The Quarterly Magazine of Florence Christian Church



Investing in Past, Present, and Future

By Rev. Dr. Susan Ward Diamond, Lead Pastor

We have chosen one word for Florence Christian Church's Theme in 2023: INVEST. As we know, words matter! They describe something about what is going on in our lives and give guidance to how we will live. In this issue of Abundant, we are looking at how Florence Christian Church has been in a season of calling us to invest, and how our investments reap a harvest for God's work in and through us.

Our 192 year history reveals how so many faithful people invested their time, talents and treasure to support the ministry and mission of Florence Christian Church. From the earliest days, our church was called a "Servant Church" to the community. Bold service is in our DNA because of the investments of our forebears. They have left a firm foundation and a legacy upon which we continue to invest in and to build.

In the present, we celebrate the ways in which we continue to invest in ways that matter to Jesus: feeding the hungry, providing a shower and clean clothes to those who need them, receiving those with dignity and love whom the world often rejects, welcoming children who need God's loving care and teaching them the way of Jesus. The decisions that we are making today about the stewardship of our resources: renovating our facilities, investing the sale of our Union property with the Christian Church Foundation for future capital needs, and widening our circle of Legacy Builders— are all testimonies to God's ongoing work in our lives and our church that lead us into the future.

I Corinthians 10:31 says "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." What we do matters. How we invest our lives matters. I hope that the celebrations that we share in this issue of Abundant will not only inspire you, but call you to consider how you will invest!







Abundant

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How We INVESTED...

Christian Church Foundation Dinner July 31, 2023

By: Pastor Susan

In 2005, Florence Christian chose to sell three apartment buildings in the area that it had built and owned since the 1980s. With those funds, the church invested in nearby land with the intent on becoming a multi-campus church. In 2015. however. congregation of Florence Christian voted to not be multi-campus, leaving us with land that we didn't quite know what to do with.

In a tough moment, our congregation collectively made a choice that is still hard to believe. Not only did we decide to sell the land, but we made a profit, too. And the congregation decided to donate the proceeds to the Christian Church Foundation (CCF).

And how much was that donated money?

\$2.2 Million Dollars!!!!!!

So where did that money go? The donation to the CCF was an investment in our church, allowing us to not only pay off debt for building

maintenance and renovations, but put that money towards future endeavors as well.

Following the unanimous vote of the Christian Church Foundation Board of Directors, Florence Christian Church was awarded the James P. Johnson Stewardship Award. The award was presented on Monday, July 31, 2023 at the Foundation Dinner during the General Assembly in Louisville.

The James P. Johnson Award recognizes that Florence Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has demonstrated leadership, creativity, and integrity in answering God's call to faithful stewardship, including the faith discipline involved in the stewardship of accumulated resources.

Several of our ministry partners were present to receive the award. A video (which is now up on our website!) was shared about our amazing ministry, and Pastor Susan offered thanksgiving and a brief reflection on stewardship to those attending the dinner.



Night for Nicaragua October 27, 2023

By: Pastor Susan

We had a tremendous Night for Nicaragua on Friday, October 27! This fundraiser, supporting the work of Rayo de Sol, Florence Christian's global ministry partner, was filled with joy, learning, great entertainment, fabulous food and drink, and most of all, GENEROSITY!

I am so proud to report that 61 of the 200+ attendees were from Florence Christian Church, representing church staff. volunteers. and people supported the event by providing (and in some cases creating) BEAUTIFUL Silent Auction Items. In the Live Auction one of our families donated a trip to Gatlinburg, and another ministry partner won their bid to purchase it! Everyone I talked to was filled with joy as they learned of the important work changing lives and communities through Rayo de Sol. I know that our witness of this event will keep us committed to supporting this work in years to come.

As Executive Director Peter Schaller said, he doesn't want any donations for Rayo de Sol. Instead, he told us that we have



the opportunity to INVEST in the eradication of generational poverty in one of the poorest areas of the world. As Peter spoke, I realized once again how well aligned our missions are, and that we had chosen our church theme for 2023 well. which happens to be the word INVEST!

