

EMAILS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OUR CHURCH - 2020

April 29, 2020

In this time of social distancing, the work of our church continues. We have some big decisions to make about the future of our church. Since we are not able to meet in person, Council has supported my proposal as incoming moderator, to call and ask your views about our future.

As I see it, this is where we are now.

Since the last annual meeting our church has gone through a lot of changes. Before the last annual meeting we were trying to make decisions about the building. At that meeting we voted to hire a real estate consultant to help us gather factual information to help us determine whether to stay in the building or to sell the building. Then our pastor resigned and the leadership of our church worked tirelessly to provide meaningful worship and to keep the church functioning. We now have an interim pastor who will provide us with spiritual leadership and help us determine our future.

I hope you had a chance to read Paul Kelley's summary about our proposed budget (see attachment). The full budget is available on the church's website (password: budget). This year we had an unexpected windfall of \$88,700 for the sale of a small parcel of land near Foothill Drive. In general, contributions to the church have fallen along with attendance. With this trend the church could only continue as we are for a couple of years.

We have a full Nominating Committee who will try to get volunteers to fill all the board positions. Please be aware that we were not able to fill all of the board positions last year. There were open spots on all of the boards and the Membership/Stewardship Board had no members. Many people presently serving on boards and on Council have expressed a need to step back from the ongoing stress of keeping this church functioning.

When we were able to meet, our average Sunday attendance was 35, despite past efforts to increase attendance. To help us grow in numbers we hired a youth director and we hoped that Camp Fellowship participants and their families would get involved with our church. We have tried using our church more by renting it out to various groups but building rental has not been consistent. We hoped that remodeling the Heritage Room would bring in more activities at church. Unfortunately, we have not seen the growth in numbers and building use that we hoped for.

Trustees have worked diligently on the HVAC system and dealing with the upkeep of an aging building (such as finding parts for the broken elevator). We have been approached by a church expressing interest in our property. They would want only the property and would demolish the building. However nothing concrete has materialized. Also there was a conversation with the Salt Lake City RDA (Redevelopment Agency) that indicated the city would be interested in buying our property for affordable housing if we chose to sell it. This was only done to get ideas for potential possibilities.

The choir continues to sound wonderful. We have times of uplifting fellowship and we have tried to stay in contact by phone, video conferencing, and social media. Parish Nurses continue to look after the well-being of our entire congregation and the boards have conscientiously toiled to do God's work.

Council has been struggling with our church's future all year. This year's Council has lots of different opinions on this. Some would like to stay together in this building for as long as possible. Others would like to stay together and sell the building to relieve us of that particular burden. Others feel like it is time to respectfully close this beloved church, sell the property and determine how we could use the proceeds to leave a valuable legacy for the community.

Considering where we are now, what do you see as the future of this church?

I would like to speak to everyone personally either by phone or video chat. Please let me know when you are available to chat by emailing me at cissywolff@gmail.com or by calling/texting me at 801-243-5457. I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Cissy Wolff

June 2, 2020

My Conversations with the Congregation from Cissy Wolff

Thank you so much to all of the people who so graciously gave their time to engage in these conversations. I have tried my best to summarize and capture key thoughts and concerns.

At the beginning of this project I thought that there would be a clear picture of what issue needed to be brought before the congregation to vote on. It felt like there was a sense of urgency to make some type of decision, especially about the building, so that an action plan could be developed. However, in my conversations with the congregation, more and more questions arose. One person stated that the, "root cause of lack of decision-making (was) because we speculate without ever truly investigating." After having all of these conversations it was clear that we need to do some serious investigating before we ask the congregation to vote on anything.

To summarize my conversations:

I had contact with 53 people, 2 responded by email, the rest were phone or zoom contacts. Any numbers I list are approximate and may not add up to the total number of respondents.

