

# **By-laws of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest**

*Approved by Operations Council on June 27, 2024*

## **NAME**

1. The name of this body shall be the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest. It is also colloquially called the Upper Midwest region (UMW).

## **MEMBERSHIP AND PURPOSE**

2. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest is a geographic region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. It is the primary region for congregations and clergy with standing in Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota.
3. All members (or the equivalent designation in congregations) of recognized congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest are simultaneously members of the regional church.
4. As a covenantal ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, we affirm the nature, purpose, and function of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest as described in *The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*.
5. In particular, we affirm these specific functions of our regional ministry:
  - a. Resourcing congregations and their leaders, including establishing new congregations, assisting with pastoral transitions, offering guidance in best practices, mediating conflicts, visioning, opportunities for learning and connection, and helping congregations end their visible ministries ;
  - b. Nurturing clergy, through ordination and commissioning processes, credentialing, opportunities for learning and connection;
  - c. Offering explicit connectional spaces (camps, retreats, and other experiences) where people connect with God and others, including our Christian Conference Center;
  - d. Connecting people denominationally and ecumenically as the middle judicatory.

## **REGIONAL GATHERINGS**

6. Regional Gatherings invite participants from all recognized congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest, along with all clergy with standing therein, to join together for learning, worship, fellowship, shared conversations and discernment.
7. There will be a business session at a Regional Gathering at least one time each year, gathered in one location, online, or in a hybrid context. It is always a publicly announced, open meeting. The primary responsibilities of this covenantal regional body are:

- a. Elections of the Executive Moderator Team, the Regional Board, and the Regional Nominating Committee
  - b. Adoption of the regional budget
  - c. Other matters referred by the Regional Board
8. Any participant may speak during Regional Gathering business sessions. Voting privileges are limited to the following:
  - a. Voting representatives from congregations: Three participating members (or equivalent designation in their congregation) designated by each recognized congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest, regardless of size. These voting representatives from congregations shall be in addition to persons holding standing in the Order of Ministry.
  - b. Ministers: All clergy with standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest as well as ministers whose standing is held by the General Commission on Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada and who reside or dwell within the Upper Midwest geographic region.
9. A Regional Gathering business session requires prior public announcement of at least 30 days to all regional congregations and ministers. This notification shall include the date, location, and approximate time the business session of the Regional Gathering will convene, along with a brief description of the business to be considered. The full content of business items will be shared at least 15 days prior to the business session.
10. A quorum for the transaction of business at a Regional Gathering shall be the voting members present and voting at each business session.

## **EXECUTIVE TEAM**

11. The Executive Team of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest will include these offices:
  - a. The Moderator will preside at business sessions of Regional Gatherings, the Regional Board, and the Executive Team. The Moderator will convene the Visioning Committee of the Regional Board and assume other responsibilities as may be assigned by the Regional Board or business session of a Regional Gathering. The Moderator has the authority to create ad hoc committees and task forces and name leadership and membership of said committees and task forces. The Moderator is expected to participate in the Fellowship of Regional Moderators (or similar groups in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)). The Moderator has the legal authority of the Chairperson of the board of directors on behalf of the regional church.
  - b. The Vice Moderator will preside at business sessions of Regional Gatherings, the Regional Board and the Executive Team in the absence of the Moderator. The Vice Moderator will convene the Regional Gatherings Committee of the Regional Board and assume other responsibilities as may be assigned by the Regional Board or business session of a Regional Gathering.
  - c. The Moderator Elect shall serve one term as the presumptive Moderator and then one term as Moderator. The Moderator Elect will convene the Mission and Ministry

Committee of the Regional Board and assume other responsibilities as may be assigned by the Regional Board or business session of a Regional Gathering.

