



Reflections

By Erick D. (Rick) Reisinger
President • Disciples Church Extension Fund

“We are more together than we are apart” is a truism I have witnessed recently in the partnership that has formed around Real Faith Christian Church in Clarksdale, Miss. Disciples Church Extension Fund’s journey with this congregation began a number of years ago when we entered into a loan agreement that would enable them to build a new sanctuary and community space, since their 98-year-old structure was no longer meeting their needs. Unfortunately, individuals no longer associated with the building project or the church did not have the congregation’s best interests at heart. The project, and with it hope for how the congregation might serve their struggling community, came to a disastrous halt.



Pastor Zedric Clayton (center) takes a construction break with hard-working Disciples volunteers.

disillusionment the unfinished structure represented.

Hope arrived in 2012 in the form of Zedric Clayton, a young pastor who recognized that the congregation was focused on the building and not on God’s

Reeling from their misfortune, the congregation lost momentum and a sense of purpose. Members left and the few who remained were paralyzed by the disappointment and



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call for them. By redirecting their attention away from their past wounds to their potential as a community of faith, he helped the congregation begin to recover the energy and the dignity they had lost.

This strong sense of new life was evident when I visited the church late in 2013 to talk about the status of their loan. As I witnessed the growing congregation squeezing into the inadequate worship space adjacent to the unfinished sanctuary and gym, I realized that the pastor and his congregation are a perfect example of what Disciples Church Extension Fund

and Hope Partnership have been espousing for quite awhile:

1) A church building is not an end in itself; it is a means to do God's ministry that will make a difference in the community and in people's lives.

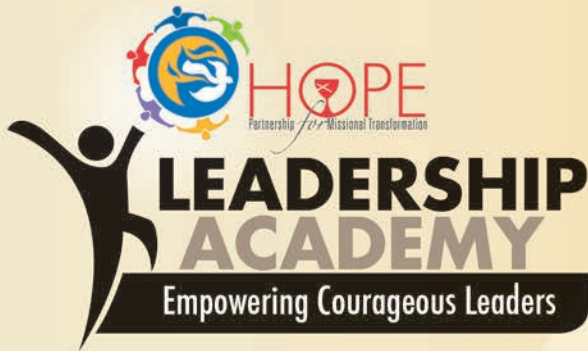
2) Courageous leaders are critical to the transformation of congregations that have lost purpose and hope.

3) When adversity and disaster strike, Disciples come together as partners to make things right, as God would have us do.

After my visit to Real Faith, I asked DCEF Building Services Advisor Jim Michel to explore what it would take to get the congregation into a finished building. And, while he engaged in conversation with contractors and city officials, I convened conversations with other partners whose mission is also to strengthen congregations and their leaders for mission, including

Hope Partnership, the Great River Region, Disciples Home Missions, Disciples Volunteering, Disciples Women, Reconciliation Ministry, Week of Compassion and National Convocation. Everyone jumped at the opportunity to serve this church and to do it collaboratively. No territories. No reservations. Only a deep desire to see this congregation succeed.

As I write this, Disciples volunteers and others are working onsite with the pastor and members of the congregation to get the church's infrastructure secured so further construction can proceed. Also happening now is an effort to raise funds from members of the congregation and from individuals across the country through gifts large and small that will cover project costs. The project has already received grants from Reconciliation Ministry, Disciples Home Missions and the Disciples Women's Endowment Fund. The plan, the prayer, is to celebrate Easter in the new sanctuary, with representatives from many of the ministry partners present to celebrate our journey together. I, for one, cannot wait! ■ www.disciplescef.org/real-faith



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ENABLING SUCCESS



▶ FEATURE ARTICLES:

A small, but mighty congregation...

Oh, the weather outside is frightful...

A small, but mighty congregation finds vitality through mission

Small in number but big in mission would describe Church of Christ, Uniting, a Disciples congregation in Lexington, Ill., according to Hope Partnership's Linda Gardner. The leader of the peer support group ("CARE Group") of which the church's pastor, Jan Proeber, is a member, Linda has witnessed the congregation's transformation as the result of their participation in Hope Partnership's Journey service, a comprehensive process for developing transformational leaders that can result in new vitality for a congregation.

The small central Illinois congregation is demonstrating its vitality through a community garden/food giveaway that engages high school students and faculty from a nearby school, neighbors, church members and more; an after-school "Peacemakers" program for kids preschool through sixth grade; a joint church/public school/community fine arts center housed in a historic blacksmith shoppe given to the church five years ago; an exercise class open to the community; hospitality for those in need of temporary housing; free lunches for the community; ongoing partnership with the

people of Lee County Kentucky Appalachia to improve living conditions; and much more.

