

Imagine With Me: DMF Day 2021

June 24, 2021

Transcript



Terri Hord Owens: Good morning, Disciples. This is your general minister and president, Terri Hord Owens and welcome to a live edition of Imagine With Me. Well, today is the day. Today is DMF Day, Disciples Mission Fund Day, a day where we celebrate all across the church all of the ministry that we are able to do together because of your contributions as congregations and individuals to Disciples Mission Fund. I hope that you will find your way today to disciplesmissionfund.org. There's a link there that you'll be able to make your gift. I made my gift early yesterday. So I hope that you will spread the word. Share on social media that today is the day you can make a difference, as our theme says, "Imagine what your gifts can do."

If together we are giving as individuals and congregations, there is so much work that we have done, can do, and will be able to do because of your gifts to DMF. DMF supports over 70 different ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), from regional ministries to general ministries, colleges and universities - all of these ministries that are helping us bear witness to God's limitless love from our doorsteps, as we say, to the very ends of the earth.

So our guests today are leaders who represent all the expressions of our church; congregational, regional, and general. I'm excited that we have with us today Randy Ehrhardt from the West Des Moines Christian Church, April Lewton from the National Benevolent Association, and Christal Williams, regional minister in Tennessee. I want to welcome you all to Imagine With Me this morning and I want to ask you each to talk a little bit about your ministry and how you benefit from the gifts that are made to DMF, and how you see DMF making a difference in your ministry. So, Randy, let's start with you. From that congregational perspective, how does your congregation think about participating in DMF and what difference does it make for you as a congregation?

Randy Erdhardt: We're very intentional. We want to think bigger than just the local church and DMF helps to connect us to the region, to the general church. It's good to see that our ministries make a difference around the world, around the country, and locally. We're very intentional and want to see how can we see the world bigger than we are, how can we change, express ourselves, how can we be a presence, make a difference. And then when it comes back, it comes back, it deepens our understanding. It helps us realize we're one in this world and how we can be together in our faith. It's part of our tradition. It's who we are. And we continue to seek ways how we express that.

THO: Great, Randy. I think as we've been talking about the importance of covenant in the life of our church, I think DMF - what you're saying is being connected, that's an expression of our covenant that we have, first with God through Jesus Christ, and then, secondly, with one another, enabling all of us to do the ministry that that we're called to do. Christal, congregations may or may not realize that part of what they give goes to their own local region. It does and there's a regional component of that allocation and it supports your region. It doesn't go to somebody else's region. Dr. Christal, could you share with us the impact and the importance of DMF and regional ministry?

Christal Williams: Yes, I want to say good morning to you Rev. Owens and everyone. I am so happy to talk about the regional component because when I think about the region I'm in. It's kind of shaped like this: we go from the hills of Appalachia all the way down to the Mississippi Delta, three distinctive areas in Tennessee with three distinctive needs.

And the impact DMF has made on offering scholarships to pastors for leadership development, helping to send young people to camp, even helping congregations fund their pastoral ministry, and ideas, and dreams that they have. It is overwhelming at times what the dollar that's donated to DMF can do to support ministry. For me, regional ministry is an extension of the local congregation. We help you, Randy, do better than which you can't do by yourself. And so each and every dollar that's sent in to DMF, and we receive a portion of that back within our region. I'm constantly being a broker or a clearinghouse sharing the dollar, making sure that the needs are met. Just like in the book of Acts, making sure that there is not a need in a congregation that cannot be filled. And that's the skinny of the doctor.

THO: Yeah, Christal, I think what you've raised just about the diversity across our church, the different needs in our local context, and how important it is to both recognize those needs and then meet them in ways in which we both have resources, but recognizing the particularity of those needs, so that we can be intentional. And, of course, I love that seeing the like region as simply the extension of the congregation - that's part of the covenant, when we don't see ourselves necessarily as separate entities but we see ourselves working together. As Rev. Dr. Nadine Burton of the Great River Region says, "Not because we have to, but we do this because we want to." And we want to be that "want to" church. Now Rev. April Lewton from the National Benevolent Association, one of our larger programmatic general ministries. Help us better understand the impact that DMF makes with the ministry like National Benevolent Association.

April Lewton: Completely. Good morning, Rev. Hord Owens, and everyone who is watching. We are excited and glad to be on this live conversation with you. I am always just amazed when you talk about the connections, Pastor Terri, the connections that are being made across the life of our church. National Benevolent Association is the health and social service general ministry for our church, and what that means is we

have the opportunity to work with health and social service ministries in the United States and Canada. That's a huge swath of area and of ministries. We have over 50 different ministry partners, Disciples-affiliated ministry partners, and countless leaders just doing amazing things every day. When I think about the generosity of Disciples Mission Fund, one of the first things I always say is, church, you are our largest giver every year. Your gifts allow work to be done across all these ministries and in large part, you know, it's sometimes not always the sexy or fun parts of the ministries, right? It's working with leaders to work on their budgets, working with leaders to work on board development or nonprofit management. You know, NBA is, in large part, about strengthening organizations and ministries, and strengthening leaders to do good work, as well as addressing, as we all know, so many issues of social justice in the life of our world and in our communities. So I think about all those connections, and the power of the work that's being done every day, and, in large part, because of the generosity of the gifts that come from you all, right? And those connections are so important because, as Dr. Christal said, there is work that we do that we simply can't do alone.

