

Regional Board Report

November 5, 2022

Rev. Michael Davison, Associate Regional Minister

At the beginning of each year, I re-read two books that were an important part of my education for ministry: *The Wounded Healer*, by Henri Nouwen, and *Will Our Children Have Faith*, by John Westerhoff. In late January, I was moving some audio files to cloud storage and found a sermon that Rev. Dr. Peter Gomes offered at a morning session of the 2003 General Assembly—preaching from Romans 12:1-2, three thoughts from the sermon for our consideration.

To be a disciple of Christ is to commit your life to a life that is incomplete, imperfect, but in which you persevere . . . The one thing that holds you and sustains you together is your common confessed Christ, convictions in the transforming Christ. If you forget that or compromise that everything else that you may be or do or have will be for not. Your mission in this life is to know and to show Christ . . . Everything else is commentary, and without that everything else is lost.

Maybe what it means to be a disciple of Christ is to be reasonable in an unreasonable world. To be faithful in a faithless world. To be loving in a hateful world. To be peace-like in a war-filled world. Maybe that is what Paul means when he says this is our reasonable service, to be living sacrifices in a world where nobody is prepared to give up anything for anybody.

One of the great risks of a heartland denomination like you is that you will often wish to blend into the landscape. You do not wish to be noticed at least as different from anybody else. Now, the Disciples of Christ used to be very different. In fact, we in New England thought you all were very peculiar, very strange group of people. They have communion every Sunday and they are not even Catholics. What is this with these people? You were once apart from the pack. You once represented that sort of reformation itch which has never been fully, thoroughly scratched. But, your great temptation has been as success has come your way, is that you have blended into the great middle American landscape, and nobody notices. And, you are very glad about that! Now I have no use for the Southern Baptists, and I'll say right here in Charlotte, NC. I cannot abide them. I believe they're unfaithful and unscriptural by and large, but we notice them. They stand out. They make their proclamations. They make their professions. They do their mischief, and they do it in public because they think it is the right thing to do. I think they are dead wrong, but they do it. You should be at least as visible. At least as obnoxious. At least as noticeable as the Southern Baptists. Why? Because you are right. You are on the right side of the gospel! You always have been, and you only get into trouble when you forget it. You only get into trouble when you think being a disciple of Christ is the same as being an American, or the same as being a Republican, or a Democrat, or whatever. You must stand in opposition to everything but Christ. And you will know no peace until you

do it! No satisfaction until you do it! No power until you do it! If you are just like everyone else, just part of this sort of pasty-face, pale national patriotic civil religion, then you deserve whatever troubles come your way. And they will come in legions.¹

Nouwen, Westerhoff, and Gomes have been a reminder for me that navigating the times we are living through requires a deep understanding of the past, attention to the details of today, and an imagination for a future, a community of faith that God trusts to our care. That helped me along the journey this year.

Thank You Notes

I'm grateful for the time gifted to me by Pam and the Personnel Committee to work from Virginia earlier this year to help Lisa and her family manage their mother's last days and celebrate her life at her passing in February.

Thank you, adults, who volunteer in our summer camp program², with the Regional Youth Council³, on the CYYA⁴, and in congregational life.

Thank you, Regional office staff, Ellen, Marla, and Carrie, for your work behind the scenes that help the Region, and my work, function smoothly.

Thank you, Pam, for the thoughtful and covenantal leadership you bring to the Church and our Region. I'm grateful for your collegiality.

Reflecting on 2022

At the end of this report, you will find my "staff log." It is a numerical representation of my time and attention from January to September this year. My complete 2022 "staff log" will be available at the next board meeting.

In my November 2021 report, I noted that 2022 was the beginning of a renovation project of the Region's programmatic ministries for children and youth. Acting as both the architect and contractor, we've experienced slowdowns and pauses as congregations are being rebuilt or

¹ Rev. Dr. Peter Gomes, *Preaching on Romans 12:1-2*. General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, 2003. Listen to the sermon [here](#).

