

GB-2209

Name of ministry: Disciples of Christ Historical Society

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Richard H Lowery

Minister name:

Ministry

Executive/Regional

rlowery@discipleshistory.org

Minister email:

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

Our finances are sound thanks to strong endowments and solid management of them by CCF and DCEF and the careful stewardship of our Board. Our budget is balanced. Gifts and memberships continue to be strong. In addition to our ongoing work of receiving and processing papers and important records from pastors, congregations, regions, and general ministries of the church, we have worked on several important new initiatives this year. A major gift from Dr. Edmund Short has helped us with our plan to digitize more of our catalog and portions of the collection. We're using that gift for equipment, salary support, and a consultant from a consortium of archives and libraries we have joined. We have a consultant site visit in January and hope to act on their recommendations this year. We launched the Journal of Discipliana, an online, open-access, peer-reviewed journal for original scholarship of issues in Disciples and Stone Campbell history and ongoing life. Under the leadership of our General Editor Dr. Mark Toulouse, our Managing Editor Jim McMillan, and a diverse international editorial board of distinguished scholars from all three major streams of the Stone Campbell Movement, we have published a number of original scholarly articles and book reviews, with others on the way. We continue to add articles and book reviews as they are approved by the editorial board. You can access this and other important research materials,

including journals, newsletters, and periodicals of our movement from the 19th Century to the present online at our Digital Commons webpage, which can be accessed directly from our discipleshistory.org website. There, you can also find a "Virtual Cemetery" of African American Disciples leaders from the 19th Century on, constructed from research in our own files and from memorial notices in *The Christian Plea*, *The Gospel Plea*, and the *Oldtimers' Grapevine*. So far we have located 106 memorials. We are particularly excited that a partnership with *Oldtimers' Grapevine* that began in 2020 came to important fruition in September 2021 with the vote by their Board of Trustees to allow DCHS to publish digital copies of the entire collection on our Digital Commons page. We are approaching 6000 downloads from around the world of the various materials on our Digital Commons page since the site went live in February. That number is steadily climbing. Our outreach on social media has grown this year. The Disciples History Facebook page currently has more than 1600 followers, with about 800 participants in the Stone Campbell History discussion group there. We have established an electronic newsletter which we distribute to our Constant Contact email list. We recently launched the Disciples History Podcast on YouTube, an ongoing discussion with scholars and church leaders about issues in Disciples history and current life. Podcasts so far have focused on the conference we are sponsoring on March 18-19, 2022: The Kirkpatrick Conference, "Visions of Wholeness: Systemic Racism, Antiracism, and 'Reconciliation' in Our Shared History and Tradition" at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma. This academic teaching conference will feature papers and conversation with leading scholars of Disciples and Stone Campbell history and other church leaders. We will look at how systemic racism and resistance to it has had an impact on our history and on particular communities among us — Indigenous, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic/Latinx. We'll focus on telling stories of historically underrepresented groups in our church. We have received major Reconciliation Ministry and Oreon E. Scott Foundation grants, as well as other grants from various Disciples ministries and seminaries,

to provide travel support for attendees. We will livestream the conference and post videos of the papers and panels for educational purposes to a dedicated website. We will follow the most recent CDC guidelines and Phillips Theological Seminary COVID protocols for the in-person gathering. Find more information on our Disciples History website. We plan to publish a book based on the proceedings. Also with our partner Chalice Press, we'll publish the memoir of former GMP John Humbert this year. We've also recruited the Rev. Yvonne Gilmore to write a new biography of Sarah Lue Bostick, the first ordained African American woman in our church, and have commissioned a biography of the Rev. Preston Taylor, one of the founders of the National Christian Missionary Convention and a leading educator and entrepreneur, to be written by Dr. Edward Robinson, associate professor of history and religion at Texas College, an historically black college in Tyler, Texas, who also joins our Board this year as a representative of the a cappella Church of Christ stream of the Stone Campbell tradition.

