

November 5, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of First Congregational Church,

You are receiving information about the motion presented by Council: **Shall Council proceed with the steps necessary to sell all or part of the real property of First Congregational Church?**

Included in this communication is the letter that was sent to the congregation via email on November 3, 2020. That first letter gives some background information on how Council came to the decision to bring this motion to the congregation.

Accompanying this letter are the varying views from Council members regarding this motion. Please read these thoughts carefully to help you make a decision about our future.

We invite you to share your views regarding this motion. We will share your views with the congregation unless the wording includes personal attacks or blaming.

All future information concerning this motion (with the exception of the official ballot) will be shared via email. Please be sure that your preferred email address is listed correctly in the directory. If you do not receive email, please contact the church office to have church communications mailed to you by US Mail. Please be aware that several emails may be printed and mailed at the same time so that you will not receive the most current information immediately.

When Council feels that all information has been shared and that the congregation has had ample time to discuss, comment, and question the proposed motion, a mail-in ballot will be sent to all voting members. If you are not sure of your voting status at this time, please contact the church.

As we deliberate the motion before us, the work of the church will continue. Regardless of the outcome of this vote, we will always strive to provide meaningful and uplifting worship experiences. We will still need people to step up to leadership positions and to fill board positions in the upcoming year. Work will continue on the revision of our bylaws along with the many other tasks that keep our church functioning. There is not yet a timeline for when the congregation will be asked to vote on the proposed motion. Other issues, such as bylaw revisions, may soon be ready for Council and congregational approval. Please be prepared that you may be asked to vote on multiple issues when the final ballot is mailed to voting members. Council is absolutely committed to following the required and proper procedures as outlined in our bylaws and state law when bringing any motions before the congregation.

Please be sure to check your email regularly for all of the updates during this important decision making time.

Please feel free to contact any Council member with any questions, comments, or concerns.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Rev. Janie Gebhardt
Interim Minister

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.

October 27, 2020

Dear Members of our Congregation,

Being asked by and encouraged by our Council, Ken Rockwell and I worked on a letter that was sent out to several churches in the Salt Lake valley inquiring if they or anyone they knew was interested in sharing our church, buying our church, or if we chose at some point to sell our church, sharing space in their church for us to meet. We were pleasantly surprised and encouraged at the responses we received on all of our questions.

In July, Ken, Marge Kimes, Mike and I started showing a few small groups around our church who were interested in either buying or renting space in our church. With Covid on the scene we were very slow in making any movement toward any decisions. Two of the churches we met with were very interested in buying our building and continuing to use it as a worship place. We reported back to Council in August and were encouraged to look further into these different possibilities. Since we had not decided as a congregation to sell the church, we did not look further into those possibilities. Bob Baird also volunteered to help this committee, but was, unfortunately, out of town most of the summer.

In August Marge, Ken, Mike and I showed two men from the Ekklesia church through the church. They were very interested in our space. They are a young church with about 150 members, including about 50 to 60 children. They indicated that they were not able to buy our church, but were very interested in renting/leasing space to have their meetings. They were, at that time, meeting at Wheeler Farm, and before that had met in a theater in Gateway. Of course, they would not be able to meet outside at Wheeler Farm for the winter and were looking for a space in which they could hold virtual services with a few of their members in attendance. They said they would be willing and able to clean and disinfect after they had used the space.

At that time we were concerned about how we could coordinate use of the sanctuary time wise. They said they could possibly use the chapel or gym for the time being. We met with this group again with four of their leadership group at the end of September with a group who had volunteered during our September Council meeting, consisting of Phil LeHoux, Glenda Barkwell, Marge Kimes, Mike and I. We were still wondering how to share the sanctuary when Covid restrictions are lifted. Terms for sanctuary sharing will still have to be addressed at that time. Council had agreed to rent to them on a month to month basis. We learned that they had moved several times over the past few years and were interested in a place where it could be more permanent. They also said that they were very interested in helping us, not only with rent money, but also with upkeep of the building and grounds and whatever they could do to help us stay in our church and make a go of it. They explained that most of their members are in the 25 to 35 age group and were very enthusiastic and able to help out. They also stated that they have outreach projects that we are able to participate in if we wish to. They have others that they would like to do in the future. Since many of us have expressed that we wanted to participate in more outreach we felt that this was another point in their favor. They are a plant church with backing from the Southern Baptist Church, but are currently beyond the point of needing outside financial backing.

Cissy and Ron were out of town at the time, so Mike sent an e-mail to Cissy summarizing what had been happening and what we had learned. It was decided that the committee should present its findings to Council before proceeding with Ekklesia.

