

# GB-22-1203

**Name of ministry:**

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Greater Kansas City

**Ministry**

**Executive/Regional**

**Minister name:**

Rev. William B. Rose-Heim

**Ministry**

**Executive/Regional**

**Minister email:**

[billrh@kcdisciples.org](mailto:billrh@kcdisciples.org)

**In what ways is your region/ministry thriving?**

Thanks to the work of our Regional Minister for Ministry Innovation, Rev. Dr. Delesslyn Kennebrew and our Ministry Innovation Team, we have received the Broadway Church as a chartered Disciples of Christ open-and-affirming congregation. Among ten new church planters from five Regions of the Christian Church in monthly online classes with Dr. Kennebrew is a candidate to start a Filipino Disciples congregation. Three congregations were given \$5,000 grants to upgrade online communications technology. Dozens of pastors and church planters participate in monthly online Ministry Innovation Circles featuring Disciples and ecumenical thought leaders.

We celebrated three ordinations, formed a Clergy Support Team, and facilitated search and call for eight congregations. Five GKC Disciples clergy received scholarships to participate in the first cohort of the new DHM Disciples Interims training program.

Six GKC congregations now host other congregations – some affiliated with other denominations – several in new hybrid models of partnership. Rather than a simple owner/renter relationship, these congregations are finding mutual benefit in exploring partnership opportunities for mutual benefit around community

missions, services like child day care, and fellowship demonstrating our Disciples penchant for ecumenism and exploration of new ways to be united in Christ. Experiments continue with online gatherings for elders, online classes using curricula from The Work of The People, and occasional online workshops around specific topics of interest to congregations. We have also conducted an online circle of trust session where leaders in a congregation in discernment were prayerfully supported by colleagues from five other congregations. Our first online Covenant Education cohort appreciated the opportunity to gain experience more about “God’s design for the Church.” All the above has helped to see a slight increase in the amount of known and reported intra-congregational collaboration – particularly among younger clergy who learn of a need and take initiative.

Our Becoming Beloved Community team actively participates in community organizing, anti-racism continuing education, and this fall produced video Advent devotionals focused on anti-racism, reparation, and justice themes. The activity of this team has sparked an increase in the numbers of GKC Disciples engaged in the work of pursuing equity and justice across the Region.

Our participation in the Tri-Regional Partnership exploration with the Christian Church in Kansas and the Christian Church in Nebraska has opened opportunities for cost-effective collaboration and sharing of resources to enhance congregational vitality. Though early in the process, we have already been the beneficiaries of invitations to send ten GKC Disciples to Kansas Leadership Center events, courtesy of the Christian Church in Kansas. Trust and empathy continue to build among the participants in the steering committee and conversations are moving now in the direction of planning and coordinating opportunities for mutual benefit in 2022.

Thanks to the quality and frequency of online events

and communications from the Office of the General Minister and President, more GKC Disciples are connecting in meaningful ways with the wider Church. Among these was the Transforming Community Conferencing workshop with Dr. David Anderson Hooker, the new Disciples Tech Corps, the Disciples Virtual Gathering, and service with General Unit and General Board entities. Rev. Laura Phillips, our GKC representative to the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), was the first of our pastors to lead her Overland Park Christian Church congregation in a study of the Covenant Education materials and was a contributor of a litany included in those materials.

With the help of our Tall Oaks Conference Center Board and our management agreement with United camps and Conferences, we have managed to avoid outbreaks of COVID 19 among those participating in events on campus. We concluded a successful summer church camp program under the leadership of our Camp and Conference Coordinator Rev. Shandra Yost-Soltani and our Ministry with Young Disciples chairperson, Rev. Dr. Lara Blackwood Pickrel.

The Micah Ministry, technically an initiative of the Independence Christian Church in northeast Kansas City, continues to attract volunteers and contributions from dozens of GKC Disciples congregations. It has operated continuously for the past twenty years, serving as many as nine hundred meals every Monday evening. Services have been expanded to guests and include two days of free medical clinics, a dental clinic, clothing, food pantry, and assistance with houseless guests needing a mailing address and help applying for government services and receiving stimulus checks. Additionally, the host congregation now houses an alternative high school for young men and space for meetings of nonprofit and neighborhood organizations. Recently two new services were added on Monday evenings, coordinated by their pastor Rev. Mindy

Fugarino; a pre-dinner gathering with workshops, opportunities to speak with city officials, orientation in community organizing, and community-building. After dinner, guests are invited to an inclusive service of worship organized to welcome those who do not normally participate in church activities.

A retreat was held this summer for our Regional Board and featured an orientation by Rev. Lee Hull Moses about the primary responsibilities of a Regional Board, a message from our General Minister and President, and discernment about the work of the Regional Board in 2022. At every quarterly meeting we now include a time for board development and a moment for anti-racism in which information is shared to fill in gaps in the history of the Church and the nation about the roots and persistence of systemic racism and dysfunctional philosophical constructs such as American Exceptionalism, Manifest Destiny, and the Doctrine of Discovery.

