Rev. Terri Hord Owens: Hello Disciples and welcome to another edition of Imagine with Me a time where I invite leaders from across the church to share with you about the wonderful and exciting reimagining that's happening all across our church. Today I'm so excited to have with me my dear sister and friend the Reverend Dr Nadine Burton who is the Regional Minister of the Great River Region and Nadine has been so involved in the work of what we're calling the Covenant Education Curriculum and she'll talk a little more about that but welcome Nadine thank you for taking the time and I just wanted to give you a chance to talk about your ministry where you serve what's going on in the mighty Great River Region.

Rev. Dr. Nadine Burton: Thank you, thank you Terry thank you so much for the opportunity to just come on to the zoom call to just share some time with you. I am Nadine Burton for those of you who don't know me I have been around the Christian Church Disciples of Christ for almost 30 years now and so I consider myself a first generation Disciple. I came from the Baptist tradition growing up and eventually joined Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, Tennessee in 1988. I have been here in the Great River Region going on six years the five and a half years I started out as the interim in 2015 and a year later they decided that they wanted to keep me on as the permanent Executive Regional Minister and so it has been six years of love and growth challenge, strategic planning learning to love three states Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana and embracing the love that they have me and so we model what it means to be the Christian church Disciples of Christ. That does not mean it has been easy but we have made some strides spiritually, emotionally, and of course financially and so we recently approved our vision and mission statement our vision is we are the Great River Region a movement that empowers Disciples congregations to transform the world through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and then our mission statement we reach teach and transform lives through Christ's love and so we are excited about our statements we are moving forward with our Dwight Bailey Institute of Learning. You'll be hearing more about that shortly but just really strategic planning is so important in our organization I am a detailed person and I struggle to do the visioning part but I have a wonderful team that compliments me regional board our congregations, donors and so we're moving forward into our future story.

THO: Amen. Amen. It's always exciting when you know that there is life right and life means growth and life means moving forward. So I'm excited every time you talk about
the strategic work it just gives me another witness right that God is still moving and that God is moving the church forward and that you two are imagining what Great River needs to be. As we explore this new world and see who we’re going to be in it I do want to just lift up again that Dwight Bailey Institute for learning I had the great honor and pleasure to work with Dwight alongside him in the Illinois Wisconsin Region and he was my colleague there. He was my big brother my congregation loved him. He often came to before I was there he was an interim advisor he did PR/AR and he preached. He covered for me if I couldn’t do a funeral or whatever but he was just an encourager long before I was GMP and so many people across the church know and love Dwight. I'm so excited that there's going to be a very a substantive way to honor his legacy across the church so bless you for that.

**NB:** Thank you.

**THO:** Dwight, I think, would have been really excited about our Covenant Education materials and as part of the work of the governance committee a subcommittee was created and you're a part of that subcommittee and one of the things that we've talked about is we believe God is calling the church to reclaim the theological foundation of what it means to be a covenant church and you were intricately involved intimately involved in the development of these materials can you talk a little bit about the process? What's in these materials and what we should be expecting?

**NB:** Yes, thank you. Thank you. So when we started a little over a year ago just talking about covenant education and what it means to the entire church we began just dreaming what could we do as a Covenant Education Team to put some legs and feet on onto what it means to be covenant. And so we just began to develop a framework for the curriculums that will be coming out shortly. We'll give you a link and you know we struggled through some stuff and we knew we wanted to talk about the theology of covenant. What is covenant? What does it mean to be in covenantal relationships for the for the Christian Church in the 21st century? And so we walk through that process.

