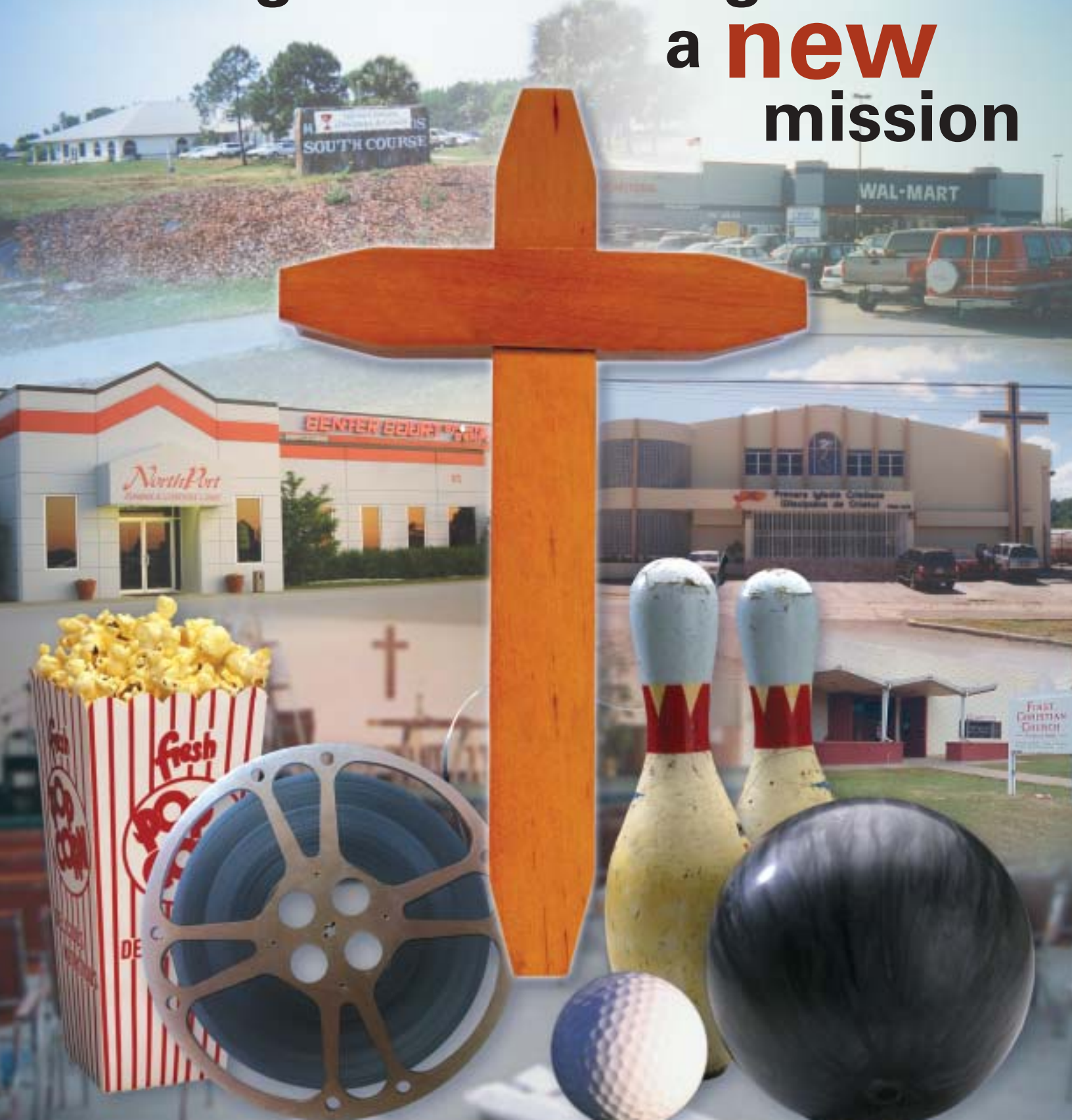


# CuttingEdge

## Giving old buildings a **new** mission



*Giving old buildings a new mission*

# Cinderella sanctuaries

**From:** Bowling Alley

**To:** First Christian Church, Laramie, Wyoming

The Disciples of Christ congregation in Laramie needs space today just as they did in 1983 when they purchased the 16,000-square-foot structure that is now their church

originally built as a bowling alley, but had lives as a discount grocery store and a geological consulting company before becoming First Christian Church.



