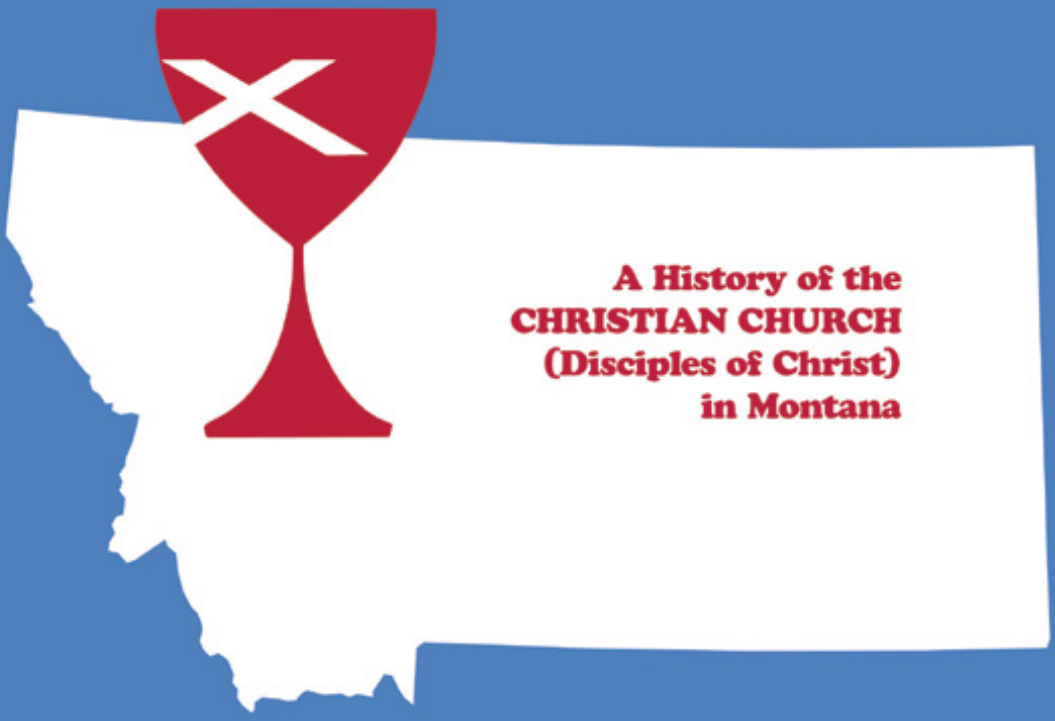
Big Sky Disciples



A History of the
CHRISTIAN CHURCH
(Disciples of Christ)
in Montana

Volume 2
1984–2018

Robert P. Frank-Plumlee

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Preface

Harvey C. Hartling and Merrill G. Burlingame wrote Big Sky Disciples, A History of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana and it was published in early 1984. It was printed by Mountain Press Publishing Company in Missoula, Montana and made available at $6.95 in paperback and $9.95 in hard copy. It is a book of over 318 pages on the history of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana, beginning one hundred and twenty years earlier in 1864. This second volume is being published in late 2018 in an effort to update that history.

It is recognized that an era is coming to a close with the upcoming merger of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana, Inc. and The Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The name of the merged regions is anticipated to be The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northern Lights Region. The lengthy title of the new region will often be abbreviated to the Northern Lights Region, just as The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana, Inc. is commonly called the Montana Region, or simply the Region.

There has been a long period of decline from 1984 to 2018 in the numbers of Disciples congregations and in the size of remaining congregations. It is a decline seen in most mainline denominations and in most of North America. At the same time, the census figures for Montana show an increase in population from 787,000 in 1980 to 902,100 in 2000 to approximately 1,042,500 in 2016.

Since 1984 in Montana, five congregations have disbanded, two have disaffiliated with the Disciples, several congregational starts have been attempted, and one start, Seeker's Harbor Faith Community (initiated in 2004) in Billings, continues.

The writing of this history has been about two years in the making. I sought to lighten the load by seeking a volunteer from each congregation to write a brief history of their congregation from 1984 to the present. Some volunteers were finished writing their brief congregational history in 2017 and some in 2018. Some volunteers that were asked were unable to do the assignment, and I wrote the specific congregational history myself from various resources at my disposal. Those included access to open files in the Regional Church office, copies of *Montana Christian News*, various reports to the annual Montana regional assemblies, and occasional phone calls to persons in congregations to clarify printed reports. There are undoubtedly historic things missed and things included that are of minimal historic merit.

I also referred to the Year Book & Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for some congregational statistics and occasional clergy information. It is an annual publication by The Office of the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana. It is commonly called the *Disciples Year Book* and will be referenced that way in this volume.

No chapter in this history was one person's contribution. Every section in the book received some editing. An Acknowledgments section seeks to recognize all who contributed something to the writing of this volume. Some contributions were greater than others, but I am grateful for all the help given.

A "Timothy" of a congregation has long been used to refer to someone who goes into professional ministry from that congregation, loosely based on 1 Corinthians 4:17, 1 Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2. In this volume a "Priscilla" (also called "Prisca") refers to women going into ministry. In the

Bible she is teamed with her husband, Aquila, and her name often precedes that of her husband when listed (Acts 18:18, Romans 16:3 and 2 Timothy 4:19), implying she headed the team. Thus, these terms are employed in this book.

In the proof-reading stage of this book, I am aware of many things that could have been said. They include such things as the names of volunteers who showed up year after year at Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center (CRWCRC), work weekends, and volunteers who served as camp directors and counselors year after year. They include many donors of time and money at local and regional levels. They include insights into the lives (biographies) of the ministers who served Montana congregations.

Basic information on credentialed Disciples clergy is on file in Regional and General Church offices. Little was made of titles such as Doctor or The Reverend because it seems that education and credentialing are a slippery slope from very impressive to somewhat uncertain. There were occasional exceptions, such as the introduction of the regional ministers of Montana at the first mention of them. This book was always planned as a brief history. The inclusion of all that could be found in files would probably have doubled that amount and added years to its writing.

Furthermore, a longer history might have been done if the Disciples of Christ Historical Society had been consulted and/or all the local church offices had been visited by me for added congregational information, neither of which was done. Locally, I relied on my volunteer helpers in each congregation. And internationally, I was aware that the DCHS was in the process of relocating from Nashville, Tennessee to Bethany, West Virginia as this volume was undertaken, which I felt might complicate information gathering.

Although the writing of this volume has exceeded two years, and at times been challenging, it has been a joy to compose and bring to fruition. As detailed in the Acknowledgments, it has been wonderful to work with so many Christian volunteers from across Montana.

CHAPTER 1

The Regional Church

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada ("The General Church") sponsors six Special Day offerings each year. The Christmas Special Day offering goes to the Regional Church budget in each region where the money is collected. The 2016 promotional material for Montana stated,

We are church together when we share our gifts

- to manage Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center
- to offer summer camps for children and youth
- to credential and support ministers
- to aid congregations with the search and call process
- to provide aid in times of conflict or difficulty
- to train leaders in changing times
- to create entry points for those who are not part of the church
- to serve in mission

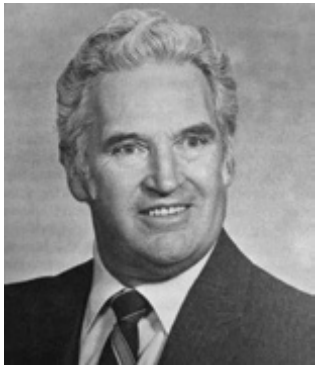
This is an excellent, concise summary of the function of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana. For history's sake, it should be noted that at the annual meeting of the Regional Board of the Christian Churches of Montana meeting in Bozeman on April 25, 1987, the name of the corporation (Region) was legally changed to The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana. The 1972 *Disciples Year Book* named the "Regional Unit" of the church "Christian Churches of Montana," and

the 1973 edition named it "The Christian Church in Montana." Thus, for a period of time, legalization took a while to catch up with functionality.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana has been fortunate to have Merrill G. Burlingame and Harvey C. Hartling in 1984 publish a history of the Disciples in Montana. *Big Sky Disciples, A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) In Montana* does a superb job of tracking the Disciples' presence and ministry back to 1864 in Helena. The history book itself is part of the history of who we Disciples in Montana are. For historic note, the book was produced in hard copy for $9.95 and in paperback for $6.95, plus postage of $1.50, if receiving it by mail. The book contains 318 pages, not counting the preface and table of contents. The book ends with a twenty-page detailed index.

The regional church office is located in Great Falls in the Central Christian Church building. The regional church address is 1019 Central Avenue, while the local church address is 1025 Central Avenue, both under the same roof. The regional church office located in Great Falls dates back many decades. It was in the home of the regional minister, D. Franklin Kohl (1916--2010) until his retirement on April 30, 1980. It was then moved into the Central Christian Church building using the Eleventh Street entrance with the beginning of the Fred Evans ministry. Kohl had served as regional minister for thirteen years.

Regional Church 1980–1987



Frederick R. Evans

The Rev. Dr. Frederick Ross Evans (1922—2013) immediately followed Kohl as regional minister on May 1, 1980. It can be noted that most regions within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) go through an interim regional ministry period between called regional ministers. Montana does not fit that mold. Each Montana regional minister has announced retirement far enough in advance to allow a search committee to be at work in

their concluding year or so. Regional Minister Fred Evans explained this process a year before his retirement in a lengthy August—September 1985 article in the *Montana Christian News*. This had been the case with Franklin Kohl and then Fred Evans, Jim Kimsey, Karen Frank-Plumlee, and Ruth Fletcher. This pattern ended when Ruth Fletcher's retirement was a precursor to the merger of the Montana Region with the Northwest Region. Since Ruth Fletcher was retiring August 31, 2018, and the merger would not be complete until the end of 2019, Sandy Messick, regional minister of the Northwest Region, had agreed to provide service to Montana along with the Northwest Region. She became the de facto "first interim" regional minister of Montana in advance of a new larger region, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northern Lights Region.

When *Big Sky Disciples* was published in early 1984, Fred Evans was four years into serving a six-year term as regional minister. He had come with the stipulation that he would serve only one term, which would take him to his sixty-fifth birthday on March 28, 1987. As already noted, he had begun serving in 1980, and at his retirement, he acknowledged in comments in the February–March 1987 *Montana Christian News* that he had served almost seven years.

Fred's wife, Mildred, is often mentioned along with references to him. She became the regional church office secretary on June 1, 1980, a month after his beginning date, and traveled the Montana region with him in the opening months of his regional ministry. (See the May 1980 *Montana Christian News*.) They were thus able to work remotely from the physical office when traveling the state. Later, in September 1983, Kathy McKerrow was hired for sixteen hours a week as regional office secretary. She had worked temporarily as regional church secretary for Franklin Kohl during the summer months of 1975. At the end of 1991, Kathy took on the added job of editor of the *Montana Christian News*. She and her husband, Gordon, were active members of Central Christian Church and were both lifelong Disciples from Disciples families. Kathy remained in that position until November 2012. The position was vacant until Ruth Lindabury came in June 2013 as communications director/executive assistant. During the vacancy, Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher added office responsibilities to her other duties.

Beginning on July 8, 1985, Ina Mae Cooper was called to serve as regional bookkeeper, a position she held until she retired on June 30, 2001. She and her husband, Duane, were also active members of Central Christian Church. It was said that the employment of Kathy and Ina Mae, although being a business arrangement, was also a ministry to God and the Christian Church. In their respective positions, Kathy served twenty-nine years and Ina Mae served sixteen years in the regional church office. Ina Mae was followed by the hiring of two other short-term bookkeepers, after which the regional church contracted with Loucks and Glassley, certified public accountants, to do the regional bookkeeping.

The year 1984 was an exciting time, in addition to having a newly published 120-year history book on the Christian Church in Montana. The lodge at Cane Ridge West had been completed and was dedicated at Congress of Christians in September 1984 with a gathering of 470 registered names, including George Turman, Lieutenant Governor of Montana.

Collecting "Favors of Faith" for what was then known simply as Colorado Christian Home began during this period. Glenn McKerrow, a Montana native and ordained Disciples minister, stated that he was called to Colorado Christian Home in Denver as Director of Planned Giving in 1983. At that time some local Disciples congregations in Montana made donations to CCH. But no official relationship existed between Colorado Christian Home and the Montana region.

Fred Evans, in talking with Glenn, was inspired to make a proposal to the Regional Board to annually have a Favors of Faith emphasis at the Regional Assembly. Each congregation in the region would be invited to bring specific household supplies and/or children's school supplies to be dedicated and carried after the assembly to Denver by Glenn. A tradition was begun, and it is still going as this volume is being written.

In 1994 the home broadened its name to include the words Tennyson Center for Children and Families (since CCH was located on Tennyson Street). This change provided a broader appeal beyond congregations since the home was making a highly visible impact on children in Denver, and

garnering city-wide support from numerous organizations. Colorado Christian Home/Tennyson Center for Children and Families continued to receive Favors of Faith at each Regional Assembly and continued to be a popular destination for home mission work trips for youth and adults to do painting, grounds work, and other projects as needed. It bears noting from *Big Sky Disciples* on pages 147 and 220 that groups of Disciples from Montana for decades had been traveling to White Swan, Washington, for workcamp experiences at Yakama Indian Mission, as has been reported on pages 147 and 220 of *Big Sky Disciples*. These trips west remained popular right on into the twenty-first century, as have trips to CCH/Tennyson Center.

Regional Church 1987–1993

James E. Kimsey

Records indicate that the Rev. Dr. James Edward Kimsey, Jr. (1927–2008) officially began his regional ministry in Montana on March 15, 1987, two weeks before his predecessor, the Rev. Dr. Frederick R. Evans, ended his regional ministry in Montana on March 28 (his sixty-fifth birthday). The records are accurate and convey a warm and gracious passing of the baton between the Evanses and the Kimseys. The Evanses had their house in Great Falls on the market and the Kimseys bought it from them. In the shared camaraderie of their month together, Fred and Mildred took Jim and Dolores on a tour of several Montana Disciples congregations. It was a bittersweet farewell for one family and a warm, inviting welcome for the other.

After World War II, Jim Kimsey and Dolores Youn were students at Northwest Christian College, where they met, and in September 1947, they married. Both went on to graduate school and became ordained Disciples ministers. A year after they came to Montana, Dolores was called as associate minister at Central Christian Church in Great Falls with Arthur Greenlee as senior minister. At that time, Dolores had become editor of *Montana Christian News*, a ministry she provided for four and a half years.

She gave it up after she left Central Christian Church to become minister of Christian Education across town at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Great Falls.

At the beginning of 1987 a CRW Permanent Fund was established. The February—March 1987 *Montana Christian News* reported that a Cane Ridge West Permanent Fund had been established, the goal of which was to build the fund to about $100,000 so that dividends would fund the care and maintenance of CRW. It read, "We are seeking at least 100 people to make a gift of at least $1,000 each. Gifts may be made as memorials to loved ones and their names will be added to the CRW Memorial Book." Simultaneously, the CRW Capital Fund Campaign #2 was under way with mid-January monies received being $119,166 toward the debt of $189,440.

A year later, there was still almost $40,000 to be raised. Jim Kimsey led the region in coming up with a solution. "ERASING THE DEBT—the Bottom Line ln '89" was selected as the theme for the 1988 Regional Assembly in Missoula. The campaign called for $150 in pledges from individuals to be paid off at $25 per month from October 1988 to April 1989. The proposal was passed with a kick-off set for the 1988 Congress of Christians in September. The funds to be raised were to include a pledge of $6,000 split 50-50 for salary support for the Disciples congregations at Columbia Falls and Whitefish.

The goal was not met by the 1989 Assembly, but was met four months later at Congress of Christians, which made the event celebratory. The retirement of that debt thus allowed giving to the CRW Permanent Fund to again be a focus for growth.

The Regional Assembly meeting in Missoula on April 23, 1988, also adopted a new MISSION STATEMENT. As reported in the June—July 1988 *Montana Christian News*, "The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana is a covenant community of Disciples of Christ congregations and their members, called to proclaim by word and example God's good news through Jesus Christ; to establish, support, nurture, and renew congregations; and to respond to the biblical mandate to work for unity, justice,

mercy, healing, and reconciliation for all people." This in many ways was Jim Kimsey's Mission Statement having been in Montana a year, and thus long enough to exercise his leadership in setting the tone for his ministry.

The 1988 Regional Assembly adopted, as a Regional Priority for three years, the theme "Strengthening the Family." Regional committees and local congregations were encouraged to focus on ways to carry out this priority. True to the priority, the theme of the 1989 Regional Assembly was "Faith in Families" with Charlie Shedd as keynote speaker. He had written several books, such as Letters To Karen, that had been on national best-seller lists. The assembly was held in Great Falls with portions of the program held in the Civic Center, due to the broad ecumenical and secular popularity of Dr. Charlie Shedd. A good representation of the community beyond the Disciples was in the audience.

Montana's "Partners in Mission" at this time were Jane and George Sullivan-Davis, who served in South America, including several Spanish-speaking countries. Information on them appeared regularly in the *Montana Christian News*, and they visited Montana Disciples congregations from January 29 to February 7, 1989. Typical of their reporting was a write-up in the June—July 1991 *Montana Christian News* describing their work with shantytown laity groups in Santiago, Chile, and their joining with dozens of local pastors in visiting 130 political prisoners.

Jim Kimsey in his "Regional Minister's Reflections" in the June—July 1989 *Montana Christian News* states, "Since ten of our eighteen congregations have had a change of pastoral leadership during the past two years, I have spent considerable time in helping ministers find new places of service, and congregations find new pastors." In other words, there was a sizeable turnover of ministry in that particular year.

In Billings on April 26-29, 1990, at Rocky Mountain College a Joint Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana and the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference of the United Church of Christ was held. Fred B. Craddock was a keynote speaker, along with Paul Sherry, the newly elected General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. The theme was CALLED TO ONE HOPE IN CHRIST

(Ephesians 4:3-4). It had been exactly twenty years since the 1970 state convention of the Montana Disciples met jointly with the United Church of Christ. Furthermore, the meeting was in the same location at Rocky Mountain College, as reported in *Big Sky Disciples* on page 205.

A growing awareness was sweeping the world for the need for computers. On August 6, 1991, the World Wide Web went live to the world. There was no fanfare in the global press. In fact, most people around the world didn't even know what the Internet was. In this context the regional board at its January 11, 1992, meeting established a Computer Fund for the eventual purchase of computers, a printer, and software equipment for the regional church office. A small committee that included Jim Kimsey had researched the need before it came to the board for an informed decision. The estimate for everything needed for a secretary and a bookkeeper was $9,180, and the goal was accepted. However, Jim was serving his final year in the position and good intentions never became a part of the budget.

Throughout the years covered in this volume, every issue of the *Montana Christian News* has had a box showing giving to Basic Mission Finance, congregation by congregation. It also has given major coverage to General Assemblies, Quadrennial Assemblies (the international gathering of Disciples Women), "Sessions" (the General Church quadrennial gathering of Disciples Men), and other General Church gatherings and emphases.

Thus, when the 1991 General Assembly meeting in Tulsa adopted a major General Church resolution called EMBRACE THE FUTURE, the Montana region accepted its share of the campaign. It was a campaign to raise $30 million for the mission of the whole church. Bill Connor, a highly respected and loved retired Montana Disciples minister, accepted the role of regional director. The region's goal was $93,658.

Jim Kimsey in his next to last "Regional Minister's Reflections" in the December 1992—January 1993 *Montana Christian News*, summarized the closing days of his Regional Ministry in Montana. Paraphrasing, he said: "Our regional youth program has made giant strides forward during recent years. Our MONTANA GROW program, which just began one

year ago, is off to a good start with a number of our churches adopting new evangelistic efforts. The EMBRACE THE FUTURE capital campaign has received exceptional support in Montana, having raised a total of $76,313 toward our goal of $93,658." [A year later the Montana region had reached $88,197 or 94% toward its goal of $93, 658.]

The two big annual events of the region are the Regional Assembly in April and Congress of Christians over Labor Day Weekend. Attendance figures for the Regional Assembly were not readily available, but attendance figures for Congress of Christians were 142 in 1990, 167 in 1991 and 170 in 1992.

In keeping with the Montana region's tradition, Jim Kimsey announced in March 1992 that his retirement would be March 15, 1993.

Regional Church 1993–2002

Karen V. Frank-Plumlee

The Rev. Dr. Karen Virginia Frank-Plumlee accepted the call to be regional minister beginning March 15, 1993. She came to Montana from thirteen years on the regional staff of the Christian Church in Kansas, first as associate regional minister and then as deputy regional minister. She received her Doctor of Ministry (D. Min.) degree from San Francisco Theological Seminary. Her husband, Robert P. (Bob) Frank-Plumlee, is also an ordained Disciples Minister. A few weeks before their arrival, he accepted a call to be interim minister at the Polson Christian Church in Polson, Montana, also beginning in March.

One of the first things Karen Frank-Plumlee did was introduce the use of computers to the regional church office. She had owned a personal computer for over a decade, having written her doctoral dissertation on one, and had brought her computer with her. She was thankful that the regional board in January 1992 had called for the eventual purchase of computers

and related accessories for the regional office. As it turned out, funds were not available for the actual purchases. However, within a few months one computer and printer were purchased, followed by a second computer a year later through a gift. With this second computer in 1994 the regional bookkeeping system became fully computerized. In addition, a new copier for the regional office was also acquired. Karen set up the computers and gave the office staff, Kathy McKerrow and Ina Mae Cooper, instruction on the proficient use of the new electronics.

Another bonus in 1994 was the upgrading of the first computer to begin making the *Montana Christian News* camera-ready. The *Montana Christian News* at that time was sent to all families of Montana congregations, either by direct mail, or through church newsletters.

In 1995 the six-page issues six times per year were reduced to two six-page issues and four four-page issues per year to cut costs. In November 1995 a regional three-night Los Angeles to Baja Mexico cruise was enjoyed by thirty-four members of the churches with the profit from the cruise helping with costs of the *Montana Christian News*. In a similar way a 1997 regional trip by bus enabled more persons from Montana to attend the General Assembly in Denver and to help underwrite the *Montana Christian News*.

Another priority for the new regional minister was to help the Permanent Fund Advisory Committee understand how to stop the Montana region's Permanent Fund from shrinking year by year, as reported on page 14 of the *Annual Report* to the 1993 Regional Assembly. The Fund's income in 1990 to the nearest dollar was $35,960, in 1991 $32,172, and in 1992 $27,685. At the end of 1992, the value of the Dain Bosworth account was $196,335, and the Shearson Lehman account was $130,781. There were some other small funds, as well. The Region had borrowed against the Dain Bosworth account to buy the caretaker's house and five acres and still owed $40,385 on it. Therefore, it was incumbent on the region that the debt be retired as soon as possible in order to deal with the poor performance of the account.

Karen Frank-Plumlee had an idea which she named the "Cane Ridge West Quilt Project." She presented her idea to the regional cabinet on June 5,

1993. After follow-up meetings with various stages of approval, the project was introduced to the churches of the region in February and March of 1994. It involved selling patch work quilt squares for $20 each. The project is described in chapter three of this book on the history of Cane Ridge West. The project was successful, raising over $45,000. The finished quilt was hung in the lodge as a symbol of the unity of the Montana region and of a debt-free property.

After the debt was paid off, most of the Permanent Funds were liquidated and moved. The Dain Bosworth holdings were invested in a Beasley Growth Fund with Christian Church Foundation. Most of the other holdings that could be liquidated were invested in the Christian Church Foundation Common Fund. By this time the EMBRACE THE FUTURE CAMPAIGN was completed, and the region was receiving its share of the distributions, as well. The Permanent Funds Advisory Committee in the following year came up with a fully revised Permanent Fund Policy, anticipating that a clear policy for use and investment of permanent funds would encourage contributions to the funds.

Another program, MONTANA GROW, began under Jim Kimsey. In the *Montana Christian News* he summarized the closing days of his Regional Ministry in part by noting that MONTANA GROW was off to a good start with a number of congregations adopting new evangelistic efforts. In 1994 Karen Frank-Plumlee reported to the Regional Assembly, "In this, the third year of Montana Grow, the 1994 *Disciples Year Book* indicates that as Disciples in Montana, '… day by day the Lord Jesus has added to our number those who are being saved' (Acts 2:47). In particular, eight congregations reported more baptisms in 1993 than in 1992, and eight reported the same or more transfers than in 1992." It can be reported that similar increases were seen in worship and Sunday School attendance, as well as twelve of the region's seventeen congregations increased their Basic Mission Finance giving.

The MONTANA GROW program under the direction of the Commission on Evangelism was deemed to have been an effective three-year emphasis. Six churches also participated in the "People of the Covenant" studies, and

Karen led several "Discovery Weekends" for congregations in the region during the year.

In 1994 the first Mother to Mother Project in Montana began in Helena, and received funding from the region's share of Reconciliation offerings. Mother to Mother was a program of limited structure wherein more experienced mothers offered mentoring and emotional support to other mothers in need of it. The program was strong in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kansas, and had been successful elsewhere through both Disciples efforts and the ecumenical body, Church Women United.

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) assigned Marlene Urban to Montana Disciples, as their new Mission Partner. A Colorado native, she was serving a one year internship in Paris, France. The region's World Outreach Commission assigned two congregations per month to focus on Marlene's work and to communicate with her, beginning in September 1994. A year later, the region was assigned a new Global Mission Partner, Donald S. Persons. On July 1, 1995, he began serving a four-year term with the Church of Christ in Thailand, working in laity training and evangelism programs. This time one Montana congregation a month was scheduled to make contact with him, as Global Mission Partner.

The General Church's MISSION IMPERATIVES had been adopted by the region with an emphasis on renewing congregational life. In 1995 the Deer Lodge congregation was given leadership assistance. After an all-church survey, a steering committee of Deer Lodge members, and members from congregations within 150 miles, planned for its revitalization. A work weekend was held in June 1995, in which the trim on the 111 year-old brick building was painted, a restroom on the fellowship hall level was installed, a nursery was painted and readied for use, an electrical sign donated by the Helena church was installed, and flowers and shrubs were planted. A First Christian Church of Deer Lodge brochure was also designed and printed for city-wide distribution. Then on July 6, 1995, at 4 PM the church held a 115th Anniversary Celebration of the Deer Lodge congregation with over 165 in attendance. Peter Morgan of Homeland Ministries was guest

speaker, and the sanctuary which seated perhaps 120, had guests seated across the chancel and standing in hallways and doorways.

The International Christian Youth Fellowship (ICYF) event was held June 30-July 4, 1995, at Chapman University in Orange, California. One carload of two adults, Bob and Karen Frank-Plumlee, and three youth attended. The youth were Candy Porter and Stephanie Hagerman of Great Falls and Robin LaBard of Billings. The next ICYF event was held July 7-11, 1999, at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. A vanload of eight youth and two adults, Bob Frank-Plumlee and Barb Lancaster of Helena, represented Montana at the international youth gathering. Youth were Alison and Jennifer Malensek, and Kyle Lancaster of Helena; Greg Schoby and Chad Yahraus of Great Falls; Amber Dixson of Missoula; and Jay Wright of Bozeman. At the Fort Worth event, the group participated in building a Habitat for Humanity house.

Each year an *Annual Report* presents to the Regional Assembly a list of ongoing significant annual regional programs. It changes very little from year to year. In 1996 it read,

> Junior and Chi Rho Retreats (March)
> CWF Spring Enrichments (Spring)
> Regional Assembly (Spring)
> Disciples Women's Retreat (Spring)
> Cane Ridge West Work Weekend (May)
> Disciples Men's and Boy's Retreat (June)
> Junior, Chi Rho and CYF Camps (Summer)
> GMPK [Grandparents, Moms, Pops, and Kids] Camp (Summer)
> Congress of Christians (Labor Day weekend)
> CWF Retreat (Fall)
> CYF Retreat (October)
> Ministers & Mates Retreat (Fall)
> Disciples/UCC Continuing Education (Fall)

Many of these programs take place at Cane Ridge West, but not all of them. The list gives a sense of the broad scope of activities in the life of the

regional church. For clarification there developed a younger group in the region known as Disciples Women, composed of mothers with children at home and younger working professionals. Parallel with it was the historic regional CWF group composed of older women with different energy and interests. There were some who easily crossed over and related outside those lines. Furthermore, there was total cooperation on regional activities and local events.

From January 13—24, 1997, seven persons and the regional minister traveled to Honduras for a regional work trip. They assisted the Christian Commission for Development, an ecumenical Honduran-led helping agency, in building a retaining wall at their Christian campground about 20 miles from the capitol of Tegucigalpa. They learned about the people, their situation, and their faith in this poorest of the Central American countries. One of the eight was a teenage son who accompanied his father and mother. The trip was such a significant experience for all who went that R. Terry Halstead, one of the ministers on the trip, led a second work trip of nine Disciples from Montana to Honduras in January 1999. Two of the participants on the second trip stayed an additional two weeks to do further relief work.

Cane Ridge West's Blackfoot River experienced a flood in the spring of 1997 which broke the dikes put in place a few years earlier along the river. As it turned out, Regional Minister Karen Frank-Plumlee put a great deal of time and energy into what came to be known as the "River Work Project." Work done immediately after the flood was subsequently undone that year, and major work was contracted and done in 2001. That work is described in detail in the chapter on Cane Ridge West.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana and the Montana Northern-Wyoming Conference of the United Church of Christ shared a serendipity in Miles City, beginning in 1997 and coming to fruition in 1999. First Christian Church of Miles City had their longtime minister, Leslie Payne, retire in April 1997. Karen Frank-Plumlee, Regional Minister, assisted them with getting Grace S. Lorenz as their interim minister. Meanwhile, the members of First Christian and of Highland Park Congregational United Church of Christ in Miles City shared VBS and

other functions together. In the course of that year, the Disciples congregation invited Karen Frank-Plumlee to come and do an all-church survey, which she had done with good results in other Disciples congregations.

In late 1997 church leaders from both congregations conversed with Bob Thaden, pastor at Highland Park Congregational United Church of Christ about simultaneously serving both of them. Due to that conversation and the congregational survey done by Frank-Plumlee, the congregations voted to begin a yoked ministry, effective January 11, 1998. Bob Thaden was named to serve both congregations in separate buildings, with separate services and boards. That summer the congregations worshiped together. At the end of summer they voted to stop worshipping in their separate buildings. Under Thaden's leadership with guidance from both John Schaeffer, the United Church of Christ Conference Minister and Karen Frank-Plumlee, Disciples Regional Minister, the two congregations took further steps to becoming a united congregation. The merger became effective January 1, 1999, with the new name of United Christian Church, and with Bob Thaden as full-time minister of the one body.

The Montana Lay Ministry Institute (MLMI) began August 1, 1998, with nine students. Six students participated the second semester of this two and a half year systematic program. This study for the laity met the education requirement for Montana licensed ministers. The courses were open to persons seeking to become licensed ministers, as well as any persons interested in growing in knowledge of the Christian faith and spirituality through engaging in serious study. Thus, the title included "Lay" rather than "Licensed."

The MLMI courses were taught by Montana Disciples ministers at Cane Ridge West. Tuition scholarships were available through a block grant from the Division of Homeland Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indianapolis. The first students graduating from MLMI in November 2000 were Lois Lyford, and Bob and Mary Smith, all from Central Christian Church in Kalispell. David Durant of Bozeman completed all but the final semester when his employment transferred him out of state. Karen Frank-Plumlee served as Dean of the Institute.

