

Called as Partners in Christ's Service



The Birth of Crestwood Christian Church

A fifty-year history of Crestwood will be written during 2009,
as part of the 50th Anniversary Celebration.

You are encouraged to contribute!

Watch for further details in The Crest.

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The Birth of Crestwood Christian Church

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Crestwood Christian Church

The publication of this booklet was made possible by Sue Ann Cowgill
in loving memory of Ben L. Cowgill



The historic photograph captured the spirit of the day: confidence and joy; friendship and mutual respect; a sense of purpose and resolve.

Fifty years ago today, on Sunday, January 25, 1959, the congregation of Crestwood Christian Church lined up for its first picture. The members of the congregation included people of all ages, but the congregation itself was only a few minutes old.

Today Crestwood celebrates a fifty-year journey of faith. This is the story of how the journey began. It is an inspiring story, worthy of telling and remembering.

* * *

Conceived for the Kingdom of God

Lexington grew rapidly in the decade of the 1950s, like many other towns across America. It was also becoming a suburban community. New neighborhoods were springing up around the edges of town, especially on the south side. Many of the homes were occupied by young families, part of the population boom that followed World War II.

Most churches were situated in older neighborhoods. Many were located at or near the center of town. They had been erected decades earlier, when Lexington was smaller.

Leaders of the Disciples of Christ saw that a new challenge had arisen, accompanied by a new responsibility. They called on older, well-established churches to launch new churches in new neighborhoods, as part of their own mission to the community.

Some of those leaders were affiliated with the College of the Bible, now the Lexington Theological Seminary. Then, as now, the institution played a significant role in pointing the way forward for Disciples ministers and their churches.

Dr. Myron T. Hopper was a professor of religious education at the seminary. He was a serious theologian who cared deeply about

congregational ministry. He was also an active member of Central Christian Church, one of the oldest and largest Disciples churches.

Sometime in the middle or late 1950s, Dr. Hopper began to advance an idea among the leadership at Central – the idea of launching a new Disciples church in suburban Lexington, as part of Central’s own mission. The idea gained momentum, apparently as a direct result of Dr Hopper’s efforts.

One can easily imagine that Dr. Hopper “called” Central into the mission both literally and figuratively: by picking up the phone and speaking with his friend, Dr. Leslie R. Smith, the senior minister of Central; and by advancing the same concept of mission, perhaps less directly, in his writing, speaking and relationships with other church leaders.

One thing is certain: Dr. Hopper’s role in the birth of Crestwood was substantial enough that the congregation decided to name its first building, Hopper Hall, in his honor. The building opened in 1961, shortly after his death.

The reasons for that decision are easy to identify. Dr. Hopper was one of Crestwood’s early leaders; in fact, he presided over the communion service at Glendover Elementary School on January 25, 1959. He was also a highly respected theologian. His untimely death was mourned at Crestwood, the seminary and beyond.

But the decision to name the building for Dr. Hopper has proven to be appropriate for another reason as well – a reason that has only become apparent with the passage of time.

The building began as a combination sanctuary and fellowship hall. In recent years, however, it has been used by Crestwood’s child care center, which provides child care services as part of Crestwood’s mission to the community. In that way, it continues to extend the Kingdom of God, exactly as Dr. Hopper intended.

* * *

A Planned Birth

In the late 1950s, the leadership of Central Christian Church adopted a goal of starting a new sister church on the southeast side of Lexington. The goal became an active project in the usual, familiar way: it inspired a group of people to begin thinking and working.

In the spring of 1958, a small group of people began to meet, almost every week, to pursue a common objective of bringing a new church to life. The group ultimately included members of two other Disciples churches, Woodland Christian and Arlington Christian. Through their involvement, Central's goal became a shared goal of three churches: Central, Woodland and Arlington.

The acknowledged leader of the group was William White, Jr. – Bill White. He would become one of Crestwood's most respected leaders during its early years, prior to his death. His widow, Rosemary White, was a member of Crestwood's Fiftieth Anniversary Committee prior to her death in 2008.

Other members of the group included Ben and Rosemary Buckley, Wendell and Ann Harris and my parents, Ben and Sue Ann Cowgill.

They became the *de facto* planning committee, with the blessing and encouragement of their respective churches, mainly because they were willing to devote time and energy to the project. It is a familiar process – the way most church work gets done.