And invest we did!!!! Together with those gathered, Night for Nicaragua raised over \$75,000 for the 5,000 children and their families that Rayo serves. Through their focus on education, health care, spiritual growth, youth in action and community development, we are partnering with them to make a difference. As my husband and entertainer for the evening, Ron Diamond, said, "It is through team work, through partnerships, that we can do extraordinary things!" Amen and Amen!

...In 2023!!!



Youth Spotlight: Hannah Stanley

My relationship with Florence Christian Church has been an instrumental part of my spiritual journey, shaping my worldview and providing me with a strong foundation upon which to build my faith. I was baptized in 2015 and Sue Rankin was my mentor during that time. She provided guidance and support, teaching me about the values and principles of our beliefs. As much as I hate to admit, I don't remember the specific details of our lessons. However, what has endured within me through the

she instilled in me about what it means to be a Christian: compassion, empathy, forgiveness, and love to name a few. These principles have guided me as I've grown older and continued on to different paths of my life. For example, as a member of Florence Christian Church, I have volunteered with others for the Thanksgiving Supper and Arcadia Food Distribution, both being events that bring people from different backgrounds together

and serve as an opportunity to give back to the community.

In addition to my mentorship with Mrs. Sue Rankin, I have also had the opportunity to connect with the pastors. Whenever I am home from college, we make a point to get together for lunch and discuss a wide range of topics that are relevant to both my personal and spiritual growth. These conversations have been a source of inspiration and guidance for me, and the pastors have become trusted advisors and friends. They have shared valuable insights and perspectives on life and faith that have challenged me to think deeper and broader about my beliefs and values. Their willingness to listen and engage in meaningful dialogue has helped me to develop a more nuanced and grounded perspective of my faith and life.

One of the most significant ways that Florence Christian Church has impacted me is by teaching me the value of community. It has provided me with a sense of belonging and a place where I can come together with others who share my faith. Through attending services, participating in group activities, and volunteering my time, I have developed deep connections with others. Looking to the future, I am excited to continue building upon the foundation that Florence Christian Church has provided. As I prepare to start college and embark on a career as a biomedical engineer, I am confident that the lessons learned here will continue to guide me as I

continue to volunteer my time and talents in any way possible. I also plan to stay connected to the community here as I move forward in life. The relationships and support that I have found at the church have been invaluable to me, and I hope to maintain these connections as I navigate new challenges and experiences in the future. Ultimately, my experiences with Florence Christian Church have taught me that faith is not just a solitary pursuit but rather something that is best explored and nurtured through relationships with others. Through the guidance of my mentors and the support of my fellow church members, I have been able to develop a strong sense of spirituality and a deeper understanding of my faith. I am grateful for the many ways that my time here has impacted my life, and I am excited to see where my journey will take me in the future.



ON MAKING A DIFFERENCE...

IN THE *FUTURE*

By: Glenna Galbraith

There's a contemporary Christian song, "Only Jesus," by Casting Crowns. They sing: "I don't want to leave a legacy, I don't care if they remember me - Only Jesus." The song illustrates that it's not about our feeling important but all about getting people to know Jesus. Would you like to make a difference in the future of our church and how we are able to share the love of Jesus Christ in the world? Making a gift to the Florence Christian Church Legacy Permanent Fund is one way to make an amazing difference in our church's future. Even though we are called Legacy Builders - it's all about Jesus.

With this as our focus, in 2016 the board of Florence Christian Church established the Legacy Permanent Fund "to expand the witness and mission of Jesus Christ in the world, serving human needs in our community and around the world. It is not intended to compete with the regular annual giving of our member or to



diminish the opportunities for responsible stewardship by present or future members" of our church. This endowment fund can be a meaningful way to carry on your family's care and commitment to our mission of celebrating God's abundant love, grace and acceptance. At the same time, this permanent fund is the best way to provide dependable support for God's mission in our community, in our region and in our world to be put to use every year.

In 1951 Jim started attending our church, and I started attending before we were married right here in our sanctuary. Then, each of our three children, Shannon, Greg and Kyle, were dedicated and later baptized here as well. Now, our grandson, Ian, is the fourth generation to be a part of our church. You can see our roots run deep at Florence Christian Church, but these aren't the only reasons we were inspired to become Legacy Builders and give to the Legacy Permanent Fund.

