

Imagine GOD'S LIMITLESS LOVE



A COVENANT
CONVERSATION

for
Disciples



Imagine
GOD'S
LIMITLESS
LOVE

Introduction: An Invitation to Imagine

Rev. Teresa Hord Owens, General Minister and President

The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the document that governs our common life together, begins with a Preamble that reads more like a hymn than a governing document. In it, we find an affirmation of our faith, an expression of hope, a call to service, and a reminder of “God’s covenant of love that binds us to God and to one another.”

That covenant is written into the Preamble, but it is lived out through covenantal relationships in all expressions of the church. This curriculum is an opportunity for Disciples to explore the notion of covenant within our faith tradition, and to deepen our commitment to living in covenant with each other.

Note: If you are using this resource in a printed format, you can access the videos at <http://bit.ly/covenantconversation>

(English Video Transcript | Transcripción en Español)



Rev. Teresa "Terri" Hord Owens is the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

Introduction Prayer

Introduction Prayer:

We Breathe

By Rev. Stephanie Kendell

We breathe in God's grace
May it transform our insecurities
So that we breathe out God's love

We breathe in God's love
May it transform our fears
So that we breathe out God's hope

We breathe in God's hope
May it transform our doubts
So that we breathe out God's faithfulness

We breathe in God's faithfulness
May it transform our hearts
So that we breathe out the Good News of Christ Jesus

We breathe in the Good News of Christ Jesus
May it transform us
So that we breathe out God's grace.....

(Go through and repeat as many times as the spirit needs)

Amen

A Covenant Conversation

The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the document that governs our common life together, begins with a Preamble that reads more like a hymn than a governing document. In it, we find an affirmation of our faith, an expression of hope, a call to service, and a reminder of “God’s covenant of love that binds us to God and to one another.”

That covenant is written into the Preamble, but it is lived out through covenantal relationships in all expressions of the church. This curriculum is an opportunity for Disciples to explore the notion of covenant within our faith tradition, and to deepen our commitment to living in covenant with each other.

A word about how this curriculum came to be: The Governance Committee of the General Board, a group tasked with making recommendations for changes to the Design when needed, has spent the past two years considering what revisions to the Design might help the church better live out our calling. As part of that work, it became clear that what was needed was not only a review of the specifics of the design, but an exploration of our theological foundations. The concept of covenant kept resurfacing as the foundational premise of our life together. This resource is an invitation to the church to join conversation.

This curriculum contains five sessions, each with carefully articulated learning goals, outlined below. Each session starts out with a short video, followed by questions for consideration and conversation. The materials are versatile enough to be used in a variety of settings, both virtual or in-person, in small groups or large gatherings. A facilitator is needed to review the materials ahead of each session and to guide conversation.. Participants should be invited to have a Bible handy. You will want to be familiar with the language the Preamble to the Design, which you can find in multiple languages at <https://disciples.org/our-identity/the-design/>. It is also included in the Chalice Hymnal as #355.

Many hands and minds worked on this material, from all corners of the church. We have done our best to offer resources that will inspiring meaningful conversation in a variety of contexts, though we know that some parts will be more relevant to some than to others. We encourage you to embrace what’s helpful to you and your community and to consider the rest with an open heart.

We pray that this resource will be a blessing to you, your congregation, and your ministry, as it strengthens the covenant that binds us to God and to one another.

The Governance Committee of the General Board
Spring 2021

Learning Goals

- 1. To explore** the concept of covenantal relationships within the Christian Church (Disciples Of Christ) (especially as written in the Preamble);
- 2. To understand** more deeply the way covenant works both in the Preamble of the Design of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and in our wider tradition, and to introduce the Preamble to congregations who may not be familiar;
- 3. To demonstrate** a deeper commitment to covenantal relationships;
- 4. To engage** in covenantal practices by imagining possibilities for new ways of being church;
- 5. To deepen commitment** to being who we say we are as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).



We say we are
Disciples of Christ,
a movement for *wholeness*
in a *fragmented world*.

Let's be the church
we say we are.

Session Learning Goals

God's Covenant of Love: Recognizing What Binds Us Together

Learning Goals:

1. To educate participants on the history and context for the Preamble;
2. To (re)introduce the Preamble of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
3. To introduce the notion of covenantal relationships and the Disciples tradition
4. To listen to and recognize the diverse history and experiences of our tradition and history

A Movement for Wholeness: Seeking Covenantal Relationships with a Living and Loving God

Learning Goals:

1. To introduce the theological concept of covenantal relationships;
2. To affirm the importance of a loving relationship between a living God and people;
3. To recognize the difference between covenantal relationships and contractual relationships;

The Bonds of Christian Faith: One Congregation's Practice of Living in Covenant

Learning Goals:

1. To examine a lived out, practical notion of covenantal relationships among the three manifestations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
2. To encourage community self-reflection on what congregations are already doing to live-out covenantal relationships
3. To foster a space where the participants can imagine how congregations might engage covenantal relationships more deeply

The Light of Scripture: A Bible Study on Romans 8:38-39

Learning Goals:

1. To gain a deeper understanding of the way this passage connects us to the Disciples of Christ understanding of Covenant.
2. To reflect on the passage as a lens into the Preamble of the Design and the implications for covenantal relationships
3. To share in community the varying perspectives of our understanding of this passage and covenantal relationships

God's Limitless Love: Covenant in Practice

Learning Goals:

1. To invite congregations and participants to renew their "Yes" to live in covenantal relationship as members of the Christian Church (DOC).
2. To encourage and empower congregations to engage in covenantal practices within the denomination and the wider community

The Preamble

The Preamble

to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

As members of the Christian Church,
We confess that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of the living God,
and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.