There was much to be done. They were eager to see the church come to life, but they also recognized that preparations were necessary.

A Church Body

The new church could not thrive without a church body – a body of members large enough to include a full complement of spiritual gifts.

The leaders of Central, Woodland and Arlington understood that fact. They agreed to set goals regarding the number of Disciples who would be called from their congregations to be charter members of Crestwood: 150

from Central; 50 from Woodland; and at least several from Arlington. They were ambitious goals, ultimately unrealized by all three churches. But they conveyed an important message to the members of those churches: that the church leaders understood what needed to happen for the project to succeed, and that the members would need to think and pray about the decision each of them would face when the time arrived.

A Permanent Home

Perhaps the most important task of the planning committee was the selection of a site for the church buildings that would be constructed as a home for the new congregation. The location needed to be one that satisfied the overriding mission of extending the Kingdom of God into Lexington's new suburbs.

After making appropriate inquiries, the committee selected the property where Crestwood now stands. It was an ideal location for Crestwood's permanent home, partly for reasons that are no longer obvious.

It was located in the heart of new neighborhoods on Lexington's southeast side, and therefore satisfied the principle criterion. Today there are a number of church buildings in suburban southeast Lexington. Almost none of them existed in 1959.

The property was owned by Transylvania College (now Transylvania University), a school with deep connections to the Disciples of Christ. It was available for purchase on favorable terms. It was a spacious tract of land, one that could accommodate the steady growth of a church over many years. And it was undeveloped, except as a cornfield. It must have looked like an empty canvass that awaited the hand of the new congregation.

The members of the planning committee discussed a variety of possible names for the new church. They decided that the land itself was telling them what the name of the church should be. The land was situated on a gentle crest, one of the highest points in Fayette County. A

row of trees ran over the crest, along the property's eastern boundary.
Crestwood.

A Place to Get Started

The new congregation would need a temporary home during the construction of church buildings. The planning committee did not need to look far. Glendover Elementary School stood directly across the street. It was a handsome new facility, less than two years old, with a combination auditorium-gymnasium, a large cafeteria and well-equipped classrooms.

The planning committee spoke eagerly with the leadership of Glendover and the Fayette County Schools. It quickly received permission to use the school's facilities, each and every Sunday, while Crestwood built a home for itself across the street.

When Crestwood's first members arrived at Glendover for their first communion service, they were greeted at the door by the principal of the school. A long and cooperative relationship between good neighbors has followed.

Glendover was Crestwood's home for one hundred Sundays, until Hopper Hall was completed in 1961.

Leadership

As 1958 came to a close, the planning committee began to focus on January 25, 1959 as the day that Crestwood might be sprung into existence. Preparations quickened.

At a meeting on January 5, 1959, the committee was joined by members of Central, Woodland and Arlington who had already made their decision to become charter members of Crestwood.

The group elected two interim officers of Crestwood: Ben L. Cowgill, Chair of the Congregation, and Mrs. Robert (Betty) Cloud, Treasurer. It also approved the appointment of seven committee chairs: Wendell Harris, Education; Ben Buckley, Finance; James C. Foley, Personnel; Sue Ann Cowgill and Carlouise Grizzard, Membership; Tom Boyd, Publicity;

and Mrs. W. A. Rominger, Worship. It also named Bill White as an ex-officio member of the executive committee.

The group also decided that all of those selections would terminate automatically on the first Sunday in March, in order to permit the entire Crestwood congregation to select its leadership, after the church came to life. The decision was only one example of the inclusive spirit that permeated the entire sequence of events.

Financial Support

In 1958, Central established a goal of raising \$20,000, over two years, to defray the startup costs of the new church. Woodland established a goal of raising \$6,000 for the same purpose.

On January 8, 1959, the *Central Church Chimes* reported that the fund had received a special gift of \$1,783.50 – about three times the total amount of Central’s average weekly offering – from an unnamed member of Central who intended to become a charter member of Crestwood.

Two weeks later, on January 22, the *Chimes* reported that “by action of the Finance Committee, all money received until February 15th on 1958 pledges will be designated for the new church.” The article explained that “enough is still due on 1958 pledges to enable Central to meet her obligation for \$10,000” in total contributions to Crestwood’s initial operating budget. It went on to explain that “it was the opinion of the Finance Committee that, if members know that there is a place of real need for these overdue funds, they will make every effort to get the money in.”

