

**Vision, Mission, Values and Strategy
for the Ongoing Transformation the Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
in Mid-America**

2015 – 2016
(Updated, Fall 2015)

Affirmed by the 2012 Mid-America Regional Assembly, October, 2012

Vision The Mid-America Region is envisioned as a continuously developing network of relationships that includes broader and deeper participation by congregations, ministers, and laity in congregational clusters, learning communities, and shared missions and ministries.

Mission The Mid-America Region’s mission is to resource and support congregations, individually and collectively, as they seek to be more faithful, effective, and sustainable in the mission to which God calls us.

Values In keeping with Ephesians 4:11-12, Mid-America Disciples affirm the core values of true community (mutual support and accountability), deep Christian spirituality, and passion for justice.

The Mid-America Region has been called to do its ministry in a new way. *This Re-Envisioning has been primarily driven by the need to address the cultural change we have all been experiencing in recent decades in an adaptive way¹ that is both faithful and effective.* Though diminishing finances are both symptomatic of the need for change and must be taken into account as changes are made, this initiative is not simply driven by finances.

The inspiration is Ephesians 4, which describes a church that is less an institution and more of an organism. That is, it is a church in which all the believers are considered to be members of the Body of Christ and each is considered a minister. Ephesians 4:11-12 says, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ....”

These words suggest that *every* member of the body has responsibility for doing the ministry. It also suggests that the leadership has responsibility for *equipping* the members for this ministry. Thus, this is a vision of a region in which the work is dispersed through multiple *networks* rather than done from a *hub*; a region in which people (both clergy and laity) are *equipped, empowered, enabled, appreciated and held*

¹ “Adaptive” is used here in the same way it is used by Ron Heifetz, author of “Leadership Without easy Answers”. That is, “adaptive change” goes past “fixing problems within a system” to addressing the entire system itself.

accountable. (Galatians 6:02 - priesthood of all believers, servant leadership, discipleship).

The Core Issue

The Mid-America Region for many decades depended upon regional and area staff to provide most of the connection between both congregations and individuals. This was practical in the 1950's, when there were many more regional and district (later "area") staff, and people connected through regional and district board meetings, assemblies, women's gatherings, Fifth Sunday Night meetings, revivals, rallies and other events. But as these events have typically attracted fewer and fewer participants due to the dynamics of post-modern culture and the characteristics of younger generations, both individuals and congregations within the region have become more isolated from one another. Thus, our congregations and leaders feel less and less connected to one another and to the wider Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The CCMA Re-Envisioning Team (2010-2012) felt drawn to a new paradigm for regional life based on networking and sharing resources among ourselves and others beyond the region, rather than continuing with the staff-dependent model (intended as a description of our old system, not a criticism of any staff). The staff dependent model is based upon knowing and being known by a regional or area minister rather than knowing and being known by each other as individuals and congregations seeking to work together within this common mission field called Mid-America.

We are working toward a Mid America that helps reconnect us to each other as Disciples, results in broader and quicker sharing of resources and assistance to those who need it most, while also helping the regional staff be healthier and more effective.²

To contrast the former model and this newer model, the CCMA Re-Envisioning Team found it helpful to think of the difference between a spider and a starfish (based upon the images used in the recent book, "The Spider and The Starfish" by Brafman and Beckstrom). A spider has a central nervous system, so if you cut off the head, the whole organism dies. By contrast, if you cut a leg off some species of starfish, the starfish generates a new leg and the leg generates a new starfish! The spider is a hub and spoke organism, but the starfish is a network organism. As an image for church structures, one is staff-dependent (what some would call "pastor-centered"), while the other is a "discipleship" model in which everyone has a ministry and gifts to share as well as to receive.

We have moved some distance toward regional ministry being carried out primarily in this "starfish", or networked way, by a constellation of leaders, lay and clergy, from among our congregations with the leadership of the Mid-America Regional Minister Team, but not always with their direct participation. Among the activities that have begun to be shared by networked groups of emerging leaders are:

1. pastoral support for the clergy of Mid-America through the ongoing development of robust and healthy clusters of congregations
2. ongoing care for congregations through the Disciples Care Team

² In the 1986 regional history, "Remember, Renew, Rejoice", it says, "Even though the organizational restructure was completed in 1983, the program is constantly being modified to make it relevant and viable in every decade." Thus the need for ongoing transformation has always been recognized.