In 1998 the region's permanent funds continued doing well under the management of the Christian Church Foundation. These funds, given by individuals who loved and provided for the ongoing work of the church, continued to undergird a significant portion of the regional ministry. The regional permanent fund guidelines were revised to include the regional scholarship fund, and a new memorial policy.

During 1998 each congregation took a month to make contact with Montana's Global Mission Partner, Don Persons in Thailand. They were in contact knowing that the region would be hosting Don and his family in the summer of 1999 while on furlough. When the time came, they visited each congregation during the month of July. Don and his family also resided at each of the regional church camps a part of each week, providing guest leadership for the Junior, Chi Rho, and CYF camps.

Dan Hoffman, Executive Secretary of African Ministries of the Division of Overseas Ministries, continued as Montana's General Ministry Partner, and shared about the church in Africa at the March 1999 Regional Board, meeting in Helena.

During the 1990s a sexual ethics course began to be held (later expanded and called "Boundary Training"). Ministers were given the option of one of two dates in 1999 to enable them to meet the Montana region's new standing requirement. Each minister must attend a regionally approved sexual ethics course every two years in order to maintain their ministerial standing.

In 1999 the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) approved an anti-racism/pro-reconciliation initiative. As an outcome of this initiative, Montana's Commission on Church in Society, chaired by Barb Lancaster, set a goal to bring racial issues into clearer focus for Disciples in Montana, beginning in 2000. A key element was for a cultural exchange with Native Americans by having church members travel to the Fort Belknap Reservation. A workshop on anti-racism/pro-reconciliation efforts and opportunities was also held at the 2001 Regional Assembly. The follow-up was education through *The Study Circles* material, which in the years to follow, enabled organizing of community dialogues on "Facing the Challenge of Racism" in Montana.

In the year 2000 the Montana Region got the gift of a person. Jean Muir retired from teaching public school after thirty-five years in the classroom. Karen Frank-Plumlee approached her about being a part-time volunteer staff person, working with women's groups. Thus, for eighteen years and still serving as of this publication goes to print, she has been the Montana Christian Women's Ministry staff. It has been a somewhat unique position, in that she is unpaid, and she is recognized as staff. She visits Disciples women's groups throughout the state, discussing the status of study materials, and other needs and issues. She also attends General Church women's gatherings on behalf of Montana, and has traveled overseas, most recently to Turkey as a walking resource person. Jean spends at least one week each summer cooking at Cane Ridge West, and some years two or more weeks, in addition to occasional retreats.

From September 7 to December 6, 2000, Karen and Bob Frank-Plumlee took a three month sabbatical. Terry Halstead, former minister of Grand Avenue Christian Church in Bozeman, accompanied by his wife, Esther, returned from Iowa to serve the Montana region as "sabbatical interim regional minister."

The Frank-Plumlees began their sabbatical by attending a Montana State University Extension Forestry Stewardship Workshop for small forest land owners. Bob attended on behalf of his personal forested property, which is 14.5 acres about one mile west of the CRW property. Karen attended on behalf of the Cane Ridge West land. Participation in the workshop required attending five one-day classes over several weeks, studying forest land management, and doing field work between classes. A key element was the homework of doing a plot study of one's own land related to vegetation age, diversity, and other factors.

A major outcome of the forestry workshop for CRW was a plan to plant 244 ponderosa pine saplings around the property. It was recognized that probably at least half would not survive, which is why so many were planted. At that time it was noted that there were almost no young, small pine trees on the land. The trees were planted in the spring of 2001 and each camp that summer, as a project, divided into teams and poured a gallon of water on each sapling during their week. On May 30, 2018, Bob and Karen

Frank-Plumlee walked the property and identified ninety pine trees that had survived for seventeen years. Some were larger and healthy, while some were smaller and struggling. A map was made of the sapling locations in 2001 and was used in 2018 for identification. Copies of it were filed in the regional church office and with the Frank-Plumlees.

The Frank-Plumlees then traveled to Houston for a Thomas Bandy seminar, "The Servant-Empowering Organization." Karen and Bob completed their sabbatical by traveling to Thailand and visiting Montana's Global Mission Partner, Don Persons, who had spent part of his 1995 furlough in Montana. Don worked out of Chang Mai with Lamp of Thailand, bringing biblical studies to rural areas in the north of that country. Karen and Bob returned and gave several programs in the Montana region.

At that time the regional board, commissions, and committees of the region met together three times a year. During these Friday-Saturday meetings, selected lay members and the ministers of the congregations would vision, receive input and inspiration, resource each other, and design programs to strengthen the congregations, and enrich the lives of the people. During the decade of the 1990s the Christian Church in Montana had continued to be in ecumenical cooperation with the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference of the United Church of Christ.

On February 24, 2001, John Schaeffer, Conference Minister and Karen Frank-Plumlee, Regional Minister, together with their judicatory leaders, met and shared how they could be intentional in working together, as well as avoid duplicating ministries. There was a shared hope in some greater partnership. That hope would eventually be tried under Ruth Fletcher's leadership a decade later.

After the close of 2001, a financial audit was performed by Loucks & Glassley, certified public accountants in Great Falls. It determined that the financial statements were free of material misstatement. The December 31, 2001, figures are,

TOTAL ASSETS $1,124,569
TOTAL LIABILITIES $7,135
TOTAL NET ASSETS $1,117,434.

Karen Frank-Plumlee retired as regional minister on March 31, 2002. From time to time she had talked of having an eye-catching entrance to the Cane Ridge West property. There had been only a horizontal swinging steel pole for a gate. At her retirement dinner in Helena on March 8, she was presented with a beautiful, laser-carved sheet of steel to hang under an arched log gate in her honor. On June 22, 2002, the entrance gate was erected with her present. A more formal dedication of the gate was held during Congress of Christians that same year.

Regional Church 2002–2018

Ruth A. Fletcher

The Rev. Dr. Ruth A. Fletcher accepted the call to be regional minister, beginning April 1, 2002. She was installed April 19—21, 2002, at the Regional Assembly at Central Christian Church in Billings. Dick Hamm, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), was the keynote speaker at the assembly.

Ruth Fletcher came to Montana from Washington where her background included serving as associate regional minister of The Northwest Regional Christian Church (1986—98). She received her Doctor of Ministry (D. Min.) degree from Claremont School of Theology. She is a lifelong Disciple and an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She is married to Ron Greene, an ordained Disciples minister and senior pastor at Central Christian Church in Great Falls (2002—present). Ruth enjoys music, drama, boating, hiking, reading, and traveling.

The Region's Mission Statement adopted at the Regional Assembly in April 2003 reads, "The Mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana is to empower congregations to effectively share Christ's ministry with the world." Priorities are, "Helping Congregations Respond to God's

Call; Developing Congregational Leadership; and Establishing New, Viable Disciples congregations."

During Ruth Fletcher's tenure, the regional church pursued a number of priorities. A priority was to infuse regional life and work with spiritual practices of prayer, Bible study, and discernment. Ruth and the moderators created a tone of worshipful work in all the board meetings. The board ended each meeting with the "Prayer of Examen," looking back over the business conducted to see where God was at work. Speakers at regional gatherings addressed such topics as Spiritual Giftedness, Tools for Reading the Bible, Praying the Scriptures, and Living Faith in Action. Yearly retreats for congregational elders began under Ruth's leadership.

A priority was to teach the principles of church transformation, and coach congregations through change. Ruth led a three-year process for strategic transformation called "Leaven." Teams made up of the pastor and lay people from six congregations met three times each year and covenanted together to learn the principles of church revitalization, to equip themselves to take steps toward renewal, to pray for one another, to read the literature about what it takes to turn a church around, to network and share resources, to hold each other accountable, and to support each other. Congregations participating in this process of transformation were Grand Avenue CC of Bozeman, Central CC of Great Falls, First CC of Helena, Central CC of Kalispell, First CC of Missoula, and Heritage of Faith CC of Polson. Six other congregations engaged in a process called "New Beginnings," offered by Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation, General Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis, Indiana. Furthermore, workshops were held across the state on evangelism, stewardship, hospitality, and the dynamics of healthy congregational systems.

A priority was to expand theological education for lay people. Ruth gathered ecumenical partners, and together they designed an expansion of the Montana Lay Ministry Institute (MLMI), begun under the leadership of Karen Frank-Plumlee in 1998. The new ecumenical venture was called the Montana Association of Churches Lay Ministry Institute (MAC LMI). The Montana Commission on Ministry accepted the coursework

completed with MAC LMI as a course of study which qualified students to be Commissioned Ministers. During Ruth's tenure, three MAC LMI students were commissioned to ministry: Becky Taylor, Jeff Anderson, and Wendy Campbell. Many other lay people took classes from MAC LMI, including at least eleven Disciples students.

A priority was to reach out to neighbors with hands-on mission. The region sponsored two mission trips to the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina. The region sponsored a work trip to the Special K Ranch near Billings. The region provided volunteers to work on a repair project on the second and third floors of Central Christian Church in Kalispell, following damage caused by a leaky roof.

A priority was to plant new churches. A New Church ministry team was trained by Church Extension, General Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), to supervise the planting of new churches in Montana. A new church was started in Bozeman by Matt Melchor-Gordon. It lasted a little over three years. A new church was started in Missoula by Doug Garner. It lasted a little over three years. A new church called Seeker's Harbor Faith Community was started by Becky Taylor and Cherie Manning in Billings in 2004. It chartered in 2017.

This list of priorities shared above by Ruth Fletcher cover the sixteen years of her regional ministry, in summary. Further history may be found in details. One of them is that there were two big events in the annual life cycle of the regional church through the end of the twentieth century. One was the annual Regional Assembly held in the spring. The other was Congress of Christian held over Labor Day weekend. In 2004 the last gathering under the name Congress of Christians was held. On Labor Day weekend in 2005 Montana Disciples gathered at Cane Ridge West under the name Festival of Faith. It is unclear from reading *Big Sky Disciples* when Congress of Christians was begun or how it came to have that name.

Regional Minister Jim Kimsey writing in the August-September 1992 *Montana Christian News* was among the many who questioned why it was called a "Congress." Nevertheless, the *Big Sky Disciples* history on page 171

does indicate that the annual Congress of Christians was ongoing and that, beginning in 1982, it would be held at Cane Ridge West. The Festival of Faith, its successor, was last held in 2012, due to declining attendance. It appeared that Labor Day weekend was no longer the best time to gather. To not lose the momentum of those who still wanted to gather in late summer at the Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center, a different format was offered called iCamp (intergenerational) for all ages. It has proven popular for a sustainable group to the present time.

In 2004 five Montana Disciples youth and two adults attended a Four-Region Youth Leadership Gathering in the Wallowa Mountains in Oregon. The youth were Erica (Aerii) Smith of Missoula, Danni Bain of Hamilton, Ashley Stephen and Brad Reynolds of Great Falls, and Becky Roberts of Helena. Accompanying them were John Bain, Hamilton minister and Regional Youth Director, and Ruth Fletcher, Regional Minister.

The *Montana Christian News* in its February-March 2006 issue announced a new regional church website. It was www.montanadisciples.org and contained a wealth of information including lists of congregations, pastors, calendar of regional events, Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center information, and much more. In keeping with changing times the Christian Church in Montana and Cane Ridge West soon went on Facebook, as well. Leaders in the Montana region could post events, pictures and other items of church interest. Followers were encouraged to "like us" when reading it.

The Montana Disciples made a mission work trip to New Orleans, Louisiana during April 20—26, 2008. Hurricane Katrina had devastated the coast and the General Church goal for Disciples of Christ was to send 750 work groups to the Gulf Coast by August 2008. That goal was exceeded and the group from the Montana region was number 624 of the eventual 750 plus groups. The group of sixteen Montana Disciples did major work on a house, including interior sheetrock and flooring, and exterior painting and roofing.

In the area of church growth Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher increasingly realized that the demographics in Montana did not indicate the kind of population growth that supports efforts of establishing traditional

congregations. Thus, she developed a church growth approach she called "Open Circles." In 2008 the Regional New Church Commission shifted its focus in new church development to using the Open Circles approach, which is thoroughly reported in the New Church chapter of this book.

In the Spring 2008 issue of *Montana Christian News* "Ruth's Reflections" stated, "Since 1995 our denomination has been in 'full communion' with the United Church of Christ. Since 1996 we have conducted all of our overseas missions as one body. Twice we have gathered together for our General Assembly/Synod." And as reported earlier in this chapter, the Montana Disciples and the UCC Conference in 1970 and 1990 shared in a Joint Assembly/Conference gathering on the Rocky Mountain College campus in Billings. Further joint annual gatherings in 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, and 2014 were to follow. Each gathering came to be known as CAMRA or Conference Annual Meeting (UCC) and Regional Assembly (DOC).

In June 2005 Randy Hyvonen (HIV-uh-nin) succeeded John Schaeffer as Conference Minister of the United Church of Christ Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference. Randy and Ruth worked closely in crafting programs and ideas that became a prelude to a joint DOC/UCC Partnership which began on January 1, 2011.

At a historic special (joint) meeting of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana Regional Assembly and the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference of the United Church of Christ on November 6, 2010, in Bozeman, a proposal for the two denominations to partner together in some ministries was passed. The gathering was held at First Presbyterian Church where Dan Krebill, President of the Montana Association of Churches, was one of the pastors.

A great deal of work went into what became "Partnership Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana and the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference of the United Church of Christ." Two offices were set up, one in Great Falls and one in Billings. The plan was for Ruth Fletcher to service Disciples and UCC congregations in western Montana and Randy Hyvonen to service Disciples and UCC congregations

in eastern Montana. They had a number of issues to work out: a new approach to bookkeeping for the two entities; working on signage for the two offices; changes with the phone systems, email, and website; and shifting how to communicate with all the churches. In the midst of this work, Randy Hyvonen was on track to retire in October 2011.

The UCC Conference had thirty-six congregations. Their conference office was in Billings while the Disciples office was in Great Falls. The UCCs were stronger in number of congregations in the eastern half of Montana and the Disciples were stronger in the western half. The conference had three congregations in northern Wyoming. The only Disciples congregation in northern Wyoming was in Sheridan, and it was a part of the Central Rocky Mountain Region. The UCC's one campground was in the eastern part of Montana. The Disciples campground was in the western portion of the state. Miles City has the only united UCC/Disciples congregation in Montana. Congregations of both denominations are found only in the larger cities of Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, and Missoula, due mostly to 1928 agreements for church planting.

The Partnership's VISION was, "a community of growing, vital UCC and DOC congregations in Montana and Northern Wyoming, committed and equipped to effectively carry out Christ's transforming ministry in the world."

The Partnership's MISSION was, "to equip transformational leaders, to encourage the sharing of resources and congregational stories, and to call DOC/UCC churches in Montana and Northern Wyoming to grow spiritually, to live as trustworthy communities, and to participate in God's reconciling mission of healing, love, and justice."

The Partnership's PURPOSE was, "to serve God and the world in our Mission from Jesus Christ. We value flexibility. We practice equality in leadership, worship, and community. We practice responsible stewardship of our resources, so that we can become most effective in our Mission. We relate through covenant. We respect autonomy."

When Randy Hyvonen retired in October 2011, Ruth Fletcher became Interim Conference Minister for the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference of the United Church of Christ while continuing to serve as Regional Minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana.

The Rev. Dr. Marc Stewart was called to be the next UCC Conference Minister. His installation was held at Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Bozeman on Saturday, April 20, 2013, with guest preacher being The Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The service included an Affirmation Covenant of The Rev. Dr. Ruth Fletcher and The Rev. Dr. Marc Stewart as Executive Co-Ministers of the Montana-Northern Wyoming Partnership of UCC-DOC.

Almost immediately there seemed to be an inability between the new Conference Minister and the Regional Minister to communicate. Agreements even when written were not honored or were misunderstood. Even among the UCC Conference leadership and the new Conference Minister something also was not right. Soon Marc Stewart was given a six month leave of absence by the United Church of Christ Conference. Meanwhile, ongoing ministries continued to take place, both locally and across Montana and Northern Wyoming. There ended up being five CAMRA gatherings, the last of which was held May 2—4, 2014, in Missoula.

Although the 2014 Joint Assembly took place, little had changed in the ability of key leaders of the UCC and Disciples to honor and trust in mutual agreements. The outcome of the impasse in the months that followed led the Disciples to call for a Special Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana, held on January 6, 2015, via conference call, at which it was decided to remove itself from the Partnership with the Montana Northern-Wyoming Conference of the United Church of Christ, retroactive to January 1, 2015.

Rick Bischoff, Regional Moderator, at the Special Assembly stated that there had been good things happen because of the Partnership. The Region had saved money. It had good events with the UCC that had more energy and

more people than Disciples would have had on their own. And new friends were made across denominational lines. But there also were difficulties.

The Disciples leadership had lost trust in the leadership of the UCC Conference. Here were some of the reasons. First, the Conference had not adhered to decisions that both sides had made together. Second, the Conference had not come back to the Disciples to renegotiate changes that they had wanted to make. Third, the Conference had not followed through with agreements they made. There were other details. For instance, the Conference Moderator had unilaterally cancelled meetings. Furthermore, the UCC Board planned a Situational Review of the Partnership, then invited the Disciples to it, rather than inviting them to the planning process for the Review.

A Vision Team for the Montana region was named consisting of John Keener, Rick Bischoff, Nancy Lumsden, Don Beal, LeAnn Budeski, Brett Fagenstrom, Kathy Hilberg, Dana Keener, Mary Larsen, and Jean Muir. On January 9, 2015, the team met with the General Minister and President Sharon Watkins to consider options for the future. The team began to work with Denny Williams, Regional Minister of Arizona, to discern future directions, discussing what Sharon Watkins had brought to them. The outcome was a report to the next Regional Assembly, April 29—May 1, 2015, in Great Falls. The Regional Assembly with forty in attendance was planned as a strategy gathering about the future of the region. They learned that in the last ten years, the number of Disciple congregations in Montana decreased by 35% and that three congregations supported 91% of the regional budget in 2014 while three churches gave nothing to support the regional church.

In March 2016 the regional board adopted two recommendations from the Vision Team and appointed a group of people to do "Research and Development:" 1] Explore, research, and lay the groundwork toward partnering with another region in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for contracted services by another regional minister; 2] Explore removing Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center from regional church control and establish it as its own independent legal entity, as a 501c3, with connection to the Montana Disciples. Those named to the team were

Moderator Dana Keener, Mary Larsen, Chuck Shannon, Brad Lancaster, and Ron Greene.

On the broader ecumenical front the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana for decades had been a part of the Montana Association of Churches. MAC in 2015 opened up its membership possibilities. Formerly, it was an association of denominational units (synods, presbyteries, dioceses, districts, and similar entities). During 2015 the Disciples region was instrumental in helping with the "re-formation" of the Montana Association of Churches to the Montana Association of Christians. With this change, it was possible for congregations, individuals, and nonprofit organizations to become members. MAC also changed the way it functions. Now, Ministry Teams are created by its members to do the work of MAC in timely ways around the issues of the day. The goal of these changes was to create possibilities for much greater participation for individual Christians around Montana to work together.

In other matters of regional church ministry, pastors, elders, and other leaders participated in the ordination of Erica (Aerii) Smith on July 14, 2014, and Colin Douglas on May 23, 2015. Wendy Campbell was Commissioned to Christian Ministry on June 28, 2015, and continues to serve as the Outreach Minister of First Christian Church in Hamilton.

The 2017 Regional Assembly was held on May 19—20 at Cane Ridge West Conference & Retreat Center. The theme for the event was "Leaning into the Future." Belva Brown Jordan of Claremont School of Theology and Dean of Disciples Seminary Foundation was the keynote speaker. The Region used the occasion to celebrate a forty year relationship with Disciples Seminary Foundation. It also recognized Seekers Harbor Faith Community of Billings as a newly chartered congregation in the region. Representing the new congregation were Becky and Doug Taylor, Jane Collins, and Karen Eddy.

The Regional Assembly then approved the two major resolutions coming before it. The first resolution authorized a team from the Montana region to begin conversations with a team from the Northwest Regional Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ) about a merger between the two regions. The teams would then bring proposals to the two regional boards followed by proposals to the two regional assemblies in 2018. The second resolution authorized a team of persons from the Montana region to create a comprehensive proposal to bring in 2018 to the regional board and regional assembly concerning the ongoing ministry of Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center.

Subsequent to the votes, the teams for both resolutions were announced. On the team to work with the Northwest Region were Ruth Fletcher, John Keener, and Mary Larsen. On the team to work on the Cane Ridge West matter were Brad Lancaster, Brett Fagenstrom, Amber Richardson, Becky Taylor, Jeremy Comstock, Rick Bischoff, and Ruth Lindabury.

On April 28 and May 19, 2018, respectively, the Montana Regional Assembly and the Northwest Regional Assembly unanimously approved moving toward being part of one big region consisting of Alaska, Washington, North Idaho and Montana. With these respective actions, the two regions entered a transition phase leading up to December 31, 2019.

Sandy Messick, Regional Minister of the Northwest Regional Christian Church and Ruth Fletcher, Regional Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana, toured Montana Disciples congregations during portions of the summer in anticipation of Ruth's retirement at the end of August 2018.

On September 7—8 "The 2018 Common Table Retreat" (an open-to-all event) of the Montana and Northwest Regions met at Twinlow (United Methodist) Camp near Rathdrum, Idaho. With fifty-eight laity and clergy gathered from twenty-two congregations of both regions, participants worked on structure, staffing, and name of the new region. The retreat was put together by a New Creation Task Team made up of Mary Larsen, John Keener, Kerry Kesey, Rick Lewis, Ruth Fletcher, and Sandy Messick. Ruth Fletcher's participation on the team ended with her retirement. But the remainder of the team took the work of the retreat and further refined it. A resolution regarding the new configuration will then go to the 2019 General Board and General Assembly for a vote, which with the resolution

being affirmed, the new region will begin its ministry in January 2020. The new name being put forth is The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northern Lights Region.

It will be a large region geographically, covering three time zones. The two regions' leadership anticipate that technology will allow the new region to change the methods it uses without losing the personal, pastoral touch it wants to offer.

Financial Statements for the Montana Region

The 137th Regional Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana met April 27—29, 2018, at Central Christian Church in Great Falls. Among the Regional Reports to the Assembly was the Regional Church's financial statements compiled by Loucks & Glassley, certified public accountants in Great Falls, as of December 31, 2017.

The full report covered five pages plus Loucks & Glassley's cover letter. It included revenues from offerings, events, programs, and investment income, as well as expenses for the year in staff, outreach, and caring ministries. Those complete figures are available in the Regional Assembly booklet, as well as in regional church files, and in the office of Loucks & Glassley. The figures below regarding Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center (CRWCRC) include land, improvements, buildings. and equipment.

ASSETS	
CASH	$ 7,420
INVESTMENTS	$1,192,532
LOAN RECEIVABLE	$ 20,000
FIXED ASSETS, NET	
CRWCRC	$ 665,025
Regional Office Equipment	$ 16,058
Depreciation	($ 352,011)
TOTAL ASSETS	$ 1,559,024

Regional Assemblies In Montana and Keynote Speakers

104th RA CC/DOC In MT April 27—29, 1984, Great Falls – Douglas G. Adams

105th RA CC/DOC In MT April 26—28, 1985, Kalispell – William J. Nottingham and James A. Sparks

106th RA CC/DOC In MT April 25—27, 1986, Helena – Cynthia L. Hale and Courtney & Lois Swander

107th RA CC/DOC In MT April 24—26, 1987, Bozeman - Thomas J. Liggett

108th RA CC/DOC In MT April 22—24, 1988, Missoula – Charles A. Patchen

109th RA CC/DOC In MT April 21—23, 1989, Great Falls – Charlie Shedd

110th is JOINT ASSEMBLY with UCC April 26—29, 1990, at Rocky Mtn College, Billings – Fred B. Craddock

111th RA CC/DOC In MT April 26—28, 1991, Kalispell – William O. Paulsell

112th RA CC/DOC In MT April 24—26, 1992, Helena – Mary Donovan Turner and Jeffrey D. Wilson

113th RA CC/DOC In MT April 30—May 3, 1993, Bozeman – William Tabbernee

114th RA CC/DOC In MT April 29—May 1, 1994, Missoula – Joseph Bragg, Jr. and Jane Lawrence

115th RA CC/DOC In MT April 28—30, 1995, CCC Billings – Alvin O'Neal Jackson and Judy Turner

116th RA CC/DOC In MT April 26—28, 1996, Great Falls – B. Brandon Scott and Janet A. Long

117th RA CC/DOC In MT April 18—20, 1997, Kalispell – Lester Palmer & Robin Hedgeman

118th RA CC/DOC In MT April 24—26, 1998, Helena – Tim Tiffany & Cindy Daugherty

119th RA CC/DOC In MT April 23—25, 1999, FCC Billings – Joseph R. Jeter

120th RA CC/DOC In MT April 28—30, 2000, Bozeman – Ann Updegraff Spleth

121st RA CC/DOC In MT April 27—29, 2001, Missoula – O. I. Cricket Harrison

122nd RA CC/DOC In MT April 19—21, 2002, CCC Billings – Richard Hamm

123rd RA CC/DOC In MT April 25—27, 2003, Great Falls – Douglas G. Adams

124th RA CC/DOC In MT April 23—25, 2004, Kalispell – Thomas Bandy

125th RA CC/DOC In MT April 22—24, 2005, Helena – Sharon R. Warner

126th RA CC/DOC In MT April 21—23, 2006, Bozeman – Dee Long

127th RA CC/DOC In MT April 20—22, 2007, Missoula – Bryan Feille & Amy Gopp

(128th) JOINT ASSEMBLY (CAMRA)** DOC/UCC May 9—11, 2008, University of Great Falls (now University of Providence) -- Sharon E. Watkins

(129th) JOINT ASSEMBLY (CAMRA)** DOC/UCC April 24—26, 2009, First Congregational UCC Billings – Michael Kinnamon

130th RA CC/DOC In MT April 24, 2010, Bozeman – Ruth Fletcher

Cancelled: JOINT ASSEMBLY (CAMRA)** for 2011

(131st) JOINT ASSEMBLY (CAMRA)** DOC/UCC May 4—5, 2012, FCC Helena – Rebecca Hale

(132nd) JOINT ASSEMBLY (CAMRA)** DOC/UCC April 19-20, 2013, Pilgrim Congregational UCC Bozeman – Ben Guess

(133rd) JOINT ASSEMBLY (CAMRA)** DOC/UCC May 2-4, 2014, University Congregational UCC Missoula – Julia Brown Karimu

134th RA CC/DOC In MT April 24—25, 2015, Great Falls – Denny Williams

135th RA CC/DOC In MT April 29—May 1, 2016, CCC Billings – Chuck Tooley & Ed Kemmick

136th RA CC/DOC In MT May 19—20, 2017, Cane Ridge West, Lincoln – Belva Brown Jordan

137th RA CC/DOC In MT April 27—29, 2018, Great Falls – Sandy Messick

**JOINT ASSEMBLY (CAMRA) refers to Conference Annual Meeting (UCC) & Regional Assembly (DOC).

CHAPTER 2

New Church Efforts

An overview of the planting of new Disciples congregations in Montana since 1984 can be summarized decade by decade. At the same time, the loss of congregations from the Disciples can be noted. For the 1980 decade none were added and none were lost, either to withdrawal or from closure. In the 1990 decade Anaconda's First Christian Church closed in 1991, and no new congregations were started. In the first decade of the twenty-first century there was much activity. Two new congregations, one each in Bozeman and Missoula, were attempted, a third in Billings (Seekers Harbor Faith Community) got under way, four were closed (Columbia Falls, Conrad, Deer Lodge, and Whitefish), and one withdrew from the Disciples (Whitehall). In the second decade of the century no new Disciples congregations were begun, one closed (Butte), and one withdrew (Billings, First CC).

In 2004 one church in Billings, Seekers Harbor Faith Community, was individually initiated. In 2005 the regional New Church Task Force allotted money for Cheri Manning and Rebecca L. (Becky) Taylor to attend New Church Planter Training with Hope Partnership in Indianapolis. Seekers Harbor will not be covered in this chapter. Rather, it is found in the chapter on Active Congregations.

During the first decade of this century, the New Church Task Force of the Montana region became the New Church Ministries Commission of the Christian Church in Montana, also referred to as the Regional New

Church Commission. In January 2005 the region, via the New Church Task Force, called Matthew Melchor-Gordon and Douglas A. Garner to be new church planters.

GALLATIN VALLEY, (Bozeman) Waterstone Community Church

Matthew E. Melchor-Gordon was a recent seminary graduate of Pacific School of Religion in California, and was set to be ordained by Disciples in Spokane on May 15, 2005. In anticipation of this event Matt was called to the Bozeman area, beginning January 20, 2005, with the goal of gathering together what came to be named Waterstone Community Church (Disciples of Christ). The vision was to draw people from the Gallatin Valley west of Bozeman, which was experiencing boomtown growth. Matt looked like a perfect fit as a young, enthusiastic professional with his wife, Miranda, and two year-old daughter, Ella. A little over a year later, Miranda would give birth to a second daughter, Marnina, on June 14, 2006.

By March 2005 Matt was involved in several community organizations, including serving as a volunteer at the Community Food Bank, joining Sunrise Rotary Club, attending Gallatin Valley Human Rights Task Force meetings, attending two Gallatin Valley ministerial alliances, and participating in numerous local events. He also was featured in the local newspaper.

On April 3, 2005, Waterstone held its first interest meeting at the public library with seven people in attendance, five of whom would become part of the core team. This meeting was followed that month by a roundtable discussion series at a local pub. On May 8 the church held its first worship meeting at Emerson Cultural Center Art Gallery, and grew to a core of ten people, which was thirteen with Matt and his family. Beginning in June, the congregation met a couple of Sunday evenings a month at the Wingate by Wyndham Hotel. On July 4th they hosted a party at a park with live music. *Montana Christian News* sought to keep Disciples around Montana informed on this new church progress, as seen by articles in the June-July and August-September 2005 issues.

In July Matt attended the General Assembly in Indianapolis, and upon his return led the group in having almost twenty at weekly gatherings by August. Later that fall, they talked with leaders of the Grand Avenue Christian Church about the possibility of nesting in the downtown Disciples church building. Grand Avenue leaders were positive, but another church had an agreement to use the building on Sundays at 5 PM. Gathering there in the afternoon or later evening was discussed. A "Preview Worship" gathering took place on November 6, 2005, at GACC, as described in the December 2005—January 2006 *Montana Christian News*. A once a month Sunday evening worship was held in December and January.

In late February 2006 the church began renting at the Homec Professional Center, a 1500 square foot suite in a professional office building, and weekly gatherings began in March 2006. At this time two childcare workers were hired. A Grand Opening was advertised for Easter 2006, and twenty-eight attended.

In June 2006 the church signed a two-year lease for a suite in an office building where they held services. In the weeks that followed, attendance was up and down from a low of four to a high of twenty-five. The church began having a weekly sacred cinema night, and a coffee house book discussion group. In the fall they went on campus and hosted an interactive booth at Montana State University's Welcoming Event for new and returning students.

In summary, by late fall of 2006 Matt was expressing strong doubts about reaching any goals of self-sustainability during the coming year. He had committed to the new church effort in January 2005, with the goal of a congregation sustaining itself within three years. Now, he did not foresee that happening. He reported that, within months of his arrival, he had learned that there were seven new church starts under a year old being attempted, and within the year, there were three more. The area also proved to be a very transient community.

