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Religion

Many Decatur church members go on giving

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the final article in a series on Christianity in Decatur today.

BY MARSHA HAUSSER
Herald & Review Lifestyle Writer

The economic pressures of high inflation and unemployment seem to have left the sowing-reaping principle intact.

For church members who have placed their trust in God for meeting financial responsibilities, the biblical principle of reaping rewards in accordance with what one gives has come alive.

The benefits have manifested themselves in increased church growth and in blessings both monetary and non-monetary flowing back to the giver, according to pastors interviewed in Decatur.

One church that has had a number of financial successes because it practices what God teaches is Peoples Church of God, according to the Rev. William Ellis, pastor.

The church raised nearly \$47,000 in one offering in July and a total of \$80,000 in

pledges in about two weeks to help reduce its building fund loan.

The motivation was to channel the amount saved by paying off the loan sooner back into social programs to help the elderly, poor and needy of Decatur, Ellis says.

Church member Rick Zehnacker, an employee of the Xerox Corp., contributed to the debt reduction campaign of the church.

He says he and his wife strongly believe in the tithing principle and strive to give one-tenth of their income to the church.

But what about inflation and financial responsibilities?

"We're not wealthy or anything, but we manage our money," Zehnacker says. "And we believe if you give to the church the Lord's going to bless you in return."

The church also had 22 members who paid their own way to Wounded Knee, N.D., this summer to work as missionaries for two weeks with Indians.

Tom and Val Mullens, who coordinated the trip, explain they wanted to take the

time and money they normally invest in a vacation and put it "into something worthwhile."

A number of church building programs have been seen recently in the area, and people have responded well.

Again it's faith, pastors contend, that rallies members behind worthy causes.

Trinity CME Church has raised about \$300,000 in pledges from its members to build a new church.

The City of Decatur compensated the church with \$100,000 to help replace the old church, which was torn down to make room for a parking lot at the Civic Center.

The Rev. C.L. Hawkins says he was not surprised with the response of the church.

"I could tell that from previous giving they would respond well."

The Rhema Christian Center moved its worship service from the basement of the Red Lake Motel to a new building at 1635 Huston Drive.

The church has had to meet higher lease costs in the new building, but church mem-

bers have responded positively, says Bernard Reedy, pastor.

"They are coming in contact with inflation," he says. "But we believe if they'll put that biblical principle to work in their lives they'll be blessed."

And they have been. Reedy says no one in the 200-member group is unemployed.

Grace Baptist Church, one of the largest churches in Decatur, has seen its contributions increase.

The Rev. Glenn Stockton says contributions have been growing, especially in the last nine months.

The church funnels the money into various activities including its bus ministry, which includes a fleet of five buses that picks up children each Sunday for church; the Decatur Christian School; and a number of mission programs the church supports.

The motivation for the consistent giving is the same.

"We have a faith promise," Stockton explains.