² Camp Directors: Chi Rho (Tara Dew, Travis Carlson, Kelley Becker), Discovery (Laura Randell and Lavonna Hopkins), CYF Conference (Eula Hledik, Chris Muse, Madi Showalter), Junior (Sally Wheeler, Paul Ragle, Sara Leisure). There are too many camp counselors to name.

³ RYC Adults: Shannon Cook, Travis Carlson, Tara Dew, Eula Hledik

⁴ CYYA: Bill Hemm, Sally Wheeler, John Wheeler, Luke Heim, Chris Muse, Eula Hledik, Tara Dew, Daniel U'ren, Kathy Standridge, Travis Carlson, Christine McCurley, and Lavonna Hopkins.

restructured as the pandemic wanes.⁵ The Region's programmatic ministries for children and youth are resilient, which is a reflection of the young people themselves and the dedication of the adults in congregational life that are providing opportunities for children and youth to discover the presence of God in their lives and follow Jesus as a response to that discovery.

Also, in that report, I said, "The strength of the Region's program ministries for children, youth, and families are the adults that volunteer. Their example of discipleship and their abilities enabled the Region, and our congregations, to adapt in pandemic time." This continues to be true as many have begun an endemic lifestyle while some, a few, remain more cautious. A parent quipped this summer, "Something may make someone sick, and it may be my kid who is the cause or gets sick, but we can't protect our kids from everything. So, just do camp and church the way you've done it before and have faith." I think that was more exhaustion than snark about the Region's Covid-19 protocols for camp, which were relaxed this year. While I agree in theory that we cannot protect campers or adult volunteers from everything seen and unseen, it is still our responsibility, it is my obligation, to assist and lead the Comm with Children, Youth, and Young Adults (CYYA) to make decisions about our programmatic ministries that:

- create and apply appropriate boundaries for all participants;
- utilize the best health assessments and social science for a healthy community;
- assures camps are hosted at the best facilities available and affordable;
- provides curriculum and content that is theologically consistent with the ethos of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in our discipleship following Jesus.

Moments from this Year

- Provided support for and attended the Northeast Area Council's Clergy Retreat (Feb 20-22).
- Production of the Discovering Wisdom Series Podcast created by Regional Youth Council (Feb-March)
- Represented the Region in the Celebration of Life Service for Rev. Sherry Shaw.
- Led International Affairs Seminar (six participants and two adults - March 11-19).
- Disciples Day at OKC Zoo (Sponsored by RYC & CYYA - April 2)
- Assisted with Regional Assembly (April 29-30).
- Our summer camp program was successful (June). The move of Junior Camp to Camp Christian was welcomed by adult volunteers and campers alike. Covid-19 did arrive post-CYF Conference (see CYYA Report). I was part of the Water Weekend Staff (July 8-10) at Texoma Christian Camp.

⁵ The way I've made sense of these last two years of the pandemic is to imagine that a tornado hit every town where there is a Disciples congregation. The focus is on local recovery and community. The Region and denomination have helped when we were able. We've prayed for one another. Congregations can send dollars to support others through DMF, the Annual Fund, and special offerings, but many are not ready to come back and participate until there is a stronger sense of community locally and their numbers feel sustainable. Many still struggle with attendance and financial support as the pandemic has changed what "church" means and when a community worships or serves together.

- The Regional Youth Council met in person (Aug 26-28) for the first time in three years. They visited the First Americans Museum as part of their retreat. They have planned two overnight, lock-in-style events. “Stop. Look. Listen. Communication Skills for a Life Following Jesus” (grades 4-8) Nov. 12-13, hosted at New Covenant Christian Church OKC. Working alongside Eula Hledik, Julia Jordan Gillett, and Madi Showalter, the RYC will assist with “Becoming Faces of Change,” Jan 14-16, 2023. This event is for Chi Rho and CYF groups (grades 6-12) and will include the Greenwood Rising Museum, Black Wall Street, and Reconciliation Park in Tulsa. It will be designed as an AR/PR event.
- Assisted the planning and co-leader with Tara Dew, the Comm on Laity’s Intersections Trip (Sept 1-6) to Washington, DC. I’ve worked with Colton Lott on creating a structure for future trips that will rotate to different cities with other themes.
- Provided planning support and led discussions at the Northwest Area Clergy Retreat (Sept 18-20) about the research in, *Meaning Making: 8 Values That Drive America’s Newest Generations*, from Springtide Research Institute.
- Assisting Northeast Area Council members that are planning a Clergy Retreat for April 16-18, 2023.

