

Welcome to the Manna Bible study! We're glad you've decided to take part in this study. It was prepared as a service for congregations by staff, volunteers, lay people and clergy, in the Christian Church in Indiana. By taking part, you are sharing an experience with other Disciples churches in Indiana as we seek to understand what lies ahead for our Regional church—not just the Regional office in Indianapolis, but the whole church, every congregation, minister and church member in the state.

In the past, the church might deal with the challenges we face by developing a strategic plan created by experts. Today, we've learned that strategic plans and expert advice aren't enough. The world has changed so much, and is changing so fast that our plans often become outdated as quickly as we can make them. We don't have a map that will lead us through our journey into the future, and we won't ever be able to make one.

The Bible has a story about God's people going on a journey with no map—the story of the Exodus, when God took his people out of slavery in Egypt and to a promised land of freedom. We have been looking to the story of the Exodus for inspiration and wisdom. During the Exodus, God's people were lost and confused, but they also found that God was close to them, leading and feeding them on the way.

The story of the Exodus tells us that when God's people were led into the wilderness, they could not find food to sustain them in the environment around them. But God gave them food—a strange kind of bread called *manna*. And since we are looking for God to feed us on our journey through the wilderness, the team that is seeking God's guidance on this part of our journey is called the **Manna Team**. The Manna Team includes Regional staff, pastors of churches, lay leaders, and students who each bring a different perspective. We are working with Rebecca Hale, Regional Minister to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Florida and consultant as a facilitator in the process. The team is spending two years together to help the Region learn how to listen to God and follow where God is leading us.

Instead of working to develop a strategic plan, this process is designed to help us listen to God, speaking to each of us and to all of us together as a church. We do this by listening to each other, so the process is built on a series of conversations which gradually expand to include wider circles of people—a process that looks more like a spiral than a straight line. The Manna Team began by interviewing a few people with many different backgrounds about the Region, and they held a gathering of clergy at the Regional Assembly in 2010. Based on those conversations, Rebecca Hale and the Manna Team identified six "common realities" that describe our situation in as a Regional church.

This Bible study is the next ring of the spiraling conversation. We hope that your church will engage in the study to reflect on the challenges facing your local congregation and the Regional church as well. We ask that you record your insights and lessons and share them with the Manna Team and the Region—not just the Regional office, but all the churches and people which together form the Christian Church in Indiana.

This study is a collection of six lessons written by six different authors. Each one brings together Scripture and our current situation in a different way. Unlike most Bible studies, each lesson is designed differently. This variety remind us that there is no one right way to go on this journey.

We pray that this piece of our journey together will bring you closer to each other, to the many other people who are part of the Christian Church in Indiana, and to God.

