

GB-22-1202

Name of ministry:

Great River Region of the Christian Church (DOC) in the United States and Canada

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister name:

Rev. Dr. Nadine Burton

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister email:

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The Great River Region continues to live into our vision: "We are the Great River Region, a movement that empowers Disciples congregations to transform the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ." And our vision statement, "We Reach, Teach, and Transform Lives Through Christ's Love." We are also living into our GRR Future Story, which is a strategic plan to develop transformational clergy leaders who foster good collegial relationships, teach each other and resource congregational program life.

In what ways is your region/ministry thriving?

We are thriving in our spiritual relationships, financial capacity, and resource development. We have a strong volunteer base on our Regional Board, RCOM, and the Regional Elders Ministry. The GRR is in covenant with a committed number of congregations and together we focus on our vision and mission together. We continue to use the Carver Governance Model to organize and execute the business of the region. Our Regional Elders provide pastoral care within and through their shepherding groups. We are a praying region. We believe that we are transforming because of the prayers of the people.

What are the biggest challenges facing your region/ministry this year?

One of the biggest challenges facing the GRR is finding ways to build spiritual, relational and financial capacity throughout Louisiana and Mississippi. While there are pockets of strength, there is still a perception that these states, because they don't have a regional office, is somehow lacking in resources and support. It is unrealistic to expect a small staff to cover this territory effectively. While the region has been blessed to build capital, it will take us all working together, giving our time, talent, and resources to forge ahead to strengthen the entire witness of the 92 plus congregations.

There is also a growing disconnect with congregations who are loosely affiliated with the region and denomination. Sharing and being in dialogue around the covenant message of the Disciples of Christ, is a long-term building strategy that we need to re-brand in our congregations. While there are churches in decline, we continue to walk with pastors and congregations who need strength through the Pandemic.

What is something you hope to accomplish in the next year?

In 2022 and beyond, we hope to build on what we are learning with the development of the Bailey Institute of Learning. We thank God for strong financial partners who believed in Rev. Dwight Bailey and his work of reconciliation. We launched the Bailey Institute last fall 2021 with two Series, Spiritual Formation and Technology. We desire to offer a hub of educational resources for clergy, lay, and members. We desire to partner with other regions, general units, and higher educational institutions in making sure that congregations have information, classes, and workshops at their fingertips. We are living into a virtual world and trying to figure out how we can move successfully into a hybrid model of ministry with congregations. In addition, we hope to fill the eight open congregations who have been in search and call seeking new senior pastors.

What is something you would like the General Board to know about your region/ministry?

I shared with a candidate during my search and call communications on behalf of congregations that, "The Great River Region is a disaster relief region. Natural disasters are a normal part of who we are. We don't stress, get anxious, or give up when hurricanes or storms hit. Our priority is to make sure that our people are okay. Buildings can be replaced...but lives cannot be replaced. Once we find out our people are okay, then we move on to making connections, finding out whose church or home has been affected and work from there." Before I knew it, I told the candidate "Here in the Great River, we take a licking, and keep on ticking." And both of us let out a hearty laugh! Sorry to borrow it from Timex, but it is so fitting of the courage, tenacity, and perseverance of so many congregations and members in Louisiana and Mississippi that keep on standing after the storms in life pass through our communities. We are not alone as Week of Compassion and other partners provide the resources that we need to move forward.

How can we pray for your region/ministry?

Pray for a new way of thriving in ministry together in light of the Pandemic. Pray that we will be able to meet the needs of our congregations. Pray that congregations will not give up on the region or the Disciples of Christ. There is a pulling away from the institutional church. Pray for our unity as three states under one banner called the Great River Region. Pray for pastors who feel isolated in their roles. Give them courage and strength to connect to those around them. Pray that the region will one day be able to have Associate Regional Ministers in Mississippi and Louisiana. Pray that we talk hold of the things that we can control, and pray for wisdom to allow the Holy Spirit to take care of fatigue, despair, and the weariness of the past two years dealing with the Pandemic.