- d. The Treasurer will be the financial officer of the region. The Treasurer will convene the Finance/Grants Committee of the Regional Board and assume other responsibilities as may be assigned by the Regional Board or business session of a Regional Gathering.
  - e. The Secretary will convene the Communications Committee and keep records of the proceedings of business sessions of Regional Gatherings, the Regional Board, Executive Team, and standing committees of the Regional Board and any ad hoc teams created by the Regional Board.
  - f. The Regional Minister and President (paragraphs 15-17).
12. All officers must be active members of a recognized congregation in the region or ministers with standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest or with the General Commission on Ministry and actively serving within the geographic boundaries of the Upper Midwest region . The Executive Team will include at least two laypersons and at least two clergy with standing, in addition to the Regional Minister, with a commitment to diversity of gender, ethnicity, geography, age, etc.
  13. All officers, except the Regional Minister and President, will be elected by a business session of the Regional Gathering for terms of 3 years. The election will be held at a Regional Gathering in the fall, with installation at the same Regional Gathering, beginning in 2024. Terms will conclude when successors have been elected and installed. No person may be elected again to the same office until a period of at least three years has passed, unless they have been appointed by the Regional Board to fill an unexpired term.
  14. The Executive Team will meet at least 8 times each year and is responsible for setting agenda for Regional Board meetings and for inviting budget requests and reports from regional ministries.
  15. The roles and responsibilities of the Regional Minister and President include, but are not limited to:
    - a. Head of Staff
    - b. Pastor to pastors
    - c. Regional executive
    - d. Visionary leader
    - e. Facilitator of regional ministries
  16. The search process for the Regional Minister and President is guided by procedures outlined by the Office of General Minister and President.
    - a. The Moderator will name a Regional Minister Search Committee, following best practices of those procedures.
    - b. The Regional Minister Search Committee will identify a final candidate, negotiate a financial package, and present the candidate for approval by the Regional Board.
    - c. The Regional Board can extend a call to the final candidate with a 2/3 majority vote.
  17. The Regional Minister and President may be removed with a 2/3 majority vote of the Regional Board. The Regional Minister and President must be an ordained minister with standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). If the Regional Minister loses standing for cause, or voluntarily yields standing, the Regional Minister's call will be immediately terminated.

## **REGIONAL BOARD**

18. The Regional Board is the governance board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest. The Regional Board will:
  - a. Serve as the legal administrative entity of the regional church;
  - b. Oversee regional finances, including creation and recommendation of budgets to business sessions of Regional Gatherings and authorization of regional grants;
  - c. Serve as leadership for the regional church, assuring that the ministry priorities of the region are actively carried out, developing connections with congregations and clergy;
  - d. Receives reports, at least annually, of each standing committee, ad hoc team, established or recognized ministry;
  - e. Fill vacancies of unexpired terms for Executive Team officers, Regional Board members, and Regional Nominating Committee members.
19. Each member of the Regional Board will serve on one of these standing committees, in addition to any other ad hoc committees or task forces they may be assigned:
  - a. Visioning
  - b. Mission and Ministry
  - c. Communication
  - d. Regional Gatherings
  - e. Finance/Grants
20. All standing committees and ad hoc teams created by the Moderator or Regional Board, and the Executive Team, report to the Regional Board.
21. The Regional Board will include the Executive Team and 15 additional elected at-large members. The elected board members will total 9 laypeople and 6 clergy, with a commitment to diversity of gender, ethnicity, geography, age, etc. Each is elected for a term of 3 years and is eligible to be reelected to a second term. After serving 2 elected terms, a person may not be reelected as an at-large member of the Regional Board until a period of at least 3 years has passed. A class of 5 at-large members of the Regional Board will be elected each year. The election will be held at a business session of a Regional Gathering in the fall with installation at the same Regional Gathering. Terms will conclude when successors have been elected and installed.
22. All at-large members of the Regional Board must be active members of a recognized congregation in the region or ministers with standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest or with the General Commission on Ministry and actively serving within the geographic boundaries of the Upper Midwest region .
23. The Regional Board may gather in one location, online, or in a hybrid context at least 4 times each year. All members of the Executive Team, including the Regional Minister, are voting members of the Regional Board. A simple majority of those present and participating is needed to take action, except the calling of the Regional Minister & President, the dismissal of the Regional Minister & President, or the recommendation of amendments to a business session of a Regional Gathering. Regional Board meetings require at least 7 days notice to all voting members.