Of course with the teams we divvied up assignments based on our gifts and areas of expertise and passion. And so we put together a packet of information. A lot of the work came out of the General Board meeting, the 2020 General Board Meeting, where we were in small groups just talking about reimagining and what it means to be covenant. And so you will see that thread interwoven throughout all of the work through the presentations from Dr Sigmund, Casey Sigmund, I believe her name is Casey. I could be wrong. Sandhya Jha of course just her brilliancy in bringing the history of who we are as Disciples to the forefront of the Covenant conversation. And then of course with Bill Lee, he's a pragmatic theologian and just looking at the ways that he walked his congregation through a process of what it means to be covenant and then to live out those practices. So he really brings some tools into our space to help us to say 'okay this is what you need to do if you're going to be a covenant church.' And then there are a couple of Bible studies written by Rev. Allison Roebuck she's here in the Great River Region and she's a member of the general board and so she had first-hand knowledge of what we shared together in 2020 as well.
And then of course I wrote the reflection based on the small group work on what it means to be a ‘want to’ church and Bill Lee mentioned that in his presentation. We do it because we want to not because we have to. We are Disciples because we want to be Disciples, we want to be in covenant relationships. But I think we’re right on point Terri because we have to go back and discover what it means to be in covenant. We are 60 years out from the 1960s when we became a formal denomination. And I don’t know if a lot of work has been done on what it means to be a covenant church. And so, I remember us talking as a team let’s submerge ourselves in the conversation. What does it mean to be covenant? What does it look like? What does God’s covenant of love that binds us to God and one another what does that mean for my church? And my commitment and connection to the larger church? Because it’s all of us together and if we’re going to reimagine and leave something for our children and grandchildren then for me this is a good place for us to start having this conversation.

THO: Amen. And I was so struck by that notion of not being a have to church but being a want to church I referenced it actually in my State of the Church address because I think we’ve got to take we’ve got to reclaim covenant. It’s not so contractual. We think of covenant in you know we’re not a church that has a lot of contracts or assessments. Like you don’t have to give to DMS, right? And we say ‘oh we have autonomy.’ John Embler said to me when I first became GMP he said ‘Terri autonomy is a theological heresy. There is nothing that the church can do by itself. There’s nothing that any of us can do by ourselves.’ And I think one of the conversations that our governance committee has had is that we want connections, right? We know that there may be lots of congregations who are out there who have the chalice on the door and quite honestly may not know anything else about this bigger movement that they are a part of. And while they’re not bound to we hope that because of God’s covenant of love that they want to, you know, be a part of the things that we’re doing. And I think for me that’s one of the important reasons why we’ve got I’m always saying we have to get more spiritually and biblically grounded, right?

NB: Yes!

THO: This understanding of covenant with the Bible study of the Romans 8 and the reflections from you and Casey and Dr Lee separating those two things-covenant versus a contract-I think it’s going to be an important conversation. What do you hope that congregations are able to get from this material? And how might we use these materials out there across the church?

NB: That’s a good question, I would hope that congregations will take the material and use it to just be re-energized about what it means to be in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and you said it so clearly we have the chalice you know on our doorposts and all that but people coming in into congregations they’re coming in because there’s something about that church that attracts them. And that’s okay. But once they get in it is our job as leaders to educate because we need to know what we’re becoming a part of. Yeah it’s love…it’s the best kept secret…but this is who we are as
Disciples we have an identity around baptism and the table we are people of the table. And so Terri we need to begin to educate our members on what it means and not only our congregations but all of us together. On the regional level regional ministers regionals, you know, the teams and organizations and partnerships that we forge to say who we are. But in order to say who we are, we have to know who we are. And that means we have to study the word. We have to study the preamble. We have to study the curriculum it's not chronological. You can start anywhere. And if you want to listen to Bill Lee's presentation and go with that, you can. If you want to go to the end to the ‘want to church,’ if you want to start with the Bible studies…but wherever you start we pray that the Spirit would just move those who take the curriculum seriously to consider who they are as a congregation in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

THO: Amen and one of the things that excites me in these past almost four years-can you believe that? Almost four years since I became GMP is that we have a lot of new Disciples who have come to us from other traditions. You’re first generation, my mother and I guess became we all became Disciples at the same time so I guess I’m technically second generation but she’s you know it's been 40 years 1980 when we joined at Second Christian what is now Light of the World Christian Church. And there are so many people who have found hope and liberation and acceptance and are excited about being a part of this movement and that uh is my hope that we can remind each other of the wonderful not only the heritage Yvonne Gilmore said once that ‘what we’re really doing is sort of transforming our heritage’ right? Reclaiming all the things that we are we’ve got some tough history to deal with but if we can help each other understand that part of what people are excited about is this idea of covenant that is half it’s not have to but it's want to and there's freedom to be yourself there's freedom uh to explore God and understand who God is for you there’s freedom for each congregation to minister in their own context and understand you know, how God is leading them. As we think about these for what we’re now calling the four re-imaginings that I’ve been talking about, covenant living as a covenant people are the narrative the stories that we tell but the narrative that binds us all together in a set of common values the tools that we have at our disposal to help us do the work and then that spiritual practice that I'm always talking about this yeah you know and it's not dogmatic Bible study but if you’re Christian you need to know your sacred text. Every major tradition has a focus on knowing their sacred text and we should Jesus knew his text so we need to that's right I need to know ourselves so how do you see this curriculum or this work that we’ve been doing as the covenant education team fitting into those four re-imaginings?