In the weeks following its birth, Crestwood also received financial gifts from members of other churches, including friends and relatives of Crestwood members.

* * *

Difficult Decisions

Suddenly it was official. At the beginning of January, 1959, an official announcement was made that Crestwood would be launched three weeks later, on January 25.

About 75 members of Central had already decided to become members of Crestwood. A smaller number at Woodland and Arlington had done the same. Other people were still wrestling with the decision – the decision to stay or go.

They were encouraged to think and pray about the decision. Articles were published; letters were written; friends spoke with friends.

One of those letters was issued by Central's senior minister, Dr. Leslie Smith. It was co-signed by the Chair of the Elders at Central, and by the Chair of its Administrative Board. It was mailed directly to Central members in Crestwood's new neighborhood, and also published in the January 8 issue of the *Central Church Chimes*. The letter stated in part:

"The time has come for us to seek to enlist up to one hundred and fifty Central Church members who will dedicate themselves and their talents to the new Crestwood Christian Church.

...

"We are not forcing anyone to leave Central but we are asking that you give your most prayerful thought to this project to decide whether you feel it is God's will that you should go to the new church."

A remarkable dialogue ensued. Young parents encouraged older couples to go with them, to provide mature leadership for the new congregation. Conversely, some older couples encouraged their children to go without them, to create something new for themselves and their young families.

Friendships were tested, but loyalties were never questioned. By all accounts, it was an earnest dialogue between people who appreciated the

significance of the decision and the difficult choices all of them would make.

Two of those people were my grandparents, Professor Lawrence Bradford and his wife, Pauline Bradford. They struggled with the decision, just as others did.

Finally, on January 13, my grandfather wrote a letter to his fellow members at Central.

At the top of the letter he typed:

Crestwood Christian Church
No Address Yet
Exists only in the hearts of people

He began the letter by stating that he and his wife had decided “to pitch our tents with the fine group of volunteers forming the daughter congregation,” although “it has not been an easy decision.” He noted that “there are dozens of good reasons for keeping membership with friends and established comforts.” The two of them had decided, however, that “the courageous band needs us more.”

He observed that “one seldom has the opportunity to help build a new church or to be a pioneer in something.” He expressed optimism for the venture, noting that the “young enthusiasts” had already “formed a congregation, put committees to work, and have some money in a treasury.”

He closed the letter by writing:

“Sunday, January 25 we are going to cast off. We would be mighty happy to have you come along, too.”

He was one of the Elders at the communion service on January 25. He would continue to be an Elder and Sunday school teacher at Crestwood for many years thereafter, until his death in 1990. The Bradford Classroom is named in his honor.

* * *

Pastoral Care

On January 22, three days before Crestwood's birth, Central's senior minister, Dr. Smith, sent a letter to members of Central who had announced their decision to become members of Crestwood. He wrote:

"It is with mixed emotions that I write this letter – the same mixed emotions which many of you have confided that you had, as you were trying to make up your minds as to whether you would go with the new church or stay with Central. And yet I am sure that in the minds of both of us, there is the conviction that this step you have taken is the right step and that God will richly bless the effort ahead in making available, to those of another section of the city, the gospel which we believe our church can distinctively contribute. So when I speak to you, severing our relationship as 'minister-parishioner,' I contradict myself by saying 'I'm glad you will be a Charter Member of Crestwood Christian Church yet I am sorry you are leaving Central.' You have meant so much to the Kingdom of God in its expression at Short and Walnut [now Martin Luther King Boulevard], and I am sure you will mean even more in the new Crestwood Christian Church."

* * *

Blessings and Best Wishes

The big day arrived at last: Sunday, January 25, 1959.

It had become known as "Commissioning Day" because *four* Disciples churches had decided to conduct special ceremonies to commission any and all members of their congregations who wished to become charter members of Crestwood. Lafayette Christian Church had joined Central, Woodland and Arlington in supporting the endeavor.

The special ceremony at Central articulated the meaning and significance of the occasion in all respects.

