

Connections



Extending  the Witness

Extending the Witness beyond 125 years

What does one do on a 125th birthday? Why, celebrate of course. And that's exactly what Church Extension is planning to do with a culmination at the General Assembly in Indianapolis, July 2009.

But it's the richness of those 125 years, the lives touched, the ministries built, the churches grown that leads us to the most exciting part of the celebration, looking forward to where God is leading us in the next 125 years. That's what we most want to celebrate in the coming months, joining with church planters, congregational visionaries, and Disciples leaders across the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico. It's joining you in extending our witness with the same passion and vision that previous "pioneers" did on their particular frontiers.

We look at our past and see the sacrifice of 19th century church planters on the western frontier planting new churches faster than money was available to provide places in which to meet. Today we see New Church Ministry planters sacrificing their own resources because they see people in their communities starved for Christ's message of hope, love and compassion.

We see them in new frontiers of diversity and cultures that build upon the richness of the past into a new future. We look at the coming 125 years and know that our children and children's children need Disciples like you, me

and those we've not yet met to extend our witness together.

The gift of 125 years of witness never stands still but extends into new frontiers, even into new directions that we may not even be aware of today, just as it has done in each of the previous years of our existence. In fact, it's already begun.

You may have become concerned about making your facilities more energy efficient as energy costs skyrocket. You might have asked how to become more environmentally responsible. All this has led to a pilot service

being developed in collaboration with several congregations, and funded in part by your annual Manna Fund gifts. We anticipate having this service available to congregations in the next several months.

125 Years Extending the Witness is evident in the efforts of local churches, regions and thousands of Disciples supporting 550 new churches started in the past eight years, propelling us well along toward, and probably exceeding, a goal of 1000 new churches by 2020.

But the numbers are not the real story. The real story is see-

ing the passion in the eyes of each new Christian who was not part of Christ's saving presence previously. To extend our witness some of us may need to keep track of numbers but the story is always in the lives being touched.

It's the lives of Disciples being touched that bring us to extending a challenge to you, one that's already been accepted by our staff and directors. During our "125 Years Extending the Witness" celebration, **we invite you to join in finding your own opportunities to extend by 25 your efforts to reach and sup-**

port the ministries of Church Extension, your congregation, your region and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

This year make it not just 100 percent but 125 percent in a new goal of helping start a new congregation in

your community. Or, it might be a gift to our annual Manna Fund of \$125, \$1,250, \$12,500 to help support development of new services such as the Green Building initiative. Or it might be adding 25 percent of time now being given to a mission project in your community. Wherever and however you offer it, we thank you for this gift on our 125th Anniversary.

What do you do on a 125th birthday? Celebrate, of course! And plan for all the connections and innovations that Disciples and their ministries offer.



Your gifts to the annual Manna Fund provide resources to develop new services

The scenario may be different from congregation to congregation. A church is in decline and needing to find a new path for its ministry; a congregation may decide that it needs to find more ways to be better stewards of God's natural resources; or it may recognize that we're not a monolithic society of Christians and there are different ways to provide services for people of diverse cultures.

Each year the Manna Fund, Church Extension's annual fund, helps to support the development of services that address the many issues surrounding Disciples ministries.

The Manna Fund comes from the same principle used in the Bible, "Just as God rained down manna for the people to eat, God gave them the grain of heaven." The fund was created as a resource to provide assistance to Disciples congregations through research and development of new services.

It may be difficult for a congregation to recognize that it does not

have the ability or resources to serve its surrounding community or even its members. While the congregation may have the heart for ministry, it may find it increasingly difficult to connect with its community. As a result, over time they face a decline in membership. And to add to the problem, the church building may be suffering from insurmountable bills due to deferred maintenance. Church Extension consultants are seeing a noticeable increase in this scenario.

Your gifts to the Manna Fund have had a direct result in a new service to congregations, called *New Beginnings*. This new assessment tool helps a congregation ask tough questions and face reality through several phases involving a comprehensive report, cottage meetings and cluster sessions. The ultimate goal is to help the congregation find its new beginning. Already, more than 120 churches in nine regions have benefited from this service.