## **REGIONAL NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

24. The Regional Nominating Committee shall consist of 9 voting members, plus the Regional Minister and President, *ex officio* without vote. The Regional Nominating Committee will include at least 3 ministers and 4 laypersons and will always include 2 at-large elected members currently serving on the Regional Board, with a commitment to diversity of gender, ethnicity, geography, age, etc. Each member of the Regional Nominating Committee is elected for a term of 3 years and is eligible to be reelected to a second term. After serving 2 elected terms, a person may not be reelected until a period of at least 3 years has passed. A class of 3 members of the Regional Nominating Committee will be elected each year. The election will be held at a business session of the fall Regional Gathering with installation at the same Regional Gathering. Terms will conclude when successors have been elected and installed.
25. Each year the Regional Nominating Committee will prepare a slate of nominations for the needed Executive Team officers, at large members of the Regional Board and members of the Regional Nominating Committee to be considered at a business session of the fall Regional Gathering. These nominations will be submitted to the Executive Team for publication at least 45 days prior to the scheduled business session at the fall Regional Gathering.
26. The Regional Nominating Committee shall solicit and accept suggestions from throughout the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest and shall maintain records of suggested nominees and their qualifications. When selecting candidates, the Regional Nominating Committee shall consider, but not be limited to, all names suggested.

## **MINISTRIES**

27. The Regional Board shall establish or recognize ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest that extend our mission of witness and service into the world and/or support congregations and clergy in their ministries.
28. A ministry may apply for recognition by submitting documentation to a member of the Executive Team that includes this information: name of ministry; purpose of ministry; current leadership and membership of ministry; and description of how others may participate or join. The Regional Board should identify the same information for any ministry it establishes. The Regional Board will take official action to initially recognize a ministry.
29. Each ministry will determine its own organization pattern. The responsibilities, manner of selection, and terms of leadership will be determined by the ministry itself.
30. Each ministry is required to submit an annual report, subject to processes and dates determined by the Executive Team. These annual reports must include this information: name of ministry; current leadership and membership of ministry and description of how leaders are selected and how people may participate; and summary of previous year's ministry. These written reports will be publicly shared with the region each year, usually in conjunction with the fall Regional Gathering.
31. The Regional Board will officially recognize ongoing regional ministries once each year, after ministries have submitted their annual reports. Ministries which do not submit an annual report will be considered inactive or ended and will not receive such recognition.

Inactive ministries may apply again for recognition, or be established by the Regional Board, through the process described in #28.

32. Recognized regional ministries may recommend items for the regional budget and may apply for regional grants, subject to procedures determined by the Executive Team and/or the Regional Board.

## **REVISION AND AMENDMENTS**

33. Revisions and amendments to these bylaws may be made by a two-thirds vote of a business session at a Regional Gathering. Proposed revisions and amendments will be recommended by the Regional Board and publicly shared with congregations and clergy with standing at least 30 days before the business session of the Regional Gathering where a vote will be taken.

### ***Appendix***

The 2003 Upper Midwest Regional Assembly prayerfully and unanimously adopted a new ministry vision entitled *Disciples Together, Sharing in the Fullness of God's Table, For the Blessing of All*. In 2011, the Regional Assembly adopted bylaws to structure ministry according to this vision, which were slightly amended by Operations Council in 2019 and serve as current bylaws in 2024.

The 2003 vision and the 2011 structure were responses to financial constraints for our regional ministry, especially decreases in regional staff over the years. Much of it, though, was guided by important positive principles for the type of ministry we wish to share.

The new vision and structure has been successful in vital ways. Our region is supportive of ministries organized and carried out in a variety of ways, where leadership is determined by these groups. The region does not perpetuate ministries because “that is how we have always done things.” Instead, the region’s ministries are driven by spiritual discernment rather than procedures and votes that divide “winners” and “losers.”

