

GB-22-1217

Name of ministry:

Christian Church in Oregon and SW Idaho

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister name:

Rev. Dr. Doug and Cathy Myers Wirt

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister email:

cathy@oidisciples.org

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

Our women's ministry enjoyed a fruitful couple of years, even in pandemic mode. The usual round of 6 in person half day district events and 2 in person overnight retreats per year, has been replaced with one overnight retreat in Idaho and 3-4 online 3 hour spiritual renewal events. You can learn more about those events in some of the following answers. Our commission on ministry has continued to meet on zoom regularly with commissioned ministers for prayer and support and has helped to guide candidates toward ordination – 2 ordinations took place in 2021. Our online presence is lively and has a strong and responsive following. Our regional elders are doing an awesome job working with retired and specialized pastors. We have continued to call and install pastors with good matches being made. Our regional board saw the highest participation in 20 years, due to the fact that we did not need to drive or fly to the meetings. This deep participation has enabled forward motion on multiple fronts of tasks that had been waiting their turn to be completed. We have deeply cleaned our computer data base. We are gaining ground on having a more nimble tech footprint. Most of our special offerings have increased and our annual fund saw a record year, receiving over \$33,000 from a campaign kicked off in July. Our people remain extremely

generous. In addition, our investments with Christian Church Foundation had an excellent return this year. In 2006 Gary Kidwell came and met with a group of leaders in the region encouraging us to expand our revenue streams. By adding this annual fund, a sound investment strategy and changing some of our fee structures after his visit, we have been able to weather some reductions in DMF giving over the years with less stress than if we had not made these changes at that time. This is one of many ways that the Christian Church Foundation has helped us to thrive. For a regional church our size, our DMF giving is strong, and we know it cannot be our sole revenue stream. We have made ground on assisting congregations in updating their governing documents and have helped with multiple congregations around issues of building use. A highlight of the year was the OBRA Hispana board meeting in the Portland area. Four of our five staff members assisted in supporting this event, primarily our New Church Program staff, Bernice Rivera, member of the OBRA board, who played host. Regional Ministers coordinated transportation and built gift bags for hospitality, our bookkeeper helped in transporting items. During 2021 we also sponsored a Hispanic men's retreat that had participation from many of our congregations. Even with reduced ability to travel and to connect, our relationship have continued to hold. Our monthly clergy district zoom meetings in 3 of the 5 districts have assisted this cohesion, along with other connections in the districts. A fourth district has resumed meeting for breakfast once a month in a restaurant. Another highlight were the three videos we made together this year. We made one for General Assembly roll call that was simple. Our reconciliation offering video was in a personal testimonial style and our Christmas video gave us a way to tell ourselves about ourselves. We have found our regional church to be deeply resilient.

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

The continuing challenges of a pandemic will loom large in 2022 as the changing realities COVID 19 present to congregations, the regional church, ministerial families and communities where we have a witness. Some of the subcategories of this challenge will be: managing search and call with fewer candidates ready to consider moving to a new location and the expectations of congregations for a quick process when timelines will likely lengthen; the reduction of regional staff capacity due to budget and pandemic restraints; church camp programming moving into a third summer in shadow of a pandemic; congregational strains due to length of the pandemic and how this has impacted their offerings, staffing and building use; and the overall hope factor for church leadership in a sustained crisis. Embedded in the following answers, you can see that the regional church will continue to be in a season of transition of leadership and structure.

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

The main task for 2022 will be the formation of a future story/regional transition committee. You can read about details on this process in the last essay of this report.

While this task might seem less critical on the scale of priority, the deep reorganization of our files to make way for a new administration seems like a gift we can give the future of this ministry. We have updated multiple policies and cleaned out storage areas of historical records – keeping essentials and saying goodbye to boxes of nonessentials. We have updated legal agreements with properties we own and have given titles back to some of the congregations while writing in reversion clauses to the deeds. We have created a strong and balanced budget for 2022 and are in the process of building a strong team of leaders to be elected at our May assembly. We have a newly revised and attorney reviewed personnel manual.

