

GA-1305

Church Extension Financial & Missional Resources, Inc.

Inclusive of

Board of Church Extension dba Disciples Church Extension Fund

Erick D. Reisinger, President

and

Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation

Gilberto Collazo, President

130 East Washington Street, P.O. Box 7030, Indianapolis IN 46207-7030
Telephone (800) 274-1883; en español (866) 534-1949; FAX (317) 635-6534

Web sites: www.disciplescef.org; www.hopepmt.org

Email: info@disciplescef.org; info@hopepmt.org

“This vision-message is a witness pointing to what’s coming. It aches for the coming—it can hardly wait!” (Habakkuk 2:2-3, The Message)

In our second year as two independent but related Disciples ministries, following a restructuring of Church Extension, Disciples Church Extension Fund and Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation are not looking back, except to remember gratefully that faithful, positive, creative and pragmatic partners developed the vision for both organizations collaboratively over a number of years, with the support of generous and forward-thinking Disciples. Rather, Disciples Church Extension Fund and Hope Partnership are now focused intensely and nonstop on “what’s coming” – on the immediate imperative to help strengthen congregations for mission into the future.

To be effective servants of congregational mission, Disciples Church Extension Fund and Hope Partnership are delivering services in response to questions, concerns and needs expressed by congregations and their leaders. In other words, we ask churches and leaders, “What do we need to do together to better help you live out your ministry how and where God is calling you to serve?” And, we pay attention to what we hear.

Each ministry’s response to churches’ needs and concerns defines the scope of our services and initiatives:

Disciples Church Extension Fund – helping congregations become better stewards of their financial and capital resources for the sake of mission

Hope Partnership – empowering leaders through collaborative processes that unleash their creativity and courage as they guide their congregations in this era of God’s mission

How do congregational needs and our respective strategies and services line up?

Disciples Church Extension Fund

Our congregation has such an emotional attachment to our church building. But, we’re rattling around in it now and spending all our revenue on heating it and keeping the lights on. How do we do a better job of focusing on God’s call to us, rather than worshipping our building?

Disciples Church Extension Fund and our partners are placing much attention these days on working collaboratively to address a major challenge in today’s denominational life – congregations who are struggling to focus on and do mission because their buildings were constructed in and for another era when attendance was higher and construction and maintenance costs were lower. Often, facilities are compromised by unaffordable deferred maintenance, debt is beyond a congregation’s ability to repay, or building location isn’t a good fit for a church’s ministry. For most of these congregations, buildings no longer serve their ministries.

In working with congregations, Disciples Church Extension Fund asks questions like these: “What do you think God wants your priorities to be? Is your building helping or hurting your ministry? How will repairing your building or making it more accessible serve others?”

In other words, Disciples Church Extension Fund is focused more than ever on helping congregations look at buildings through a different lens, from a mission and outward/neighbor-focused perspective, rather than a building-centric and inward/member-focused perspective.

Our building planning/design services and tools, a new relocation service, traditional and in-development loan products and funding tools are all designed to help churches explore new and different ways to use facilities to do ministry where and how it is the most impactful and relevant. Because this is an enormous challenge for our congregations, Disciples Church Extension Fund will continue to work together with Regional ministers, clergy and lay leaders, general ministry and constituency group leaders, architects and other professionals to identify common approaches to implementing suggested solutions.

This collaboration will build off the work already begun in November 2012 at a “charrette” that Disciples Church Extension Fund convened in Kansas City, Mo.,

of partners committed to helping churches address building and space challenges.

Some suggested solutions to these challenges may include sharing space with new congregations and community groups, emphasizing lay-leadership development, choosing to lease rather than own space, identifying a location and right-sized facility that match ministry, sharing building ownership with other congregations and/or organizations, merging congregations around a focused vision, and more.

Our church has several projects for which we'd like to raise money through a capital campaign. But, our members say they're already stretched too thin. How do we generate buy-in, even enthusiasm for this effort?

Recognizing that one size does not fit all, Disciples Church Extension Fund is in the process of upgrading our capital fundraising service to make it more customizable and flexible for a time when congregations are challenged to raise money for their projects and ministries. Particularly, the service helps campaign leaders put mission, stewardship and leadership development at the center of the fundraising effort, emphasizes that other fundraising counsel are not typically equipped to address. An enhanced feasibility study component enables project planners to assess potential support for a building or debt-reduction project. Thorough pre-campaign evaluation enables planners to strengthen their case for support, so that the congregation can begin to approach funding from a perspective of abundance rather than scarcity.

