in which we live.

Challenges ahead:

Here are a few of our current challenges but these should not be understood as a complete list:

1. For the sake of history and others who might read these words in future, I also want to add that one of the challenges we are seeing is that of what is the limit of diversity as we continue to seek a clear understanding of our identity. We seek to be a movement for wholeness and yet what are the valid limits. This struggle is not new as we have seen this present itself in the past but I want to acknowledge that I believe we are seeing a growing division around what members fundamentally believe is faithful Christian practice.
2. A practical challenge is the aging of members and what to do with large buildings that no longer fit our needs. Will we have the same kind of leadership and vision that the people who chose to start churches and build buildings a century ago?

A story of Hope:

In the same week that I learned of another congregation that had run out of people in order to continue as a congregation, I learned this story First Christian Church in Hampton VA. Only a few years ago the church was struggling themselves as to what to do, as they could not find a minister and we're beginning to believe they had no realistic future. In a conversation with their search committee, we imagined them becoming a student congregation to journey alongside one of our new Commissioned ministers. The church did not fully understand what that meant but took the chance to call, now Reverend Debbie OTT. As they gave her trust and she built trust with them they began to explore new ministries with developmentally delayed adults and looking into the needs of

their community. I would say they were thinking outside the box but I'm not sure that they even had a box. They found their purpose and ministry as this new ministry with developmentally delayed adults became reciprocal in nature where all developed a deeper faith and value for one another. Then they looked around at their gigantic building that their congregation of 40 no longer needed and learned of eight other religious and community groups that needed a space to make a difference in this world. The variety and diversity in these new groups were a risk but once again the congregation was willing to follow the vision of their pastor. There's much more to this story, but I will conclude what's that joy the minister shared with me in a recent phone call. "Who could have imagined that only two years later this church would know why they matter and would find that meaning in embracing people and needs in their community that until they opened their hearts, we're unable to even see the needs around them. In doing so they have found purpose and healing for themselves."

I have 8 more stories like this one and we as disciples need to figure out how to share them with each other and stop believing and spreading just the stories of struggle and decline. I remember my mother saying as she echoed the words of Jesus, who we become, starts with the words that come out of our mouth. My mother always reinterpreted scripture so that I could better understand.

"It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." -- Matthew 15:11

Blessings
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