In Christ's name and by his grace
we accept our mission of witness
and service to all people.

We rejoice in God,
maker of heaven and earth,
and in God's covenant of love
which binds us to God and to one another.

Through baptism into Christ
we enter into newness of life
and are made one with the whole people of God.

In the communion of the Holy Spirit
we are joined together in discipleship
and in obedience to Christ.

At the Table of the Lord
we celebrate with thanksgiving
the saving acts and presence of Christ.

Within the universal church
we receive the gift of ministry
and the light of scripture.

In the bonds of Christian faith
we yield ourselves to God
that we may serve the One
whose kingdom has no end.

Blessing, glory, and honor be to God forever.
Amen.



Session One

God's Covenant of Love: Recognizing What Binds Us Together

Learning Goals:

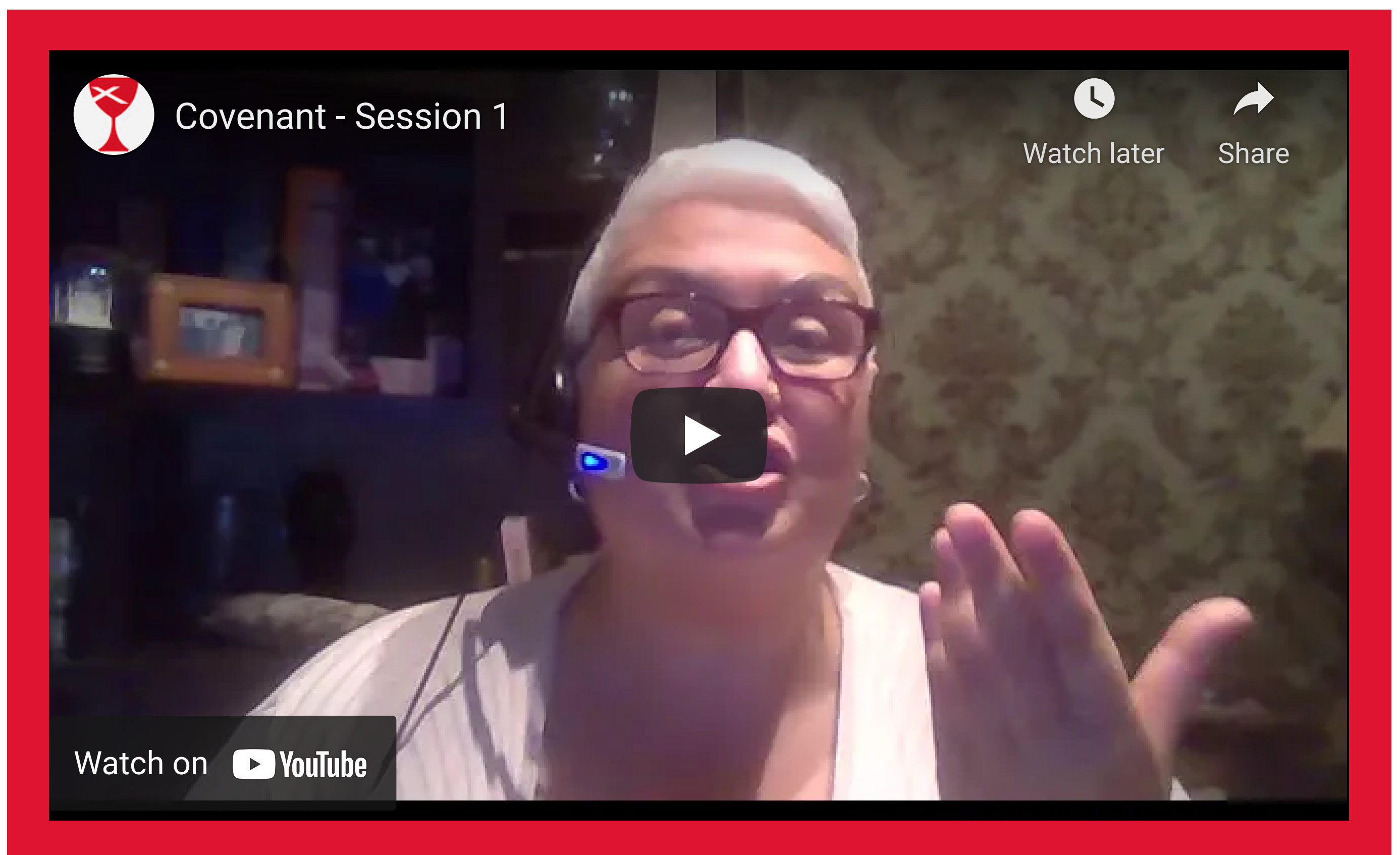
1. **To educate** participants on the history and context for the Preamble;
2. **To (re)introduce** the Preamble of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ);
3. **To introduce** notion of covenantal relationships and the Disciples tradition;
4. **To listen to and recognize** the diverse history and experiences of our tradition and history.

