



May 14,2019 **REGIONAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL EDITION** Neil E. Topliffe, Editor

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Regional Assembly Celebrates Leaders and plans for future

Michigan's annual Regional Assembly recognized the generosity of Michigan Disciples by supporting a congregation in crisis, celebrating leadership of many years, receiving reports of encouragement and challenge, and approving a study into the future direction of the Region. Participants were inspired with a closing worship including a message by Dr. Ron Allen, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Blaine Christian Church, Arcadia, host of our May 4 Michigan Disciples Regional Assembly, welcomed 60 Disciples from 19 congregations to this year's event, presided over by Moderator Rev. Mitzie Hall.



Regional Assembly Program Book online

Includes full reports of Regional Minister, Commissions, Committees and 2018 Financials.

http://michigandisciples.org/uploads/2019_Regional_Assembly_Program_Book.pdf

Crystal Property Sale Task Force Report



The Task Force received approval to move forward on the sale of five acres of land (Plot C) at the corner of Morro and Lobb Roads to a current Crystal owner, **for** \$65,000. The Assembly also empowered the Task Force to "move forward to negotiate and complete the sale of plot B, above the \$232,000 current offer; subject to the approval of the Executive Board." Plot B is a 40 acre section on either side of Morro Road, not adjacent to our current campground. Chairperson, Doug Morgan, (pictured) will continue finalizing of sales, with

Task Force and Executive Board.

Vision 2025 Ministry Priorities Task Team

"We are at a crossroads that calls for intentional exploration of what the future purpose and nature of a Michigan Disciples regional ministry will look like," said Neil Topliffe, in presenting a proposal for action by congregational representatives.



The Assembly approved the formation of a **Vision 2025 Priorities Task Team** to be established in the coming month and spending the coming two years to carefully discern and make recommendations for the future Michigan Disciples ministries and structures. The process would include exploring financial viability and staffing needs/structures and establishing 3-5 year priorities in effecting ministry and supporting our congregations.

Topliffe noted that Treasurer Sarah Beth Simonds, in her financial report, estimated that at best we have 3-4 years under our current financial income/expenses as a region before we no longer have sufficient funds to continue supporting the Michigan Region office and personnel.

He also noted that we need to be anticipating staff transitions with the projected retirement of our Regional Minister in two years, plus other changes anticipated in the region.

"I suggest such a task team might begin with a zero based approach, assuming nothing and building upon what the essential ministries are needed within the Michigan Disciples churches. This we need to do as we continue to be a witness within the Christian Church (Disciples of

Christ) in North America, supporting our churches and ministers while witnessing to the presence of Christ in our midst," Topliffe suggested. This would mean careful consultation with the general and regional church leaders, he noted.

Next steps in formation of the Task Team are with the Regional Minister and Regional Board.

Priorities Renewed for 2019-20

The Assembly approved continuing the 2018 Priorities through 2020, as it pursues future directions for the Regional church for 2021 and beyond.

VISION: As Disciples of Christ in Michigan, following the example of Jesus, we are called to be a Christian Community living in the love of God, supporting one another as the Holy Spirit acts among us."

PRIORITIES:

- Refresh, Renew, Revitalize, Transform our congregations: actively strengthening our leadership through the commissions of the region and Regional Elders.
- Resource congregations and pastors for Conflict Management.
- Endeavor to build unity while understanding and respecting our diversity.
- Resource congregations to be missional.
- Commit to training, mentorship and educational opportunities focused on our youth as our future and current church and denominational leaders.

