

Draft Recommendation to Session regarding Our Building Needs and Location
June 7, 2016

Background

The Minutes of the June 2, 2015 Session meeting recorded the following action:

- Session discussed the feedback from the **College of Elders** meeting held on May 31, 2015, concerning our current location and facilities. It was agreed to appoint a committee of elders and trustees at the Combined Board Meeting in July to bring a recommendation regarding the way forward with respect to location and facilities.

At the Combined Meeting of the Boards held on July 14 it was agreed to invite the Deacons to also appoint a member for this committee. In due course the following individuals agreed to serve: Jack Ransom, Jeff Hardesty (Session), Doyal Bell (Board of Deacons), and Dick Hammer (Board of Trustees). The Committee convened for the first time on August 23 and since then has met many times to visit different church buildings, gather information from professionals in the building trade, and wrestle with the challenging question of “the way forward with respect to location and facilities.” We are grateful that the Lord has brought us to the point of being of one mind in offering a recommendation for the consideration of the Session.

We offer this recommendation as those who have tried, as best we could, to leave our own personal preferences “at the door” and be open to how the Lord might lead and teach us in this process. Our discussions together have been forthright, honest and respectful. We have all found ourselves re-thinking our assumptions more than once as we have weighed and prayed over a hard set of questions. We have sought, in particular, to consider how the legacy of the past should inform decisions that will shape, in significant ways, the ministry of future generations in an uncertain world.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that the Congregation build a new sanctuary and multi-purpose wing in an established residential neighborhood in Frankfort.

Rationale

In bringing this recommendation we had to wrestle with questions to which there are no clear-cut answers. Every building and location scenario has much to commend it. In coming to a decision we sought to discern what would best serve the church in the future.

1. We recognize that we are a “legacy” church with 180 years of history and 140 years of connection to the current sanctuary. The generation that constructed this sanctuary pointed us, by its lofty, impressive design, to the beauty, holiness and transcendence of God. They created sacred space that nurtures, through the outward senses, inward reverence and awe. This legacy shapes the spiritual “DNA” of our congregation. However, we have become convinced that the best way to honor this legacy is not to preserve buildings. Instead, we believe we should design a new worship space that reflects our heritage and “DNA,” but also supports new patterns of worship and church life.

The greatest challenge facing any “legacy” church is to find a way to renew its life. One younger member of Session urged the committee early on in its work to consider the possibility of “replanting”

the church elsewhere in the community as a step toward congregational renewal and greater evangelistic outreach. After ten months of study, the committee found itself coming to the same conclusion—with fear and trembling, to be sure, but also with a sense of excitement and hope.

When the possibility of relocating was raised in conversations with members of the congregation, almost everyone assumed this would mean “somewhere in a cornfield” miles out of town. Opportunities exist, though, to relocate in an established residential neighborhood within the city. We believe that a residential setting would be more attractive to families seeking a church than our current downtown location. Objectively considered, our current location is not part of a residential neighborhood and is surrounded by several structures that can hardly be described as attractive.

2. As we weighed the practical aspects of preserving the sanctuary and making it more accessible, we reached the conclusion that a commitment to preserve it would ultimately take over as the controlling mission of the church. The preservation of the building would become an endless, costly process, made more challenging over time by the modifications needed to achieve handicapped accessibility throughout our facilities.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 reminds us that there is a time and season “for every matter under heaven.” Some times are clearer and more inescapable than others. “A time to be born and a time to die” involves little need for human discernment. “A time to break down and a time to build up” is not always so easy to judge. We believe, though, that this time has come. As we weighed scenarios and associated costs for preserving the sanctuary and making it accessible, our greatest concern was this: at the end of the day we would be left with a facility that is still not fully satisfactory from either a functional or aesthetic standpoint and that is still aging at its core.

“A time to be born and a time to die” requires two things of us all: the capacity to joyfully welcome new life and humbly, gratefully and bravely let go of something precious. On reflection, “A time to break down and time to build up” requires exactly the same, (though in the reverse order). Someday some generation will have to let go of the present sanctuary. We believe God has positioned this generation of First Evangelical Presbyterian Church to make the hard but hopeful transition between breaking down and building up.

Respectfully Submitted,

Doyal Bell, Richard Hammer, Jeff Hardesty, Jack Ransom, Paul Copeland