Read:

The Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
(pg. 7) or **THE DESIGN** **El Diseño en Español**

Watch:

Session One video – Rev. Sandhya Jha
([English Transcript](#) | [Transcripción en Español](#))



Rev. Sandhya Jha is the founder of the Oakland Peace Center and an author of several books, including *Room at the Table*. She is also a gifted trainer for Reconciliation Ministry—the antiracism/pro-reconciling ministry imperative of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

God's Covenant of Love:

Recognizing What Binds Us Together

Consider:

In your group or on your own, consider the following questions. Broader questions, like: "What stood out to you in her presentation? Did anything in her story resonate with you? Was there anything you disagreed with?" could also be helpful discussion starters.

- 1.** When you read the Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), what do you notice? What sections or phrases speak to you the most? Why?
- 2.** How much do you know about the history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)? How much of what Rev. Jha shared was new information to you? What would you like to know more about?
- 3.** Rev. Jha talks about the significance of the Preamble and the Design emerging at a time in history when racial tensions were high in the United States. She says, "In 1968, while the nation wrestled with the question of whether racial reconciliation and real relationship across races was even possible.... in that moment, Disciples decided to seek deeper relationship across race in Christ." Why do you think that's important? What can we learn today?
- 4.** Rev. Jha says that the Preamble is important in part because of the societal norms it resisted. She says, "We were recommitting to unity at a time when our nation was coming apart... and to radical inclusion at a time when people of color had little reason to trust that our white family could include us." What societal norms does the church accept or resist today?
- 5.** Rev. Jha says that the Preamble explicitly names what weaves us together: baptism, faith in a living Christ, and a table of gratitude. What role have these aspects played in your life? How have you seen these three aspects weave the church together?
- 6.** After watching this video, what do you want to know more about? How can you learn more about our church's history, and how can you live more deeply into the covenantal relationships that weave us together?

God's Covenant of Love:

Recognizing What Binds Us Together

Close:

As the time and conversation come to a close, end with a brief prayer of thanksgiving for God's covenant and our covenantal relationships.

Session Prayer:

God of Compassion, we are thankful for your covenant of love, your son Jesus the Christ, which binds us to You and to one another.

May we be emboldened to seek the "design" you have for us as Disciples, as family, as equals, as servants to each other and the world.

Amen



Session Two

A Movement for Wholeness: Seeking Covenantal Relationships with a Living and Loving God

Learning Goals:

1. **To introduce** the theological concept of covenantal relationships;
2. **To affirm** the importance of a loving relationship between a living God and people;
3. **To recognize** the difference between covenantal relationships and contractual relationships;

Read:

The Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

(pg. 7) or

THE DESIGN

El Diseño en Español

Watch:

Session Two video – Rev. Dr. Casey Sigmon

(English Transcript | Transcripción en Español)



Rev. Dr. Casey Sigmon is Assistant Professor in Preaching and Worship and the Director for Contextual Education at St. Paul School of Theology in Leawood, Kansas. She has served congregations in Tennessee and the Greater Kansas City Regions and currently serves on the Greater Kansas City Region's Board.

A Movement for Wholeness: Seeking Covenantal Relationships with a Living and Loving God

Consider:

In your group or on your own, consider the following questions. Broader questions, like “What stood out to you in her presentation? Did anything in her story resonate with you? Was there anything you disagreed with?” could also be helpful discussion starters.

- 1.** Dr. Sigmon highlights her journey to intentionally choose to be a part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). How did you start attending your current congregation? What drew you to your current congregation? If you were raised Disciples, what has kept you in relationship with this particular tradition? If you were raised in another tradition like Dr. Sigmon, what are some differences you have noticed between the Disciples tradition and the tradition in which you were raised?
- 2.** In what ways is your congregation already living out this concept of covenant--a relationship with God and other living things?
- 3.** How has a conflict resolved through covenant relationships changed or reshaped your congregation/community? What was that process like?
- 4.** When has your congregation felt tempted (or fallen into the trap) of living out contract because of fear? What was the context and how was it resolved?
- 5.** In her presentation, Dr. Sigmon highlights the connection between covenant and assembly and challenged us to think about novel ways of assembling. How has your community already lived into this challenge in light of a year that has essentially required physical distancing? What ways have you already adapted and re-imagined new ways of assembly/community/relationships? What is gained from this adaptation and re-imagination? What is missed from this current reality?
- 6.** Do you think living out covenant is different in a digital world? If so, how?
- 7.** We have practiced physical distance for a while now. Many congregations pivoted in a variety of ways to continue worshiping and serving together. Some congregations remain physically distant, while others have returned to physical ministries with safety protocols. Individuals and congregations alike have experienced fearfulness, feeling frozen, and fragmentation. How can the concept of covenantal relationships overcome these three very present FR-words (fear, frozen, fragmentation)?

A Movement for Wholeness: Seeking Covenantal Relationships with a Living and Loving God

8. Dr. Sigmon suggests that covenant is a tool that can combat initial reactions to live out of fear and fragmentation. How might covenantal relationship be used in your congregation and wider community to foster “a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world?”

Close:

As the time and conversation come to a close, end with a brief prayer of thanksgiving for God’s covenant and our covenantal relationships.



