Ohio Regional Newsletter ~ January 2026

Love Letter To The Church
Rev. Allen V. Harris, Regional Pastor and President

My Dearest Friends and Colleagues,

As a new year begins, I wanted to set all the tasks of ministry aside and write a simple note to you, the lay leaders, congregants, clergy and staff, and ministry partners with whom I have the privilege and delight of serving as Regional Minister for almost five years. May this love letter help you know that you are seen, heard, known, respected, supported, and appreciated and that you are never alone in this calling to which Christ has called each of us.

I know that naming this a "love letter" may come off as seeming either sentimental or calculated. I would wish you to know that it truly is meant to be neither, but simply an honest reflection of my affection for the Church of Jesus Christ and all those who work diligently to help the church be its best self.

First and foremost, I love how you work to be a community that cares for one another and supports each other through thick and thin. In an era where mobile devices, self-service kiosks at restaurants and stores, and political and cultural tensions pull us apart one from another, the church still places a high value on coming together, being there for one another, deepening relationships, praying for each other, and smiling when we see our church family members again, all despite our differences and peculiarities (and some of us are *quite* peculiar, myself first and foremost!) And we've learned how to gather together virtually as well as physically, which has expanded our embrace so that many more of our members, friends, and visitors can feel included. (Romans 12:5)

Secondly, I also love how you care for the world around you and seek to meet the deep needs of your community, regardless of who receives your acts of service. From filling Blessing Boxes and pantries full of nutritious non-perishable foods, to running coat and blanket drives during the winter months, to filling disaster relief buckets and period packs, to hosting community health and wellness fairs, to leading Bible studies at the community center, to stuffing backpacks with food for children on the weekend, to…, to… Your light shines brightly and you care so deeply and do so much good for God's Beloved Children and for that, I thank you. (Matthew 5:16)

Thirdly, I celebrate that your witness to the God of the ages, to Jesus Christ our Savior, and to the wily Holy Spirit, is deep and heart felt. From worship services that reflect the best gifts and graces your leaders have to offer, to the powerful sermons your pastors and lay preachers painstakingly and prayerfully prepare and preach, to the prayer circles, fellowship groups, and online devotions in which you invest yourselves so deeply, your spiritual depth inspires me and helps me stay firm in my faith.

But even as I am profoundly grateful to you for who you are as Church, I am also painfully aware of

how much stress you are under, and how this stress is affecting your physical, mental, and spiritual health. I trust you know that I do not sit in some ivory tower disconnected from what is happening in our churches and the world around us. I am blessed by a Regional Church leadership that supports my desire to be with churches and in the midst of the ministry you are doing rather than sitting in a big office behind a fancy desk issuing orders. That is why your Regional Finance Committee has seen the wisdom in increasing my travel budget each year so that I have the ability to drive to where you are and be present with you as much as one person possibly can. It is why we have a full complement of Regional Elders who are connecting with congregations and leaders weekly and report to me what they learn. One of my primary commitments in 2026 remains the same as in 2025: to visit as many of our 130 congregations I have not yet visited to get to know you and to learn from you and grow closer as members of the Body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

A day does not go by that I am not painfully aware of the declining numbers of people in our pews, or the increasing age of many of our church members and leaders, or the bone-deep exhaustion so many of you have been feeling – for years now – as fewer and fewer leaders have to do more and more work to do just to keep the doors open. Likewise, I am keenly mindful that giving to support the minister's salary, pay the utility bills, or fulfill the obligation on a mortgage, is in steep decline. Every time the Regional Church Office puts out a social media post inviting our members and congregations to support the mission and ministry of the General or Regional Church, I know in my heart I am asking faithful members – many who are now on a set retirement income – to choose between supporting their local congregation and supporting the Regional Church. That dilemma hurts my heart so much, and we never ask for financial support without being deeply aware of how challenging such giving is for many people. My deepest hope is that when you do give to the Regional Church, you do so knowing deep in your heart we are partners in this ministry in Jesus' name. (Philippians 1:5)