Over one hundred members of Central had decided to become charter members of Crestwood at that point in time. They were encouraged to sit together at the front of the sanctuary, directly behind the elders and deacons, as the worship service began. They participated in the first half of the service as members of Central, no differently than other members. The entire congregation heard a sermon from Dr. Smith, titled "We Build."

Then the commissioning ceremony began. Dr. Smith made a statement about the significance of Crestwood, its potential as a church and the responsibilities that would rest upon its members. He then commissioned the volunteers to fulfill those responsibilities, as charter members of Crestwood. Each of them was called to stand, and remain standing until all of their names were called.

They were given Certificates of Commission that charged them "to go forth and establish a new Christian Congregation." The Certificates quoted the Great Commission in Mathew 28:19: "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples ..." They were signed by Dr. Smith and Harold J. Utter, the Chair of the Board at Central.

After presenting the Certificates, Dr. Smith made a statement about the responsibilities of the Central members who had chosen to remain. He noted that the departure of so many members, including church officers, created a challenge for Central itself. He installed new officers to replace those officers who had chosen to be charter members of Crestwood. He then charged the entire Central congregation – those who had not been commissioned – with continuing responsibility for the health of Central. He concluded those steps with a prayer of dedication for both Central and Crestwood.

The most dramatic aspect of the ceremony came next. The worshippers stood and sang "God of Grace and God of Glory." During the first two stanzas, the newly-commissioned members of Crestwood processed out of the sanctuary on their way to their first communion

service at Glendover Elementary School. The moment was described, a year later, in these words:

“Tears filled the eyes of many ... who stayed behind to keep the home fires burning. Both joy and sadness filled the hearts of 144 volunteers, who left accustomed pews, family ties and lifelong friends to form an infant congregation.”

Those who remained sang the remainder of the hymn. While singing, they stepped forward and filled the vacant pews at the front of the sanctuary, literally and symbolically taking the places of those who had been sent forth to create a new church.

After finishing the hymn, they took communion. They did so as a redefined congregation, a church family with different members than before. The new Crestwood family was on its way to a communion service of its own. For each group, the worship experience consisted of two parts, old and new. Each group took communion as part of its new life.

In each and every respect, the ceremony was an example of the intelligence and spiritual depth that Dr. Smith brought to worship services at Central throughout his tenure as senior minister. Ironically, the new members of Crestwood were sent forth in a ceremony that exemplified one of the reasons why it was difficult to go.

* * *

First Communion

One hundred and forty-four men, women and children gathered for the communion service at Glendover on Sunday, January 25, 1959. The service began at 11:45 a.m., after the commissioning services at Central, Woodland and Arlington.

They prayed, took communion and sang two hymns: “My Faith Looks Up to Thee” and “Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us.”

It was a brief service, but one that was filled with emotion nonetheless. Fifty years later, it is still remembered vividly by people who were present. It was, after all, the moment Crestwood was born.

Dr. Myron T. Hopper presided. The Elders were Lawrence Bradford and Scott Young. The Deacons were William (Bill) Azevedo, Clarence Blakely, Ben Buckley, Robert (Bob) Cloud, Lucien Congleton, Ben L. Cowgill, James (Jim) Foley and William (Bill) White, Jr. The pianist was Mrs. Kenneth Keplar.

Other people had learned about Crestwood and were eager to be part of the new congregation. Eight of them placed their membership at Crestwood immediately following the communion service, increasing the size of the congregation by five per cent in a single day. The new church was off to a good start.

The bulletin for the communion service provided two different numbers for each hymn: one number in the "Red Hymnal" and a different number in the "Black Hymnal." In an exercise of frugality, the congregation had acquired two sets of used hymnals that didn't match in color or content. Crestwood continued to use those hymnals for years.

* * *

Rising Early

The business of building Crestwood continued apace.

On January 28, three days after the communion service, the members of the church received a letter from the chair of congregation, my father Ben L. Cowgill. He began by writing, "I know you must have felt, as Sue Ann and I did, the most heartwarming experience of our first communion service." Then he turned to the business at hand.

He noted that the congregation enjoyed the leadership of a steering committee that included Ben Buckley, Lucian Congleton, Jim Foley, Carlouise Grizzard, Wendell Harris, Mrs. W. A. Rominger and Scott Young.

