

A BACKGROUND SHEET ON THE ALTAR PLATFORM

SHORT SUMMARY

The architectural study

- On March 4, 2007, the congregation authorized the expenditure of up to \$20,000 in renovation funds (from the sale of the property) for an architectural study to renovate the sanctuary for the purpose of creating safe access to the altar rail.
- The study was undertaken so that any modifications to our worship space would be rooted in a comprehensive plan for our worship space.
- The purpose and results of the study were communicated to the congregation in a report in the newsletter in September 2009.
- Because some question remained unanswered when other events intervened, the study was not finalized or formally adopted. It did, however, provide the congregation with the answer it needed for moving the altar rail.

The planned altar platform

- The current plan for the altar platform is the one envisioned in the architectural study.
- The opportunity to move forward with the altar platform presented itself this year with a donation of funds and labor.
- The need to move forward was driven in part by the fact that several choir members could no longer negotiate the stairs to the choir loft.
- The organ company has given us an estimate for moving the organ of less than \$1,500.
- The cost of the altar platform itself is for materials. Bob Smith, a licensed civil engineer, offered to construct the platform. The cost of the new rail depends on the design which is being investigated by the Worship Committee.
- The initial step is to build the platform using our current furnishings (altar and lectern).
- The worship committee is developing the process for a new altar, lectern/pulpit (technically called an ambo) and paraments.
- There are strong theological and liturgical reasons for an altar that visually looks like a table in the middle of the community rather than an altar far away and/or high above that suggests priestly authority and mediation (These reasons led to our current altar being pulled away from the wall years ago so that at least the ministers could face the people).
- The plan is consistent with our mission statement. (See the section “*The architectural vision and the mission of the congregation*” beginning on page 4).

Related Question about an upstairs bathroom

- The need for an upstairs bathroom was discussed when ideas were gathered for the use of renovations funds. The projected estimate of the cost at that time was deemed prohibitive, \$150,000.
- It has continued to be a recognized need by the leadership of the congregation.
- The property committee will research the matter again with the hopes of getting a proposal about how this might be accomplished, a more solid estimate of the cost, and an answer to the question whether it would force us to make other modifications to bring the whole building up to code.

DETAILED SUMMARY

Renovations to the facilities

- 1) In 2006 the property was sold and a plan developed so that the funds from the property would foster the mission and future of the congregation.
 - The money was divided to provide for pastoral housing, additional staff, the renovation of the building (both function and appearance), investment in the endowment fund, and a small amount as an operating reserve.
- 2) Among the renovation projects were
 - Opening the Sunday School rooms with the double doors, replacing the carpeting/flooring, upgrading the lighting. (Plans for paint and whiteboards have not been completed.)
 - Replacing the crumbling ceiling in the nursery and offices and adding air conditioning for that space.
 - Replacing the windows in the upstairs hall with safety glass.
 - Making the existing bathrooms more attractive (some work was done but the project has had several delays).
 - New signs so people could find their way around the campus. (Handmade signs were added, but a larger campus map for visitors has not been finished.)
 - Developing a long rang vision for the worship space so that it would be more attractive and appropriate for our mission.
- 3) More renovation needs were identified than we had funds for.
 - Some things, like an upstairs bathroom in the fellowship hall were investigated but judged prohibitively expensive.
- 4) Please note that the focus for the renovations was on things that would help the congregation grow – that would makes our space more useful, accessible and inviting to members of this community.