Prayer:

Spirit of creation, we are thankful for the limitless opportunities to live a covenantal life: a life that connects us to all living things, opens doors for resolving conflict, and holds us fast when fear would cause us to step away from the covenantal path. Continue to create anew the desire to follow the way of Jesus as we foster wholeness in a fearful, frozen, fragmented world. It is in Christ’s name and by his grace, we accept our mission and service to all people. Amen.

Session Three

The Bonds of Christian Faith: One Congregation's Practice of Living in Covenant

Learning Goals:

1. **To examine** a lived out, practical notion of covenantal relationships among the three manifestations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
2. **To encourage** community self-reflection on what congregations are already doing to live out covenantal relationships
3. **To foster** a space where the participants can imagine how congregations might engage covenantal relationships more deeply

Read:

The Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
(pg. 7) or [THE DESIGN](#) [El Diseño en Español](#)

Watch:

Session Three video – Rev. Dr. Bill Lee

[\(English Transcript | Transcripción en Español\)](#)



Rev. Dr. Bill Lee is pastor emerita of Loudon Avenue Christian Church in Roanoke, Virginia. He has served the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through his leadership on various boards as Moderator of the General Assembly, on General Board, the Pension Fund, and more.

The Bonds of Christian Faith: One Congregation's Practice of Living in Covenant

Consider:

In your group or on your own, consider the following questions. Broader questions, like "What stood out to you in his presentation? Did anything in his story resonate with you? Was there anything you disagreed with?" could also be helpful discussion starters.

- 1.** Did you find it helpful to hear Rev. Lee describe Disciples living together in covenant not as something forced or required but as an act of love? What was meaningful about this description?
- 2.** Is Bill Lee's discussion of covenant as relationship helpful in understanding your congregation's connections to the wider church? Where do you see covenant as relationship in your community?
- 3.** As you think of Disciples as a covenantal church does Bill Lee's practice at communion of reminding members of the statement from the Preamble of "God's covenant of love which binds us to God and one another." He goes on to say, "no one has to make us, no one has to force us, no one has to twist our arms, we do this because we love God, we love each other, and we love our church." Does this description of covenant help you better understand the relationship of your congregation with other parts of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)? What is helpful? What doesn't resonate as well?
- 4.** Is Bill Lee's reference to Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of threads tied together in a single garment, a tapestry, helpful for understanding Disciples as a covenantal church? Why or why not?
- 5.** Would regular use of the Preamble in worship as an affirmation of faith be helpful to your understanding of how Disciples live together in covenant?
- 6.** Would an annual service of commitment to our covenantal relationship as Disciples be helpful in strengthening your congregation's relationship with the other expressions of the church? What would that annual service celebrating covenantal relationships look like in your congregation?

The Bonds of Christian Faith: One Congregation's Practice of Living in Covenant

7. Bill Lee stresses the importance of putting our covenant with the wider church into practice through money and presence, making sure support for the wider church is in the budget, and pastors and members of the congregation are present at assemblies and other gatherings of the church.

- a. Which of the practices described by Rev. Lee does your congregation embrace?
- b. Does your congregation contribute to Disciples Mission Fund by including DMF in your budget?
- c. Do you collect Special Day offerings?
- d. Do you encourage and support your pastor(s) and members of the congregation to attend General Assemblies and Regional Assemblies?
- e. What are some of the other ways your church lives in covenant with the whole church?

8. Do you think the mission and ministry of your congregation would be enhanced through experiencing the diversity of Disciples by being present at wider church gatherings? If so, how?

9. Bill Lee expressed surprise that every Disciples congregation was not as involved in serious study and practice of covenant as they were at his congregation. What would happen if all Disciples were involved in such practice? Would you advocate with the leadership of your congregation for a serious ongoing conversation about the covenantal nature of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)? What would that program look like in your congregation?

Close:

As the time and conversation come to a close, end with a brief prayer of thanksgiving for God's covenant and our covenantal relationships.

Prayer:

O God, you are the Master Weaver. We are thankful that you have woven us together as a covenantal church. Those who have gone before us have tried their hand at writing it down and making it plain so that we might study and put into practice what it means to be in covenant one with another. In our congregational and wider church life, may we renew our commitment to you, holding ourselves and one another accountable, resting assured that you hold this garment we call our church together, connected by the bond of love in Jesus Christ. Amen.



Session Four

The Light of Scripture: A Bible Study on Romans 8:38-39

Learning Goals:

1. **To gain a deeper understanding** of the way this passage connects us to the Disciples of Christ understanding of Covenant.
2. **To reflect** on the passage as a lens into the Preamble of the Design and the implications for covenantal relationships.
3. **To share** in community the varying perspectives of our understanding of this passage

Note: This session is a slightly different format from the other sessions, in that it will be much more interactive and conversational. You will read the passage together, and then spend some time exploring what it might have to say to those of us who are seeking to live in covenantal relationship with each other. (Online Format Suggestions are in red)

Read:

The Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
(pg. 7) or **THE DESIGN** **El Diseño en Español**

Watch:

Session Three video – Rev. Dr. Nestor Gomez
(**English Transcript** | **Transcripción en Español**)



The Light of Scripture:

A Bible Study on Romans 8:38-39

Rev. Dr. Nestor Gomez currently serves as Second Vice-Moderator of the General Assembly. Raised in Colombia, he has served both English and Spanish-speaking congregations in Colorado and Connecticut. He holds a Ph.D in Religion and Social Change.