He explained that the congregation needed to approve a nominating committee, to nominate Crestwood's first slate of officers and board members; that it also needed to appoint a "pulpit committee" (what is now called a search committee), to begin the process of calling a minister; and that "other phases of our long range planning" also needed to be discussed. He indicated that each of those matters would be discussed at the first congregational meeting on February 1.

Then he closed the letter with words that foretold what Crestwood would mean to him, and many others, over the years that followed:

"May the fellowship, love of Christ and this challenge that has been given us be the most enriching experience of our lives."

* * *

Standing Up

A week after its birth (on Sunday, February 1, 1959), Crestwood was clearly up and running:

- 206 people attended worship;
- 148 children and adults attended Sunday School;
- A congregational meeting was held after worship;
- A nominating committee had been elected, charged with nominating members to the first Administrative Board;
- A pulpit committee had been elected, to begin the process of searching for a minister;
- CYF and Chi Rho meetings were held in the evening; and
- Last, but hardly least, Mrs. O. T. (Elizabeth) Evans had agreed to begin the task of organizing a Christian Women's Fellowship.

A week later, the first issue of the church newsletter appeared, reproduced on a mimeograph machine. The hand-lettered masthead read:

“CRESTWOOD – Calls? Echoes? Notes? Chime Bells?
(who has a good name?)”

The one-page issue reported that:

- Crestwood had grown to include 165 members;
- The Membership Committee had obtained a list of prospective members in the neighborhood, and was planning to make house calls;
- The congregation would hold its first fellowship event, a “Box Supper Social,” on Friday night; and
- The church had received several gifts of money, and also a piano, from friends of the congregation.

A few weeks later, the congregation elected its first Administrative Board: Ben L. Cowgill, Chairman; William White, Vice-Chairman; Betty Cloud; Treasurer and Financial Secretary; Carlouise Grizzard, Secretary; Lawrence Bradford, Historian.

* * *

Finding Guidance

Crestwood relied on a series of guest ministers, and one interim minister, to provide sermons to the congregation during the spring and summer months of 1959, while it was conducting a search for its first permanent minister. The distinguished guest ministers included Dr. Dwight Stephenson, Dr. William R. Baird and Dr. Ralph G. Wilburn, who each served in the pulpit for a month. Rev. Ben Watson served as interim minister during the months of July and August.

Crestwood called its first permanent minister, Rev. James A. Lollis, in July of 1959. He delivered his first sermon to the congregation on

September 6, 1959. Excerpts of the sermon appear in a later section of this booklet.

A graduate of Yale Divinity School, Rev. Lollis was already a member of the Board of Curators of Transylvania College and the Board of Trustees of the College of the Bible (now the Lexington Theological Seminary) when he became Crestwood's minister. He had also served as president of the State Convention of Christian Churches. He was a prolific writer, whose work had been published in *World Call*, *Christian Evangelist*, *Front Rank*, *Bethany Guide* and *Kentucky Christian*. He had been the minister of First Church of Danville for eight years, after earlier pastorates in Winston-Salem, Louisville and Bowling Green.

His wife Lorraine was highly educated as well, holding a Master's Degree from the University of Kentucky. Their team ministry had included youth camps in Scotland, Jamaica and Indianapolis. They were the parents of three sons, David, Wayne and Jimmy. Fifty years later, Wayne continues to be a member of Crestwood.

Rev. Lollis served Crestwood with distinction for nine years, until 1968. His decision to answer Crestwood's call was, without question, the most significant and propitious event during Crestwood's first year of life.

* * *

Growing Strong

The congregation grew throughout its first year, as friends and acquaintances, residents of the neighborhood and members of other churches decided to place their membership at Crestwood.

They all became charter members, upon their arrival, because Crestwood had wisely decided to keep its charter membership open for one year.

On January 24, 1960, the last day of Crestwood's first year, a formal roll of Charter Membership was printed on a placard, recognizing all of them forever as charter members of Crestwood. The roll included the names of 445 men, women and children. That number included 281

adults who were active members of the congregation at that time, compared to 144 members who had been commissioned a year earlier. The congregation had doubled in one year.

The Charter Membership was later engraved on a plaque that now hangs in the narthex at the rear of Crestwood's sanctuary.

