

Oldest church building in Enterprise keeps the faith

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Maybe it's a modern-day miracle.

Pastor Micah Agnew of Abundant Life Assembly of God Church in Enterprise thinks it is.

Agnew arrived in Wallowa County in 2015, having replaced Eli Smith as pastor at Abundant Life. It's his first post as a lead pastor, though he's spent eight years as a youth pastor. He has the support of another former pastor of the church, John Walther, who teaches Sunday School.

On the trip out to Wallowa County, Agnew and his wife, Michelle, had prayed to get a sense of what God wanted him to focus on in Enterprise. The answer? Reclaiming the lost sheep who had stopped attending and engendering a spirit of inclusion.

Agnew was pleased when he arrived in Enterprise to find out there was a thriving Ministerial Association, representing about 10 denominations, which met monthly at the historic Enterprise Christian Church at 207 Main. Members of the group talked about what was going on in individual churches and prayed for one another. They also arranged sharing community celebrations of the religious holidays. Agnew's church hosted Good Friday this year.

The miracle began to transpire, Agnew said, in the summer of 2015.

"I like to walk and pray," Agnew said. "While walking

and praying, I had the distinct impression that God was telling me to ask for the Christian Church building."

Agnew was mystified by this impression.

"My question was, 'why would I do that?' We were fitting in our old church, it was about half capacity, we had about 30 folks attending regularly. The Christian Church building is a huge place for 30 people."

The 10,000 square-foot facility was more than twice the size, and it wasn't even for sale at the time.

But Agnew said he couldn't shake the sense that God was prompting him to ask for the building.

Agnew answered what he felt was God's command and "out of obedience" prayed for the building that summer day in 2015. But he didn't tell anyone, not even his wife.

Three months later he still couldn't shake the idea and he shared his experience with his wife.

In January 2016, he took his church board to a conference. On the way home, he asked them what they thought was the biggest challenge they would face in the coming year. They quickly responded "room for growth" because attendance had swelled to 50.

As they considered space, one of the board members asked, "What's the Christian Church going to do with their old building?"

Agnew laughs. "I said, 'Funny you should ask. Let's all pray about it and see what



Courtesy photo
Abundant Life Church is now located at 207 E. Main in the old Enterprise Christian Church.

happens."

Enterprise Christian Church was building its new digs on a hill off Joseph Highway just outside Enterprise. The 1898 church on Main Street, the oldest wooden structure in Enterprise, was up for sale.

A month later the minister of Enterprise Christian Church, David Bruce, offered Agnew and Abundant Life Assemblies of God the building.

The board of Abundant Life

didn't want to be in a situation where the mortgage was a strain for the congregation, so they prayed for a couple more months before presenting the idea to the congregation and asked them to pray. Gathered at a membership meeting, the congregation voted unanimously to make an offer.

"We made an offer and they accepted it," Agnew said.

Long-time member Annette Lathrop called the move

"God's perfect timing."

"I think it's important to put into context that the church is not a building but a body of Christ's followers," Lathrop said. "We weren't changing churches, we were changing buildings like a crab outgrowing its shell. God's perfect timing provided a building right when we were outgrowing its shell."

Enterprise Christian further sweetened the deal for the Abundant Life congregation, throwing in a projector and screen, the sound system and other items.

"It was our hope that the building would remain a church," said Bruce. "Every-one for a century put their investment in that building for it to remain a church. Those things (sound and video system) were going to be good for their ministry, so we just decided that should be a part of (the deal)."

Abundant Life finished most of the remodeling and held the first Sunday service in the building the first Sunday in February 2017.

"We now have 73 to 76 regular attendance and had 92 for

Easter," Agnew said.

The growth is from both reactivated members and new members who are responding to the community feel of the church.

"Changes come, and they're good changes," said Lathrop. "After services, we just pour into each other's life. It's just wonderful to have enough room for people to visit it and for kids to be kids. We're more visible and we're seeing a lot of new faces and that's fun, too."

Agnew says he had very little to do with what had happened.

"I want to make sure God gets all the credit," Agnew said. "Because I couldn't even see it happening when He presented it to me."

And God's hand is still visible, Agnew said with a laugh.

"When you have four women unanimously agree on color scheme — God is involved," he joked.

Services begin with Community Prayer at 9 a.m. Sundays, followed by worship service at 10 a.m. May's monthly Men's Breakfast is 8 a.m. May 6.

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