Rev. Alison Robuck (Bible study author) has a heart for education, healing, and wholeness and has served the Church in a variety of capacities for over 25 years. She currently serves on the Board of the Great River Region, and is the region's representative on the General Board.

Centering Exercise:

Beginning Note: Depending on size of group, it is left to the discretion of the leader whether or not to break up into virtual small groups or simply lead a general discussion with the group gathered virtually. If the group is large enough, use zoom (or another meeting conference platform, to break individuals into small groups. The host/leader will need to have the individuals assigned to break out groups when the study starts.

Invite someone to Read Romans 8:38-39 (Scripture will be shared on the screen). Prior to the reading, ask participants to listen carefully and choose ONE word (or phrase) which speaks to them, and/or share in the chat box.

(On Screen) Romans 8:38-39: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Ask for volunteers to share which word (or phrase) caught their attention. When all who have wanted to share have had the opportunity, ask if there is anyone who is willing to share why they think their word spoke to them in a personal way. (Allow enough time to listen to all who care to share.)

Before we delve further into the scripture, it would be helpful for us to know a little bit about the Roman church and Paul's relationship with it. The Church in Rome had been established for several years and was composed of both Jewish Christians and Gentiles. Paul had wanted to visit them for several years, but had not yet been able to be with them in person. The main focus of his entire letter was to remind them to keep the love of Christ at the forefront of their ministry. Paul was encouraging that the church's ministry should always point to the central theme of Christ's love in the world.



The Light of Scripture:

A Bible Study on Romans 8:38-39

Share the following questions on the Screen. Use break-out groups to review the questions. Give the groups 15 minutes to answer the following questions. Ask for someone to take notes to report back to the larger group. The leader can move between the groups to listen, add insight, answer any questions, or move the group along in the conversation.

Consider:

1. What about our relationship with Christ convinces US that Paul's words are – in fact – true?
2. How are we being encouraged to remind OTHERS that Paul's words are true?
3. How can we be the hands and feet of Christ in a world filled with people who believe that circumstances of life have separated them from God?
4. As Paul himself was convinced, how can we, in turn, convince others that God is ALWAYS with them?
5. How does the phrase "actions speak louder than words" apply when attempting to convince others?

Bring the small groups back together into the larger zoom room to share their reflections with the larger group.

After a time of sharing, approach the following questions as a large group. Participants can share their thoughts in the chat. As the leader, feel free to share thoughts from the chat, ask probing questions and call on those who may be reluctant to share openly. (Make sure that all are getting the opportunity to be heard).

6. How do Paul's words affect us as individuals?
7. Would our attitudes or approach to our daily tasks benefit if we began each day with Romans 8:38-39 on our hearts? How so?
8. How do Paul's words affect us as a local congregation?
9. How might our ministries look differently if we remembered that absolutely nothing separates us – or anyone – from the love of God through Christ Jesus?

The Light of Scripture: A Bible Study on Romans 8:38-39

(On the Screen—Invite one participant to read the Preamble aloud as others read along)

Español

Read The Preamble of the Design in unison:

“As members of the Christian Church,
We confess that Jesus is the Christ,
The Son of the Living God,
And proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.
In Christ’s name and by his grace
We accept our mission of witness
And service to all people.
We rejoice in God
Maker of heaven and earth,
And in the covenant of love
Which binds us to God and one another.
Through baptism into Christ
We enter into newness of life
And are made one with the whole people of God.
In the communion of the Holy Spirit
We are joined together in discipleship
And in obedience to Christ.
At the table of the Lord
We celebrate with thanksgiving
The saving acts and presence of Christ.
Within the universal church
We receive the gift of ministry
And the light of scripture.
In the bonds of Christian faith
We yield ourselves to God
That we may serve the One
Whose kingdom has no end.
Blessing, glory and honor
Be to God forever. Amen.



The Light of Scripture:

A Bible Study on Romans 8:38-39

10. Remembering that although Paul was writing to the Church in Rome, his words apply to us today as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.). How do Paul's words affect us as a denomination? What positive experiences might we have if we reminded ourselves regularly that we are part of a larger whole?

11. In the midst of uncertainty and the financial implications that come with an economic downturn, how might we benefit from keeping Paul's words front and center as we make difficult decisions?

12. Do Paul's words cause us to shrink in fear or walk boldly into the future with confidence that truly NOTHING can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord?

Take 5-10 minutes to allow individuals to spend some time reflecting on the Preamble. **(Share Preamble on the screen or make sure that everyone has a copy, in advance).** With soft, reflective music playing in the background, (instrumental would be best) invite participants to spend time with the Preamble. Encourage them to write down words or circle phrases that hold meaning for them.

Ask participants to consider the words/phrases that jumped out at them while remembering Paul's words.

Action: Invite participants to share the action word or phrase that they feel inspired and/or compelled them to contribute personally to the church's mission either locally, regionally or globally.

Here's where we put feet to the fire –

Ask the question, what are you willing to do differently as a result of our time together?

Close:

End your time together with a litany prayer, giving God thanks for being present in our midst and for the movement of the Spirit which has prompted the gifts of: _____ (Highlight the words that were shared.)

