

Members of Ascension:

November 5, 2009

I have more good news!

You will recall that after the open forum meetings on June 7 and July 12, your Council appointed a Facilities Renovation Task Force and delivered to them a written charge for their work. I am pleased - no, I am thrilled - to tell you that the Task Force completed its work on time. Under the stewardship of Andrew McCune, Task Force members Donna Craven, Kurt Vining and John West spent hundreds of hours reviewing drawings, reports and meeting notes; holding numerous meetings with the Staff and interested Congregation members, including members of the predecessor design committees; reviewing the results of over 105 completed survey forms; and drafting a report and set of recommendations for rejuvenating our physical plant. Enclosed you will find their report. It is a very rich document. Please start reading, thinking and praying about it. And please be sure to thank Andrew, Donna, Kurt and for all of their devotion and hard work.

We are now ready to move forward in very meaningful ways through a series of consecutive and inter-related steps:

- November 22 at 10:15 a.m.: we will hold an Open Forum meeting co-chaired by Andrew and me in Fellowship Hall. Task Force members will be available to answer your questions and register your thoughts and ideas.
- Your Council will be appointing two implementing committees to ensure that we progress forward: (i) a Design/Construction Committee (with subcommittees devoted to each of the parking lot and the building), and (ii) a Capital Campaign Committee.
- We are also charging (in writing) the Finance Committee to develop alternative plans to finance the construction and appointment of our physical plant
- January 10, 2010 at 10:15 a.m.: we will hold a second Open Forum in Fellowship Hall that will be co-chaired by the chairs of the Design/Construction, Capital Campaign and Finance Committees and me. The committee chairs will report to you on their progress.
- January 24 at 10 a.m.: we will hold a Congregation Meeting in the Sanctuary to vote on the Task Force's recommendations.
- Consistent with the January 24 vote, your Council will charge (in writing) the Design/Construction Committee to complete its tasks (*i.e.*, obtaining design/build plans and firm construction bids), hopefully no later than May 1.
- As soon as the Design/Construction Committee completes its work, we will schedule another Congregation Meeting to vote on the proposal.

Meanwhile, replacement of our boiler - with a high efficiency "green" system - is proceeding under the watchful eyes of the Property Committee..

It is an exciting time to be a member of Ascension. We have a new senior pastor, our Jubilee celebration is well under way and the Holy Spirit has made His presence known and felt by all of us. You can feel it!

Please keep all of us in your prayers and don't hesitate to ask questions about what's going on. You're welcome to address your Council at our monthly meetings, which generally are held on the third Thursday evening of each month, from 7-9 p.m. in the Augustana Room. If you would like to do so, please notify Diane Carlson and me by close of business on the Monday immediately preceding the monthly meeting.

God bless us all. And keep lifting up!

Stephen Schwab

Stephen Schwab
Congregation Council President

**Report and Recommendation
of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ascension of Northfield, Illinois
Facilities Renovation Task Force**

The following is the report and recommendation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ascension Facilities Renovation Task Force (the “Task Force”). Pursuant to a resolution adopted by the Congregation Council (the “Council”), the Task Force was charged (the “Charge”) to:

(i) review all of the plans that have been developed over the last 3-4 years for rebuilding/updating our facility;

(ii) invite input from interested persons, such as those who worked on the JNA Plan, the Serena Sturm plan, Duain Claiborne's office/entranceway plan, Staff, Worship, Education and Youth Ministry;

(iii) cause a survey of Congregation members to be done to learn their needs, wants and commitment to support rebuilding - especially economically; and

(iv) make a recommendation to the Congregation Council of a comprehensive plan that addresses both our congregational needs and affordability.

The plan should provide for construction and fundraising/borrowing. You are to send your plan and recommendations to the Council on or before Monday, September 14, 2009 [subsequently extended to October 15, 2009]. You are not to retain an architect or to engage in architectural redesign.