We have found the love and compassion that comes from a wonderful church family. We found a place where we can be the hands and feet of Jesus. We found a place where our faith journey continues to grow. Giving a legacy to our church is an expression of our gratitude and thanksgiving towards God for all that we have been given and enjoyed during our lives. It is also a means of ensuring that our past can become part of the future of Florence Christian Church's life, through mission and ministry to all God's people.

Once you have made provision for your loved ones you have the opportunity to make that lasting gift to God by leaving a legacy to Florence Christian Church. There are various ways you can do this which include leaving assets in your will, making the church a beneficiary of a life insurance policy or \mathbb{R} A an orother retirement assets, gifts of stocks or bonds, real estate or cash. This lasting gift is one of the most valuable and lasting ways you can continue to support the mission and ministry of our church.

When you give an end of life gift to the Florence Christian Church Legacy Permanent Fund, your gift will be considered permanent and will never be spent. It is only the income from interest earned that can be spent. Our current policy allocates 10% support of the operational budget, 30% retirement of outstanding debt, 10% support of Regional programs and with 50% of the annual income designated for Outreach Ministries.

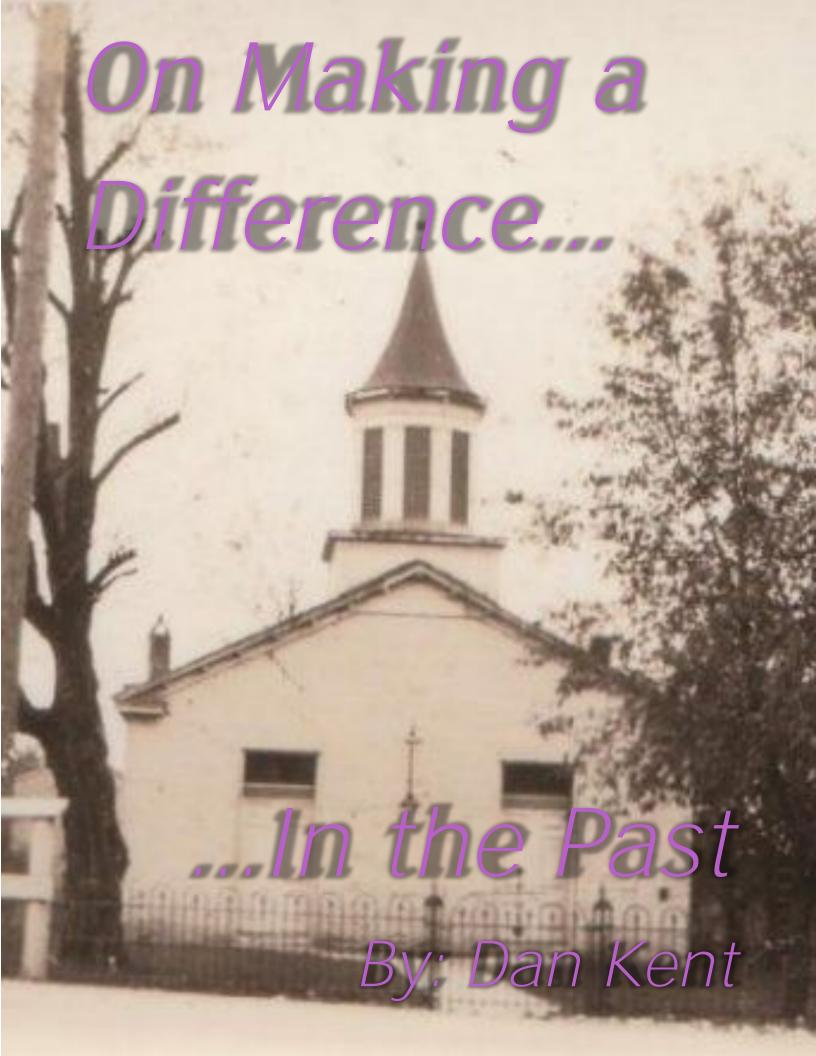
As we focus this year on investing in the future of Florence Christian Church. consider. this very meaningful way you can become part of the future of our church as a Legacy Builder. Pastor Susan said once that "our whole life is a

gift to God. Even in our passing we can still testify about our faith in death". We can continue to be Jesus' disciples and spread his love even though we are not here. Jim and I consider our gift to the Legacy Permanent Fund as our last offering – our lasting offering.