Describing the congregation's transformation, Hope Partnership Vice President Rick Morse says, "By going through the Journey process, this small group discovered that it's not about being a bigger church, but a church that understands its calling to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Hope Partnership has given this small community, with declining membership and finances, a boost to get back to the work of mission that has long identified them. They are learning new ways to grow, not in numbers, but in the spirit of Christ and the call to discipleship."

Inviting others to support them in their efforts, Jan says, "God keeps blessing us with opportunities to serve, and that is what we are to be about. Our work identifies us as the people of God. Our ministry speaks for itself. We are seeing Emmanuel – God with us – here and now in Lexington, Illinois."

Hope Partnership's Journey is a two-year cycle of services that helps church leaders discover the courage to lead their congregations through missional transformation by helping them seek answers to the right questions, unleash creativity and develop teamwork in their congregation. The process includes intensive training experiences, coaching and CARE group participation. ■

For more information, visit www.hopepmt.org/transform/the-journey or contact Hope Partnership's Rick Morse, rmorse@hopepmt.org, or Linda Gardner, linda@heareveryvoice.com.



"...I have to say that the quality of the information and the record of success were inspiring. In the last 4 years, I've been studying different programs for congregational transformation, and this one is the best and most data-driven that I've seen. The references to the neuro-scientific dimensions of effective leadership were an extra bonus...I hope we can draw from the insights of Hope Partnership as we think about the future ministry of the region. We can be encouraged by the data-driven studies and practical successes of this Disciples program."

Pastor attending "DARE to Lead," a preview of Hope Partnership's Journey service for transforming congregations and their leaders (Capital Area, June 2014)

Oh, the weather outside is frightful... Loans can help make it warmer/cooler inside

Winter weather. Hot and dry climate. Need cooler air. Must keep the pipes from freezing. Regardless of where you're located, every church has heating and air conditioning (HVAC) requirements and the energy costs that go along with them.



Disciples Church Extension Fund offers loans at competitive rates that help congregations install, repair or upgrade their HVAC infrastructure for more efficient energy use that frees up money better spent on ministry. The following are two examples of churches that are realizing the benefits of partnering with Disciples Church Extension Fund to improve their infrastructure:

- No surprise that **First Christian Church in Torrence, Calif.**, uses a lot of electricity to cool their building on a daily basis. Where better to capitalize on the power of the sun than in the Golden State! In 2013, the congregation approached Disciples Church Extension Fund for a loan to install solar panels designed to generate power to run their air conditioning, keep the lights on and meet other electrical needs.

Church leaders projected that once installed, the panels would provide solar energy to cover more than 90 percent of their electrical needs, thereby recovering the cost of the panels in less than eight years.

Says Pastor Steve Fietz,
"A monitor of the system



and its savings will allow us to educate our congregation in the care of creation. The visibility of the panels themselves will serve as

a testimony to the community of our values."

- A mountain resort town, Ruidoso lies in the rugged Sierra Blanca mountain range of south central New Mexico. **First Christian Church in Ruidoso** takes the challenge of heating and air conditioning their building in high elevation particularly seriously, given the responsibility they have for the children in their childcare ministry who are in the building throughout the week.



When their boiler failed in the winter of 2013, the church came to Disciples Church Extension Fund for an emergency loan to repair it so they and the children they care for could stay toasty warm. Says Maribeth Westerfield, Disciples Church Extension Fund building and capital services advisor, "We were impressed by this congregation's commitment to the children in their care, recognizing that the church's setting required that we act quickly before a lack of heat interrupted their entire ministry." She adds, "Other lenders might not have been as responsive." ■

For more information about Disciples Church Extension Fund loans, including loans for "green" improvements, visit www.disciplescef.org/borrow or contact us at info@disciplescef.org, 800.274.1883.

A NEW THING

FEATURE ARTICLES:

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Hope Partnership and NBA intersect to serve social entrepreneurs

“I think the intersection of social entrepreneur leaders with new church pastors and those doing transformation was a rich mix for this year’s fall Leadership Academy,” says Rebecca Hale, vice president of Mission and Ministry at the National Benevolent Association, which serves as the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

According to Gilberto Collazo, president of Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation, NBA collaborated with Hope Partnership this fall to offer a Leadership Academy track for ministries that provide social services. He reports, “This was the first time the Social Entrepreneurship track was offered at the Leadership Academy and it proved to be an excellent opportunity for learning and networking with others who are exploring social services ministries.”