3. leadership development activities such as assemblies, camp and conference and other programs that arise out of the work of the various regional commissions, and now increasingly through resource teams.

The work of the region (and areas) has been carried out in a way that is about 80% spider and 20% starfish, but we have made significant movement to a style that would reverse that ratio: 20% of the work being done by the Mid-America Regional Minister Team 80% of the work being done by others in collaborative networks (thus potentially generating a huge increase in the amount of ministry that gets done while making it possible for the Mid-America Regional Minister Team to spend their time engaged in those activities that are most important for them to do). Much of the work will be done through resource teams (some of them affinity groups-- people who have shared interests and needs), along with resource teams trained to do those kinds of conflict management that do not have to be done by the regional minister team, and Disciples Care Team members who will regularly visit congregations and clergy to provide support on behalf of the whole of Mid-America. Activities that will still be carried out by the Mid-America Regional Minister Team directly will include (but not be limited to) the confidential portions of the congregational Search and Call process, and crisis intervention in congregational life, especially in cases that involve ethical misconduct. The Mid-America Regional Minister Team will also continue to be engaged in pastoral care, nurture of congregations, leadership recruitment and promotion of resource teams and affinity groups, etc., but in tandem with others.³

Three things are implicit in this vision for Mid America:

1. A smaller, more flexible regional structure that will allow Mid-America to more easily begin new ministries, change the nature of current ministries, and discontinue ministries that are no longer effective. The 2015 regional assembly will vote on a 15 member Governance Board, which will more efficiently policies, finances and other business. All four Areas will close out their operations at the end of 2015, freeing up considerable time and energy for mission and ministry. A new Mid America Mission and Ministries (M&Ms) Council will form by January 2016, to provide a gathering “place” for the many and growing mission and ministry trajectories in Mid America. The M&Ms will provide a “place” for the joyous celebration of all the missions and ministries in our region, as well as for the resource teams to meet and plan ahead for the next year, with a look over the horizon to three years.
2. The continued development of the key connections tool in Mid America: <http://www.mid-america-disciples.org/> This will allow our Mid-America Regional Minister Team to be more present to us and allow us as clergy, lay leaders and congregations to be present for one another - without always having the heavy burden of cost and travel time. While electronic meetings of various kinds can

³ While institutional volunteerism is down in recent years, this is because so much of what volunteers are asked to do is without much meaning or satisfaction. We believe there will be willingness and enthusiasm for participation in activities that have meaning and impact for the mission and that provide genuine connection with other Disciples.

- never replace face to face meetings entirely, they can be wonderfully effective when used in combination with face to face meetings.
3. A principle: that engaging in ministry *together*, rather than in isolated congregational silos, will actually generate and release more energy than is required to live the model! Much of the exhaustion felt by so many congregational pastors and lay leaders, as well as regional and area ministers, is born of the sense of being “on our own”. Recreating Mid-America as a networked community, rather than as what is sometimes perceived to be a mere maintenance structure, will bless us all.

The CCMA Re-Envisioning Team and its successors, the Mid America Implementation Team and the Mid America Regional Minister Team, realized that the shift to the new model would not occur overnight. Responsible and effective change has to be lived into with much improvisation and invention along the way. As this vision and strategy is affirmed, embraced, and further developed, we continue to seek input from Mid-America clergy and lay leaders for the sake of regular evaluation and making on-going corrections and amendments—think of it as continuous quality improvement.

The Needed Transition

The transition to a network-driven region has indeed required some time, intentionality and skill on the part of the Mid-America Regional Minister Team and the volunteer leadership. Such a decentralized model is requiring more “*networking between congregations*” rather than “*networking between congregations and the Regional and Area offices*” only or primarily. It has required the investment of time and money in networking tools, including an advanced website and other Internet capacities (e.g. “webinar” capability). It increasingly means using volunteer time for mission and for nurture, rather than for governance primarily. Governance is important, but a huge proportion of volunteer time has been used in boards and committees rather than in the *primary work and mission* of Mid-America. Thus, the “primary work” has typically been left to the regional and area staff (a hallmark of modern era, 1950’s style institutions that do not work well in this post-modern era). This Vision and Strategy envisions gradually revised job descriptions for the staff (the Mid-America Regional Minister Team) that will support the new networking model of the Region.

