

# *CEP*

## *Is Here to Help*

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My name is Mark Whitney, and I am the President of Church Extension Plan (CEP). Gene Roncone and I have collaborated on many projects, and CEP is part of the mentoring team for the Charles T. Crabtree School of Ministry. Gene asked me to address a couple ways CEP can help emerging leaders who are either preparing for their first lead pastorate or are in the early years of being a lead pastor.

CEP is a ministry that provides financial services to Assemblies of God districts/networks and churches and their constituents by assisting them in fulfilling their vision of spreading the gospel.

For over 70 years, CEP has partnered with more than 3,000 churches by providing church loans, ministers' retirement plans, and individual and organizational investments. At the heart of each of these interactions is a spirit of a win-win partnership which often takes them "outside the box" of a traditional financial institution.

CEP balances the tension between financial stability and visionary ministry potential to better serve the local church and pastor. We believe in the local church and also in your future! Because of that belief, we stand ready to serve you in four specific ways:

- Strategic Conversations
- Planning for Your Future
- Investing in Ministry
- Funding Your Vision

The Charles T. Crabtree School of Ministry helps to prepare first-time lead pastors and emerging lead pastors for their first lead pastorate. Allow us to explain how CEP can serve you as you lead your own church.

**Strategic conversations.** The leadership demands placed on a pastor are numerous and broad. Many pastors do not always have the needed training in strategic financial planning and how to facilitate their ministry's vision. Unlike other institutional lenders, CEP welcomes conversations around your vision and what steps God is calling you to take. In fact, we encourage you to connect with us early in your vision planning. Our experience can often help you identify the next step to take toward reaching the vision. We can also help explore strategic objectives to work toward what would better align the church with your vision goals in the future and prepare you to explore funding options.

Our ministry consultants are seasoned ministers with pastoral ministry experience and understand what it is like to be in your position.

Additionally, CEP has strategic partnerships with other ministry-minded organizations that can speak into various aspects of your vision outside of CEP's area of expertise.



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**Planning for your future.** Too many pastors get to the last chapter of their careers and are not prepared for the future outside of full-time ministry. According to a 2017 survey conducted by Grey Matter Research and Consulting for the Assemblies of God on Ministers and Finances, 40 percent of senior pastors have under \$10,000 of retirement savings, 37 percent of ministers under the age of 45 have no retirement savings, and the median retirement savings of AG lead pastors is \$20,000.

Failing to adequately prepare for retirement as a young minister is why many pastors stay in full-time pastoral ministry past their prime and often feel stuck. Additionally, stress over retirement and finances is a leading cause of ministers leaving the ministry.

CEP believes it is crucial that young, emerging pastors start planning for retirement. Even saving a small amount now, for example, 3 percent of your

monthly income and increasing that to 10-15 percent as your income grows, will set you on a healthy trajectory for retirement later.

Why is retirement planning and saving now so crucial? Following are a few of the benefits for saving for retirement now:

- Having financial peace of mind today and in your senior years as the amount in savings will continue to grow over time with compounded interest.
- The flexibility in schedule to spend time with your family and friends.
- The freedom to travel as desired and explore new places.
- The ability to go on extended missions trips and support missionaries through long-term service.
- The availability to participate in new ministry opportunities without the fear of adequate compensation.
- Assists in safeguarding against the uncertainty of Social Security benefits.

Every dollar invested with CEP is assigned a mission—to empower ministry by funding church loans across the country. Consequently, while your retirement funds grow to benefit your family and future, they are also used to enable kingdom growth. Opening an individual retirement account or creating a church-sponsored plan is very easy. CEP's team of experts can assist you every step of the way.

**Investing in ministry.** How much should a church keep in savings? That is a commonly asked question. CEP recommends that churches aim to have at least three to six months' worth of operating expenses set aside in savings. This can help cover recurring expenses such as salaries, utilities, and maintenance during periods of reduced income, interruptions in weekly services, or unexpected financial challenges. This same principle relates to your personal savings as well.

Additionally, some churches may have specific savings goals such as funding future building projects, expanding ministries, or supporting outreach programs. Creating these savings goals will help you stay within your church's financial margin. Too often, churches do not plan ahead and end up overspending to accommodate these special projects and initiatives at the expense of monthly cash flow.

Church Extension Plan recommends that you diversify your savings. Consider keeping the equivalent of one month's operating expenses in an easily accessible checking or savings account and invest the remaining funds in a 30-day access or short-term investment account. This would allow your savings to grow at a better rate, putting those funds to work for the church.

When you invest with CEP, you choose the investment amount, term, and interest payment schedule that best fits your savings needs and goals.

As you reap the benefits of their competitive rates and flexible terms, your investment will also fund loans to Assemblies of God ministries.

**Funding the vision.** CEP understands the mission of the Church. We also believe that God gives you a specific and unique vision for how that mission is to be accomplished in your community. That vision will often require financing for buildings, construction, renovations, and relocation projects. CEP values strategic interactions with pastors even if those interactions do not immediately lead to financial transactions. CEP is available and willing to be a part of this process in the foundational stages to help you formulate a plan. Formulating that plan addresses the following questions:

- What are the spiritual and felt needs in your community that your church is equipped to address?
- How does your campus facilitate your vision?
- Is your campus strategically located within your community?
- What financial and asset adjustments do you need to make to accommodate your vision?
- Who are you inviting to speak into your vision?
- What additional partnerships are needed to realize your vision?
- What financial resources are needed to fund your vision?

- Will your vision require special fundraising or a capital campaign?
- What is the appropriate timeline for your vision?
- Can your vision be accomplished in phases?
- Is your vision scalable to grow as your church grows?

CEP sees the potential for growth traditional lenders do not notice and understands the passion that drives your ministry and the outcome it produces in the kingdom. When we begin discussing loan options, we will weigh your vision alongside your budget and measure the value of your ministry in terms of changed lives and community impact. When you work with CEP, we will evaluate your church as a ministry, not as a business.

**Your next step.** God has given you great vision in your life, ministry, and church. What is the next step you need to take to make that vision become reality? CEP invites you to start a conversation with our ministry consultants today. We are available by phone at 503-399-0552 or e-mail at [consulting@cepnet.com](mailto:consulting@cepnet.com). Learn more online at [www.cepnet.com](http://www.cepnet.com).