Our church and some of our members want to stay "local" when it comes to borrowing and investing money and managing our building. That's the autonomous nature of Disciples, right?

Yes, but few local financial institutions and building planners understand how money and facility impact ministry like Disciples Church Extension Fund and other Church partners do. During the past few years, many Disciples congregations have chased the lowest loan rates instead of seeking a compatible lending partner with "church-industry" expertise, only to be surprised by called-in loans or balloon payments. More recently, Disciples Church Extension Fund has seen an increase in building-loan and refinancing requests, thanks in part to low, competitive rates and an improving economy. Some of these requests address deferred maintenance and accessibility issues – again, needs particular to so many of our congregations' aging buildings. The local loan market remains tight with more stringent lending criteria, and many lenders may not fully appreciate how these needs are connected to a congregation's ability to do ministry in their neighborhoods.

At the same time that loan demand has increased, our loan delinquency rate has decreased slightly, as Disciples Church Extension Fund advisors have worked

diligently with congregations to get them back on track with their payments. That said, Disciples Church Extension Fund's operating income continues to be negatively affected by ongoing loan delinquency, as non-payment results in decreased interest income.

The good news is that, in addition to increased loan activity, Disciples Church Extension Fund is experiencing an increase in requests for building and capital planning services. This is recognition that more congregations, diverse congregations, are seeking partners who can help them be more strategic and careful stewards of their capital resources, including their buildings.

Additional good news is that Disciples, especially congregations, continue to invest with Disciples Church Extension Fund, as they seek to realize competitive returns on their investments that also fund Disciples Church Extension Fund loans to churches they care about.

Especially good news is that Disciples continue to demonstrate their connection to the wider Church by making generous gifts – record-breaking gifts in 2012 – to Disciples Church Extension Fund. These significant gifts are particularly meaningful, as they will multiply churches and their ministries for years to come.

Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation

The congregation I pastor expects me to manage our church in ways that make our church seem self-serving and not other-serving. How do I learn to lead them differently so we can move forward and outward, and not backward and inward?

This plea is one of the primary reasons why Hope Partnership was formed – to help empower leaders who know they need to lead differently, but must first find within themselves the creativity and courage required to guide their congregations through transformation.

With other partners, Hope Partnership is delivering collaborative processes and services that help leaders unleash that very creativity and courage by first helping them ask questions that get at the heart of what it means for a congregation to do God's mission in the world.

During our first year, Hope Partnership has been on the road, recruiting congregational leaders for our two-year leadership-development process called The Journey. As a result of leaders eager for change and preview events hosted in cooperation with North Carolina, Canada, Arizona and Illinois-Wisconsin Regions, and Mid-America Northwest, Southeast Gateway and Southwest Trinity Brazos Areas (with additional Regions interested in hosting), nearly 160 lay leaders from 19 congregations have begun The Journey process.

An additional 11 congregations, with close to 100 additional leaders, will start The Journey in the months ahead. As part of the process, 30 pastors are now participating in facilitated peer support groups and coaching sessions. Hope Partnership has conducted the first of The Journey process's retreats, designed to help leaders develop the foundational skills for transforming themselves and their congregations. Additional retreats are planned for the Mid-America Southeast Gateway and Northwest Areas and the Illinois-Wisconsin Region in 2013.

One leader reports on how even initial engagement in The Journey has had an impact on the way he guides his congregation:

"In the past, I have been a "doer" pastor – one who likes to make things happen. However, my style has not engendered congregational ownership and has led to stress and feeling of burnout for me over the years. We are now encouraging spiritual practices and using them when we meet... Inviting our leaders in our meeting to begin with a time of worship characterized by a reading and silence followed by reflection on how our reading has touched us or challenged us has been positive too. This practice has become a regular way in which we are affirming our need to wait and listen. Through these we are practicing how to pause and let go of our agendas and preconceived ideas, opening ourselves to wonder and God in the present...it felt like we were a community really listening to one another and genuinely seeking God's leadership."