It is important to note at the outset of this report the indebtedness of the Task Force to the invaluable contribution made by numerous members of the Ascension community – members of the Staff, participants in prior facility planning efforts and property committees, Council members and members of the Congregation. This report will mention various of these individuals by name, but such references are not intended to be a comprehensive listing of the multitude of individuals who contributed their time and energy to assisting the Task Force in completing its Charge and the omission of a specific reference, while a practical necessity, is not intended to be indicative of anything other such practical limitations of this report.

The report first summarizes the process and methodology followed by the Task Force, then discusses the key issues identified, follows with the specific elements of the our recommendation and concludes by discussing proposed next steps and possible funding.

Process and Methodology

Consistent with the Charge, we began with the recognition that it was essential to have a thorough review and understanding of all the prior facility work that was done and that lead to

the engagement of JNA, followed by Serena Sturm and then the work requested of Duain Claiborne. We determined at the outset of our discussions that only with the benefit of a full understanding of such prior work, considerations, approaches, roadblocks, choices, etc., could we even begin to move forward. Based upon a review of the entire record of materials made available to us, a comprehensive set of materials was assembled and reviewed by each of us. To meet the timetable set forth in the Charge, we determined that the Congregational survey mandated by the Charge would be necessary in evaluating alternatives needed to be started immediately, but that we did not have the capacity both to conduct the survey and accomplish the other tasks required of us.

After explaining our concerns to Stephen Schwab, he enlisted Nancy Nagel and Richard Kreutfeldt to assist with respect to the survey. Nancy and Richard prepared a draft survey and after input from us and Stephen, took responsibility for its production and distribution with Diane Carlson, and Richard tabulated the results. Their willingness to perform this important task was a key to our ability to accomplish the other elements of the Charge and we are extremely grateful to each of them and the superb job they did.

As useful as was the record created by the prior materials, we all agreed that meeting with the people involved in the creation of these materials was integral to understanding them. Therefore, per the Charge, as soon as we completed reviewing the available written materials, we began to meet with the individuals identified in the materials or otherwise identified to us. From the prior planning efforts, we met with or otherwise obtained input from Duain Claiborne, Patti Cain, Harry Carlson, Jan Funk, Keith Lee, Jon Leverenz, Carl Peterson and Chris Rude and we thank each of them for the time they took to meet with us and also for the significant time, energy, creativity, concern and stewardship it was apparent to us that they each have so freely and consistently expended on behalf of Ascension during all phases of the renovation consideration and planning. From the Staff, we met with Diane Carlson, Greg Peterson, Gail Price, Vanessa Young and Mischa Zupko, and we extend our thanks to each of them for their assistance and their evident concern for and enthusiasm for Ascension and their ministries. We were very fortunate to be able to meet with Pastor Dennis Kelly, and we extend particular thanks to him. He made available as much of his personal time as we asked of him and had clearly already spent time considering the needs and opportunities of the Ascension facility and how they fit with the Congregation's ministry. Lastly, we were able to meet with Richard Kreutfeldt both to discuss the survey results but also in his role as Treasurer. We extend our thanks for all his efforts, expertise and assistance.

Key Considerations

A relatively limited, but we determined significant, number of considerations became quickly apparent as we began to discuss and put into an overall context all of the information we had learned as a result of the prior efforts. The survey results provided invaluable information regarding priorities, preferences, support, etc. None of these considerations are novel or only identified by us, but we were in a unique position to be able to synthesize and reconcile a totality of information that had not previously be afforded to any group or individual. It became apparent to us that:

