Central Rocky Mountain Region Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) 2026 Regional Profile

Introduction

The Central Rocky Mountain Region (CRMR) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is shaped by several characteristics:

- Territory: 311,000 square miles (CO, WY, UT, Southeast ID, Northwest NM).
- Congregations: 38 total (urban, rural, mountain, storefront, historic, living rooms)
- Theological Spectrum: Progressive, Moderate, Conservative, Open & Affirming

The Region currently maintains an office in Denver; however, we plan to close it and transition fully to an online and distributed model. The Regional Minister may live anywhere within the CRMR. The CRMR staff consists of a part-time administrative assistant and a part-time Associate Regional Minister for Children and Youth. The Regional Minister will work closely with both staff members, as well as with the Regional Board, the Board Moderator, and the Foundation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) CRMR.

In 2026, the Region held 15 listening sessions, engaging 21 of our 38 congregations across every district (four geographic divisions of the Region) and state. They represented congregations from struggling to thriving, conservative to progressive, smaller to larger, and rural to urban. Their reflections shape this Regional Profile and guide our search for our next Regional Minister, with a few of their words included in italics.

The CRMR's ministry is deeply shaped by geography and sustainability. Vast distances influence connection, pastoral support, and collaboration. Because of where our congregations are located, most Regional Minister visits to congregations will likely be made by car rather than by air. Sustainability concerns, such as aging buildings, limited budgets, changing participation patterns, and access to pastoral leadership, affect congregations across the Region. These realities call us toward creative ministry models, renewed communication, and leadership able to navigate complexity with clarity, compassion, and vision.

We are a region marked by theological, cultural, ethnic, and contextual diversity and a shared commitment to justice, compassion, and the ministry of Jesus Christ. Our diversity is a gift we are learning to embrace.

2016 Mission & Vision

Created during the last Search & Call process, these statements are still affirmed by our listening sessions and remain commitments we strive to live into.

Mission:

To equip, enable, and edify congregations and leaders across the Central Rocky Mountain Region so that together we embody the movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

Vision:

To be a region where relationships flourish, congregations thrive, and ministries of justice and compassion are nurtured and supported.

Who We Are Today

1. Diversity Across Congregations and Contexts

Strengths

- The Region includes congregations with a wide range of theological identities, cultural backgrounds, ethnic identities, and ministry contexts.
- Congregations shape ministry around their histories and local needs.
- Small and rural congregations demonstrate resilience and community identity.
- Congregations show deep commitment to ministry despite distance and isolation.

Challenges

- Geography, isolation, and uneven population patterns create distinct challenges for congregations across the Region.
- Some congregations feel overlooked or unsupported, especially those outside the Front Range in Colorado.
- Theological, political, and generational differences can make connection and collaboration more challenging within congregations and between them.
- Some congregations navigate the tension between honoring cultural heritage and welcoming younger generations or members from outside that cultural identity.
- A small number of multidenominational congregations encounter unique challenges related to differing denominational identities.

2. Innovation and New Ministry Models

Strengths

- Several congregations have dynamic pastors, strong lay leadership, and a willingness to experiment with new ministry approaches.
- There is broad recognition that change is necessary for long-term vitality (region and congregations). *"We need to think outside the box; things in the past were good but not always realistic."*
- Creative ministry models, such as volunteer-driven leadership, shared preaching, and hybrid worship, are emerging in multiple contexts.
- Youth and camp ministries serve as vital sources of connection, growth, and leadership development, though smaller in scale than in some regions.

Challenges

- Many congregations face declining membership, aging demographics, and uncertainty around post-pandemic participation, making it difficult to attract younger members and families.
- Bi-vocational ministry realities and burnout affect pastors across the Region.
- Sustainability concerns (e.g. buildings, budgets, and long-term viability) are significant for several congregations.
- Access to pastoral candidates is limited, especially in remote areas.
- Difficulty recruiting and sustaining regional volunteers and officers.
- Limited active regional ministries, with several programs struggling or inactive, and a need for additional offerings for youth and young adults.

3. Communication and Connection

Strengths

- Congregations desire deeper regional connection.
- Virtual clergy gatherings have been helpful for pastors across the Region.
- Congregations value connection to the wider church, especially in isolated areas.
- Clergy and congregations express appreciation for regional presence, pastoral support, and shared communication. *"Our church is valued because regional resources are shared."*

Challenges

- Long travel distances and travel limitations make connection difficult for congregations and regional staff.
- Inconsistent regional communication, outdated information, and unclear regional mission and priorities leave some congregations feeling disconnected or unsure of the Region's role.
- Some congregations seek greater transparency and broader participation in regional decision-making and processes, expressing concern that decision-making has sometimes felt concentrated among small groups.
- Some congregations expressed that regional visits have at times seemed focused on financial needs rather than relational support.
- Congregations seek more equitable engagement across all states.

4. Empowerment and Support for Congregations

Strengths

- Strong lay leadership is present across much of the region.
- Congregations offer prayer, volunteers, hospitality, and financial support.
- Many congregations seek renewal and transformation.
- Several congregations show resilience and creativity in adapting to local contexts.
- Ecumenical partnerships and community outreach offer meaningful opportunities.
- Retired ministers across the Region offer wisdom, experience, and pastoral support that many congregations hope to engage more intentionally.

Challenges

- Burnout, volunteer shortages, and limited younger engagement affect many congregations, especially smaller ones.
- Financial strain and building maintenance burdens impact many congregations.
- Isolation intensifies challenges for many small congregations, limiting connection, support, and shared ministry opportunities. *"Distance between churches contributes to a sense of disconnection."*
- Congregations often need support navigating administrative, structural, and mission questions, as well as internal conflict, resistance to change, generational differences in ministry expectations, training in nonprofit practices and community partnerships, and stronger lay leadership development.