

Madison Heights Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
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MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

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Open doors-----Open hearts

Brenda Harris
Secretary

General Assembly Elects Rev. Teresa Hord Owens

I wrote a newsletter article about our assembly experience. It will be published next month as I found the following article to be more news worthy. It was published in the IndyStar.

An Indy-based church of diversity elects first black woman to lead a major denomination

Police shootings. A racial and income divide. The border wall. Fake news. Divisiveness and mistrust is alive and well in America today. But what if there was a place where civility and respect were expected — and everyone was welcome at the table? An Indianapolis-based church founded on ecumenical unity and inclusiveness has elected what it says is the first black female leader of a mainstream Protestant denomination. For anyone familiar with the core values of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the election this week of the Rev. Teresa Hord Owens as general minister and president shouldn't be a surprise.

"It's important to take note of it," Hord Owens said Wednesday, as the church with about a half-million members wrapped up its biennial convention in Downtown Indianapolis. "Within our church, we do celebrate diversity. The fact that we have the first African-American woman as a general minister and president is a significant event and we are certainly celebrating it."

Hord Owens grew up in Terre Haute, a direct descendant of members of the Lost Creek Settlement, a community of free black men and women founded in Vigo County in the early 1800s. As a young adult, she joined what is now known as the Light of the World Christian Church in Indianapolis. She is the dean of the University of Chicago's Divinity School and is the senior minister of a predominantly white congregation in Downers Grove, Ill.

She isn't the first black woman to hold a major role in the American faith community. In April, the Episcopal Church ordained the Rev. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows as the 11th bishop of Indianapolis, the first black woman to lead an Episcopal diocese. And last year, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) elected the Rev. Denise Anderson as a co-moderator. Still, it's not shocking the Disciples of Christ took this step. After all, the church was led for the past 12 years by the Rev. Sharon E. Watkins, its first female head. And it has had African-American members since the 1830s, free men and women who joined soon after its founding.

A key tenet of the Disciples of Christ is embodied in its symbol: a chalice with the Cross of St. Andrew. The chalice represents the Lord's Supper and Disciples' belief that everyone is welcome to share in Communion — without having to prove their faith. The cross represents its roots in Scottish Presbyterianism. Stressing unity over disagreement is key to the Disciples, just as its founding fathers rebelled against the rigid sectarianism and fractious dogma of the Presbyterian Church of the time. Unity and neighborliness is key in an age of acrimony, said Rev. Nathan Day Wilson, a minister in the Disciples of Christ and the director of communications at the Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. "Today, it seems there is a continued push to dividing people, instead of bringing them together," he said. "The election of Terri is part and parcel of our historic commitment to the inclusion of all God's children."

In Christian Love,

George Harris