I always say, when I'm speaking with other people about the significance of our general ministries, our general ministries, before we were officially a denomination, when people called us, we were the brotherhood, and we were this loose federation of congregations. Most of our general ministries were started because congregations figured out that there was more that they could do if they did it together, whether it's the six women who realized they needed to do something to address the homelessness and the need that they saw in the St. Louis area, or it's the widow who said, "I don't ever want anyone to be left without resources in the way I was." And we now have the Pension Fund. The idea that we would collaborate in our investment resources for the betterment of the church through Christian Church Foundation. Disciples Home Mission, that deals with Christian education resources supports ministry day-to-day - children, youth, and young adults, and intergenerational ministry. All of these ministries at the general level came to be because congregations understood that there was so much we needed to do that we simply could not do alone.

THO: I want to give us some time to talk about some specific stories or examples. There's such power when we tell our stories and I won't necessarily call on you, but I'll let you maybe put your foot in the water to share a story about how you've seen DMF makes a difference in the ministry in which you're engaged.

RE: I can start.

THO: Randy.

RE: Yeah, first I want to thank you for this dialogue. This just energizes me, excites me. We need each other and we're stronger with each other. And I've just been looking forward to this discussion. I happen to be at camp right now. I'm directing, my director and counseling in my 40th year of camp. I can hear youth in the background. And after a year of not having camp them being here, hearing them ask their questions and looking for community again, that's just, that's life-giving.

But the illustration I wanted to share was Disciple Volunteering. They've had a huge impact on our congregation and me personally. Churches in the, you know, Midwest, our congregation has people all across the continuum as far as politics and theology, and sometimes we see things the same way and sometimes we don't, but we try to celebrate all being together at that Table. And it's actually the type of volunteering that's helped me with the members that are probably the most different on the theological line for me. I'd be more liberal than some of our conservative members, but I can think of one particular member - his name's Jim - and he and I lots of times don't see eye to eye on things. But every year, we go on a mission trip together. We'll get on some roof where we're putting some maybe shingles back on a roof that got hurt in a storm. We'll chat up on that roof. We come off the roof, tired, worn out, but appreciating that we're still loving one another, trying to make a difference in the world, trying to make life better. And we can go that night and have worship together, and share the Table together, and come back to our church family and say, "Hey, we can do this. We can come together." If you can have a vision, that's a coming together, different than the divisiveness in our world right now. That's got to be a, well, I just say, thanks be to God.

THO: Amen. Thanks be to God, Randy. I think what you've just shared is a really wonderful example of really what it means to be in covenant. Covenant doesn't always mean that we agree individually on every point of doctrine or theology, but our covenant is really, you know, it begins at that Table, right? It begins at the Table of the Lord. Jesus said, "I'm establishing a new covenant with God in his creation." When Jesus establishes that Lord's Supper ritual, that that means so much to us. And we believe, as Disciples, that we welcome everyone to that Table just as God has welcomed us. And that's what we mean by God's limitless love - that there is something that we work at together, that's bigger than our own individual thoughts or opinions. And it's that love of God which we extend to all, whether we agree on every point of theology or doctrine or not. So, thank you for that working, Disciples Volunteering, when we're able to send folks out in the mission field to places that have been devastated by natural disasters, places that just need our help to rebuild and recover. And we've been chomping at the bit during the pandemic for folks to get back out to places. We're still doing recovery work after Hurricane Harvey in Texas, so this is another example of how we just continue to be there for one another, and your explanation to us helps me really drive home that point, I think, Randy, that that limitless love and covenant is not about what we agree about or disagree about. It's about us agreeing that our goal is for people to see the love of Christ that we hopefully are living into his church.

Christal, April, are there stories that come to mind of the power of ministry that's possible because we're giving to DMF?

CW: Yes, yes. I was just sitting here thinking, as regional minister you have so many stories where DMF keeps popping up, but specifically I'm thinking about my own story. I'm nearly 23 years into some form of regional ministry.

THO: Twenty-three years? Wow.

CW: And that's been a lot of windshield time. I have served over 152 congregations in a 23-year period of and I've had to drive to each and every one of them. And the money for the gas in the vehicle for me to come to a congregation to help them with search and call helping congregations find pastors. Some congregations, because of their size, they can't afford to give to the region like they want to. And so they often ask, "Dr. Williams, what do we do? Do you have a fee for services?" And I love to tell them we don't have a fee for services, but because of the generosity of those who contribute and donate to DMF, I can continue serving you. I can come here and help you get to the next level and dimension of your ministry.