The facility now houses a 350-seat sanctuary, a pre-school, a fellowship hall and small kitchen, six classrooms, a choir room, a small prayer chapel, several restrooms and an office suite with four offices and meeting/education space. Currently, the

facility. The congregation needed more space and more parking and the options at the time included buying an existing church structure—but none were available—or building new—but this was out of their financial capacity at the time. The facility the church purchased was

building is being remodeled to become more “user friendly.” This work will add accessible restrooms, a cry room, two new offices, extend the preschool area and open up the entry way to expand the gathering space. The current effort will also insulate the room and replace two

furnaces. The congregation has a longer range building plan as well that will double the existing floor space by adding a multi-purpose space behind the existing building.

Like any relocation effort, the move in 1983 came with some opposition. But in recent discussions around whether to add on to the existing building or move, it was clear that the majority of members like being in the “bowling alley.” Pastor John Verburg relates, “It is a part of our psyche now or at least some of how we identify ourselves.”

**From:** Car Dealership and Pepsi Warehouse

**To:** La Primera Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo)  
Vega Alta, Puerto Rico

Just 10 years ago, La Primera Iglesia Cristiana in Vega Alta was looking for a church home when they came upon an empty Pepsi-Cola warehouse. With an even earlier history as a car dealership, the building had been vacant for more than a decade and time and neglect had taken its toll, but the core members of the congregation could see a future for the property.

After a year of

cleaning and crafting a worship space inside the building, the congregation had its first crusade. At that crusade 100 people dedicated their service to Christ’s church and the congregation began to flourish.

Now, 10 years later, the congregation has 700 members and vital ministries to its community and beyond. The pastor of the congregation is Marta Ramirez de Cruz.



## From: Golf Course To: Iglesia Cristiana Renuevo, Kissimmee, Florida

Iglesia Cristiana Renuevo recently celebrated eight years of ministry. The congregation has experienced rapid growth from approximately 20 members four years ago to more than 300 in worship each Sunday. With such rapid growth, the original meeting space became very crowded and inadequate for the needs of the growing congregation.

In a casual search through the neighborhood, Pastor Peter Ortiz became aware of a parcel of property that was on the real estate market in the bounds of their target neighborhood. The only issue was that it was a 147-acre golf course! The course was one of two built in the development and operated by an independent company, but the

course did not do well and was subsequently closed and placed on the market. Since the church did not need all of the land, the congregation was able to obtain a 47-acre parcel with the club house (with restaurant and bar), two other buildings that housed golf carts, and a maintenance



building. Church Extension and the Florida Region did a site evaluation and determined that this golf course property just might solve the congregation's growing space needs.

While the main club house is being converted into sanctuary space, it is the congregation's vision to be able to begin a day care ministry in one of the buildings as well as provide quality space for youth and children's ministries. Pastor Ortiz knows that this property is a miracle and blessing from God.



## From: Wal-Mart To: First Christian Church, Keokuk, Iowa

Keokuk, Iowa, is the southeastern most city in Iowa and sits on the banks of the Mississippi River. First Christian Church has been a fixture in the community since its founding in 1887. It built a building one block off of the main street in 1897 and added to that facility in 1962.

In the late 1990s, the congregation began to realize that the building and property could not contain its ministry and various committees began to look at options. It did acquire adjacent property until they finally had control of the entire city block. Then came an interesting opportunity. The local Wal-Mart was building a "super center" and the original Wal-Mart

building would become available on the real estate market. Church Extension Special Architectural Consultant, Joe Gardner, traveled to Keokuk to give an exploratory committee some architectural insight on the possibility of transforming the Wal-Mart into First Christian Church.

Conceptual plans were developed and in early 2004, the congregation voted to buy the building and conduct a capital fund campaign. A recent campaign resulted in more than \$500,000 in three-year pledges and

the congregation has taken the next step in transforming the Wal-Mart into sacred space. As one church member remarked during the recent campaign, "by this time next year, that building really will be 'the saving place!'"