It also has not escaped me that the political divisiveness of our world has seeped into our congregational life and has caused tension, if not outright splits, in our churches. Where once many of us felt the church was the "safe space" from the strains of the world now it feels like the very same debates we witness on social media and the television are happening in our church board rooms and sanctuaries. I am not so dense as to be unaware that some point to my own preaching, newsletter articles, and social media posts, or that of your own clergy, are viewed as contributing to the tensions. Some of you have told me this outright, and I hope you know that I am listening. I do remain firmly committed to my belief that the Jesus we follow in scripture addressed the real-life concerns of the people with whom he ministered, and he calls us to do the same. But this particular "muscle" in the life of the church, that is prophetic preaching and rigorous debate, has not been flexed much in the last 50+ years in many – though not all – of our churches. And so, like any muscle that has atrophied without use, the call for the church to move from its comfort zone to a place of honest deliberation and transforming action hurts like heck. (1 Peter 5:9)

What I mean to say in all of this is that I am aware of the beauty and the pain, the possibilities and the challenges, the hope and the despair of being church right now. And I am committed to continuing to receive your feedback and shape our ministry as the Christian Church in Ohio to best serve you as well as to move the church forward faithfully.

I don't write this love letter accompanied by a neatly packaged gift of a solution to all the problems you – our churches – are having. I'm not sure such a resolution even exists, and I'm darn sure that there is no single answer that will help every single congregation turn things around. From the first days of creation God made it patently clear this thing called life was going to be as complex as it was

beautiful, and that partnership with each other and with God meant learning some things the hard way. The Apostle Paul said it simply but eloquently in 1 Corinthians 3:9 when he wrote, "For we are God's coworkers, working together." This work can be messy, it can catch our breath with its wonder, it can be confusing and up for discussion, but it is the work to which we have been called, and we will serve together as best we can in order to follow God, live like Jesus, and trust the Holy Spirit into and beyond 2026.

If I want you, the reader of this love letter, to gain anything from it, I want you to know that I, as your Regional Minister, your Regional Staff, Council, Elders, and Commissions, Committees, and Teams, are doing our best to be coworkers alongside ***you***. We may disagree on exactly what ails the church… We may differ on what solutions might be most faithful or effective… but we do believe pressing on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus is best done together.

Faithfully and Gratefully Yours,
Rev. Allen V. Harris
Regional Pastor & President

Regional Book Discussion Group To Go Deeper On Thriving Congregations

At our Congregational Renewal Retreat in November the Rev. Dr. Erin Cash and the Rev. Dr. Kory Wilcoxson shared insights and research they had gained from studies of thriving, faithful congregations. So many ideas came out about real possibilities for revitalizing our churches – both the Regional Church and the Local Church – that several people began to wonder whether or not the book they wrote, ***Thriving Congregations: What We Can Learn From Thriving Congregations***, wouldn't make a perfect focus for a monthly Regional Church book discussion group.

There are 10 chapters (plus intro and conclusion) that will make for a great year of discussion, with no group for June & July and adding the intro to Chapter 1 and the conclusion for Chapter 10. Please say on your calendar the fourth Thursday evenings from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. for such a book discussion group,

If you would like to participate in this Book Discussion Group please send an email to ccio@ccinoh.org with the subject line "Sign Me Up For Thriving Church Book Discussion Group" and a Zoom link will be sent to you prior to the first meeting. If you do not already have the book, you can purchase one at Thriving Church: What We Can Learn from Faithful Congregations — Chalice Press or by calling 1-800-366-3383.

"If Not Now, When…. If Not You, Who?" Update
A View from Zambia

We are so excited about the significant changes that the "If Not Now, When…If Not You, Who?" campaign is already helping us make towards the new swimming pool, staff additions, and accessibility improvements that we can lose sight on how these funds are also greatly blessing our mission partners including the Theological Education by Extension in Zambia. The Christian Church in Ohio is helping TEEZ build their Dream House (Office Complex and Counseling Center).