Other guiding principles, though, seem to be less realized in our current structure. While the hope is that our structure would be laity-oriented rather than clergy-dominated, clergy voices still seem to dominate in regional leadership. While a representative Operations Council sought to be more inclusive of congregations of all sizes across the entire geographic region, larger congregations and those in central Iowa still seem strongly influential.

As with anything, there were unexpected and unintended consequences of this structure. It has been difficult to invite lay people to stand for election to Operations Council. The current 1 year term limits for officers, plus their election from within Operations Council, creates perpetual lame ducks and limits leadership choices; it also makes our region more staff-dependent in many ways. The desire to have meetings focused on mission rather than receiving reports has led to a lack of reporting by ministries, leaving many people unaware of what ministries are doing or if they are dormant.

In late 2023, regional leaders determined that now was a good time to revisit our structure. This included work by Operations Council over several months in 2024, supported by feedback gained in several listening/visioning sessions held around our region, with hybrid options, in Spring 2024. The Operations Council then considered several revisions to the current regional bylaws.

This revision also coincides with significant amendments to the *Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, adopted at the 2023 General Assembly and scheduled to take effect following the 2025 General Assembly. Significant among these are changes to the makeup and gathering of both the General Assembly and the General Board, including the adoption of offset 3-year terms for elected representatives to the Assembly.

### *The Updated Bylaws*

Bylaws often seem to be dry administrative details. At best, our bylaws describe how our regional structure helps us better engage in ministry and mission.

The updated bylaws intend to continue the vision of Disciples Together and honor our covenantal relationship with the General Church. They honor our vision to be relational, rather than hierarchical; permission-giving; laity oriented rather than clergy dominated; passion-seeking; missional; flexible for new ministry opportunities; driven by shared spiritual discernment, rather than votes that divide winners and losers. They reflect how we are growing and adapting as Disciples Together after more than 20 years.

As part of our covenantal relationship with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we wrote bylaws similar in form to the *Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. We are adopting a structure that includes 3-year terms for regional offices.

The desire to meet annually as a region is now also a goal of our general church for the General Assembly, though many of these sessions will occur online rather than in person. These regional bylaws celebrate and expand on this goal, celebrating that we can gather more than once a year in regional gatherings.

These bylaws attempt to strengthen officer leadership by creating an Executive Team of elected regional officers and the Regional Minister. The elected officer positions (Moderator, Vice Moderator, Moderator Elect, Treasurer, and Secretary) will serve together as a team with the Regional Minister for three years.

These bylaws clarify the role of leadership on the Regional Board, which will replace the current Operations Council. Members of the Regional Board will be elected in classes each year from nominations gathered from a newly formed Regional Nominating Committee. Rather than hoping that people will volunteer within a representative system, the Nominating Committee will seek out a diverse group of leaders that represents our region in a variety of ways.

While we believe that a certain amount of clarity of purpose and roles will benefit our officers, the Regional Board, and the Regional Nominating Committee, these bylaws accentuate that all ministries of our region will have freedom to organize themselves and pursue their missions in

their own ways. Ministries can be formed at any time. It is believed that official recognition of ministries at their start, and annual recognition and celebration of those ministries, is valuable. To achieve this goal – and to better share word of what mission we are accomplishing in our region and beyond – these ministries will be expected to submit a short report each year, sharing three key pieces of information: the name of their ministry, current leadership and description of leadership structure and how people become involved in the ministry, and highlights of the ministry in the previous year.

In all of this, we value welcoming more participation in our region's leadership and ministries. We strongly believe that offering concrete ways to engage and participate, as well as identifying specific responsibilities for our regional Executive Team, Regional Board members and Regional Nominating Committee members, will offer more ways for people to engage and participate. We also believe that it will create more transparency for all of our region's ministries, allowing more people to recognize and celebrate the many ways we are serving in Christ's name.