“Ministry sometimes takes the shape of faith-based projects offering social services that extend beyond the doors of the church into the community and provide basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and counseling,” says Rick Morse, vice president for Hope Partnership. Rebecca adds, “The Social Entrepreneur track, which had eight project participants, was designed to help engage and inspire leaders who are exploring important social ministries that meet needs in their respective communities, while building a strong foundation for the work they see ahead.”

The Leadership Academy, held in Indianapolis in September, had 63 participants and focused on six leadership tracks: New Church Ministry 1.0 and 2.0, Transformation 1.0 and 2.0, Social Entrepreneurship, and Interim Ministry that was sponsored by the Association of Disciples Intentional and Interim Ministers.

During the Academy, participants attended workshops on human trafficking, marketing, social media, finance and legal



issues. They also had the opportunity to worship together and visit local congregations, entrepreneurs and social service ministries.

National Leadership Academy presenters included Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Rev. Marvin J. Owens, Jr., Pastor of Michigan Park Christian Church in Washington, D.C. Also presenting during the week were Rev. Dr. Richard L. (Dick) Hamm, author of “Recreating the Church,” Rev. Dr. Irie Session, senior pastor at Warren Avenue Christian Church, and Rev. Shaunie Hoskins, executive director of Well-Founded Hope.

“Hope Partnership’s strong relationship with NBA has allowed the two Disciples ministries to work cohesively on other projects, too,” says Rick. He is referring to the New Beginnings service that Hope Partnership provided to four Disciples churches near the Hiram, Ohio area: Hilltop Christian Church, Mantua Center Christian Church, Hiram Christian Church and Brighter Day Christian Church. Once these churches went through the New Beginnings process, which allowed them to examine their place in ministry and determine their future calling, the four churches decided to offer social services as a focal part of their ministry. This provided NBA an opportunity to initiate the XPLOR program with these churches. XPLOR is a 10-month congregational resident experience for young adults, who are at a place to explore the intersection of their vocation and their walk in the world. Young adults in XPLOR work with social service agencies that are supported by these congregations. “The collaboration at the Leadership Academy and the services provided to the four churches near Hiram, are excellent examples of how partnership through ministry works,” says Gilberto. ■



Nothing “retiring” about these retirees!

Ministries partner with a congregation of empowered seniors

You’re never too old to do a new thing. Nearly 15 years ago, two retired ministers, Revs. Chuck and Linda Yarborough, met with a dozen “snowbirds” living in a gated community in Wildwood, Fla., to start a new church for people with more than a few years under their belts.

Early participants in Hope Partnership’s new church planter training, Chuck and Linda identified a mission for their new church to serve older residents primarily, many who had not attended church in more than 30 years. From its humble beginnings, this “Seniors Church” grew in two years to 40 people and was chartered as a Disciples church in three years.



growth. With the help of a loan from Disciples Church Extension Fund, the congregation recently moved into a new and versatile “sprung” structure that houses worship space for 188 people. During the winter months, the sanctuary is filled on most Sundays with ninety percent of members attending every week. To date, First Christian Church (formerly Continental Christian Church) has received 235 members.

No grass grows under these empowered seniors’ feet when it comes to outreach ministry. An active Disciples women’s group visits people who are homebound, hospitalized and in nursing care. An active men’s group (ROMEOS — Retired Old Men Eating Out) raises scholarship money through golf tournaments for the area high school, other at-risk youth and for the Disciples Camp in Ocala, Fla. In the past eight years, the ROMEOS have raised \$40,000 for camp scholarships, making it possible for scores of kids to attend camp every year.

Says Chuck, “We are blessed! I don’t know why God has blessed Linda and me to pastor such a loving and mission-minded church as this new church has become, but we’re so glad God did.” ■

That same year, the “young” congregation purchased property with future plans to build a building to accommodate their



Rick Reisinger, president of Disciples Church Extension Fund, and Gilberto Collazo, president of Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation, present Patricia B. Maples, president of the National Convocation, with the Service Award for outstanding leadership and commitment at the 2014 National Convocation. Disciples Church Extension Fund and Hope Partnership also participated at the Disciples Women’s Quadrennial, Hispanic and NAPAD assemblies in 2014. ■