The long range vision for the sanctuary

- 1) As approved by the congregation, an architectural review of the sanctuary was commissioned
 - the goal of developing a long range vision for the worship space was so that decisions on more immediate concerns (like the safety of the altar steps) would be consistent with a larger plan.
- 2) The goals identified by the committee for updating the worship space were:
 - Safety
 - Family Friendly
 - Brighter
 - Technologically current
 - A larger more efficient sacristy
 - “Fresher”
- 3) Among the specific ideas we asked the architect to explore was the possibility of side aisles
- 4) The architect we hired, Nielsen Consulting out of San Jose., was experienced in church design.
- 5) The architect discussed with city officials the relevant codes
- 6) The architect provided us with two possible drawings
 - One included
 - Straightening the exterior walls and creating side aisles.
 - Building a new altar platform, moving the altar and reading desk forward, and creating a new rail.
 - Pushing out the side of the sanctuary to create a transept for congregational seating creating a sense of the community gathered around the altar table. This transept would also add natural lighting, a more open feeling, and a view of the redwoods. *(If the floor plan of a church were like a cross, with the altar at the head, the transepts are the arms of the cross. We can only go out one direction because of the property line.)*
 - Installing skylights over the altar and down the center aisle to bring in natural light.
 - Bringing the stained glass windows from the back of the church forward where they could be seen and appreciated (opposite the transept).
 - Creating a larger more effective sacristy/vestry.
 - Adding windows on the transept for natural lighting.
 - Removing the balcony to create a more open feel.

- A second drawing included many of the above features, but did not create the transept.
 - Without a transept, the alternate design brought the altar forward but kept it in the current chancel space, creating a smaller rail across the front on the main level.
- 7) The committee was unanimously in favor of the plan with the transept.
 - 8) Some questions needed additional thought and conversation after we reviewed the plan including
 - The placement of the organ, piano and choir.
 - What to do about the balcony
 - The proposed design of the cry room
 - The location of the font and of the sound board
 - 9) The committee received a cost estimate of \$352,922.35. Permits and contingencies suggested a total of \$450,000 for the complete renovation
 - 10) The information on the process and the drawings were shared with the congregation in the September 2009 newsletter.
 - 11) The collapse of the economy and other issues in the congregation pushed the further development of the plan to the background.

THE ARCHITECTURAL VISION AND THE MISSION OF THE CONGREGATION.

- 1) The renovation plan is consistent with the congregation's mission statement:

Our Mission: to let Christ speak in our community, creating faith and enriching lives, and to build a welcoming place for children, nourishing friendships across generations
- 2) "Letting Christ speak:"
 - In particular, the plan to move the altar forward is consistent with the concern that the architecture of the worship space embody the Biblical message.
 - The biblical message is about God's healing/saving of the world; Jesus announces and embodies the kingdom of God. While the message involves individual faith and discipleship, that faith is trust in God's restoring and transforming of the human community (God reigning on earth), rather than individuals getting into heaven.
 - That altar therefore properly represents the table of the Lord rather than an altar where a sacrifice is performed on behalf of the people.
 - The altar should evoke ideas of the promise in Isaiah of God's banquet, Jesus feeding of the 5,000, the water turned to new wine of the wedding banquet, as well as the shared meal of the last Supper when Jesus gives them the new command to love one another.

- Secondly, Biblical faith is not hierarchical but communal. The church is not the pastor/priest with power on high, but a community gathered around the Word and Sacraments.
 - The reading desk and altar should be raised for the purpose of people hearing the word, but ought not to suggest power and authority.
 - The sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism are not personal events but communal actions. They are deeply significant to us individually not as private experiences, but because they bind us to Christ and one another and join us to the mission of God in the world.
- 3) “Nourishing friendships across generations.”
- In a culture that emphasizes the individual over the community, the architecture of the church should emphasize the community.
- 4) “A welcoming place for children”
- Since the Biblical message is fundamentally about the welcoming home of outcasts, the architecture of the church should make all people feel welcome.
 - Seating for the physically challenged, for example, and their ability to commune with the rest of the community, should be an important element of the worship space.
 - Children enjoy worship more when they sit close to the front, but our current architecture makes this uncomfortable for parents – especially parents of children unfamiliar with worship. Side aisles allow parents to feel that their children will be less obtrusive and easier to take out. The transept has easy access to an outside door and can be configured for children.
- 5) “Enriching lives”
- The worship space should call us beyond ourselves. It should inspire. It should be beautiful.
 - Bringing the stained glass windows forward, opening the ceiling, creating natural light, opening up the crowded rear of the sanctuary, all the elements of the long range plan are consistent with this goal.
- 6) “to our community”
- Attention to the character of our community suggests that people tend toward the exceptional rather than the ordinary – whether it is the flowers, the preaching or the architecture.