“We want to be intergenerational, as well as multi-generational.”

— First Baptist Church, Seymour
After 18 years of working with Indiana congregations, the Center knows that faith communities can do wonderful things. Congregations can successfully handle their challenges and opportunities when they find good outside resources and use those in concert with their own creativity. Encouraging teens and young adults to make good decisions; educating about bullying; connecting to youth using Sticky Faith strategies; updating governance structure; beginning an outreach to homeless families; creating congregational care ministries; designing a more welcoming fellowship environment thanks to technology improvements — these are just a few examples of the great things congregations are doing, with the help of the Center’s services.

To reach more congregations, the Center developed the Congregational Resource Guide (CRG) in 2014. The CRG is a web-based application that helps faith communities find and use resources. The Indianapolis Center for Congregations received an incredible opportunity – to reinvent the CRG, a project originally launched in 2002 as a joint effort of the Center and the Alban Institute. This new CRG offers interactive features allowing congregational leaders, staff and members to search, save, organize and discuss the resources and issues that are relevant to them.

Additionally in 2014, the Center welcomed a new northeast director, Matt Burke. Matt succeeds the retiring Brian Witwer.

The Center also welcomed two new supported organizations, Christian Theological Seminary and Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. This affiliation will benefit the constituents of all three institutions, who will gain increased access to knowledge about congregations, as well as other opportunities to support the congregations they serve.

We are proud to serve congregations and to help them find the resources they need to address their challenges and opportunities.

Tim Shapiro
Center President
By 5 p.m. on Wednesday, the small brick church on Elkhart Street—home to Jesus Christ Outreach Ministries—is teeming with activity. Downstairs in Fellowship Hall, Cathy Mathews coaches teenage members of the congregation’s Bible Bowl team for their upcoming competition. Taped music, piped in from the sanctuary, fills the kitchen where a crew prepares mounds of chicken, fish and pasta. Families arrive from nearby Gary and are greeted by name and with hugs from Pastor Wanda Jackson, leader of the church’s all-volunteer staff.

“We’ve only been here a year and a half,” says Jackson, who launched the ministry at a local library before moving it to the basement of a beauty shop, then to a hospital chapel, and on to a community center. When the vacant church building in the suburb of Lake Station became available, members seized the opportunity for a permanent home. “It wasn’t in good shape,” explains Jackson, “but our members have a heart for ministry. Everyone pitched in.”

The congregation is small, but its vision is large. Like many faith communities throughout Indiana, Jesus Christ Outreach Ministry views the Center for Congregations as a long-term partner in achieving its mission. Members’ current focus, supported by a Center resource grant, is a program that encourages teens and young adults to make wise decisions while living in a challenging environment. “Being a kid today is hard,” says LaWanda Simpson, a lay leader and mother of four. “Teenagers feel so much pressure as they try to compete and fit in with their peers.”

The multi-faceted initiative took shape during several discussions with Katie Lindberg, director of the northwest Center for Congregations at Crown Point. “We sat around a conference table and talked about their dreams,” recalls Lindberg, “I had a few ideas about some resources they could explore, and one thing led to another and their dream expanded.” Simpson followed up with a grant application that Lindberg describes as “excellent,” and the congregation adopted a curriculum that includes components on bullying, anger management, abstinence and leadership. The first interactive session was led by a Gary law enforcement officer, who touched on topics as varied as peer pressure, drugs, truancy and academics.

“He showed videos about how things play out differently when a person makes the right choice as opposed to the wrong choice,” says Simpson. “In between each video, he invited questions and discussion. The kids were fascinated.”

To encourage participation in the program, most workshops begin with an activity as simple as musical chairs…but always with an educational twist. After the students circle the chairs and compete for seats, Simpson pauses the action and links the game with the day’s lesson. “Suppose you’re in the school cafeteria and your classmates are sitting in groups and won’t make room for you. How does that make you feel?” she asks. “Or, suppose you’re with friends who refuse to invite a newcomer to join their circle. Do you follow their lead and isolate the newcomer? What’s your response?”