Partnerships Beyond the Mid-America Region

The network of services and resources can range across the entire Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and beyond. Ecumenical partners may also participate in sharing resources. These partnerships (including other Disciples regions, general units, congregations and ecumenical partners) should be kept in mind in any and all program planning and development done by Mid-America.

Just as a sturdy building is built on piers that go deeply into the good soil and provide sound foundations, there are several “piers” that will support our covenantal life together and upon which this new system (as named above) will continue to be implemented into the fabric of Mid-America over time. Additional information about these “piers” is provided below. There will be regular reviews of progress,

accountability within our governance structures, and regular on-going corrections and amendments as needed.

(1) Development of the Mid-America Regional Minister team:

The members of the Mid-America Regional Minister Team now have somewhat differing individual roles based on need and individual strengths but common responsibilities and accountabilities. Though Mid-America Regional Minister Team members continue to be dispersed throughout Mid-America, they have been meeting regularly electronically and in person to coordinate their work.

With the agreement among the Mid America leadership, both clergy and lay, that the dissolution of the current four Areas into one Mid America, the “new” Mid America seeks to preserve the current strengths of the church in Mid America, including our geographical deployment of staff, as well as our fiscal sustainability.

(2) Development of the Disciples Care Team:

At the Mid America Regional Assembly in October 2012, the work and ministry of a Mid-America Disciples Care Team was affirmed and an initial group of Care Team members were commissioned to engage in a Region-wide ministry that provides contact and care with our congregations. The DCT has continued to develop after its training event in February, 2013. When fully implemented, each Disciples congregation in Mid-America will have a Care Team member assigned to them.

The ministry of Mid-America’s *Disciples Care Team* includes the care of congregations in partnership with the Mid-America Regional Minister Team, serving as “connectors” within the body. This is fundamental to the development of a system that is based on relationships between congregations and individuals representing Mid-America (rather than relationships merely between staff and congregations/individuals). These Disciples Care Team members are not “staff” in the normal sense of the word, but are lay and clergy leaders (some younger, some older) chosen to serve for a limited term because of their spiritual, emotional and ecclesial maturity- the Team members have no formal authority and their representation of Mid-America is more informal (that is, they have no “constitutional powers” but become effective as they develop trust and express care and concern for those of the body). They might be thought of as Mid-America “elders.”

Members of the Disciples Care Team provide a Regional presence in ministers’ lives and ultimately within congregations; enable a spiritual, prayerful, and transformational presence in support of ministers and congregations; extend prayer for and care and concern to more persons than the Mid America Regional Minister Team could ever provide; and enable a greater sense of Mid-America identity and oneness for ministers and congregations Mid-America serves.

Early on the Disciples Care Team developed its Mission and each Care Team member is expected to live it out in their ministry:

With the Love of Christ as our foundation, the Disciples Care Team of the Christian Church of Mid-America will engage in the covenantal ministries of contact and care through listening, relationships, collegiality, hospitality and unity.

(3) Development of a sophisticated-yet-user-friendly communication system that will undergird networking:

A key to the effective development of networks is the free flow of information that does not depend upon individual staff members. Because of the volume of work and information with which staff must deal, when the Region looks primarily to them for communication, staff members become unintentional “bottlenecks.” The communication system must be broader, easily accessible, and mostly unencumbered by “experts” and “gate keepers.” The network will utilize the most current technology possible, but will also be sure to include people who do not use the Web or to whom the Internet is unavailable.

The communications plan has developed an enhanced “one stop” Christian Church of Mid-America website with consistency of branding and timely postings and responses. Soon, virtual team rooms will be available to facilitate interest groups and resource teams, along with other groups. Training on these various new capacities is coming soon. A Mid America Communications resource team is working this plan.

