

“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”

- Philippians 4:11-12

“‘Tis a gift to be simple. ‘Tis a gift to be free.”

- Shaker Song

I am grateful for the collaborative efforts of our facilities planning team. Rich Lippmann, Doug Sacra, Ken Vona, Debbie Wilson, Mary Shahian and I have worked together for the purpose of researching and recommending some options for the church to consider regarding the future of our physical plant. Our prayerful hope is that God will help us to determine how to best steward our facilities in a way that will best support the mission of the church. My hope, as pastor, is that whatever stewardship strategy is ultimately chosen, it will reflect a commitment to simplicity while continuing to support our many wonderful ministries.

The idea of “simplicity” may be a new to some, but the sentiment can be found in Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi. Reflecting on his words, Adele Calhoun wrote, “Simplicity cultivates the great art of letting go. Simplicity aims at loosening inordinate attachment to owning and having. Simplicity brings freedom and with it generosity.”¹ And so, as a work of God’s grace among us, I would like us to practice simplicity as a community-wide spiritual discipline as we consider our future together. Toward that end let us consider what it could look like for us to hold loosely before God the buildings we currently have, so that we can enjoy the freedom to be even more generous with what God has entrusted to our care.

First, I’d like to discuss what it might look like to hold our buildings loosely before God. I am grateful for the conversation that we were able to have at our annual meeting this past January. Rich did a wonderful job helping us see the costs associated with maintaining our current physical plant, including the backlog of repairs that would be required in order to continue subsidizing the four buildings on our footprint. The associated costs are exorbitant when we consider them in light of the mission of our church. As a result we have asked God and the church, ‘Do we need all four buildings in order to fulfill our mission to be and make

¹ Calhoun, A. A. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2005. p74.

disciples?’ Having listened to your feedback, and in our own team discussions, our sense is that we will not require all four buildings. Although the church has graciously availed housing to its staff, both senior and junior ministerial staff have elected not to live in the parsonage for various reasons. Based on that observation, the trend among other churches nationwide away from parsonage housing and the feedback we have received from the church, it appears as though we will not require a parsonage to fulfill our mission as a church. Also, as you will see in the Ewing Office Building Space Report and the proposal for office relocation, it is possible to maximize our stewardship of the main church building without inhibiting the opportunity for ministerial growth. Currently, the ministerial staff is spending a considerable amount of time working in the main building and of course, the facilities staff is already stationed in the main building. If we were to be able to hold loosely both Ewing and the parsonage, we could raze both buildings and retain the property for other future uses.

Secondly, let us consider what it could look like to enjoy more freedom. If we were not paying yearly utilities, insurance costs and deferred maintenance on Ewing and the parsonage we could “free up” \$15,192 in combined utilities, \$1,760 insurance, and \$408,000 in deferred maintenance. That is a total of \$424,952 that we would not have to raise in order to retain our current physical plant. Imagine what we could do with our resources instead of investing such a sum in buildings that we do not require in order to fulfill our mission! In addition to this, facilities staff would enjoy the freedom from maintaining four buildings, and the freedom to concentrate their energy on other priority projects. The ministerial staff would enjoy the freedom from a poorly insulated work environment that has black mold growing in the basement, and the freedom to collaborate in a workspace where they are already spending significant time. Finally, the property on which the parsonage and Ewing buildings currently sit would be freed from the edifices that currently stand there in order to provide free parking for our growing church. We currently have 86 parking spaces. We could add an additional 43 spaces, which would help offset any future parking needs in the event that the Wayland Town Hall overflow parking becomes unavailable in the future. After the winter we’ve had, we are even more keenly aware of how limited and insufficient our current parking availability can be.

Finally, I would like for us to imagine the implications of enjoying the freedom to be even more generous with what God has entrusted to our care. If we were able to maximize the stewardship of the buildings we are currently using to fulfill our mission, we would be able to be

more generous toward the completion of renovations on Bradford Hall, a building that is regularly employed to make disciples among our student population. We would also be able to ensure that our beautiful “main church” building continues to be maintained properly. Even though this building was completed in 2009, the maintenance costs associated with this facility will rise over time, and we want to be in a sustainable stewardship position in order to maintain the quality of this building. Ultimately, if we are stewarding our physical plant with simplicity, we will be not only able to continue being generous toward the ministries and missions that we currently support, but hopefully will be in a position to spend less on ourselves and able share more resources with those beyond our walls.

In closing, I would like to share Richard Foster’s reflection on how the church can enjoy the practice of corporate simplicity:

“God does indeed want to bless his children. The real issue, however, is the purpose for which God blesses us. God’s blessing is not for personal aggrandizement, but to benefit and bless all the peoples of the earth. To understand the distinction makes all the difference in the world. The theology of wealth says, ‘I give so that I can get.’ Christian simplicity says, ‘I get so that I can give.’ The difference is profound.”²

Let us learn simplicity together then so that in having less to maintain for ourselves, we are free to be more generous towards those God wants to be and make disciples of Jesus among us and through our church.

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Chris

² Foster, R. *The Freedom of Simplicity*, New York: Harper Collins, 1981. p189.