We are writing up case histories of each of the

congregations for the files to empty onto paper the historical narrative in our Regional Ministers' brains before they leave the work. We are reshaping our regional staff in 2022. We have been without an administrative assistant for three years following a retirement. We now have a better sense of what is needed in the position and will hiring a part time staff person early in 2022. We have changed the job descriptions of the current staff to reflect current needs and priorities.

Along with sorting out administrative details for the regional office and staff, we have mounted in 2021 and will continue in 2022 a concerted effort to assist congregational boards to update governing documents and policies to be more up to date. We held a webinar in the fall of 2021 which is available on our website and regional staff have been systematically working through the congregations over the past 5 years to update documents. The pandemic slowed down this work for a while because of the multiple adaptations that were happening on all levels. We are back at it at the time of this writing.

We are updating our own information technology and are assisting congregations to join the ALEX system. We have a variety of platforms where we have kept information for mailings, registration, bookkeeping, and search and call. We are reevaluating and restructuring our informational technology to streamline our processes. This will involve purchase of a new computer and being ready to receive a new admin employee with this work done and ready for them.

Our current tech staff did a webinar on basic ALEX usage this fall and will continue to follow up with congregations in the beginning of 2022 as a part of the yearbook process. Our goal is to gradually increase usage of ALEX with targeted training and assistance through

our own tech staff.

We plan to have another round of boundary training in 2022, and our Commission on Ministry is currently working on format and dates.

A “relational map” of the regional church will be drawn showing connections between congregations that do similar ministries and will include the mapping of how general church resources are accessed by congregations. Another mapping project underway is for disaster preparedness resources. This project was in gear before pandemic but stalled when people were actively involved in disasters of the moment that included pandemic, floods and fires. We are now engaging with ecumenical partners to discuss disaster preparedness. In addition we are writing up bios about those person listed on our named funds and investments in order for current members to know more about these saints who undergird our ministry with their past gifts and endowments.

During the last 2-3 years we have gotten behind on the presentation of honored minister pins for those retiring from full time ministry, so we have done a survey and will be presenting pins in the first half of 2022 in congregational settings and in the regional assembly in May.

And, finally, we have been sharing office space in an “interchurch center” since the 1960s. With the changing office needs of the four denominations and an ecumenical agency that share the building ownership, the conversation is surfacing about the future of that partnership. Regional Minister, Doug Wirt, is the current chair of the building steering committee. This conversation will continue through 2022 moving toward next steps for each of the tenants sharing ownership of the building.

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

Our regional church exhibited deep resilience in 2021. In 2020, right before the pandemic, our women's ministry launched what they assumed would be their usual 6 in person "pray and play" events around our geography. The theme, "A Quiet Moment", evoked the image of making a cup of tea using the quotation from Eleanor Roosevelt that "People are like tea bags, you see what they are made of when they get in hot water." How could we have possibly known what was coming? We did an event in February and one in early March and then the other 4 were at first postponed and later cancelled. Our program included time of watching tea steep in clear teacups with tea balls that the participants took home as a keepsake (anyone need 8 boxes of clear teacups or 100 tea balls? Just call me—I've got them!) The learning and prayer process, based on the 7 factors of cultivating resilience, turned out to be the exact right conversation for a time of pandemic!

Taking our cue from a teaching model for school teachers helping students develop resilience and another matrix found for military training in resilience to ward off PTSD, we sought to build capacity for women in a time of political turmoil and congregational change. We created activities around discovering our own resilience patterns and those of our congregational witness. The resilience factors included competence, contribution, confidence, connection, character, control, coping. We gave each factor a scriptural text for context and enjoyed a lovely tea time at the end of the session.