In addition to Regional and Area delivery of The Journey, Hope Partnership hosts the Leadership Academy, an intensive week-long learning experience for leaders in both transforming and new congregations. More than 135 leaders attended the first annual event in September 2012, designed to inspire, teach and encourage people as they lead courageously in their local settings.

Funding partners are key to the success of these efforts. For example, thanks to a grant from the Fund for Theological Education, younger leaders ages 18 to 25, including young leaders of color pursuing seminary educations, will have greater access to assessment that may empower them to consider becoming our transforming and new mission leaders of the future. In addition, Hope Partnership received a grant from Reconciliation Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to fund scholarships that provide greater access to The Journey process for leaders from congregations of color.

I think God is calling me to start a new church in a new place, but I'm not sure what, where, how or even if I have what it takes. What's next for me?

Today's leaders contemplating starting a new church have services and support available to them from Hope Partnership's new church ministry team and their

Regions. The Disciples new church movement is still very much alive and kicking, as Disciples have started nearly 800 new and affiliating congregations since 2001, with an 80 percent sustainability rate for the new churches whose leaders are coached by Hope Partnership-trained coaches. These churches have played a major role in the tremendous growth of the Church's racial/ethnic diversity and represent the greatest number of new Disciples additions and baptisms in comparison to established Disciples congregations.

New church leaders can turn to Hope Partnership for assessment, training and coaching that will help them discern their call and equip them to lead their new faith communities in mission. They learn how to articulate mission, vision, values; set goals; and, importantly, determine if their new church's witness is a demographic fit for the community they're targeting. Coaches walk alongside planters during the early years of their projects, providing encouragement and helping the leaders stay focused on their vision and goals.

Hope Partnership has also begun to identify those planters who may possess the skills and qualities needed to start congregations with the potential to grow to an average of 500 or more people in worship. The Antioch Network identifies and recruits promising and creative planters and then matches them with outstanding experienced Disciples pastors and entrepreneurial lay leaders of exceptional and growing congregations.

A major challenge of walking alongside new church leaders continues to be an issue of funding. Participation in the Pentecost Special Offering, which supports new churches, is still below previous levels, so Hope Partnership is exploring and implementing more effective ways to advocate for new churches and to motivate established churches to support their ministries.

Our church feels stuck in neutral and we're feeling tired. Without a purpose or a plan, our congregation seems unlikely to survive. How do we get jumpstarted?

Hope Partnership was formed to help congregations do more than survive – our purpose is to guide them on their journey to become vital, vibrant communities of faith. Our New Beginnings Assessment Service works alongside hundreds of Disciples, United Church of Christ and Presbyterian (USA) congregations to help them assess their strengths and opportunities as they seek to answer the all-important question, “What is God calling our congregation to do and be in this time and this place?” The service is an objective, tools-based approach to helping a congregation visualize and set into motion a shared vision for its future, a vision that can unstick them and move them forward to live out God's call for them.

Then what? New Beginnings churches and other congregations have been asking for more. After they have made some decisions about their future, leaders are seeking to discern “next steps” to help them implement their call. In

response, Hope Partnership offers “MissionPathways,” a ministry-planning service that helps congregations map a path to their future vision. MissionPathways resources include tools for exploring worship and ministry context, including demographic analysis; for taking stock of available property, financial and human resources; for plotting next steps, and more.

Partnership is key

At the heart of the work of Disciples Church Extension Fund and Hope Partnership is partnership – with and between congregational and lay leaders; general ministries, such as Disciples Home Missions and Higher Education & Leadership Ministries, who bring their leader development and scholarship opportunities and expertise to the table; and Regional, constituency group, educational and ecumenical partners. Important partners also include investors and generous donors, whose advocacy and support undergird our ministries and make it possible for us to move forward.

And, because it is through collaboration that all great change occurs, the important imperative of transforming and strengthening congregations – accomplished when faith communities are empowered to mobilize their financial, capital and leadership resources for the sake of mission – must be implemented by all of us working together. Disciples Church Extension Fund and Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation are committed to collaborating with our partners everywhere in order to realize this imperative to which God has called us.

The General Board has reviewed Report No. 1305 from Church Extension Financial & Missional Resources, Inc. The report is submitted to the General Assembly for consideration and discussion. No action is required. (Discussion time 12 minutes)

*Financial information can be found in the reports posted on the General Assembly web site at www.disciples.org/ga.