The project is in its earliest stages, but attendance and feedback have been good. “Church leaders are exposing their kids and families to a much larger world where there are many resources and options available to them,” says
Lindberg. As for the church’s future interaction with the Center for Congregations, Lindberg adds, “Our relationship is strong. The members know they’ll always find an open door at the Center. This continues to be an energizing experience.”

**Positioned for the Future**

More than 200 miles to the south, another faith community—one in Jackson County—is strengthening its outreach to youth by applying strategies learned at a Center-sponsored workshop series called Sticky Faith. Staff members at Seymour’s First Baptist Church were part of the first year-long Sticky Faith cohort and now are serving as hosts for a second cohort of congregations going through the training. This is the latest of several collaborations between the Center and the 175-year-old Seymour church.

“For a long time, youth ministry programs compartmentalized everything,” explains Shellie Riggs Jordan, director of youth ministries at First Baptist Church for the past dozen years. “People walked through the door and then scattered” to age-specific classes. Many students viewed the youth program as their church, and when they reached the age of 18 and cycled out of youth activities, they felt no link to the larger body of believers. “Sticky Faith is all about connecting youth to the entire congregation,” says Jordan. “It teaches kids to have a faith that sticks beyond youth.”

With the help of a resource grant from the Center for Congregations, the church launched a major fundraising campaign this year to coincide with the anniversary of its founding. Leaders looked for ways to include the youth in the effort. Rather than the teens pledging their support in a separate youth ceremony, adult members “invited them in and had them participate along with their families,” recalls Jordan. Other attempts to blend the generations have resulted in teen appointments to various church governing boards and a program that matches deacons with college students in pen-pal relationships. “We want to be intergenerational as well as multi-generational,” says Jordan.

Unifying members is especially important now because the church is entering a period of transition. Popular senior pastor Bruce Cochran announced his retirement in November after 22 successful years in the pulpit. His departure has evoked feelings of mourning, apprehension, anticipation and excitement. “Bruce performed our wedding ceremony and baptized our kids,” says Doug Ewing, who has been part of the church for 55 years and as a lay leader in its youth program has attended several Center workshops. “But we have to move forward and accept the fact that Bruce isn’t coming back. Fortunately, we just recruited a transitional pastor who is familiar to us, and his presence will have a calming effect.”

The interim period may last as long as 18 months as members prepare for the next chapter in the life of their congregation. A positive aspect of the transition has been a new appreciation for the pastoral team that has stepped up and filled the void. “Our staff has blossomed,” says Phil Garrison, who joined the church in 2000 and serves on the stewardship board. “Pastor Bruce will always be a part of us, but now he’s somewhere else doing what the Lord wants him to do.” As for First Baptist Church: “We’re on a roll,” says Garrison.

Shellie Jordan, a key part of the team that is standing in the gap, agrees. “I feel like we’re on the cusp of a lot of change,” she says. “I’m excited to see what’s coming.”

**When Change Is in the Air...**

A faith community that experienced a similar leadership change in 2008 is Avon Christian Church, led by Carolyn Scanlan-Holmes, who admits she broke a few rules when she began...
her ministry there. “I did everything they tell
a new senior pastor not to do,” she says with
a laugh. For starters, “they tell you to give it a
year…sit and be still for a year. I didn’t.” Like
Shellie Jordan, she sensed the congregation was
on the cusp of change, and she wasted little time
in nudging things along. An interim pastor had
done an exceptional job of building anticipation
for a new direction under new leadership, so
“the energy already was here,” says Scanlan-
Holmes. “I just helped release it.” The results
have been impressive. In the first six years of her
pastorate:

- Members created a new governance struc-
ture that reduced the size of the board
from 30 to 9 and separated the business
of the church from the ministry of the
church.
- A discernment process led to the decision
to welcome all worshippers, regardless of
sexual orientation.
- After a study revealed that poverty is a
serious issue within Hendricks County,
the church spearheaded the organization
of Family Promise, an agency that offers
shelter and assistance to homeless fami-
lies.
- The congregation dedicated a spacious
new facility in 2014 as part of the church’s
50-year anniversary celebration.
- The number of Sunday worshippers has
almost doubled to 180.

