



General Assembly

of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

July 29 –
August 1, 2023

A Movement for Wholeness in a Fragmented World

Christian Unity remains central

As a denomination that claims Christian Unity to be our Polar Star, Disciples spent this General Assembly gathering pondering what that means for us in this everchanging age of the Body of Christ. What kinds of new configurations of church will emerge? Will we see more mergers of congregations? Will denominations become less parochial and embrace anew Jesus’s call for unity (John 17)? Of course, while Disciples have made Christian Unity at the center of our witness, it is not an end in itself. Christian Unity, if it is to have any value, must enhance our witness to the healing grace of God as reflected in Jesus’s proclamation of the Realm of God.

So, as the opening night preacher, Chaplain Major Owen Chandler, declared, the most important thing we need to know as we seek to live in the Kingdom of God, and live as the Kingdom of God is this: “Love first, love always, and we’ll figure out the rest as we go.” That sounds like a plan that Jesus would approve of. The future remains unknown to us. The good news is that we do not approach the future alone. For even as Jesus called his disciples to be united, he also promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with them. It is the Spirit who guides and empowers us as take up each day as members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), our calling to be “a movement of wholeness in a fragmented world.”

KINDOM OF GOD WITHIN US AMONG US



Left Photo: The Rev. Terri Hord Owens receive prayers from her family, the Moderator of the CC(DOC) and former General Minister and President Rev. Sharon Watkins, as she is installed. Right Photo: The General Minister and President of the CC(DOC), Rev. Terri Hord Owens, opens the General Assembly with the official bugler of the Kentucky Derby, Steve Buttleman, with a “call to post,” as typically heard at Churchill Downs.

General Minister & President Re-elected to Second Term

Rev. Terri Hord Owens is installed for a second term

Some have said that institutional religion is passé and irrelevant. These are indeed challenging times for religious institutions. We tend to make the news when a scandal hits or when religious leaders make outrageous statements. Mainline Protestantism once dominated the American religious scene, but that’s no longer true. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a rather small denomination, and yet we seem to punch above our weight. And we continued this practice gathering for the 2023 General Assembly in Louisville, KY.

As a congregationally based denomination, the leadership of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada is nominated by representatives from the entire church who serve on the General Board, and then elected by biennial gathering of the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

In 2005, we elected the Rev. Sharon Watkins as the first woman to lead a Mainline denomination. And in 2017, we elected the Rev. Terri Hord Owens as the first African American woman to lead a mainline denomination. On August 1, 2023, Rev. Terri Hord Owens was elected by over 3,000 members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to serve a second, 8-year term, and installed in a worship service later that night.

As the global Christian church continues to be led predominantly by men, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) celebrates the gifts of women all over the world keeping the faith alive, and honors the unique leadership of the many women of color leading our denomination including our General Minister and President, Vice President and Chief of Staff, Associate General Minister and President, and more.

Worship

Disciples gathered for four nights of worship, in addition to worshipping in the Louisville community on Sunday morning. Chaplain Major Owen Chandler, Rev. Yolanda Norton, Rev. Dr. David Anderson Hooker, and Rev. Terri Hord Owens all shared the Word at one of the evening worship gatherings.

Business

Voting representatives from local congregations, as well as ordained clergy, all gathered for four business sessions of the General Assembly. Business included receiving reports from General Ministries, and voting upon Sense-of-the-Assembly resolutions, which are described on the next page.

Workshops

When not worshipping, fellowshiping, or conducting business, Disciples had the opportunity to choose from dozens of workshops, led by church leaders from across the life of the church enriching their knowledge while connecting with others who are also curious about the same issues and prospects.

General Assembly

Business Sessions of the Christian Church

One of the many reasons Disciples attend the General Assembly is to perform the worshipful work of the Church through business sessions. Much like the Board of Directors of local congregations, the General Assembly is the representative body of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and receives and acts upon proposed policy and program, reports and resolutions, and other items of business presented during business sessions.

At least two representatives from each congregation along with all clergy with *standing* within their region met for four different business sessions during the General Assembly gathering in Louisville. Casey and Phil Sigmon, and their daughters represented Overland Park Christian Church at these sessions.

Business items included reports from the various General Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) along with 14 different resolutions that were discussed and voted upon.

Twelve of the resolutions were adopted by the General Assembly, and two were Referred to the Office of General Minister for further study, reflection, and action.

Among those twelve resolutions adopted by the General Assembly were policy items such as the re-election of our General Minister and President, Rev. Terri Hord Owens, and establishing the location of the 2025 General Assembly (Memphis, TN). A significant policy resolution that was also adopted was “GA 2343” *Amendments to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*.

As many denominations have discovered, in-person gatherings like our General Assembly are expensive. This is true for the denomination but also individual participants, especially if one doesn’t have a congregation able to pay their expenses. As part of the changes made in the *Design*, our governing document was moving our in-person gatherings from biennial to triennial gatherings.

Beginning in 2028, these triennial gatherings will also allow for hybrid participation in the business meeting, along with annual online assemblies, at which every congregation will have three voting representatives (clergy with standing will continue to have voting privileges).

Disciples also adopted several resolutions surrounding social issues within our communities. Disciples voted to:

- Oppose Christian Nationalism
- Oppose Anti-Trans Legislation and Affirm the Dignity of Transgender and Gender-Diverse People
- Answer the Cry of our Palestinian Siblings
- Respond to Food Waste, Food Insecurities and Environmental Justice
- Build on our Church’s commitment to Faith-Based Investing

You can contact Rev. Laura, or Casey & Phil Sigmon for more information about these resolutions.



Left Photo: OPCC’s Rev. Chuck Pickrel led the youth programming for the entire General Assembly along with GKC pastor Rev. Dr. Lara Pickrel and Rev. Randy Kuss who serves the General Youth Council in Indiana.
Right Photo: OPCC’s Rev. Laura Phillips found OPCC representatives Casey, Phil, Viola and Lillian Sigmon.

Youth & Children at General Assembly

This is one of the first years that the organizers of youth and children’s programming were given “a seat” at the General Assembly planning table from beginning to end, giving youth and children an opportunity to participate wherever their gifts would flourish.

Some youth and children participated in the business sessions, others taking part in service projects. A rich and full “prayer ground” allowed families to worship together each night, and included all ages in the worship services.

Youth and children were also invited to participate in their own unique workshops and/or the workshop opportunities provided for the wider church, as well as given the space for rest and sabbath in their own area.

Exhibit spaces for each of the General Ministries and partners also included opportunities for children and youth to learn more, and participate fully in the life of the church, in the Kingdom of God.

Mission Projects at GA

Whenever Disciples gather, mission opportunities abound. Week of Compassion, the outreach and development ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), provided an opportunity to continue supporting Western Kentucky tornado recovery right there in the exhibit hall of the General Assembly. Volunteers framed a home, and then wrote prayers on the frame before the structure was moved to its new home.