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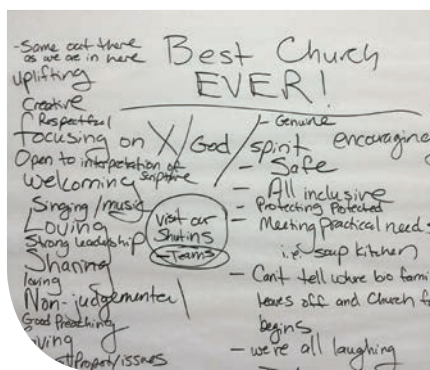
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MOBILIZING RESOURCES FOR MISSION

▶ **FEATURE ARTICLES:**
Stepping back to move forward

Stepping back to move forward

The term “sabbatical,” derived from the biblical Sabbath, is a prolonged hiatus in the career of an individual, perhaps a college teacher or even a pastor, taken as a time to rest, rejuvenate and perhaps to fulfill a dream. Where is it written that a congregation can’t do the same?



A few months ago, Hope Partnership’s Matt Rosine, minister of Congregational Planning Services, received an email from Laura Hutchison, pastor of First Christian Church in Anniston, Ala., describing her congregation’s remarkable journey. She wrote, “About a year ago, I participated in your webinar on common mistakes churches make when visioning for the future. During the question and answer part, I asked what to do when your church was too tired to vision. You suggested a sabbatical year of rest and spiritual renewal.”

She continues, “Well, that’s what we did! ... This year we’ve only had one scheduled board meeting, the ministry teams have only met on an as-needed basis, and we’ve streamlined our work down to the simplest process possible.”

Laura then describes what they were able to start doing because of what they stopped doing:

We added a weekly prayer service and also email out the prayer list so people at home can participate. The elders meet each month to discuss “A Celebration of Discipline”



and to pray for the church. The deacons meet each month to pray. The youth have started a monthly Bible study group. The staff (everyone from pastor to custodian) meets at my house once a month for dinner, fellowship and prayer. We started a children’s Sunday school class...and attendance in adult Sunday school has gone way up. Our average worship attendance has gone from 28 to 38 and 15 people have joined the church so far (that’s 15 more than in the last 3 years). One non-religious thing we added was a monthly children’s activity called Super Saturday Bunch. The kids go bowling, roller-skating, to the park, or even to my house for pizza and a movie. It’s super simple and cheap and the families love it. We did that to compensate for the fact that we cancelled the big community Easter egg hunt, vacation Bible school and the Halloween party. We also promoted our nursery worker to children’s coordinator (an extra hour a week) and it’s her job to coordinate these monthly activities. We’re having an all-church spiritual retreat in October, where we will focus on discerning God’s call for our little church. At the end of the year, we will choose one mission project for the congregation and so between now and then we are praying for God to show us what that should be.

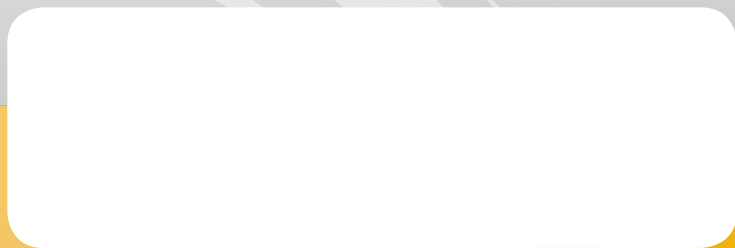
According to Laura, by stepping back, the congregation is finding room to learn important truths. She says, “The results of all this are unbelievable and are, in some ways, immeasurable. We are a different church than we were this time last year. And, I know that the members are starting to realize that they don’t need to worry about the church and that they don’t need to feel overwhelmed by all that needs to be done. They are starting to see that we can do things much more simply and get even greater results, and God is in charge, not us...All things are possible when He wills it to happen. Now, when we sit down to vision for the future, we will have a much lighter and enthusiastic spirit about us!”

Matt explains, “This church’s story is a perfect example of what can happen when a congregation is willing to prioritize, to let go of activities that have become a drain on energy and resources in order to focus on those things that add meaning





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to their ministry.” He adds, “Equally important is that the gift of breathing room is enabling the congregation to be proactive, not reactive, in how they shape their future.”

In addition to Hope Partnership’s role in the church’s new vitality, Disciples Church Extension Fund recently served the church through a General Consultation to help them identify and prioritize deferred building maintenance needs and explore ways to fund those projects. The church building has also been home to Primera Iglesia Cristiana de Anniston, since it started nearly a decade ago with the help of strong local leadership, the Region and Hope Partnership’s new church ministry team. ■

The Journey



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