Your gifts to the annual Manna Fund also support emerging services like *Green Building*, which is currently in the pilot study phase. Green Building helps congregations discover ways that they can create a safer and more energy efficient facility that also lowers their operating costs. "We offer this program as an effort to help congregations realize that they can be better stewards of their financial resources and

God's natural resources," said John Davidson, consultant for Church Extension's Congregational Services Team. "Small adjustments to the church facility, such as using more energy efficient lighting, heating and cooling systems and watching water consumption, can make a big difference in a church's utility costs, which leaves more money for ministry.

"As God entrusts us with both the responsibility for the earth and the church's offering, Christians must take seriously God's call to be good stewards of the resources we have been given," Davidson added.

Church Extension also is answering God's call to provide the *Mustard Seed Service* to Disciples. This is another emerging service in its pilot stage supported by the Manna Fund. It's designed to assist racial/ethnic congregations in their financial stewardship efforts, particularly as support may be needed for property purchase, a major building project or loan payment counsel.

Church Extension recognizes that cultural needs may vary when it comes to capital fund raising. Your annual gifts are helping us develop a comprehensive tailor-made fund raising service for racial/ethnic cultures.

"As the face of the Christian Church becomes more diverse, Church Extension wants to make sure that we are serving the needs of all Disciples," said Eugene Randall, II, vice president of congregational relations.



A Green Building energy audit at Northwood Christian Church, Indianapolis.



Low interest rates getting you down?

If you are retired or approaching retirement you may be concerned about interest rates and the possibility of reduced income. This may be true for you or someone you know.

A Charitable Gift Annuity is an excellent option in providing you a stream of payments for life, a charitable deduction that can reduce current taxes, and a payout rate that is quite attractive. Besides, funding a Charitable Gift Annuity will help other Disciples through the ministry of Church Extension!

Depending on your age, the Charitable Gift Annuity rates can be very attractive for one person or a couple. Please check out the rates in the next column for a single life arrangement.

But hurry...the rates for Charitable Gift Annuities will drop July 1, 2008!

Here are the current Charitable Gift Annuity Rates:

Age	Rate	Age	Rate	Age	Rate
55	5.5%	67	6.2%	79	7.8%
56	5.6%	68	6.3%	80	8.0%
57	5.6%	69	6.4%	81	8.3%
58	5.7%	70	6.5%	82	8.5%
59	5.7%	71	6.6%	83	8.8%
60	5.7%	72	6.7%	84	9.2%
61	5.8%	73	6.8%	85	9.5%
62	5.9%	74	6.9%	86	9.9%
63	5.9%	75	7.1%	87	10.2%
64	6.0%	76	7.2%	88	10.6%
65	6.0%	77	7.4%	89	11.0%
66	6.1%	78	7.6%	90+	11.3%

If you would like to receive our helpful Charitable Gift Annuity brochure or receive personal calculations just for you, simply contact Church Extension by using our toll free number of 800.274.1883, or email emitchell@churchextension.org

Make a gift – increase your benefit

As you know, last February Congress passed and the President signed an economic stimulus package that provides a tax rebate for millions of Americans. Checks started going out in May and while some will use the rebate to pay bills or decide to make a special purchase, some will add these funds to their savings.

What you may not know is that you can use your rebate to make a gift and increase your benefit. The amount of your rebate is not subject to income tax and if you itemize deductions on your 2008 tax return, you will be entitled to a tax deduction for the amount of the gift. This means that you may enjoy another "rebate" as your deduction provides you with tax savings of up to 25 percent or more of the amount given.

A charitable gift to the annual Manna Fund can stimulate the research and development that the Church Extension staff is doing to provide innovative services to Disciples congregations like New Beginnings, Green Building, the Mustard Seed Fund Raising Service and Building Readiness. Think of it as a way you can help stimulate the growth of services provided to new and existing congregations.

So, if you don't need your tax rebate for other purposes, we hope you'll join others in considering giving some or your entire rebate to help Disciples extend the witness to other Disciples through the ministry of Church Extension. Just let us know how we can be of assistance.

You help remove barriers

Many Disciples churches face a common obstacle if they were built before 1990. They probably were designed with physical challenges like steep stairs, narrow aisles and restrooms that are too narrow for a walker or wheelchair.