Because we were already having this conversation, we expanded it and have made one or more of these resilience factors consciously the theme of every online event and most meetings. We have explored the power of the congregations to build these capacities into our membership and share them out into our community and world. Having a framework in place for these conversations created a platform on which we could

stand as we were bandied about by changing county to country, state to state regulations about meetings in person and as we held so many memorials to persons who had died from COVID or left food on porches of those who were sick. We prayed for our chaplains and had one of them come and give her testimony about resilient hope at one of our online women's events – the same one where we streamed in a woman who is staff at the Global Ministry Partner Family Village Farm Ministry in India serving orphans and seniors. We have sought to keep the "how to manage details" of COVID season embedded in scripture and hope and in the cohesion of our regional church.

The regional ministers gathered and sent out resources for congregational leaders and met monthly with district clergy groups and spent countless time on the phone with pastors one on one.

Every aspect of our life has been remade to adapt to COVID. We were already well on the way to make some of these adaptations – we already did many meetings by zoom and had trimmed the budget to create more funds for technology. We had already made a list of things that required in person gatherings and things that could be done by other means – group chats on line/zoom/webinar/website posts and more. We have learned to do almost everything on the in person list in an adaptive method during the pandemic.

What we learned about ourselves, and will tell you here, is that we are amazingly resilient as a regional church. We have found ways to hold together, share together, not forget we are grounded in a global church community and to maintain hope in the moment while pondering our future a step at a time.

A recent quotation found in a meme of all places has become focus for our upcoming regional assembly in

2022. "The stream is always revising. Water is always ready to learn."

How can we pray for your region/ministry?

During the next 2 years, our regional church will be in transition. Our congregations in Oregon have had the same regional ministers, Doug Wirt and Cathy Myers Wirt, since 2001. The Idaho congregations had the same regional minister, Larry Crist, from the 1980s until the late 2000s. When we formed a new regional church in 2014, we continued to be served by Doug and Cathy Wirt and expanded their footprint to two full time positions to accomplish the tasks of creating a new regional church. Larry Crist remains in service as a local pastor in one of the Idaho congregations and as a regional elder for the Snake River District (Idaho congregations). This means that the congregations in Oregon and SW Idaho have not seen regional minister transition for decades. As our current regional ministers move toward retirement age, we have undertaken an intentional several year transitional process. We began in 2017 reducing the FTE of the Regional Ministers and added staff members to serve in support of new church ministries, social media/communications, youth camps. We eliminated the administrative assistant position in 2018 and distributed duties between remaining staff. We have continued to have a one day a week bookkeeper. This changing staff model is to prepare us for an eventual regional minister transition, by embedding tasks into more people to have more robust continuity and reducing the Regional Minister FTE for an eventual one RM model.

In 2020 the regional board adopted the executive search model for its next regional minister search. The regional board studied three models of transition: interim regional minister, a seamless transition from one regional minister to the next, and the model of a several month overlap of regional ministers with completing and beginning staff working together for a period of

weeks/months. After discussion, the board adopted the model of having an interim regional minister. Since this was not a part of the current process in the governing documents of the regional church, the documents were revised in 2021 with a new policy that was read at one meeting and voted at the next meeting.

After the revision to the governing documents was adopted, the goals and directions chairperson/board vice moderator, developed, in consultation with regional staff, a chart of tasks to accomplish before the interim season, during the interim season and when a new regional minister staffing model is in place. This was presented to the November 2021 board meeting and will receive a vote/amendments at the February 2022 board meeting. A copy of this document is attached to this report.

A separate list of tasks for the current regional ministers to accomplish before completion of their tenure was compiled over a year ago, and the tasks are well underway with intentionality to make the eventual transition smooth. These are primarily tasks aimed at getting files, offices, documents and policies up to date. Review of all the titles of properties owned by the regional church and the personnel manual have been updated and are in process at the end of 2021.

At the regional assembly in May 2022, the speakers will help to assist the regional church in visioning for the interim period. A timeline for the transition will be determined in early 2022. No public timeline has yet been announced.

We covet your prayers for this transition.