TEEZ recently sent us the attached update on the construction of their new facility. It is such a tangible reminder of how the Christian Church in Ohio is connected to mission sites around the world. Please share it with others and encourage them to make a pledge and a recurring gift to the campaign.

Find all more information and make your donation at: https://www.ccinoh.com/other-pages/if-not-now-when.aspx

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THIS WEEKEND - Advance Winter Retreat
Featuring Rev. Amy Gopp

January 9-11 at Camp Christian
For young adults ages 19-30

January 9th, 2026 is the annual Advance Winter Retreat at Camp Christian. This event is headlined by the Reverend Amy Gopp, Senior Minister at United Church of Christ in Kent and former Director of Week of Compassion with the Disciples of Christ. With her wide range of experiences in our world of faith, the Advance community will be taking a deep dive into what OUR collective purpose is as Disciples of Christ. In a continually fracturing world, it is more important than ever to understand the core concepts of the church and how we can be our best selves both inside and outside of it.

Join us for a weekend getaway at Camp Christian that promises to be filled with thoughtful discussion, fun events, and applicable worship.

Not sure if you're able to come just yet? Do not worry! The registration window will continue to be open at the normal event rate all the way through January 2nd of 2026. Afterwards, registration will continue to be open, but the pricing will increase in this late registration window.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out to us here on Facebook, Instagram, or via email at email@advanceministry.org.

Quarter Life Retreat
February 20-22, 2026
For Adults ages 25 -50 at Camp Christian

"Invest in Yourself"

at the Quarter Life Conference Retreat

FRI. FEB.20TH THROUGH SUN.FEB.22ND 2026

AT THE MONROE LODGE AT CAMP CHRISTIAN

JOIN US FOR THE WEEKEND AS ALI AND ADRIAN MIGUEL LEAD US AS WE EXPLORE THE MANY WAYS YOU CAN "INVEST IN YOURSELF."
WE'LL ALSO ENJOY SOME DOWN TIME, GOOD FOOD, CATCHING UP WITH FRIENDS, MAKING NEW FRIENDS, AND BUILDING COMMUNITY.

REV. ALI MIGUEL (SHE/HER) IS PASTOR @ NEW HORIZONS CHRISTIAN CHURCH
ADRIAN MIGUEL (HE/HIM - DIRECTOR -WORKPLACE ADVICE AND EDUCATION @ CHARLES SCHWAB

QUARTER LIFE IS FOR ADULTS AGE 25 TO 50.
COST IS: $80.00 FOR THE WHOLE WEEKEND
$25.00 FOR SATURDAY ONLY

CONTACT REV. ALI MIGUEL WITH ANY QUESTIONS
ALI.MIGUEL@YAHOO.COM
330-410-4057

Introducing Deacon Nick Bates As the Interim Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches

The Governing Board of the Ohio Council of Churches is pleased to announce that it has called Deacon Nick Bates as the Interim Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches. For over a hundred years, the Council has been a Jesus Christ movement for unity, justice, and peace. Deacon Bates began this new call on January 1st of this year. He will serve in a half-time capacity.

Deacon Bates brings extensive experience to the Council in the ecumenical and interfaith arenas. Since 2004, Nick has worked in the non-profit advocacy and organizing sector on issues related to state budget and tax policy, immigration, voting rights, fair wages, multi-system youth, school funding, and much more.

Nick is a graduate from Capital University (2006), as well as Capital Law School and Trinity Lutheran Seminary in 2012. Deacon Bates passed the bar in 2012 and was ordained in November 2014.

Nick serves as a Deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) called to ministries of advocacy and social justice. He serves on various committees and boards within the faith community.

Beginning in 2016, Deacon Bates was called to serve part-time as the director of the Hunger Network in Ohio, while continuing to coordinate a secular state budget coalition group. He continued to serve both with Ohio Voice and the Hunger Network in Ohio until 2023, when he became a full-time employee of the Hunger Network.