STRATEGY: Focus on "Three Big Rocks":



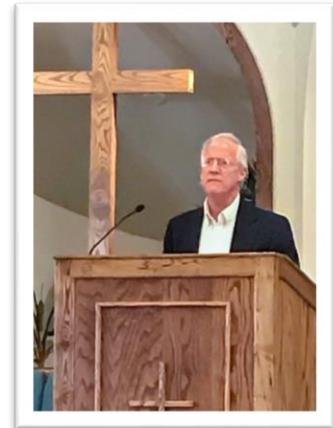
1. **Communications:** Engage our congregations, members, and Region in a partnership by strengthening our communication and connection with one other, building upon a sense of wholeness in a fragmented world.
 2. **Caring Missions and Ministries:** Create and build on our encounters with Christ in our Regional efforts to grow spiritually, engage in mission and witness, and proclaim the power of Christ with our events, programs, and regional pastoral care so that we, together, might improve lives and congregations.
 3. **Crystal Conference Center:** Create events and opportunities at our Conference Center on Crystal Lake that impacts the spiritual faith and depth of children, youth, and adults, that they might experience and demonstrate the koinonia of Christian life and the blessing of life together.
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Called to live in God's future reality now

Worship remains highlight of Assembly

Assemblies each year begin and end with worship, the bookends that remind us that we are not only a family of local churches but a community of Christian believers known as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Michigan Region, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

Dr. Ronald Allen, professor at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, reminded us of our call to be an "Eschatological Community" - one that is living in God's future reality now ... in this very present moment. "This was a stirring felt-sense call," reflected Tina Heck, UCCR Director of Reservations and Communications.



Allen drew on 1 Corinthians 1:10, a passage where Paul beseeches the church at Corinth to be unified in mind and in judgment with no divisions among them. He noted, "on the one hand we are firmly planted in our concepts, yet on the other hand, Christ continually calls us to unity."

Anne McCauslin recognized

Anne McCauslin was recognized and thanked for 14 years tenure as the Dean of STEM, the joint UCC-Disciples program for continuing education. "Anne McCauslin did an outstanding job as the Dean of the STEM program," said Regional Minister Eugene James, in the presentation of a Certificate of Appreciation.



The citation noted, "Over those years, she touched the lives of many who have served as church leaders, and some who are still serving today. Her dedicated and inspirational leadership, her genuine concern for and support of the STEM students, and the diligence with which she fulfilled her responsibilities as Dean gave relevancy, strength and consistency to the program."



#WeAreFamily Support to Battle Creek

Battle Creek First Christian pastor Kingery Clingenpeel and wife, Laura thanked the many Disciples congregations and church members who have made financial gifts in support of the church following the embezzlement of all its bank accounts by a former treasurer. More than \$17,000 has been contributed in the past two months. Donations continue to be received at

<https://christianchurchdocmichiganregi.givingfuel.com/we-are-family-fund-drive>.

Worship included the installation of our Regional officers for 2019 and concluded a closing circle of prayer led by Rev. Terry VanHeyningen, Regional Elder and Blaine congregation host.



Regional Board & Assembly Actions

1. **Elected to Regional Board** the following persons: Mitzie Hall, Moderator; Arnold Lakes, Vice-Moderator; Rick Modglin Green, Secretary; Sarah Beth Simonds, Treasurer. Also elected were Tim and Jennifer Murtaugh, Crystal Commission Co-chairs; Maggie Mills, Church Growth & Vitality chair; Rhonda Moore-Lewis, East District; Barbara Hemphill, General Ministry Partner. Other Commission and members at large continue for in their positions.
2. Approved Regional Commission on Ministry recommendation that **active retired clergy need to remain current with their boundary training** (renewing every five years).
3. **Approved the recommendation of Crystal Commission** that Revs. Jill Forton and Neil Topliffe serve for two years as Michigan Region representatives on the United Camps Conferences and Retreats (UCCR) Owners Council.
4. Regional Board approved a **\$2,700 matching grant** from the Reconciliation Fund to Rippling Hope Detroit, making possible the **hiring of three summer interns** from the community to help manage summer work/mission groups.
5. Regional Board approved **forgiving the Land Contract** with New Life Full Gospel Church for the former Saginaw Christian Church East property and turning over the deed to the church.
6. Regional Board approved, as an ongoing policy, continuation of the **complimentary use of Mission House and Pioneer Lodge** for use by the Regional Minister for one week each year. So also, that Pioneer Lodge be available to the Michigan Region Administrative Assistant without cost for Women's Retreat each year.



7. Regional Board approved that the **west end of Crystal Conference Center beach** be available for Michigan Disciples to reserve for their use with the appropriate documents signed.