- none of the existing planning work (JNA, Serena Sturm, Office Relocation) can be understood or evaluated independently of each other but needs to be recognized and considered as evolutionary steps and possible alternatives in a process – a process begun some time ago by various Property Committees and Councils which is not finite but something continually being shaped and reconsidered by the evolving ministry of a dynamic Congregation and community
- the Congregation recognizes the need for its facilities to position the Congregation for its future, to grow in service to God’s Word, to appeal to new members and to be able to serve evolving needs, and is willing to make financial commitments to support this
- the survey results indicate that the Congregation is largely in agreement as to its immediate needs:
 - address the deficiencies of the pews and the seating/layout in the Sanctuary to increase capacity
 - lighten the overall appearance of the Sanctuary
 - improve the acoustics in the Sanctuary
 - improve the physical access to the Church building and within the Sanctuary
 - do something to resolve the current state of the offices
 - fix the parking lot
- the Congregation possesses a wide variety of aesthetic preferences as to how to address these needs but there is significant agreement to maintain the brick side walls in the Sanctuary for either or both of aesthetic or financial reasons
- the effects of the current economic situation are immediate and real to members of the Congregation and we need to be mindful of that, but we are people of faith and support the call to address the needs of both current members and future members
- interest and support exists to contribute to paying the costs of specific elements of a plan or piece of furniture/equipment that is not included in the overall plan
- no “construction ready” plans exist which the Congregation can implement to address its priority needs and a group will be necessary to oversee the preparation of such plans, make the particular choices and aesthetic selections inherent in such plans and oversee their implementation

Recommendation

Based upon these considerations, we evaluated and synthesized the existing alternatives. We have selected those elements responsive to the needs identified by most of the Congregation into a plan consistent with the Charge. As also specified, we did not engage any architects or other design or construction professionals. Our expense estimate is based solely on the prior costing work available to us in the materials and the input of the persons with whom we met. We note that another group will need to turn any plan into a construction program and that specific costs will need to be obtained in connection with that program. Such actual costs will certainly be different from the estimates in our plan.

Worship Space:

- Move communion rail to even with the first roof support, and raise entire area behind the rail to make one floor
- Do not create a fixed choir location – either behind the Altar or otherwise
- Replace both the pulpits/lecterns with one smaller and portable pulpit/lectern
- Replace the baptismal font with a movable font which would have a designated location at the entrance to the Sanctuary (with shortened pews or rows of chair on either side)
- Stylistically unify Altar, lectern, baptismal font, accent furnishings and communion railing [Note, a formal program should be developed to preserve and display/utilize objects of historical significance that require movement or alteration due to changes in the facility.]
- Arrange pews in a moderate chevron to increase capacity, improve vision and enhance community feeling
- Replace existing pews with a new wood pews
- Add an additional row of pews (without privacy wall) at front
- Remove sliding glass doors and rails near the rear of the Sanctuary
- Replace rows of chairs at the rear of the Sanctuary with additional rows of pews except for one or two rows of chairs at the very back
- Place limited number of chairs (e.g., 2 rows each side of 5 each) perpendicular to Altar at the front of the Sanctuary to accommodate choir, service participants, etc., and allow for flexibility in use of space
- Create ramp access to Altar area to/from the side aisles
- Reconfigure existing closet to left of Altar for musical instrument storage, including removal of interior wall if necessary

- Leave brick side walls as is
- Replace all flooring with light, hard surface flooring (perhaps with appropriate carpet runners in aisles)
- Replace existing Sanctuary ceiling lighting with brighter lighting, which can be more easily serviced
- Add additional wall, ceiling and reflective lighting to brighten the Sanctuary
- Have an acoustical analysis done of Sanctuary space to upgrade sound system – with consideration of most effective location of sound board

Building Access:

- Replace existing two front doors with doors that 1) are self opening, 2) are aesthetically consistent with the appearance of the building 3) are compliant with the building code and 4) have sufficient windows to allow safe remote opening
- Install close circuit monitoring of front door and enable remote opening from the office

Office:

- Maintain main office in central location. Have architect reconfigure space, allowing for Youth Leader to move into central office location
- Redo existing Youth Leader office space as part of Fellowship Hall with a wall between adjacent Youth Room and Fellowship Hall
- Obtain new office furniture for Office Manager with increased work surface and storage, otherwise continue to utilize existing furniture pending determination after space is reconfigured and final budget determined

Parking Lot:

- Given the underlying structural deterioration of the parking lots, replace them completely. Consider opportunities for a “green” design that employs porous paving material, drain water retention and use, etc. Seek a design that anticipates future facility development and is consistent with local codes and requirements.