Projects for November and December 2022

- Christmas Offering Video (drops Nov 28)
- RYC Advent Devotional eBook, *Advent at the Movies* (drops Nov. 21).
- Summer Camp Director Recruitment & Promotional Materials

Search and Call

I am assisting seven congregations as they search or are beginning their search for a minister. Three are full-time positions. Four are part-time or bi-vocational positions.⁶ Two congregations, First Christian Church Chandler and First Christian Church Pond Creek, called ministers this year. The process of helping congregations find a minister continues to be a challenge. A confluence of factors has been amplified by the pandemic and politicization of congregational life and daily life. It is frustrating for Search Committees and congregations. It is frustrating for Pam and me. The best summary I can offer is:

- Fewer clergy are entering Search and Call.
- Few clergy are willing to discern a call to serve a congregation in Oklahoma. The politics of our State and the state of the education system deter candidates with families.
- The financial constraints of congregations and the financial needs of clergy.
- Some congregations are seeking a part-time or bi-vocational minister, and there are few qualified candidates with standing or willing to go through our Comm on Clergy process for standing as a commissioned or ordained person.
- Some congregations perceive the process as too cumbersome and formal. Some want to do it their way and have the Region bless it, which is outside the boundaries of our covenantal system.

⁶ Full Time: FCC Stroud, Central CC Enid, Presbyterian Disciples Church Pawhuska. Part-Time/Bi-Vocational: FCC Wagoner, Bethany CC Miami, FCC Sand Springs, First Christian Presbyterian Pryor.

While the denomination remains in a contraction phase of our corporate life⁷, the congregations that have adapted in their context, kept reaching out to their community, kept being invitational to join a journey with Jesus, and practiced the covenantal ethos of our denomination; those congregations have experienced stability and some growth. It has not been easy. It won't be easy in our politicized culture. In corporate speak, we need to be more intentional about onboarding those new to the Disciples and remind life-long Disciples, be they laity or clergy, in every manifestation of the denomination about our covenantal relationship and ethos: in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity. Being a follower of Jesus has always included an argument about the "essentials."

On the horizon in 2023

Alongside my usual portfolio of responsibilities, I will focus my attention on the following areas.

- Begin the next renovation phase of the Region's programmatic ministry for children, youth, and the adults that serve. Borrowing from an old model, work with the CYYA and RYC to design one-day gatherings for clusters of youth groups in similar geographic areas for service work (like the Regional Food Bank or something similar) and group building. The Region can set the table and make invitations. One example of our ethos is to serve and learn together.
- Work with RYC to plan a Region-wide Youth event for Fall 2023.
- Launch and manage the next evolution of the summer camp program (see CYYA report). This evolution will recognize the transitions from elementary, junior high, and high school. As campers age through the program, there are more opportunities and responsibilities that are part of intentional Christian community. I'll co-direct CYF Conference in 2023.
- Work with Pam to utilize the Region's podcast to drop one new episode a month. I'll also get the podcast on more platforms.
- Highlight some of the youth and children's ministries around the Region through podcast interviews and digital eNews platforms.
- Work with Comm on Faith in Action to offer day events for congregations to experience the Greenwood Rising Museum and the First Americans Museum.
- Work with Comm on Laity to finalize plans to offer a rotating Intersections trip for adults.
- Connect with clergy on the collegial edges of the Region and encourage them to find Disciples colleagues in Oklahoma.

I'm honored and grateful to continue to serve in the Region's ministry.