Prayer:

Inseparable God, thank you for the light of Scripture that moves us to pray these words: *O God, I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*Romans 8:38-39

Session Five

God's Limitless Love: Covenant in Practice

Learning Goals:

1. **To invite** congregations and individuals to renew their "Yes" to live in covenantal relationship as members of the Christian Church (DOC).
2. **To encourage and empower congregations** to engage in covenantal practices within the denomination and the wider community.

Imagine

Read:

The Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
(pg. 7) or **THE DESIGN** **El Diseño en Español**

Watch:

Session Three video – Rev. Dr. Nadine Burton

(English Transcript | Transcripción en Español)



Rev. Dr. Nadine Burton is the Executive Regional Minister for the Great River Region. She currently provides spiritual and administrative oversight for 106 congregations throughout Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and a pastoral "presence" for pastors, lay leaders, and members.

God's Limitless Love: Covenant in Practice

Read:

Living Into Covenant: A "Want To" Church

"We rejoice in God, maker of heaven and earth, and in God's covenant of love, which binds us to God and one another"

In our small groups at the General Board meeting in February 2020, each group shared their understanding of covenant as it relates to where we have been, where we are, and where we must go in the future to be a truly covenantal church. Some of us focused on identity, and others focused on what we need to be doing. We understand that something has been lost in our desire to live in Covenant. We recognize our lack of trust in our DNA. Many see us as an "island of misfit toys" waiting to use our unique gifts and personality towards the warmth and energy of what we love about the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We perpetuate a myth of exceptionalism, while the reality of decline is on our hearts and minds at every expression of the church.

We feel the ache in our heart, that our sons and daughters do not want this church and that our children may not have this church in the future. Now we find ourselves dwelling in tents as opposed to fortresses. Our Preamble gives us permission to be who God has called us to be. It is a living and fluid document, as opposed to a contract that is to be upheld, where some of us see ourselves by accident. God's love for us is ever changing, but the love never changes.

So you may ask what is a "Want To" church? "Want to" churches are grace (filled) churches, who understand, embrace, live with, and support the three expressions of the Christian Church (DOC). We hold to the Covenant of Yahweh, and seek not to live by contracts, but by the grace (filled) example of our forebears. We seek to bring to each congregation what covenant is, to teach it, and contextualize it for each other.

Covenant requires teaching and teaching requires grace, i.e., sacramental grace, sacrificial grace, agile grace, and incarnational grace. "Want to" churches seek to plough the ground of our theological understanding deeper into the arms of a loving God. "Want to" Churches have the courage to imagine, permission to be and live, and freedom from fear and judgment. Our General Minister and President, Rev. Terri Hord-Owens, shared, *"We show up in the world - God is already at work and we get to participate in what God is doing."*



God's Limitless Love: Covenant in Practice

Our prayer is that some of you would become a "Want to" Church. And that others would renew your commitment to "Want to." All it takes is a "Yes" to God, "Yes" to yourself, and then "Yes" as a community of faith. "In him (Jesus Christ), every one of God's promises is a "Yes." (New Revised Standard Version, 2 Cor. 1:20). Watch! Stand on the rampart to see how God will show up in our church and world.

Prayer of Response: In the bonds of Christian faith, we yield ourselves to God, that we may serve the one, whose Kingdom has no end. Blessings, glory, and honor be to God forever, Amen.



Consider:

In your group or on your own, consider the following questions.

1. This reflection lifted up and named some of the sorrows, anxieties, and fears the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Do you share these? Are your sorrows, anxieties, and fears different? What might they be?
2. Yet, we're reminded that God is already doing new things. Where are you already seeing God at work? Where are you, as individuals and a community, already participating in what God is doing?
3. How might renewing our "yes" embody and teach the many kinds of grace we experience and receive from God? How might a grace-filled understanding of covenant empower and liberate us from the false security of contracts?
4. What might your "yes" look like? How might your congregation live into that "yes" (in specific action oriented ways)?
5. As we reflect on the past five sessions, where might your community further engage in the broader life of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)?

God's Limitless Love: Covenant in Practice

Explore:

Practices for Embodying Covenantal Relationships

As you look at this list of healthy practices for congregations, take an inventory of your congregational life.

- What are the things on this list that your church is already doing really well? What does that look like for your congregation? How do these practices help folks to see how God shows up in the church and world?
- What are some things that your community could lean into more? What would that process look like? How might that change your congregation? How might God be revealed in new ways through these new practices?
- What would it look like for your congregation to be a “Want to” church?

We recognize that we are a part of an amazingly diverse church— theologically, culturally, ethnically, contextually, and more. This list is meant to be a starting point for faith communities to further engage in covenantal relationships in their local communities, within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and ecumenically. Some of these are very broad to help account for the variety of ways congregations faithfully live out covenantal relationships. Conversely, not all of these may fit your context, but we invite you to use this list to help encourage wonder and imagine new possibilities for recognizing God in the world and participating in covenantal relationships.



God's Limitless Love: Covenant in Practice

Embodying Covenantal Relationships through actions and presence

1. Attend district, regional, and general events
2. Notice and follow up when people around the church are not present at Regional and General Assemblies by sending a note to say "you were missed"
3. Connect with an ecumenical faith community near you
4. Connect with a Disciples church whose racial/ethnic makeup does not look like yours
5. Let the Covenant become your marching orders for outreach in your community.
6. Send delegates to General Assembly to help the pastor tell the story of what is happening in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
7. Use the Chalice as a means of "branding the Church" and a visual connection with other Disciples communities
8. Show up in the world
9. Pray for your church and other churches
10. Support your church and other churches



We say we are
Disciples of Christ,
a movement for *wholeness*
in a *fragmented world.*

Let's be the church
we say we are.