Entering a church facility needs to be welcoming for all. There should never be a physical barrier that would prevent or limit an individual's ability to enter, worship or be active in the church. Several years ago Church Extension recognized that this problem was far too common in our Disciples churches and created the Accessibility Loan Fund. This fund allows for donations from Disciples to provide loans to churches at lower interest rates to help remove physical barriers. In other words, the Accessibility Loan Fund helps connect Disciples to Disciples. The loans are designed to provide churches with the financial resources to help remedy some of the physical barriers that churches may face that would prevent individuals from being active in their church, whether that is by adding a ramp, installing an elevator, widening aisles or making restrooms more accessible.

"We know what accessibility means," said Don and Ruth Nash of Elyria, Ohio. "The congregation that we attend in North Eaton had many steps leading to the

entrance. After a fire destroyed the facility, the builder redesigned the church so that there were three parking lot entrances to the facility on the ground level.

Accessibility is important and we know that the Accessibility Loan Fund helps people get into and be active in church by removing physical barriers. That's why we have supported it."

Don and Ruth know that you, too, can help remove barriers when you support Church Extension's Accessibility Loan Fund. You help Disciples and their churches. To donate to this fund, contact Ellen Mitchell at 800.274.1883, 866.534.1949 en español; or e-mail: development@churchextension.org.



Ruth and Don Nash

Your investment produces shared blessings

By investing with Church Extension you are creating a blessing for yourself and others. Church Extension investments help provide loans to Disciples congregations as they seek to witness to their communities. And, the invested funds produce interest earnings as well. Just listen to what three investors are saying:

Jack Sherley of Lexington, Kentucky, has been a steadfast investor with Church Extension. He shared "I want to keep my money there for a long time to build interest and to build churches at the same time."

Nathan (Pete) Smith of Mainville, Ohio provided a personal account of why investing with Church Extension makes sense. "To save or not to save' was not even a question for my wife, Karen and me! Being young in the ministry, our very limited income was stretched to the maximum, we thought. An



Karen and Pete Smith

occasional ice cream cone seemed like a big treat.

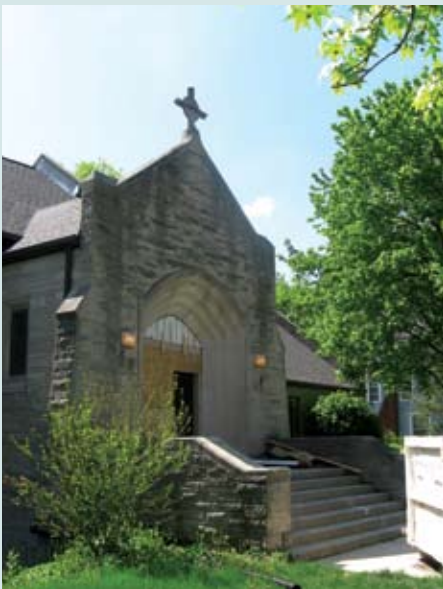
"Then, early in the 1960s, as a new member of the Regional Staff of the Disciples in Ohio, I was asked to be the driver for Dr. William "Bill" Percy of the Board of Church Extension, as he traveled throughout Ohio helping the region launch a major New Church Capital Campaign.

"The Campaign proved to be a huge success, and I learned a very important lesson from Bill ... that Karen and I didn't have to be rich to start saving for our future! Church Extension seemed to be the perfect avenue for us to start two things: 1. To save for our own personal future ... and now, ten years after retiring we are reaping the benefits of our meager savings, and 2. Our personal savings could benefit the church we love, and help with the great ministries of Church Extension! We began saving \$25 each month, and while that amount has varied over the years, the benefits to us and to Church Extension have continued to grow and grow.

"We thank God for Bill Percy, for the lesson on saving, and Church Extension for providing us with an easy avenue to support our church's ministries!"

Building Highlights

Highlights of some of the hundreds of building and new church projects you and Church Extension are helping through your gifts and investments.



Downey Avenue Christian Church, Indianapolis

When a fire struck Downey Avenue Christian Church a week before Christmas in 2006, it sure damaged the structure of the church but it didn't tarnish the spirit of the congregation or its surrounding community of supporters.