Some impressions:

- Desire to stay together: about 43
- Ready to disband/close: 6-7
- Desire to stay in the building at least another year: 12
- Ready to accept we need to let go of the building: about 40

For those who were open to selling the building, these questions were asked by the respondents:

- What will we do with the money from a sale? Suggestions included an endowment for Camp Fellow
- What will we do with the organ and the stained glass windows?
- Where will we gather when we sell? Suggestions: rent (determine place and cost), build, share with another church in their sanctuary, buy a smaller building, swap facilities with a growing church, gather as a house church
- Could we merge with another church?
- What type of development might be built on our property? Suggestions: Friendship Manor type place, perhaps having a space for us to worship and have our stained glass windows, Affordable Housing selling to Salt Lake City Redevelopment Agency, Mixed use (retail on lower level with housing on upper floors) perhaps with a space for us to worship

For those who were advocates to stay in the building, these suggestions/comments were made:

- Hire a full time property/facilities manager who will oversee maintenance and who will also get renters if we want to rent space in our building
- Work with a real estate developer/planner/architect to see if our building could be a mixed use space or if we could rent portions of our building
- Define actual costs to stay in the building
- Write letters to churches to see about sharing our space (one person volunteered to contact some congregations)
- Reasons to stay in the building: it is paid off, Garden of Grace, Keep the organ, Keep the stained glass windows
- Address our ability to control temperature/climate to preserve the organ

Other Suggestions to try before selling/closing the church:

- Seek help/advice from NA; tap the resources they may have
- Be willing to spend money on needs in the building; do what is best for NOW
- Contact past members and friends of FCC informing them of our situation
- Publicize and outreach to the community about our unique heritage and what we have to offer

Other thoughts expressed:

- Concern about our ability to attract a pastor (at least 10 comments) Do we look for someone who might be interested in doing something like a church plant? Who could we get for a church of our size?
- Comments about needing a vibrant settled pastor if we expect to grow
- Comments that we need to change our governance structure, the need to be more streamlined; we are trying too hard to function like a large church; too many people making basic decisions
- Church is not the building
- Moving would split/kill the church
- If we wait too long we will lose our window of opportunity to do things lovingly, gracefully, and respectfully
- Comments were made about rebranding ourselves, reinventing ourselves, changing ourselves to meet the needs of who we are now.
- We need to decide: What is it we need to be now?

Suggested Next Steps

1. Celebrate and Honor the accomplishments that this year's boards and Council have achieved: Pulpit fill, finding interim pastors, ongoing worship services (in person and virtually), ongoing work on the physical plant, Outreach, fellowship opportunities, Parish Nurses, developing ways to stay in contact during the pandemic, investigating potential interests in our property, interviewing a potential real estate consultant, selling some of our property, finding volunteers for nursery and coffee hour, continued support of Camp Fellowship, applying for and receiving Payroll Protection for church employees, obtaining property tax refund from county, work on By law revisions
2. Define committees/topics/questions that require investigation
3. Find Volunteers to do these investigations
4. Presentation of findings to Council
5. Schedule meetings to present information to the congregation
6. Schedule a vote by the congregation

In a separate email you will receive a list of committees/topics/questions that require investigation. Please prayerfully consider how you will help with these investigations. The present leadership of this church has done an outstanding job of keeping our church functioning during extremely trying times. Now it is up to every single person to take action in determining the future of our church.

Cissy Wolff

June 4, 2020

Follow up from Conversations with the Congregation: These are the issues that we need to investigate to help us determine our future

These are the questions that so many of you asked. Please look at this list and decide where you will help. Our congregation cannot make an informed decision about our future unless every single person commits to helping with these investigations. Please contact me at cissywolff@gmail.com or call/text me at 801-243-5457 to let me know how you plan to help.

What does church look like for us now and in the near future? Discussions led by our current pastor, Janie Gebhardt

- What is it we need to be now?
- What will our gathered community look like?
- What type of settled pastor are we looking for?

Staying in the building

- What are the actual ongoing costs associated with the building?
 - Utility and maintenance costs
- What are the capital costs we face in the near future?
 - Costs to finish the HVAC system, including air conditioning
 - Our organist mentioned the need to maintain appropriate temperature/climate control to preserve the organ
 - What are the repair/replacement costs of the elevator?
 - Any other anticipated/needed capital expenditures?
- Find candidates for a facilities/property manager to do minor repairs, to provide open/close services for tenants, to oversee custodial services, to oversee and manage larger physical plant projects, to help find potential renters
 - What do we pay for this position and where will this money come from (general fund, possibly the Trust if it is a new program/position??)
- Engage with a real estate broker to determine the feasibility of renting out our building (this broker would probably be the same one we engage to investigate selling the church)
 - Identify potential renters and develop a realistic estimate of the rental income we will realize from them
 - Determine which spaces within our current facility would be best designated as leased space
 - Develop real cost estimates to remodel/renovate the building space for rental
 - Estimate increased utility and maintenance costs (e.g. janitorial, building security) associated with additional use
- Share our current space with another church (Ken Rockwell expressed willingness to contact some congregations, Carla McIntire may be able to help)
 - Write to other congregations to see who may want to share our space
 - When would another congregation meet and for what cost?
 - Would a church tenant have specific building needs/upgrades?

