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Here Is the Church

Reflections from the Regional Minister

*"Here is the church, here is the steeple,
open the doors, and here's all the people."*

If you recognize this children's poem, then you know that the church is your folded hands, the pointed index fingers the steeple, and when you open your hands, your wiggling fingers become the people.

This is a fun rhyme to teach children, yet, according to Kristine A. Culp in an article titled "Equipping the Saints," this simple poem expresses some of the most radical ideas of the Christian faith.



According to Culp, Martin Luther stated that the church is neither a structure nor a hierarchy, but truly the people of God. This means that the church is not a building, the programs that are instituted, or even a place of worship. The church is a community of faith that has heard a life-changing message and must share it with the rest of the world.

In this community, we are all called to be ministers, Luther's notion of the priesthood of all believers. We are vested with the power of the Holy Spirit, given gifts of ministry, and called to share them for the good of the church, our community, and the world. These gifts are a blessing and a challenge. Sometimes they exceed our comfort level, and God often leads us to new commitments that test and expand our lives of faith.

Our call to ministry cannot be contained within the walls of the church. At home, in the workplace, and in our daily lives, we should become a vision of what the church can be: inclusive, honest, open, hardworking, just, merciful, and full of the grace of God. If we do not live out our ministry, then our hearts are empty because we have not accepted the transformative power of Jesus Christ in our lives.

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Yet, we must also remember the reverse of the children's poem, "... open the doors and where's all the people?" If our churches are not open and welcoming to new Christians and the ministries they bring to those who have been hurt by the church in the past and need healing, and to those whose ideas are different, we will eventually wonder where all the people have gone. A part of ministry is learning when to let go and let others and God lead us down the path of faith.



As Summer ends and Fall begins, let us celebrate our ministries in the coming months, share them with all people, listen to the leadership of others, and move as the Spirit calls us, so that we might truly become the Church, founded by Christ and loved by God. Amen.

Paul



Welcome Table CC Celebration

At the end of this year, Welcome Table Christian Church in Seattle (née Findlay Street Christian Church) will be concluding our visible ministry. But first, come celebrate with us.

As the first Open and Affirming congregation in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we set a wide table where all are welcome, and all means all. That welcome rippled outward, into other churches, other lives, long after it began here. Come, let us set that wide table once more, and give thanks for the holy mystery of our enduring legacy and the continuing work of welcome.

Please send questions, reflections, and RSVPs to Rev. Rebecca Sumner at pastor@welcometablecc.org.

The event will have a streaming option (details TBD) at this link:

[us06web.zoom.us/j/97628243489?](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/97628243489?pwd=d1g2bEZldktldFVxREFQYXhXUWdTO9)

[pwd=d1g2bEZldktldFVxREFQYXhXUWdTO9](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/97628243489?pwd=d1g2bEZldktldFVxREFQYXhXUWdTO9)



A commissioning service!

After six-plus years of course work, time with a mentor, meeting with the Regional Commission on Ministry, and completing all requirements set before him, the Northern Lights Region is thrilled to announce Stephen Best as the newly commissioned minister at United Christian Church in Yakima, WA. Steve has served United Church for several years, and now is officially commissioned in his role as the congregation's pastor and shepherd.

For those wishing to attend Steve's service of commissioning, you are welcome to attend Worship at 10 am PDT this Sunday, August 23rd. An added bonus will be the opportunity to hear Regional Minister Paul Allen bring the good news that morning, as well as formally commissioning Steve as well.

Ordinations, installations, and commissions are also a traditional time to share a donation for the region's Lane-Salmon Clergy Emergency Fund and our Clergy Scholarship Fund (donations are split equally between the two). These funds support our clergy during times of need, and to further their continuing education with funding from the accounts. (See more on Page 4)



Steve recently served as counselor at TWO weeks of summer youth camp!