God's Limitless Love: Covenant in Practice

Embodying Covenantal Relationships through communal imagination and conversation

1. Start by reflecting and discussing the question, "Where is God calling your church?"
2. Do not allow geographical boundaries to stop us from connecting as a body
3. Ensure there are enough seats at the table
4. Imagine new ways of being church
5. Recognize evangelism is an old term, with a new twist
6. Affirm that "in Christ's name and by his grace, we accept our mission of witness and service to all people.:
7. Imagine a new world that results from God's reign and our witness
8. Allow others to have new thoughts and ideas
9. Be a "want to" church and not a "have to" church
10. Seek to understand that you are part of a living organism, not a club

Embodying Covenantal Relationships through recognition and celebration

1. Recognize/celebrate that we assemble in person, on social media, in chat rooms, near and far
2. Recognize/celebrate that you have already been given permission to be a covenant church
3. Recognize/celebrate and affirm pastors' and lay leaders' participation in region and wider church (board membership, attending events, etc.)
4. Plan an annual day for the pastor to renew their covenant & standing with congregation and wider church.

God's Limitless Love: Covenant in Practice

Embodying Covenantal Relationships through study

1. Study Disciples history & polity with your leadership teams (ex. board, trustees, and elders) so they understand who Disciples are and can lead from that understanding
2. Use New Testament to explore the covenant that God makes with us, and how we celebrate it beyond our local church
3. Think, study, pray, and worship together
4. Use curriculums that shape your spiritual life
5. Encourage the congregation to have conversations around Covenant (what it means, what it looks like, how to live it out)
6. Have your congregation affirm the importance of the Preamble. Some examples of this include: regular recitation in worship, use in a sermon series, devotional materials with congregational leaders, around the communion table, small group educational opportunities, and in written and digital communications (like bulletins and websites)
7. Encourage further reflection and exploration of the Preamble. This could be done by choosing a section of the Preamble to interpret and explain to the congregation each month. This could be in worship as a sermon series (if you're a pastor), through blog posts and newsletter writings, and sharing of video clips
8. Recite the Preamble/affirmation of faith every Sunday; share it with newcomers to help clarify "This is what we believe"
9. Highlight a general ministry in your church during worship or outreach



God's Limitless Love: Covenant in Practice

Embodying Covenantal Relationships through finances and budgets

1. Implement a budget line item to cover all expenses to send a pastor to General Assembly. This allows the pastor time to connect with other clergy, the denomination's wider ministries, and allow them to share what they have learned and experienced with the congregation
2. Include Disciples Mission Fund core support in your congregation's annual budget and educate the congregation on what Disciples Mission Fund supports. This can be done by:
 - a. Having your pastor, board chair, or treasurer write a congregational letter providing more information about DMF and the special day offerings
 - b. Utilize the resources offered online at disciplesmissionfund.org
 - c. Highlight a general ministry in your church during worship or outreach meeting
3. Ask each member to give to Disciples Mission Fund (DMF) over and above their regular offerings (some suggestions include: Each congregation give \$1 to each special offering, have each member give in dollars the number of members the congregation has [e.g. if a congregation has 100 members, each congregant would give \$100 to DMF])
4. Support every special offering, including those of Reconciliation Ministry and Week of Compassion
5. Ensure your pastor receives standing/credentials through your region and the congregation is paying into their pension

Close:

As the time and conversation come to a close, end with a brief prayer of thanksgiving for God's covenant and our covenantal relationships.

Prayer:

O God, your love is a limitless invitation to say 'yes.' We are grateful that we have the opportunity to renew our commitment to be a "want to" church, living grace filled lives in covenant. May we have the courage to imagine how we might show up in a world where you are already at work. For it is a gift that we get to embody your spirit in relationships bound by the love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Closing Litany

Use this closing litany to bring your time and journey through strengthening who we are individually and collectively as a Church in Covenant to bring you to a place of wonder and imagination. While the study comes to a close, the courage to imagine continues and is encouraged. Recite together, or use as your imagination and the Spirit lead you.

Litany offered by Rev. Laura A. Phillips

As we leave this space,
In the grace of our Creator,
Redeemer and Sustainer
Who makes and keeps covenant with us,
May our mouths sing
in the harmony of God's promise,
May our arms reach
across tables of Divine abundance
May our feet dance
in shared rhythms of witness,
May our heart strings
weave together in love,
May our souls yield
in devotion to Christ,
And may we renew our covenant
with God, together
Until we celebrate God's promise
of salvation through Christ
Around table fulfilled in God's presence,
again.