Thus, he resigned, effective in December 2006, and returned to Washington state with his family. Waterstone Community was left with four Disciples households and four non-Disciples households. During the transition, some

of them found other places to worship or focus their energy. Within another three months, the depleted core group of a half dozen members came to conclusions similar to those of Matt about Waterstone's future, and made the decision to close.

When they decided to close in March of 2007, the Montana region was left to continue to pay the lease for 15 more months, even though the suite was not being used. The church was officially removed from the *Disciples Year Book* in April 2008.

MISSOULA, New Day Fellowship

Doug Garner had come to Missoula on June 1, 2002, as pastor of First Christian Church. A year later, he led the church in starting an alternative Friday evening contemporary worship service, known as "New Day." During this time, Doug took an increasing interest in being part of a new church start in northwest Missoula. He went through a discernment process, then attended a training event for New Church Planters with the General Church's New Church Ministry Team. The regional New Church Commission then called him to start a new congregation in northwest Missoula, because of his experience, gifts, and passion for reaching seekers and the unchurched. He resigned from First Christian Church, effective December 31, 2004, to be the New Church Planter for what would be called New Day Fellowship. He was sufficiently committed to this ministry that he set out to support himself half-time with a secondary job for the first six months.

By spring of 2005 there were five small groups meeting, and forty-one families were on a mailing list. Worship began to be held about once a month in a hotel meeting room. For singing, they had Bruce Threlkeld, a professional musician, to share his talents on the guitar. On September 11, 2005, they launched weekly worship with forty-seven in attendance. As Christmas neared, they collected gifts for the Angel Tree program for children of incarcerated parents. In the summer of 2006, they began renting a worship space in the North Reserve Business Center, and met at Salmon Lake for baptisms and a picnic. They also established a website. In November Rick

Morse, the General Church director for New Church Ministries, visited the congregation.

In January 2007 members participated in a candlelight vigil on Martin Luther King, Jr. day, and the church began a "Fifth Sunday" community needs worship emphasis. That summer of 2007 seven youth attended camp, and in the fall three women from the congregation attended the regional Disciples Women's Retreat. During Advent the church held a sock drive for a homeless shelter, collected a special offering for the Missoula AIDS Council, and supported the Angel Tree project for the third year.

In January 2008 the church began the video series *Living The Questions*, a study of introduction to progressive Christianity. One outcome of this study was discerning how to relate to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Christians. By the end of spring, they had completed the first series of that study. The leadership circle decided to contact GLAD about using the Open and Affirming materials as the next step. As the church transitioned into summer of 2008, it also decided not to renew its lease on North Reserve, and look for a new space while working on building a larger base of support.

When New Day Fellowship gave up their lease, they decided to go back into a gathering phase again, which they called phase two. Patti Nau and Lisa Garner went to facilitators' training for Open Circles to see if they could restart the new church by using the Open Circles model. They continued to attend Open Circles leadership events at Cane Ridge West from 2008 to 2011, but never were able to establish a viable Open Circles group in Missoula. There was never a formal closing for the New Day Fellowship start, but New Day Fellowship last appeared in the *Disciples Year Book* in 2012.

REGION-WIDE, Open Circles

Ruth Fletcher, Regional Minister, increasingly realized that the demographics in Montana did not indicate the kind of population growth that supports efforts of establishing traditional congregations. Thus, she developed a church growth approach she called "Open Circles." The mission of

Open Circles was, "to provide hospitable space where those of us from diverse backgrounds can connect with our true selves, with community, and with the source of our courage for the purpose of compassionate and creative action in the world." These small groups, led by teams of lay people, provide safe space where those who are not members of an established congregation can come together to reflect, to pray, and to eat together.

Ruth Fletcher and John Payne

In 2008 the regional New Church Commission shifted its focus in new church development to nurturing Open Circles under Ruth Fletcher's leadership, along with part-time Polson church minister, John Payne. John was enthused about Open Circles and accepted a call from the region to serve as New Church Planter for the Open Circles Project during June 2008—May 2009. The region paid a small stipend to him to work with Ruth in training leaders in starting Open Circles, and help lead quarterly retreats at Cane Ridge West for Open Circles participants, beginning in October 2008. In 2009 John Payne continued to do that ministry while pastoring the congregation at Polson.

Two churches used Open Circles as a small-group evangelizing tool: New Day Fellowship in its second phase, and the Christian Church in Polson. Two other areas, Hot Springs and St. Ignatius, established their own Open Circles groups, and their leaders attended the leadership retreats at Cane Ridge West. The Hot Springs groups lasted about a year, and the St. Ignatius group lasted almost three years.

It should be noted that the Montana region gave significant financial help to these endeavors. From 2005 through 2008, the Christian Church in Montana paid out $403,068 in supporting New Day Fellowship, Waterstone Community Church, and Seeker's Harbor Faith Community.

In the case of Seeker's Harbor, the Region paid for two students in the Lay Ministry program (MAC LMI), Becky Taylor and Cheri Manning, to attend New Church Planter training in Indianapolis. The Region also paid for Matt Melchor-Gordon, Doug Garner, and John Payne to attend that training. Becky Taylor dates the start of Seekers Harbor as being in 2004 because she had a small group meeting with her. But the kick-start really took hold in 2005 after Planter's Training. The church plant followed a new structure, which involved gathering small groups around a common set of values and beliefs. The church would grow by the groups reproducing. They were led by lay leaders who were trained in common practices. It was never intended for the groups to come together to form one large worshipping community. Because Seeker's Harbor made use of small groups, their leaders attended Open Circles leadership retreats, and used some of the Open Circles materials. See the full history of Seekers Harbor Faith Community in the Active Congregations chapter of this book.

The Polson church continues into 2018 to use the Open Circles model as a way to reach out to unchurched people. Other Disciples church groups in the Montana region continue to reach out to those who refer to themselves as "spiritual but not religious" through the Open Circles program. The program includes leader training, quarterly retreats, and session designs for Open Circles groups.

Open Circles Leaders and Participants, beginning in 2008

People who have been trained as Open Circles Leaders

(* indicates additional training with the Courage to Lead organization)

*Randy Hyvonen (UCC)	Billings
*Dana Keener (DOC)	Billings
*Ruth Fletcher (DOC)	Great Falls
*Cathy Barker (UCC)	Helena
*John Payne (DOC)	Polson
Barbara Archer (UCC)	Billings

Ken Crouch (UCC)	Billings
Becky Taylor (DOC)	Billings
Doug Taylor (DOC)	Billings/Great Falls
Wendy Campbell (DOC)	Darby
Susan Watterson (UCC)	Glasgow
Brett Fagenstrom (DOC)	Great Falls
Ron Greene (DOC)	Great Falls
Jim Petersen (UCC)	Great Falls
Barb and Brad Lancaster (DOC)	Helena
Amy Carter (UCC)	Missoula
Lisa Garner (DOC)	Missoula
Patti Nau (DOC/UCC)	Missoula
Peter Shober (UCC)	Missoula
Mickey Dooling (UCC)	Phillipsburg
Erik Donovan (DOC)	Polson
Sharon Payne (DOC)	Polson
Donna Rolfson (DOC)	Polson
Judy and Don Fleck (DOC)	St. Ignatius
Nell and Neil Lindorff (UCC)	Sydney

Open Circles Group Participants

Kathy Engen	Billings
Marty and Rozana Herak	Charlo
Ben Greene	Great Falls
Michelle Iserloth	Great Falls
Brad Reynolds	Great Falls
Dick Bratten	Polson
Pete Daniels	Polson
Sandy Farrell	Polson
Charlotte Gustad	Polson
Toby Hunter	Polson
John Hamilton	Polson

Bob MacCellan	Polson
Danette Niestler	Polson
Shanna Savage	Polson
Maureen Theiler	Polson
Byrl Tiskus	Polson
Kermit and Carol Werner	Polson
Mimi Werner	Polson
Joanie Gordon	St. Ignatius
Dave and Jeannie Morrow	St. Ignatius
Marlene Oaks	St. Ignatius
Lita Sasser	St. Ignatius

CHAPTER 3

Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center (CRWCRC)

The *Big Sky Disciples* Index has three different title entries for the Lincoln property. They are Camp Christian, Lincoln Campground, and Cane Ridge West (CRW). They reflect the purchase of an initial 23.8 acre parcel of property in 1949, and development of that property before the final naming of the grounds around the time of the construction of the picturesque, two-story log lodge from 1981 to 1984.

References to the property can be found throughout the 1984 book, and as early as page 58, where it was called "the men's camp at Lincoln." Although the official name was always Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center, in 2013 this longer name was re-emphasized to reflect a marketing strategy, and a reflection of its wider use.

For most of the period since 1984, it was simply known as Cane Ridge West, and will be used in this book for history before 2013. The story of the development of Cane Ridge West is mostly found on pages 157—175 of *Big Sky Disciples*, as well as a brief nineteenth century history of Cane Ridge in Kentucky on pages 213—216. It is worth noting that the lodge was completed and dedicated a mere six months after *Big Sky Disciples* was published. The completion of the lodge turned many people's thinking from the property being a campground to it being a conference and retreat center.

Lodge at CRWCRC

Dedication Day for the lodge was Labor Day weekend (September 1—3) 1984, with 470 names registered for the day. Dignitaries included George Turman, Lieutenant Governor of Montana. The weather was perfect, many people dressed in 1804 period clothing, and outdoor activities abounded. There were several stump preachers delivering Disciples slogan sermonettes, including "No Creed but Christ" and "Believer's Baptism," after which a large crowd proceeded to the Blackfoot River where five people were baptized, including two men from Helena and three youth from Great Falls.

Attendees signed split logs, connected with chains, which were placed on the dining room wall, and have hung there through the years. In later years, it was sometimes said that the gatherings at Cane Ridge West have been the glue that holds the regional church together. That location is the one place where folks of all ages, and all Disciples congregations throughout Montana, returned year after year to renew friendships, and celebrate being part of "The Church." Furthermore, the lodge came to symbolize the heart of Cane Ridge West. Fond memories inevitably revolved around the lodge at the center of it all, times spent together eating, sleeping, studying, worshiping, and relaxing.

The first floor of the lodge consists of a large gathering room (70 feet long and 36 feet wide) with picture windows (looking east, north and west), a large stone fireplace (east end), a dining area (west end) with commercially equipped kitchen, a handicap-accessible restroom, and a small conference room for eight to twelve people (all off of the south wall). The lodge sleeping rooms are on the second floor, as well as two restrooms with shower stalls. A few feet west of the lodge is a solid, log-construction shower house with handicap-accessible showers and restrooms designed for people from the tents, RVs, the two sleeping cabins and visitors, in general, to the grounds.

In order to build the lodge above the flood plain, a ten acre parcel along the north side of the property had been purchased in 1977. In 1985 another parcel of five acres along the west side of the Cane Ridge West property was purchased for $25,000. It increased the grounds size to 38.8 acres. That same year a small tool shed about eight feet square was constructed about fifty feet north of the shower house. It was built with money raised by the regional Christian Women's Fellowship. It stored not only hand tools, but life vests and inner tubes for river play.

The October-November 1985 *Montana Christian News* reported that on August 30-31, the regional board met and approved a designated area at CRW where ashes of loved ones could be disbursed. The name of the deceased person will be included in a memorial book. No body or container burials will be allowed at Cane Ridge West.

In 1996 a Cremains Policy Task Force met twice, then made recommendations to the regional board, which passed an expanded measure giving other stipulations for scattering cremains on the grounds. Relevant State of Montana statutes and rules were reviewed and followed. Rules and records of scattered cremains are kept both with the CRW Caretaker and in the regional office in Great Falls. Records are to be updated at each place when cremains are scattered.

As of this writing, six cremains have been scattered at CRW. Their names and years of birth and death are: Stephen Nils Fenner (1941—1984), Eunice Poe (1911—1985), Robert W. Raney (1930—1987), James L. Caddell (1926—1997), Bethany L. Connor (1933—2005), and William F. Connor (1924—2006).

As a point of historical note, for the year 1987 the region received $15,920.82 total rent money for usage of the grounds and buildings, with November being the only month it was not used. In addition to Disciples using the facilities, Presbyterians from Great Falls, Lutherans from Missoula, Baptists from Helena, Berean Bible of Montana, a high school musical camp from Missoula, a Wilderness Agape group, and a Sweet Adelines group were among those on the reservations calendar. This was welcome income, because the regional church was counting on Use Fees to help cover the cost of maintaining the facility.

A tradition had developed of each year having a work weekend in May. It included cutting and splitting fire wood until the covered wood corral was full, cleaning the lodge inside and out (windows, walls, light fixtures, pantry shelves and more), repairs anywhere on the grounds, brush clearing, burning the large slash pile of log trimmings, and other projects large and small, such as chinking, plumbing, and electrical work.

It was also a time for new projects. A new project in 1987 was the beginning of laying a boardwalk between the lodge and the cook shack, years later renamed Fellowship House. The boardwalk was not completed in one year, but work began. It was also determined to make it a lighted walkway with an automatic light sensor mounted on the west side of the shower house to activate it at night. Another switch indoors allowed it to be shut off when the grounds were not in use. The walkway also took people from the lodge to within a hundred feet of the campfire area.

Fire Circle at CRWCRC

On the 4th of July weekend 1988, a number of Great Falls people gathered at the campfire area, and built a new firepit just east of the cook shack. There was a water hydrant nearby, and the new layout included 3 levels of wooden benches in a 360 degree circle around a steel-lined firepit. They poured a concrete floor under the entire circle, and made the benches accessible by three entryways, angled downward past the benches to the central fire ring. Seating capacity is estimated to be about 120 around the fire with three sections of about forty persons per section.

Forest fires were especially bad in 1988. For instance, one sixth of Yellowstone National Park was consumed by fires. At CRW a concern arose about preparedness on the grounds. A sub-station of the Lincoln volunteer fire department is only one mile from the camp, but it is unattended, and

help would be slow in arriving. So, a flatbed trailer, capable of being pulled by a pick-up truck, was acquired. A metal water tank and fire-fighting equipment were purchased and bolted onto it, with all costs covered by the Bob Moe Memorial Fund. Plans for where and when to have it "ready" were established. It was parked next to the tool shed, and a designated "fire lane" was posted leading to it.

By the end of 1988 the Cane Ridge West grounds had the lodge, a matching log construction shower house, two heated sleeping cabins, an outdoor chapel area for worship, a quality campfire circle, a tool shed, a covered wood corral (wood shed), the cook shack, tent sites, and RV sites with electricity and water to each site.

In 1991 the region's Disciples Men purchased for $12,473 a new John Deere tractor, complete with front loader bucket and a blade for snow removal. Some cash was used, and a loan from Security State Bank of Polson carried the remainder of $8,653, which was paid in full on May 10, 1993. They affectionately named it "Old 99," and painted the name on its side as a reminder of the men's group that had bought the original grounds in 1949. A tractor shed was built in 1994, adjacent to the caretaker's garage, for $401.

Walter Scott Footbridge was completed in May 17—19, 1991 at work weekend. It spanned a dry, shallow ditch running behind Cabin #1. It had five fan-shaped supports on each side holding the handrails, on which was written the five-fingered exercise of Walter Scott, the historic, nineteenth century Disciples evangelist. The bridge was popular for posing for group photos. The wooden bridge in time began to show signs of rot. So, in August 2017 a new bridge was constructed. This one had concrete footings on each end and portions of it were built with specially treated wood against rot. As closely as possible, it was like the first bridge, which was removed when the newer bridge next to it was finished.

In 1991 a two bedroom house and 5.04 acres along the west property line were purchased as the caretaker's residence. The land and house were acquired for $52,583, with the region's money at Dain Bosworth Inc. assisting as collateral for a loan. Several months later, the mobile home, that

had been the caretaker's house, was sold for a net income of $8,000 over its original purchase price. Two years later, new Regional Minister Karen Frank-Plumlee would come with an idea for clearing the region of all the 1991 incurred debt.

In 1992 a picnic shelter was built west of the RV area. The structure is 24 X 32 feet with a concrete floor, four open sides, and a full roof at a cost of $3,203. However, donated concrete and other materials lowered the cost to $1,967. Small steel firepits were set into the ground nearby for cooking small portions, or roasting wieners and marshmallows. Also, in 1992 rules were established that the use of snowmobiles on the grounds be restricted to roadways only.

Karen Frank-Plumlee on June 5, 1993, presented to the regional cabinet a fund-raising idea that came to be known as the Cane Ridge West Quilt Project. After a meeting with Board of Church Extension representatives from the General Church offices in Indianapolis, and through various stages of approval, the project was introduced to the churches of the region in February and March of 1994.

Raw pieces of the patch work quilt were 2 x 2 inch blocks, selling for $20 each. Packets were hand-delivered to each congregation in the region. They were sold, signed with special pens, and returned to the regional church office. The quilt was assembled and quilted at the September 3—5, 1994, Congress of Christians, as it celebrated the tenth anniversary of the dedication of the Cane Ridge West lodge. Over $20,000 was raised from the two inch quilt blocks. It was followed by a post-campaign gift of $25,000. The finished quilt was 84 x 120 inches, and was hung in the lodge as a symbol of the unity of the region and of a debt-free property. It has remained there throughout the years. Five percent of campaign receipts were escrowed to insure that the campaign did not undercut the 1994 Basic Mission Finance giving at the projected level of $80,586. As planned and carried out, the campaign did not undercut BMF giving.

In 1994 on the tenth anniversary of the dedication of the CRW lodge, the cook shack was remodeled and renamed Fellowship House, with priority of use given to the youth. It was celebrated at Congress of Christians with 150

attendees, and Dick Hamm, General Minister and President, as keynote speaker. Of historic note is that Fellowship House was the "first building" on the grounds, and was called by various names from its inception onward, most popular of which was cook shack. The regional men's group held their first retreat on the site in August 1964. At that first retreat, they began construction of a structure consisting of a number of poles covered by a sheet of plastic to keep off the rain. At that moment in time, it was less than a building. With each men's retreat, a better cook shack evolved. It got wooden sides and a roof. The floor was wooden boards with cracks, through which one could see the ground, and any grease or water spilled simply disappeared through the floor. With the 1994 remodel, it was winterized with electric heat, running water, a refrigerator, and other amenities, including decking on the front and back of the building.

During the summer of 1995 Mark Blakely, a young Great Falls church member, for his Eagle Scout project, built a 21 x 24 foot basketball court near the baseball diamond and volley ball court. Three years later during work weekend in May 1998, a new jungle gym was constructed just west of the lodge. In later years upgrades and newer, safer playground equipment were added in that area. Except for the horseshoe pits north of the lodge, all the athletic areas are west of the lodge.

A multi-year project of re-chinking the logs of the lodge was carried out during the mid-1990s. The original chinking had been wire mesh with inflexible concrete applied into the spaces between the logs, which began to crumble and fall out. High quality "Log Jam" (a trade-marked name) began to be used for longer life and durability.

Due to a hail storm in August 1998, the roofs of the lodge and the shower house had to be replaced in 1999, following insurance negotiations and bids on the work. The roofs had been shake shingles. A year or two before the hail storm, a small fire occurred on the lodge roof when de-icing tape on the roof was accidentally turned on during August heat, causing smoke and a limited fire. The smoke had been noticed by a youth and reported to adults. It was said, "That's the day we almost lost the lodge." Thus, a metal roof was desired after the fire and the hail storm. However, settling and bowing of

the logs holding up the roof disallowed metal. So, expensive fire retardant asphalt shingles were used.

Dishwashing by hand for 100 to 150 people at major events tied up volunteers from almost one meal to the next. The youth who washed dishes at their camps, began to raise money to buy a commercial dishwasher. In 2000 a Hobart (microcomputer-controlled high speed) dishwater was purchased, reconditioned, at $3,500 for the kitchen of the lodge. Its acquisition greatly improved clean-up and sanitation for crowds, both large and small. In addition to the large commercial grade grill and stove, the other kitchen appliances were a commercial size refrigerator and freezer. The latter was replaced in 2017 with a new freezer.

After the flood of 1997, which broke dikes built years earlier, Leo Renfrow went to secure permits to reconstruct the dikes. Four government agencies were all to be involved in approving them. Those agencies included Montana Fish, Parks, and Wildlife (FPW); Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Bureau of Land Management (BLM); and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). After talking to one of the agencies, Leo was told the permits on the original work allowed for reconstruction. After reconstruction, CRW was cited for not having all required permits, had to tear out the new work, and was required to have a professional riparian engineering firm draw up a proposal for reconstructing the dikes.

In May 2001 the region launched the Blackfoot River Bank Stabilization Project at a cost of $82,419. Major floods in 1964 and 1975 had caused the loss of significant property and many large trees. Slow but steady loss continued year by year. It was deemed necessary to stabilize the river bank, so an engineering contract was awarded to Inter Fluve, Inc. of Bozeman.

In the October-November 2001 issue of the *Montana Christian News*, Regional Minister Karen Frank-Plumlee dedicated her regular column to Cane Ridge West. She wrote,

> God has created a wonderful, life-sustaining world. While we too are a part of God's creation, God has given humanity the responsibility of caring for all of God's creation.

Cane Ridge West is your and my special piece of God's creation to protect, enhance and give care. Cane Ridge West's special needs at this time are weed control, planting seedlings and Blackfoot River bank stabilization.

Jim Freeman has given us quality weed control over the years. This year spotted knapweed has spread from other properties to Cane Ridge West. Jim and Sherry Freeman have done extensive spraying this year and he has submitted a five-year weed control plan on our behalf.

During Cane Ridge West work weekend in May 245 Ponderosa Pine seedlings were planted in barren areas. The seedlings were protected with ground cloth and each received a gallon of water when planted. Each seedling received an additional gallon of water during each of our four summer camps. Participants gave each seedling an additional gallon of water during Congress of Christians.

The final permits have been received to complete the Blackfoot River bank stabilization project. In early May the east bank was reconstructed and covered by a coir of coconut cloth around rock and dirt over willow poles. The willows are growing nicely. Rock from the project was spread on the Stone Campbell Road. During September and October, four rock barbs, a grade control structure, 400 feet of stone toe covered by a coir of coconut cloth around rock and dirt, regarding of the floodplain to return any flood water to the river channel and revegetation with willows and cottonwoods will be accomplished.

The regional church needs your help in caring for Cane Ridge West, the special piece of creation to which God has entrusted both you and me. Karen Frank-Plumlee

A trivia question might be, "When was a major annual Cane Ridge West event NOT held on the grounds?" The answer would be in late summer of 2000. That year, due to extreme fire danger in Lincoln, the annual Labor Day weekend Congress of Christians was held at Central Christian Church in Great Falls. Everyone adjusted beautifully, and assisted in making it a

great weekend. They even set up a fake campfire in the round in the sanctuary to everyone's delight. The youth rolled out their sleeping bags in Sunday School rooms for their overnight accommodations to add to the adventure. The modern church building with movable chairs and furnishings, easily accommodated the event.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, in the fall of 2000 while on sabbatical Karen and Bob Frank-Plumlee attended a Montana State University Extension Forestry Stewardship Workshop for small forest land owners. A key outcome of that workshop was a plan to plant 245 new ponderosa pine saplings around the CRW property. In 2018 ninety young pine trees can be identified as surviving from that project.

From time to time campers and others attending CRW had talked of the aesthetic value of having an eye-catching entrance to the property. There had been only a horizontal swinging steel pole for a front gate. At Karen Frank-Plumlee's retirement dinner on March 8, 2002, she was presented with a beautiful, laser-carved sheet of steel to hang in her honor under an arched log entry gate. It was designed by Barb Lancaster, a laywoman at First Christian Church of Helena. Karen retired March 31, 2002, and on June 22 returned to the grounds to help erect the entry gate. The gate was further recognized at a service of dedication during Congress of Christians that year with Ruth Fletcher leading the dedication.

Gate with Bob and
Karen Frank-Plumlee

In 2004 there was no large celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the dedication of the Cane Ridge West lodge, only cake and ice cream at an afternoon break on work weekend in May. However, to recognize the twentieth anniversary Barbara Lancaster, who had designed the entry gate sign, and who over the years had given many weeks as a camp counselor, director, and "laborer-of-love" at

CRW also gave another artistic gift. She painted the lodge in oil on canvas and entitled it "Lodge at Cane Ridge West." Limited edition giclée prints (unframed) were made available for sale for $65, and unframed prints on canvas for $195. The prints were signed and numbered by the artist. The proceeds from this commemorative painting went to the Montana region's anti-racism work with Native Americans.

In 2004 the last gathering under the name Congress of Christians was held. On Labor Day weekend in 2005 Montana Disciples gathered at Cane Ridge West under the name Festival of Faith. This was deemed by some to be a more appropriate title for this decades-old gathering that can be found on page 302 of *Big Sky Disciples*.

Some accomplishments at CRW during 2004 were: new tankless hot water heaters installed in the lodge; chinking on the lodge logs completed; eave troughs cleaned on the caretaker's house; landscaping to keep water away from the caretaker's house; new carpet installed in the caretaker's house; flag pole base repaired with rock; and a new gas barbecue installed on a permanent, concrete and cement block base.

The Regional Assembly's *Annual Report* ("booklet") provides a year-by-year record of the Cane Ridge West/Real Property Commission's work, and the Outdoor Ministry Commission's statistics on camps, conferences, retreats, and other training events at CRW. This history does not seek to recount those yearly reports. But as an example of one year, the *2005 Annual Report* to the Regional Assembly reports: "The 2004 camping season was an exciting success with a total of sixty-eight young people who attended four camps. Nine adults also attended GMPK (Grandparents, Moms, Pops and Kids) Camp. The camps were blessed with a total of twenty-six volunteers. Three retreats were held this year: MT CYF Roundup, Chi Rho Breakaway and Junior Spring Fling, the latter being cancelled due to low registrations."

A major accomplishment in 2005 was installing new energy efficient windows upstairs in the lodge. This project was in keeping with the Cane Ridge West/Real Property Commission's vision to make CRW more environmentally friendly. As noted, energy efficient tankless water heaters had already

been installed. Energy efficient light bulbs began to be used as old lights burned out. And as funds became available, in 2008 the first of the lodge's original toilets was replaced with a low flow toilet in the first floor restroom.

In 2006 the lodge was due to be stained. That same year Jimmy Mohler, a Disciples Licensed Lay Minister from Kansas City had a dream of a mission trip to Montana with six of her friends. That dream of spending a week in Montana doing a mission project turned into a gift of love for the lodge at Cane Ridge West. Seven women from Kansas, Missouri, Pennsylvania, New Mexico and Washington, D.C. paid their own expenses to come and stain almost the entire lodge. They were assisted locally by regional office secretary Kathy McKerrow, volunteer Women's Ministries staff, Jean Muir, and Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher. Scaffolding was supplied by Brett Fagenstrom and Chris Hunter of Great Falls, who gave time to transport, set-up, and assist in its use. In 2007 the same out-of-state group of women returned and worked on other projects at CRW for a week.

In early 2006 plans for re-flooring the lodge were put in motion. The cost would be about $13,000 and needed to be done by a commercial jobber. The floor replacement would not be done until fully funded by donations. At the 2006 Festival of Faith, a silent auction raised $911, as a start for the new floor. At that event with ninety-four in attendance, they also took up a $995 offering for an IMA Medicine Box for the region's mission partners in Paraguay. An offering for others and an offering for our needs was in keeping with an unwritten tradition of Montana Disciples.

In 2008 the Cane Ridge West/Real Property Commission developed a long term plan to update the facility, including replace the wood floor and carpet in the lodge; replace all the lodge toilets with low flow toilets; replace the wooden boardwalk between the lodge and Fellowship House with durable stone block; make Cabin #2 wheelchair accessible with a relocated ramp; improve the safety of the playground equipment; and long term weed control of spotted knapweed. By 2012 a number of these things had been done.

By 2008—2009 the mountain pine beetle outbreak continued to impact Cane Ridge West. The beetle kill of pines had been coming on slowly for

years. A number of ponderosa pine, large and small, were dead on the property. More losses were expected, and tree removal/debarking escalated in an effort to stop the spread of tree infestation. This work was done mostly by volunteers, and tackled at retreats and work weekends.

In 2009 the Region celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the dedication of the lodge at Cane Ridge West. The gathering drew about a hundred to the property on Sunday, September 6 to share a program of pictures, stories, anniversary cake, and tours of the lodge and grounds, followed by worship, led by Ruth Fletcher, Regional Minister.

A party of twenty enthusiastic workers on October 15, 2011, installed new playground equipment for the little ones. Stephanie and Sam Thomas of Helena headed up the project, which was too large for one trip. So the "big toy" project was finished at the May 2012 work weekend.

In 2012 the Cane Ridge West/Real Property Commission put the new floor in the lodge and did more work on the playground equipment. The project of replacing the boardwalk with a cinderblock walk was completed. There were two work weekends. One focused on finishing the playground and a sidewalk project. The second one was for annual maintenance and clean-up for summer.

Decades earlier, Ruth and Leo Renfrow in November 1987 drew up plans for "Cane Ridge West Conference, Educational, and Retreat Center," and encouraged the use of either a Retreat Center or a Conference Center title. Karen Frank-Plumlee, based on that request, in her *Montana Christian News* writings often referred to it as Cane Ridge West Retreat Center. In 2013 action was taken to officially change the name from Cane Ridge West to Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center (CRWCRC). Then the CRW/Real Property Commission took further steps to transform the facility to the feel of a Conference Center. Three rooms in the lodge were redone into adult and family friendly spaces with queen beds, comfortable seating, curtains, and new lighting, with the work completed in December 2013. The regional board approved a policy to allow limited use of alcohol among

adults at non-camp events. Furthermore, the larger acronym CRWCRC began to be used with intentionality.

Becky Taylor, a Commissioned Lay Minister from Billings (with experience in once owning a Bed & Breakfast) was hired for the new position of part-time Camp Administrator. It was a two year position for 2014—2015. With her at work, new photographs were used to create a new brochure of CRWCRC.

Taylor's work included distribution of pens & other promotional pieces, marketing packets and letters to churches, businesses, and non-profits. She visited both local businesses and most Montana Disciples churches to share a new vision of CRWCRC. She ran a promotional booth at two wedding fairs, as well as displays at some Disciples/United Church of Christ events. Becky was also involved in the creation of walking paths and benches, and repainting the interior of Cabin #2, complete with privacy curtains.

By 2015 the Christian Church in Montana and Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center were on Facebook. It encouraged readers to "like us" and events, pictures, and other items were posted.

At the May 2015 work weekend, the six-foot tall, red chalice sign on Highway 200 at the corner of Stone-Campbell Drive leading to the Conference and Retreat Center was set back farther from the road (per State Highway regulations), and received new paint and lettering, along with an arrow pointing toward the property.

Ruth Fletcher in her 2015 *Regional Minister's Report* to the Regional Assembly states: "We were pleased that a court ruled no public access will be granted through Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center, and that a public road may never be built through the property." Some local residents had sought to turn Stone-Campbell Drive into a public road from the 4 X 4 Road to Highway 200. The negative ramifications of it becoming a public thoroughfare would have been numerous. Ruth Fletcher said, "Appreciation goes to Susie Rebeck for her legal work toward a successful outcome in this legal battle."