Matthew 6:21: For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

If you are interested in becoming a Florence Christian Legacy Builder if you would like more information, you can contact either Pastor Susan, Pastor Diana, Todd Reed or myself.





In 1831, members of Florence Christian Church invested their time, talents, and treasure to build a sanctuary where they could gather together to worship God and serve humanity. That meeting house, Florence's first, was made of logs and was located at the Southwest corner of Main Street and Union Road, today's U.S. 25 and U.S. 42.

In 1835, the meeting house was consumed by fire, perhaps accidentally, perhaps not. It was thought at the time that the fire may have been the result of a feud between two church families, though this was never proven. In any case, the fire did not deter members from building a new meeting house, possibly mindful predecessor's premature demise - made of brick.

And so, later in 1835, Florence Christian Church purchased the lot at the Northwest corner of Main Street and Union Road (today's church site) and built what would become known far and wide as the Little White Church, where members would worship until March 1965.

As Florence Christian grew from 1835 until 1965, members regularly recognized and acted upon the need to expand. In 1951, a vestibule was built in front of the 150-person sanctuary and a basement added beneath it that would contain Sunday School classrooms, restrooms, and a kitchen. In 1958, an Education Building (classrooms, a large assembly room) was built next to the sanctuary; it currently houses the church's pastoral and administrative offices and the Fresh Start Shower Ministry. In 1961, the church purchased a private residence near the sanctuary in which the bursting-at-theseams high school contingent could attend Sunday School.

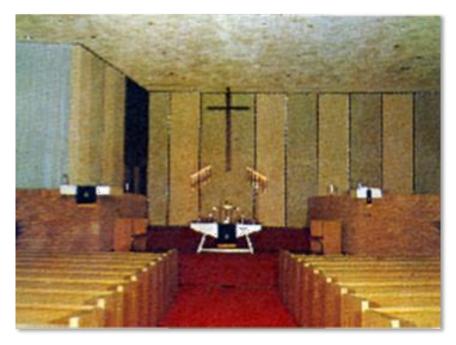


The original "Little White Church," built in 1835. Picture provided by nkyviews.com.

By 1964, Florence Christian bowed to reality and admitted that the much-beloved Little White Church had outlived its usefulness. Despite the church's adding a second Sunday morning worship service, the sanctuary could no longer accommodate the large number of people seeking to worship God there. Accordingly, and amid much weeping, members made the difficult-but-correct decision to replace the meeting house where God had been worshiped for 130 years with the meeting place in which we worship today.

From its birth, Florence Christian Church has devoted its energies to caring for people, rightly recognizing that everyone who breathes is a child of God. As long ago as 1862, members of our then-young church converted their sanctuary into a hospital where Civil War soldiers wounded in a Florence battle could be nursed back to health, thereby laying the foundation for our present-day efforts to promote good health and well-being.

In the middle-to-late 1970s, more than 100 years after that Civil War battle, Florence Christian continued to embrace its mission of being a Servant Church to the Community; it



The brand new Sanctuary, circa 1965. Picture from the Florence Christian Church archives.

courageously made not one nor two but three expensive investments that would benefit people of all ages immediately and continue to bear fruit today.

First, since mid-1970s Florence contained no affordable, good-quality public housing units where senior citizens who'd sold their homes could live their remaining years comfortably, safely and with dignity, Florence Christian took on considerable debt and initiated a partnership with the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to erect an 85-unit Senior Center that opened its doors in Autumn of 1980 and whose doors remain open today.

Second, alert to the fact that "Idle Hands are the Devil's Workshop" and seeking to provide Florence's young an alternative to hanging out on the street where mischief might easily find them, Florence Christian took another financial deep dive and bought adjacent Main Street property on which would rise in the Spring of 1980 our current heavily-used Activity Center.

