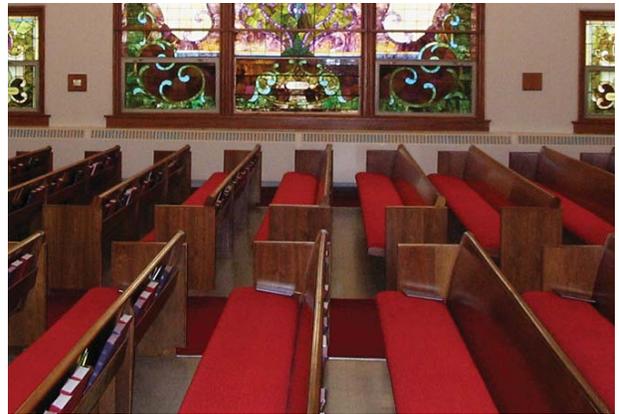


# FROM ARSON TO RECOVERY — JUST IN TIME FOR EASTER

First Presbyterian Church — Monticello, Iowa



**6 HOUR**  
RESPONSE TIME



**\$300,000**  
UNDER BUDGET



**\$0** NEW CHURCH  
DEBT





**On a cold morning in March, members of the Monticello First Presbyterian Church watched the 105-year-old church burn.**

From basement to bell tower, an arsonist’s fire had touched nearly every part of the structure. To make matters worse, the very slow and smoldering nature of the fire caused the worst case of smoke and odor GC3 has ever experienced.

However, with the close collaboration of the church’s newly formed Building Committee, superb subcontractors, and close cooperation with the adjuster and the building inspector, we were able to complete the reconstruction in just 13 months — meeting their goal of an Easter grand re-opening. Along the way the Building Committee got to implement everything on their wish list, the church actually experienced an uptick in membership, and the project was completed \$300,000 below budget.

**Fast Response for Faster Recovery**

GC3 strives to be onsite within 48 hours of the notice of a fire. In this case we were there within six. Rapid response helped GC3 take control of the site to ensure the safety of church members and to begin assessing the damage. Most importantly, however, it helped the church members regain control.

**SPECIAL DANGERS FOR CHURCHES**

When disasters strike churches, disorientation is a very typical result. History has shown that when members relocate to a “temporary” church for stability, the temporary church has a habit of becoming their permanent church. Thus, the congregation loses members and financial support.

A disaster can also mean a disruption in services and ministries as reconstruction takes up resources and the space may simply not exist.

**REBUILDING COMMUNITY**

GC3 believes our mission is to rebuild the church and the community. So when we arrived in Monticello we sought to solve the danger of member defection before it occurred.

**How did we do that?**

**1. Kept members onsite through the entire reconstruction process**

- + We immediately restored, cleaned, and painted the education wing.

- + We relocated the pastoral offices out of the education wing and into a building across the street, freeing up space.
- + We established a temporary worship center in the education wing so the congregation could continue worshipping — together.

**2. Kept church members involved**

- + We kept members active in the rebuild process by establishing informational meetings.
- + We conducted periodic reconstruction tours to show progress.
- + We held community events to keep the wider Monticello community aware of the process.

**THE CHURCH’S WISH LIST**

+	Address long-term maintenance issues
+	Make the building more user friendly
+	Improve the HVAC system
+	Modernize the kitchen
+	No debt!

“ THEY ARE CONSUMMATE PROFESSIONALS WHO GENUINELY CARE ABOUT PEOPLE AND MAKING THEM WHOLE. IT IS RARE TO ENCOUNTER A COMPANY SO DEDICATED TO HONORING THEIR WORD. OUR CONGREGATION FEELS TRULY BLESSED TO HAVE WORKED WITH GC3. ”

— Rev. Al Polito

### THE RESULT

When First Presbyterian Church held its first services after the fire, on Easter Day, the congregation was at full strength. In fact, over the previous thirteen months the church had actually experienced a small growth spike. And, due to the modernized and expanded kitchen, growth also occurred in their popular “Pie Ladies” ministry, resulting in an increase in their annual pie sales.

Today First Presbyterian Church is stronger than ever and continues to be a source of strength and ministry for the community of Monticello and Eastern Iowa.

### Ahead of Schedule and Under Budget

A successful project requires teamwork from all parties, including the owner, the design team, subcontractors, suppliers, and the insurance adjuster. GC3 solicits subcontractors and suppliers that are cost effective and will adhere to our open-book approach: problems are to be shared and resolved, not withheld and ignored.

Because of the great teamwork, we reconstructed the church ahead of schedule and under budget, and had no lost time accidents.



#### LOCATION:

First Presbyterian Church  
Monticello, Iowa

#### THE DISASTER:

Arson damaged the church from basement to bell tower

#### GC3 RESPONSE TIME:

6 hours

#### BUDGET:

**\$3,200,000**

#### ACTUAL COST:

**\$2,900,000**

**TIMEFRAME:** 13 months

**LOST-TIME ACCIDENTS:** 0

**NEW CHURCH DEBT:** \$0

### THE MAJOR CHALLENGE: SMOKE AND ODOR CONTROL

#### The Roof

Extensive soot residue was found between the roof decking and framing system, and we exposed an abandoned roofing system in the attic area. These areas could not be physically accessed to properly soda blast and seal them against smoke odor, so the team decided to replace them.

#### Stained Glass

A stained glass specialist removed the soot-stained windows and transported them to Des Moines for a lengthy and complete refurbishment.

#### The Odor

After soda blasting and sealing the entire interior, we still had a problem: in isolated areas a very faint smoke odor remained. Rather than hope that the odor dissipated over time, we proceeded with additional soda blasting before sealing the entire structure once more. Then the entire Building Committee conducted an official “sniff” test. The building passed.



### VALUE ENGINEERING THE WISH LIST

To meet the owner’s wish list and remain debt-free, we needed to use value engineering. The owner decided not to replace the severely damaged ten-rank pipe organ and to use pre-manufactured plaster molding rather than custom ones. These cost savings allowed us to install a new concrete floor system, modernize the kitchen, improve the HVAC system, and improve the lighting.

### A NEW FLOOR

We replaced the wooden floor system with a modern steel bar joist, metal deck and concrete topping floor system supported by steel columns and I-beams. The new system made the basement more usable and reduced the potential combustible wood on the main level by 75 percent.



### BASEMENT EGRESS

To improve debris removal and material distribution, we installed a permanent exterior door in the 3’ wide stone basement wall, and conservatively saved approximately \$30,000.

### SCAFFOLDING SYSTEM

An extensive interior and exterior scaffolding system was used to reach the roof and the nearly 40’ tall ceilings. We chose a fully decked scaffold with outriggers and stairs. It cost more than other options, but was simply the safest system available.

Although no church, institution or business wants to experience a disaster, the First Presbyterian fire ultimately became a positive for the church, **resulting in a safer, more usable, and more comfortable structure.**

It was an extremely positive experience for GC3 as well. Not only did we help a worthy church recover from disaster, but the team won an award. Because of the work done by GC3 and an exceptional team of local and specialty craftsmen, the Iowa Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America awarded GC3 the Master Builders Award for Excellence.

To learn more about GC3 and to see our other reconstruction projects, **please visit [GC3Builders.com](http://GC3Builders.com).**

