

Sale of closed church enriches ABC seminary: Funds will endow chair in congregational health

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An American Baptist seminary in Shawnee, Kansas, has received a gift in excess of \$2.2 million—the largest in the school’s history—from the former members of a St. Louis-area congregation that became too small to support itself.

Central Baptist Theological Seminary was the designated recipient of funds from the sale of the Des Peres Baptist Church in St. Louis’s posh western suburbs, the seminary announced July 31.

Founded in 1955 as a mission of Third Baptist Church in St. Louis, the Des Peres congregation reached its peak of almost 250 members in 1981. Declining membership led the church to close its doors on the last Sunday of 2006.

“The congregation determined that the proceeds from their building and property should help sustain our work in theological education and provide for creative, accessible delivery,” Central Seminary president Molly Marshall said in an e-mail to students, faculty and supporters.

“Although they could not continue as a church, they wisely chose to sow seeds for the future,” said Marshall.

The funds will endow the Des Peres Chair in Congregational Health, a new faculty position at the seminary’s main campus outside of Kansas City, Kansas.

“Creating a means to train candidates for the pastorate somehow lessens the feelings of failure and provides a hope and promise for the future,” said church trustee Maurice Smith.

Added Marshall: “Central is committed to finding ways to help churches nurture congregational health in honor of the ministry of Des Peres Baptist Church.” -

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