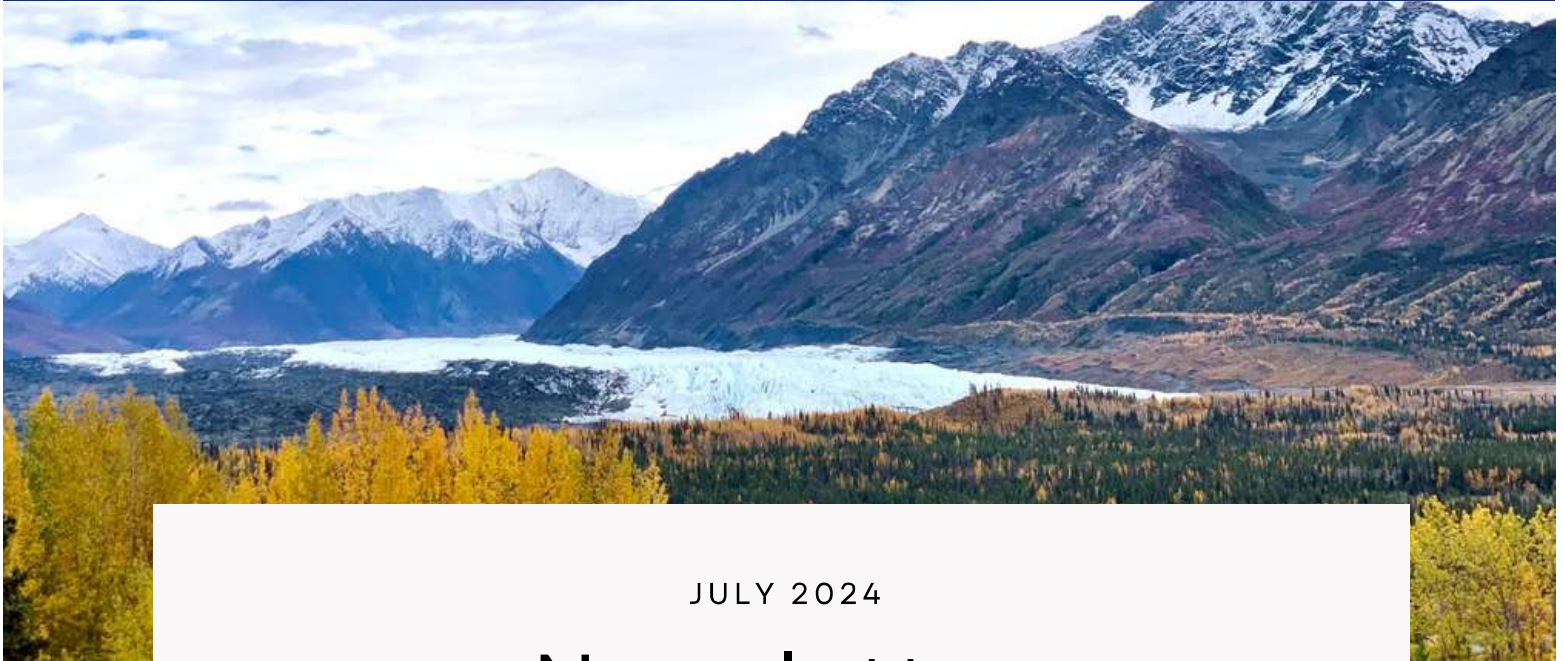




JULY 2024

Newsletter



Rural Churches



As we continue our mission to strengthen the ministry and outreach of Covenant churches across the nation, we turn our focus to a vital yet occasionally overlooked aspect of our community: our rural churches.

Rural congregations play a pivotal role in their communities. These churches are beacons of hope and tradition, fostering deep-rooted connections that span generations.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to the mission of National Covenant Properties. Together, we can ensure that every church, no matter how rural, remains a vibrant cornerstone of its community.



In this newsletter you will find:

Tips on routine maintenance, Shaktoolik Covenant Church, Bethlehem Covenant Church, and more. Keep reading!



Shaktoolik Covenant Church

SHAKTOOLIK, ALASKA

The Covenant Church in Shaktoolik, Alaska, was excited to be chosen to host the Covenant's Alaska Conference annual meeting in April 2024, but they faced some challenges. Located on the shores of the Norton Sound in Western Alaska, Shaktoolik gets an average of 78 inches of snow each year and in April the average high temperature is only 35 degrees. The harsh climate had taken its toll on the church's building and their front porch had separated from the main building.

The main entry was not accessible to people with disabilities and the door was not wide enough for a casket. If they had a funeral, the body needed to be removed, the casket turned vertical to get through the door and then the body was returned to casket. The entire process was very distressing for a family grieving a loved one. "What we have to do with the casket for a funeral shows great disrespect for our elders, but there has been no other

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President's Corner



Peter Hedstrom, President

Happy Summer to all our Ministry Partners! I trust there will be room for a time away with family and friends this summer. God's plan for us includes a time of rest to be re-energized.