Throughout all this activity, the Center for
Congregations has walked alongside church
members, offering them counsel and resources.
Kathy Owen, a member of the congregation
for more than 30 years, credits Scanlan-Holmes
with enlisting partners such as the Center to fuel
the momentum. “We’ve all heard the expres-
sion about thinking outside the box,” says
Owen. “Well, I’m a person who, if you give me
a box full of stuff, will make the very best use
of what’s inside.” But Scanlan-Holmes thinks
beyond the content of the box, according to
Owen. “And that’s one of the reasons I respect
her so much,” she explains. “Carolyn would
look at the box and say, ‘Okay, what else can we
put in there to make this even better?’”

Sometimes the “what else” takes the form
of a workshop series, such as the Center’s
Leadership Training for Women that Scanlan-
Holmes attended with Owen and another
member of the congregation. The sessions were
so helpful that the team now hopes to develop
a similar program, tailor it to their congrega-
tion’s specific needs, and invite 30 members of
the church to participate. “That will be our next
adventure,” she says.

The most ambitious project that the congrega-
tion has undertaken with the Center’s help was
to dust off, update and implement a master
plan to expand the family life center to serve
dual purposes—worship on Sunday mornings
and weekday basketball, volleyball and fitness
classes. Members hesitated to take on the debt of
construction because they remembered a painful
time when their church struggled financially. A
grant from the Center for Congregations, ear-
marked for architectural services, did more than
help with expenses; it built hope.

“If it hadn’t been for the Center, we might not
have proceeded,” says Scanlan-Holmes. “It
made all the difference to have somebody from
the outside look in and say, ‘Yes, this is a faith
community that has great possibilities.’ It also
gave us the courage to seek other grants.”

The dream of adding a totally dedicated sanctu-
ary is on hold, and Scanlan-Holmes jokes that
“the next minister can deal with that.” For now,
members refer to their new facility as “God’s
gym” where they share the good news, build
physical and spiritual unity, and have fun. “Two
of our founding members sat together at the
dedication ceremony,” recalls Scanlan-Holmes.
“One leaned over and whispered in the other’s
ear: ‘Did you ever imagine, 50 years ago, that we would be a part of this?’ It was wonderful.”

Creating a Community Asset

Around the same time Scanlan-Holmes began her ministry at Avon, Brian Buschkill accepted a call from St. Peter’s Highland United Church of Christ, just outside of Evansville. Like Scanlan-Holmes, he quickly recognized the energy that was present in the congregation and knew his challenge was to harness it. “We had a bunch of things going on, but they were all going in different directions,” he recalls. The time was right for members to pause, assess their situation, determine where they wanted to go, and create a 10-year vision plan to get them there. The overall goal was to transform the church into a community resource center that would reach out to the people in the pews…and beyond.

Achieving the goal required a paradigm shift. “When I first got here, people would come up to me after church and say things like, ‘I think it would be great if we had a book club! Could you make that happen?’” says Buschkill. The vision plan provided the framework for church members to present their ideas to a vision team that then would help generate support to implement the ideas. “This was all about empowering members of the congregation to take ownership of their ministries,” says Buschkill.

A frequent partner in turning ideas into reality has been the Center for Congregations. Buschkill became acquainted with the Center by attending several workshops. When he learned about the Technology and Ministry Grants Initiative, he saw it as a way to accelerate the congregation’s outreach to the community. St. Peter’s fellowship hall was an inviting space for neighborhood activities, except for one enormous drawback: “It was like a vast echo chamber,” he says. “We had cobbled together a sound system, but there was so much reverberation that you could hardly hear the people seated around you.”