Our Regional Board approved a sabbatical leave plan for Regional Minister and President William Rose-Heim and offered funding to help with travel and other sabbatical experiences. They generously agreed to allow for international travel not possible with the surge in COVID cases as late as 2023. Much of the research focus for this sabbatical leave was and is about anti-racism in the Church. A trip to Northern Ireland and Scotland will be taken in May 2022 to examine how the Campbells were “educated” in racist thought through their formal education and homeland experiences before arriving in the U.S. and how that influenced their passion for Christian unity even with slaveholding Christians. The hope is that “overhearing” their stories may help white-privileged Disciples to consider the foundational influences of their own spiritual and civic formation.

**What are the biggest challenges facing your region/ministry this year?**

The challenges named most often by pastors and lay leaders are the adaptations they are having to make dealing with the specter of COVID 19 and its mutations. In-person worship was beginning to be a reality, albeit with mask wearing encouraged and other precautions. Then came the Delta surge and slow down followed by the rise in cases of the more infectious Omicron variant. We are living with a question we had not much considered before 2019; "Did my coming to worship, possibly having been exposed to the virus, result in the sickening or death of a neighbor?"

Most of our pastors and lay leaders are committed to a future of video streaming worship and other online productions requiring infusions of funds for equipment and training. Many who grew up in the Church before the advent of online everything were neither well prepared for nor particularly desirous of being in front of a video camera or figuring out how to offer pastoral care and assist with the spiritual formation of those who regularly participate out of state while at the same time attending to all the other regular duties expected of church leaders.

Like most church entities our congregations are affected by the rise in the number of those in the U.S. and Canada who no longer look to the Church universal or to organized religion for spiritual formation and creative missional expression. We miss connecting with many of those who have been disappointed or hurt during their experience within a faith-based community and have stopped looking for a church home.

In too many congregations the conversations at board meetings are about money and members. Leaders called to be a non-anxious presence may show up as an anxious non-presence Too much of congregational (and at times wider Church) energy, attention and resources are focused on keeping what we have.

We hear little effort made in most congregations to encourage youth to listen for a call to a ministry (in any form), but we are so eager to equip them for a career

that will help them to “make it” in the world as it is. We drive miles to attend church and pass by homes near the sanctuary - homes filled with neighbors we do not know and thus cannot effectively love. We may not even know or spend much time with those who live next door to our own homes. Vestiges of segregation and the persistence of systemic racism make it possible for us to be unaware of the real work that the Church was/is uniquely equipped to do.

But these are not our biggest challenges.

We struggle to reclaim the heart of the Great Commission – to corporately desire to proclaim a living gospel with humble lifestyles, work to make justice happen, and sacrificial demonstrations of love as God loves. Could it be that few of us will talk openly about our faith beyond the walls of the sanctuary because, over time, there has been less vital faith to talk about? Who are we Disciples? How are we known and experienced by our neighbors as a recognized denomination? We have been exploring that in small group Covenant Education conversations, yet we know that from one congregation to another, there are few things in the Preamble to the Design that we consistently witness to well enough to create a credible, consistent “brand.”

Our biggest challenges are not technical, structural, or economical. They are spiritual. If we would move away from a “membership” mindset toward a more passionate and earthy discipleship, the sky’s the limit on what God can accomplish through our Church!

**What is something you hope to accomplish in the next year?**

Among the goals for 2022, Greater Kansas City Disciples will:

- Plan and organize new opportunities for spiritual revival for clergy and laity – one or two “big tent” events and increasingly varied opportunities for small group and individual renewal
- Create new opportunities for more Disciples to engage in learning more of the whole truth about the

aspects of systemic racism that affect life in our KC metro, with more tours, online book studies and interviews with local authors, and workshops to equip us to be more effective activists for making justice happen

- Partner with other Regions to offer online orientation and support for elders, congregational board leaders, and those leading stewardship and development efforts
- Offer more Covenant Education sessions online
- With professional help, revamp our regional communications program
- Hold a Regional Assembly October 14-15 in Kansas City, MO
- Organize a Regional Board retreat with new officers
- Complete in 2022 a season of discernment about the future of our Tall Oaks Camp and Conference Center
- Continue to invest in the Tri-Regional Partnership with the Christian Church in Kansas and the Christian Church in Nebraska
- Reduce the number of age-specific summer church camps and add one or two intergenerational options focused around areas of interest.
- Promote participation in General Ministry events
- Plan in 2022 for a season of discernment to restructure our Region in 2023 to better serve congregations, reduce deficit spending, and align staffing with mission
- Midwife at least one new church start

**What is something you would like the General Board to know about your region/ministry?**

We are acutely aware that we are in a time of deep transition away from models of being the kind of church that fits in with the prevailing cultural narratives and aspirations of those who prize certainty, comfort and control over creativity, compassion, and courage. To borrow a phrase from Brian McLaren, we are joining with the whole Church in the early stages of a spiritual migration. We seek to be led by the Spirit to become a church that helps to form a better narrative with our communities, demonstrates love of all people, and

leads collaboratively keeping ever in mind the well-being of future generations.

We commit to honoring our covenantal relationships, promoting healthy accountability, and engaging in closer collaboration with all Disciples of Christ.

**How can we pray for your region/ministry?**

Please pray that we act with strong intention, conviction, and courage to do and become what God intends.