According to Sue Shadburne Call, senior minister of Downey Avenue Christian Church in Indianapolis, "We have had terrific support from the community." Immediately following the fire, which severely damaged the sanctuary and choir room, churches and schools in the Irvington area came to support Downey. Children from the local Catholic school raised money to provide assistance. A local nursing home provided a special monetary gift and the community Presbyterian church offered its facility as a place to worship on the Sunday following the fire.

Yet in the following weeks the congregation of Downey had to make some very tough decisions. "Do we rebuild the same structure or is this an opportunity to make some needed changes to the design of the church?"

they asked themselves. After further study, the congregation decided on new designs that would be contemporary and allow flexibility in the worship space while increasing the gathering area in the church's narthex.

With a Church Extension loan (including a portion from the Accessibility Loan Fund), Downey Avenue was able to make the changes needed to offer a great experience for worshipers. A ramp was installed that leads from the sanctuary up to the choir room and into the chancel area. This makes the choir more accessible to people with physical challenges.

Shadburne Call reports the construction project is progressing and the congregation feels that God has been with them every step of the way. "We hope to be in the sanctuary by this summer," she said. Meanwhile the congregation of 185 members worships in Century Hall, which is the church's fellowship hall. "During this time, we have been able to create a very special worship space," said Shadburne Call. "It (Century Hall) has felt like home."



Runnells Christian Church, Runnells, Iowa

Runnells Christian Church is nestled in a small bedroom community just outside Des Moines, Iowa. The congregation, organized in 1907, has a 50-year-old, two-level building sitting on the side of a hill. While the church is attractive and welcoming, it is a small structure and doesn't have the accessibility desired for all participants. The congregation also is facing another challenge—it's growing, due to an increase in population over the past few years.

As a result, Runnells has decided to expand and add a few elements to its structure to make it accessible for everyone. "In a fast growing rural community we soon recognized that we needed a larger facility if we were going to be able to nurture faith to the unchurched or under-churched in our area," said Alice Bolen, minister of Runnells Christian Church.

Runnells Christian Church worked with Bill Bass, associate vice president for congregational services at Church Extension, to secure an accessibility loan for their vision. This vision included expanding the sanctuary, creating a larger more inviting narthex with a wider staircase and an elevator. Plans also included attach-



Pastor Alice Bolen is excited that the construction will make the entire church more accessible to everyone.

ing a nursery to the sanctuary, a new entryway to the fellowship hall and space for future classrooms.

"As with many congregations in this type of setting, there are transitional and transformational forces that affect congregational life," said Bass. "The pastor, Alice Bolen, has done a good job in developing the congregation and helping them welcome the

new people in the area," said Bass.

The renovation project started in October 2007 and Bolen anticipates the construction will be complete by the end of May 2008. Bolen proudly added "the addition of the elevator makes our entire church, including the classrooms, sanctuary, fellowship hall and offices more accessible to everyone."

Did you know?

Did you know that many employers sponsor matching gift programs and will match charitable contributions made by their employees? Some companies match gifts made by retirees and/or spouses. The impact of your gift to Church Extension may be doubled or possibly tripled especially as we celebrate our 125th Anniversary and extend our witness! Got questions about next steps? Contact Ellen Mitchell, vice president of donor relations, at 800.274.1883 or e-mail: development@churchextension.org.

Making connections



With this issue of *Connections* we are launching our celebration of 125 years of ministry. We are celebrating the witness you have made, the lives that have

been touched and the ministries built while we look at new and innovative ways to connect Disciples to Disciples and their congregations over the next 125 years.

As our entire staff and Board of Directors are seeking ways to Extend the Witness, we hope you will find this journey an opportunity to once again connect with us and other Disciples through your invested funds, gifts and the ways we partner together to start new churches or utilize building and loan services.

Please note how the growing gifts to the Manna Fund are annually helping with the research and development of new services like Green Building and New Beginnings for congregations. See how the Accessibility Loan Fund helps congregations remove physical barriers and catch the details of how you can stimulate benefits for you and Disciples congregations. Be sure to note those Charitable Gift Annuity rates and matching gift programs.

Let's celebrate together while we continue to make connections with each other and Disciples congregations.

Ellen L. Mitchell
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Donor/Investor Relations

Connections

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