Mike has continued to keep in touch with Greg Arender, one of their pastors. They have been very agreeable and easy to work with. We have offered them the use of our gym to hold their services and meetings during the week as the gym is available on a month to month basis. They have filled out a "building request" form and trustees have agreed on a monthly rent for their use. Some of our members have observed their service and one of their meetings and felt it was a good use of the space and they are respectful of the building and our needs. They are holding two services on Sunday mornings at 9:30 and 11:00 and are streaming the sermon part of their service if you want to check them out. Their service is more contemporary than ours.

I feel that this group offers us a chance to possibly stay in our church, both financially and assisting us with some of the maintenance and physical drain on our members. We could also engage in outreach with them if we chose. Of course, I don't know how all of the logistics will work after we are able to meet again in person, but I feel it is worth investigating and trying. If we do not want to sell our church it gives us another possibility worth considering.

In Christian Love,
Carla McIntire

From Cissy Wolff, moderator

I plan to vote YES on the motion to have Council proceed with the steps necessary to sell all or part of the real property of First Congregational Church.

We have been wrestling with the issue of whether or not to stay in this building for at least 16 years (and probably longer).

In September of 2004, Council had a retreat to help establish priorities for our church. One person commented that the “over worrying” by FCC leadership about the building and finances created the negative consequences of lack of enthusiasm, withdrawal from activities, and submission to a sense of doom. Another person commented that the decision of whether to stay in the building or move needed to be put to rest. He felt that the topic distracted us and let energy drain from the congregation. Sixteen years ago we questioned our ability to be good stewards of the property of FCC when we had over 100 people attending services, a thriving Sunday school, and a large pool of people to help and to attend activities. It was felt that the building should not dominate our time, energy, and finances. We wanted to concentrate on creating the vision we had for ourselves. The vision of being an inclusive, spiritual, caring group for all ages. At that time it was felt that concerns about the building had to be resolved since they represented a huge stone that needed to be rolled away so that we could fully embrace the abundance that God has given us.

We have experienced the negative consequences of over worrying, we are distracted, and we have let energy drain from us. We are still trying to roll away that huge stone that is blocking us from fully embracing God’s abundance.

Right now we have many opportunities before us that will allow us to concentrate on our “Why”. Why does First Congregational Church exist and what do we stand for? However, to fully explore these opportunities we have to **officially** accept that we are willing to let go of a building that no longer works for us. Voting YES means that we can learn about the critical need for affordable housing in Salt Lake City through meetings with Salt Lake RDA (Redevelopment Agency). We can explore a variety of ways to help solve this problem and the details of partnering with Salt Lake RDA. They have provided some innovative plans that allow us to help solve the housing crisis **and** potentially retain the sanctuary or have space for us to gather.

Voting YES means that we can fully explore selling our real property to another church. These other churches expressed interest in keeping the building and possibly renting out space for us to continue to gather. This would relieve us of the responsibilities of being owners and caretakers of the church and still worship in the space that so many love. We would be free to concentrate on taking care of each other, enjoying inspiring worship, enjoying fellowship without the burden of caring for the building.

Voting YES means that we can seriously consider the implications of accepting multi-million dollar offers for our real property. We can openly discuss how having huge financial resources will define us. Instead of struggling with the building we can struggle with how to do the most good in our community. Would we save some money to build/purchase a structure more suitable to our needs? Would we generously support groups that reflect what we stand for? Would our abundant financial resources be an incentive to attract a dynamic, energetic pastor that so many hope will revitalize our church?

Voting YES on the motion to sell all or part of the real property of First Congregational Church does not mean an end to our gathered community. I think it is an opportunity to reinvent and reimagine ourselves. Voting YES is an invitation to design a new future for ourselves. It is an opportunity to determine our destiny with the abundance that God has given us.

Ron Sawdey's position on the motion to consider selling the church property

I plan to vote YES on the motion to have Council proceed with the steps necessary to sell all or part of the real property of First Congregational Church.

I believe that our best option to survive as a Christian community lies with selling the church property. I acknowledge that the sanctuary holds historic and sentimental importance for many in our congregation. However, I would like to remind everyone that our church is not the building in which we meet. Our church is made up of the people that gather together in worship and in fellowship together.