**Come and join the celebration - Sunday, August 23rd at 10 am PDT
United Christian Church, 317 S 41st St, Yakima, WA 98901**

Anti-racism/Pro-reconciliation training opportunities



The Northern Lights Region trades focus on clergy training every two years: Healthy Boundaries or Anti-racism/Pro-reconciliation. To maintain standing, clergy are required to complete 6 hours on these topics in their focus year, and in 2026 our focus is AR/PR. With few exceptions, all active and Retired-active ordained and commissioned clergy with regional standing, as well as our in-care candidates, need to complete this. Prior to our Regional Assembly, an in-person training was led by Rev. Chris Dorsey of Disciples Home Missions. In accordance with NLR policy, those unable to be there may opt to take a 6-hour training held by another Disciples Region or led by other approved denominations under the umbrella of Churches Uniting in Christ.

UPDATE: an in-person AR/PR training will be held Saturday, Sept. 12th from 9 am-4 pm PDT at North Hill Christian Church in Spokane, WA and will include lunch.

If you are in or near the Spokane Area or would just love a road trip -- registration is open now at northernlightsdisciples.org/boundaries-arpr-training; scroll to "Clergy Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Training Opportunities," and click the REGISTER link.

(Current members of the COM may attend free - see the registration form option.)

If you are a clergy in need of AR/PR training but can't be at the Spokane session, **other opportunities for trainings through other resources are listed on that page.**

Clergy Scholarship Funds (and Lane-Salmon Clergy Emergency Assistance): *A thank you note from Rev. Rochelle Richards*

I am writing to express my gratitude for the funds which helped fund my recent trip to the Grünewald Guild, June 28-July 3 for week 3 of the summer program Resonance. The Grünewald Guild's mission is "to offer welcome and inspire all people who seek to explore the intersections of art, faith, and community." During each session, several art mediums are offered, and participants choose one and work on a project (or projects) within that medium for the week. I attended week 3 with my eldest daughter and we both participated in the stained-glass class.

You have asked for a brief reflection on "the current and anticipated value of the training" to me and my ministry. The most succinct way of stating the value of the experience at the Guild is to say that it provides space and time



for respite and self-care, which are crucial to longevity in ministry. My 28 years of Ordained Ministry have brought a variety of experiences and lessons to my life as a minister and human being—some tender and sweet and others deeply bitter and wounding. This 21st year of ministry at Sumner First Christian Church qualifies me for a third sabbatical; however, with the size and budget of the church being what it is, a full sabbatical is not feasible. The week at the Grünewald Guild, and the funds granted for it, have given me a brief but extremely meaningful and necessary time of sabbath.

I have never made stained glass nor worked with glass before then. It is an unforgiving medium. You cannot bend glass to your creative will.

You must learn to use tools and techniques and to prepare for safety by wearing thick gloves, masks and eye protection. When you cut glass, sometimes it breaks, sometimes it shatters. When you grind glass, it becomes a fine dust that can be inhaled, causing damage. When you solder tin and lead, it creates noxious fumes. Beautiful things are created from potentially dangerous and damaging materials and processes. There is a parallel to ministry, and I found myself reflecting a bit on how to be flexible, protected, and creative with what is sometimes inflexible, sharp, and damaging.

The Guild is a place of creativity not just in studios, but in the community that is built during the week. It is truly one of the few places where I see intergenerational interaction and collaboration on a deep and caring level. It was an absolute joy to see my Gen Z daughter meet and connect with people her age and people 4-5 decades older than her. Seeing community and creativity in this way gives me hope in these complicated times in a way that nothing else has. So what is the value of this experience? How do I quantify that for you in a meaningful way? The experience encourages me, propels me to keep moving forward in a creative and compassionate way. The experience compels me to look and listen for God in different ways. It reminds me to be patient with myself and others—to be flexible, especially in inflexible times.

I thank you for awarding me the funding from the clergy scholarship funds and am grateful for the life and gifts of those who make such gifts possible.

