

GB-2206

Name of ministry:

Board of Church Extension of Disciples of Christ, Inc. dba
Disciples Church Extension Fund

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister name:

Belinda R. King

Ministry

Executive/Regional

Minister email:

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

Through investments, loans, and a holistic suite of services, Disciples Church Extension Fund (DCEF) connects with Disciples of Christ congregations to discern their best path forward. Offering relevant resources and innovative solutions, DCEF inspires and empowers congregations to create Holy Places where people connect with God, each other, and the community.

We are pleased to report to the wider church that our ministry and mission continued faithfully and fruitfully, in the face of the adversity of 2021. With oversight for the denomination-wide program, New Church Ministry (NCM), we also celebrate continued growth and vitality for this movement. NCM trains, equips, assists, and multiplies emerging and affiliating congregations and leaders. Find NCM's specific responses to these questions at the close of each DCEF entry.

In what ways is your ministry thriving?

Despite a second pandemic year — and the many

challenges that accompanied it — Disciples Church Extension Fund ended 2021 positioned to support the church as it adapts to the challenges of unprecedented change. Most notably we celebrate:

- A New President: Belinda R. King continues DCEF's 138-year legacy of leadership, as a history-making new president as of January 2022.
- A Solid Financial Position: With year-end financial reports still being compiled, we can say with confidence that we ended 2021 in a solid financial position.
- Services and Facilities Expertise: We continue to undergird the mission of our partner congregations — especially as they navigate an unanticipated and unsettling context for ministry.

A NEW PRESIDENT

After celebrating the 46-year ministry of Erick D. “Rick” Reisinger, outgoing president, DCEF's board warmly welcomed Belinda R. King as the ninth president of DCEF, effective January 1, 2022.

With nearly two decades of experience in business banking, commercial lending, investment management, and client services, King was selected after a nationwide executive search. She makes history for the 138-year-old ministry as both the first African American, and first woman to serve in DCEF's top post.

A DCEF Vice President since 2019, King joined the ministry in 2012 with a strong background in banking. Prior to her employment with DCEF, King held roles at KeyBank and JP Morgan Chase Bank.

“I am overjoyed with Belinda becoming the next President of DCEF,” said Rev. Laurie Pound Feille, 2021 DCEF Board chair. “She has the experience, gifts, and talents to lead DCEF into the future. The Board of Directors looks forward to working with her and to all

that she will bring to the position.”

“DCEF is called to be a change agent for what comes next for the Church,” King said. “We are on the cusp of change. I feel called by God to be the bridge for DCEF’s future as we continue to advance services that prepare congregations for ministry in a changing context.

“Congregations thrive when they understand that carrying out the legacy of their predecessors requires adapting to the context in which they find themselves called into ministry,” said King.

“DCEF helps congregations assess what I call the ‘Trinity of Success.’ That is, we help them assess the context in which they serve, the resources they bring to the mission, and the processes that can help them live up to their unique call.”

A SOLID FINANCIAL POSITION

Meanwhile, the ministry’s financial position is solid. Recent market gains boosted 2021 financials, which at the time of this writing were not yet official.

“With year-end financials still in process, we obviously cannot provide specifics,” said Jennifer R. Gallagher, Chief Financial Officer. “But all indicators show solid footing in this second pandemic year.”

“Like other financial ministries of the church, we also benefited from market gains that boosted investment income for the year,” she added.

SERVICES & EXPERTISE

To help congregations continue navigating the uncharted territory of ministry in an ongoing pandemic, DCEF stepped up in 2021 to encourage innovation.

Case in point, DCEF approved 98 tech grants for more

than \$300,000 to help congregations buy the equipment necessary to shift from in-person to virtual worship – and to the both-and terrain of hybrid worship.

Among recipients, Heart of the Rockies Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Fort Collins, Colo., used their grant to upgrade video equipment, and expand broadcasting options on multiple platforms.

“I think Covid-19 sort of gave us a proverbial kick in the pants,” Matt Wharton, a member of the tech team for Heart of the Rockies said. “I think we’re in a stronger position because of the adaptations we’ve had to make.” The tech grant helped the congregation make the crucial leap, he said.