⁷ It is merely an observation but one I feel comfortable suggesting. We are experiencing a contraction era that is a natural part of an expansion era. Having a corporate approach to new church starts, like opening a new franchise, it is a natural cycle that some of those are going to close, be bought, or be taken by others. People move away. Neighborhoods change. Social, financial, political, and theological forces change congregations and their ministries. Though overly focused on rural congregations, the contraction is affecting suburban and urban settings as well. There is a need for new church starts, and those may be in existing congregations as a revitalization project.

Michael's Staff Log, January through September. I track my time 8hrs a day, 7 days a week. This helps me see where I'm spending my time, what congregations I visit, and balance my work.

Categories	8hr Days
Office	199
Field	102
Day Off	26
Holiday (National)	3.75
Vacation	10.5
CE (continuing ed)	5
Sick Day/Leave	7
Total	353.25
Mileage	7373

Events/Meetings/Tech

- Congregational Preaching (9)
- **bold in the far column**
- CYYA Mtgs (2)
- Director/Counselor Training Zoom
- Faith in Action Commission Mtgs (2) Zoom
- IAS Leader
- Installations (3)
- Intersections Trip Co-Leader
- NEA Council Mtgs (7)
- NEA Clergy Retreat
- NWA Ministers Mtgs (6)
- NWA Clergy Retreat
- Regional Assembly
- Regional Board (2)
- Regional Staff Mtgs (9)

Other Work

- Monthly CYYA Intersection
- Monthly NWA Synopsis
- Monthly NEA Newsbites
- Podcasting Production
- Tech Support for Region
- Weekly Devotion Writing

Events/Meetings/Tech

- Regional Office Tech
- Updates (3)
- RYC Lent Podcasts (5)
- RYC/CYYA Zoo Day
- RYC Zoom Retreat
- Summer Camp PR Production
- Summer Camp Visits
- Tech Assist Congregations
- Texoma Camp Visits & Water Weekend Staff

Workshops/Training

- ACA Covid-19 Protocols
- Brite Ministers Week
- Healthy Boundaries - Camp
- Navigating Grief in Children & Youth (New Church Hacks)
- Pete the Planner Webinars (6)
- PTS Remind & Renew
- Springtide Research Webinar, "The State of Religion & Young People: Mental Health"

Congregation In-Person & (Digital Only)

- FCC Alva (2)
- FCC Arnett (2)
- FCC Bartlesville 2**
- Disciples CC Bartlesville 2 & (2)
- FCC Broken Arrow - 3 & (1)**
- FCC Chandler
- FCC Cherokee (2)
- FCC Chickasha (2)
- Shepherd St CC Chickasha (1)
- FCC Claremore 1 & (1)
- FCC Cushing (1)
- FCC El Reno 1 & (2)
- Central CC Enid 3 & (2)**
- Covenant Enid 1 & (4)
- University Place CC Enid - 1
- FCC Edmond (1)
- Southern Hills CC (1)
- FCC Guthrie (2)
- FCC Hennessey (2)
- FCC Jenks (2)
- S. Grand Lake CC Langley 1 & (1)**
- FCC Lawton (2)
- FCC Moore
- E Sixth St CC OKC (2)
- New Covenant CC OKC (2)
- Western Oaks CC (3)
- FCC Norman 1 & (2)
- FCC Nowata & (2)
- FCC Okeene 1
- FCC Pawnee (2)
- Presbyterian Disciples Pawhuska - 2
- FCC Perry 2 & (2)**
- Community CC Ponca City (1)
- FCC Ponca City 1 & (2)**
- FCC Pond Creek 2 (3)**
- First Christian Presbyterian Pryor 1
- FCC Sand Springs 4**
- FCC Stillwater (2)
- FCC Stroud 1 & (1)
- FCC Sulphur 1 & (2)**
- FCC Tahlequah (2)
- FCC Tulsa 1 & (2)
- FCC Wagoner 1
- Forest Park CC Tulsa 2 & (2)
- Harvard CC Tulsa 2 & (2)
- Yale Ave CC Tulsa 1 & (2)
- FCC Wagoner 2
- FCC Woodward (2)
- Waukomis CC 2 (4)