Third, seeing the value of offering to Florence working parents a religious setting where their children would be well-cared-for, Florence Christian in 1978 bought a nearby Main Street property and converted it into a well-respected Childcare Center that has expanded to become today's Discover Zone Preschool and Childcare Center.

In 2005, Florence Christian sold its Senior Center to Arcadia Park after receiving ironclad assurances that the new owners would maintain the church's commitment of offering good-quality affordable housing to Seniors. The church used a large part of the sale's proceeds to buy property in Union on which to build a second church campus that would serve Union's religious needs. But despite its promising lift-off. Harmony Place never fully took flight. Accordingly, with members crying tears no different from those shed in 1965 when the Little White Church was razed, the church determined to shutter Harmony Place and focus its prodigious, Godgiven energies primarily on Florence, whose growing population was - and is today - facing many hardships, including hunger, poverty, and homelessness.

Today, Florence Christian Church uses its technology investments to welcome people from around the world into our weekly worship Outreach services. programs dispense free food to folks who struggle to get their daily bread, collect school supplies for children whose families afford cannot education items but whose minds are tomorrow's palaces, and provide free showers that restore hope, dignity, and a sense of possibility to God's unforgotten children. In sum, we continue to invest our talents, time, and treasure to gather together to worship God and serve humanity.

Cover picture courtesy of nkyviews.com

Staff Spotlight: Debbie Smith

By: Alec Fields

Zone Since 1978. the Discover Preschool and Childcare Program has been one of Florence Christian Church's most important ministries. Congregation members who visit throughout the week know just how much time and willpower goes into teaching and caring for all of our daycare students.

At the center of the Discover Zone is Florence Christian Church's longestserving staff member, Debbie Smith. Having reached her 40th vear anniversary as Discover Zone staff in 2023, Debbie has shown a proud commitment to the ministry and, most importantly, a lifelong investment in the many children who have been a part of Discover Zone throughout her four decades here.

Debbie was initially hired in 1983 as a teacher for the Discover Zone, In 2023, after years of working her way through the program, Debbie became Discover Zone's Interim Executive



Director. Debbie is currently involved in all of the ministry's operations, including management, hiring, organizing the Adventure Zone program, and working with parents (among so many other responsibilities!)

In her short time as Executive Director, Debbie has boosted the Discover Zone's reputation considerably through successful inspections and licensing visits, overseen the growth of her staff and students with her excellent leadership, strengthened the connection between the daycare and the church, and cultivated an immense respect from her supportive staff and loving students.

As congregation members, we rarely see how impactful the Discover Zone and Debbie's work really is. But when it comes to investing time, talent, and treasure, Debbie Smith is among our church's most faithful servants.

How will YOU Invest???

In this issue of **Abundant**, we've explored the many ways the members of Florence Christian Church have invested in its community, congregation, and even itself!

But the story doesn't end there!!!

Our church's future is only as strong as those who see our mission through. There are many more stories waiting to be written about how our church invested now and the difference we made by doing so.

What steps will you take to invest in our church's future?

Attend Worship

Your presence in worship, on campus or online, is possibly the simplest **investment** you can make. With your attendance and input, we can make our services the best they can be!

Build

This is a great opportunity for everyone to participate in the creative process of rebuilding. Do you have a particular ministry, passion or interest that you wish to **invest** in? Do you see gaps that your unique talents could fill? Speak to the Elders or Pastors about your ideas and let's build this community together.

Give

In gratitude for all that God has given to us, will you commit to sharing your gifts of time, talent and treasure in order to participate in the unveiling of God's light in our church, our community, and the world? Committing to make a regular donation to the General Fund is an **investment** that supports the daily operations and ongoing ministries of the church.

Engage

The volunteer opportunities are abundant!

- ...Multimedia Team
- ...Hospitality Team
- ...Property Team
- ...Free and Fresh Food Distribution
- ...Food Aid to Arcadia Park
- ...Care and Share Pantry
- ...Fresh Start Shower Ministry
- ...Office Assistance
- ...Faith Formation Leader
- ...Homebound Care Connection





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