## From: Sports Complex To: Pilgrim Christian Church, Waukesha, Wisconsin



athletics. The plan called for the sale of their building, relocation to Waukesha and the development of a ministry center with concentration on sacred space, sports ministry, a health and wellness center, retail space, a seminary and vocational training. Along with this plan came the availability of Center Court Sports Complex, the facility in which the church conducted some of its athletics outreach. Now in its new home, the vision is beginning to materialize—today you'll find Pilgrim Christian Church right at home in the sports complex.

On January 4, 2004, Church Extension consultant Luis Ferrer preached the dedication sermon in a very unique facility—a sports/church complex. Pilgrim Christian Church began in the late 1960s in Brookfield, Wisconsin, at a time when most mainline denominations were beginning to decline. Despite this, the congregation established themselves as a viable ministry in the predominantly Roman Catholic and Lutheran area of suburban Milwaukee. They built a first unit in 1969

and a sanctuary in 1995.

In recent years, however, the congregation experienced a plateau and began to experience shortfalls in their general budget income. The situation forced the leadership at Pilgrim to take a serious look at ministry goals and objectives and their target community. A Development Committee was called into being and came up with a plan. At the center of the plan is taking the church to the community through a variety of ministries including



## From: Grocery Warehouses To: First Christian Church, Globe, Arizona

In 1942, twelve families put up \$100 each to buy two Safeway wholesale grocery warehouses and the adjacent land that would become the home of First Christian Church in Globe, Arizona. Located on the main street and close to downtown, the site was deemed a good location for this new congregation by the founders. Built in 1927, the facility consisted of two

warehouses sitting side by side. The maintenance garage for delivery trucks was converted into a parson-

age after the acquisition, but in 2003 was removed from the church property.



In addition to a sanctuary, the facility houses a fellowship hall with stage, a commercial kitchen, classrooms, restrooms, storage space and offices for a resident counselor and the pastors. Barbie and Dan Morton are co-pastors of this congregation.

# Confessions of a minister and wanna-be architect

By Ryan D. Hazen

This tension really is this—as a minister I want to be open to God’s call for a congregation and the kind of facilities that can carry out that vision. As one who studied architecture and attempts to keep my foot in the door of that profession, I want quality, aesthetically pleasing buildings that provide an “awe inspiring environment” for God to speak to the people.

An issue of *Cutting Edge* focused on non-traditional church buildings would not be complete for me without “coming clean” about the tensions I have on the subject.

In my architectural training, a design professor once told me that if an architectural jury ever called my work “interesting,” I should consider another profession. While this is not why I left architecture, there is the architectural part of me that wants to call these non-traditional church buildings “interesting.” Few are architectural masterpieces. They are the most utilitarian of designs with little attention given to the impact that the building can have on the experience.

HOWEVER, the reason that these non-traditional spaces are being selected for church use has to do with culture and finances. The culture is used to these already-built spaces in the community. Many have shopped at them or passed them in everyday travels and perhaps are more willing to venture into a church in such a space.

Financially, congregations considering building new should first sit down before looking at the cost of such a venture. In addition to land costs, building costs range in the \$100 per square foot range. City regulations are requiring all buildings to put more money into site development through holding ponds and parking requirements. Most existing facilities already have done this development. Who can fault congregations for looking to other, less-traditional options to allow their mission to thrive?

Finally, I’ve come to this conclusion. I believe architects are valuable, non-negotiable assets to any project—new or remodel. Architects have the ability to take even the most mundane spaces and make them special. Congregations, if

following no other piece of advice, should always allow their mission to dictate their facility rather than the facility to dictate the mission. Done right, it is God who gives the mission and people responding to that mission who provide the facility.

## New congregations find creative sacred space

By Rick Morse

On any given Sunday, you will find new Disciples congregations worshipping in many different places. New churches often rent space at local schools, but as space rental rates in schools rise or they close their doors to churches, congregations have had to be more creative.