“Not a week goes by that we don’t hear from folks who are very grateful for the opportunity to still be able to worship with us even when they can’t be here in person,” says Rev. Rev. Melissa St. Clair, senior minister. She echoed numerous church leaders in noting that the changes have “drawn the circle of how and with whom we worship considerably wider.”

Halfway through 2021, we celebrated an ease in pandemic restrictions, which temporarily permitted on-site visits with congregations. However, late in the year the rapid emergence of the Omicron variant of the Covid virus stymied those trips.

Nevertheless, virtual visits continue to keep us connected to our partners. Like many of our congregations, we are learning that our remote connections can make our consulting services even more accessible to those who seek our help.

NEW CHURCH MINISTRY

In 2021, NCM continued to offer quality learning experiences for leaders of our movement, with remarkable results.

Despite being held online for a second year running, registration for Leadership Academy nearly doubled 2020 figures, with attendees reflecting age and racial diversity. The 2021 class boasted 150 registrants, 16 workshop leaders, 15 vendors, and seven denominations. The three-day virtual intensive included church planters, regional representatives, and lay leaders.

Moreover, with the Multiply Track session – a new addition for 2021 – program staff, boards, and clergy of established congregations learned alongside their new church peers. The cohort – facilitated by Pastor Terrell L McTyer, Minister of New Church Strategies; and Christie Love, pastor and church planter of The Connecting Grounds in Springfield, MO – was the largest track, with 60 attendees who explored ministry innovation.

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

Like most of the world, DCEF faces deep challenges from a raging pandemic, a climate in crisis, and the racial inequities exposed anew by these disaster-inducing conditions. In the face of these challenges, we seek to remain nimble, humble, and relational.

To be sure, our congregations have demonstrated considerable pluck and adaptability with adjustments like virtual worship, drive-through food pantries and online gatherings for decision making and fellowship. As the impact of the virus continues, we anticipate standing ready to support further innovations.

Yet our congregations face more than the unpredictability of a pandemic. They are often among first responders in the face of the deadly fires, floods

and funnel clouds being generated by an escalating climate crisis.

Take the inland 40-mile-wide wall of 100-plus-mph straight winds visited upon central and eastern Iowa in 2020. Damage topped \$7.5 billion even before agricultural losses were calculated. Or consider last month's EF5 tornado that killed 77 people in Kentucky alone, as it cut a 128-mile continuous path across four states.

Rebuilding a community after any disaster, but especially storms of this scale, requires the compassionate response of the faith community. Yet Disciples of Christ houses of worship felt the brunt of these storms, too.

The DCEF Building Disaster Response service, offered at no cost to impacted congregations, provides support throughout remediation, insurance assessment and/or rebuilding. DCEF Building and Capital Services Advisor Jim Michel works with insurance adjustors to ensure the congregations receive what they need.

As we see these crises disproportionately impact people of color, we continue to seek ways to make resources available to communities of color. This commitment shows up most profoundly through New Church Ministry, where new church starts have tended to be our most diverse communities. But we also continue to seek ways to help our congregations rise to the occasion in this moment of reckoning. For example, nearly 500 registrants signed up for the New Church Hacks event on antiracism.

But as we enter 2022, we view providing access to low-interest loans for communities of color as part of an ongoing effort to redistribute capital to historically underserved communities. As we help build assets in

those communities, we will strengthen their potential – as well as live up to our call to serve the whole church.

NEW CHURCH MINISTRY

NCM values being relational, resourceful, and relevant. Exercising these values given certain societal realities (post-Christianity, COVID-19 pandemic, racial inequity, etc.) is challenging. Our deepest questions include: How do we encourage, empower, and equip new church pioneers and collectives as they discover new ways to be meaningful and missional? How do we provide relevant coaching, mentoring, training, and tools? How do we optimize and maximize our resources, as a general ministry, to maintain momentum and efficacy?

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

If there is a “bright side” when a disaster (whether a pandemic or weather-related crisis) renders a church building useless, it is the reminder that the church is not a building. Such loss raises questions DCEF has posed for decades:

- As beautiful and historic as it may be, is this large, one-use sanctuary meeting today’s missional moment?
- How do we position our congregation financially for flexibility in ministry and facilities?
- How do we make worship more accessible to everyone?

