



# Northern Lights Region

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



*A partnership of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)  
in Alaska, Washington, North Idaho, and Montana.*

June 28, 2021

## Dear Northern Lights Moderators and Congregations,

Just about a year ago, I wrote to you in the mode of “Captain Obvious” to say that your pastor was tired! In that letter I cited an article by John Dobbs that predicted a coming crash – pastors retiring or resigning or leaving ministry because of burnout brought on by or accelerated by the COVID19 pandemic.

<https://johndobbs.com/the-coming-pastoral-crash/?fbclid=IwAR2UTsbwoRy6yrI3om0pXnQUgvVuY82O1qQc6DazxF6ldAZlBQBTIrlfuUI>

We are writing today to let you know your pastor is still tired! In addition to being the tech person and dealing with the stresses of online worship and remote pastoral care during the pandemic, these days your pastor is often the point person for bringing the congregation back to in-person gatherings. Congregations are attempting to do hybrid worship (both online and in-person) and navigating that new reality often falls heavily on the pastor. Additionally, when there is conflict in the congregation over when and how to lessen meeting or masking restrictions, it is often the pastor who hears and holds the brunt of the frustration of the congregation. Pastors with young children may feel especially conflicted as the vaccinated adults of the congregation want to remove all restrictions, and the parents of young children recognize their children are still vulnerable and ineligible for vaccines.

Chaplains within our congregations are exhausted as well. Some of them served as front-line workers offering pastoral care to COVID patients. Others had to navigate new restrictions in how they offer ministry to those in their care. While we are all feeling the effects of a year and more of lockdowns, restrictions, and corporate anxiety, many of our pastors and chaplains are feeling it even more. One study by the Wisconsin Council of Churches found that 25% of clergy surveyed had seriously considered retiring or resigning during COVID. What can we do to prevent the potential wave of clergy burnout?

One of the ways the Northern Lights Region is stepping up is by offering **mini-sabbatical grants to congregations to help support their pastors and chaplains in life-giving and energy restoring activities**. These grants, up to \$500 per congregational pastor or chaplain, could be used in a variety of ways to provide respite for our clergy. Some possibilities might be:

- Paying for supply preachers to give the pastor some extra Sundays off
- Supplementing the cost for a chaplain or pastor to attend a spiritual retreat
- Paying for a series of sessions with a Spiritual Director
- Supplementing the cost of a life-giving continuing education opportunity.

We are intentionally asking the congregations to apply for these grants to encourage a conversation between congregational leaders and clergy about their well-being and need for support. The process for applying is outlined below. Grants do not need to be used in 2021 but must be requested by Dec. 15, 2021.

In addition to the grants, there are other no-cost ways for the congregation to provide an extra Sunday or two off for the preaching pastor.

- Declare a “Visiting Sunday” and invite your members to worship with another congregation (online or in-person). Share the stories of what’s happening in other faith communities.
- Several of our churches have a library of pre-recorded sermons from this past year. Ask if they would loan you a sermon or two to experience a different preacher.

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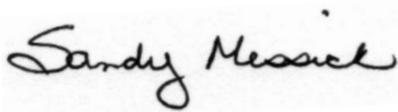
☐ [northernlightsdisciples.org](http://northernlightsdisciples.org)  
☐ [office@northernlightsdisciples.org](mailto:office@northernlightsdisciples.org)

- Laypeople are the backbone of our congregations and a treasured resource. Invite a layperson to bring the message or invite several of your newer and older members to share stories of how they came to be at your church.
- Focus a Sunday worship around an expanded communion celebration: always a significant moment for Disciples congregations. How could you make it an extra special experience and the focus of the service?
- Gather your congregations for a work project or two in your neighborhood or community. Worship God through service!

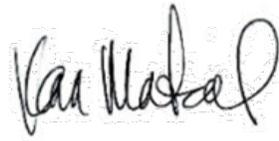
Whatever you do, take a moment to thank your pastors and chaplains for their leadership through this challenging time. We are blessed with incredibly gifted clergy in this region, and we have had the honor of walking alongside them as they rose to the challenges with creativity and faithfulness.

I give thanks always for them, and for you, and for the ministries of our congregations in the Northern Lights Region. Please review the instructions for applying for these grants, have a conversation with your pastor and any chaplains in your congregations, and help us help you to offer them a bit of extra support.

Grace and peace,



Sandy Messick  
Transitional Regional Minister



Kara Markell  
Commission on Ministry Chairperson

#### **Instructions for Congregations for Mini-Sabbatical Grants:**

1. Have a conversation with the pastor and chaplains about their wellbeing. What might be helpful in combating the ongoing fatigue or burnout following COVID? What would feel restful or life-giving?
2. Develop a proposal for supporting clergy in pursuing agreed upon goals or time away.
3. Complete the attached Application Form which includes: description of activity, cost to congregation or pastor, amount congregation will contribute (if any), and amount requested from regional funds (up to \$500).
4. Send proposal to Regional Minister, Sandy Messick ([sandy@northernlightsdisciples.org](mailto:sandy@northernlightsdisciples.org)). The application will be reviewed by a subgroup of the Commission on Ministry.
5. **Deadline for application is Dec. 15, 2021**