Fellowship House

On October 1, 2016, Loren Lindabury, a flooring professional and husband of regional Administrative Assistant, Ruth Lindabury, with the help of a crew of church members, tore out the water damaged flooring in Fellowship House. The demolition was followed two weeks later with the installation of a new subfloor and a beautiful cork backed laminate surface.

As mentioned in the chapter on Regional Church, in March 2016 the regional board adopted two recommendations from the Vision Team. One was to explore removing Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center from regional control and establishing it as its own independent legal entity, as a 501c3 with connection to the Montana Disciples. As this history is being written, a team is at work seeking to carry out that idea.

Cane Ridge West Caretakers

Inky and Grace Nelson	1983—1985	(Volunteers)
Tom and Kathi Lofthouse	1985—1986	(June to February)
Bill and Bobbi Miller	1986—1987	(December to May)
Scott and Joyce Brinkner	1987—1989	(August to September)
Larry and Mary Watson	1989—1990	(December to September)
Don Cole	1990—1994	(October to May)
Tom and Bonnie Cribbs	1994—2001	(May to October)
Dennis Caldwell, interim	2001	(January to June)
Janelle (and Dave) Trusty	2001—2004	(October to July)
Kathy and John Duffner	2004—2005	(September to June)
Judy Johnson	2006—Present	(began in October)

(Volunteers such as Burt Johnson, a Disciple and retired school teacher from Conrad, lived at the camp for brief times between some caretakers, either for an interim period or for caretaker vacations. Note: Burt Johnson and Judy Johnson are not related.)

Annual Disciple Events at CRW Conference and Retreat Center

Junior Spring Fling in March for grades 3-4-5
Chi Rho Breakaway in March for grades 6-7-8
Work Weekend, usually in May
Disciples Women Retreat in May
Disciples Men Retreat in June
iCamp (Intergenerational Camp) in August and first held in 2013
Congress of Christians (Labor Day weekend) last held in 2004
Festival of Faith (Labor Day weekend) started in 2005 and ended in 2012
CYF Roundup for grades 9-10-11-12 in October
Quilting in the Pines Retreat (October)

Land Purchases at CRW

In 1949 the first 23.8 acres were purchased for $100. That property consisted of 2,057 feet of frontage along the Blackfoot River. The property consisted of a four-sided boundary but almost triangular in shape at the east end, as it roughly followed the curvature of the river. In 1977 another 10.0 acres were acquired along part of the north property line for $10,000, paid at $1,400 a year, according to page 168 of *Big Sky Disciples*. In 1985 on the west side, 5.02 acres were added for $25,000, and in 1991 the final 5.04 acres were purchased for $52,583, bringing the total land size to 43.86 acres at Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center.

Funding Campaigns and Special Drives

Several campaigns were held to raise capital funds. The 1981—1983 campaign, with a goal of $100,000, raised $137,719.39 to build the lodge.

The second campaign of 1984—1986, with a goal of $135,000, raised $142,020.50 to pay off the remaining lodge debt and furnish it. The third campaign of 1988—1989, with a goal of $46,000, raised $49,443.72 to pay off land-purchasing debt and provided $3,000 each in pastoral support for the Columbia Falls and Whitefish congregations. The fundraiser of 1993—1994 named the CRW Quilt Project, with a goal of $45,000, met that goal, and put over $3,000 extra into a Permanent Fund for ongoing CRW income. The River Work project in 2000 raised $82,419 to meet its goal. The lodge floor project of 2006—2011 raised $13,000. Fund-raisers not requiring campaigns or special drives are not listed here.

CHAPTER 4

Active Congregations

Central Christian Church of Billings

BILLINGS, CENTRAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Central Christian Church dates from its first worship service on October 2,1955, as reported on pages 99 and 226 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The congregation began as an outcome of continued sizeable growth of First Christian Church, and the impressive westward growth of the city of Billings after World War II. Paul Deane Hill was its first pastor, serving 1955 to 1964.

The year after *Big Sky Disciples* was published, the congregation held a great thirtieth anniversary celebration, marking thirty years to the day. On October 2, 1985, the congregation had a special worship service, dedicated its new educational facilities, and held a banquet at a local hotel with about 250 in attendance. Leading the celebrations were lay persons from both Disciples congregations in Billings, along with Central pastor Eddie Stubblefield, founding Pastor Paul Deane Hill, founding Board Chair Curt Anderson, Regional Minister Frederick Evans, and the pastor of First Christian Church of Billings, Russell Myers.

Central Christian Church, during this time, launched its "Super 8 Suppers," which helped assimilate new members, and embellish the fellowship of the church. Groups of eight, both couples and singles, met for dinner in private homes, and shared an informal evening. This pattern was employed off and on for a number of years.

The church had a strong emphasis on outreach and mission, both locally, and through giving to Basic Mission Finance. For several years they received recognition in the *Disciples Year Book* as among the top twenty-five congregations for "Largest Contributions to BMF for their Size." During this period, they co-hosted a Disciples "School of Mission" with First Christian Church.

Stubblefield left in May 1988, and Larry Miracle came as an interim in June. Larry was soon offered a called pastorate elsewhere, and George L. Kendall came as interim in January 1989. Kendall, a retired U.S. Air Force chaplain, encouraged the congregation to remember the veterans in their midst. That year the church noted important dates in America's history and veterans were invited to wear their medals and ribbons to church on Memorial Day. Kendall left in November 1989.

On November 19, 1989, Ronald L. Franklin began his called ministry at Central Christian Church. In addition to regular ministries and outreach, the church put a new roof over the fellowship hall area during the summer of 1990. In October 1990 Bill and Bethany Connor joined Central, having recently retired from the Hamilton pastorate.

Regional office files on Central Christian Church in Billings at the time are sparse. One note of the period reported a church rummage sale and luncheon in the fall of 1991 which netted over $2,200 for their general fund. In July 1992 Central hosted a church picnic at the city park in Big Timber. Co-hosts were members of Grand Avenue CC of Bozeman, and included guests from First Christian in Billings, and from Joliet Christian Church. In October 1992 for a celebration of Week of the Ministry, Central Christian and First Christian of Billings swapped ministers and chancel choirs for a Sunday.

During the 1990s Central Christian and First Christian joined together from year to year in a number of endeavors. For several years they held a joint Vacation Church School, and combined their youth groups in meetings and activities. An annual fall hayride and wiener roast, held at Riverfront Park, was especially popular. The adult choirs of Central Christian and First Christian also joined together to present a Christmas cantata during several Advent seasons.

In the fall of 1993 Doris Davis, a student at Rocky Mountain College, began serving the congregation as youth director. That fall there were fifty-two people participating in five *People of the Covenant* Bible study groups. Four of the groups continued the following year.

In 1994 Russ Myers retired from over 14 years as minister at First Christian Church of Billings, and he and Joyce placed their membership at Central Christian Church. He served as elder, and they were a strong addition to the congregation.

The year 1995 has a good record of the many activities of the church. As the year began, the elders encouraged the congregation to join in reading through the Bible in one year, and passages were printed in the weekly bulletin, as well as the monthly newsletter. They also began using a new format of having all committees meet the same evening, following a potluck dinner. It freed up a number of nights on people's calendars. On April 28—30, 1995, Central Christian in Billings hosted the 115th Montana Regional Assembly. In October the congregation celebrated its fortieth anniversary. And in November Chuck Tooley, an elder of the congregation, was elected Mayor of Billings. Being an outstanding church leader, Chuck was selected two years later, in 1997 to serve a four-year term on the board of directors of the Division of Overseas Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Central Christian also made many physical improvements around its property in 1995. They included landscaping, air-conditioning, furnace replacement, addition of a children's restroom, and a new well. The church's back yard was developed from a master plan that included a playground, shaded picnic area, volleyball court, and horseshoe pits.

Ron Franklin resigned in October 1998 to take a pastorate in Iowa. The interim ministry time was filled first by John Pugh, followed by Jim Fraley. Russ Myers and Chuck Tooley filled the pulpit between the two interims.

Donald J. Beal came to serve the church as senior minister in October 1999. At the time the church was averaging about fifty in worship. The church experienced gradual growth to a high of about 140 in 2005. In 2001 the church agreed to a remodeling of the sanctuary, opening the front of the sanctuary, and installing new chancel furniture. Two years later, the church adopted a novel idea of offering volunteers to community agencies and organizations. The program was an instant success. In its first two years, the church members participated in 540 projects and volunteered 8,109 hours of service. The program was popular and continued for several more years.

In May 2004 Jeff Anderson was installed as the church's Licensed Lay Minister, a position he held for the next two years. In 2005 the church held a big celebration to recognize its fiftieth anniversary. The anniversary was spread out over several months, culminating with a banquet at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center. Several previous ministers returned for visits during these months, including John Moore, David Decker, Larry Miracle and the immediate past minister, Ron Franklin.

Also in 2005, the church appointed a Young Adult Ministry Team and began a search for a called associate pastor. Through the years the church had held Vacation Church Schools, with the largest happening in the summer of 2005, when more than fifty children were in attendance. The church also held Lenten Soup Suppers for several years during Lent.

In 2008 a couple of significant events took place. Chuck Tooley, one of the church's elders, was given the "People of Faith" award by the Montana Association of Churches. In September the church finally called, and installed, an associate minister. Dana Keener came from Nebraska to fill that position. Her husband, John Keener, also a Disciples minister, came with her as called pastor to Joliet Christian Church. Both were installed the same day in October by Ruth Fletcher, Regional Minister.

Dana's title was minister of Spiritual Nurture with a focus on planning and leading contemporary worship, children's programming, reaching out to

younger adults, and helping to assimilate them into the life of the congregation. To aid in worship, the church installed a screen and video projector in the sanctuary. The contemporary service was held in the sanctuary immediately prior to the traditional worship service each Sunday.

Don Beal continued to lead the congregation for another year, before retiring at the end of 2009. Dick Talley then came as interim minister, and guided the congregation through a discernment process that eventually led to the calling of Dana Keener to be senior minister in June 2010. Jeff Anderson was called to be the minister of Pastoral Care. The church also started the search for a part-time youth/children's coordinator.

Perhaps it was too much too soon. Attendance was not supporting having two worship services. Thus, the church moved to one worship service, which was billed as a "blended" service. However, it fell short of the expectations of many. A "Congregational Conversation" was held on November 13, 2010, facilitated by Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher. Her report indicated that younger people were frustrated because worship was not the "contemporary" service they had been promised, long-time members were frustrated because it was not the "traditional" service they had been promised, and Dana was frustrated that the church discontinued seeking a youth/children's program coordinator, as promised. It was also noted by Ruth Fletcher that the congregation had experienced a lot of loss over the last five years, and that people in the church were grieving the loss in many ways.

Church income declined, Jeff Anderson resigned, and the church budget for the next year took a noticeable cut. The *Disciples Year Book* in 2010 showed Average Worship Attendance (AWA) as 80 and Local Operating Receipts (LOR) as $159,950. Those numbers in 2011 were 61 AWA and $111,910 LOR. In 2012 the numbers were 43 AWA and $93,582 LOR. But Central's numbers leveled out thereafter, and were stable for the next five years. The *Disciples Year Book* for 2017 had 38 AWA and $106,555 LOR, reflecting an effective ministry continuing on a smaller scale.

The community service outreach team of Central Christian in the summer of 2016 took on a new and different outreach endeavor. They focused on Burlington Elementary School, which is in the neighborhood of the church.

The team co-captains encouraged members and friends to bring in new or gently worn children's clothing for kids in grades K—6. Clothing needing minor attention, such as a missing button, were mended, and all was taken to the school. School personnel then distributed clothing according to need when classes started on August 25.

Dana Keener left Central Christian in February 2017, and Douglas A. Garner began serving as acting minister with the privilege of call. After a few months, the church extended the call and he was installed on Sunday afternoon, October 8, 2017.

Gathering in the sanctuary at CCC in Billings

SENIOR MINISTERS at Central Christian Church of Billings

Eddie K. Stubblefield	1983—1988
Ronald L. Franklin	1989—1998
Donald J. Beal	1999—2009
Dana L. Keener	2010—2017
Douglas A. Garner	2017—Present

Interim Ministers have included Larry L. Miracle (1988), George L. Kendall (1989), John Pugh (1999), James A. Fraley (1999), Richard D. Talley (2010), and periodically Russel E. Myers, Jeff Anderson, and lay member, Charles F. (Chuck) Tooley.

A Priscilla of the congregation during this period was Tamalyn L. Kralman. She is listed on pages 137 and 294 of *Big Sky Disciples* (1984) as Tammy Kraalman and on page 263 as Tammy Shoemaker. Regarding Tamalyn L. Kralman, the 1984 volume contained two errors. First was the double "aa" in Kralman, and second was that she retained her family name upon her marriage to Gary A. Shoemaker, a Timothy of Central Christian Church in Kalispell. Both attended Northwest Christian College (Eugene, OR), were married, and attended seminary at the School of Theology (Claremont, CA). After seminary graduation they were ordained together on July 25, 1986, and co-pastored Polson Christian Church.

Seeker's Harbor Faith Community of Billings

BILLINGS, Seeker's Harbor Faith Community
is people, not a building.

Seeker's Harbor is a fresh approach to Church, building on Jesus' way of sharing a meal with folks and sending them out to share.

A harbor is a place of protection for boats, a stopping point to unload cargo, a place to be refueled. Seeker's Harbor Faith Community is a safe place to refresh, refuel, and replenish for the journey.

Seeker's Harbor Faith Community began meeting as a group in 2004, praying and talking about the "new thing God might be calling us to become." In 2005, the New Church Development Regional Team allotted money for Cheri Manning and Rebecca L. (Becky) Taylor to attend New Church Planter Training with Hope Partnership in Indianapolis. By the end of the week, Cheri and Becky realized that God was calling them to the task, and they became co –planters for the new faith community. They were assigned a New Church Coach, Steve Westbrook from Missouri. They created a Leadership Circle that included Cheri & Adam Manning, Becky & Doug Taylor, and Lucy Kleinsasser; developed vision, mission & values statements; and adopted Circle Principles to guide their time together. They were given a small, new church grant from the Montana Region to begin the ministry, and became a "Congregation in Formation." When life issues prevented Cheri from continuing the work, Becky became the primary pastor, completing Lay Ministry courses in April 2007.

The Circle Principles, designed to create safe space, are read at the beginning of each gathering to guide our time together. Groups [numbering three at this printing] share a meal together, which has been a proven way to build trust and community. In keeping with Disciples tradition, groups also share communion. Direction is guided by a leadership circle, and decisions are made by consensus. Seeker's Harbor actively reaches out to those who have been alienated from church, because often that means they feel alienated from God. The church is Open and Affirming, which means that it welcomes LGBTIQ folks into full inclusion in the life of the community.

The church meets in small groups and does not have formal membership, believing that implies some are "in" and some are "out." All who participate, belong, and are partners in ministry! This, and the fact that the church's people participate in many ministries in the community, make it difficult to report numbers. Nevertheless, for statistical purposes the 2016 *Disciples Year Book* reports the church having 154 total persons reached

and forth-five participating regularly. Seeker's Harbor is touching lives – the lives of many who have been alienated from church for various reasons.

A few of the ministries in which its folks are, or have been involved, are as follows:

> AIDSpirit (a faith-based organization providing services to HIV+ people in Montana and Uganda), Yellowstone AIDS Project, Not In Our Town, HIV+ Women's Retreats, BARK (Billings Animal Rescue Kare), Women's Prison Ministry (Seeker's Harbor also provides progressive, inclusive study materials for this group), Soft Landing Missoula (Montana's refugee welcome center), Montana Human Rights Network, PRIDE Foundation, Montana Pride, SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice), Native Relations, Black Heritage Foundation, Martin Luther King (MLK) events, MLK Interfaith Service, MSU-Billings Campus Ministry, Institute for Peace Studies (Rocky Mountain College), Suicide Prevention Training and Walks, Planned Parenthood, Cancer Society's Relay for Life, Always Our Children, PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians And Gays), community arts outreach projects, mental health outreach, and Sanctuary Rising, as well as various rallies and community events.

Seeker's Harbor has no paid clergy. A major role of the lay pastor is to hold safe space. All are trained to hold safe space and in other aspects of Seeker's Harbor gatherings, so groups function regardless of the presence of the pastor. Groups are based on participation, rather than on a lecture model. Each person brings their unique self to the community, and everyone shares their gifts – all are ministers. This makes the groups reproducible, as no special skills are necessary. Leader training is provided for all, and everyone is encouraged, equipped, and empowered to follow their call to serve.

Seeker's Harbor does not, nor does it ever want to have a building. It sees that owning a building, or renting space could change its focus from people

to money. The groups meet in homes and public spaces, freeing donated money for ministry, rather than maintenance.

Seeker's Harbor is committed to ecumenism and to developing relationships in the community to partner with other congregations and organizations to widen reach.

Seeker's Harbor's request to be chartered was approved by the Regional Board of the Christian Church in Montana on March 25, 2017 and celebrated a few weeks later at the Regional Assembly on May 20.

Compiled by its founding and only pastor, Rebecca L. (Becky) Taylor, P.O. Box 51055, Billings, MT 59105 406-661-1584 www.seekersharbor.wordpress.com

Grand Avenue Christian Church of Bozeman

BOZEMAN, Grand Avenue Christian Church

Grand Avenue Christian Church (GACC) dates from a worship service on June 26,1887, as reported on pages 229—232 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The congregation began as an outcome of a large number of Disciple families living in the Bozeman area to invite Martin L. Streator, missionary-evangelist from Helena, to assist them in organizing a congregation.

Through the years GACC has continued strong support for all expressions of the church: local, regional, and General, with financial support, as well as physical involvement. This includes representation on the General Board of the Christian Church (DOC) in the United States and Canada, the

International Christian Women's Fellowship, (now Disciple Women), and the ICWF Quadrennial Assembly Planning Committee. Members have also served on the regional board and regional committees. Volunteers have served as directors, counselors, and cooks for regional church camps and retreats. Disciple Men and Disciple Women's Fellowship groups are ongoing in the local church. The church bought and dedicated 120 copies of the *Chalice Hymnal*. From its inception on, members of GACC have supported and participated in the financing, construction, and maintenance of the Cane Ridge West facilities.

The congregation's Mission Statement is "Empowered by God to Serve." This Mission Statement is put into action through the church's involvement in providing financial and physical support for many non-profit organizations in and around Bozeman that care for the homeless and victims of abuse. For example, Love In the Name of Christ, Family Promise, the Warming Center, the Community Café, the Food Bank, the Salvation Army, His Soup, The Sheriff's Chaplaincy Program, Haven, Thrive, and many others. The GACC building has provided space for the local Kiwanis Club to house a gently-used clothing distribution center. Numerous AA groups also regularly meet in the building.

Terry Halstead, senior minister, was among eight Montana Disciples clergy to participate in an eleven-day work trip to Honduras in January 1997, sponsored by the Montana region. In January 1999 he led the second regionally-sponsored work/mission trip to Honduras, which included six Grand Avenue lay members. After returning, they presented a program and a Honduran meal for the congregation. In April 2008 Mark MacWhorter, senior minister, participated along with fifteen other Montana Disciples in the regional church's Gulf Coast Mission Trip to do clean-up and repairs from the devastation left by Hurricane Katrina.

The church annually conducts an ecumenical mid-summer worship service at The Soldier's Chapel at Big Sky, followed by a picnic in Gallatin Canyon. A fall Kick-Off Sunday is held each September with worship and a picnic, originally at the Grover residence in Bridger Canyon, and more recently at the Frank and Marilyn Carter farm in the valley. GACC is

also involved in the mid-summer ecumenical Vacation Bible School with neighboring churches.

The 130-year-old building requires constant upkeep and improvements. Some of those have included a remodeling of the baptistry, restrooms, pastor's study, church office, an elevator lift from the main floor to the lower level, addition of a patio, and extensive landscaping.

GACC faithfully supports all Special Day Offerings of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and for many years has been listed in the *Disciples Year Book* in the top twenty-five congregations for their size in giving to the Disciples Mission Fund.

A celebration of the 125th anniversary of Grand Avenue Christian Church was held with events throughout the year of 2012. Guests from around the Montana region, and from other states, attended a special celebration that took place on a Saturday during the summer with an ice cream social in the church parking lot, with special speakers, music, and activities for the youth. Ruth Fletcher, Regional Minister, provided the Sunday morning sermon in recognition of the event.

A 2018 gathering of people at GACC in Bozeman

SENIOR MINISTERS at Grand Avenue Christian Church of Bozeman

Ronald Hanson	1983—1989
Terry Halstead	1990—1998
Warren Lynn	2000—2002
Tony Alonzo	2004—2007
Mark MacWhorter	2008—2015
Edward Combs	2016—Present

Interim Ministers have included Russell Hensley (1989), Jim Cox (1999), Jeff Holder (1999), J. Denise [Deni] Smelley (2003), Connie Harbert (2007), and periodically, Paul Deane Hill.

Central Christian Church of Great Falls

GREAT FALLS, CENTRAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Although Central Christian Church in Great Falls dates itself from May 3, 1903, some Disciples meetings, Bible studies, and worship services took place as early as 1885. *Big Sky Disciples* on pages 247—251 notes that three adult baptisms took place in the Missouri River in 1886, and periodic gatherings occurred thereafter, but efforts fell short of calling a resident minister until 1903.

Fast forward to early 1984 when the history book, *Big Sky Disciples*, was published, and we find Fred W. Dorisse, in his final months as pastor of Central Christian Church. That fall he accepted the call to a pastorate in Indiana and the Great Falls congregation welcomed Barton A. Dowdy as interim pastor. He served until Arthur Roy Greenlee arrived to assume the pastorate on February 15, 1985.

Montana's regional church office continued to be located in the Central Christian building. Thus, the change of regional ministers is directly felt in the congregation. In 1986 Fred Evans, Regional Minister, announced his plans to retire, and a search began for a successor. Central Christian was having issues with its older sanctuary, and with parking only along the streets. These issues were put on hold while the church got acquainted with its new minister and participated in the search for a new regional minister.

Fred Evans with his wife, Mildred, retired in March 1987, and James Kimsey began his regional ministry the same month. His wife, Dolores Kimsey, an ordained Disciples minister, was called to be part-time associate minister with a focus on Christian Education. Later that spring Barbara Reavley retired from twenty-five years of loving volunteer service to the children in Central Christian's Day Care program.

In the fall of 1987 a Capital Building Funds campaign was set up to raise money for acquisition of property, and construction costs. At this point the congregation owned no property, except the ground where the aging sanctuary, and a somewhat aging education building, sat.

Board of Church Extension was invited to run the campaign, led by Wm. (Bill) Pearcy. Maud Morrison, who was both a local realtor and a church member, was requested by the church board to investigate the availability of the building and lots across the alley north of the church.

It was determined that the education building could be remodeled. Plans were completed, and the church remodeled the education building by enlarging the chapel to become a fellowship area, adequate for worship, and a classroom became a kitchen. Other classrooms became office space for the regional office, pastor's study, secretarial space, new bathrooms, and a storage area. The church was also very intentional to make the new space handicap-accessible.

Central Christian Church was sensitive to special needs. It already had a special relationship with a local nonprofit called Quality Life Concepts. QLC is headquartered in Great Falls with satellite offices in Shelby, Havre, and Browning, and serves families with developmentally disabled individuals of

all ages. QLC ran an adult day program five days a week in the back 25% of Central Christian's education building, starting in the late 1980s and going until 2001 when QLC purchased their own building and moved.

The church's ministers, first Art Greenlee and then his successor, Bob Frank-Plumlee, regularly provided various services for Quality Life Concepts, including a weekly thirty minute worship service, and officiating at funerals for those with no church home. As part of the church's remodeling in 1992 the church installed two sets of handicap restrooms, with the set of restrooms near the back of the building to include shower stalls. The showers were often used by QLC staff to give added mid-day care to their special needs people. The showers were also installed with the plan to allow traveling groups to spend a night at the church, as they travel through Great Falls.

On January 6, 1991, the congregation began the worship service in the sixty-three year old sanctuary, then walked over to the newly remodeled chapel in the education building. Worshippers carried the large wooden cross and the communion elements in procession from the old sanctuary to the new space. Volunteer workers within days began to raze the old sanctuary building.

Helen Cascaden, after faithfully serving for over thirty years as Central Christian's church secretary, retired in 1992.

In January 1993 a new women's group was formed at the church named Lydia Group. It is part of Christian Women's Fellowship, along with the Miriam Group.

In June 1993 Art Greenlee resigned after completing eight and a half years as minister of the congregation. After several weeks of pulpit supply and preaching by elders, Robert P. (Bob) Frank-Plumlee began serving as acting minister with privilege of call on August 1, 1993. Seven months later, he was installed as called minister.

In the fall of 1993 the church had a series of "futuring" meetings. One outcome of the meetings was a mission statement, "The mission of Central

Christian Church is to empower people for Christ's ministries in their daily lives: home, school, workplace, church and community." This mission statement has been revisited from time to time, but remains the same and is still printed on all church bulletins and newsletters after twenty-five years.

That same fall another outcome of futuring was to begin a mid-week tradition of meetings and activities called Wednesday Activity Groups, (WAG). Each week it began with a meal, followed by youth meetings, choir practice, craft lessons, and other gatherings. Although Wednesday evening eventually changed its format to offer a contemporary worship service in 1998 called ROC (Rely On Christ), the church retained the 6:15 PM meal for decades until 2017.

The church's youth group, under the leadership of Susie Rebeck and Bob Frank-Plumlee, in June 1994 took a week-long fun and fellowship trip to the Calgary Zoo, Calgary Tower, and Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada. The eleven youth and four adults stayed in homes in Calgary and in sleeping bags on First Christian's floor in Edmonton. It was the first of several every-other-year trips they would make, but the next trips were all as work trips. in 1996 the youth group took Amtrak to Seattle with part of the work to be in an urban garden. In 1998 they did yard work and painting at Colorado Christian Home (Tennyson Center) in Denver. In 2000 the youth spent two days painting, and playground repairs, at Yakama Indian Mission, followed by traveling on to Northwest Christian College for a campus visit. The trip concluded with a trip to the ocean. Bob Frank-Plumlee coordinated and led each youth trip. He also assisted in leading a region-wide ICYF (International Christian Youth Fellowship) trip to Chapman University in California in 1995, and to TCU in Texas in 1999.

By the fall of 1994 the indebtedness for demolition of the old sanctuary building and the remodeling of the education building had been erased. A mortgage burning was held on September 18. By early 1995 an architect had been selected to work with the building committee for a new sanctuary. New furnaces were installed to replace the thirty-two year old ones. By spring another capital campaign was in full swing. A catered dinner was held to unveil the architect's drawing of the new sanctuary. New *Chalice Hymnals* arrived in time to be used.

Bill and Bethany Connor moved to Great Falls in 1995, and became members of Central Christian Church. William J. (Bill) Connor (1924—2006) was an ordained Disciples minister with a Ph.D., who had taught at Phillips University in Oklahoma. Originally from Montana, he returned in retirement and served First CC in Hamilton (1985—1990). He retired from there and the Connors lived a few years on family property near Billings, where they attended Central Christian Church of Billings. Then Bill moved with Bethany (1933—2005) to Great Falls, where he was a great asset to the congregation. He led periodic Bible studies, served as elder, covered for the minister when needed, and along with Bethany, was a general blessing to the entire church community. He also served on regional commissions and committees.

By the fall of 1996 the congregation had raised $70,000 toward its goal of $100,000 necessary to break ground for the sanctuary, which would be added onto the education building. By mid-1997 the financial goal had been exceeded, but construction plans had to be postponed to spring. On March 15, 1998, a ground blessing was held for construction to begin on the new sanctuary. The dedication service for the new sanctuary was on August 30, 1998. Guests included former regional ministers Glen Holman, D. Franklin Kohl, and Fredrick Evans.

As already noted, Wednesday was church night at Central Christian. In the fall of 1998 the church hired Mark Whitley, a recent graduate of Chapman University to be Youth/Young Adult Minister. With a talent for singing and playing guitar, his job description included leading a mid-week contemporary service. He resigned five months later but the mid-week service continued.

Dan Russell, a graduate of Northwest Christian College, was hired with a different job description. He was Central's part-time associate with a major responsibility for the contemporary service, and First Christian Church's weekend pastor in Conrad, Montana. In 2000 the mid-week contemporary service was formally named the ROC (Rely On Christ) service.

By 2000 the congregation had been enjoying its new sanctuary for two years, but with four clear glass windows. The plan was for stained glass

windows. Winters Studio in Great Falls was commissioned to do them at $2,100 each. From description to drawings to finished products, it took two years, but with the new windows the sanctuary was finally complete. Each window had a theme: Bible, Baptism, Communion and Creed (Jesus is Lord).

In the fall of 2000 Bob and Karen Frank-Plumlee took a three month sabbatical. Terry Halstead, former pastor at Grand Avenue Christian Church in Bozeman returned from Iowa and served as Sabbatical Interim for the regional minister and served as part-time pastor for the congregation.

As part of their sabbatical leave, Karen and Bob traveled to Houston for a Thomas G. Bandy seminar, "The Servant-Empowering Organization." Karen Frank-Plumlee was a follower of the work of church visionary and strategist, Tom Bandy. Thus, Central Christian's Elders in 2001 called on her to take them through a process based on Bandy's work. Out of that work came a vision statement. In 2004 Tom Bandy would be the featured speaker at the Regional Assembly in Kalispell.

In brief summary, Tom Bandy states that the CONGREGATION meets regularly for worship; meets annually to set/refine its identity: Core Values, Bedrock Beliefs, Motivating Vision and Key Mission. Disciples Basic Beliefs include but are not limited to: Jesus is Lord; Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God; A People of the Table; Priesthood of all believers; In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things love; Unity is our Polar Star. Core values include (in no particular order): inclusivity, openness, diversity, faithfulness and wholeness. In a worshipping community the four essentials of PALS groups are: Prayer, Activity, Learning, Sharing.

In August 2001 Dan Russell resigned to attend seminary. For the month of September the Rev. Dr. Sean Harry from Oregon filled the position of leading Wednesday evenings at CCC and preaching in Conrad on Sunday. Musician and Disciple member, Jeff Carroll, had been assisting Dan Russell on all of the ROC music. His title became contemporary music director. A worship team which coordinated Wednesday services continued to meet and plan them. Linda Reynolds, an MLMI (Montana Lay Ministry

Institute) student and Disciples member was named volunteer coordinator of the Sunday worship.

In January 2002 Lynda Bridges came in the dual capacity of being associate minister for Wednesday worship in Great Falls and as part-time pastor at First CC in Conrad.

Bob Frank-Plumlee retired on Easter Sunday, March 31, 2002. Jim Fraley began serving as interim minister in April. Ron Greene had already been called as senior minister, and as planned, began on July 1, 2002. He and his wife, Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher, were welcomed as new members and honored at a potluck dinner.

In 2003 Ron Greene and Ruth Fletcher began a tradition that they carried throughout their ministry in Great Falls. Each year at their home they hosted an Easter Sunrise service followed by breakfast. That same year Central Christian Church celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary with a banquet and centennial program. Special guests included Timothies and Priscilla's of the congregation, former pastors and regional ministers. A program featuring the special guests followed the Sunday worship. Many in the congregation wore period dress of 1903.

