

# *Regional Update from Moderator Tom Stephenson*

June 27, 2018

Dear Ohio Disciples,

I am writing today to update you of recent and upcoming happenings in our regional church. Please pass along this correspondence and any attachments to your congregations, clergy groups and others who are part of our shared ministry. For the past 15 months we and our regional church have been under great stress. How wonderful and encouraging to see the pictures and experience the joy of youth and adults walking in the way of Jesus Christ during another amazing summer of outdoor ministry at Camp Christian! Please continue in prayer for all who are serving and sharing through this camp season and those who worked so hard to prepare. I will share more on Camp Christian later in this update.

Regarding the region itself, it is by God's mercy that we are here (it always has been) and we are working very hard by grace to see that *Ohio Disciples* have a future beyond these challenging days. Here's how:

1. We have been blessed abundantly by the ongoing support, encouragement, resources, and pastoral care from our General Church partners in Indianapolis, the General Units, and from surrounding regions. Their outpouring of love and shared wisdom has been invaluable. I want to remind you that every dollar you and your congregations share through Disciples Mission Fund supports not only regional ministries but the larger mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). These gifts enable the church to accomplish its mission priorities across North America and around the world. Thank you for your ongoing partnership and generosity through DMF giving!
2. A special shout out is due the Office of General Minister and President. General Minister Terri Hord Owens has been available to us for conversations and counsel often, and within her office, we could not ask for a better partnership than we have with Treasury Services and the skill and compassion of John Goeble as he and his office provide us fiscal accountability and transparent reporting which are shared with Ohio leadership and the regional church as soon as they are made available. And, we can say with unfaltering certainty that every dollar and dime shared by Ohio Disciples is 100% accounted for through 'best practices' accounting which is certified by annual audit.

**Attached is the new Treasury Services Annual Audit** which is conducted by an outside auditing firm *each and every* year. This report covers all of T.S.'s accounting and its customer accounts which includes our regional church. This additional layer of accountability is a great reassurance to me personally and, I hope, to each of you.

3. Our regional ministry staff is a tireless partnership between, ***Interim Regional Minister John Richardson*** and ***Office Administrator Jennie Bernard Stoddart***. These two servants of the church are doing a titan job of caring for the pastoral, program, administrative and missional interests of Ohio Disciples. I want to thank them specifically for their commitment and faithfulness toward the future health of the regional church. Few understand the weight that has been laid upon their shoulders, but they somehow find the time and energy to get it done. So, I ask you to be patient and persistent if your call or email isn't answered instantaneously. Two are doing the work of many and your questions or program needs will be addressed. I would be remiss if I didn't say thank you to Rev. Jeff Gill who has served as our regional records researcher and as part of the Finance Team. Jeff has given countless hours to help interpret what the records say, telling us a somewhat uncomfortable narrative about ourselves without shielding our eyes from the truth. Didn't Jesus say something to us about truth and freedom? Thanks, Jeff!

4. The **Regional Church Council** has a duly called meeting on Saturday, July 28, 2018 beginning at 9:30 am. The meeting is anticipated to last between 2 ½ - 3-hours and will take place at Gender Road Christian Church (5336 Gender Rd, Canal Winchester). The RCC will be discussing recommendations for the future viability of the regional church and a 12 to 24-month plan to help Ohio Disciples leverage a future. Further, the RCC will focus on recommendations for Camp Christian's sustainability. The Regional Church Council will not make these decisions for the region but will vet the recommendations and forward a concrete proposal to an upcoming Regional Assembly which will have the final authority to determine a path forward. *As is now the case, all RCC meetings are open to anyone in the region. You are welcome to gather with us.*
5. A **Regional Assembly** has been slated for **Saturday, November 10<sup>th</sup>** at Gender Road Christian Church (see address in No. 4). Details are still in the planning stages but please save the date and plan to attend this crucially important event where we will worship, learn, and determine together, upon which path God is leading us as a region. We hope many Ohio Disciples will attend the event but know that the Constitution indicates that voting delegates to the Regional Assembly include: one (1) duly appointed representative from each congregation listed in the 2018 Yearbook of the Christian Church, and each minister who has standing in the region.

At this Regional Assembly we will also bid farewell to Rev. John Richardson who will conclude his agreed upon time of service with the region on November 10<sup>th</sup>. I hope you will join me on that day to thank John personally and wish him a joyous retirement in Louisville, Kentucky.

Note: While the assembly is slated for Nov. 10, there is always the option of a called Regional Assembly as long as a 60-day notice of date, place and agenda is provided to the regional church. This is to say, that if necessary, we may be called together in community to deliberate prior to the November 10<sup>th</sup> date.