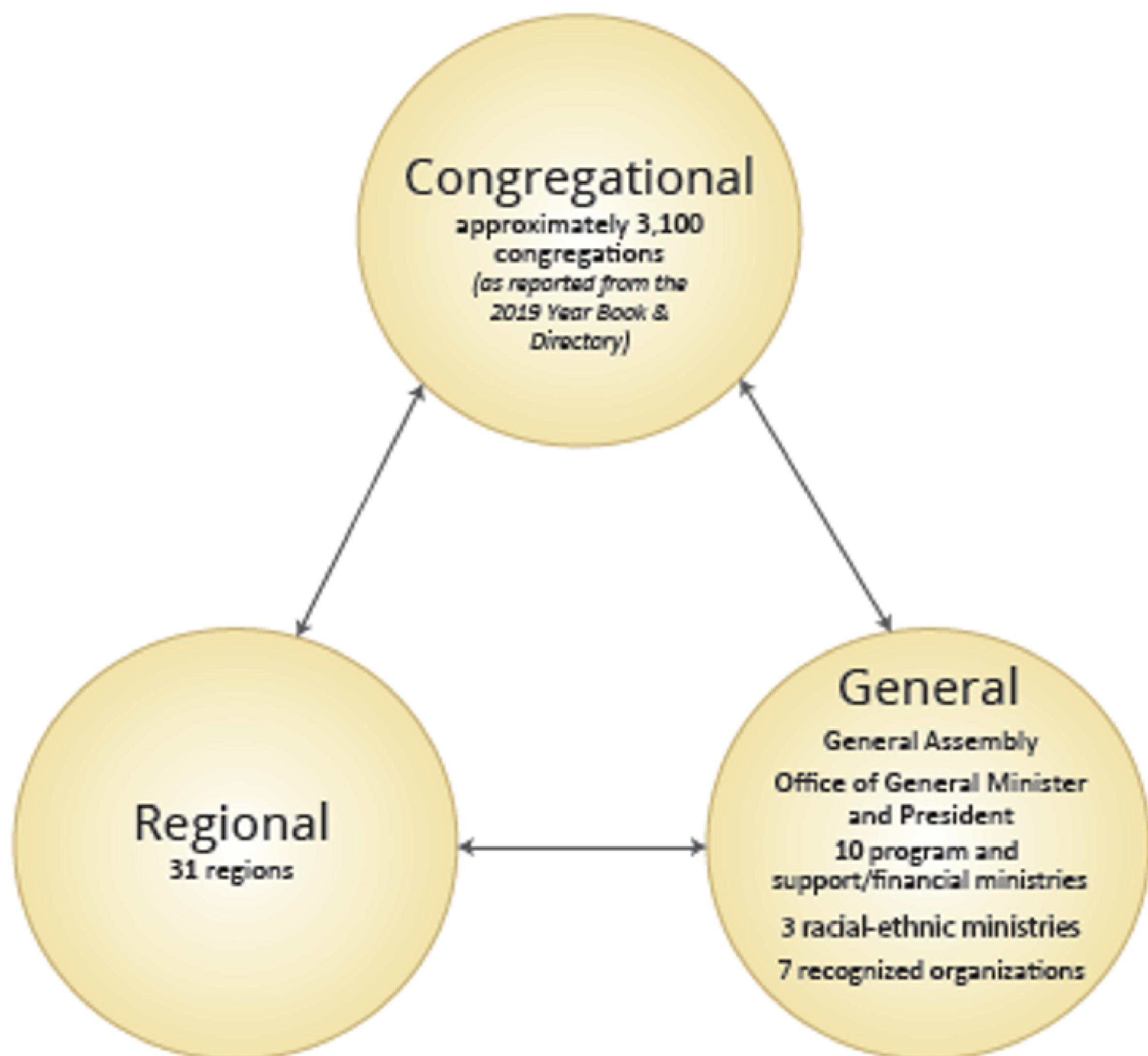
Imagine

Appendix



Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Covenantal Relationships



Appendix

Common Acronyms in the Church

Administrative Committee	AC
Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries	CPOHM
Christian Board of Publication/Chalice Press	CBP/CP
Christian Church Foundation	CCF
College of Regional Ministers	CRM
Council of General Ministries (a.k.a. Cabinet)	CGM/Cabinet
Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry	CUIM
Disciples Church Extension Fund	DCEF
Disciples Home Missions	DHM
Division of Overseas Ministries	DOM
General Assembly	GA
General Board	GB
General Commission on Ministry	GCOM
General Minister and President	GMP
General Nominating Committee	GNC
Higher Education and Leadership Ministries	HELM
Historical Society	DCHS
Hope Partnership for Mission Transformation	Hope
National Benevolent Services	NBA
National Convocation	NC
New Church Ministry	New Church
North American Pacific/Asian Disciples	NAPAD
Office of Disciples Women	ODW
Office of the General Minister and President	OGMP
Pension Fund	PF

Appendix

Stay Connected

- Websites: <https://disciples.org> | <https://disciplesmissionfund.org> | <https://disciples.org/ga>
- Weekly e-letter, general interest: Disciples News Service; Bi-monthly pastor e-letter: Disciples Together; Occasional GMP messages: Dear Disciples; Occasional news about justice work: Disciples Justice Ministries - sign up on disciples.org under Disciples News Service
- Facebook fan page: ChristianChurchDOC
- Facebook groups: Disciples Exchange, General Assembly, Disciples Local Impact
- Twitter: @DisciplesNews and @DisciplesGA
- Instagram: christianchurchdoc
- Common hashtag: #ccdodoc



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Many historical Disciples of Christ Publications can be found in the [Open Access Digital Theological Library \(http://oadtl.org/\)](http://oadtl.org/)



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Let's be the church
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