

GB-22-1210

Name of ministry:

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) In Nebraska

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister name:

Rev. Christopher B. Morton

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister email:

regmin@ccnebr.org

**In what ways is your
region/ministry thriving?**

The Christian Church In Nebraska has been through a great many transitions since 2012 when the last settled Regional Minister retired, including three interim regional ministers. Listening sessions with the clergy and laity of our Local Churches in Nebraska suggested to the Regional Church leadership that there is a great deal of uncertainty that can best be attended to by strengthened communications.

The Christian Church In Nebraska is now thriving because of the visionary leaders who are working together, and engaging clergy, lay leaders, and Local Churches in ministry. The leaders are joined in a common sense of "function," coming together to fulfill the purpose of the Regional Church (according to The Design (#19) is to "engage congregations as unique entities through A) mission, teaching, witness, and service; and B) establishing, receiving, and nurturing congregations . . . providing . . . pastoral care to members, ministers."

Our ministers are expressing that they are feeling more supported now than they have been in the last 10 years, and some are saying than ever before. Many churches are reporting that throughout the COVID-19

Pandemic they have felt the support of the Regional Church. Yet, we also have heard from other churches that they have felt frustrated that the Regional Church wasn't encouraging people to gather in-person more quickly.

We have seated a Nebraska Disciples Behavioral Health Initiative that is working on how behavioral health issues are showing-up in pulpits, pews, and communities --- before, since, and during the traumatic experiences of the COVID pandemic, and since the lights have been brightened on our nation's racism. Additionally, CCN has been re-imagining the future of the Local and Regional Churches together; and re-imagining the future of leadership in the Church including preparing and mentoring people for the future of The Church.

The Christian Church In Nebraska has embraced the belief that the Regional Church, too, is to be engaged in "transformation by the renewing of their minds" (Romans 12). To that end, CCN is exploring a new "form," or structure that will include 4 Centers: Center on Church Vitality; Center on Church Leadership; Center on Church In Mission; and Center on Regional Church. Additionally, CCN has engaged two other Regional Churches (Kansas and Kansas City) to explore how we might work more closely together and become partners in ministry across Regional Church boundaries (Tri-Region Partnership).

Some tangible ways that the Christian Church In Nebraska is engaged in ministry, fulfilling its purpose ("function") includes:

1. Cotner College has begun awarding scholarships again as of September 2021, after a 3-year hiatus.
2. Cotner College has identified 5 people to enroll in courses at Phillips Theological Seminary's Certificate in

Pastoral Ministry.

3. Pastoral Leadership Commission has seven candidates for Ordained Ministry, and one candidate for Commissioned Ministry Under Care and have established Nurture Teams for each candidate -- for the first time in 10 years.

4. Youth & Outdoor Ministries Committee hosted its first Fall Youth Retreat in October 2021, the first such retreat in more than 7 years.

5. Supporting a new church being developed in Lexington NE by partnering with the Micronesian Church in Overland Park (GKC), and New Church Ministry.

6. Partnering with Week of Compassion and Refugee and Immigration Ministries (RIM) to resettle Afghan refugees in Lincoln and Omaha, and possibly in Grand Island, Hastings, and/or Lexington NE.

7. New Church Development has been mostly "by accident," but we have had one new church affiliate with us, two Disciples churches merge into a new church, and a Micronesian Church open in Lexington NE -- in some ways, that would be 3 "new" churches in the last 3 years.

8. Creating a new part-time position of Communications and Office Manager to support our ability to design, develop, and implement better communications tools -- including upgrading our E-Newsletter, Web Site, and Social Media presence (but we made this decision at the cost of eliminating the part-time Administrative Assistant position so that the effect on the budget is neutral).

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

The on-going dilemma that we face as a Regional Church (which may be echoed by nearly every Regional Church) are clearly defining what it means to be the Regional Church, and developing and sustaining meaningful relationships with our Local Churches. There are a lot of mechanical transactions that occur between the Local Churches and the Regional Church,

as well as between and among Local Churches; our hope is that we can face the challenge of moving from the mechanical and transactional, to a relational way of being together so that we can better adapt to the changes both within the Church, and in society more broadly. Finally, quite possibly the biggest challenge is identifying and developing leaders who have a working knowledge of the Regional Church as it is and are able to envision as it will need to be in 5, 10, and 20 years from now.

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

During 2022, CCN plans to re-write our By Laws so that we better align our current and envisioned future practices with our stated purpose and structure. As we envision what it means to be the Regional Church and articulate our “function and form” (that is, purpose and structure), we are exploring how three Regional Churches (KS, GKC, and NEB) might partner in being Regional Church together. We also plan to re-write our Personnel Policies so that they are simplified and updated to address a much smaller staff size. Additionally, we are drafting a Guidebook to Ministry for Nebraska so that candidates for ministry know what the candidating process looks like in Nebraska; and so that ministers know what is expected of them to maintain and/or regain Ministerial Standing. Finally, CCN is partnering with New Church Ministry in supporting a new Micronesian Church in Lexington NE, and begin the process of exploring the starting of another new church (probably in Kearney NE).

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

The Regional Church Board and Regional Minister continue to seek ways to align our purpose and structures in ways that support the future direction of the General Church as it unfolds --- that is by emphasizing covenantal relationships, deepening our commitment to practices that will enrich our faith, addressing social justice and racism, and re-imagining

how we might structure our relationships so that they are edifying, gratifying, and glorifying.

How can we pray for your region/ministry?

Please pray that the Christian Church In Nebraska remain open to the moving of the Holy Spirit in our midst, to the Wisdom of God as shared and revealed in our relationships and conversations, and the embodiment of Christ as we consider ideas and concepts. May we be willing to explore new ideas, venture into new ways of being, and open to learn from our efforts, failings, and celebrations.