

# GB-22-1224

**Name of ministry:** Christian Church (DOC) in Virginia

**Ministry**

**Executive/Regional**

**Minister name:**

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**Ministry**

**Executive/Regional**

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

The main observation of thriving in Virginia can be seen in the increased connection and communication between churches, clergy and lay members. The pandemic has prevented most in person meetings and therefore really prevented much forward progress on many fronts. Yet, there does seem to be a measurable increase in the communication between Disciples across the geography of the region. We are seeing this energy in particular with the beginning of conversations for a clergy retreat and an increased interest in attending the upcoming Regional Assembly (this will be our 3rd attempt to hold an assembly since the pandemic began and I began my call as Regional Minister). The other area of thriving has been with the commission on ministry in that the use of video technology has allowed the committees to be more flexible and increased the diversity of members across the length of the region. We have also witnessed a 3 fold increase in ministry candidates in both our Commissioned and Ordination paths to ministry. This in turn has helped the process of providing more and better candidates for churches searching for ministers. This leads to the third area of an indication of thriving in Virginia, the reduction of congregations seeking a new minister and the length of those ministerial searches.

We have worked hard to provide better Anti/Racism training but there is still work to be done here. The pandemic has made this ministry difficult but not impossible. This ministry has been growing and we have been able to invite and train a few more trainers but until we can sit face to face or develop other ongoing processes I cannot include this ministry in our Thriving category. New Church has gained energy but yet again the pandemic has held this process back as well... I suspect that this will change as the pandemic lessens.

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

The biggest challenge this past year was in keeping the people together, both in the congregations and the across the region. The simple but crucial act of gathering and connecting people has been difficult and exhausting. For local ministers, they have had to adapt worship experiences, deal with an uptick of disagreements due to isolation and lack of propinquity with each other. Some ministers have described this issue as being caused by the fact that in a faith group that does not require everyone to agree to doctrines the simple Hallway passing time or in person Sunday school provides just the right amount of presence with each other that true holy relationship can be established to allow for grace and love to thrive in between members with diverse views. The world screams at us every day to divide up and tells us exactly how to do that and in this time when we have not been able to just be together the wedges between members and members and their ministers have increased greatly. This challenge has resulted in the loss of 2 congregations leaving the Disciples stating their reasons that look like a parroting of political or news program positions rather than faith/belief issues. This challenge has been very difficult on ministers as they have witnessed members who have loved them for years quickly turn on them without any viable way of mending the relationship.

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

In the next year I hope the world's situation allows for more direct contact and conversation and visitation to congregations. In short, I will do everything to establish more propinquity with people across the region. In doing this my hope is to increase fellowship and better representation on the ministry committees and gathering the valuable ministries happening in the congregations. Two ways to measure the success of the increased propinquity and relationship across the region will be to take stock of the membership of the ministries (asking always, who is not at the table and does the group represent the whole membership of the region) AND to take note of how many members attend the regional assembly. These numbers have normally run around 120 people in a region with 130 plus congregations. Our hope is that the number will increase to 400 and involved many more congregations across the districts and Piedmont District Convention churches.

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

I would hope as you read this report you would understand that Regional Ministry is a long-term, relationship endeavor that will grow stronger with time. Virginia is a strong region with many great and talented lay & clergy but what we are lacking most is sense of togetherness/wholeness. That only comes with relationship and lots of propinquity. Having served in the Upper Midwest for 12 years as Regional minister and 8 1/2 as their associate regional minister, I know it simply takes time to build upon the connections and relationships in a region. This takes trust and trust takes time to accomplish. I believe we are on our way. I am an optimist but also know the challenges of today's world. I hope you will read this report and view the Virginia Region with this in mind.

**How can we pray for your region/ministry?**

Pray for continued connection and relationship and trust to thrive in this region. Pray that God's Spirit will

continue to move in between the Disciples in Virginia  
and allow us to really believe that we are the Body of  
Christ.