

GB-22-1214

Name of ministry:

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northern Lights Region

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister name:

Sandy Messick

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister email:

sandy@northernlightsdisciples.org

In what ways is your region/ministry thriving?

Despite the ongoing challenges of COVID, the Northern Lights Region ended 2021 in solid financial shape due to generous DMF giving, fruitful investments and lower expenses. We are projecting a surplus budget for 2022 even with increased spending for ministry and outreach. In 2021 we were able to have in-person camps at both of our related campgrounds. We also tried something new by instituting "Second Saturdays," a monthly educational event on Zoom that focused on spiritual growth, congregational transformation and social justice. With an influx of younger pastors serving in their first solo pastorate, we initiated a peer cohort with a mentor to provide additional resourcing and support. We continued our clergy care groups for congregational pastors and chaplains that we began in 2020. After a number of years of planning, the Northern Lights Region entered into a Global Ministry Partnership with Justapaz, a peace and justice organization in Colombia. We welcomed Ministerio Bethesda of Arlington, WA as a new Congregation in Formation, and shepherded Journey CC in Seattle, WA to be recognized as a fully chartered congregation. Our New Church team continues to work with other congregations as either affiliated or newly started congregations. With faith and hope, we are planning for our 2022 in-person

Regional Assembly in May, 2022. Our theme is "Authentic Unity," and we will be exploring what that looks like in our context and region.

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

Coming back to in-person worship as COVID continues to be a factor in our communities and has left our pastors exhausted and our congregations facing the realities of lost members and revenue. For some congregations this means hard conversations about their future life and ministry. Several congregations made the decision to close in 2021 and others are facing that hard reality. With that comes grief. Our pastors are experiencing compassion fatigue as well as the burnout of learning and leading with new technologies. Some of them are looking at life changes such as retirement or seeking new congregations or even career changes. The challenge for the region then is finding ways to support both congregations and pastors as they move through transitions, explore options for their futures and deal with the associated grief of unwanted and unplanned for change. The Northern Lights Region has offered mini-sabbatical grants to help congregations help their pastors find creative means of respite, and is engaging on multiple levels with congregations about future possibilities.

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

In 2022, in addition to an in-person Regional Assembly (we hope), also hopes to again offer in-person camps for our children and youth and several hybrid (in person and online) retreats for adults. We are continuing our commitment to becoming an Anti-Racist/Pro-Reconciling Region through continuing education for clergy as a requirement for standing, and encouraging regional leaders to also receive training. In 2022, the Northern Lights Region will begin their search for their next Regional Minister and President as the tenure for the Transitional Regional Minister comes to a close.

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

The Northern Lights Region continues to shine across our three time zones and four states (Montana, N. Idaho, Washington and Alaska.) Together we are connecting congregations to each other, to the wider church and to the resources they need to be God's presence in their communities.

How can we pray for your region/ministry?

Please pray for the region as they begin the search for their next Regional Minister, and for the congregations and pastors of the Northern Lights Region as they seek to be and to share God's good news.