I recently returned from Gather in Cincinnati, which is always a fantastic opportunity to be reminded and grateful for all the wonderful initiatives and meaningful ministry that collectively our denomination, churches, and affiliates provide for our communities and neighbors. During Gather, NCP had the opportunity to share our latest video asking the question:

What is your church doing to reach your neighbors and become a relevant meeting place for your community?

In this newsletter, you can learn how two churches in smaller communities are making a difference to their neighbors. Their intentional focus on serving and connecting with people searching for hope is leading to transformational ministry opportunities. I am thankful for their ingenuity in having a long-lasting impact on others with sometimes limited resources.



Recently, our founder, Robert C. Larson, went home to the Lord. He faithfully served the Covenant and NCP for 65 years and had a passion and heart for the local church. We celebrate the faithful ministry taking place in many rural and urban churches for which Robert found their ideal location to do ministry or helped them with their first loan for their church property. He left a huge legacy in the Covenant. Peace to his memory!

As we continue to build on Robert's vision to collaboratively serve the Covenant family, NCP would appreciate the opportunity to come alongside any churches that are considering how to better use your resources to connect with your neighbors and become a relevant meeting place in your community. Our team would love to work with you, dream, and consider options for your unique circumstances.

Thank you for partnering with NCP on our shared mission and for creating, inviting, and transforming places for conversation and impact. For God's glory and neighbor's good!

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option,” said Lynda Bekoalok, a leader in the church.

A church from Alabama was willing to come up to help put in a new, wider entry door and add a ramp to make the space more accessible. The church had some cash on hand but was concerned about using all of it on this project. NCP, the Covenant denomination, and the Alaska Conference came together to discuss options with the church. It was decided that the best course of action was a small loan from NCP.

The work was completed in the summer of 2023 and this past April, despite a snowstorm that made travel to Shaktoolik difficult, the 2024 Alaska Conference annual meeting took place and those in attendance enjoyed fellowship and heard from Rev. Grace Shim, executive minister for Serve Globally, and Dr. Dennis Edwards, dean of North Park Theological Seminary. “We were blessed to be in Shaktoolik for our annual conference, and we are grateful for the hospitality and warm welcome we received from the church,” said Rev. Curtis Ivanoff, superintendent of the Alaska Conference.

The church is excited about how this project will increase their ability to serve their members and the community. “The project will make the church more accessible for all and hopefully bring more people into the body of Christ, giving us more options for the church to be an instrument to share the love of Jesus with our village,” said Lynda Bekoalok.



Bethlehem Covenant Church

WHEATON, MINNESOTA

Wheaton, Minnesota, is a small city (population 1,400) located in Traverse County in the western part of the state. Known for its rural charm and close-knit community, Wheaton is situated near the Minnesota-South Dakota border, surrounded by rich agricultural land. It's part of the Red River Valley region, known for its fertile soil. We recently had a conversation with Cheryl Skeleton, ministry administrator for Bethlehem Covenant, about their church addition.

Project: Building addition to improve youth and children's ministry

How did you want to enhance ministry with the addition?

Initially, the addition was about creating more space, but as we began to envision its potential, we realized there were numerous untapped ministry opportunities. This new youth room addition could serve multiple purposes beyond its initial intent. We

envisioned it as a venue for Marriage Weekend Retreats, a space for overflow during large celebrations, and have already used it for a large family gathering before and after the funeral of a loved one. The possibilities for this new space are endless, allowing us to dream of various ways to use it for ministry.

Was it worth the wait?

Of course, I want to say "yes." The waiting period was difficult and frustrating, especially as we had begun to dream big, only to face numerous delays due to COVID and weather. However, we are now extremely happy with the addition. It's surprising what a blank canvas can do for the imagination. We've used the new spaces for a variety of activities well beyond their intended purpose, making the wait worthwhile.

What excites you most about the way your building impacts your ministry?

We have been outgrowing our current building space since 2017. The youth group has been feeling displaced since they had to move to the sanctuary to meet. This new space provides them with a sense of ownership and renewed belonging. The Abilities Ministry (Adults Living with Disability), which had to move offsite due to lack of space, has now returned to meet at the church. They eagerly counted down the months, weeks and days until they could "come back."

The new building opens up exciting possibilities for ministry, enabling us to continue reaching out to our community and surrounding areas. We have a unique setting that reaches marginalized, hungry, and lost people.

How do you see God at work within your church?

It has been evident from early on at Bethlehem Church that God is working through our family meal ministry. We provide hot meals on Wednesday nights to all ages, creating an environment where people feel welcomed, valued, and supported. This fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment. After dinner, small group ministry is offered to all, with groups formed by peers for teaching, games, and interactions. This allows us to feed both their bodies and their souls.