In Wichita, Kan., a new congregation used to meet in the local zoo. In Miami, Fla., a new Haitian congregation crowds more than 500 people per Sunday into a storage unit at a public storage facility. In Texas, a new Hispanic congregation has renovated an abandoned warehouse into a place of worship and ministry. In Oklahoma, another congregation meets in a funeral home.

The most unusual story comes from the Sonshine Christian Church in Newhall, Calif. That congregation leased and renovated a storefront into a worship center and ministry station. They discovered some months later that their facility once housed a pornographic studio. They are proud to have claimed that space for the sake of the Gospel, and the neighbors are glad to have a church in that place.

Congregations that utilize schools often get the set-up and takedown processes down to a science. One new church has a trailer with three carts that are ready each Sunday. When the trailer arrives at the school, the Pastor sets up sandwich board signs as deacons roll the three carts into the building. One cart is equipped with nursery items (i.e.



**New Church Ministry**

diapers, toys, changing pads etc.), which are set up for guests with small children. A second cart is filled with coffee hour supplies and a 5-gallon water jug. This is set up for the coffee hour in the back of the auditorium. The third cart goes to the front, and is filled with communion and worship supplies, banners and music for the ensemble.

Churches on the move can set up or take down in 30 minutes or less. They can also set up in different locations for different worship events with little notice. These new congregations are very flexible!

The best site, however, for new congregations is within an existing congregation’s facilities. This is a great way of expanding the ministry of any congregation, but is troublesome when the “host” congregation sees their role as a landlord instead of a partner in ministry.

New congregations usually utilize temporary sites for their first 5-7 years. That is 300-500 set-ups and takedowns. They are usually very thrilled to move into their new facility when that day comes; but when you go back years later, you will hear them remember the “good old days” when they had three carts.

*Morse is New Church Ministry’s Lead Minister.*

# CHURCHES ON THE CUTTING EDGE

## Disciples congregation receives major architectural award

First Christian Church, Gurnee, Illinois, has been awarded a Faith & Form Architecture Merit Award by the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture, an interest area of the American Institute of Architects. The congregation was located in downtown Waukegan, Illinois, for 110 years before relocating to their present location in 1998. The first worship service in the new building was held on November 26, 2000.

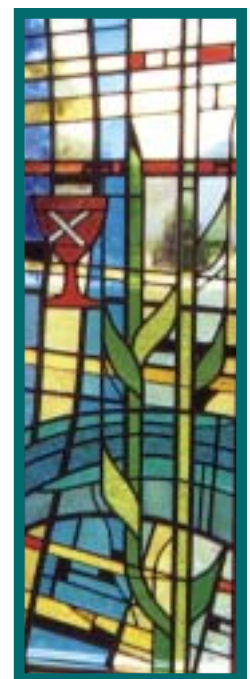
The new site is on a major east-west thoroughfare, and the building is situated on top of a knoll facing this road. David F. Schultz of David F. Schultz Associates, Ltd., Barrington, Illinois, was selected to design the structure on the new site. He was given the charge of designing an economical building that would reflect the frontier heritage of Disciples and the basic theological tenets of the congregation. The church is topped, to the left of the center entrance, with a four-arm cross representing the congregation's commitment to missions and the four gospels going to the four corners of the earth. The clean, crisp lines and white color of the building speak to the simplicity.



The church is two levels, with both levels being multi-purpose. There is flexible seating in the sanctuary on the main level and fellowship space with adjacent classrooms on the lower level. Six stained glass windows from the former building were incorporated into the sanctuary design.

The architectural jury analyzing the entries made these comments about the building design: "This church is appealing in its simplicity of form and palette of materials. The proportions are handled very well, and traditional elements such as the cross are rendered in a contemporary manner. For a small, rural church it has a powerful identity in the landscape. It is a clean and crisp presence on the plains of Illinois." (p. 14, *Faith & Form*, Vol. 37, No. 1).

The pastor of the congregation during the building process was Theophilus M. Carroll, now Minister Emeritus. The current pastor of the congregation is David A. Bondurant. Church Extension congratulates First Christian Church of Gurnee on this honor.