In the spring of 2005 the church board entered into a "Native American Ministry Exploration" (NAME) with the regional New Church Task Force. Historically, it is noteworthy from page 204 of *Big Sky Disciples* that Montana Disciples have not been lax in funding through Reconciliation offerings and in physical involvement in helping to make a difference in the Montana Native American community. In the fall of 2005 the church sponsored "Jesus Quest," a four-day outreach event for the Native American community. Chief AJ, a Native American Disciples lay leader from Illinois led the event.

Central Christian was one of six Montana Disciples congregations to participate in a three-year program on church transformation called "Leaven," which is explained in the chapter on Regional Church ministry. The program spanned 2005-2008, led by Ruth Fletcher. The Central Christian Team was Pastor Ron Greene, LeAnn Budeski, Brett Fagenstrom, Jean

Muir, Linda Reynolds, and Brad Reynolds (who began as a high school youth and continued as a University of Montana college student).

During the 2006 Lenten season fifty people came together in small groups to share their faith and explore God's vision for Central Christian Church, including six under the age of thirty. Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher led nineteen of them to consider the responses from the small groups and adopt the Congregational Vision Statement: "Be an inclusive people living God's radical love that challenges all to grow in faith and mission."

In the spring of 2007 the church's elders considered a request from the website gaychurch.org to see if our vision statement meant we would be welcoming of LGBT persons. They asked Pastor Ronald Greene to lead a discernment using the materials devised by the General Church committee on which he served. Fifty people representing a diversity of age, length of time in the church, gender, and theological perspective came together for 6 weekly sessions and 2 extended special sessions for the Disciples "Listening to the Spirit" discernment. Together they affirmed their discoveries on the various issues and agreed to be listed as a "gay-friendly" church on the website without taking steps to become officially "Open and Affirming." This position includes being non-discriminatory on same-sex weddings in the church.

Through the "Leaven" Program the congregation in 2007 revised its church leadership structure. It downsized the church board as the governing body responsible for resources (property, personnel and finances) and policies. A Vision Focus Council also was created and meets bimonthly. It plans programs, approves requests for events on the church calendar, and considers how the church is living up to its vision statement, including ways to celebrate the activities and ministries of the church.

The vision of Central Christian Church is to be a midsize congregation with a wide age range that includes young adults. The church will offer a high quality worship built around two types of spiritual food—feeling and thinking. Personal relationships will continue to be a top priority. The foundation of the church will be built on three core values: spiritual, mission, and influences. Individual diversity will be accepted and encouraged.

In 2005 Hurricane Katrina blasted into New Orleans, LA and Mississippi. Montana Disciples from across the region traveled to New Orleans in 2008 for the regional work trip. Central Christian volunteers helped as they added sheetrock to walls, put down flooring in a home, painted the exterior of another home, and constructed a roof for a home. Ron Green said, "We did the work, but more important listened to their stories and felt their loss. Before our trip we enjoyed a pre-Thanksgiving fundraiser meal of Jambalaya, Gumbo and Shrimp Creole."

Another fundraiser was a chili supper and movie, "Who Killed the Electric Car?" Don and Linda Reynolds brought their ZENN, electric car, into the fellowship hall for added excitement. Linda Reynolds is Central Christian's assistant minister, after completing the Montana Association of Churches Lay Ministry Institute (MAC LMI) studies.

The congregation set and met a goal of gathering 2,010 pounds of food for FISH by Pentecost of 2008. "Prodigal Sons," a professionally produced documentary film about a family connected to the congregation, dealing with issues of transgender, homosexuality, family systems and relationships, mental health, and domestic violence, was presented to the community at the church. A broad spectrum of Great Falls residents attended. The church also regularly hosts meetings of the Blind and Low Vision Council, and recently hosted its state convention.

In the Fall of 2011 Noemi Ban, a Holocaust survivor from Bellingham, WA, shared her story of hope to over 400 at the church. Jean Muir, Montana Disciples Women Staff, participated in the Disciples Women's Ministry's Woman to Woman trip of Turkey.

When Pastor Micah Hartung of the Metropolitan Community Church in Great Falls retired, the congregation voted to close. While attending an ecumenical meeting held at Central Christian, he read the church's vision statement painted on the fellowship hall wall. He asked if the church really meant what was printed. The answer was yes. He began to attend and soon Pastor Hartung and several others from the former MCC joined Central Christian Church. In July 2017 Micah Hartung was among those from

Central Christian who attended the General Assembly in Indianapolis. In December 2016 Micah Hartung was elected an elder.

In January 2015 Family Promise after two years of planning was finally begun. The hard work of planning was led by Pastor Ron Greene, and Chris and Viv Hunter, who assisted in the organizing of the local affiliate. Through various steps, the decision was made to place the hub at Central Christian Church. Chris Hunter led a team in remodeling the space. The church now houses the office and day-center for the organization. The non-profit is a consortium of thirteen Great Falls churches and helps homeless families get back on their feet.

Central Christian Church also hosted the 2015 Regional Assembly. Attendees came together in April to consider the question of the future of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana. It was the first overt step toward a decision brought to the 2017 Regional Assembly meeting at CRW in May, to enter a partnership with the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) about merger between the two regions.

A 2018 gathering of people at CCC in Great Falls

SENIOR MINISTERS at Central Christian Church of Great Falls

Fred W. Dorisse	1978—1984
Arthur R. (Art) Greenlee	1985—1993
Robert P. (Bob) Frank-Plumlee	1993—2002
Ronald C. (Ron) Greene	2002—Present

Part-time Ministry Staff for Central Christian Church

Dolores K. Kimsey, Associate Minister	1988—1990
Mark Whitley, Youth/Young Adult Minister	1998—1999
Daniel Russell, Part-time Associate	1999—2001
Lynda Bridges, Part-time Associate	2002
Linda Reynolds, Assistant Minister	2005—2012

Interim Ministers have included Barton A. Dowdy (1984—1985) and James A. (Jim) Fraley (2002). Terry Halstead served as Sabbatical Interim (2000).

First Christian Church of Hamilton

HAMILTON, First Christian Church

First Christian Church in Hamilton dates from April 21, 1895, as reported primarily on pages 42 and 252—254 of *Big Sky Disciples*.

The unique brand that Disciples have for being open-minded, free-thinking people formed the history of Disciples in the Bitterroot Valley in southwestern Montana, where Hamilton is located. Disciples had multiple thriving churches in the valley during the 1880s that, from time to time, came and went, before Benjamin F. Norris began holding a meeting on April 21, 1895, which led to the formation of the congregation in the relatively new county seat of Hamilton.

The history of the Hamilton Disciples church can be divided into three distinct times, correlating to the ownership of three different buildings.

The first one was built in 1895 at the corner of DeSmet and South Second Street on land donated by Marcus Daly, one of Montana's Copper Kings. The congregation remained vitally active there for eighty-two years. With the fast-growing valley and the fast-growing Disciples movement, membership rose at one point to 175 people.

The year 1977 marked the purchase of the Grace Lutheran Church building at State and Fourth Street, where they enjoyed seventeen years of traditional worship, with full church activities and service. Faith, family, and fun describe these gentle years, with membership fluctuating between sixty and eighty people. Favorite memories include an annual summer outdoor worship, community ecumenical fellowships, outreach ministries, and supportive educational groups.

A special connection with the Cane Ridge West campsite was established in 1981 with the log structure for the new lodge being sourced from Mountain Log Homes, whose owner, Keith Robinson, was a member of the Hamilton church. Camp attendance and volunteering has always been a high priority for the congregation, and the time spent there has been filled with great memories for generations now.

Norman E. Morriss, who came to Hamilton as minister in 1979, continued to serve until late August 1985. At that time attendance was large enough that the church had gone to two identical Sunday morning services in June 1985.

William F. Connor was called to the ministry of the congregation, beginning in January 1986. Under his leadership, discussion began in the late 1980s of the importance for having a building with everything on ground level. With visions for building, they purchased 20.5 acres of undeveloped land in 1991 with the help of a loan from the Board of Church Extension in Indianapolis. Connor, who had a Ph.D., and had already retired from a college professorship, decided to retire from active ministry, as well.

The land purchase closely coincided with the call of Gordon A. Read, who arrived in May 1991. In September 1992 the congregation sold its building, and on October 3 held its first worship in what would become one of several rented locations. With the sale of the property, and with the enthusiastic leadership of Read, a talented retired military chaplain, the Church Extension loan was paid off.

Because the congregation had a tradition of one Sunday outdoor worship each summer, they planned a 1992 celebration on their newly acquired property east of town. Invitations were sent, and five former ministers of the congregation and their spouses attended, including Tom Lofthouse, Walt Smith, Kenneth Johnston, Glenn Johnson, and Bill Connor, in addition to current minister Gordon Read.

"Wandering in the wilderness" describes the next four years, since church activities were held in various rented locations. In 1993 they sold the building at Fourth and State, paid off the loan, and set their plans for a future at 328 Fairgrounds Road in Hamilton.

With the new land and a newly planted sign reading, "Growing with God and the Bitterroot Valley," the congregation celebrated their one-hundredth anniversary outdoors on their new property during the summer of 1995. On August 27 former minister Bill Connor was the featured speaker with 116 in attendance. A picnic and event-filled afternoon was enjoyed and greatly attended by the community and neighboring Disciples. The children served up some special "Stone Soup," complete with a rubber snake, and lessons from the old folk story, where people are convinced to share a small amount of their food in order to make a meal for everyone to enjoy.

Though meeting in various locations, the congregation undertook various ongoing outreach ministries. Under a nation-wide public program called "Adopt-A-Highway," the congregation in 1995 began participating in it as a community service project, periodically cleaning litter from the roadside of a two mile stretch of Highway 93. That year the youth collected and contributed 111 pounds of food to Haven House. The church also received

a letter of congratulations from the Center for Congregational Growth for 10% or more worship attendance growth during 1995.

On May 11, 1997, a ground-breaking service for a new building was held with former minister Bill Connor bringing the sermon. Present were Regional Minister Karen Frank-Plumlee and former Regional Ministers Jim Kimsey and Franklin Kohl. Wayne Gustafson was the architect, and construction began immediately. At that time the congregation had been temporarily worshiping at City Hall.

On November 30, 1997, the congregation began worshipping in its new building. It was dedicated on April 19, 1998, with Fred Evans, former Montana regional minister as the guest speaker, and 270 people in attendance.

A plaque mounted on a rock wall of the building reads:

"To the Glory of God
For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people" Isaiah 56:7b
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Hamilton, Montana
Established April 21, 1895
This Facility Dedicated April 19, 1998
"To Know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and
to Make Him Known to all people."

Behind the plaque is a time capsule intended to be opened a hundred years from the dedication date.

Gordon Read took medical retirement in March 1998, due to an injury from an automobile accident. Don Slaughter served as interim for a few months, followed in September by Jeff Holder, as interim. Jason J. Jones came as called minister on January 17, 1999.

Church programs and ministries flourished and grew in the new building. By the year 2001, total membership reached 163 and average Sunday worship was over a hundred. A new, early morning contemporary service was added and enjoyed for many years. A new high school was built directly across the street in 2000, and the church began welcoming the students

over for hot chocolate every Thursday morning. This favorite ministry is still in operation in 2018, and the church is known by many as the "hot chocolate church."

Some of the land was subdivided and sold, and with great effort, the mortgage was paid in full by 2008. This was accomplished under a succession of two young, energetic ministers. Jason Jones, mentioned earlier, was the first of the two, and served from 1999 until 2001. Daniel M. Dixson, a hospital chaplain in Missoula, then served as part-time interim. The second of these young ministers answering the call was John E. Bain in March 2003. He was a Timothy of the Conrad congregation.

A new, extensive children's "Logos" program was undertaken, which included family dinners every Wednesday night, and which dovetailed with in-depth adult Bible studies, and summer Vacation Bible School. The men's group met regularly and sponsored activities, such as hiking trips to Glacier National Park. The women's fellowship was also very active with study, community service, Lenten luncheons, fundraising, and donating to many charitable projects.

Ecumenical Easter Sunrise Services, the Ministerial Association, "Walk for Jesus" events, and Regional Assembly participation was enjoyed. A stretch of Hwy 93 continued to be cleaned of litter for many years, a member helped on a mission trip after Hurricane Katrina, and the youth held carwash fundraisers. These were active days, alive with multiple small groups for 'multiple points of entrance' into the fellowship of FCC.

The large number of members included a diverse set of belief systems, and as open discussions began, many people found they wanted to be with more like-minded people. Thus, a shift was made as members moved to other faith communities in the valley. Others moved to warmer climates, or to be closer to children in other states, as well as the loss of numbers through the natural aging process. With this decline of membership, the remaining core of members spent time clarifying the Disciples' way, and chose to honor the open-minded, free-thinking standards of the early Disciples. By 2012 the church began operating with guest preachers and lay ministers, and focused its study and worship on the liturgical calendar of festivals and

seasons, from Advent through Pentecost, and on the teachings of Jesus and discipleship.

In 2017 the church started volunteering to provide one meal a month to the Community Meals program, which provides free hot meals five nights a week from Labor Day to Memorial Day. The church is also leasing building space to another congregation, Center for Spiritual Living, alternating the time spent in the sanctuary and fellowship rooms, as well as meeting space. The congregation also hosts a Girl Scout troop, and provides meeting space to several clubs and groups. The building, which was dedicated to be a blessing to the community, is holding true as the church seeks God's will for the future.

Having now served for twenty years at 328 Fairgrounds Road, the church is enduring some waning years, with participating membership listed in the 2017 *Disciples Year Book* at twenty and worship at fifteen. The exciting part of these numbers is, several of the people are under the age of eighteen, three of whom are serving on the Montana Youth Commission. God is building leaders to continue to define who Disciples are in Christ. Hamilton's First Christian Church is endeavoring to stand solid in "our belief in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and looking outward with God's plan to establish justice, equality, and peace."

A 2018 gathering of people at FCC in Hamilton

MINISTERS at First Christian Church of Hamilton

Norman E. Morriss	1979—1985
William F. Connor	1985—1990
Gordon A. Read	1991—1998
Jason J. Jones	1999—2001
John Edwin Bain	2003—2008
Jack Harris-Bonham	2010—2011
Guest Ministers	2012—2018

2012—2017 Rotation of Guest Ministers Dan Dixson, Doug Garner, and John Brock together with Commissioned Minister and member of congregation, Wendy Campbell, as well as Lay member of the congregation, Diana Kostecki.

2018 Rotation of Dixson, Brock, Campbell, and Kostecki.

Interim Ministers have included Ronald E. Nowlin (1991), Don Slaughter (1998), Jeff Holder (1998), Dan Dixon (2002), and Roger Lynn (2009).

First Christian Church of Helena

HELENA, First Christian Church

The record of Disciples in Montana begins in Helena with the coming in the summer of 1864 of Thomas Franklin Campbell. European settlements in Montana at the time consisted chiefly of gold camps. Placer mines were just being opened when Campbell arrived in Helena. He apparently had two interests, gold mining, and ministering. The story of Campbell and his ministry in Helena begins on page one of *Big Sky Disciples*, and will be found on numerous pages thereafter. The succinct history of the

congregation can be found on pages 254—258 of *Big Sky Disciples*. History reflects that early worship was intermittent before 1872. The book reports on page 254 that on June 18, 1972, First Christian Church of Helena celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of its founding.

When *Big Sky Disciples* was published in 1984 Thomas K. (Tom) Devitt was the minister, having arrived September 1, 1980. During his tenure at the church numerous strong ministries were in motion and policies were revised. Women began serving as elders of the church. The parsonage in the 900 block of Knight Street was sold in favor of a housing allowance. A young adult group called "Alive" met for study and social events. In 1984 young adult lay leaders, Mary and Curt Larsen, took nine youth to the World Convention of Churches in Jamaica. Mary Larsen in later years represented Montana in serving on the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Members of the congregation became involved with the Helena Cursillo community. Several attended the three-day Christian retreat and later offered leadership in the Walk to Emmaus retreats. The Walk to Emmaus continued to be instrumental in leadership development at FCC through the 1990s.

Tom and Jean Devitt left Helena in July 1985 to serve in the Peace Corps. Their assignment was to the island nation of Fiji, where they served in Rural Community Development. Newell and Anna Rose Morgan, both ordained ministers began their interim ministry on July 14th. Theirs was a short but very appreciated interim ministry, especially with Anna Rose sending out hand-made greeting cards containing her original poetry.

Kenneth W. Moore came to pastor the Helena congregation in January 1986, just in time to host the 106th Regional Assembly held there April 25—27. Ken was soon involved in regional leadership roles and was elected regional moderator in 1990. Later he served as chair of the regional Ministry Commission, and working with other regional leaders, established an educational program for Licensed Ministry. Ken also directed and counseled at youth camps at Cane Ridge West most summers.

Every summer a week of evening Vacation Bible School brought lots of children and excitement. In around 1992, in addition to the existing Christian Youth Fellowship group for high school youth, a Chi Rho group was started for middle school students.

The Miriam and Priscilla Christian Women's Fellowship groups met monthly for Bible Study. CWF hosted quarterly programs that included speakers, luncheons, and other fellowship opportunities. Each November they invited the congregation to be involved in their big fundraiser, the "Christmas Bazaar." Their fundraising efforts helped support outreach to Helena Food-share, YWCA, God's Love (The Helena homeless shelter), and several other local agencies along with regular CWF giving to the General Church's Basic Mission Finance (BMF).

Ken's wife, Susan Kierely-Moore, organized and led a Wednesday afterschool program for grade school children called Power Company. The program focus was split between music and games/activities. Susan initiated several musical productions that combined the church choir and the Power choir. Among these all-church productions were the musicals, *Timothy, Silas and Paul; Oh, Jonah;* and *Elijah, Man of Fire*.

Susan Kierely-Moore was an accomplished musician and filled in as church organist. She eventually replaced long time organist Aurethia "Pete" Harris when she retired. A group of young women formed "Joy Song," a musical group that introduced contemporary music to worship. Ken was an outstanding vocalist and coordinated the Annual Church Choral Festival, bringing together various churches.

Ken had a very ecumenical spirit, which in a few short years found him serving as president of the Montana Association of Churches. He also served as Spiritual Director for the Walk to Emmaus in Helena.

His years in Helena had a great impact on the secular community, as he was involved in several local ministries. He was founder and Coordinator of the Ecumenical Jail Chaplaincy Program, and served as Law Enforcement Chaplain for the Helena Police Department, and the Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's Department for fifteen years. During this time First

Christian Church of Helena began a special "Community Services" Sunday, recognizing Helena's law enforcement officers and fire fighters.

Ken served as President of "United Way," ultimately receiving the Community Spirit Award. His dedication and service with "Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies" resulted in the Kenneth Moore Award, established as a "Community Award of Excellence in Improving Maternal, Family and Child Health". Ken Moore touched the larger community in other ways. He served as president of the Helena Kiwanis, and provided a daily sixty-second meditation on KMTX-FM radio entitled "Seed Thots."

Steve Betz, a talented guitarist and song leader, joined the church in 1995. As the church choir was winding down, Steve was asked to bring special music, "Songs of Joy," to the worship service. Together Ken and Steve were instrumental in forming a second Sunday worship service. Soon the church had an 8:30 contemporary service in addition to the 11:00 traditional service. Steve Betz remained involved in the congregation's music ministry for over twenty-two years, retiring in January 2018.

Ken, Susan, and their son, James, participated in the Montana region's work trip to Honduras on January 13—23, 1997. The trip consisted only of Montana clergy except for Susan and James, and James had the distinction of being the only youth on the trip.

Ken closed his ministry at Helena on July 9, 2000, to become regional minister of the Christian Church in Nebraska.

Jack L. Hart and his wife, Phyllis, were happy to return and provide the congregation's interim ministry. Parishioners from his Helena ministry years of 1962—1972 were happy to reconnect with him and Phyllis.

Steve Moody began serving the church in 2001. This was another reunion, as Steve had grown up in the Helena church. In fact, he had been a youth during the years that Jack Hart was the minister. At this time worship was taking on a more casual tone, both in worship style, music, and the attire of attendees. The front area of the sanctuary was remodeled, removing the

two large built-in pulpits and the modesty rail on each side. The expanded chancel area was done to accommodate a praise band.

The church increased its focus on outreach when Mary Larsen began S.O.S. (Service on Saturdays) Projects, including work at Habitat for Humanity, bell ringing for Salvation Army, cleaning projects at the Florence Crittenden Home for children and young families, and the continuation of the quilting group, making quilts for the children at Helena's Shodair Hospital, as well as the CWF's annual craft bazaar.

In 2005 the church youth groups joined with Covenant United Methodist in a "Logos" program. In the spring of 2006 the musical production of "Celebrate Life" was performed. The partnership lasted for four years.

A team of seven members joined the regional program, "Leaven," that Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher introduced in 2005. Susan Brown, Brenda Johnson, Millie Johnson, Linda Kindrick, Barbara Lancaster, Genii Skoog, and Steve Moody joined other regional teams in a three-year focus on "church transformation." With the group just starting, Steve Moody retired in June 2006.

Bill Robey came as an intentional interim minister and worked with the "Leaven" team to complete the renewal process for FCC. Bill and Connie Robey brought energy to the church that enabled continued focus on the vision and mission for the church.

Co-ministers Scott and Laurie Budlong-Morse began their ministry in November 2007. In 2008 the church began a "Change Your World Campaign," promoting a greater focus on reaching out to the community.

In April 2008 Alison Malensek, Barb and Brad Lancaster, and Scott Budlong-Morse joined others on the regional mission trip to New Orleans. For one week they helped families repair homes that were damaged in Hurricane Katrina, and listened to the stories during the days, while learning more about the community and the recovery process at night. Laurie Budlong-Morse helped organize and lead a prayer service at the capitol in

support of the Montana Association of Churches' focus on "Abolition of the Death Penalty" at the Legislature.

In November 2009 the pews in the sanctuary were replaced with chairs. The sale of the century-old pews helped pay for the chairs. People from around Montana came to purchase pews. During Laurie and Scott's years in Helena, the tradition of baptism at Cane Ridge West was started. The first year, it was a small overnight retreat for the families, elders, and congregation that wanted to attend.

In 2010 the church joined other churches in Helena to begin the Family Promise ministry, which helps homeless families with children to regain sustainability with a home and income. With the leadership of Mary Larsen, in January 2011 the church hosted the first "Comfort Food Challenge," a Family Promise fundraiser in the sanctuary.

Around this time the church went to one combined 10 AM worship service, with music led by the praise band. By 2010 Mark VanAlstyne had joined the band and was soon leading a second praise band on occasion, and then once a month. In 2015 Mark and Steve began leading worship music on alternating Sundays.

In 2011 the "Sew 'til You Glow" group began meeting monthly for a full day of quilting, crafting, and fellowship. Everyone was welcomed to come, and loaner sewing machines were available for those wanting to learn how to sew. An outreach of the group was making pillow cases and filling them with items to be given to the women at the YWCA.

Scott and Laurie Budlong-Morse concluded their ministry in Helena in December 2011. Scott began work for the Pension Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indianapolis, while Laurie returned to school in a Master's degree program.

In March 2012 Paul Pryor was called as an intentional interim. He began working with a steering committee to finish assessment work, then create and introduce a new mission and vision statement, which was, "Reach, Teach, Rejoice in God's Love."

Paul Holland began his ministry in Helena in the fall of 2013. A native Montanan, Paul was glad to return. In June 2014 Paul, his wife Debbie, Mary Larsen, Barb Lancaster, and others from around the Montana region traveled to Kalispell's Central Christian to help with a Work Week project as part of that church's New Beginnings program.

Prior to Paul's arrival in Helena, Monica Bomgaars had led some activities approaching fitness in a prayerful way. Paul and Debbie shared Monica's vision, and in 2013 the "Run for God" program, a combination body and soul fitness, was formed. In 2017 sixteen "Run for God" partners participated in the Governor's Cup in June.

With the leadership of Debbie Holland, Shanna Semmens, and Genii Winter, "The Prodigal Daughters" began in 2015 as a women's study, inviting all women in Helena into active study and fellowship. The congregation bid farewell to Paul Holland in July 2016, as he accepted a call to a ministry in Michigan.

Dana Keener was called to pastor First Christian Church of Helena, beginning February 15, 2017.

A 2018 gathering of people at FCC in Helena

SENIOR MINISTERS at First Christian Church of Helena

Thomas K. Devitt	1980—1985
Kenneth W. Moore	1986—2000
J. Steve Moody	2001—2006
Scott & Laurie Budlong-Morse	2007—2011
Paul Holland	2013—2016
Dana Lee Keener	2017—Present

Interim Ministers have included Newell F. Morgan (1985), Jack L. Hart (2000), Bill Robey (2006-- 2007), Paul Pryor (2012), and pulpit supply (2016).

A Timothy of the congregation during this period was Steve Moody, a student from Helena reported on page 258 of *Big Sky Disciples*, who returned to serve Helena later as pastor.

Joliet Christian Church of Joliet

JOLIET, Joliet Christian Church

Joliet Christian Church dates from October 1908, as reported on pages 93 and 259—261 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The congregation began as an outcome of a revival led by Walter M. Jordan, pastor of First Christian Church of Billings and singing evangelist Lucille May Park. Those who became the forty-five charter members of the Joliet church had already been in contact with Oliver G. Shanklin, an ordained Disciples minister who was the principal of the high school. After the revival Shanklin began conducting Sunday worship in a rented hall, while plans were immediately set in motion to construct a building. With the help of the entire Joliet community, the building was dedicated on June

2, 1909. The cooperation of the community was an indicator of things to come. In its early years, it is said to have become something of a community church with a membership reaching 80. Even though future pastorates were short in Joliet, the church remained strong.

This history of this congregation picks up with David Scott Logue as pastor of Joliet Christian Church and Community Congregational Church in Columbus from 1979—1984. In 1984 Joliet Christian Church made the decision to break the yoke with Community Congregational Church and call its own pastor. During the interim ministry of Vernon Poe and of Earl Moore, the congregation remodeled the parsonage in anticipation of the arrival of a new minister.

Joseph Strange came in mid-1986, and was the first full time pastor, following the yoked ministry years. Strange died suddenly on Saturday night, September 12, 1987, after serving the church for just over one year. He was 37 years old. Because it was late in the day when he died, many came to church the following morning not knowing their pastor was deceased.

During Joe's brief time at the church, he had a significant impact on the congregation. One person in particular, Mary Callard Bohman, gives him strong marks. She had recently moved to Joliet, and he inspired her to become a Disciple. After his death she was further inspired to pursue a seminary education for full time ministry.

On July 21, 1996, during 10 AM worship, Mary Bohman was ordained to the Christian ministry after receiving her Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree from the Divinity School at Vanderbilt. Mary, in her *Relocation Form* (dated June 8, 1996, and used by ministers seeking a ministry position), wrote, "I was unchurched for most of my adult life but discovered the Disciples through Joe [Strange] and joined the Joliet church [in 1986]. Joe's sense of God's presence was awesome." A paragraph further on, she continued, "God was urging me toward the ordained ministry." These words were written just weeks before her ordination.

In addition to spiritual matters, the church kept an eye on its property. It put on a new roof in 1989 and did a major renovation of the bell tower in the summer of 1994. Also, in 1994 the Montana Christian News reported

that the CWF served its annual Election Day Dinner, an event that has been held regularly since the church's founding in 1908.

In March 2000 the church board decided to tithe 10% of its income. Off the top, 25% of the 10% is given to the Disciples Mission Fund. Each month the board discusses any need within the community. The church community has been so blessed by tithing that as of 2016, the board tithes 13% each month.

In the spring and summer of 2003, the basement was remodeled. The Montana region supported the church with a Miracle Day on May 10. Disciples came from all over the state for the weekend to jump start the project. Sheetrock was carried to the basement, new electrical wires installed, painting the entryways to both back doors, and many more projects were accomplished that weekend. When the project was complete, the whole basement had been painted, and new flooring installed. The kitchen was totally remodeled with new cabinets, appliances, and wiring.

Once again, on November 2, 2005, the pastor of the congregation died suddenly. John Lauenberg, who had been pastor for almost six years, had a heart attack while attending a local Ministerial Association meeting. Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher presided at the memorial service celebrating his life.

Larry Pray, retired UCC minister living in nearby Big Timber, came immediately to serve as interim minister through Advent. He and others then served as pulpit supply while the congregation searched for a called pastor. Larry Pray completed his ministry at the church and was followed by Neil Lindorff, who did supply preaching and pastoring two days a week.

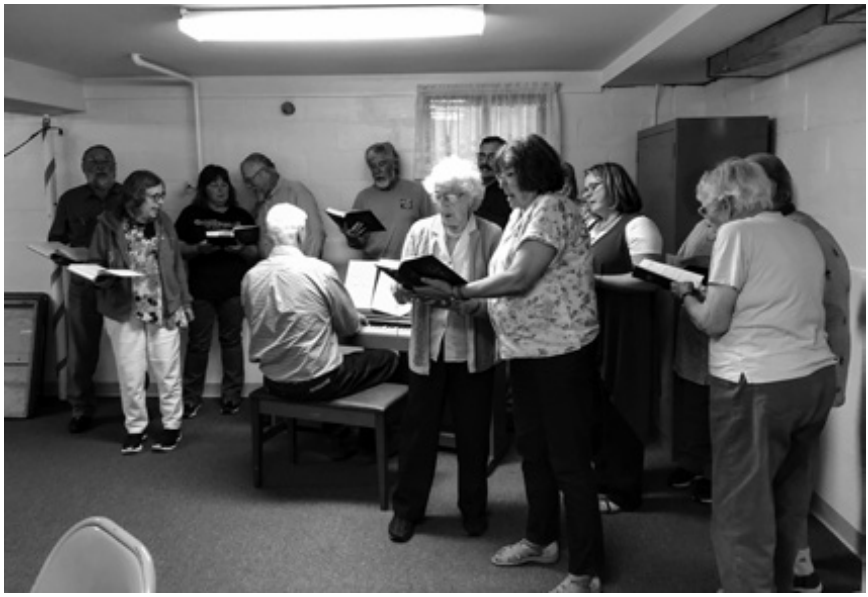
In September 2008 John and Dana Keener, a Disciples clergy couple came to Montana from Nebraska. John was called to Joliet while Dana was called as associate minister to Central Christian Church in Billings. Both John and Dana were installed the same day in October by Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher.

During this period many improvements continued to be made to the building. They included painting the outside of the building, a handicap ramp,

a new roof, an enlarged parking lot, and a new bell tower fence. The tower fence tumbled in the wind not too long after being installed. The church building itself is one of the oldest buildings in Joliet, and was added to the Montana Historical Record in 2009, while the congregation celebrated its 100th anniversary.

In 2011, a new covenant was adopted by the church to replace the constitution. The new covenant's core values are Bible-centered, hospitable, sacred journey, spiritual growth, and peace/wholeness/shalom. The church no longer has members, but instead, participants.

On May 25, 2011, the town of Joliet flooded, putting 18 inches of water in the church basement. The lower cabinets in the new kitchen, flooring, hot water heater, and furnace were all ruined. Week of Compassion funds were immediately sent to help. Insurance paid for the cleanup and replacement of the ruined materials.

The parsonage was sold in February 2014. The funds were placed in a parsonage fund with Disciples Church Extension Fund. It is gaining interest and will be there if the church ever wishes to purchase a different parsonage.