Deacon Bates has earned the respect of many secular advocacy groups, having been chosen to serve more than 2 years as a co-chair of the state's leading health and human services coalition in 2023.

Deacon Bates is married to Katie, an elementary school music teacher in Madison County. Together they have two children.

If you would like to know more about the work of the Ohio Council of Churches and donate to support its important work, please go to: https://www.ohcouncilchs.org/

Registration Now Open For Faithful Response Immigration Gathering, March 17-19 at Camp Christian

Gathering Dates: March 17-19, 2026 (Check in at 4:00 pm, check out at 10:30 am)
Gathering Location: Camp Christian, 10299 Maple Dell Rd, Marysville, OH 43040

While the United States has a long history of hostility towards immigrants, the current administration has created a crisis for immigrants and refugees through aggressive immigration enforcement and racial profiling, diverting resources from the public good to immigration detention and deportation. With the rescinding of the sensitive sites memo from the Department of Homeland Security, churches have become a target of enforcement. This has created an atmosphere of fear for immigrants in churches as well as for those who seek to be in solidarity with them. Additionally, immigration enforcement has unjustly targeted, detained, and deported many neighbors within our own communities, and there is an urgent need for community defense.

In light of these challenges and needs, it's more important than ever for our churches to faithfully respond to God's call to welcome, love, and defend the sojourner in our midst. As pastors and lay leaders, we must step up in this crisis to faithfully serve those both inside and outside of our churches. This is why the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), United Church of Christ, Church of the Brethren, and the Mennonite Church USA are sponsoring a ***Faithful Response Immigration Gathering***. From March 17-19, we will gather to strengthen our faithful response to the current immigration crisis by facilitating space and providing tools for pastors and lay leaders to:

1. Develop relationships that cross denominational lines to broaden our network of support
2. Create and practice safety planning and rapid response to prepare your congregations and communities for heightened immigration enforcement
3. Spiritually ground your work and care for your congregations to build resiliency and endurance to respond to this crisis

Registration for this event is now open. To register, go online to: https://www.ccinoh.com/regional-calendar.aspx?events=16088&action=details

Ohio Council Of Churches Adopts Policy Statement on Gun Violence Prevention

The Ohio Council of Churches, of which the Christian Church in Ohio is a member, has prayerfully and thoughtfully adopted a policy statement on gun violence prevention. This document comes after months and months of study by the Council's Faith & Order Commission, which is charged with exploring and studying statements of faith related to the work of the Ohio Council of Churches. The statement was formally presented and adopted by the Board of Directors of the Council on December 19, 20205.

You can read the full statement here: https://www.ohcouncilchs.org/post/for-immediate-release-the-ohio-council-of-churches-statement-of-gun-violence-adopted-de

The statement says, in part:
"Our advocacy on this subject stems from our personal pain as faith leaders who have had to attempt to comfort families affected and eulogize the victim. We pray the day comes soon when we no longer have to bury our parents, children, siblings, and friends whose lives have been cut short by gun violence. Therefore, we invite every judicatory of the Ohio Council of Churches to endorse this statement, to join a dedicated task group on gun violence prevention, and to encourage their congregations to take action in their local communities. Together, we can transform our grief into witness. It is our prayer that God's abundance, safety, and shalom will be realized in our lifetimes."

Our Regional Minister, Rev. Allen V. Harris, is Secretary of the Board of Trustees for the Ohio Council of Churches.

One Home One Future Offers Green Teams Practical Advice

One Home One Future's step-by-step Green Teams guide provides practical advice to help you establish or continue operating a successful team dedicated to implementing green initiatives in your congregation.

Join One Home One Future today to access FREE Green Teams resources!

onehomeonefuture.org/join

January Network Meetings

The Christian Church in Ohio is partnering with the Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ to do expanded mission and ministry through a series of Networks. Below you will see the January Network gatherings.

