



Finding the Sparkplug for Revitalization

Dreaming in the Sun Revisited

By Jim and Sharon Omvig

Members, Capilla del Sol Christian Church

In the July, 1985, issue of *The Disciple*, there was an article about the birth and growth of Capilla del Sol Christian Church in Tucson, Arizona. The article was titled, "Dreaming in the Sun." Now, fifteen years later, we have been dreaming again and have just completed an expansion of our original building. Our success is so dramatic and so inspiring that we thought we should share our good news with others. We feel there is a glow over this church now, and that we truly have seized the moment of this glow.

Capilla del Sol Christian Church was established in 1980 and we occupied our own building in 1985 after meeting in a home and a school. Through the years, our programs were successful but, as sometimes happens with established congregations, we had become what you might call "comfortable Christians." We had settled into a routine and much of the original passion and excitement had waned.

In the fall of 1996 great things began to happen again, and "Dreaming in the Sun" was rekindled. First, in one of his thought-provoking Sunday sermons, our interim pastor, Skip Hughes (Skip didn't pull any punches), said, "I sense that you people have been on sabbatical. I think it's time you get back to doing God's work in this place!" And, we did!

Before long, there was talk of membership growth and building ex-

pansion, including a new mortgage. Board of Church Extension representatives came to Tucson to discuss additional borrowing with us. However, their initial report was perceived by

most as disappointing at best. They told us very frankly that we were not good candidates for a new loan, since our payment history was not sterling and because we still owed a great deal on our original mortgage. But, they hastened to add that all was not lost. If we would initiate a vigorous capital campaign to get our outstanding mortgage balance down to a manageable size, they believed we could be good candidates for a new loan in two or three years.

Rather than succumbing to disappointment we rolled up our sleeves and went to work. In early 1997, a Capital Campaign Team was



Capilla del Sol Christian Church in Tucson, Arizona was a new congregation start in 1980; the building was built in 1985. After struggling for direction, the congregation surprised themselves in a debt retirement campaign that proved to be the impetus for future building and growth.

organized and by May, \$40,000 had been pledged over a two year period to pay down the mortgage. In the 1985 article in *The Disciple*, our founding pastor, John W. Smith, was quoted as saying, “there is a right-pocket/left-pocket principle at work here. People will give only so much out of the right pocket for operating expenses, but they will turn around and give more out of the left pocket for capital development and building programs—something which catches the imagination.” This was true in 1985, and it was true again in 1997.

Ed Nelson began his ministry in August, 1997 and the excitement and renewed spirituality only intensified. By the Fall of 1998, dreams of building expansion began again in earnest when it became clear that we would reduce our mortgage nearly in half long before the end of the two year pledge period. The infectious attitude of hope and excitement had spread throughout the congregation—a large number of new leaders and workers had surfaced and joined in God’s work. At the suggestion of BCE, plans were made for the expansion and loan approval was given to the project.

Construction began in January,

1999. Proudly, the dedication service was held on April 25, 1999. Regional Minister Denny Williams concluded the dedication sermon with the following quotation that appears on the entrance door of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri:

“We must wake up, sing up, preach up, pay up and pray up. We must never give up, back up, let up or shut up until the cause of Christ is built up!”

Now, our “Dreaming in the Sun” continues. We are in the midst of a new Growth Fund campaign to raise funds for expenses rising out of our growth and to immediately begin to pay down the mortgage.

We have dreamed and hoped and planned for this new and beautiful space for two reasons—first, of course, we wish to work, worship and carry on God’s work in suitable surroundings. But, even more, we wish to attract new members and grow, so that others, particularly the unchurched, may know the joy and peace and love of Jesus Christ.

To paraphrase a wise saying, “some congregations see things as they are and ask, why? Others dream things as they ought to be and ask, why not?” What a joy it is to be a part of a dreaming, growing, empowering and committed ministry!



The main entrance of Capilla del Sol Christian Church in Tucson, Arizona includes an inviting outside courtyard. Building expansion, signs and parking lot paving were included in the most recent project.

A note from the editor

The two congregations featured in this issue of *Cutting Edge* caught my eye for the same underlying reason—they were struggling and turned the corner to become very enthused about their ministry. They are very different congregations with different histories in different parts of the country but both, through telling their story, can inform other congregations and give hope in situations that perhaps seem hopeless.

Cowden Lake Christian Church is 126 years old. Coral, Michigan, the closest town, has a post office and a couple of businesses but no stop lights (sometimes used to judge the size of a town). After seeing the transformation first hand, I asked Raymond Gaylord to write this article. Raymond is 74 years old and commutes 40 miles one-way from his Grand Rapids home to pastor this congregation. God has provided the spark of this 74-year-old to energize this congregation.