Selling the building

- Engage with a real estate broker to investigate various scenarios and help determine an asking price for the building (Tom Simons has made an initial contact to get some potential candidates, Ron Sawdey will help with this)
 - Partnering with/selling to Salt Lake City or another entity for affordable housing
 - Sell to a commercial developer to build mixed use development possibly with retail below and housing on upper levels that may potentially save the sanctuary
 - Develop a Friendship Manor type place, possibly creating a place for us to gather to worship and perhaps even preserve the stained glass windows
 - Sell to another church
 - Sell to any developer to make the largest profit
- Determine where to gather after we sell the building
 - Lease space for Sundays only (e.g. Fort Douglass Chapel)
 - Lease space for 7 days per week
 - Share space with another church

- What time(s) would we be allowed to meet on Sunday?
 - Would we be able to use their classrooms for CE type activities and Council/Board meetings?
 - Would we be allowed office space for our Church Secretary?
 - What would it cost?
 - Is this a congregation with whom we can potentially merge?
- Purchase/build a more appropriate sized worship space
 - Where in the valley should this property be located?
- What will happen to the organ? (Bob Dobson has done some preliminary investigations)
- What will happen to the stained glass windows?
- How will our cellular antenna commitments impact the sale?
- Are there any UDOT implications with the planned new interchange for I-80 and 215?
- What will we do with the money from a sale?
 - Endowment for Camp Fellowship
 - Apply for 501(c3) status and determine insurance needs (Mike McIntire agreed to help with this)
 - Gift to Friendship Manor Foundation
 - Donate to charities (e.g. Food Bank, State housing funds)
 - Save to rebuild
 - Save to subsidize the future activities of a smaller church

Disbanding as a church

- What are the legal requirements? (Susan Olson will help after other commitments are completed)
- How do we disperse our assets?
- Are there any FCC Trust issues?
- What legacy, if any, would we like to leave?
- Offer FCC historical records to the University of Utah library
- Plan and implement a process for celebrating the history of FCC in the community, sharing our plans for our ongoing spiritual journeys, and planning ongoing ties for those who would like them

Other Investigations/tasks

- What are the available resources through our National Association? (Nancy Dahill-Brown has volunteered to contact the NACCC to start some of these investigations)
 - What to do with the stained glass
 - What to do with the organ
 - What to do as we look at a potential closure
 - Information on merging with another church
- By-law changes to streamline our governing structure and to ensure voting procedures meet legal requirements (Susan, Wendy, and Marge are already working with a lawyer on this)
 - Request was made to incorporate a way for the congregation to vote electronically or remotely
- Contacting past members and friends of FCC to keep everyone informed
- How to keep our church functioning while we are investigating (Nominating Committee will try to fill as many board positions as possible)
 - Identify core functions
- Inform all members and friends listed in the directory of their membership status and procedures for acquiring/retaining voting rights

Remember, these are the questions that so many of you asked. Please decide where you will help. We cannot make an informed decision unless every single person commits to helping with these investigations.

June 20, 2020

The latest updates on investigations as we determine the future of our church

- The Nominating Committee has worked hard to find volunteers to fill board positions
- Scott Hansen will work on finding a facilities/property manager or company to help maintain the church building
- Trustees were able to get the elevator repaired
- Susan Olson, Wendy Haupt, and Marge Kimes are continuing work on Bylaw revisions
- Susan Olson, Wendy Haupt, and Cissy Wolff had a conversation with Salt Lake City Redevelopment Agency (RDA) and they provided information on the RDA's role in affordable housing, providing the church with assistance in identifying a path forward, and considerations for selling property for affordable housing. Council approved to have the RDA do a "fit study", a site analysis and feasibility study to determine what could be built on the property. The study could look at different development scenarios including redevelopment of the site while leaving the sanctuary intact. Council will keep the congregation informed as we get more information.
- Tom Simons, Ron Sawdey, and Scott Hansen are working on engaging with a real estate broker to investigate various development scenarios
- Nancy Dahill-Brown contacted the NACCC to set up a Zoom meeting with the executive director Michael Chittum, our pastor (Janie Gebhart), the Moderators (Carla McIntire, Mike McIntire, Cissy Wolff) and the head of Deacons (Phil LeHoux). The purpose of the meeting was to investigate resources that the NA may have for churches struggling to determine their future. Michael Chittum and Cissy Wolff will have a conversation after June 27 to determine if our church should take part in the Church Renewal Process offered through the Center for Parish Development.
- Mike McIntire, Cissy Wolff, and Kristi Hansen are working to update church membership lists. Please watch for an email about your membership status. These emails will go out in the next two weeks. After you get the email, please contact the church office if you have any questions about your membership status.