**Ed Says—An on-going conversation between Ed Taylor, the Editor and You:**

**Ed says:**

When a storefront becomes sacred space, it may simply be a matter of a building coming to maturity.

**Ryan says:**

Converted sacred space can be one witness to the transforming power of the gathered Christian community.

**You say:**

Share your insights. Write to us at [cuttingedge@churchextension.org](mailto:cuttingedge@churchextension.org).

Ed Taylor is the Executive Director of the Ecumenical Stewardship Center in Indianapolis. The mission of the Center is "to serve Christian denominations, institutions, organizations, and congregations in developing creative and vital stewardship ministries." For more information, visit [www.stewardshipresources.org](http://www.stewardshipresources.org).

**Looking for planning resources?**

- Check out the Church Extension website at: [www.churchextension.org](http://www.churchextension.org)
- And the Congregational Resources Guide at [www.congregationalresources.org](http://www.congregationalresources.org)

The Congregational Resources Guide is a joint effort of the Alban Institute and the Indianapolis Center for Congregations and is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc.

# Property Committee Corner

## Evaluating existing facilities

Many, many Disciples church buildings were built in the late 1950s through the mid-1960s, meaning these facilities have been in service for 40+ years. As property committees around the denomination are well aware, the life expectancy on many of the major "systems" of a facility are 30-40 years. Congregations everywhere are grappling with how to replace/repair boilers and air conditioners, roofs and other expensive pieces of equipment. In kitchens, commercial dishwashers, refrigerators and garbage disposals

are wearing out or becoming obsolete to the point that parts can no longer be obtained. Even more cosmetic items like carpeting, painting, pew cushions, etc. that likely have been replaced fifteen years ago are ready for replacement again.

Few congregations have been able to systematically set aside funds over the years for such projects in order to react calmly as issues surface. Property committees have to be wondering if there is a better way than simply reacting to the next crisis and praying for the wire and duct tape to hold something together.

Most congregations will have to embark on a capital fund cam-

paign to raise funds to pay for major maintenance projects. However, a property committee (or other appointed task force) will want to be certain they have considered all possible needs for the coming three-five year period before launching such a campaign.

Committees may want to consider utilizing an evaluation tool developed by Church Extension to analyze the complete facility. Inside the *Building Planning Workbook*, designed to compare ministries with the facility, is an existing facilities evaluation.

This evaluation can be used to

complete a systematic analysis of the condition of the building. Some issues, once uncovered, will need more investigation

by a qualified professional, but the evaluation section of the workbook will help by examining everything from caulk on the windows to the condition of the sidewalks.

The *Building Planning Workbook* is available, in English and Spanish, at no cost to the congregation and can be requested by calling 1-800-274-1883 or through the "Contact Us" section of the Church Extension website at [www.churchextension.org](http://www.churchextension.org). Church Extension can also be helpful as congregations consider capital fundraising for such projects.



# Notes from the Editor



The congregations represented in this issue have demonstrated the ability to see beyond themselves and think about their

“center for mission” in some non-traditional ways. They confronted the “we’ve always done it that way” mentality and found it within themselves to change. The journey in each of the congregations has likely come at a cost of those unable to see into the future.

When I meet with congregations who are seemingly “stuck,” I always want to look to previous generations of that congregation who made monumental decisions and changes.

I wonder, mostly in private, how those ancestors in the faith would respond to those unwilling to take a step or two on faith. My appreciation to all of the congregations represented here for their ministry.

Now in my eighth year of ministry at Church Extension, I will begin a Study Leave on June 9. In that time I will work with a variety of congregations, not as consultant, but as observer as they plan and make changes to their buildings. I will work beside architects, observe building committees, and perhaps even pound a nail or two. My colleagues at Church Extension will step in as “Guest Editors” for the summer issue of *Cutting Edge*. I look forward to my return in the Fall.

Thanks for your ministry.

## CuttingEdge

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P.O. Box 7030  
Indianapolis, IN 46207  
1-800-274-1883  
Editor: Ryan D. Hazen  
e-mail:  
rhazen@churchextension.org  
Designer: Debbie Williams  
Web site:  
www.churchextension.org

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