A 2018 gathering of people at JCC in Joliet

MINISTERS at Joliet Christian Church

David Scott Logue	1979—1984
Joseph Strange	1986—1987
Thomas (Bo) Midkiff	1988—1990
Milton Bryarly	1991—1993
Bruce and Lorraine Bailey	1995—1999
John Lauenberg	1999—2005
John Keener	2008—Present

Interim Ministers have included Vernon Poe (1984), Earl Moore (1984—1986), Barton A. Dowdy (1987—1988), George Shoemaker (1990—1991), William Conner (1994—1995), Larry Pray (2005—2006), and Neil Lindorff (2006—2007).

Joliet Christian Church's Priscilla during this period was Mary Callard Bohman (1943—2006). After seminary and ordination (1996), she served jointly at Ballentine United Church of Christ and Huntley United Methodist Church before her death.

Central Christian Church of Kalispell

KALISPELL, Central Christian Church

Central Christian Church in Kalispell dates its beginning from 1898 when a small group of Disciples were meeting at Spring Creek about six miles northwest of Kalispell, as reported on pages 261—264 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The one-hundredth anniversary of the congregation was celebrated by Central Christian Church in 1998, using the date of the establishment of the original Spring Creek congregation as its beginning. A worship service was held near the site of the original meetings along with visits to the nearby Bondurant

(founding family) homestead site, and a barbeque was held with various activities, including members dressing in pioneer garb to have their photos taken in a Conestoga wagon.

Many members of the Kalispell congregation were heavily involved in the construction of the Cane Ridge West lodge near Lincoln, from its inception as a dream in 1980, to its completion and dedication in September 1984, much of which is recorded on pages 169—175 of *Big Sky Disciples*. Kalispell members played key roles, including Leo and Ruth Renfrow serving as the general contractors, Ron Lyford overseeing the plumbing, and George Hanson overseeing the electrical work with dozens of Kalispell members working on weekends to help finish the buildings and grounds. In the ensuing years, numerous members assisted in further development of the facility, which has come to be known as Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center.

Central Christian Church in Kalispell, over the years, has produced a number of young people entering the Christian ministry. Among them is Gary A. Shoemaker, who with his spouse, Tamalyn L. Kralman, has been introduced in this book's history of Central Christian Church of Billings. He also is listed among the ministers who have served the Disciples congregation at Polson.

For more than twenty years, beginning in August 1988 and last reported in the *Montana Christian News* in 2009, the Flathead Valley Disciples from Columbia Falls, Kalispell, Polson and Whitefish on a Sunday afternoon joined in an annual "Worship in the Park." They gathered in Glacier National Park for praise at the Apgar Amphitheatre overlooking Lake McDonald, then journeyed to the Avalanche Campground Amphitheatre for scripture and a devotional, and concluded at the Logan Pass summit of Going To The Sun Road with a brief communion service. The event was publicized region-wide and park visitors were encouraged to attend the outdoor service. Attendance was often forty or more.

In the mid-1990s the carpeting and pew coverings in Central Christian's sanctuary were replaced, and beautiful stained glass windows designed by member Harold Van Dusen, were installed. Also during this period, a new

handicap-accessible entrance with a lift (elevator) was added to the building. The women of the church sewed new curtains for windows in the educational wing. In 2002 a major make-over of the kitchen and fellowship hall was completed, with all non-technical work done by volunteers from the congregation. This included replacing the stoves and making new window coverings.

During Week of the Ministry in 1995 the congregation honored Betty Williams for twenty-eight years of service as church secretary, and in the spring of 1996 she retired after twenty-nine years of service. Betty is the mother of Kathy McKerrow who was on staff in the Montana regional church office from 1983 to 2012.

From year to year the congregation regularly maintained various forms of ministry beyond itself. From January 13—23, 1997, Terry Van Heyningen was part of a Montana regional church work trip to Honduras. The congregation also participated in ministry to both the Yakama Christian Mission and the Colorado Christian Home. In 2000 Stan Shoemaker, a member of the congregation, was named to serve on the board of directors of the Yakama Christian Mission. Historically, the Yakama Christian Mission at times was known as Yakima Indian Mission and on pages 147 and 220 of *Big Sky Disciples* was called White Swan Indian Mission.

Many different enrichment activities have been undertaken during the thirty-three years from 1984 to 2018. Of note were "Cabin Fever" retreat weekends at Essex in February or March each year; Cabin Fever workshops at the church on weeknights; Laymen's Weekend retreats; Prime-Timers (seniors) day trips to area sights and events; members going on the regional church's work trips including to New Orleans after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005; participation in many community ecumenical services; many different Bible studies during the week at various times of the year, including Lent; sponsorship of parenting groups aimed at breaking the cycle of child abuse and violence; congregational picnics at the Shoemaker and Tinseth summer homes on Ashley Lake; a once-per-month movie and discussion night, with films chosen for some aspect that relates to faith; hosting Harvest/Thanksgiving dinner, both for Central Christian folks and for those who attend the other ministries that use the church building.

The women of the church, functioning as a CWF group, led the whole congregation in many outreach ministries in the Kalispell community. For nearly twenty years the church has helped at a benefit luncheon for a community "fund of last resort" for the Neighbors In Need, being in charge of cutting upwards of 200 pies into servings. From 2008 to the present, the church has taken dinner monthly to serve from a dozen to thirty people at The Ray of Hope, a local homeless shelter. In honor of long-time member Freda Mahugh, the dinner was named "Freda's Feast."

Beginning about 2000, each spring for more than ten years, the CWF with help from the congregation, hand-made over 1,000 chocolate-covered Easter eggs with four different filling flavors. The funds raised from the sale of the eggs, usually in excess of $1,000, was used to support five local charities, and to purchase needed items for the upkeep or furnishings of the church building, including kitchen items.

In recent years the church has rented or given free use of parts of the building to other ministries, notably Feeding the Flathead (dinners for the homeless cooked in our kitchen by various community groups and served in our fellowship hall approximately a dozen nights per month), the Hope City Church (Sunday worship & dinner for "those down on their luck," plus a warming room with internet access, and occasional overnight sleeping in the winter), and some space used for worship and fellowship by the Community Congregational United Church of Christ congregation.

Additionally, beginning on December 31, 1999, the congregation participated as a host allowing the use of its sanctuary as an entertainment venue for the community's non-alcoholic New Year's Eve celebration, "First Night," until its final year on December 31, 2015, when this Flathead area festivity became financially and logistically unfeasible.

In 2009 the congregation contacted Church Extension in Indianapolis (Disciples General Ministry), and did a New Beginnings Assessment, which was held on July 23, 2009, at the church. It included a complete tour of the facilities, a "windshield tour" of the community to confirm the demographic data, and an hour-long meeting with key leaders and financial officers of the

church, as well as Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher. That evening a further meeting was held with about thirty participants of the congregation.

"Cottage Meetings" were then held in the fall to discuss the findings, and the future path of the church. Among the challenges the congregation faced were fewer than fifty in worship, an aging membership (more than half being over age 70, lagging energy, an oversized facility, growing maintenance needs, and financial concerns.

In November 2009 the congregation voted to sell the building and move to a new location in a growing part of the community. However, they rejected the New Beginnings consultant's recommendation to (close and) restart the congregation, and instead go for "Mission Redefinition" with a passion for relevant twenty-first century ministry.

In January 2010 they listed the property for $1,200,000. On March 21, 2010, during morning worship a transition team was commissioned. That same month the pastor, Jan Van der Poll, announced his intention to retire, and on May 23, 2010, the congregation celebrated his ministry.

The Transition Team then called Charles W. (Chuck) Shannon to be interim minister, beginning in July 2010. Chuck came as an interim, then in conferring with Ruth Fletcher and congregational leaders, accepted the invitation to be the called minister.

The building which had been listed for $1,200,000 was put on the market for $900,000, and received only a couple of serious inquiries. After two years of trying to sell the building, they took it off the market. A staff member of Church Extension said the building's structural integrity was much better than they thought, when they removed it from the market.

Ruth Fletcher offered Central $20,000 as a loan from the region from the sale of the Butte church property to do needed repairs of the building (the loan to be paid back upon sale of the building), along with financial help from the General Church.

As the regional church had done in 1995 at Deer Lodge, and in 2003 at Joliet, it organized a work period at Kalispell. With financial help and with

volunteers joining Kalispell workers, the upper rooms of the education wing were renovated with assistance from those from many Montana congregations, and a few volunteers from other regions. Outdoor upkeep included revamping the Paxton Courtyard into a more open space with new landscape plants. In 2018 due to overnight loitering issues in the courtyard, which is in a downtown location, the courtyard received a further makeover. It was re-named the Paxton-Alguire Court in honor of the bequest enabling the work. Landscaping included rock, shrubs, flowers, a bench, and a wrought-iron fence and gate. Members of the congregation take turns unlocking and re-locking the gate for daytime use each day.

Statistically, the church had declined in average weekly worship attendance over the years from 131 in 1984 to thirty-five in 2016, according to the *Disciples Year Book*. But the spirit of the current membership remains strong. The history of Central Christian Church in Kalispell is well-summed up by a long-time member who recently said, "It exemplifies the love, friendship, and genuine caring of our members, not only one for another, but for our community and world. While currently small in numbers, we are mighty servants of God."

A 2018 gathering of people at CCC in Kalispell

SENIOR MINISTERS at Central Christian Church of Kalispell

M. Eugene Mockabee	1980—1988
James D. (Jim) Simpson	1989—1991
Terry Van Heyningen	1992—1999
Jan Van der Poll	2001—2010
Charles W. (Chuck) Shannon	2010—2017

Interim Ministers from beyond the congregation have been Russell Hensley, George Tolman, Cliff Peightal, Chuck Shannon, and Ron Naff. Volunteer interim pastoring from within the congregation have been Lois Lyford, and Mary and Bobby Smith ("Bobby" is the name on his birth certificate). Mike Woods often filled the pulpit on special occasion Sundays.

A Timothy of the congregation during this period was Gary A. Shoemaker. He is listed on pages 137, 209, and 263 of *Big Sky Disciples*. He is also listed in this volume at the end of the section on Central CC of Billings. After seminary graduation he and his spouse, Tamalyn Kralman, were ordained together on July 25, 1986, and co-pastored Polson Christian Church.

First Christian/ United Christian Church of Miles City

MILES CITY, United Christian Church (before 1999 First Christian Church and Highland Park Congregational United Church of Christ)

First Christian Church in Miles City dates from 1910, as reported on pages 93—95 and 265—267 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The desire of the Disciples to establish churches in eastern Montana led State Secretary-Evangelist J. S. Raum to work with the Disciples in Miles City, who were asking for help to get a congregation going. In mid-August 1910

a month-long evangelistic meeting was held in a large tent. On Sunday, September 11, 1910, a covenant of support was signed by 44 charter members. Land was purchased at Pearl and South Center Streets, a building was erected, and a dedication was held on October 23, 1910.

The *Big Sky Disciples* authors note that this was surely some kind of record for prompt action. Records indicate that Raum appears to have returned to Miles City about twice a month for several months to lead worship services, followed by J. L. Lemon who resided there as minister for six months in 1911. Miles City's history of ministers from 1911 to 1971 includes a list of thirty clergy having served there. This was not a reflection on the congregation but on the remoteness of the city and the roller coaster hard times of living in eastern Montana during the period. For instance, it is reported on page 94 of *Big Sky Disciples* that in July 1929 the minister at Miles City planned to attend the state convention in Kalispell, which was a two and a half day automobile drive, just to get there.

When *Big Sky Disciples* was published, Leslie H. Payne was the minister of the Disciples church in Miles City. But the story is larger. Payne served as pastor in 1960—1963, then became chaplain at the local Montana Industrial School for Boys, now known as Pine Hills Youth Correctional Facility.

Although the church was pastored by a succession of three others, Leslie Payne gave the church steady assistance in times of need and in 1971 returned to pastoring the church on a half-time basis. All along, his wife, Norlene, gave leadership in the Sunday School and the music program. On January 12, 1990, Payne retired from his chaplaincy at Pine Hills School for Boys and turned his attention fully to First Christian Church.

Leslie Payne retired April 1, 1997, from the congregation and moved to Turner, Oregon. Needless to say, Payne broke the short term ministry mold for Miles City ministers and for Disciples ministers in the Montana region. Although intermittent and part-time, Payne was part of the life of the congregation in Miles City from 1960 to 1997.

Miles City is approximately 145 miles east of Billings. Yet its members served beyond their community. Peggy Jerrel (*MCN*, Feb-March 1992) who was a member of First Christian Church served on the campaign executive committee of the Montana Association of Churches and the New Century Fund II campaign, a state-wide ecumenical organization. Miles City people attended regional assemblies, regional board meetings and events at Cane Ridge West near Lincoln.

Leslie Payne was followed by Grace S. Lorenz as interim minister, who served until the end of that year. During the remainder of that year, the congregation invited Regional Minister Karen Frank-Plumlee to come and do an all-church survey, which she had done with good results in several other Disciples congregations around Montana.

In late 1997 the church leaders, after a conversation between DOC member Peg Jerrel and UCC member Jess Stickney, conversed with Bob Thaden, pastor at Highland Park Congregational United Church of Christ in Miles City about serving them. Due to that conversation and the survey, the congregation voted to begin a yoked ministry with Highland Park United Church of Christ, effective January 11, 1998. Bob Thaden was named to serve as pastor to both congregations with separate buildings, services, and boards. One congregation would worship earlier in the morning than the other.

As summer approached, since neither church had air conditioning, and neither wished to worship late Sunday morning, the congregations agreed to worship together for the summer months. They held worship the first part of the summer in First Christian's building and the remainder of the summer in the Highland Park UCC building. At the end of summer they split up again, but by the end of September, First Christian Church voted to stop worshipping alone and, as a group, would join in worship with Highland Park Church.

There was discussion about simply closing First Christian, but Thaden reminded members that they had a significant tradition in Miles City as perhaps the oldest protestant congregation in the community. He urged them

instead to send a letter to Highland Park Church to see if they would consider a yoked or merged ministry. Under Thaden's leadership that fall the two congregations took further steps to becoming a united congregation.

The merger became effective January 1, 1999, with the new name of United Christian Church and Bob Thaden as full-time minister of the one body. The new congregation committed to continuing to support programs and missions of both the Disciples and the United Church of Christ. *Chalice Hymnals* were purchased and the congregation began using both them and the United Church of Christ hymnals. The congregation began meeting in what was the Highland Park building, and First Christian's building and parsonage were placed on the market for sale.

The Disciples parsonage quickly sold and the proceeds were used to fund the construction of a new fellowship hall, and fortify the church savings account. Much of the work was done by volunteers, led by Thaden who was well-versed in construction. Stained glass windows from the FCC building were placed in the new addition, and were dedicated in memory of former pastor Leslie H. Payne, with the hall itself being named Disciples Hall. A news article in 1999 reported that United Christian Church was the only air-conditioned church in Miles City.

In 2000 Thaden went on sabbatical to Europe for the summer and Robert Shy, a church member and licensed lay ministry student, provided pastoral leadership. Thaden served until the end of May 2001, when he resigned to become camp manager of the United Church of Christ's Camp Mimanagish.

Caroline Fleming served as interim minister until the call of Darryl W. Kistler as new minister beginning January 27, 2002. Kistler was a UCC student educated at Brite, the Disciples seminary at Texas Christian University, and ordained by the United Church of Christ just days before coming as minister to the congregation. In keeping with the spirit of the congregation on April 6, 2002, John Schaeffer, Montana-Wyoming Conference Minister (UCC) and Ruth Fletcher, Montana Regional Minister, participated together in the installation of Darryl Kistler as new minister at Miles City.

During the years 2002—2005 a childcare center intermittently used the church building. Beginning in September 2003 the church provided a Saturday evening worship service. The church also participated each summer in an ecumenical Vacation Bible School with the Methodists and Presbyterians. The church youth also went Christmas caroling with the Methodists and Presbyterians.

Kistler resigned on October 31, 2004, to be a campus minister in Ohio. The church spent most of a year searching for a new minister. A news article reported that Dorothy Zabrocki, chaplain of Holy Rosary Health Center and a trained Catholic lay parish worker was among those filling the pulpit during the interim period.

A congregational profile was completed on January 19, 2005, which said that the church had seventy participating members, no indebtedness and permanent funds of $58,660. For the three years of 2002 to 2004 their annual local expenses ranged from $56,203 to $47,589, their basic mission giving to DOC & UCC combined, averaged $3,500 annually, and local outreach averaged $1,106 annually. Their community ministries were: Custer County Food Bank, Meals on Wheels, Habitat for Humanity, Hospice, and Education. Their ecumenical activities were the CROP Walk, Lenten Breakfast, Vacation Bible School, and Ministerial Association.

A Call was extended on October 2, 2005, to Kathryn Jeannie Douglas to be United's new minister. She, and her life partner Debbie Manley, were inspired to be coming to the open-minded congregation. Jeannie Douglas's installation was April 9, 2006. Under her leadership church members organized an actor's group to present skits and plays. All seemed well. The regular ministries and outreach endeavors continued, as noted above. Nevertheless, some unhappiness with the minister was surfacing. A Listening Conference was held April 11, 2007, and forty members were interviewed. By mid-summer Jeannie Douglas resigned and she and her spouse moved to Wisconsin.

Various members then filled the pulpit until mid-November when Joel W. Biggers came as new licensed designated pastor. In October he had

just completed the classwork of the Interim Ministry Network (IMN), including skills for working with conflicted congregations. Later that year, he led an evening "Service of Healing and Letting Go" at which twenty-five attended, including four people who had left the congregation when Jeannie Douglas resigned. It was eventful and they returned.

In 2008 the church began a new shepherding program. On January 10, 2009, Joel Biggers was ordained as a United Church of Christ minister, and installed as the called minister of United Christian Church. In the fall, ahead of Advent and of the ordination, the church held several work parties to paint the exterior of the building and install new windows. In the fall of 2009 portions of the interior of the church were painted and stain applied to parts of the exterior. A labyrinth was set up at Joel Biggers' home.

In June 2010 Biggers began a Doctor of Ministry program and the church began "Exploration 101," an alternative worship. In addition to regular mission and outreach, a bake sale netted over $700 to aid Haiti earthquake victims. The congregation also hosted the Annual Meeting of the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference of the United Church of Christ with about a hundred in attendance.

In mid-2011, Joel moved to New Jersey to serve a United Church of Christ congregation there. Bob Thaden again served as interim minister until the beginning of May 2012. At that time Amber Dixson, a recent graduate of Chapman University in California and Christian Theological Seminary Indiana, began to serve the congregation. Amber, the daughter of a Disciples of Christ pastor with strong Montana roots, was ordained at United Christian Church in June 2012.

In January 2014 Amber Dixson resigned as installed minister, and Bob Zadow began serving the church as a Lay Pastor. He was finishing study and training for licensure from the United Church of Christ, which came later that year. In January 2015 the congregation voted to establish a Team Ministry consisting of Bob Zadow, Dixie Rieger, and Bob Thaden, with Zadow acting as church administrator and with each of the three team

members sharing worship, pastoral care, and planning. Dorothy Zabrocki was also invited to participate in leading worship.

In January 2018 Amber Dixson Richardson returned with her husband Lee to the congregation, and was welcomed to the Ministry Team which has continued to serve the church. In April 2018 Zadow resigned from the team, citing personal health, as well as significant responsibilities as a Social Security counselor, as reasons to leave the team.

During the last four years with the Team Ministry in place, the congregation's Mission Committee has energized the congregation's support for both local and mission abroad. Having significantly lower ministry costs freed up funds for expressing compassion more broadly.

The congregation continues to maintain a broad welcome to all people, celebrating the diversity of races, religions, creeds, sexual orientations and/or other distinctions, and has enjoyed the breadth of conversation and preaching styles that four to five different preachers bring to Sunday worship. In January 2018 the congregation voted again strongly to continue the Team Ministry approach.

A 2018 gathering of people at UCC in Miles City

MINISTERS at First Christian/ United Christian of Miles City

Leslie H. Payne	1971—1997
Robert L. (Bob) Thaden, Jr.	1998—2001
Darryl W. Kistler	2002—2004
Kathryn Jeannie Douglas	2005—2007
Joel W. Biggers	2007—2011
Amber (Dixson) Richardson	2012—2014
**Team Ministry	2015—2018

Interim Ministers included Grace S. Lorenz (1997—1998), Caroline Fleming (2001), Dorothy Zabrocki (2005), Bob Thaden (2011—2012), and lay member Bob Zadow (2014).

**The Team Ministry are all credentialed pastors and members of the congregation. They include Dixie Rieger, Bob Thaden, Dorothy Zabrocki, Amber (Dixson) Richardson, and until early 2018, Bob Zadow, who was a licensed lay pastor.

First Christian Church of Missoula

MISSOULA, First Christian Church

First Christian Church in Missoula dates from the fall of 1884, as reported on pages 33—35, 195—196 and 267—272 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The congregation began under the name of the Church of Christ in Missoula, and changed its name to the First Christian Church in 1960 at the time of its relocation to Russell Street and the dedication of its new building.

Earl Sample came to Missoula as minister at First Christian Church in 1983, less than a year before *Big Sky Disciples* was published. Sample is remembered fondly as a popular pastor, who led the congregation to some of its higher average worship attendance (AWA) numbers before he retired on August 31, 1991. The Disciples *Year Book* records AWA his first year as 112 with a steady climb to 156 average weekly attendees during 1986 and 1987. Then like most Disciples congregations, Missoula's numbers started declining until the 1991 number was 112, the same as when he began eight years earlier.

During this period three persons were in varying stages of responding to the call to ministry. In 1987 Gerard F. (Gerry) Ouellette from the congregation entered Lexington Theological Seminary, graduated in 1991 and returned for ordination at Missoula FCC on August 4, 1991. He was later called to serve at Polson. Grace Stempke Lorenz received her MA in theological studies at Claremont in 1989 and was ordained at the church on June 14, 1992. At the time of her ordination, Grace was the interim minister serving the UCC congregations at Columbus & Absarokee. In 1987 Kenneth McKenzie went to TCU in Texas as a music ministry major. Then on September 3, 1995, the Missoula congregation was host for his ordination at Cane Ridge West during the Montana region's annual Labor Day weekend celebration known as Congress of Christians.

The December 1987—January 1988 *Montana Christian News* reported that the congregation had two men's basketball teams, from high school age up, playing in a city church league. Later, the June—July 1993 *Montana Christian News* reported that the congregation had a co-ed church softball team.

After Sample's retirement in 1991, Glenn R. Johnson served as interim minister. He was not new to Missoula, having served as campus minister at the University of Montana, and earlier, served pastorates in Miles City (1955-57) and Hamilton (1959-63).

Daniel M. Dixson began his Missoula pastorate on September 1, 1992. Soon, he would be leading the congregation in planning for and hosting

Montana's 1994 Regional Assembly. Average worship attendance during 1993 and 1994 was running 126 to 129, as noted in the *Disciples Year Book*.

The 1995 year began with Lenten Soup Suppers each Wednesday of Lent. During the year the church purchased new *Chalice Hymnals*. It installed new wooden playground equipment in the outdoor playground area. But more importantly, the church entered into a two-year *Voyage of Discovery* which began with Regional Minister Karen Frank-Plumlee conducting interviews ("Listening Conferences") with members and friends of the congregation, as part of a self-assessment.

As it did each year, the church conducted its annual Western Montana Fair parking project in late summer. Since the church is located across the street from the fairgrounds, and since it had a large parking lot, it annually charged Fair attendees for parking, and netted over $5,000 for the church's general budget. In this typical year fifty-five persons helped with the Fair week parking project, and it brought in $5,397.

On December 4, 1995, a wind storm ripped a majority of the roof off of the fellowship hall, followed by rain and snow, causing considerable damage. While church members were reeling from the property loss, they received a pleasant surprise. Week of Compassion sent $1,000 to assist the church in its time of need.

In early 1997 the church purchased a new piano for the sanctuary with memorial money. This became the prelude to a fall drive to raise $12,000 to refurbish the sanctuary. The overall project was completed in 1998, which included painting the sanctuary, re-upholstering the pews, and purchasing new choir robes.

The church had been on a multi-year *Voyage of Discovery* and self-assessment. As an outcome of their study, the church in the fall of 1998 began a new style of ministry using a cabinet of leaders in four areas of ministry: worship, congregational life, mission/outreach, and faith development.

If structure helped the church function, fellowship groups helped the church embody life during this period. The "Top of the Hill Gang" was often

mentioned in bulletins and news items, as it hosted a reunion dinner, or did some outreach program. The youth group hosted the annual church talent show. The Christian Men's Fellowship (CMF) met monthly for breakfast, and responded to needs as they arose. The Christian Women's Fellowship (CWF) was possibly the most active group. For instance, the 1998 CWF annual holiday bazaar raised over $1,300 for outreach. In mid-1999 the Senior Adult Group renamed itself the "Goldeneers Group," as it continued to organize trips and fellowship activities.

There were various outreach ministries, such as having an ice cream social to raise money for the Good Samaritans fund, and hosting the church's annual back-to-school clothing swap in late August.

Early in 1997 Dan Dixson in addition to his work at the church began to work with Community Medical Center to set up a volunteer chaplaincy program. This endeavor eventually led him to discover his true calling. He concluded his ministry with First Christian Church in August 2000 to begin full time chaplaincy at Missoula Community Medical Center.

Eugene C. Hill, III, began his interim ministry with the congregation on September 1, 2000, and ended it on February 10, 2002. During that time, he led the congregation in hosting the Montana Regional Assembly, much as Dan had done when he first came to Missoula. During his ministry in early 2001, the church renamed the fellowship hall "The Paul Dean Hill Fellowship Hall," honoring Hill's long ministry with the congregation and his contribution to other Disciples congregations in Montana. The loving action was timely as Paul Dean Hill died on August 8 of that year. He had served the Missoula congregation from 1964—78. Paul Dean Hill and Gene Hill were not related to each other.

Gene Hill had hoped to turn his interim ministry at the church into a called position. But clergy ethics and denominational policy prevented him from that plan. So he resigned on short notice, and in mid-February Clifford Peightal came to serve out the interim period leading to the call of Douglas Andrew Garner on June 1, 2002, as pastor of First Christian Church.

Congregational life continued with its routines and annual events under Doug Garner's leadership. That summer the church sent twenty-one campers and one staff person to the regional youth camps at Cane Ridge West.

In the fall of 2003 an alternative contemporary worship service known as "New Day" was begun on Friday evenings. The contemporary worship band was known as DayBreak. The contemporary service enjoyed some success, and switched to Thursday evenings for the summer in 2004. During this time Doug Garner took an increasing interest in being part of a new church start in northwest Missoula. As that interest grew, he resigned from First Christian Church, effective December 31, 2004, to be the New Church Planter for what would be called New Day Fellowship.

Thomas Steenberg, a retired Lutheran missionary, began providing pulpit supply, which transitioned into an interim ministry period. Church life continued. That year the youth led the congregation in collecting 1,200 pounds of food for the Missoula Food Bank. In anticipation of summer camps, the Youth Chat group also went through the congregation collecting needed items for Cane Ridge West, which a family delivered that summer.

Allen M. Shriver's pastorate at the church began October 2, 2005, just in time to be part of "Leaven," along with five other congregations in the region. They were Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, and Polson. "Leaven's" purpose involved helping congregations become who God is calling them to be. A year after starting "Leaven," the Missoula church began some new small groups. The details of this program are covered in the chapter on Regional Church.

The congregation maintained an emphasis on mission and outreach. The first Sunday of each month was Food Cupboard Sunday. In the fall of 2006 the proceeds from the church rummage sale were given to a fund for a new chapel at Warm Springs State Hospital.

Two major church property matters are noteworthy. One relates to the sale of property. When the congregation relocated to its current site on Russell Street in 1960, it was able to acquire most of a city block. This arrangement enabled it to have parking on both sides of the building with many parking

spaces to spare. In 2004 almost half of the land was sold to the non-profit Youth For Christ for their City Life Community Center. That 34,000 square foot state-of-the-art youth center, completed around 2010, included a gymnasium and other recreation venues. The congregation felt that it was a good sale, because it would be a compatible facility next to the church. Another benefit was an agreement that the church could still use the back parking lot, even though half of it was property that they no longer owned.

A second property change was that First Christian started renting portions of its building to Five Valleys Church of Christ in 2011. In 2018 the rental agreement is still in effect and has worked well for both congregations. The renters only use the sanctuary and the public areas of the building, and are only in the building on Sunday evenings and Wednesday evenings. They do not maintain an office in the building, nor do they attend First Christian's congregational activities.

Alan D. Hilberg came as called minister on February 1, 2014. He states that First Christian Church is providing or participating in several local outreach ministries. It is active in the Missoula Interfaith Cooperative (MIC) which oversees Family Promise among its ministries. The congregation works with the YWCA on housing. It donates items throughout the year to Union Gospel in its work with the poor. And it participates in the Matthew 25 Project with donated things for children at nearby Russell Elementary School.

Some ministries related to First Christian Church of Missoula have been ongoing for decades. The congregation has a long relationship with Boy Scout Troop 1911, which is the largest and oldest troop in the county. Girl Scouts also meet at the church, as well as TOPS (a weight-loss support group), which has about 100 attendees. The congregation has been continuously involved in the activities of Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center from summer camps, retreats, and other events to material support. And like many congregations, it always gladly hosts the Montana Regional Assembly on a rotating basis every few years.

A 2018 gathering of people at FCC in Missoula

SENIOR MINISTERS at First Christian Church of Missoula

Earl Sample	1983—1991
Daniel M. Dixson	1992—2000
Douglas A. Garner	2002—2004
Allen M. Shriver	2005—2012
Alan D. Hilberg	2014—Present

Interim Ministers included Glenn R. Johnson (1991—1992), Eugene C. Hill, III (2000—2002), Clifford Peightal (2002) and Thomas A. Steenberg (2005 and 2013).

Timothies and Priscillas of the congregation during this period are Grace Stempke Lorenz, Kenneth McKenzie, Gerard F. (Gerry) Ouellette, and Erica M. (Aerii) Smith.

journeyBe of Polson

POLSON, JOURNEYBE
(FORMERLY POLSON CC TO 2000 AND
HERITAGE OF FAITH CC TO 2009)

Polson Christian Church in Polson dates from 1911, as reported on pages 95 and 272—274 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The congregation began out of a meeting of a traveling evangelistic team, from which a congregation was organized and H. Gordon Bennett was called as the first minister.

Lawrence D. (Larry) Pew came to Polson as minister in 1979 and served there until 1986. The Polson church was already a strong congregation, and he built upon that strength. In 1984 the Polson church was experiencing what would become among the best years of its life, including financial strength.

On June 1, 1984, the church purchased and paid for half a block next to the city hospital at a cost of $50,000. It was a perfect building site high on the hill on the south side of the city with a grand view of Flathead Lake. The church at 420 First Street East (corner of Fifth Avenue), which they had owned since 1932 was inadequate in numerous ways. The main floor (1250 sq. ft.) had no restroom. The kitchen and restroom were in the basement (1,000 sq. ft.) accessible only by narrow winding stairs, making it difficult or impossible for many. And the basement had ongoing water seepage problems.

In 1985 as they reviewed their plans for building on the property they had purchased, some strong differences of opinion apparently arose, which now seem lost in time. But those differences could not be reconciled. On September 14, 1986, Pew resigned and moved to Longview, Washington, to pastor a non-Disciples congregation, and soon was dropped from Disciples standing.

