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It seems as though we Disciples have always been on the move, but I imagine those early church planters here in Northern Indiana never imagined how the seeds they planted would continue to grow today.

Two elders and three deacons organized First Christian Church in 1843, one of the first of four churches in Mishawaka. Early members met in homes or a schoolhouse until gathering in a small meetinghouse in 1853 on Lincolnway and Spring Street. They later dedicated a modern Gothic style building in February 1896. Once again, they were on the move as they built a new church in 1971.

Several women met in the house of Mrs. Frances Stillman 141 years ago this week and dreamed of building a church, which blossomed into Central Christian in Elkhart. The first church built was on the corner of Middlebury and Monroe. Those early Disciples built a new church in 1889, but after outgrowing that church, in 1897 they purchased a lot on a triangular corner of West Lexington, Vistula, and Fifth Streets and moved the church

building to that location and renovated it. Can you imagine moving an entire building? What if it had gotten stuck in the middle of traffic? What if the movers decided after getting partway to the new location that they just couldn't go any further and said, "That's far enough. Park it right over there." Just imagine the chaos that would have occurred had the church gotten stuck somewhere along the journey.

That's sort of what happened to the ark of the covenant after David had been anointed as the new king of Israel; it got stuck. You may remember hearing about the ark of the covenant as you've read through the Bible. It was a large box they gathered around for worship—sort of like a portable temple. Since their ancestors had been nomadic people and had moved around a lot, they had not yet built a temple for worship. Instead, they carried the ark of the covenant from place to place to represent God's mobile presence with them. The box contained the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments and other sacred objects. This

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worship box was portable, and at one point it was captured by their enemies (1 Samuel 5). After retrieving the ark, another time the cart, used for transporting the box, was burned in a field (1 Samuel 6:14). Once a new cart had been built, King David wanted to have a big parade with lots of people, using the ark of the covenant as part of the procession.

The ark of the covenant was not nearly as big as a church building, of course, but a large box made with dense wood overlaid in gold could run anywhere from 500 to 600 pounds,<sup>1</sup> which even with four men, could be a lot to carry.

During the procession, an event filled with dancing and lots of music, something went wrong—the cart lurched, a man died while trying to steady it, and the incident put a damper on the parade and celebration. David was angry about the whole fiasco and said something like, “I’m fed up with this ark of the covenant. It’s nothing but trouble. Park the ark over there and leave it.” And there it stayed, stuck near the house of a guy named Obed-edom.

Have you ever felt that way? Stuck? Frustrated? Unable to finish a project? Ever doubted that a new idea would ever work, such as Horace Rackham, President of the Michigan Savings Bank advising Henry Ford’s lawyer, “The horse is here to stay but the automobile is only a novelty—a fad.” Back in 1876 the Chief Engineer for the British Post Office said, “The Americans have need of the telephone, but we do not. We have plenty of messenger boys.”<sup>2</sup> When innovation began to occur, these two men resisted the change, becoming stuck. What if their resistance prevailed? Can you imagine our life today without cars or phones?

Ever feel as though you’re trying to move a church that seems stuck? A Congregational church tried to discern how and whether to move their church, literally, further back on their property.

For a number of years the membership had been vigorously debating the cons and pros and costs of lifting the entire structure on steel girders, sliding it to the far back of the parking lot... pouring a new foundation, then setting the entire edifice down — 35 feet back from

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the intersection at the edge of the road where it had sat on gray granite blocks since 1849.

Back in the day of horses, ox carts and gravel roads, back when this church was built, no driver or rider ever came around that corner out-of-control.<sup>3</sup>

But one Sunday morning, a car came rushing around the corner by the church and crashed into the sanctuary. That morning the congregation got unstuck and made a unanimous decision to move the church.

Just imagine what would have happened had they remained stuck in their decision, with a gaping hole near the front entrance of the building. They could have said, “This is our new energy efficient heating and cooling system—it cools in the winter and it heats in the summer.” Or they could have explained to visitors, “This is our new accessible entrance for wheelchairs.”

Why wait for a disaster to make a move toward the future? Changes occur around us all the time, so why not try and anticipate some of them, to get unstuck and move forward?

King David finally got unstuck and decided to try and move the ark of the covenant once again. The first time they tried to move it, as we heard in the scripture reading from 2 Samuel, they paraded with dancing and “with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.” The second time was filled with just as much enthusiasm: dancing and shouting and trumpet blasts.

Even while being stuck, in the midst of King David’s frustration, he found a way to celebrate God’s presence, to recognize what God was doing around him. Sometimes I’ve known people who prefer to remain stuck than to take a step forward and trust that God will be with them as they try something new or difficult. Often, we’re reluctant to celebrate, to dance and sing and make a joyful sound, for then we would have to get unstuck and acknowledge that change can happen. Getting unstuck and celebrating might mean we trust in God even when things look difficult or when life

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seems complicated, as was the case with Lenny and Carissa, who have come to tell you their story...

*(Skit from Narrative Lectionary Program 1 2019-2020 Worship Resources, p. 67.)*

I celebrate the changes we have made, that we have become unstuck as we move forward.

- Central has renovated a space for a childcare ministry that will begin as soon as the state approves the building.
- First has revamped the order of worship, weaving together the best of traditional and

contemporary forms of music and worship styles.

- Both our congregations have found creative ways to share in ministry. We meet regularly for planning worship; we began hosting family night; and this weekend we hosted a wonderful retreat.

Let's continue to move our church forward rather than parking the ark and getting stuck, and together let's celebrate what God is doing among us!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://warrenmyers.com/blog/2012/06/the-dimensions-and-approximate-weight-of-the-ark-of-the-covenant/#.XaeLOuhKgrw>

<sup>2</sup> Sherry Heyl, "Famous Examples of Resistance to Change," January 9, 2015, [www.linkedin.com/pulse/famous-examples-resistance-change-sherry-hey/](http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/famous-examples-resistance-change-sherry-hey/)

<sup>3</sup> Story told by Evelyn Tibbetts, a Congregational witness to the church-moving event, Homiletics, July 13, 2003.