And I think about those stories, because it's so important that we fund DMF so that we're able to give ministers - all of our pastors and leaders - the capacity to lead. I'm thinking about the scholarships for our seminarians. DMF helps to fund that so those of you who are looking for clergy persons, whether senior ministers, associates - DMF will help you get the right person for your particular congregation. And it offers the region the opportunity to come and serve you without having something hanging over your head or on your back because of the generosity in which others have contributed to Disciples Mission Fund. So I think about that often. Each and every day when I arrive at my desk, I think about the privilege and the joy that I have serving because of the generosity of others. And to me, that is the foundation - making sure that leaders are capable of leading and that they have the capacity to do what they've been called to do without the worry without the frets of whether or not they have the resources to make them who God is calling them to be. Now, that's DMF.

THO: Amen. Amen. We're in a fee-for-service world and DMF makes it possible to serve it in that kind of freedom. I think it's also important to say that there's not an assessment with DMF, right? There's not an amount that a congregation has to give. You give what you can give. And if all of our congregations would just give something, whatever they can give. My home pastor always used to say, it's not about equal giving in terms of dollar amount, it's about that that sense of equal sacrifice that we're all giving together whatever we can. So, thanks, first to you, Dr. Williams, and to other regional ministers literally are boots on the ground, crossing our church in amazing ways to be there for our congregations. And DMF makes it that possible.

April, any story come to mind? I'm sure there are lots of crazy and wonderful stories from the NBA world.

AL: Well, I so appreciate Pastor Christal. You're talking about leaders and the ability to do amazing things. I was recently on a call with one of our leaders who serves as an administrator for Manistee Manor in Arizona. And this administrator, she's been doing this for 20-plus years. And what Manistee Manor does is offers housing for seniors and older adults, and, as you can imagine, this past year has been a major roller coaster for them. But one of the things that she talked about was really the ability to continue to be

community in that place, even in the midst of what last year was, because of the connections to the wider church. She spoke about just, she said, "You know, I will always remember the trainings that I have done in connection with NBA and other people. And I leaned into that leadership development training in these times of crisis." She spoke about - at NBA we have a lot of cohort and peer learning groups - and she spoke about participating in conversations like that. She said, you know, one of the last conversations she was in - it was around food security - and because of that conversation she came back and they generated a whole lot of energy. And she says, "I wish I could take my camera out and show you the community garden we have here at Manistee Manor because it's that kind of activity that residents have but also the bounty and plentifulness of food that comes out of their community garden."

She says all of that was because of conversations that she had with other leaders. And then she also spoke about - NBA has a mission and ministry grant program and we've been providing this kind of support to non-profits and to ministries doing amazing work - and Manistee Manor, she spoke about the ability to pay for some chaplaincy services in partnership with other Disciples in the community. And she says the ability for people to come in and pastor and be with residents. She says all of that is possible. So, I promise you, I didn't prompt any of this in the storytelling because she was just talking about real life and about, you know, the ability to recognize that she was not alone in this work of nurturing community. And she was so grateful for that, and I was so grateful for her, and I was just glad to see her face, but also just to hear the energy and the spirit of that community. And I think about that in every day, of a ministry that's happening whether health and social services are, like we've mentioned, just across the life of the church. There's just so much ministry happening that we don't often get to hear about. And it's the small ministries as well as the big ministries. And the gifts of DMF really do support that kind of presence and partnership.

THO: Yeah, I think one of the most important learnings that we've had from COVID 19 has been the ways in which those connections and those community relationships and the way the general ministries and regions have worked together to help support congregations, to help support our community partners. We don't want to forget our mission around the world as we support mission co-workers who are partnering and accompanying so many important peace and faith-oriented ministries around the world that are also supported by DMF. The excitement that I'm getting and energizing that I'm feeling out of this conversation is really important, because this is the work that we do as a church.

This is why we are a part of this wonderful movement that we call the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), so we want to encourage each of you to not only make your gift today, but also to go follow us today on social media. We're on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or even on LinkedIn. We may be on TikTok soon, who knows? But there are lots of great stories about what Disciples Mission Fund does. And if you have a story that you want to share about what has been made possible, share it on your social media and use the #DMFdoesthat. We want to hear more of your stories always.

And so, I want to thank Randy Ehrhardt from our congregational setting, Dr. Christal Williams, regional minister, and Rev. April Lewton, who serves with one of our general ministries, for sharing how important DMF is across the life of our whole church, how it allows us to live in covenant with one another, and, most importantly, how it allows us to bear witness to the limitless love of God in all the ministry that we do.

Today at 2 o'clock EDT, I hope you'll join Lee Hull Moses and Bruce Barkhauer from the Center for Faith and Giving for a short conversation about generosity. And also they'll be sharing some great tips about stewardship and how you do that in this digital age.

Everything is new. We are imagining ourselves as a new church in a new world, doing the work that God has called us to do, giving ourselves permission to change but also walking in freedom from fear of what happens when we do change. We need your support in DMF to do those things, to be that new church and to walk boldly forward into the future into which God is calling us.

So, thank you again to my guests, and thank you, Disciples, for tuning in to this first-ever live version of Imagine With Me. Don't forget, today at two o'clock you'll hear from Lee Hull Moses and Bruce Barkhauer, and then tonight at 8 eastern, we're going to give thanks to God for all of your generosity. So, I hope that you'll be staying tuned to us on social media all day long.

Thanks be to God for your generous gifts. Remember, Disciples, God loves you.