(4) Streamlining of governance and finance structures so as to free up time and energy of volunteers for doing the actual ministry of Mid-America:

With the adoption in October of our new By Laws and Governance Board, a great deal of time and energy will be freed up for the enhancement and proliferation of missions and ministries within the aegis of the Mission and Ministries Council. The Mid America region has made a significant step in the direction of a unified financial system by contracting with the DOC Office of General Minister and President (OGMP) Treasury Services to perform the region’s financial work, from payroll to bill-paying to audits.

(5) Development of “Mid-America Resource Teams”:

Resource Teams are comprised of persons who by virtue of their experience, effectiveness, trustworthiness, and willingness to engage in continuing education and in team work and accountability, are carefully chosen to provide some basic regional and area services with excellence.

Some of the services provided by Resource Teams *might* include:

- developing congregational youth ministry;
- providing resources related to stewardship education;
- assisting acquisition of and education related to technology and communications;
- educating members about local mission and justice ministry issues;
- leading cultural or generational sensitivity training;
- guiding to resources and encouragement toward evangelism;
- guiding to help toward conflict management and mediation;
- orientation of congregational search committees to the search and call process;
- stimulating worship enrichment and spiritual life development.

Not all of the needed teams can be developed right away, but we already have some in place: the Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism Resource Team; the Youth and Outdoor Ministry Resource Team; the Disaster Response Resource Team; the Disciples Care Team, and the Communications Resource Team. A Leadership Development

Resource Team and a Stewardship Resource Team is emerging from conversations among Disciples in the region. The identification of teams to be formed will be under the aegis of the Mission and Ministries Council. Team members will be accountable to the Mid-America M&Ms Council and to each other as a learning community of peers. Being a Resource Team member is a form of continuing education that benefits both the individual team member, the congregation of whom he or she is a part, as well as the congregations assisted.

Some Resource Teams will emerge and develop from common interests. Resource Teams might be created by those interested in, for example: personal practice of the spiritual disciplines, regular study of the lectionary for sermon and lesson preparation, the arts and worship, particular mission and/or social action interests (local or global), technological skills for use in the church, mutual support of leaders, theological study and discussion, Bread for The World, and congregational revitalization. These groups may form spontaneously, while some will grow out of various gatherings and conversations. Some may be ongoing for many years (such as a Camp and Conference Resource Team for those who are passionate about providing quality camp and conference experiences), or may be very short-lived, depending upon interest and need. Some groups may be self-recruiting, others may have recruited leadership and be advertised for participation. The development of a Disaster Response Resource Team for Disciples congregations, in collaboration with UCC as well as various public and non profit organizations is a good example of a common interest group in Mid America that is well underway.

Disciples Women are an ongoing model of a Resource Team that crosses over all these categories.

(6) Development of intentional dialogue on cultural and justice issues.

Differences in opinion in matters of conscience are an ongoing challenge, but one that must be met if we are to be a truly diverse community that respects differences of perspective. Dialogue means the outcomes are not perceived as win-lose, but win-win: in which all win by being pushed to think more deeply and carefully about various issues, while maintaining the “unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3-4) and recognizing our “oneness in Christ” (John 17:21).

This is such a challenge because the “natural” tendency (as Paul uses the word “natural”), is to want to “hang out” only with those who see things as we do and to avoid talking about the deeper matters of life and faith with anyone we suspect might challenge our thinking and perspective. Yet, if we do not engage in such dialogue, we increasingly become strangers to one another and erect “dividing walls of hostility” between us (Ephesians 2:14).

A Word about Change

The unfolding of the re-envisioning process in later years will depend a great deal upon what is accomplished in the first years, the degree to which the new approach is embraced by our members and ministers, and upon regular evaluation of progress and of the plan itself. The overall Plan and our progress will be reviewed annually by the Mid America Governance Board and M&Ms Council. Implementation Team (which includes the Ministry Team) in order to recommend governance adjustments as needed and to

celebrate that which has been accomplished since the last review. Changes and celebrations should be shared with the whole of Mid-America in a public way and, as possible, in a context of worship in order to give God thanks and to engender greater ownership.

The primary factor in the rate of forward movement is Mid-America's *capacity* in terms of time, energy, and money. As Mid-America transforms, new energy (and hopefully funding) as well as more volunteers (serving more short-term task forces and fewer large, on-going committees) will become available and a greater rate of movement will be achievable.

(Updated, October, 2015)