August 3, 2020

Where We Are Now from Cissy Wolff, moderator

Thank you to all of the people who are working so hard on the investigations to help determine our church's future.

Here is an update on some of the work that has been done:

- Phil LeHoux and Paul Kelley organized a way for our congregation to access the information that is usually presented at the Annual Meeting. Our treasurer, Paul Kelley, made himself available to answer any budget questions. Phil organized a mail-in ballot to ensure that all voting members had an opportunity to participate in decision making.
- Ken Rockwell and Carla McIntire will send letters to various congregations to gauge interest in sharing our church's space. Additionally, letters will be sent to churches making inquiries about our church sharing space in other churches should we decide to sell our property.
- Susan Olson, Wendy Haupt, and Marge Kimes continue to work on bylaws revisions. This is being done to help us function more efficiently and to ensure that we are meeting all of the legal requirements for a nonprofit organization.
- Scott Hansen continues to determine how best to handle facilities management issues.
- Janie Gebhardt has begun Appreciative Inquiry sessions with small groups. She will help us determine what we value and what we want to be as a church. Be on the lookout for invitations to participate in Appreciative Inquiry.
- Ron Sawdey, Tom Simons, Scott Hansen, and Dave Svihart have investigated hiring a real estate broker. The need for the expertise of a real estate broker was evident due to these events. There has been unsolicited interest expressed in our property by a larger church in the valley. There has been an unsolicited offer to purchase our

property. Last year's Council approved a site analysis and feasibility study (FIT) by Salt Lake Redevelopment Agency (RDA). Contact with Salt Lake RDA was initiated to investigate the possibility of selling our property to an entity committed to building affordable housing. The committee felt that it was essential that we had someone with the required expertise to represent our church's needs and interests. The committee concluded that the best and most ethical practice would be to have the church commit to selling the property before engaging with a specific real estate broker. Therefore, they recommended that Council bring the motion to sell the property before the congregation.

However, 8 of 13 Council members (present and past) did not feel ready to present a motion to sell the property to the congregation. Many felt that at least 6-8 weeks were needed to see the results of Janie's Appreciative Inquiry sessions and the responses from the inquiries about church sharing.

Where do we go from here?

- Council will continue to coordinate and support meaningful spiritual experiences for this gathered community.
- Janie will continue with Appreciative Inquiry sessions
- Council will continue to encourage investigations and evaluate any gathered information. Specifically Council will evaluate responses from other churches regarding sharing church space, the results from Salt Lake RDA's FIT study, and Janie's insights from Appreciative Inquiry.
- The committee tasked to investigate hiring a real estate broker will continue work on finding answers to questions that our congregation may have if we decided to sell the property.
- In 6-8 weeks Council will determine if there is any motion that needs to be presented to the congregation.
- Council will determine ways to inform the congregation of the findings from all of these investigations.

How you can help

- Contact a leasing agent to investigate the possibilities of renting/leasing space in our building. There is a name available for you to contact.
- Participate in Janie's Appreciative Inquiry sessions
- Begin research on potential storage options for our stained glass windows
- Begin research on dismantling and storing the organ

If you have any questions or concerns as we continue to explore the options for our future, please contact me at cissywolff@gmail.com or call/text me at 801-243-5457

Again, thank you to those who continue to show such love and passion for this special place.

November 3, 2020

Where We Are Now from the Council of First Congregational Church (Cissy Wolff, Carla McIntire, Mike McIntire, Marge Kimes, Glenda LeHoux, Ron Sawdey, Paul Kelley, Phil LeHoux, Scott Hansen, Patti Garver, Janie Gebhardt-non-voting member)

In August of this year 8 of 13 Council members (present and past) did **not** feel ready to present a motion to sell the property before the congregation. There was a desire to see the results of the various investigations important to this congregation. These investigations included engaging with a leasing agent to determine the feasibility of renting out parts of our building to commercial or nonprofit organizations, sharing our current space with another church, options for where to gather if we sell the building, results from the Salt Lake City RDA (Redevelopment Agency) FIT study, available resources through our National Association, and results from Appreciative Inquiry. This group recommended that the results of the investigations be reviewed in 6-8 weeks.