I believe that at this point in our history that the church buildings and property require too much of our limited resources; too much money and too much of people's time. Our membership has declined to the point where we have difficulty filling Board positions, and our giving has trended steadily downward over the last several years. Do we want to spend these resources caring for an aging structure that is too large for our numbers? That is not what I desire. I would rather that we can focus our energy and resources on caring for one another, and extending that care to the community in which we live. I would prefer that we focus on inreach to our fellow members, and outreach to the greater community. I would prefer that we do not need to focus on how we go about replacing an aging HVAC system, and fixing the latest leak in the roof of our sanctuary.

We already know that should we decide to sell, that we have multiple possible buyers of the property. Other churches, the Salt Lake Redevelopment Agency, and commercial developers have all expressed an interest in purchasing our property. In at least a couple of scenarios the sanctuary could be preserved and we would still be able to meet there. We also know that other churches have offered to share their worship space with us, so that regardless of who we sell to, we will have a church home. Who we select as the buyer of our property will require more investigation on the pros and cons of each potential buyer. Where we wind up spending our Sunday's will also require careful consideration on our part. However, I am convinced that we can make wise choices in both cases.

I am convinced that a sale will provide us with the means to leave a lasting legacy for our church. I also believe that it will free us to focus on our destiny as a community of faith.

To the Members of First Congregational Church:

There is a Sunday School song whose words are: The church is not a building-the church is not a steeple- the Church is not a meeting place; THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE! Perhaps because I moved so often growing up, I have never been terribly attached to any church building rather I have always thought of the church as the people who attended that building.

One of the most frequently heard responses when people are asked what it is that they like about FCC is “the people”. Certainly, the faith community who gather at FCC would top my list. I love how we care for one another through good times and bad. This is the community where my daughters grew up. This community loved my girls and provided a church family for them This was especially important as all their actual family lives in Canada. More than once my daughters told me that “they would need to consult with one of their “church moms” before making a decision. This is the community that had my younger daughter declare that “maybe she should bring her boyfriend to church to see if he could pass the Dick Coleman test” It takes a village to raise a child and FCC was my village. All my family members have formed long-lasting friendships among members of the congregation.

It is because I hope that we can preserve this faith community that I support the motion to sell all or part of our real property.

We have lost many members of our congregation over the years and are now a very small congregation. We are also an aging congregation. Our building may be beautiful but is too large for our numbers, old and too expensive for our membership to maintain. From a strictly financial point of view, we are drawing down both our Trust Fund and our General Fund just to keep the doors open. In just a few short years we will no longer be able to financially support ourselves. One has to wonder if there is a better and more meaningful way to use the financial resources of the church.

Another consideration is the time, energy, and manpower needed to take responsibility for and provide upkeep of the physical property. The drain on our physical and emotional energy needed to take care of the building needs leaves little energy for anything else. I feel that we need to shed the financial and maintenance burdens of owning this property in order to become once again a thriving, vibrant community of faith.

We have been associated with FCC for thirty years. I know that many of you have been part of this community for much longer. I understand that there is a deep and abiding attachment to this building and especially to the sanctuary. The good news is that many of the options which are before us would allow us to continue to use this building for our worship.

Two of the churches who are interested in purchasing have offered to let us rent space in the building to gather as a faith community. A sale to either of these churches would be a blessing to them. It would provide them with a church home to continue to grow and thrive. A sale like this would also maintain this building as a church as it was originally intended. A sale to either of these churches would be an excellent way for FCC to help another Christian church.

Salt Lake RDA has two options which would maintain the sanctuary for a worship place for us and another plan that would provide us with a new simple space to gather for worship.

There is yet another church who would like to lease space from us. While this option does provide support for another Christian church, it still leaves us with the financial issues and responsible for the care and maintenance of the building. For that reason, I do not consider this to be a viable option.

So, we have options to consider and discussion to have. In order to engage with any or all these potential buyers in good faith, we need to know that the congregation is ready to sell some or all our property.

I would encourage support for the proposed motion. A YES vote will provide us with a way forward to becoming a vibrant church community once again.

Glenda Barkwell (Lehoux)

Members of First Congregational Church

There is a question before us on authorizing the FCC Council to consider options to sell the property. A “Yes” is an acknowledgment that the future of the congregation need not be tied to the property. The liberating aspect of such a vote is the ability to consider all possibilities that will allow our congregation to continue and plan a future. Note that continuing does not guarantee thriving. Thriving implies increasing numbers of members to add energy and spread the responsibilities of managing and performing the functions that we consider essential and supportive of active Christian ministry. Growth will be critical as the energy level of our aging leadership and membership inevitably declines. We will have to make significant changes in any case to “thrive”, which will have to go beyond any consideration of the physical future. Alternately, voting “No” to the motion, in my view, rejects the need to explore the new possibilities and directions required if we are ever to achieve “thrive.”