6. It is important to note the good preliminary work of the Search Committee during the first half of 2018. None of us knew on January 1<sup>st</sup> what the year would hold, and this group has faithfully trained and discussed many leadership options. Janet Long has aptly led this effort but we have come to the decision that the region is not in a position to seek or hire permanent ministry staff at this time. Further, until the Regional Church Council and Regional Assembly are able to determine next steps, we have agreed that the Search Committee will take a hiatus until these questions are resolved.
7. There is much joy to share regarding ministry. Operating under the new policy and guidelines for ministry that were approved in 2017, the Commission on Ministry has been actively working with candidates and has approved six (6) candidates for ordination in 2018! Some of these celebrations have already occurred and others have been or are close to being scheduled. Further, the COM continues to shepherd other candidates on the ordination and commissioned ministry tracks. This says to me that in spite of all the hardships we have faced as a region, God is still calling people into the Gospel ministry and into partnership with the Christian Church in Ohio. Praise and thanks be to God!
8. I was really pleased to share for a brief time at this year's Adult Conference last week in Columbus. I am doubly happy to learn that they are pressing forward and scheduling their event for next year! Another sign of new life!
9. Camp Christian. There is a new effort among many Ohio Disciples (individual and congregations) to sacrificially donate to pay off the principle on the camp mortgage. The hope is that if enough of you can share above and beyond gifts toward this end, then we can burn that mortgage by the Regional Assem-

bly or no later than the end of 2018. Several congregations around the region have already committed special gifts above and beyond their Disciple Mission Fund giving toward this effort.

Further, many of the children and youth who are participating in camp programs this summer are bringing home Milk Jugs to your congregation for this stated purpose. Coins for Camp will help enable this debt retirement and I deeply appreciate this children and adults who are providing leadership for this initiative.

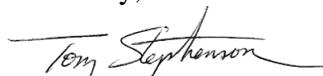
Wouldn't it be amazing if we could begin 2019 without a \$3,700 monthly mortgage payment and know that Camp Christian is unencumbered? We have been treated graciously by Disciple Church Extension Fund which has given us relief on principle payments this year, requiring only interest each month. But it is time to rally our resources and great love for the camp and clear this fiscal burden from our proverbial decks. Your check should indicate clearly that the gift is for "Camp Debt Retirement" so it is credited properly. Thank you all for your love and stewardship of Camp Christian!

Finally, thanks to our camp directors, counselors and staff who have worked very well under tighter financial constraints this summer. We do have fewer resources and austerity measures have been taken in some aspects of camp operations to stay within the constraints of budget and available funds. We are in a new epoch of accountable discipleship and must maximize every gift and resource. Kudos to all of you who are still bearing witness to message and mission of the Kingdom of God in the lives of our campers. A special thank you to Al and Donna Channel for your ongoing efforts to secure a future for Camp Christian. Your love is showing!

10. My final word concerns 2018 Disciple Mission Fund (DMF) giving to date. DMF is the central financial commitment between Disciple congregations and the regional/general church. Our regional percentage of what churches give to DMF makes up about 70% of the operations side of the overall budget. Our ability to gauge where we are in a budget year is complicated by the fact that the bulk of that giving plus the Christmas Offering (100% to regional ministry) comes in between Dec. 15 and Jan. 8. So we get a good read by the end of July where our income and expenses will be for the camp side of the region's budget, but are still unsure how the current year will resolve for regional operations as we are planning for the next. 2017 ended with DMF giving down in total but thanks to the grace shown by our general church partners, we are keeping a larger percentage of DMF for Ohio's work - but it is still the case that our churches gave less in sum. As we work our way back to a fairer DMF balance between the region's share and general ministry support, we continue to ask churches to communicate with us their intentions for DMF giving for the second half of 2018. Our two annual funds, "Leadership" for the region and "1 in 1,000" for camp, plus designated gifts *are being honored in donor intent* and are all helpful in their own way. But our future will be largely determined by congregations choosing to support the wider work of the Disciples of Christ (regional and general church) through their DMF gifts.

Thank you for taking the time to read this lengthy update. If I have not answered your questions, please don't hesitate to be in touch with Regional Minister John Richardson or me. I look forward to our time together in assembly and invite you to continue lifting prayers for wisdom, courage and clarity as we move forward together as Ohio Disciples.

Gratefully,



Rev. Dr. Tom Stephenson, Regional Moderator  
[epastor.tom@gmail.com](mailto:epastor.tom@gmail.com)  
937-768-5710 cell