Approximately 8 weeks have elapsed and Council evaluated the information gathered from the investigations. At the October 21 Council meeting, 7 of 11 Council members (1 opposed, 2 abstained, 1 absent) decided that it was time for the congregation to decide if we see ourselves continuing to be owners and caretakers of this property as part of our destiny.

Here is an update of those investigations that lead to this decision:

- No one volunteered to contact a leasing agent to investigate the possibility of leasing portions of our church as commercial or office space.
- When churches were contacted about sharing our church's space, two churches expressed interest in buying our church and would potentially keep the structure intact if they purchased the property. They also offered rental space for our church to gather within the building.
- One church, Ekklesia, expressed interest in renting/leasing space in our church. They requested a long term lease/partnership arrangement of 2-5 years. There was uncertainty among some Council members that this type of arrangement would provide the long term benefits that many members desire. It was decided to rent space to this church on a month to month basis until our church makes a firm decision about remaining property owners.
- All Saints Episcopal Church, Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, and First Presbyterian Church offered places for our church to gather if we sold our property.
- Salt Lake RDA has completed its FIT study which included 4 potential options for our property. Two of the options included maintaining the sanctuary as a worship space for us, and a third includes a new, simple space for us to worship and meet in.
- We have had 2 unsolicited offers to buy the property. One for 4 million dollars and the other for 5.6 million dollars.
- Last year a church expressed interest in purchasing our property with the intent to raze the building and build a new church.
- Finances: We are relying on revenue coming from our Trust to pay for maintenance of the building and property. That revenue combined with revenue we receive from the antenna leases is covering our building expenses. Giving is not covering the salaries that we pay to our minister and staff.
- Conversations with Michael Chittum at the NACCC helped us determine what services may be useful for us. He suggested that we may want to engage with the Center for Parish Development after our church determines that it is viable and committed to staying together, whether in the present building or in another place. He gave encouragement that churches of our present size are typical of modern day Protestant churches and can be thriving, vital, spiritually uplifting communities of faith.
- Information from Appreciative Inquiry helped us identify our core values and discover that we have shared hopes and dreams that honor our comradery and the many things we do well, such as the Parish Nurse program and Camp Fellowship. Our dreams for this place include having spiritually uplifting worship services, putting faith into action, listening to one another, not worrying about the building, and being ready to embrace change. We still need to articulate our "Why"--What we stand for, and we need to determine our destiny.

Based on all of this information it became clear that to pursue and more fully investigate the many options before us, the congregation must first decide if they are ready to sell all or part of the real property of First Congregational Church.

Council proposes the following motion to the congregation:

Shall Council proceed with the steps necessary to sell all or part of the real property of First Congregational Church?

It is anticipated that the result of this vote will be a **first** step in helping us articulate our "Why"--What we stand for. To be clear, by accepting the motion the Congregation is authorizing Council to solicit and evaluate offers to buy our property. **Another** Congregational vote of approval will be needed to accept an offer and complete the sale. The congregation's input will be sought and considered as Council narrows the options and weighs the merits of alternative offers.

Following this letter you will receive the thoughts from Council members about the motion before you. Since there was not unanimity on Council to bring this motion before the congregation we felt that it was absolutely essential that all views be shared.

Since we are not able to gather in person, we are sharing our views in written form. As you receive the opinion pieces, please read the thoughts carefully to help you make a decision. Feel free to contact any council member with questions or requests for clarification. If you would like to share your opinion with the congregation regarding this motion, please send a written version of your views to the moderator, Cissy Wolff. We will distribute your views to the congregation via email unless the wording includes personal attacks or blaming.

After all members have had a chance to read and respond to the written opinions of our congregation, we will hold a Zoom meeting to answer questions and clarify any information. Following the Zoom meeting a member(s) of Council will speak to interested members and friends personally either by phone or video chat.

A mail-in ballot is planned to ensure that all voting members have an opportunity to participate in this important decision. There has not been a timeline established for the vote to be completed. We feel that it is critical to take the time necessary to provide everyone with as much information as possible.

Thank you to all of the people who participated in Appreciative Inquiry, who have worked so diligently to get concrete information to help determine our future, and who continue to work to coordinate and support meaningful spiritual experiences.

If you have any questions at this time, please contact any of the Council members. Their contact information is listed in the church directory.