Rochelle+

To apply for clergy assistance grant support:
northernlightsdisciples.org/clergy-assist-grants



Soul Circle - Women's Spiritual Retreat

September 18-20, 2026 | Register BY 9/10
Cane Ridge West Conference & Retreat Ctr.

This annual favorite is on the calendar again as women from around the Region will gather to celebrate gifts, passions, empowerment, and the joys of womanhood.

REGISTER NOW

docgeneralassembly.regfox.com/nlr2026-womens-retreat



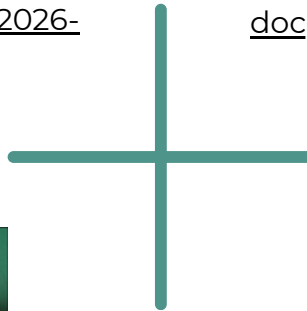
Rhythms of Rest - Clergy (+1) Retreat

October 16-18, 2026 | Register BY 10/8
Cane Ridge West Conference & Retreat Ctr.

All regional clergy are invited to participate in a retreat of restful surroundings in the company of colleagues, friends, and a plus-one companion (optional).

REGISTER NOW

docgeneralassembly.regfox.com/nlr2026-clergy-plus-one-retreat



Central Christian Church, Billings Book Sale

1221 16th Street W, Billings, MT 59102

Monday 9/21 - Saturday 9/26

10 am-4 pm (MDT) daily

Over 75,000 books (soft .50 / hard \$1.00),
DVDs, CDs, puzzles & games.

Something for everyone!

Win a handcrafted quilt - \$500 value



Feast of Creation in Christ ecumenical worship service

St. Andrews: 111 NE 80th St, Seattle, WA 98115

Tuesday, 9/1 at 6:30pm PDT

Sponsored by CEIE Faith & Ecology Roundtable, will include leadership from diverse Christian traditions sharing a deep sacred connection to earth and commitment to earth care and climate justice. A time of conversation and connection is offered after the service.

RSVP: events.seattleu.edu/event/feast-of-creation-in-christ-ecumenical-worship-gathering

Streamed: youtube.com/watch?v=8AGKaUPG1ZY



Phoebe Fellowship

In the tradition of Phoebe (Romans 16:7) and other female biblical leaders, active clergy in the Region who identify as women faithfully lead and minister in diverse contexts and communities. The group's 2nd Tuesday monthly Zoom gathering provides a safe, supportive, empowering environment for clergy identifying as women to connect, share experiences, and address challenges unique to their roles and lives as church leaders.

Contact Robin in the Regional Office to be added to Phoebe Fellowship emails.



Retired Clergy to resume in October

Intrigued by what our Retired Clergy group will discuss next? This group of engaged and energetic clergy meets on Zoom at 1 pm PT on the first Monday each month, in the company of Regional Minister Paul Allen, and often has a special topic or speaker.

If you'd like to join the group, **contact the Regional Office to be added to the group** to receive emails, links, and updates. Northern Lights clergy in all stages of retirement are welcome and encouraged to take part!

NBA Mission & Ministry Grants





Supporting Disciples ministries for older adults and educational programs for at-risk youth and young adults.

Apply online at
NBAcares.org/MM-Grants



National Benevolent Association

The National Benevolent Association is accepting applications thru 9/30 for Mission & Ministry Grants funding projects serving older adults, educating at-risk children and youth, and inter-generational projects for at-risk children and older adults.

nbacares.org/mm-grants



Disciples Mission Week 2026

Disciples Home Missions is providing powerful educational webinars for congregations on issues affecting communities: Food & Housing Insecurity, Healthcare Inequities, and Disability Equity. Through HUB, DHM provides education and awareness to churches to turn compassion to action.

Join Tuesday-Friday at 4:30 pm PT for four powerful webinar-style gatherings during Disciples Mission Week. Each is designed to deepen understanding and fuel a congregation's mission to serve.

Register for webinars [here!](#)