It is also important to realize that a “yes” vote is not necessarily the loss of the current sanctuary, to which there is so much emotional attachment. We have before us several proposals which may allow us to retain a presence in the current building after ceding ownership; however, realistically, these inevitably involve relinquishing control and priority in its use and direction. There is no scenario I can envisage where the current membership maintains the energy and active leadership numbers required to continue to function as the primary stewards of our beloved facility while still continuing or possibly expanding the programs and fellowship activities that define our congregation and promote our Christian path.

Phil LeHoux

To Members of the First Congregational Church

First of all, I would like to thank everybody involved in the Appreciative Inquiry and Investigations efforts which provided great insight and perspective for us to consider with this important motion.

I feel strongly we need to move forward and consider all the possible options of potentially selling all or portions of the church property. Therefore, I vote YES on the motion. This doesn't mean I would necessarily support selling to the highest bidder or taking the "best of the worst offers" We need to carefully consider what are the best strategic moves for our congregation as we plan for the future. I urge you to support this motion so we can perform an in depth analysis of our options. Who knows there may be great opportunities out there we haven't considered that may help us survive and thrive!

My fellow Council members Cissy, Ron, Glenda and Phil have articulated the important issues very well so I won't restate them here.

This has been and will continue to be a very difficult and emotional process for most of us. May we move forward with keen minds, sensitive hearts, hope and strength in our upcoming deliberations.

Scott Hansen

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

I support the motion to sell the building. I think it is time for us to face up to our dire situation. We are a small, old, tired church. Our membership has shrunk dramatically over the last couple decades. Most of our members are not active in the daily or even weekly life of the church. Before Covid-19 shut down in-person services, barely thirty people were attending Sunday worship. The sight of such a small gathering in a sanctuary built for hundreds was depressing. As membership has declined so has the number of volunteers willing to shoulder the tasks of maintaining the church. We have not replaced former stalwart members who have left, have become too frail to help, or have died. The result has been unfilled leadership positions, non-functioning Boards, and increased responsibilities for those who remain. There are simply not enough willing volunteers to keep the church operating, and there is no prospect that will change. If anything, I expect we will lose more of our active helpers, and the church will need to close.

We have not been able to chart a course towards revival. A decade or two ago a change of course was conceivable. It no longer is. Despite visioning exercises and honest attempts to think about our future, our trajectory has not changed. We have no idea of what we might be other than what we have been. Even if there were a vision, change requires that someone step up and assume one more responsibility. There has been little appetite and energy for that. I think in the not-too-distant future our church will not be able to keep going as owner of our current building. It may close. It may move to a location where it can live out its life as a shrinking church, or it may find a way to rejuvenate itself free of the constraints placed on it by our building. I believe selling our property is inevitable. We should do it sooner than later. Selling our property will be a lot of work. Today, we have enough engaged members to complete a sale while working to secure the future or perhaps the legacy of First Congregational Church. We do not have to sell today, but we should. The trajectory is clear. Putting off the decision simply shifts the burden onto those leaders who stay on. I am not willing to be one of those people.

Paul Kelley

To Members of First Congregational Church Salt Lake City from Marge Kimes

I do not want to sell this church. It has been a large part of my life for over 50 years and when I walk in that sanctuary I feel blessed. But, in my heart of hearts I see it coming. On the other hand, our reaching out to others has brought forth options and opportunities that we now need to consider. And I hope we will consider all of them.

To think we have been offered \$4-5 million for our property is astounding, the interest in continuing to use it as a faith community is encouraging, to think it could be used to help the disadvantaged is heartening, and the opportunity to assist another faith community to grow and allow us to remain (at least awhile) is a possibility worth considering.

The group currently using our gym for services brings life to our property and building that it has not seen for quite awhile and I would like to see us consider the possibility of continued cooperation and working together.

I have been told we have to say yes to the motion so that we can go ahead and investigate all of these possibilities. That is confusing to me but I guess that is reasonable to allow interested parties to discuss the true interest and process needed.

I hope each of you will consider your faith commitment and interest in our FCC community and the possibilities we have for the future of FCC. It will take a great deal of commitment in our time, talent and treasures to go forward, a great deal from everyone. This is a particularly difficult time when we are unable to meet for face to face discussions and considerations. I want to make sure each of you are informed and comfortable with the decisions we make for First Congregational Church Salt Lake City.

Please contact me or other Council members with your questions and comments.

Love to all and stay safe Marge