Financial Reports

Individual gifts helped operating budget somewhat

Chair Sarah Beth Simonds, in reporting on the financial health of the Michigan Region noted that although monthly recurring gifts from individuals helped increase the giving to the Region's operating funds, "there has not been a dramatic change in income." She noted that 31 giving units are generous in their donations, providing approximately \$24,000 to the regional ministries in 2018.

"These gifts are sustaining our ministries even when resources are strained," she added. "But it's not enough to sustain us long term... Unless there are dramatic changes, we can probably function as a regional church for 3-4 more years."



Year-end and Current Reports

The Regional church and Crystal Conference Center funds incurred operating deficits of (\$46,516) and (\$5,916) respectively for 2018. The 2019 budget for regional operations, "basically a repeat of 2018 with three exceptions," projects a deficit of (\$37,405), Simonds reported. Depreciation expense is included - \$8,000; liability insurance increased \$7,000; and service income from the Ohio Region of \$21,000 (see Page 8). Crystal Conference Center/Camp Crystal projects an operating deficit in 2019 of \$16,000.

Our cash available for the Regional Church as of March 31 was \$109,782. Total income through March was \$89,937 with expenses of \$69,347.

Your Monthly Gift to Regional Ministries is Welcome

You can begin a monthly recurring donation now by clicking the "DONATE NOW" button and go to our secure online donation center to make a recurring contribution by credit or debit card. Or send a check monthly to the Regional Office.





"Your Crystal facility and location is phenomenal. You are so blessed to have this site," shared Rev Tina Heck, Disciples clergyperson and UCCR representative, in providing an overview of their management of Crystal Conference Center which began April 1.



60 registrants from 19 churches enjoyed lunch together, provided by members of Blaine Christian Church.

Lord, Teach us to Pray



Please join us in prayer for these congregations and their ministries

PRAYER

- First Christian Church - Battle Creek
- Cascade Christian Church - Grand Rapids
- Triumphant Temple of Praise - Flint
- First Christian Church West - Saginaw
- The Word Christian Church - Detroit
- First Christian Church - Dowagiac
- Woodgrove Brethern/Christian Parish - Hastings
- Central Woodward Christian Church - Troy
- First Christian Church - Traverse City

This prayer request is a call to pray together for our congregations in Michigan, Disciples in covenant with one another. We look forward to lifting up each of our Michigan Disciples congregations in the coming year.

Commission Reports

Reports were received from Regional leaders along with Commissions, committees and General Church representatives, India Bobadilla - Christian Church Foundation, Sarah Renfro - Pension Fund, and Tina Heck - UCCR. Here's a quick snapshot of several – full reports are available on the web site at [Regional Assemblies Reports.](#)

Church Growth & Vitality Commission

Chairperson, **Rev. Brenda Etheridge** (Swartz Creek) reported that support was given to a pastor/church developer to attend the Hope Partnership training session in Indianapolis. Mentorship is being provided to two church planters by **Rev. Dr. Francis Gilliard, Rev. Dr. Arnold Lakes and Rev. Dr. Gwendolyn Pettway.** **Maggie Mills** was elected as new chairperson.

Crystal Conference Center



Russ Tiller, chairperson, lifted up the transfer of responsibility in April to Crystal managers, UCCR, and affirmed their selection of **Eric Strommer** as the new Site Manager. We welcomed **Tina Heck**, UCCR Director of Reservations & Communications to the Assembly.

Volunteer Work Day to prepare Crystal for campers will be May 25 weekend. A property sub-committee has been formed to help oversee maintenance project priorities of facilities and property. Dates and staffing for our Disciples summer camps has been moving along smoothly, under the direction of **Jill Forton**. With assistance from **Sarah Beth Simonds**, all camp registrations can be handled online, in addition to mailing them to the regional office. Facilities continue to be available for renting by families, groups as well as our churches - information and the rates are online at www.campcrystal.org.

Ecumenism – Gospel in Action, Festival of Faith, STEM

Jerry McAllister shared the work of Gospel in Action mission, education and ministry with our other faith partners, including the United Church of Christ.