NB: I think we are right on point as you are moving the denomination forward in this reimagining process I think each area you can take and find it somewhere throughout each of these curriculum pieces. And so wherever you start if you want to start with narrative story Bill Lee tells a wonderful story, Casey Sigmund tells a wonderful story just about who we are. It’s our branding as Disciples when you put when you put the chalice out on your church post that means something. And so the spiritual practices the tools there there’s something it's just it's really interwoven throughout these four areas. And I just want to say personally that I am so proud of our Covenant Education Team to
see when y'all see the end product. I'm really proud of what god has done through us with these four areas and to place ourselves somewhere wherever you place yourself this study will help to give you a revelation of who God is in Disciples and where God is trying to take us.

**THO:** you know I have to say with you Nadine that I too am so proud. I was just looking at it again over the weekend. When folks are looking at this video this edition of Imagine with Me [we will include a link](#) to the materials on the website or on social media. Wherever you're watching this, look somewhere in the comments for the link to this material and you'll have a chance to look at it. It's multimedia, there's digital there is a video there's pdf. And we want to thank Rev Lori Tapia for putting it in a nice little wrapper so that it lives in a nice little bundle on our website. But we're so excited and so proud. We also hope that when we do the formal launch we really think it's important to get some feedback from congregations as they're using it. And nothing is static, right? We continue to learn and grow, so I know the team is going to be open to some feedback from folks around the church. And from, as you said, regions to congregations we hope everybody will try it out. And I promise you that you will be excited by the people that you hear from the General Board heard heard the videos and they saw these materials in their in a more raw form if you will and we had such a good time at that meeting. And so much work has gone into creating an important resource for the church, as we consider and reclaim. You know sometimes we abuse that word covenant, right?

**NB:** We abuse it and we're going around but really don't understand what God requires of us to really hold each other accountable because we are family.

**THO:** That's right. That's right and I hope that as we think about this that that one thing that will come of it is that whether you're a congregation or a region or a general ministry or an individual member of a congregation, that your identity is that 'I'm involved in this place whatever it is that you're doing because, I'm a part of this movement called the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).’ That your identity is not so much in a region although that's part of it or not so much in a general ministry although that's part of it or even not so much in a congregation which is the heart that's the foundation of all that we are but to say ‘I'm here because I'm a part of this wider movement.’

**NB:** That's right

**THO:** This movement for wholeness right in a fragmented world this church that desires to become pro-reconciling anti-racist, so I hope that we can move to the whole of all that. We are so it's been so great to talk with you Nadine and I'm so so grateful for all the work that you've put in to bring us to this place with the covenant education materials, the diligence. Just like you say you are a person of details and you said from the beginning ‘if we're gonna do it needs to be tight, right?’ It needs to be tight and I think I can't say now it is tight.

**NB:** Amen, amen.
THO: You kept pushing it to be better so thank you thank you for your hard work and again disciples if you want to look at these new materials what we're calling the covenant education curriculum so faithfully and lovingly developed by a subcommittee of the governance committee of the general board you can find a link to that important work wherever you're watching this video on Facebook or Instagram we'll tweet it out as well as you'll find it on our website so thanks again for joining me for another edition of imagine with Me I hope that you'll continue to have the courage to imagine who you must be as part of our new church that that God is calling to serve in new ways in this new world the narrative that we share the stories that we tell the tools that we use to empower ourselves so that we can serve the communities that God has called us to serve and most importantly grounding ourselves in spiritual practice so that we have the theological and spiritual depth that we need and from which we do the work that God has called us to do so God bless you all. Remember that God loves you and so do I we'll see you on the next edition of Imagine with Me.

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