The technology grant enabled the church to add video capabilities to the worship space, as well as acoustical panels to the fellowship hall. “The use of that room has skyrocketed,” says Buschkill. As an example: “We recently hosted the Financial Peace workshop series and opened it up to the community.”

One of the church’s newest activities launched after four retired nurses attended the Center’s long-term learning program Circle of Care. The women initially began offering blood pressure checks and other basic services to members of the congregation. This has blossomed into a multi-pronged ministry that involves a growing team of volunteers who transport persons to medical appointments, visit shut-ins, send cards and pray for those dealing with illness. “It’s a powerful way to demonstrate to our church, our city and our friends that we don’t exist just for our own wellbeing,” says Buschkill. “We exist to better our community.”

Six years into his ministry at St. Peter’s, Buschkill gives credit to the Center for Congregations for its ongoing encouragement and support. “This is a much more positive place to be than it was a few years ago,” he says. “So many churches look back longingly to the ‘heydays’ of the 1950s when attendance and stewardship were growing. Well, we don’t have that problem. In the 1950s, St. Peter’s had 20 members and was struggling to pay its bills. Our past doesn’t hamper us, and we’re not tempted to say, ‘That’s not how we did things in the 1950s when everyone came.’ We’re excited about the present, and we have confidence in the future because we’re healthy and we’re growing. We couldn’t have been able to do a fraction of what we’ve accomplished without the Center’s help.”
### Financial Report

**STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION AND ACTIVITIES**

The following is a summary of the statement of financial position and the statement of activities of the Center as of December 31, 2014 and for the year then ended. This financial information was extracted from the audited financial statements of the Indianapolis Center for Congregations, Inc. It does not, however, include all disclosures normally associated with financial statements prepared in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles. The complete financial statements, including footnotes and the report of our auditors, BKD, LLP, are available for review upon request.

#### Assets

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<th>2013</th>
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#### Net Assets

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#### Summary Statement of Financial Position

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total liabilities and net assets</td>
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#### Summary Statement of Activities

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<td>Total revenues and other support</td>
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<td>Net assets released from restrictions</td>
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<td><strong>Total revenues and other support</strong></td>
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<td>($4,987,583)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total expenses</td>
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<td>$4,662,859</td>
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<td><strong>Total expenses</strong></td>
<td>$5,080,776</td>
<td>$4,662,859</td>
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#### Revenues and other support

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#### Expenses and losses

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<td>1,194,790</td>
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<td><strong>Total expenses</strong></td>
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#### Change in net assets

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<td>Change in net assets before other gains/losses</td>
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<td>(3,483)</td>
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Net assets, beginning of year | 3,157,105 | 30,476,443 |

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, end of year</td>
<td>$3,523,269</td>
<td>$30,476,443</td>
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ANNUAL REPORT
MISSION

The mission of the Indianapolis Center for Congregations is to strengthen Indiana congregations by helping them find and use the best resources available to address the challenges and opportunities they identify — and then to share what we learn nationwide.

The Congregational Resource Guide is a project of the Indianapolis Center for Congregations. This web-based application helps congregations find and use the best resources for the challenges they identify.

The Indianapolis Center for Congregations is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. and was a supporting organization of the Alban Institute in 2014. In late 2014, the Center became a supporting organization of Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis and Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

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Nancy DeMott, Resource Director
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Photography
Chris Minnick

Writing
Holly G. Miller

Front cover photos are, clockwise from upper right, Avon Christian Church. St. Peter’s Highland United Church of Christ in Evansville, Jesus Christ Outreach Ministries in Gary and First Baptist Church in Seymour.
“It made all the difference to have somebody from the outside look in and say, ‘Yes, this is a faith community that has great possibilities.’”

— Avon Christian Church
“Our members have a heart for ministry.”

— Jesus Christ Outreach Ministries, Gary