Rippling Hope, with Michigan Disciples **Gospel in Action** support, has launched training classes for homeowners and a tool library for neighborhood partners. Last year they served 260 households with help from 465 volunteers.

Festival of Faith - Service has become "Festival of Service" with work day projects being held last month in Detroit, Grand Rapids and Benzie County. This is a joint program of the Michigan UCC Conference and Michigan Disciples.

Systemic Training for Effective Ministries (STEM) courses have been discontinued until further notice. The STEM Board is meeting quarterly to explore future directions.

Commission on Ministry

Robert Cornwall reported that conversations are ongoing with several prospective candidates for ministry. The Commission continues work to enhance the process for clergy to fill out their annual report form for clergy standing. Cornwall emphasized that active clergy need to be sure they include responses to all questions, including those requesting continuing education and reading updates.

Personnel Commission

The commission, under the leadership of **Julie Drews**, has reviewed job descriptions of Eugene James and Beverly Peeler and discussed levels of responsibility as a two member staff team.

Regional Minister Reflections

In his annual State of the Region report, Regional Minister **Eugene James**, began, "The love of many multiplies joys and diminishes sorrows. We have seen this made manifest in the response of the Regional Church to the tremendous loss experienced by First Christian Church Battle Creek... Pastor Clingenpeel and the congregation have been encouraged, and the Regional Church was unified in its response. Praise the Lord! More than \$17,000 has been donated to the Battle Creek congregation to date.

James lifted up the highly successful Crystal Conference Center 100th Anniversary Celebration under the leadership of **Tim and Jennifer Murtaugh**, with more than 200 participants on site over that July weekend. He also noted that "a new era has begun in the Outdoor Ministry of the Regional Church," with the formal agreement with United Camps Conferences and Retreats bringing their wealth of experience and knowledge in the management and promotion of Crystal.

The memory of Rev Paul Holland, former pastor of First Christian Church, Traverse City was recognized with special thanks to **Pastor Bob Larimer** for providing a comforting presence to the congregation during the period of illness and death.

With approval of the October 2018 Regional Board, Eugene has been serving as a **Visiting Regional Minister for our sister churches in the Northwest area of Ohio**. This interim arrangement is the result of the Ohio Region being without a Regional minister following a financial collapse. The agreement is for two years with the Michigan Region being compensated for Eugene's services.

James reported on the loss of one congregation this past year, True Foundation Christian Church, withdrawing without explanation.

Upcoming Events for the Region

June 1 - Crystal Conference Center Open House - Frankfort

June 2 & 9 – [Pentecost Offering](#) to support New Church growth

June 16-21 – Elementary Camp - Camp Crystal

June 21-23 – Disciples Women Retreat – Camp Crystal

July 7-12 – Independence Camp – Camp Crystal

July 8-11 – Vacation Bible School – Camp Crystal

July 12-14 – Young Families Retreat – Camp Crystal
July 14-20 – Family of God Camp – Camp Crystal
July 20-24 - **General Assembly** - Des Moines, IA
July 21-27 – Chi Rho and CYF Camps – Camp Crystal
September 13-15 – Disciples Men Retreat – Camp Crystal
October 19 - Regional Board Meeting - Regional Office, Lansing

For more details on these events and others go to www.michigandisciples.org
or www.campcrystal.org.



Summer Event Space & Overnight Lodging
OPEN HOUSE
SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 10am to 1pm

Invite a friend and come enjoy yourself with appetizers, tours of the entire Crystal Campus including: lodging tours, dining options, Crystal Lake beach, low ropes & more.

Summer SPECIAL
2 Nights
+ 5 meals for \$115 per person

uccr.org/crystal

CRYSTAL CONFERENCE CENTER

The advertisement features a blue background with white and yellow text. It includes a logo of a tree and a sun in a square, and two photographs: one of a geodesic dome structure and another of a two-story white building with a porch. The text is arranged in a clear, hierarchical manner, with the event title and dates at the top, followed by an invitation and a list of activities. The special offer is highlighted in a dark box on the right side of the bottom image.

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You have been included on this list as one who has joined or asked to be recipient of communications from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Regional office.