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

I would highlight three challenges for the coming year. First, we need to address issues of space. Since our move to Bethany, WV, we have received a number of new files and boxes from regions, general ministries, congregations, and individual ministers. This, to a large degree, is a sign of confidence in our work. People in the church know we have the capacity and the expertise to care for these precious records that tell the story of our church. I also think that the various means of communication and the electronic resources we have developed in recent months and years, as well as the programs we have sponsored, have also increased the visibility of DCHS. We are "coming to mind" in a new way. We are not yet "at capacity," but are aware that we have to plan for the future and are taking steps now to facilitate that. The consultant from the consortium we've joined will have the specific task of helping us think through issues related to digitization and space. We hope to receive and act on the report and recommendations in our Board meetings this year. Second, the COVID

pandemic continues to have an impact. The nature of our work and the configuration of our building are such that we are normally "socially distanced," but we currently maintain social distancing and require masks when we have visitors inside the building. We continue to follow the most up-to-date recommendations from the CDC. The rapidly changing nature of the virus is complicating our plans for the academic conference in Tulsa in March. We remain flexible and will make final decisions probably in February, but whatever those decisions are, they will be based on current Phillips Seminary protocols and the most up-to-date information from CDC. Check our website for updates. Third, since I will retire this year, with September 2022 as my last Board meeting, we will experience a change of leadership. We plan to elect our new President at that meeting. Board member Rebecca Hale will chair the search, which will follow the Executive Search model (rhale@discipleshistory.org). We cherish your prayers, suggestions, and support.

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

We will sponsor the March 18-19 conference on Systemic Racism, Antiracism, and Reconciliation at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa both in-person and livestream. We will post videos of presentations on a dedicated website and publish a book centered on the papers and panel discussions as an educational resource for the church. We will publish the memoir of John Humbert, adding to the already existing biographies of Dale Fiers and Kenneth Teegarden, giving us books on our first three GMPs. Hopefully in the future, we will continue to work to publish biographies/memoirs of all of our GMPs. We will publish and continue to add to the 2022 edition of Journal of Discipliana. We will add more materials to our Digital Commons website. We will publish a new critical biography of Sarah Lue Bostick by Yvonne Gilmore in 2022. Edward Robinson's biography of Preston Taylor will be in process but probably won't be ready to go to print by the end of the year. We will continue to publish the electronic newsletter and update our website. We will continue to produce and publish

new Disciples History Podcasts. We will search for and hopefully elect a new President.

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

We publish books, videos, and digital copies of important periodicals and other materials relevant to Disciples and broader Stone Campbell history and identity that can be accessed on-site or online. We promote original research by scholars, students and other interested persons. We have a global audience for materials posted on our Digital Commons website. So far, there have been about 6000 downloads from Europe, Western and Eastern Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, South America, and the US and Canada. We host a Stone Campbell History discussion group on Facebook. We are digitizing and publishing scores of important journals and other resources specific related to African American Disciples history and will be increasingly adding materials pertinent to Asian and Hispanic/Latinx Disciples experience. We are focused on telling the whole story of our church within the broader Stone Campbell tradition, with a special emphasis on stories of historically underrepresented communities. We have begun publishing Disciples History Podcast, featuring 35-to-40-minute interviews with scholars and church leaders about Disciples/Stone Campbell history and identity for personal edification and for use by discussion and study groups. DCHS is the premier collection of Disciples and Stone Campbell materials in the world. DCHS staff provide research support for individuals, institutions, and churches around the world.

How can we pray for your region/ministry?

We cherish your prayers in this time of leadership transition. Pray for wisdom and a successful search for our new President. Pray for our mission of preserving and proclaiming the story of our church, this movement for wholeness in a fragmented world, with our distinctive witness to the unity of all Christians and the whole human family. We ask you to pray for our continued financial wellbeing and faithful, effective stewardship that we may continue to find creative ways to tell the story and to fund programs

that empower historically underrepresented communities to participate more fully in our shared mission of witness and proclamation.