Can you reflect on the partnership with NCP?

From the beginning, working with Rollie and the NCP team felt like more than just a resource; they are people who genuinely care about the mission, ministry, and vision of Bethlehem Church. They listened to our reasons, needs, and plans. Personally, I felt I had access to the staff, especially when I didn't know what I needed or how to accomplish certain tasks. Their support has been invaluable in helping us achieve our goals.

Financial Training

FOR PASTORS, TREASURERS,
CHURCH LEADERSHIP, AND
STAFF

LEARN MORE

October 5, 2024

Central Conference, Covenant Offices

October 26, 2024

Crossview Covenant Church, Mankato, Minnesota

November 9, 2024

Great Road Church, Acton, Massachusetts

November 23, 2024

New York Covenant Church, New Rochelle, New York

Routine Maintenance, Part 1

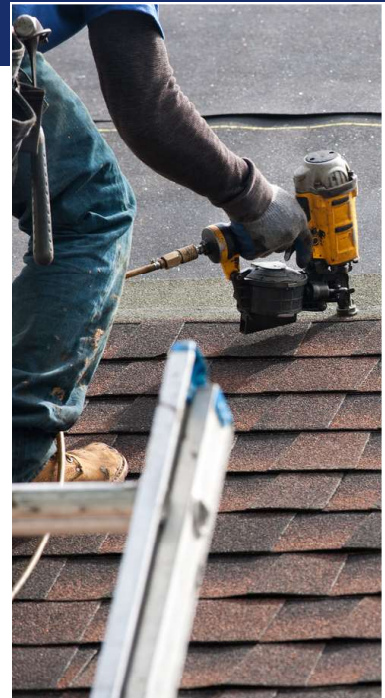
PAY ME NOW, OR PAY ME LATER

There was a commercial in the 1970s that showed a mechanic working on a car. He was saying that if the car owner had come to the mechanic for routine oil and oil filter changes, he could have saved money. At the end of the commercial the mechanic shrugs his shoulders and says, “You can pay me now or you can pay me later.” The implication was that if you spent a little money on routine maintenance, you could avoid spending more money on costly repair costs in the future.

Church facilities are no different than cars in this regard. Tim Cool, chief stewardship officer and founder of Smart Church Solutions estimates that every \$1 spent on maintenance and minor repairs can save, or at least delay, the need to spend \$4 on capital renewal. We will discuss the need to plan for and have a reserve for capital renewal in the second part of this series, but for now we are going to focus on the importance of planning and budgeting for routine annual maintenance and repair.

There are three inescapable facts about buildings:

- **All Buildings Deteriorate:** According to a study by the International Facility Managers Association, the annual rate of deterioration is 1-4% of the current replacement value of the building.
- **Deferred Maintenance Accelerates Deterioration:** Left unaddressed, the rate of deterioration will accelerate and can even increase exponentially, which means that ignoring routine maintenance or the need for minor repairs can be the root cause of a significant issue later.
- **Costs of Facility Operations Exceed Cost of Acquisition and Construction:** We spend a lot of time planning for and raising funds to purchase/construct a church facility, but that is typically only 20-23% of the cost to own that facility over a 40-year period. In comparison, the operating cost of a facility over the same period is typically 71% of the overall cost of ownership.



Routine Maintenance, Part 1 (continued)

At National Covenant Properties (“NCP”), we believe that church buildings are simply a tool that helps the church to live into the ministry and mission they feel called to do in their community. Just like a master builder, we need to make sure that we maintain our tools so they serve our needs for a long time. NCP likes to remind churches that your building is an asset that needs to be cared for and maintained well. It is not a commodity that can be used up and then replaced. We advocate that churches have an annual plan for preventative maintenance and repair. This means doing maintenance on a regular schedule, with the goal to detect, delay, or prevent the breakdown of a system due to deterioration and extend the use life of a system.



Preventive maintenance also helps to keep your systems running smoothly and efficiently, which can also lower your energy costs. Preventive maintenance is compared with reactive maintenance, which waits until the problem can no longer be ignored due to a total failure of a system. Reactive maintenance saves money in the short run but always ends up costing more money in the long run. David Tod Geaslin in an article titled “Inverse-Square Rule” says that if a necessary repair is deferred and allowed to remain in service until the next level of failure, the resultant expense will usually be 30 times more than the cost would have been for the initial repair.

NCP recommends that a church have a line item in their annual budget for preventive maintenance and repair. There are a couple of different methods of budgeting for this line item and if you reach out to NCP, one of our vice presidents of Real Estate Services can connect with you and help to coach you through this matter.



In Part 2 of this series, we will discuss the need to establish a capital reserve to help your church to plan for the cost to replace items when they reach the end of their useful life.