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Renovation Creating New Chapel “Moments”

by Carol Lee ’96

The student experience looks different for each generation of Cedarville students. Some alumni remember when the college had a football team. Others remember when the dress code required skirts for the women and prohibited mustaches for the men. But chapel has always remained a constant. There’s nothing quite as iconic about Cedarville as the daily 10 a.m. hour when the student body gathers in the James T. Jeremiah Chapel to worship together and be inspired by Scripture.

Daily chapel is unique, even among Christian colleges. And Cedarville’s commitment to preserving that shared experience demonstrates what the University has declared for years: that chapel is the heartbeat of the Cedarville experience. That’s why the University has undertaken a total renovation of the chapel space to improve and enhance the total worship experience — from the carpet and seating to the lighting and sound. Not since the Dixon Ministry Center opened 20 years ago has the University made such an investment in chapel.

HEART OF THE CAMPAIGN

Last fall, Cedarville launched the $3 million Campaign for the Jeremiah Chapel. It began with an announcement that the 298 pews (that had surely seen better days) would be replaced by theatre-style seating. On the practical side, this will allow individual seats to be replaced as needed instead of all the pews at once. In addition, individual seats can be numbered and reserved for ticketed concerts and events. To kick off the campaign, alumni, parents, faculty, and staff were invited to sponsor a seat in the renovated chapel. For a gift of $250 or more, donors can have a seat placard personalized with their initials, class year, and favorite Bible verse reference.

For three days in April, students from Brock, a men’s residence hall, volunteered their time and muscle to unbolt the pews and carry them out of the building. According to Stephanie (Cleek) Carroll ’10, Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving, a row of chairs will be reserved and named to honor the students’ meaningful and cost-saving service.

MEMORIES FOR A LIFETIME

Each generation of Cedarville alumni can tell stories about a special, memorable chapel experience where “you had to be there.” In 1995, a storm knocked out the power across campus, and Tony Evans continued preaching in the dark. On “the day the power went out,” students heard a powerful chapel message they would not soon forget. A year later, students lined up to move hymnals from the previous Jeremiah Chapel, now the Apple Technology Center.

On Tuesday, April 19, students, faculty, and staff gathered for this generation’s “had to be there” chapel moment. With all the pews removed, everyone sat on the floor (see pages 42–43).

“We all remember that one chapel, and I wanted to be part of that day,” Carroll said. “When I arrived, students were singing and worshipping so loud you could feel it in your chest. And it hit me — I wanted to bring every alumnus — the whole Cedarville family — into this room with these students to worship together.”

GIVING WITH A BOOST

That wasn’t the only special memory that happened that day. Alumni Relations and Annual Giving had planned a one-day fundraising event, fueled by social media, to raise $75,000 for the renovation. Sweetening the deal were two $75,000 gift matches so that every gift given on April 19 would be tripled in value. The response to the “Triple Tuesday Challenge” was overwhelming, and the goal was met by 4 p.m.

“Nearly 750 people gave to the campaign that Tuesday,” Carroll said. “One donor gave $25,000 so that 125 students could sponsor a chapel seat for just $50. Students were calling parents and posting about the campaign on Twitter. This was one of those campaigns where everyone wanted to get involved because chapel is such a special part of the student experience.”

The surprises kept coming. When the $75,000 goal was met eight hours early, another $175,000 dollar-for-dollar gift match was announced (extending through June 30) to continue the momentum. By the end of the day, alumni, students, parents, faculty, and staff had united to give $422,821 for the chapel renovation. So far, $110,000 has been raised toward the second match, and $65,000 remains. If you would like to participate, visit cedarville.edu/chapelcampaign. Thank you for praying about how you might help meet this need.

“We appreciate everyone who has already given to the Campaign for the Jeremiah Chapel,” Carroll said. “And special thanks to everyone who made the Triple Tuesday Challenge possible. It was incredible to see the Cedarville family come together and give so generously.”
Tech Changes Will Enhance Chapel Ministry

Behind every pastor, speaker, musician, and worship leader in chapel is a technical crew that ensures the Gospel message can be seen, heard, and clearly understood.

In the following Q-and-A, Brandon Waltz ’87, Director of Production Services Group, explains some of the technical changes coming to Cedarville’s chapel and how they will enhance its ministry opportunities.

Q: From a technical standpoint, what will you be able to do with sound and lighting in chapel that you’ve not been able to do before?
A: The way we do programming and production today is so different from how it was conceived when the chapel was built in 1995. We’ve been working with technology that was original to the room, and we’ve been able to work around some of the constraints for some time. But the renovation will give us a lot more flexibility and functionality to do exactly what we envision to create a specific environment in the room, whether for chapel, concerts, or special events.

With a darker color scheme, we’ll be able to keep light from reflecting off the walls. We’ll have better control to reduce distractions and focus the audience’s attention to what is happening on the platform.

Depending on where you sit in the chapel, there are spots where the sound seems louder and spots where it’s harder to hear. We will have a new public address (PA) system with new speakers and custom-designed acoustic panels. We’ve hired a company to do an acoustic study to ensure that the sound quality is balanced, no matter where you are in the room.

Q: What about video?
A: Video is what started this discussion — how to do it better in the room. There were previously two student videographers standing on platforms midway down the chapel floor. Anyone seated behind them had an impeded view of what was happening on the platform. We’ll be building camera pits at the back of the room where students will have a safer, more stable place to do their work. The new equipment will also allow us to do more live streaming of events.

Q: How many students are part of your chapel production team?
A: We have a crew of about 25 students who regularly assist in production work. Throughout the year, we involve as many as 65 students to help with video, sound, and lighting for chapel and event productions.

Students have a significant role in shaping the daily worship experience in chapel. This renovation will provide a lot more tools and opportunities to create some special worship experiences. I look forward to seeing what students are able to produce creatively.

Q: We talk about chapel as the “heartbeat” of the student experience. What do you see as the “heartbeat” of this renovation?
A: Enhancing the experience around the spoken word. We want to create an environment where the Gospel is clearly articulated so people can hear it, understand it, and respond to it.

It’s not all about the audio, lighting, and video. These are merely tools, a means to an end. The end is the ability to serve well and use the tools and gifts we have to glorify God.

We have a vision that our graduates will take their talent and technical experience into local churches and beyond so that others will be blessed by both their skills and their heart for Gospel-driven ministry. And our grads can say, “I learned this by serving in chapel production at Cedarville.”

Carol Lee ’96 is a freelance writer and editor and the Publication Manager at Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids, Michigan.