For more information about each of these and/or if you have any questions, please email networks@heartlanducc.org.

Deborah Women Still I Rise Prayer Breakfast
Summit Christian Church
March 7th from 9:30am to 12pm

Join us for a powerful morning of faith, inspiration, and sisterhood. Enjoy uplifting speakers, soul-stirring music, and a delicious breakfast—all designed to refresh your spirit and remind you of your strength. Connect with other women, share in heartfelt prayer, and experience a warm, empowering atmosphere where hope rises and hearts are renewed.

Details and registration at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/deborah-women-still-i-rise-prayer-breakfast-tickets-1976624639506

DEBORAH WOMEN

STILL I RISE

PRAYER BREAKFAST

MARCH 7, 2026

9:30-11:30 AM

SUMMIT CHRISTIAN CHURCH

4021 DENLINGER RD, TROTWOOD, OH 454266

GUEST SPEAKERS • GOOD FOOD • MUSIC

FELLOWSHIP • SISTERHOOD

TICKETS $30

FOR INFO AND TICKETS

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/19766236339506aff=odrtdtcrea

Welcome Rev. Karen Bruno As Part-Time Interim For First Christian Church Of Kent

Rev. Karen Bruno has had diverse roles in her multiple careers. These include Caseworker, Supervisor and Manager at Denver Human Services (DHS) for 24 years. The programs varied from Child Protection, Adult Protection, Heating Program, Adoptions, 24-hour Emergency care for children removed from their homes, Food Stamps, and Medicaid. Karen's most formative experiences were during this time when she went on 10 Mission trips as a youth and young adult.

Karen graduated from Hudson High School and Kent State University. It took her (many) more years to finally say yes to God and started Seminary about 10 years later. She graduated from Drew Theological School. It took (many) more years (again) to say yes to God and was ordained in the UCC in October 2002. Serving part time for a small church and then as a Hospice Chaplain while continuing her work at DHS.

Since early Retirement from DHS, Karen has worked at a Camp for Children with severe medical condition and then Hospice Chaplaincy for 5 years.

Karen then began her journey into Interim Ministry, serving for several years. She then began Consulting for the Living Water Association UCC and as Network Coordinator for the Heartland Conference UCC. Most recently she has taken the Leadership of Interim Ministry Support Coordinator in the UCC Heartland Conference and the Ohio Region Christian Church. She feels blessed to now be serving First Christian Church in Kent as their part time Interim.

Karen lives in Cuyahoga Falls with her wife, Rev. Brenda Waddell pastor of Old South Church UCC in Kirtland OH and their two kitties, Frankie and Grace.

Rev. Dr. Luther Young, Jr. Featured In Chicago News Feature

The Rev. Dr. Luther Young, Jr., former Assistant Pastor of Woodland Christian Church in Columbus, was recently featured in ***Reader: Chicago's Alternative Nonprofit Newsroom*** on November 19, 2025 in an article by Devyn-Marshall Brown.

You can read the entire article here: [Reverend Dr. Luther Young Jr., The Justice-Championing Pastor - The People Issue 2025- Chicago Reader]

Rev. Dr. Judy Alston and Rev. Dr. Cynthia Tyson Receive Scholar Honor

The Rev. Dr. Judy Alston and the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Tyson have been selected to be inducted into the 41st Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. College of Ministers and Laity as part of their Collegium of Scholars, Benjamin Elijah Mays Crown Forum.

The couple will be presented the honors on Thursday, April 9, 2026 at 11 a.m. in the Martin Luther King International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia.

Please join us in celebrated this much deserved honor of two distinguished clergy scholars in the Christian Church in Ohio.

Week of Compassion Special Offering
Suggested Offering Dates - February 15 & 22, 2026

Resources, including Bulletin Inserts, graphics, and Worship resources, and more available at https://www.weekofcompassion.org/2026.html.

SAVE THE DATE
Christian Church in Ohio Regional Assembly
October 9-10 at Camp Christian