* * *

First Words

Dr. Charles E. Dietze, a professor at the College of the Bible (now the Lexington Theological Seminary) delivered the first sermon to Crestwood on February 1, 1959. It was titled "Our Partnership in the Ministry."

These are some of the words that Dr. Dietze spoke to the members of Crestwood in that sermon:

"The meaning of the Kingdom of God must somehow be recaptured, or else 'Christian' will continue to have less and less meaning, until it is not only not respected, but laughed at.

...

"Christianity is basically a religion of laymen, not of clergymen ... The real battle of faith is not fought in the church, but in life. It's fought in the workaday world.

...

"What a chance the layman has, that the preacher never gets! In the shop, in the office, in the ball park, in the club, on the street – he can take the testimony of his faith and make it count for Christ.

...

"But simply witnessing for Christ as individuals is not enough, important though it be. This partnership finds its best expression in the Christian community, the Church,

because it is there that Christians have a means of working together to make Christ's way known to our society.

...

"This is our partnership, with God the Senior Partner, with you and your minister as co-workers in the Church's paths of service – teaching, preaching, helping, healing God's children and our brothers of every race and nation, beginning at home.

...

"It is a glorious partnership we share, and the coming of the Kingdom depends on how well we do our share!"

Rev. James A. Lollis, Crestwood's first permanent minister, delivered his first sermon to the congregation on September 6, 1959. The sermon was titled "This Tide of Dreams."

These are some of the words that Rev. Lollis spoke to the members of Crestwood in that sermon:

"In light of what has happened to bring us to this service, it is my conviction that all of us feel that other hands have shaped our decisions. We have not done this of ourselves alone. Our judgments have been under the impulse of His will. What we have done, we have done under God. This is my faith. I believe it is yours.

...

"Building a church commands the best that we have and more. It involves buildings, but it looks always toward the Builder. Jesus said that when stone and mortar crumble, the church will prevail. We will build a building on a hill, but we will build the church on the enduring force – the power and love of God.

...

“Our most pressing problem at Crestwood will not be money. It will not be members. It will be remembering what we are seeking to magnify. We are so beautifully exposed up here on the highest point in Fayette County! The danger is evident. To which of these are we dedicated – exploiting a lovely site, or becoming worthy servants?

“The ultimate test lies here. We must know whom and what we are waiting upon. A church waits not upon itself, not upon its members; it waits upon the Lord.

...

“As I stand in this place, I am looking through those windows to our beautiful building site. But I see more than a spire rising like a prayer to God. I see people looking for meaning and purpose in life. I see a ministry that is both person and problem centered.

...

“We are not ready to build for God until the Master Builder has shaped us with that which is ‘not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens.’ It is to this, at the last, that we bind our hearts – to this tide of dreams that moves through Calvary and moves through us. To this, this day, in deepest reverence, we bind our hearts.”

* * *

Precious Memories

This booklet has endeavored to tell the story of Crestwood’s birth. That story ended when Crestwood celebrated its first anniversary in January of 1960. The church had been organized, a permanent minister was in place, the charter membership had been established and the congregation was in full motion.

Crestwood has continued to enjoy a rich history in the forty-nine years since its first anniversary in 1960. A complete, fifty-year history of

the church will be written during 2009, as part of its fiftieth anniversary celebration.

All members and friends of Crestwood are invited to contribute material for that publication. It is my hope that the story told in this booklet excites interest in recalling the people, events and stories that should be mentioned in a complete fifty-year history of our church.

The story of Crestwood's birth is a uniquely precious piece of that history. I believe it is also a timeless source of inspiration, for several reasons.

First, it is a story about the wisdom, confidence and strength of Crestwood's parent churches, Central, Woodland and Arlington. They were wise enough to recognize the need for a new church in a new part of town; confident enough to undertake the task of launching the new church; and strong enough to commission members of their own congregations to be its first members.

It is also a story about the courage, optimism and dedication of Crestwood's charter members. They were courageous enough to give up the comfort and security of membership in churches they knew and loved; optimistic enough to believe that they could build a new church from scratch; and dedicated enough to make their vision a reality.

Most of all, it is a story about people called as partners in Christ's service, working together to extend the Kingdom of God.

Benjamin Cowgill

*Chair, Fiftieth Anniversary Committee
Crestwood Christian Church*

January 25, 2009