Some congregations, like Harmony Springs Christian Church (formerly High Street Christian Church) of Akron, Ohio, didn’t need a disaster for these questions to arise. Through the New Beginnings assessment service, they took account of their situation a decade ago: the lifecycle of the congregation, its finances, and its building. They realized the maintenance cost of their old downtown building was preventing them from faithfully executing a meaningful ministry.

Last year, they broke ground on a 6,000-square-foot, multi-purpose non-profit event center. As the congregation discovers new life in a new location, the building will support their mission in today's context for ministry.

While Harmony Springs had a decade to assess, plan and execute their new life, most of our congregations face the emerging experiment of being church at a mind-boggling pace under today's conditions. But we do not intend to let them face it in isolation.

DCEF considers three main areas of self-examination for congregations as they consider their mission and ministry:

Congregational Life Cycle – Where does the faith community find itself in the natural life cycle of an organization? They may be just getting started; self-sustaining and growing; leveling off; or beginning to decline.

Building Life Cycle – What about the facilities they have at their disposal for ministry? Is the building new? Has needed maintenance been deferred? Is it too big, too small or located too far from the community they are called to serve?

Financial Life Cycle – How is the congregation positioned financially? Are they barely getting by? Growing in ways that fully fund their ministry? Are they leaving a legacy for future generations?

We're planning "Building Reimagining Conferences" for 2022, where we'll focus on pandemic-informed ministry questions, like:

- How is the building helping/hindering our mission?
- What are the stewardship opportunities in a high-tech/low-touch context?

- How do we build community in a hybrid world?
- What are some best practices that have worked in other places that might be applied in our congregation?

NEW CHURCH MINISTRY

In 2022, NCM is poised to share a new experience called the Pioneers' Retreat to cultivate leadership skills, self-awareness, and spiritual development for founding new church pastors. We've designed this restorative, peaceful, and enlightening event to provide opportunities to explore personality and identify strengths. To be held in-person at the Zephyr Point Presbyterian Conference Center in Lake Tahoe from Friday, March 25 to Sunday, March 27, 2022, this getaway features the support of a spiritual director, team-building opportunities, and guidance from the New Church Ministry Team and coaches.

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

First, General Board members may be aware that Disciples Church Extension Fund relies on Disciples investors to carry out our ministry. That is, individuals, congregations, and Disciples organizations invest with us; we leverage those investments to fund loans at competitive rates to congregations.

This funding model requires participation by Disciples who wish for their resources to not just make money, but to make a difference. We welcome your support in keeping this investment opportunity in front of Disciples in your area. Help us get the word out about how to support ministries across the life of the church through these investments.

Secondly, DCEF offers congregations services designed to help improve their financial and capital position. We would welcome the opportunity to share more information about the services we offer, and how

congregations can take advantage of competitive loans that keep church resources circulating to support the mission and ministry of Disciples. Please encourage congregations in your region to be in touch with us to learn more.

Finally, as you may know, DCEF receives a welcome, but relatively small portion of the wider church offerings through DMF. New Church Ministry, which we host on behalf of Disciples, receives no regular DMF funding. The one whole-church funding available to NCM is the Pentecost Offering, which is shared 50/50 with regions in which the offering is received. This means benevolent giving to our ministry is one of the ways we continue to make resources available for transformation, innovation, and faithful ministry. We hope you will consider DCEF as the recipient of your gifts, even as you encourage others to share generously to support this churchwide ministry.

NEW CHURCH MINISTRY

New churches and their leaders need us, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), to be more loving, more giving, more prayerful, more creative, more innovative, more open, and more externally focused than ever before. We are not just called to form new churches, but to form churches with unique qualities; churches that are prophetic, radical, non-traditional, risky – even misunderstood – just like Jesus! We hope you will share your excitement about being part of this movement with those you serve in your own area.

How can we pray for your region/ministry?

Please pray for our new DCEF president, as well as for all our staff as we experience the transition of new leadership. Pray for our continued inspiration and innovation as we strive to faithfully serve congregations on the front line of mission and ministry in this

fragmented world.

NEW CHURCH MINISTRY

We strongly encourage you to join our weekly prayer time during “Water The Plants”. Pray with us to continue to strive to make disciples. We also covet your prayer for the New Church Ministry team, as NCM Minister Terrell McTyer steps away from his role to accept another position. While we have great confidence in the team – and our many ministry partners – that support this ministry, we know transitions can be challenging and unsettling.