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To all the Saints of North Oak Christian Church  
May 16, 2020

Dear friends,

I am writing this letter to you with tears born of deep appreciation for the faithful witness that you have maintained for these 45 years!

When I look back on those early days, it is remarkable to think that nearly all of us were in our early 30's and younger! I was 27 (yikes!). Mindy and I arrived in October, the congregation having started meeting on May 16. Some 18 of us gathered faithfully in the lower level of the RLDS Stake on North Oak Street. From there we grew.

There were lots of challenges in those days. Some I think of immediately:

1) As mentioned, we were young and few of us had much church experience. Thank goodness for the Vansickles who were in their 40's, and a few younger ones who, though young, were "old church hands"! 2) Few congregations were being started in those days by *any* mainline denomination, so there wasn't much wisdom to be offered even by denominational leadership, though they did their best to be of assistance (thank you, John Wolfersberger). Their expectations for growth, based mostly on experience in the 1950's, were unrealistic and so we had to make the case constantly for continued financial support until we could make it on our own. (That said, we were grateful that the Kansas City Area Disciples invested some \$350,000 in us!) 3) There was over-speculation on land everywhere around us due to the building of KCI. That inflated land prices and slowed expected residential and commercial development to a crawl, which considerably narrowed our prospects for new members. 4) TWA located a new overhaul base at KCI, but brought mechanics, administrators, and other workers in from New Jersey where there were few Disciples congregations, so "Disciples" were unknown to many of the people living in our area. (Some days I felt like an evangelist for the Catholic Church as so many of these workers from the Northeast were Catholics, and I would tell them where they needed to enroll to become a part of their new parish!). Of course, we (North Oak) would later help

the Catholics get a new parish started in the New Mark area – true to our Disciples ecumenical values!

But there were so many wonderful things I remember, too: 1) The people who “stuck” were wonderful, determined pioneers who wanted to do something significant for God and people. 2) I was able to ride my moped into a housing development and make door to door calls inviting people to church and, in those days, people would actually come to their doors and were almost always polite, even if not interested. 3) Colleagues throughout the Kansas City area were wonderfully supportive of me personally. 4) We assembled a cast of wonderful characters (and I do mean “characters”!) who were attractive and welcoming to new people who were spiritually seeking and/or looking for a church home. I’ve seldom had so much fun or such good friends in ministry since.

There were the hard days (like the day the building bids came in 100% above the architects’ estimate!), but there were so many wonderful days (like the “Exodus” parade from the Middle School to our new building!). You who were there in those days should tell these stories and keep those memories alive, even as you all are making new, wonderful memories these days.

On this occasion of the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary (holy cow!), I am filled with gratitude to God, gratitude to those of you who shared all or part of those first 7 years of North Oak Christian Church with me and Mindy, David and Laura, and gratitude for all of you today who are tending and growing the flame of this important witness in the Northland.

I give thanks for Rob Carr and all the fine ministers that have served North Oak through the years. Each one brought a different set of gifts in turn, and each have left an important mark on the congregation. How blessed they all have been to work with you wonderful people.

Mindy and I love you all and pray for many more decades of life, joy, and ministry for this congregation which will always be in our hearts.

Sincerely,



Rev. Dr. Richard L. Hamm

P.S. This letter was read and approved by Mindy.