

October 27, 2009

Dear Congregation,

Thank you. Thank you for being a congregation that can have deep conversations. Thank you for being a congregation that cares. Thank you for being a community where people can disagree and still know they are loved. For the last five months our congregation has been in a discernment process, considering a request from the University District Ecumenical Campus Coalition (UDECC) to conduct a feasibility study (to include economic, financial, zoning, and architectural components) of our Parking Lot C and Gold House properties (on the corner of 45th and 15th) for potential use as a site for several University churches who are exploring the possibility of co-locating within one building. We are writing to report to you the results of that discernment, and to outline our next steps in response to what we have learned.

We begin with gratitude to all who have led us in this time. Thank you Marty Curry, who chaired the Task Force that guided our discernment process, and thank you task force members: Bob Bingham, John Coleman, Tim Croll, John Lewis, Don Mallett, Mary Elizabeth Maltman, Mary Paananen, Kathryn Robinson, Arlene Strong, Valerie Thiel, and Patty Whistler, with Catherine Foote as the Leadership Team Liaison. Thank you Peter Drury of DZO Strategists, our congregation's consultant in this process. Thank you Kathy Kripps, our church moderator, for your excellent leadership throughout. And thank you again, congregation, for being faithful to this process.

At the congregational meeting last Sunday we voted 96 to 84 (with 3 abstentions) to advise our church council to allow the feasibility study. On Monday night the church council met to receive the advisory vote of the congregation, as well as the report of the task force. At that meeting, the council outlined a letter to the UDECC Board, which grants permission for a feasibility study and sets out clear parameters for that study based on all that we have learned over the last several months. Those parameters include ways we as a congregation will inform any project, based on our vision, values, and understanding of what it means to be church. It includes a report of significant concerns our congregation has about this project as it relates to our ministry (including justice and social action, interfaith work, ecumenical vitality, strong communication, timing of next steps, and the future of our congregation) and about wise stewardship of our current facility and property (including financial stability, parking and traffic issues, property values and building and community enhancement). That letter will be sent to the UDECC Board and to you as soon as it has been finalized.

After the UDECC Board receives the letter from the church council, they will decide whether or not to pursue the feasibility study. Should that be their choice, this congregation will have some significant work ahead to prepare to participate in the study, and to respond to its results.

As leaders of this faithful congregation, there are things we know about what it means to be a vital, energized church, and things we have learned about ourselves in the last several years of work together. In addition, there is work we already know we are called to as a congregation. We want to be sure this work remains a focus in any conversation with our ecumenical partners. We offer you these observations and priorities here so that we might all move forward together. In the end, we expect that we will be a stronger church for taking this journey.

In our next steps together, we begin with who we are as a faith community. Our vision as a church is to "imagine love and justice" in a way that is Jesus-centered and radically welcoming. Our wide open and informed imagination about what it means to be church and about the love and justice needs in the University district will always be our starting point. In this case, that means letting go of assumptions about buildings until we fully understand what shapes the need for a building. Any compelling project utilizing our property on the corner of 45th and 15th will be grounded in our vision.

Secondly, we will take the time we need to explore the vitality of our ecumenical connections with the U district churches. We have seen some signs of what might be possible to do together, for example, the social services now offered co-operatively by churches in the U district, such as food, financial help, and shelter, as well as the new and energizing University District Conversations on Homelessness. But the real substance of our partnerships has not developed sufficiently to inform us regarding building needs. We must understand the shape of future meaningful, collaborative ecumenical work in the University District before we build something together.

A third major issue we are clear about is of the role of social service agencies in the church's work. We must make room for a justice ministry that incorporates the good work of the Justice and Social Action Task Force report of last spring. From that starting point of faith we must clarify our support of and relationship with social service agencies before we finalize a plan that presumes those relationships. We also know that our faith journey is both an inward one of deepening relationship with God, and an outer one of expressing God's compassion for all of creation. Our work will support both of those aspects of our growing faith.

We believe that faithful, prudent stewardship begins with our sense of mission and ministry, and also carries us into the future. As we move forward, we will strengthen the ways the younger voices in our congregation are engaged, and make sure all voices are heard in any plans for a church beyond our own time here. Our Family Friendliness Task Force has given us some important direction regarding the ways we bring everyone to the table for worship, Christian formation, and outreach. So we will continue to ask, "What kind of faith community do we envision ten, twenty, or fifty years from now and what kind of resources will we need then?" We will use our resources in this congregation in a way that shapes a sustainable project, both for our faith community, and for the future of our planet. That means our ecumenical conversations must ask both "What do the churches need?", and "What might the University district need that the churches could offer?" That means we will put a priority on developing an agile and dynamic network of relationships and resources rather than simply building another building.

Being a large, progressive church presence in the University District is not necessarily about having a larger church, or even being a large, co-located collection of faith communities. Moving forward on a feasibility study with UDECC means we will work to build an ecumenical plan that will reflect an imagination that goes beyond "bigger building." In addition, because of our compelling visions of some vital needs of our world, we will include a genuinely collaborative interfaith component in any plan for the use of our property.

Clearly, such work will take time. Please know that we will not rush this process. We will engage the entire congregation in a way that helps participants feel informed, heard, strengthened, and empowered. With UDECC, we will work in such a way that our voices will be a significant part of the study, and that a deep, imaginative, and thoughtful conversation about what it means to be "church" together will be at the heart of our own continuing discernment about participating in a co-location project.

Wherever you are on this journey, please know you are all held in prayer. Whatever our future holds, this we know. We build on the faithfulness of those who have come before us, and God holds us as we move into the future.

Blessings,



Catherine Foote
Pastor



Peter Ilgenfritz
Pastor



Amy Roon
Pastor



David Anderson
Church Administrator