After Larry Pew's departure in September 1986, the congregation, two months later on December 1, 1986, welcomed Gary A. Shoemaker and Tamalyn L. Kralman, a husband and wife team as co-ministers. They had graduated from seminary earlier that year and had been ordained by the Christian Church in Montana. Gary was a Timothy of Kalispell and Tamalyn was a Priscilla of Central in Billings. For personal reasons she resigned her co-ministry position seventeen months later, but remained with Gary and in the congregation. He later resigned, effective April 17, 1989, and they moved out of state to a new ministry together.

Studies from a May 17, 1992, document indicated they could not underwrite the cost of as much as $250,000 to build on the site next to the hospital. For a period of time they then considered making the building a joint venture with the United Methodists.

But in the fall of 1992 they sold their building of 60 years, as well as the undeveloped property, and bought Bayview Funeral Chapel near downtown at 101 Seventh Avenue West. The congregation held its final worship service in the old facility on November 8, 1992, and its first service in the new facility on November 15. Much remodeling followed over a period of time. In 1995 a baptistry was purchased, and in 1999 the old carpet was removed from the sanctuary, revealing solid hardwood floors which were utilized, along with some new carpet.

After Larry Pew's departure in September 1986, the congregation, two months later on December 1, 1986, welcomed Gary A. Shoemaker and Tamalyn L. Kralman, a husband and wife team as co-ministers. They had graduated from seminary earlier that year and had been ordained by the Christian Church in Montana. Gary was a Timothy of Kalispell and Tamalyn was a Priscilla of Central in Billings. For personal reasons she resigned her co-ministry position seventeen months later, but remained with Gary and in the congregation. He later resigned, effective April 17, 1989, and they moved out of state to a new ministry together.

As noted in the Kalispell history, Polson was one of the congregations (along with Columbia Falls and Whitefish) participating in an annual,

August "Worship in the Park," beginning in 1988. Several Polson couples looked forward to it each year with enthusiasm. Experiencing worship outdoors in Glacier National Park with friends from other Disciples churches was always inspirational. Plus, participation in it and in work projects at Cane Ridge West during the year created a strong bond between a number of Disciples in the Flathead valley during that period. It can be noted that the Columbia Falls congregation closed in 2002, and the Whitefish congregation closed in 2009. Along the way the tradition of Worship in the Park ceased, having lasted from 1988 to 2009.

After Gary Shoemaker and Tamalyn Kralman left Polson, pastoral leadership during the next four and a half years was a turnover of five interim ministers and one called pastor. It sheds a bad light on the congregation, but in at least three cases with these ministers, health issues and personal circumstances led to their departure. And the church weathered the changes with grace.

Barton A. Dowdy served as interim briefly (August to December 1989) before stepping aside for health reasons. Frederick R. Evans arrived as Interim minister on January 1,1990, but could not serve past April. He was followed by the six month interim of David M. Stewart, which ended with the call of Oliver J. Bergeron, III, on January 6, 1991.

Oliver Bergeron arrived seeking to lead the congregation through its move from an old building to "something" new. But there was no clarity on what that would be. He concluded that he was not a good fit for the congregation, and left Polson in January 1993. Hap Piper came as Interim, but health issues in his family forced his departure after only a few weeks. Robert (Bob) Frank-Plumlee came as interim on March 15, 1993, and left five months later to take a position that opened up in his home town 240 miles away. He was living in Great Falls and commuting four days a week to Polson. His wife, Karen Frank-Plumlee, was the new Regional Minister, with her office in Great Falls.

The church welcomed Gerard F. (Gerry) Ouellette in August 1993 as acting minister and a few months later extended it to be a called ministry. Gerry,

who was a Timothy of the Missoula congregation, broke the short ministry cycle at Polson by remaining there until the summer of 2002.

Even with the many changes of pastoral leadership, the Polson church was faithful to its calling in ministry and mission. As noted on page 274 in *Big Sky Disciples*, Dora Mahugh had served on the board of the Department of Church Women (1974—1983) and had remained an active lay leader in the Polson congregation throughout the 1990s. Her family was one of several strong Disciples supporters in the congregation. *Disciples Year Book* statistics show the church gave ten percent or more of its Local Operating Receipts (LOR) to Disciples outreach throughout these years. Other records show annual direct giving of winter clothing and funds to the Colorado Christian Home (Tennyson Center) in Denver, and layettes to Yakama Christian Center in Washington. In 1997 Gerry Ouellette was among the eight participants on the Montana region's Honduras work trip.

In the summer of 2002 Gerry Ouellette completed his ministry at Polson. Afterward, the pulpit was filled for a few months by Lois Lyford, who stepped aside due to health reasons. Eddie K. Stubblefield followed her as pulpit supply, and was soon joined by John R. Payne. They were also assisted by Susan Evans, a lay member of the congregation. The three of them covered preaching and pastoral duties until the summer of 2003, when John Payne was officially designated the church's interim minister. On November 20, 2004, John Payne was ordained by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana.

For an unknown period of time in the 1990s the congregation had shared its facilities with the Seventh Day Adventist Church. In September 2003 they began sharing their building weekdays with Mission Valley Christian Academy. That school year went well and in September 2004 MVCA began another school year with forty-eight students, which reportedly brought new life into the church building.

John Payne began to lead the people in meeting any community needs he saw. In 2004 Family Table, a community outreach project which included dinner, began to be hosted monthly by the congregation for needy families.

The church also acted as the community contact for funds for Week of Compassion support for tsunami victims.

A study group designed to engage those who have left the church, called "Living the Question," began to meet weekly on Wednesday evenings. The Polson community was invited to participate in this interactive series.

By the summer of 2005 the monthly "Family Table" outreach dinner continued to grow both in numbers and community awareness. The "Living the Question" series meanwhile was 50% completed with positive reaction from church members and the community. In the fall of 2005 Mission Valley Christian Academy began its third season in the building with over fifty students enrolled.

Polson was one of the six Montana Disciples congregations to participate in "Leaven." This program is detailed in the chapter on Regional Church in this book, including names of all participating congregations.

In December 2005 an attendance of fifty-one people shared in the Christmas Eve service including bagpipes and a drum group. John Hamilton of the congregation and of the Celtic Cross Pipe and Drum band often leads worship, which included the Easter 2006 service. New to the 2006 schedule were a contemporary service, and a Taize service once a month. Their church-sponsored bagpipe band is called Great Scots.

In April 2006 "Living the Question" completed its third class with over forty total participants. In the fall of 2006 Heritage of Faith Christian Church opted to become an affiliate of THE CENTER FOR PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY.

Progressive Christianity is an open, intelligent and collaborative approach to the Christian tradition, and the life and teachings of Jesus that creates a pathway into an authentic and relevant religious experience. It offers thoughtful and practical resources for individuals, families, and communities to explore and affect progressive Christianity, spirituality, community life, and environmental justice. More information is available on its website progressivechristianity.org.

In 2006 the church added over fifteen new members for the year. Two "Circles of Trust" groups were in the process of figuring out how to form a worshipping community out of these circles.

As of January 2007 monthly outreach included: a visiting musician program; Taize service which gives the interfaith community a peace presence; Family Table free dinner for all in the community; and Circles of Trust, a small group educational series.

In April 2007 the congregation adopted a new slogan, "A place to gather, rather than a church to go to."

In 2008 a new model for starting new congregations, as well as revitalizing small, struggling ones, was introduced. As reported in the December 2008—January 2009 *Montana Christian News*, the regional New Church Commission started planting new spiritual communities around Montana called Open Circles. These small groups led by teams of lay people provide safe space where those who were not members of an established congregation could come together to reflect, to pray, and to eat together. Once each quarter, Open Circles met together in a weekend retreat at Cane Ridge West. John Payne was the contact person for Open Circles. He also led the Polson congregation in creating a non-traditional congregation with an eventual change of name to journeyBe.

In 2000 Polson Christian Church had changed its name to Heritage of Faith Christian Church under Gerry Ouellette's ministry. In 2009 the congregation had a new vision of its ministry, and thus changed its name to "journeyBe." The people are on the "journey to Be" the people of God. Worship that summer moved to Thursdays at 6:30 PM. with a recreational activity scheduled for Sunday morning.

Backing up to Spring of 2008, the Polson congregation had begun a three-year review of their vision, mission and core beliefs. Their "Good Sam's Club" (Good Samaritans) for neighborhood kids had been started and was having a positive impact on the kids and parents. The Good Samaritans group was reaching kids age 5-13 in the community each Saturday. By fall on Friday evenings, there were forty kids enrolled for pizza and video night.

The community room in the building, which is the site of many church activities, was named the "Wander Inn." A sign was hung outside on a fence near the door identifying it as the Wander Inn.

A new outreach program of free lunch, called "Soup's On," was began in December 2009. The church's "Soup's On" initiative offering a free lunch of homemade soup and bread Monday – Thursday every week, became increasingly ecumenical. By mid-May of 2010 they were serving as many as 120 hungry people. Within months they were raising money to remodel the church kitchen to better serve the Soup's On program, which had grown to serving over 200 people each week.

The church pews were removed and sold to complete the kitchen remodeling. Its completion included the approval from the County Health Department. Eight years later the program is still going and feeding even more people. The church continues to be on the "Journey to Be" the people of God. In addition to over 500 meals a month being served, the church provides emergency shelter to over 200 per year.

A 2018 gathering of people at journeyBe in Polson

MINISTERS at the Disciples congregation in Polson

Lawrence D. (Larry) Pew	1979—1986
Tamalyn L. Kralman, Co-Minister	1986—1988
Gary A. Shoemaker, Co-Minister	1986—1989
Oliver J. Bergeron, III	1991—1993
Gerard F. (Gerry) Ouellette	1993—2002
John R, Payne	2003—Present

Interim Ministers included Barton A. Dowdy (1989—1990), Frederick R. Evans (1990), David M. Stewart (1990), Hap Piper (1993), Robert (Bob) Frank-Plumlee (1993), Lois Lyford (2002), Eddie K. Stubblefield (2003) and John Payne (2003). In 2003 Susan Evans, a lay member of the congregation, also assisted with pastoral duties.

CHAPTER 5

Closed or Withdrawn Congregations

First Christian Church of Anaconda

First Christian Church of Anaconda dates itself from February 1884, as reported on pages 218—221 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The congregation was begun by Galen Wood, pastor at Deer Lodge, when the smelter was new and there were no other church buildings in the town. He got a $600 grant from the Christian Woman's Board of Missions, hired contractors, constructed, and dedicated the building for use on July 27, 1884. It was the first church building in Anaconda.

In summary from *Disciples Year Books*, David Kullowatz was the minister at Anaconda from 1983 to 1988, followed by I. M. (Inky) Nelson for the three years until the church closed in 1991. Total membership from 1984 to 1991 varied between twenty and twenty-one persons, with average worship attendance fluctuating between twelve and seventeen. Local Operating Receipts (LOR) from 1984 to 1991 averaged $6,242 per year. Disciples outreach averaged $1,056 per year, and total outreach averaged $1,083 per year, reflecting that most of what was reported went to the Disciples Mission Fund. The group was small in numbers but strong in spirit for supporting the broader work of the church. The *Disciples Year Book* also reported that for a three-year period, beginning in 1985 the congregation raised $29,766 for capital improvements. This was due to the purchase of

a church building in late 1984, before which they had met in homes and rented sites for about five years.

Part of the final paragraph of the Anaconda section on Congregational Histories on page 220 of *Big Sky Disciples* reads: "Forty ministers and a number of lay leaders in its almost one hundred years, reflect the difficulties experienced [in Anaconda's economic cycle of boom and bust]. Continuing uncertainties made it seem wise to sell the building in December 1979. The announcement in 1980 by the Anaconda Company of a complete vacating of smelting operations was merely another disaster [for the city of Anaconda]". This paragraph is included in order to tell the rest of the story, which unfolded from 1984 to the Anaconda church's closure seven years later in 1991.

On August 1, 1983, David Kullowatz was called by the First Christian Churches of both Anaconda and Butte to serve them jointly. This arrangement served them well until the Anaconda congregation found it increasingly difficult to meet its salary commitment to the minister, and Butte was not in a position to make up the salary difference alone. David Kullowatz closed his ministry with both congregations on October 1, 1988.

The church called Inky and Grace Nelson to service as part-time interims, driving the few short miles from their home in Deer Lodge on Sundays, Mondays, and Thursdays.

Kullowatz's ministry initially had been a hopeful period in the congregation. They had sold their building in late 1979, then within a year of his arrival in 1983, they were able to purchase another building in late 1984. During that five years they met sometimes in homes and sometimes worshipped at St. Mark Episcopal Church at Sixth & Main. But when a seventy-five year old Reorganized Latter Day Saints (RLDS) church building came on the market for $14,000, complete with all furnishings, pews, tables, chairs, and a full kitchen, they reinvested in property.

As mentioned earlier, the Anaconda congregation was a strong supporter of mission beyond itself. A letter dated November 1, 1984, from Fred Evans, Regional Minister, to them said, "Please share this letter with the congregation at Anaconda expressing the appreciation of the Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ) in Montana for your generous support of Cane Ridge West. You are the first congregation to reach and exceed your campaign goal on the second Cane Ridge West capital campaign. At the end of September you had a 142% increase over a year ago."

The June-July 1991 issue of *Montana Christian News* announced that the last worship service would be June 23, 1991, and that the church building was for sale. A subsequent issue of that newspaper announced that the building had sold. The final chapter of the Anaconda congregation was closed.

MINISTERS at First CC of Anaconda

David S. Kullowatz	1983—1988
I.M. (Inky) Nelson, Interim	1989—1991

First Christian Church of Billings

Billings, which began as a construction camp for the Northern Pacific Railway in 1883, was a rapidly growing town of 4,000 residents by 1903. That fall Disciples began meeting together, but no formal organization occurred until April 17, 1904, when James T. Webb came as the first resident minister. *Big Sky Disciples* covers the congregation's history and development on pages 91—93, 99, 221—226 and 259.

On March 1, 1980, Russell E. Myers and his wife, Joyce, began their ministry at First Christian Church of Billings. Russ was a humble, compassionate man who loved tending his flock, fellowshipping with them at parties, retreats, conferences, work parties, and in their homes. He brought healing and cohesiveness to a diverse congregation, and worked well with the church board and elders.

During his tenure (1980—1994), the education building and the sanctuary were refurbished. He led several all-church weekend retreats at a camp near Red Lodge, strengthening the lay leadership. Regional church camps, conferences, and retreats were promoted and attended by the youth and adults. Several members attended the Quadrennial Assemblies and General Assemblies. Two new adult classes were started. A strong children's

program was in place. Several young families became a vibrant part of the church. Stewardship giving and support of world outreach increased. Worship attendance averaged over 125.

While crossing a Billings street, Joyce was hit by a car on her way to work. Her injuries left her handicapped for the rest of her life, but did not stop her from participating in church activities to the best of her abilities including a trip to the 1990 Quadrennial Assembly.

The church's eighty-fifth anniversary was celebrated on September 17, 1989, with the first Timothy from FCC, Lester Rickman, as the speaker. Lester had served as Mid-America's regional minister. The celebration drew 30 fifty-year members among those in attendance.

On May 15, 1994, Russ retired from the ministry after over fourteen years as minister at First Christian Church of Billings. This was the longest ministry of any pastor in the history of the congregation. The Myers remained in Billings, but in keeping with clergy ethics, transferred their membership to Central Christian Church, where they stayed very active.

James K. (Jim) Ward served as interim minister until October, when Arthur R. (Art) Greenlee came from an interim ministry position in Helena to be the installed minister. Under his leadership a successful "Logos" program was started, as well as a second weekly service, which met on Thursday evenings with about thirty in attendance. A capital campaign was started for a new boiler for the heating system. The sanctuary was painted and re-carpeted and the chancel area remodeled by church volunteers. A playground was developed in the church courtyard. Organized calling in the neighborhood was done by church members. A young adult class was started. Art Greenlee resigned in September 2001, after seven years of serving the congregation.

Eugene C. Hill was called as the next pastor in February 2002. His ministry with the congregation was short, but his enthusiasm was contagious. He was a very talented pianist and shared this talent with the congregation. During his time at the church, new hymnals and choir robes were purchased. He resigned July 31, 2002, and returned to California to be near his two children.

Phillip L. Hayes served as interim minister from October 2002 to June 2003. He and his wife, Dorothy, brought some stability to the congregation. He was especially involved with the youth, even coming back to Montana in July to serve as a counselor at Cane Ridge West.

Jeff A. Taylor came fresh from seminary with new ideas versus "the way we've always done it" attitude. His ministry lasted only one year (August 2003—July 2004), after which several church leaders were among the exodus. Nevertheless, Jeff encouraged participation in the 2003 General Assembly and chartered a bus to the Regional Assembly in Kalispell. The baptistry was repaired. The sound system was upgraded. The stucco on the outside of the building was repaired. An outside sprinkler system was installed, and fans were put in the fellowship hall. Jeff was very supportive of CWF projects, although ideas about new outreach opportunities were not well received by the congregation. Jeff resigned just a month after the church celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary on June 12, 2004. The anniversary itself was a festive event around a dinner at the Holiday Inn Grand with Roger Cone, a former pastor of the congregation (1969—1972) being among the many out-of-town guests.

In April 2004 the nominating committee was unable to fill a slate of officers because of term limits. The church board voted to suspend part of the bylaws for a year, and have a transition team replace the board. The "Let's try it for a Year" team was approved by the congregation and consisted of two trustees, treasurer, financial secretary, five members at-large, and the pastor (ex-officio). Task forces were appointed as needed. The suspension ended June 30, 2005, when the congregation voted to return to the bylaws.

Tim White, a lay minister, served in part-time ministry from August 1, 2004, to April 30, 2005, until he was offered a full-time job with a local TV station. Robert Clark Brock, a retired regional minister, came for five weeks during September and October 2004, as a consultant dealing with conflict, grief, stewardship, finances, and the future.

The congregation had long been a solid supporter of Disciple outreach causes. In the days of Russell Myers ministry, it gave about ten percent

of local operating receipts to Disciples Mission Fund, which annually amounted to between $330 and $430 per capita to Disciples outreach. During the following ten years, which saw a number of short ministries, Disciples outreach dropped to just over five percent of local operating receipts per year. In the final five years of the congregation's affiliation with the Disciples of Christ, that number slipped to about two percent.

Bobby Shaw, a member of the congregation with a background in the Southern Baptist church and with a major in music was called as minister of music. He was soon leading a mid-week Bible study, and filling the pulpit as needed. After Tim White left, Bobby agreed to become the part-time senior minister. The choir grew and attendance increased in both Sunday School and worship. He drew in new leaders, and over the next five years (2005—2010) average weekly worship attendance increase from fifty to ninety, which enabled the church to call a full-time associate pastor.

During this time the church began supporting non-Disciples mission projects. In October 2010 when the regional church voted to form a partnership with the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference of the United Church of Christ, the delegation from First Christian Church of Billings voted "No," and began a nonparticipating role in the region. In April 2013 the congregation voted to sever ties with the Disciples of Christ and become non-denominational.

SENIOR MINISTERS at First Christian Church of Billings

Russell E. Myers	1980—1994
Arthur R. Greenlee	1994—2001
Supply & lay leaders	2001
Eugene C. Hill	2002
Jeff A. Taylor	2003—2004
Tim White, Lay Minister	2004—2005
Bobby Shaw, Lay Minister	2005—2013

Interim Ministers were James K. Ward (1994) and Phillip L. Hayes (2002-2003).

Shortridge Memorial Christian Church/First Christian Church/Disciples Christian Church of Butte

The Disciples church in Butte dates its beginnings from February and March of 1888, but short gatherings of Disciples took place as early as 1879 in this rapidly growing and changing mining camp. Over the years the congregation worshiped under three different names. It was begun by Galen Wood, pastor at Deer Lodge, who took a year of brief visits to Butte before assembling a steady core group of people. The index on page 300 in *Big Sky Disciples* has several Butte entries, but most helpful is pages 27—30 and 235—238.

The Disciples church in Butte was first named Shortridge Memorial Christian Church in honor of Mrs. Sarah Shortridge, former secretary of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions in Indianapolis, Indiana. The CWBM raised the money to construct the building in 1891 at the SE corner of Washington and Mercury Streets. It carried the name until 1959, when it relocated to 1200 Texas Avenue, and was renamed First Christian Church. That name was changed again in 2009 when the congregation reorganized as Disciples Christian Church with a unique arrangement of management by a seven member "Butte Oversight Task Force" of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana. This effort did not produce revitalization, and the Butte congregation held its closing worship service on March 3, 2013.

Big Sky Disciples shows David Kullowatz as coming to Butte in 1982 and the Disciples *Disciples Year Book* agrees. However, official correspondence on file in the regional church office indicates a year later. According to that correspondence, on August 1, 1983, David Kullowatz was called in a combined meeting of members of the First Christian Churches of Anaconda and of Butte to serve them jointly. This arrangement served both congregations well until the Anaconda congregation found it increasingly difficult to meet its salary commitment to the minister, due to the economic downturn in that city, and Butte was not in a position to make up the salary difference

alone. David Kullowatz thus closed his ministry with both congregations on October 1, 1988, and returned to Oregon.

Over the next six years the Butte congregation was served by four different ministers, three of whom carried the title of interim minister, and none of whom reached two years of service at the church. Butte, like Anaconda, was greatly influenced by the copper mining industry. The Berkeley Pit closed in 1982, and mining largely ceased in the area in 1983. Butte was not strictly reliant on mining, but its demise brought on a slow decline over the next decade in business and population in the city. The church, due to its strong fellowship and sense of church family, was basically stable in worship attendance under each of its longer term ministers. And the congregation continued to perform local outreach ministries both ecumenically and individually. Nevertheless, each succeeding minister started with a smaller number than the previous minister. According to the *Disciples Year Book* worship annually ran 33-35 under David Kullowatz, 21-27 under Barbara Archer, 15-23 under Marvin Hatfield and finally 12-16 under Ed Pangburn. Financial contributions showed mostly parallel declines in giving over the years.

In 1994 Barbara J. Archer, a United Church of Christ minister living in Butte, was called as installed minister to a yoked ministry of both First Christian Church and Church in the Valley (American Baptist). She and her husband owned a home in Butte, where he was employed as a cartographer. Soon after her call, a youth group was started called Kids for Christ ("KFC") with leadership from First Christian, Church in the Valley and United Congregational UCC Church. It averaged twelve to fifteen youth, drawing both churched and unchurched children. The group met regularly and took several trips over the next six years, including Spokane, Seattle, youth retreats, and water parks. Each trip included a mission component, as did the many fundraisers they held. They designed and painted a quilt "from Homeless to Hope" which was displayed at the three churches. They also designed and led worship services at each of the three churches at least once a year.

The men's and women's groups were also active. The men from Church in the Valley and First Christian met for a monthly breakfast. The First Christian

women's group was always active, sponsoring programs with speakers from the community, and holding regular fundraisers for enrichment and outreach. There were annual ecumenical services for Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Maundy Thursday, and other occasions, wherein the Methodists and Lutherans also joined in hosting. First Christian saw modest growth under Barbara Archer's ministry, but not without some struggles related to Butte community economics, and to cooperation among the congregations.

Coming from Oregon in 2000, Marvin Hatfield ultimately provided the longest ministry to the congregation in the thirty-three-year period covered since 1984. Marvin's wife, Georgie Hatfield, initiated an intensive outreach program to the neighborhood children. Weekly after-school programs fed the spiritual, as well as nutritional needs of the youth. Marvin got a small bus, and he and she took the children on many field trips during the summer months. Seasonal programs were put on by the children at the church. The presence of children and upbeat activity seemed energizing. Parents attended these programs, but few participated in other church activities, or took leadership roles.

So, when the Hatfields retired back to Oregon, the core group of laity, all of whom were women, numbered twelve to fifteen with only a few of them taking leadership roles. Monthly, the entire congregation met after worship as a church board, but they were weary of overseeing the physical property, the weekly worship leadership, and the administration of the church. Thus, the Butte church board consulted with the regional church about possibly closing. As an outcome of the consultation, a plan was devised to have the regional church take over management of the property through a "regional church task force," and find and oversee a part-time minister to serve the church. By coincidence, at the same time Ed Pangburn had decided to retire from a pastorate in Missouri, and return to his home state of Montana. He chose to settle in Butte, unaware that the Disciples congregation had considered disbanding.

Meanwhile, Ruth Fletcher, Regional Minister, recruited Bob Frank-Plumlee to chair the region's "Butte Oversight Task Force" (**BOTF**), consisting of regional board members from three other congregations and a Butte church

member. As the task force was created, it learned of Ed Pangburn's presence and interest in that part-time ministry. The task force interviewed and called him to the position.

In early 2009 in an effort to revitalize the church in image and function, the decision was made to change the name from First Christian Church to Disciples Christian Church. Ed Pangburn began with enthusiasm, producing several articles for Butte's daily newspaper, producing a monthly church newsletter, and seeking to evangelize through weddings, funerals, and civic club activity. He officiated at numerous funerals and weddings, but saw only six additions from them in four years. The task force also gave input and direction to the ministry, with monthly scheduled contact between Ed and Bob. However, hoped for results did not take place.

The heart wrenching decision to close came in late 2012, and the closing service was held March 3, 2013. Soon thereafter, the building was sold to Christ Church Anglican of Butte for $160,000 gross with $148,727.38 net received. The remaining Disciples members felt strongly that some of the remaining funds that were raised by Butte people should remain in Butte. The amount of $5,000 each was given to Big Brothers/Sisters of Butte, Butte Rescue Mission for the kitchen project, Butte Emergency Food Bank, Butte AIDS Support Services, New Hope Pregnancy Support Services, Toys for Tots, Butte Ministerial Association, and a scholarship to the church's present minister, Gloria Soja, a seminary student, to continue her studies. The remainder of funds went to the Montana regional church.

The church building, constructed in 1960, included a wing of classrooms that were ideal for a small school. The church leased the education wing to two women of the community to run a preschool, independent of the church. The preschool began about 1999, and ran fourteen years until the church closed, whereupon the preschool relocated.

When the building sold to the Anglican Church, Disciple church members were delighted that the building remained a House of God. And although the church closed, the CWF in 2018 was still meeting once a month in homes, just as it did for decades, and continued participating in community

outreach projects. Of the twelve regular attendees at the time of the closing, seven attend Aldersgate United Methodist Church, a congregation of over 135 in weekly worship.

MINISTERS at First Christian/ Disciples Christian of Butte

David Kullowatz	1983—1988
Pateng Makdoh	1991—1992
Barbara J Archer	1994—2000
Marvin Hatfield	2000—2008
Douglas Garner	2008—2009
Edmond Pangburn	2009—2012
Diane LaRue	2012—2013
Gloria Soja	2012—2013

Interim Ministers have included Bob Payne (1988), Arthur L Sanford (1989), Carlton Buck (1990), George Kendall (1993), and David Durant and Diane LaRue, both lay ministers from Bozeman (2000).

First Christian Church of Columbia Falls

First Christian Church of Columbia Falls held its first worship service on February 4, 1951, and its closing worship on June 30, 2002. *Big Sky Disciples* tells the first half of the story on pages 98 and 239—240. This is the second half of the story.

In summary O. D. Harris came to minister at Central Christian Church in Kalispell in 1949 and found Disciples living in both Columbia Falls twelve miles to the northeast and Whitefish fourteen miles northwest of Kalispell. Seeing the need, he was instrumental in getting congregations started in both towns in 1951. Joyce Barclift came from a pastorate in Glasgow, Montana, to become the first called minister in Columbia Falls, beginning September 1, 1951. Within a few months she would also serve

Whitefish about 10 miles to the west, which held its first service November 11, 1951.

In its 51-year history the Columbia Falls congregation was served by a total of 13 called ministers and 8 interim ministers, some of whom returned two or more times as interims for a total of 13 interim ministry periods. After 1976 the church seemed to become a revolving door for clergy lasting less than two years until its closure in 2002. The sole exception to these short ministries was the arrival of the Edith N. Parrish in 1987, who served as their called minister until her retirement in 1996, which was a longer period than any other minister in the congregation's history. She provided a stable period of service and left Columbia Falls to retire, having served the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) from Oregon to Indianapolis to Montana.

Edith Parrish's call to Columbia Falls was enabled by matching grants of $3,000 each from the Christian Church in Montana, and the Department of Evangelism and Membership, Division of Homeland Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indianapolis. The $6,000 grant covered the calendar year of 1988, and was renewed for 1989 and for 1990 as part of a revitalization effort by the General Church. The Pension Fund also assisted in Edith's call by providing health insurance for her first fourteen months, beginning November 1, 1987. Thus, the congregation received $18,000 over three years, plus the minister's health insurance for over a year.

As required by the annual grants, reports were made, including one which listed projects completed. In 1990 they included a new gas furnace in the parsonage ($2,311), a new roof on the church building ($1,000), and new carpet in the narthex ($209).

In fairness to the congregation in its struggle for stability, Columbia Falls as a community experienced a similar struggle. A major employer's rise and fall almost exactly coincided with the Columbia Falls church's beginning and end (1951 to 2001 and 2002). An announcement was made in 1950 that a massive aluminum plant would be built near Columbia Falls by a California company. When financing fell through the Anaconda Copper

Mining Company stepped in and built the aluminum plant. Construction began in 1952, employing nearly 1,600 workers. The city in 1950 had 1,232 people according to the U.S. census. When completed in 1955 the plant itself employed about 1,000 people. The facility included the largest building in Montana, and later official records (1983) showed that it consumed nearly one-quarter of all the electric power used in Montana. It had been built in Columbia Falls to coincide with the completion of Hungry Horse Dam in 1953, the third largest, and second highest, concrete dam in the world at the time.

During the plant's history, employment was constantly changing. And by the late 1960s environmental concerns were in the headlines, especially the impact of fluoride emissions from the aluminum plant on the surrounding plant species and wildlife. Soon, the Anaconda Company was plagued with lawsuits over toxic emissions. In 1977 the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) purchased the Anaconda Company, even as further hazardous and solid wastes were identified. In January 2001 for the first time in its history, the entire plant was idled. In 2002 the Disciples church in Columbia Falls closed. These parallels were not the deciding factors for the church's plight, but they had an impact, even as the mood of the entire city was impacted.

During the historical period covered in this book, *Disciples Year Book* figures indicate that worship attendance dropped from an average of forty-four per week (1984—1986) prior to Parrish's ministry to a steady annual average of twenty-nine during her ministry (1987-1996), then downward to fifteen in average worship in its final year. Financial giving averaged $21,000 a year when Parrish arrived, and increased under her leadership to the final four years of $31,700 per year average. Those figures declined after her retirement to around $15,000, then to $13,000 income its final year.

The closing worship service for the congregation was June 30, 2002. The church property was sold a few months after closure for $147,284.11 (less $1,322.97 in expenses). Two major recipients of funds were $135,000 to the New Church Fund of the Christian Church Foundation, and $5,500 to the Blackfoot River Stabilization Project at Cane Ridge West. Three gifts of $820.38 each were made to Whitefish Christian Church, Central

Christian Church of Kalispell, and the Permanent Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana. Six gifts of $500 each were made to Columbia Falls Food Pantry, Klothes Kloset of Columbia Falls, Community Kitchen, Church Women United, Disciples Mission Fund, and Colorado Christian Home.