Storage:

- The proposed plan creates storage opportunities and improved facilities use by (i) reconfiguring the closet left of the Altar for storage of musical instruments, (ii) converting the conference room in the corner of Fellowship Hall to general storage (under the direction of the Property Committee), (iii) reopening the women’s bathroom currently being used for storage and reopening universal bathroom as a men’s bathroom, (iv) converting the room across the hallway from women’s bathroom to the Business

Office, (v) allowing alternate uses of the current Business Office and (vi) having the Property Committee identifying the best multipurpose use of the Junior High Youth Room in the education wing as an occasional conference room space.

Estimated cost:

- Based solely on the cost information available to us as adjusted by the recommended scope of the projected project and the input received, we expect the aggregate cost of the project to be approximately \$1,000,000, of which approximately one-half is the cost of the parking lots. Given the limitations resulting from the information available, the preliminary degree of the project's development and the lack of firm cost estimates, this amount can only be viewed as an estimate of the order of magnitude of the cost of the project rather than the actual expense.

Next Steps

The intention of this plan is to use the elements developed through the existing design work, and to address those issues as to which there was consensus among the Congregation as requiring immediate consideration, in as cost-effective manner as possible. Some items, such as creating building code compliant access at the front door and redoing the parking lot, are practical necessities that will be unavoidable as a result of doing any significant facility work or the physical condition of the property. Given the limitations in the Charge and the existing materials, our proposal remains at the conceptual level. Additional work will be necessary to develop and refine a plan into something that can be built at projected costs.

We recommend that the Council appoint a Design and Construction Committee to oversee this work and make the aesthetic choices that will be necessary. The work of that committee will create costs (such as costs of final drawings, electrical engineering, acoustical engineering, etc.) that are in addition to the cost of the renovation. The Church has an amount of funds reserved for the facility that will likely be sufficient for such a committee to do this further development work. The Church does not currently have funds on hand or the ability to finance borrowing to cover the total renovation costs. We recommend that the Council confer with the Treasurer and the Finance Committee and develop a budget for 2010 that anticipates adjustments in order to allocate some portion of Member giving to construction. More important, while the Church currently does not have a mortgage, the borrowing capacity of the Church is limited by its ability to service the monthly costs of any borrowing. Absent an increase in general giving, any debt service will require a reduction in other expenditures by the Church, with Benevolence and Compensation the only two sufficiently sizable areas of spending over which the Church has discretion. We understand Benevolence was significantly reduced during the building of the education wing and has variously been reduced and increased from year to year in response to the other budgetary needs of the Church. Congregational views on reducing Benevolence varied widely in the survey results, with supporting views on both maintaining it at current levels (approximately 12% of income) and reducing it to whatever is necessary. There did seem to be some consensus that a temporary reduction would be acceptable as long as the level did not fall below 10%. Reducing Benevolence to 10% would create approximately \$100,000 of immediate borrowing capacity, and we recommend the Council consider such an approach as being consistent with prior practice and a consensus among the Congregation.

We further recommend that the Council appoint a Capital Development Committee. With total project costs estimated to be approximately \$1,000,000, financing \$200,000 through borrowing would leave a balance of \$800,000. This amount would need to be financed by additional capital giving by the Congregation. Such gifts will not need to be fully funded at the beginning of the project but could be paid in accordance with the costs of the work plan developed by the Capital Development Committee. However, we believe it is important to establish Congregational support and commitment for the entire program costs. While current economic circumstances certainly limit the ability of some members of the Congregation to make meaningful, if any, gifts to a capital campaign, we were struck by the enthusiasm and willingness also expressed by many members to support Ascension and help position it for its next 50 years of serving its community and furthering its mission.

Communication and careful deliberation are key to the success of any plan. We recommend that the Council cause the website to be updated with this report and all future design materials be uploaded for review. We welcome any questions on this report or the process leading up to it.

Our recommendation is based upon this faith and optimism.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Craven
Kurt Vining
John West
Andrew McCune