

The Death of a Church

by Eric S. Gray, Executive Director

Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, Colossae, Smyrna, Thyatira, Pergamum, Laodicea – all of these places and many more had a [F]irst Christian Church. All of those first churches have passed away. So, what went wrong? Although most of these churches had their problems, the real answer is that it was time for them to pass. Each church had its season. Their season ended, but the Church as Christ’s universal body of believers has lived on. The churches are just a manifestation of Christ’s work in the world. For that reason, the churches must be constantly changing form in order to bring the unchanging story of God’s love and grace to an ever-changing world.

What will the church of the future look like? Will buildings even be necessary? Will congregations gather like flash mobs to worship and serve? Wild questions? Not really. There are already multiple internet churches. We even have one in our own denomination – www.disciplesnet.org. Flash mob church services? Some grassroots groups have hosted flash mob services at older Catholic churches in hopes of a revival of culture, faith, and spirit. It’s catching on. In Cleveland and Buffalo they call it Mass Mob referring to bringing hundreds of people together to show up for “mass” service in otherwise almost empty churches. Other churches are experimenting with Community Service Flash Mobs. Change is happening. What is our role as Christians today?

Jesus said to his disciples, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.*” John 15:16. How can we bear

Church Memorial Funds & Beneficiaries

University Park Christian Church, Oklahoma City

Central Christian Camp

Phillips Theological Seminary Scholarship

Senior Ministries

First Christian Church, Tecumseh

Phillips Theological Seminary Scholarship

Texoma Christian Camp

Memorial Christian Church, Tulsa

Camp Christian Scholarship

Phillips Theological Seminary Scholarship

Red Rock Christian Church, Red Rock

Central Christian Camp

Christian Church in Oklahoma

Rogers Heights Christian Church, Tulsa

Camp Christian Scholarship

Hands-on Senior Ministries

Oklahoma Disaster Relief

Sheridan Avenue Christian Church, Tulsa

Camp Christian Scholarship

New Church Assistance

Northeast Area of the Christian Church in Oklahoma

Phillips Theological Seminary

Week of Compassion

South Side Christian Church, Tulsa

OASIS (Older Adult Services & Interfaith Sharing)

Phillips Theological Seminary

Youth Ministries (Leave No Child Behind)



fruit that will last? Particularly, how can we bear fruit if our individual church's season is fading? The passing of a *community of believers* can seem overwhelming.

Death

As Disciples, we know that death brings new life to the faithful. The same can be true for congregations. God is present in all circumstances. When a congregation dissolves, its history and mission can live on through creation of an endowment (a legacy gift). More importantly, the creation of an endowment allows the church to bear lasting fruit in the service of Christ.

Resurrection

Oklahoma Disciples Foundation currently holds ten endowment funds from the passing of seven Oklahoma Disciples congregations. On closure, faithful church leaders created endowments with the remaining church assets. They designated earnings on these endowments for specific ministries. Over \$310,000 has been distributed to Disciples camp programs, senior ministries and Phillips Theological Seminary for educating future Disciples pastors.

As of April 30, 2014, the market value of these ten endowments totaled more than \$1.5 million; thereby ensuring these ministries are able to continue Christ's work for many years to come. The churches are gone but the fruit of these congregations lives on.

We should all give thanks for the cloud of witnesses who have borne fruit to last forever. Give thanks. Enjoy the fruit. Go out and bear your own fruit in the work of the Spirit. Leave a legacy personally and as a community of believers.

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