MINISTERS at First Christian of Columbia Falls

Vernon Poe	1983—1984
Bob Payne	1984—1985
Sendel Barr	1985—1986 and 1998—99
Earl Moore	1987
Edith N. Parrish	1987—1996
Eddie K. Stubblefield	2000—2001
Bobby & Mary Smith	2002

Interim Ministers have included I. M. Nelson (1986—87, 1998), Lois Lyford (1996—97, 1998, 1999, 2003), Jim Long (1998, 1999), George Tolman (1998) and Fred E, Krause (2000). Records are unclear on whether some short-term pastorates listed above were interim or called ministries.

First Christian Church of Conrad

A group of Disciples in Conrad came together in the fall of 1911, and invited H. Gordon Bennett and Carol M. Ridenour to hold a five-day evangelistic meeting in February. This led to the organization of the congregation on February 25, 1912, with Bennett being called as its pastor. During those early years, a notable pastorate was that of Siddie E. Olive (1913—1914). She is recognized as the first resident woman minister among the Disciples in Montana, and led the congregation in a year of growth.

The Conrad church's early history is found on pages 96—97 and 240—243 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The final paragraph of page 243 indicates that John C. Nesby came as pastor in June 1972 and remained until 1981, providing almost a full decade of stability and progress. It seems appropriate to regress

earlier than 1984 to lay the groundwork for telling the Conrad story, and thus not miss how that nine-year period of stability and progress was accomplished. It goes well past 1984.

Shortly after the Nesby's arrival, the church shared a great sadness with John at the death of his wife, Virginia. John continued to serve the church very effectively, and after a period of time, married Loretta Lenington of Great Falls. John was a poet and had a book of his poems and prose published during this time entitled *Gleanings*, which he dedicated to Loretta. John started an annual ice cream social that was continued for many years after his Conrad ministry ended. One year, the ice cream social featured the largest banana split made in Conrad.

During John Nesby's ministry at Conrad, a number of accomplishments were recorded. A new piano was purchased with memorial money, as well as Bibles and hymnals. New carpet was installed in the church and parsonage. Permanent siding was put on the church, which not only lowered heating bills, but added to the church's appearance. The church was fully insulated, and new storm windows installed. Five years into John's time at Conrad, the church was helped financially with the inheritance of 320 acres of land from the estate of Minnie Leavitt, which had income from rentals and oil royalties.

Not all accomplishments were related to property. The church began taking part in the Senior Surrey program which provided transportation for Conrad's elderly. A half-tuition scholarship for children and youth to summer camp was established. And First Christian Church of Conrad strongly supported, and participated in the building of the lodge at Cane Ridge West, along with many other Disciples congregations of the Christian Church in Montana. At the time of Nesby's departure from Conrad, the *Disciples Year Book* indicated ninety-two participating members and average worship attendance of forty-eight.

In August 1982 Joseph E. Wagnon came to the Conrad pastorate from Oregon. He was a popular personality around Conrad, and gave strong leadership to the youth program, both in Conrad and in the regional church.

He loved to cook and his Ground Hog Day dinners and his pie socials were special events in the life of the church. During his three plus year "first" ministry at Conrad, the church acquired a new organ with chime board, and a new photocopier. It also installed two new furnaces. Joe left Conrad in October 1985 with average worship attendance running forty-five people.

Gary E. Ruths arrived in Conrad in January of 1986 fresh from a seminary education, to lead the church in upgrading its educational program. That summer a new program of intergenerational Sunday School was started. He also helped the congregation begin planning for its seventy-fifth anniversary, which took place the weekend of June 13—14, 1987. All fall, winter, and spring were spent on physical preparations of the building and grounds around it. The basement received new sheetrock, and the kitchen got refurbished cabinets. Many rooms were repainted, as well as the foundation around the exterior. Beautiful new front doors were hung. The anniversary weekend included an open house to the community, and a banquet and program with decorations and displays. Six different committees worked on different aspects of the weekend, which is detailed in the "75th Anniversary Book" that was compiled for the event. Average worship attendance was holding steady at forty-five per week.

With Gary Ruths' departure in July 1988, Joe Wagnon returned to serve as interim, a position and title which he held for eight years. Joe had left Conrad on a high note in 1986 and returned with a similar degree of popularity. Interim ministries by nature are short-term, and the church remained statistically strong for Joe's first two years. Then it began to decline in attendance.

The *Disciples Year Book* shows local operating receipts for the congregation remained steady at $20,000 to $26,000 per year for the entire period from 1984 through the arrival of Inky Nelson's interim ministry in 1997. During the same period the record shows an overall decline in average worship attendance from forty-five to twenty per Sunday. Records in the regional church office for activities and outreach ministries in Conrad are sparse for the period.

An inquiry into why Joe Wagnon held the interim title for eight years had the following answer. He increasingly slipped mentally, which was a slow realization for church members. Then there was concern about handling his situation lovingly, perhaps with some differences of opinion. With assistance from Regional Minister Karen Frank-Plumlee, he finally was helped to retire to a place where he could receive care.

Wagnon left in mid-1996 and was followed by the nine-month interim of Invwgald M. (Inky) Nelson. Wagnon and Nelson were both semi-retired and part-time. They were followed by James Elshoff (1997—1998), Supply preachers (1998—1999), Dan Russell (2000—2001), Linda Bridges (2002) and C. Jack Kitchen (2003—2005). Jim Elshoff was a practicing attorney in Great Falls and a member of Central Christian Church there. Dan Russell and then Linda Bridges each served as assistant ministers at Central Christian Church in Great Falls with mid-week service responsibilities, while preaching at Conrad on Sundays.

During this period in 1998, the church parsonage was sold for $50,000. The proceeds from the sale were put into a fund called "Dollars for Scholars," to further the education of Conrad graduates. When the church building was sold, some money from that sale was added to this fund, and the fund is still being used by Conrad students to the present.

Over the years the church took part in many community activities and ecumenical programs in Conrad, including regular community blood drives.

In February 2005 the decision was made to close, and the final service was held on April 9, 2005. The sales and financial accounts were:

Sale of 320 acres	$44,214.94
Sale of church building and property	$33,609.33
Church Foundations Savings	$22,638.13
Memorial Savings	$ 4,318.67
Rummage Sale	$ 2,515.70
(Less final bills & expenses	-$853.07)
Balance to distribute	$106,443.70

Distribution:

Dollars for Scholars	$15,000
Regional Church Permanent Funds	$23,000
Cane Ridge West Permanent Funds	$23,000
Ministers' Scholarships	$ 5,000
Helicopter Pad at Conrad Hospital	$ 1,000
Choteau Boys Ranch	$10,000
New Church Start Fund	$23,609.33
Regional Church General Fund	$ 5,834.37
TOTAL	$106,443.70

MINISTERS at First Christian of Conrad

Joseph E. Wagnon	1982—1985
Gary E. Ruths	1986—1988
James Elshoff	1997—1998
Dan Russell	2000—2001
Lynda Bridges	2002
C. Jack Kitchen	2003—2005

Interim Ministers have included Joseph E. Wagnon (1988—1996), Invwgald M. (Inky) Nelson (1996—1997), and supply preachers (1999).

The Timothy during this period was John E. Bain, son of John (1931-2003) and Carol Bain of Conrad. He was ordained at Conrad on February 10, 1991, and returned to Montana to serve as senior minister at FCC Hamilton 2003—2008.

First Christian Church of Deer Lodge

First Christian Church in Deer Lodge began to take form in 1879, and was organized on July 18, 1880, with the arrival of Wiley Mountjoy, who became its first minister, as reported on pages 243—246 of *Big Sky Disciples*.

When that history was published in 1984, Jay E. Rogers with his wife, Georgia May Rogers, and children, were recent arrivals in Deer Lodge. He and his family gave a great deal of time and attention to the ministry from October 1982 to May 1987. He was especially conscientious in service to the elderly. However, membership continued to decline bit by bit, fueled by the failing economy of the area, and overall denominational decline. The defunct Milwaukee Railroad and the closing of the smelter in Anaconda (20 miles away) and of mines in Butte (30 miles away) in the 1970s and early 1980s played a major role in the economic downturn.

The Disciples *Year Book* when Jay arrived showed average worship attendance (AWA) at fifty. The next year AWA dropped to forty, then leveled off at about thirty-five for his remaining years at the church. The city and area continued to decline, according the U.S. Census records. Deer Lodge had a 2000 census of 3,400, and a 2010 census of 3,111, with projections for 2015 to be 2,965 persons. In this climate the church held its closing worship service on December 6, 2003.

The congregation and the regional church, however, performed some significant ministry in attempting to stem the downward tide leading up to its closure. Max Nelson with his wife, Cindy, and children brought new ideas and positive attitudes during their ministry from August 1987 to October 1990. *Disciples Year Book* AWA figures showed an upturn from thirty to forty-three. But Cindy's health problems forced them to conclude their Deer Lodge service. Nelson was the last full-time minister of the congregation.

Steve Moody, a Disciples minister working in a counseling position at the Montana State Prison at Deer Lodge, became the church's part-time minister, serving from 1990 until mid-1992, when other circumstances required him to move to Helena. Grace Lorenz then drove from Missoula, eighty-four miles away, to serve as part-time interim for a few months, followed by the interim of Jack Kitchen (1992—1993). Lucretia Uhrich then served briefly as pulpit supply/ interim.

In 1993 the church called Robert (Bob) Dawson and his wife, Martha, to a part-time ministry, in which he remained until May 2002. Shortly after his arrival, in 1994 a new congregation in Deer Lodge, Christ Fellowship

Church, asked to rent the fellowship hall. The agreement was made with the stipulation that there would be no interference for others already using the building, including a Senior Citizens group, Cub Scouts, a small preschool, and activities of the congregation itself. About ten years later, but unforeseeable at the time, this would be the group that bought the building and still holds worship there.

After Dawson's arrival, the congregation continued to struggle. In late 1994 Dawson and the congregation called on the regional church for guidance. In keeping with the denomination's Mission Imperatives, the Montana regional board in early 1995 approved the recommendation of Regional Minister Karen Frank-Plumlee to work together as a region in helping the Deer Lodge church become renewed and revitalized. A steering committee for the "Deer Lodge Project" was formed, which began a thorough analysis of the physical facilities, and the spiritual desires and direction of the congregation.

As an outcome, volunteers from around the Montana region came to the church on June 16-18, and did extensive painting of the building, installed a new sign, installed a half bathroom on the fellowship hall level, readied an abandoned nursery for use, and other projects around the building. They strategized on raising visibility in the community. Then on July 16, 1995, they held a "115th Anniversary Celebration," promoted region-wide. The service included Peter Morgan of Homeland Ministries, Indianapolis, as guest speaker. Over 165 people attended, requiring seating in the fellowship hall, in addition to many standing in the sanctuary. But as plans were being made for the anniversary, funerals were held in April and May for three leaders of the Deer Lodge congregation. Plans proceeded and following the anniversary, a family of six transferred membership to the church, soon followed by three more and a baptism for ten total additions. But *Disciples Year Book* figures which showed the additions did not reflect any average worship attendance (AWA) increases. AWA in 1994 was twenty-three, 1995 was twenty-two, 1996 was eighteen, 1997 was sixteen, 1998 was eighteen, then leveled off at thirteen average weekly attendees in four of the next five years.

From Dawson's departure, until mid-December 2002, Dan Dixson drove the eighty-five miles from Missoula as pulpit supply. He encouraged

service projects, and led a grief workshop one Saturday. Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher called on the church to host a region-wide workshop on healthy congregations. That workshop was led by Ineke Mitchell from the Healthy Congregations organization and drew forty participants from nine congregations.

The last family to transfer its membership to the church was that of Dawn and Greg Nottingham, and their three children. They moved to Deer Lodge from four years of service in El Salvador as missionaries for the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ. Greg Nottingham came as a professional environmentalist to the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site of the National Park Service, and worked there for a time.

The last baptisms at the church were of the four Christensen children and youth from far away Baker, who were grandchildren of Shirley (church organist) and Stan Thomas on October 4, 2003. Marvin Hatfield from FCC of Butte officiated at the baptisms.

Inky Nelson began pulpit supply on January 1, 2003, and shocked everyone two months later with his sudden death on March 6. Sunday worship continued with various lay members offering a devotion at sermon time. From March to July there were several more deaths in the congregation. In June ballots were mailed to members and attendees for a vote to #1 sell the building and property, or #2 retain it, and raise sufficient funds to do building repairs and finance a continued ministry. On July 17, 2003, the ballots were announced with fourteen for #1 and three for #2. The process thus moved toward closure.

The legal groundwork for possible closure had started two years earlier. On December 3, 2001, First Christian Church of Deer Lodge approved a resolution to file a Deed of Future Interest with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana, Inc. that would convey the real property to the regional church if or when the Disciples church ministry might cease.

Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher documented a thorough timeline of the period, beginning with an October 13, 2002, meeting with the congregation about future pulpit supply ministers. It is on file in the regional church

office in Great Falls. The timeline documents each step all the way to the closing worship on December 6, 2003, and the sale of the property to Christ Fellowship Church on January 15, 2004, for $96,000, less fees, resulting in $89,519.62 net. With the congregation's other assets, the total placed with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indianapolis, Indiana was $102,550.12.

Of this figure, $5,636.05 was used to establish a new fund called "First Christian Church Deer Lodge Scholarship Fund" with Christian Church Foundation; $89,519.62 was put in trust with Church Extension for use in the Deer Lodge Valley (earmarked for use within 5 years, or thereafter for Disciples church establishment elsewhere); $7,394.45 was deposited in an accessible savings account for funding to attempt to establish a new ministry in the Deer Lodge Valley, with the same 5 year stipulation.

MINISTERS at First Christian of Deer Lodge

Jay E. Rogers	1982—1987
Max Nelson	1987—1990
John Stephen (Steve) Moody	1990—1992
Robert (Bob) Dawson	1993—2002

Interim Ministers included Grace Lorenz (1992), Jack Kitchen (1992—1993), Lucretia Uhrich (1993), Dan Dixson (2002), and Inky Nelson (2003).

Whitefish Christian Church of Whitefish

Whitefish Christian Church held its first worship service on November 11, 1951, and its closing worship on December 27, 2009. *Big Sky Disciples* has three notable references to the Whitefish congregation on pages 98—99, 164, and 277—279.

O.D. Harris, minister of Central Christian Church in Kalispell found Disciples living in both Columbia Falls and Whitefish, one town being about twelve miles northwest, and the other fourteen miles northeast of

Kalispell. Seeing the need, he was instrumental through the State Society (later to become the Christian Church in Montana) in getting congregations started in both towns the same year of 1951. Joyce Barclift came from a pastorate in Glasgow, Montana to become the first called minister at Columbia Falls in September and simultaneously in November at Whitefish.

In 1952 she was followed by Thomas H. Shelton, who served both churches from 1952 to 1956. After Shelton's departure, the next fifteen years five different part-time ministers served in Whitefish.

In 1971 Dr. David V. Kauffman (M.D.), a practicing medical doctor in Whitefish, began a licensed lay ministry at the church with his wife, Ruth, assisting him with music, teaching, and visitation. "Doc" and Ruth were the key leaders and driving force of the congregation for the next thirty-eight years until its closure at the end of 2009.

During the congregation's fifty-eight years of ministry, it never reached sufficient size to call a full-time pastor. Also during those years, church records have been sketchy or incomplete, both before the publication of *Big Sky Disciples*, and since that time.

Disciples Year Book reports indicate that worship attendance varied from fifteen to twenty-five, with the sole exception of thirty-six average weekly attendees for 1986 during the two-year interim ministry of Joseph E. (Joe) Wagnon. From the late 1980s until the church closed, the pulpit was filled routinely with the alternating preaching of Doc Kauffman and of Fred E. Krause, Jr., both licensed lay pastors. Krause was a public school teacher from Columbia Falls. But they were not the sole preachers. Numerous others did supply preaching. In the summer of 1993 Steven Cranford, Regional Minister in Mid-America, preached for six weeks as part of his sabbatical spent in Montana.

Although small, Whitefish CC was a solidly Disciple congregation, with a viable ministry in its locale. A new sanctuary was added to the building in 1980. Thereafter, for more than twenty-five years, a highlight of the church was its annual homecoming in October, which celebrated the anniversary

of the new sanctuary, and which usually drew more than forty worshipers to its well-publicized service and potluck dinner.

Beginning in 1990 the congregation hosted the community Head Start program for more than ten years. Records available don't indicate how many additional years Head Start met in the church building.

The congregation was known for its outreach giving. In 1993 worshippers saved a quarter of a mile of pennies for Basic Mission Finance which is 48 cents per yard. There are 440 yards in a quarter-mile, thus 21,120 pennies. In 1996 it received a "Certificate of Appreciation" from Church Finance Council for its support to Basic Mission Finance. That same year it received recognition for participating in Blanket Sunday for Church World Service.

For about twenty years, beginning in August 1988, Whitefish Christian Church joined with the Disciples congregations of Kalispell, Columbia Falls, and Polson in "Worship in the Park" held on a Sunday afternoon in August in Glacier National Park. The event was publicized region-wide, park visitors were encouraged to attend, and worship attendance averaged forty or more.

Doc and Ruth Kauffman were regulars at regional events at Cane Ridge West and had a church budget line for giving to the camp. In May 1999 Doc Kauffman hauled a caterpillar to CRW and did river work to restore a dike on the property.

On October 21, 2001, the congregation celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with Fred Evans, former Regional Minister of Montana, as guest speaker.

On October 27, 2003, in a step to be responsible for the future assets of the Whitefish church a warranty deed transferred the property to The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana. After the church closed six years later, the property was eventually sold to Potter's Field Ranch, Inc. on March 5, 2012. After closing costs and fees, the cash to the wider Disciples church was $233,474.09.

MINISTERS at Whitefish Christian of Whitefish

David V. Kauffman, M.D.	1971—1984 and 1987—2009 (member and lay minister)
Fred E. Krause, Jr.	1987—2009 (alternated preaching with David Kauffman with each often doing two weeks at a time). Krause was a lay member of FCC of Columbia Falls.

Interim Ministers have been Walter Smith (1984) and Joseph E. Wagnon (1985—1987).

The Whitehall Christian Church/First Christian Church of Whitehall

The Whitehall Christian Church dates itself from sometime in 1897 with the ministry of F. A. Parrish. Its official organizing date was February 28, 1898, as reported on pages 44 and 274—277 of *Big Sky Disciples*. The book, published in 1984, leaves off with Paul SeGraves serving half-time at The Whitehall Christian Church and half-time at Butte's American Baptist Church of the Valley.

On May 1, 1984, Paul SeGraves became full time minister at Whitehall, where the congregation was experiencing strong growth. According to the *Disciples Year Book* each year from 1984 to 1993 the congregation continued to grow, having an annual average worship attendance gain of seven to ten persons. The 1984 average worship attendance was thirty-five, while that of 1993 was a hundred and five.

On December 13, 1987, in morning worship, the congregation held a celebration for their remodeled sanctuary, and for two specially designed stained-glass windows. In 1989 a classroom addition was built, and the kitchen enlarged. The congregation also voted in 1989 to give 10% to Basic Mission Finance. They maintained their commitment of 10% of their

income to Disciples outreach throughout the years, until their withdrawal from the Disciples in 2008. The congregation was also a loyal contributor to the Colorado Christian Home and Habitat For Humanity, as well as local community outreach throughout the years.

On January 19, 1993, Paul SeGraves was killed when his pick-up truck was struck by a train on a crossing between his home and town. In the following months, a number of interim ministers served the congregation, followed by several short, called pastorates.

Attendance and giving declined slightly during the 1993 interim ministries, according to the *Disciples Year Book*, but dropped further during the two year pastorate of Don Dunn, whose ministry began on November 14, 1993.

Afterward, average weekly worship ran about sixty through the remaining decade. During this period the Whitehall church instituted a new Sunday morning format of forty-five minutes of worship, followed by forty-five minutes of Sunday School. The congregation was pleased with this model which strengthened Sunday School attendance, and more easily enabled transition into a monthly noon church meal, as well as other after-services meetings and events.

Preparations for the congregation's centennial celebration on July 26, 1998, included repairs to the fellowship hall, painting, refurbishing the youth meeting room, and adding new pews to the sanctuary. Fred Dorisse, a Timothy of the congregation, came from Indiana as guest speaker.

Documents seem to indicate that the church was known as The Whitehall Christian Church up through the 1980s, but came to be called First Christian Church in Whitehall sometime around 1990 or soon thereafter. *Disciples Year Books* through 1995 call it WHITEHALL and then beginning in 1996 refer to it as First Christian Church. Regional office files reflect this change as early as 1993.

Whitehall last appears in the *Disciples Year Book* in 2008. The congregation voted on September 28, 2008, to terminate its affiliation with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Notable is that the congregation with a local

budget of about $20,000 a year in 2007 and 2008 was giving about $2,000 (or 10%) to Disciples Outreach until the year it withdrew, even though they were unhappy with the theological direction the denomination was headed. Ruth Fletcher, Regional Minister, stated that the congregation in their letter of withdrawal stated no reason for their decision.

MINISTERS at Whitehall Christian of Whitehall

Paul SeGraves	1973—1993
Don Dunn	1993—1995
Gordon Jones	1997—2000
Rodney W. Spitler	2001—2004
Matt Melchor-Gordon	2005
Edmond D. Pangburn	2005—2006
Warren Smith of Dillon	2007
Harvey Pearson	2007—2008

Interim Ministers have included John Nesby (1993), Art Greenlee (1993), Inky Nelson (1993) and Jim Cox (1996—1997).

FOOTNOTE: Fort Benton Christian Church of Fort Benton

Fort Benton Christian Church is recognized on page 58 of *Big Sky Disciples* as uncooperative with the Disciples. But it was not until November 7, 1987, that Fort Benton CC officially withdrew their name after 30 years of inactivity with the Disciples of Christ. Thus, this volume is not counting them as a congregation that withdrew between 1984 and 2018. It was functionally Independent decades earlier.

Appendix

MINISTERS LISTING 1983-2018

Big Sky Disciples pages 284—293 lists ministers who served Disciples congregations in Montana up through 1983. Below are ministers who served DOC congregations or the regional church in Montana from late 1983 to midway through 2018.

The date in some cases is calculated off of their first appearance in the *Disciples Year Book*, recognizing that statistics are of the previous year. If clergy arrive in January or February, the date may be one year off due to the *Disciples Year Book* data cut-off date. But the date does give a very close, if not always exact, year of the beginning of their ministry. The "or earlier" usually means they are carrying over from the list on pages 284—293 of *Big Sky Disciples*.

Alonzo, Tony 2004
Anderson, Jeff 2005 [licensed lay minister]
Archer, Barbara J. 1994
Arrington, Owen 1983 (or earlier)
Bailey, Bruce 1996
Bailey, Lorraine W 1996
Bain, John E 2004
Barr, Sendel 1986
Beal, Donald J. 1999
Bergeron, Oliver J, III 1991
Biggers, Joel W 2007 [non-Disciple minister]

Bonham, Jack 2011
Brock, John 2017
Brock, Robert 2007 Interim
Bridges, Linda 2002
Bryarly, J. Milton 1992
Buck, Carlton C 1990 Interim
Budlong-Morse, Laurie 2008
Budlong-Morse, Scott 2008
Connor, William F 1986
Cox, A. James 1997 Interim
Devitt, Thomas K 1983 (or earlier)
Dixson, Amber [see Amber Richardson]
Dixson, Daniel M. 1993
Dorisse, Fred W. 1983 (or earlier)
Dawson, Robert C. 1994
Douglas, Colin A. 2014
Douglas, Jeannie 2007
Dowdy, Barton A. 1988 Interim
Dunn, Donald W. 1996
Elshoff, James 1998 [licensed lay minister]
England, G. Louis 1983 (or earlier)
Evans, Frederick R. 1980 REGIONAL MINISTER
Fletcher, Ruth A. 2002 REGIONAL MINISTER
Fraley, Jim 2002
Frank-Plumlee, Karen V. 1993 REGIONAL MINISTER
Frank-Plumlee, Robert P. 1993
Franklin, Ronald L. 1990
Garner, Douglas A. 2003
Greene, Ronald C. 2003
Greenlee, Arthur R. 1985
Grosgebauer, Bryan 1983 (or earlier)
Halstead, R. Terry 1991
Hansen, Ronald W. 1984
Harbert, Connie 2008 Interim
Hart, Jack L. 2001 Interim
Hatfield, Marvin 2001

Hayes, Phillip L. 2003 Interim
Hensley, Russell 1983 (or earlier)
Hilberg, Alan D. 2014
Hill, Paul Deane 1983 (or earlier)
Hoffman, Dan2001 Interim
Holder, Jeff C. 2000 Interim
Holland, Paul 2013
Johnson, Glenn R. 1992 Interim
Jones, Gordon 1998
Jones, Jason J. 1999
Kauffman, David 1983 (and earlier) [non-credentialed lay minister]
Keener, Dana 2009
Keener, John 2008
Kendall, George 1993 Interim
Kimsey, Dolores K. 1989
Kimsey, James 1987 REGIONAL MINISTER
Kistler, Darryl 2002
Kitchen, C. Jack 1993 Interim
Kralman, Tamalyn L. 1986
Kullowatz, David S. 1983
Logue, David E. 1983 (or earlier)
Lauenberg, John 2000
Lyford, Lois 1997 Interim [licensed lay minister]
Lynn, Warren P. 2001
Lynn, Roger 2009 Interim
MacWhorter, Mark 2009
Makdoh, Patreng 1991
Melchor-Gordon, Matthew 2005
Midkiff, T. L. (Bo) 1989
Mockabee, M. Eugene 1983 (or earlier)
Moody, J. Steve 1991
Moore, Earl J. 1985
Moore, Kenneth W. 1986
Morriss, Norman C. 1983 (or earlier)
Myers, Russell E. 1983 (or earlier)

Naff, Ronald H. 2018 Interim
Nelson, I.M. (Invwgald, aka. Inky) 1983 (or earlier)
Nelson, Max A. 1988
Nesby, John 1983 (or earlier)
Nowlin, Ronald E. 1991 Interim
Ouellette, Gerrard (Gerry) 1994
Pangburn, Edmond 2010
Parrish, Edith N. 1988
Payne, Bob 1985
Payne, Leslie H. 1983 (or earlier)
Payne, John 2004
Pew, Laurence D. 1983 (or earlier)
Poe, Vernon O. 1983 (or earlier)
Pugh, John 1999 Interim
Read, Gordon A. 1992
Reynolds, Linda 2009 [licensed lay minister]
Richardson, Amber (Dixson) 2013/2016
Robey, William A. 2007 Interim
Rogers, Jay E. 1983 (or earlier)
Russell, Daniel 1999 [licensed lay minister]
Ruth, Gary E. 1986
Reiger, Dixie 2016 [non-credentialed laity]
Sample, Earl L. 1984
Sanford, Arthur 1989 Interim
SeGraves, Paul W. 1983 (or earlier)
Shannon, Charles 2011 Interim and later pastor
Shaw, Bobby 2009 [non-Disciple laity]
Shoemaker, Gary A. 1986
Shriver, Allen M. 2007
Simpson, James D. 1990
Smelley, J. Denise 2003 Interim
Smith, Bobby 2002 [licensed lay minister]
Smith, Mary 2002 [licensed lay minister]
Smith, Walter 1985 Interim
Spitler, Rodney 2002
Steenberg, Thomas A. 2013 Interim

Strange, Joe M. 1987
Stubblefield, Eddie K. 1984
Taylor, Rebecca L. 2005 [licensed lay minister]
Taylor, Jeff A. 2004
Thaden, Robert, Jr. 1998
Tolman, George 1989 Interim
Torrence, G. Martin 1983 (or earlier)
Van der Poll, Jan 2002
VanHeyningen, Terry J. 1993
Wagnon, Joseph E. 1983 (or earlier)
Zadow, Bob 2014 [non-credentialed laity]

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Various online searches including Wikipedia.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks go first and foremost to Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher, and to Administrative Assistant Ruth Lindabury in the Montana regional church office during the time this volume was written. They literally gave me a desk in their office, and provided me with a key to the door. After over ten years of serving in regional church positions in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Georgia it was a courtesy, without infringing on any sensitive or confidential regional church records, of which this author carries the credentials of extensive regional church work.

Special thanks also go to Ron Greene for proof-reading the manuscript for this book. Ron has a special perspective as an ordained Disciples minister, as the spouse of Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher, and as pastor of Central Christian Church in Great Falls for sixteen years (and counting), as this book goes into print.

As mentioned in the Preface, members from a number of congregations wrote two to three page histories of their congregations for inclusion in this book. I greatly appreciate their contributions. No history submitted escaped some editing. And all contributors understood the editing process. Some contributions were greater than others, but I am grateful for all the help, and wish to acknowledge these contributors.

Volunteers who wrote about their congregations included Chuck Tooley (Billings, Central), Don Beal (Billings, Central), Joanne E. Lindberg (Billings, First), Becky Taylor (Billings, Seekers Harbor Faith Community), Marilyn and Frank Carter (Bozeman), Jean Muir (Great Falls), Ron Greene

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In the final months of accumulating pictures for the book, I was given significant help from interim Regional Minister Sandy Messick. She took pictures of many Disciples church buildings, and church groups that met with her, during her tour of the Montana Region. She then graciously shared them for potential publication, and many were used.

Finally, and foremost, I give special thanks to my spouse and former Regional Minister Karen Frank-Plumlee, not only for resources and insights into this writing, but for physical space when it was needed to accomplish the work.

Robert P. (Bob) Frank-Plumlee

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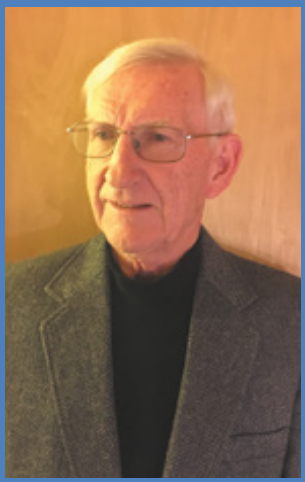
The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has enjoyed a long history in Montana, and in 1984 its prior 120-year history was recorded in a thorough volume, *Big Sky Disciples, A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana*. But much has changed since 1984, and the recent history of the Disciples can shed much light on both the past and future of the church.

Big Sky Disciples, Volume 2: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Montana, 1984–2018 shares this recent history and chronicles the changes in church organization over the last four decades. Author Robert P. Frank-Plumlee tells the final chapter of the Christian Church (DOC) in Montana as it prepares to merge with the Northwest Regional Christian Church (DOC) in January 2020. This new region will comprise Alaska, Washington, North Idaho, and Montana.

While the church has experienced a long period of decline both in numbers of congregations and in size of remaining congregations, this recent history of the church offers an insight into each of the nineteen congregations that were in Montana in 1984 and where they are today, along with a history of the Cane Ridge West Conference and Retreat Center.

About the Author



Robert P. "Bob" Frank-Plumlee is a retired Disciples of Christ minister living in the mountains near Lincoln, Montana, with his wife, Karen. They have been Montana residents since 1993. Bob graduated from Northwest Christian University in Oregon in 1966, and from Phillips Theological Seminary in Oklahoma in 1969. He went on to serve the church in Colorado, Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, and Montana. Ordained in 1969, Bob has held church positions as an associate minister, senior minister, interim minister, new church planter, associate regional minister, and interim regional minister. Bob and Karen are both pilots, and own a Cessna 172. Besides flying, they enjoy hiking, canoeing, cross-country skiing, and world travel. They have seven children and many grandchildren and greatgrandchildren.

lulu