In the desert north of Tucson, Arizona, Capilla del Sol Christian Church is 106 years younger than the Cowden Lake Church and is now in the midst of new housing and commercial development just a few miles off Interstate 10. However, it too had a slow time. Jim and Sharon Omvig are members of the congregation and have been a part of the recent transformation. They chaired the Capital Fund Campaign that energized the congregation by paying down the debt and moving the congregation forward.

Both congregations have inspired me in my ministry and I am pleased to share them with you.

— Ryan D. Hazen

Finding the Sparkplug for Revitalization

Outreach Emphasis Energizes Congregation

By Raymond Gaylord

Pastor, Cowden Lake Christian Church

Cowden Lake Christian Church in Montcalm County, Michigan (one of the five poorest counties in the state) came into being in 1874 when the lumbering of white pine trees was in full swing in the Wolverine State. After the lumbering was exhausted, potato farming and other crops were introduced. Farming still exists in this area but most area residents now drive long distances to various factories and businesses for their livelihood.

Cowden Lake Church has always struggled to stay alive. Forty years ago, when Larry Maines was the Regional

Minister, two of the remaining handful of members visited Mr. Maines in his Lansing office to turn over the keys to the church. The church was giving up but the Regional Minister

refused the keys—"Ladies," he said, "go back and try again." They did and with some measure of success. In early 1996, another low point was reached. The church roof leaked, the building needed paint inside and out, the steps had rotted, there was inadequate parking and the congregation lacked "tender love and care." In addition to these issues, there was no minister! Total offerings in 1995 amounted to less than \$10,000.

My first words to the search committee and to the congregation as their new pastor were, "Forget your own problems and think of others." The intervening years have been a time of spiritual and numerical

growth. The congregation was rather surprised to learn during a Board of Church Extension visit with the congregation in January, 2000 that the church was giving roughly one dollar

Week of Compassion Giving Cowden Lake Christian Church		
1996	\$	0
1997	\$	1,592
1998	\$	2,000
1999	\$	3,766
2000	\$	4,231



In nice weather, baptisms at Cowden Lake Christian Church actually take place in the waters of Cowden Lake. Twenty persons were baptized in 1999.

out of every four to outreach and mission causes. Recipients of the church's outreach efforts include: Basic Mission Finance, CROP/Church World Service, Crystal Conference Center of the Michigan Region, Habitat for Humanity, Montcalm County Literacy Council and, of course, Week of Compassion. Week of Compassion giving in 2000 totaled \$4,231 placing it near the top in Michigan Week of Compassion giving.

As the congregation focused its efforts on doing for the so-called "least of these," an indebtedness was retired, the roof replaced, new carpeting installed, additional land purchased and a parking lot was paved. There has been extensive painting and refurbishing throughout the building. The membership has tripled and offerings have gone up sevenfold over 1995! Fifty baptisms have taken place in four years—in Cowden Lake in nice weather and in borrowed baptistries when the weather is inclement. A new spirit prevails with new excitement. In lieu of various "church growth" methods, the pushing of benevolences, missions, outreach programs and local charities proved to be the "Open Sesame" for Cowden Lake Christian Church.



Cowden Lake Christian Church near Coral, Michigan sits at an intersection of two county roads and is surrounded by farms. The congregation revitalized through an emphasis on outreach. In 1999, the congregation gave nearly \$12,000 to outreach causes. In the first six months of 2000, more than \$7,000 has been given to outreach.

Get on board ... join the accessibility campaign

The Accessible Congregations Campaign seeks the commitment of congregations to include people with all types of disabilities as full and active participants. It is a project of the Religion and Disability Program of the National Organization on Disability.

What is an Accessible Congregation?

An Accessible Congregation acknowledges that it has barriers to full participation of people with disabilities and makes a commitment to begin removing them. An Accessible Congregation commits to these three principles:

- In our congregation, people with disabilities are valued as individuals, having been created in the image of God.
- Our congregation is endeavoring to remove barriers of architecture, communications and attitudes that exclude people with disabilities from

full and active participation.

- People, with and without disabilities, are encouraged in our congregation to practice their faith and use their gifts in worship, service study and leadership.

Joining the Accessible Congregations Campaign costs nothing. Visit the Accessible Congregation Campaign link on the Board of Church Extension web site at www.churchextension.org



Members enter the new entrance at First Christian Church, Corvallis, Oregon. The congregation won the 1999 BCE Presidents' Honor Award for Architectural Excellence in Accessibility. The challenge of a largely inaccessible church became an opportunity to blend the building's past with a more inviting, accessible entrance and gathering areas.

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