

Sanctuary Renewal – A Long and Winding Road

Steve Cook – Chair of Church Council

As we near a milestone in this long process, I thought it would be prudent to take a step back and review a bit of the background of this project, at least from my perspective. It is a project that has its roots in many beginnings – separate issues that have all come together - from moving the organ out of its hole, to redesigning the stage area, to addressing restroom deficiencies, to addressing water damage to the ceiling. It all coalesced into one major project.

Communication - Some of you may have questions and I hope this article will answer a lot of your questions. However, if it does not address your concerns or you still have questions, I want to hear them. We all must take part in the process. Nothing is set in stone. I know there are members who are opposed to any change. I want **everyone** to be a part of this process, but I also hope **everyone** will be receptive to making this communication process a 2-way street. I hope **everyone** will listen to and consider the pros of this project as well as the cons. I have asked Pastor Tom and Jerry Dittman to be available after service for the next several weeks to hear your ideas, your concerns, etc. Unfortunately, I will be out of town the next two Sundays but after that, I too, will be available after services to listen. There will also be additional, specific information and a Q&A section on the Church's website. Look for it this week at www.firstmesquiteumc.org.

Why are we doing this?

- Water damage to the ceiling and parts of the walls and asbestos issues with ceiling
- Accessible restrooms in the building for those needing the assistance of walkers or wheel chairs
- Safety concerns related to the hole in the floor where the organ is located
- Fixed prayer rail and chancel rail and the large fixed pulpit and lectern limit accessibility for varied programs and presentations
- Safety concerns related to the steep stairs leading up to the choir area
- Wiring has no ground circuit causing issues with sound quality
- Inadequate lighting in various areas of the Sanctuary and poor quality audio/visual support

When an architectural design for remodeling the chancel area was considered a few years ago, the estimated cost and scope of that project would have required us to come into compliance with new building codes and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). We still had debt related to the Family Life Center and your church leaders did not feel it was the appropriate time to take on additional debt. As we mulled over all these problems, it became obvious that restricting our focus on the chancel area was not a complete solution but ignored many other issues.

We have problems throughout the sanctuary building and all of the issues listed above must be addressed in one comprehensive plan to proceed in the most cost effective way possible. The Church Council approved hiring an architect to help us find solutions to each of those problems and the options unveiled Sunday bring us to today.

How Can We Pay for This? - Even though we have fallen far short of our aspirational budget in our giving this year, the Church continues to be in a fairly solid financial condition. Thanks to a very successful Academy Kids program and very prudent operating policies by our staff, we no longer live Sunday to Sunday as was the case a few years ago. I know we just paid off a large debt and there doesn't seem to be much appetite to take on more. I understand that. We communicated to the architect that we need to do the best we can to keep the total project costs below \$700,000. We already have about \$100,000 on deposit at Edward Jones but that isn't enough for me to be comfortable with proceeding. I would like to see a bare minimum of 20% of total project costs in the bank before any work is started. I would prefer to have 100 percent of the project cost in the bank but time is not our friend. If the congregation as a whole is behind this project, I have no concerns whatsoever about the money. I know we can manage a project of that size but I will not sugar coat this, financing this project will be a challenge. It will not be a hardship of the same scale that the FLC debt was, but

it will be a challenge nonetheless. The current condition of our sanctuary is a poor reflection of who we are. I agree that incurring large amounts of debt is not desirable, but doing nothing would be extremely irresponsible.

Why Now? - It is obvious that investment is needed in our sanctuary. I have yet to talk to anyone that doesn't recognize that. The unanswered questions are just how much and when. There are plans for hundreds of up-scale homes to be built over the next 12 - 24 months in south Mesquite and in Sunnyvale. Many of those new homeowners will be looking for a new church home. The construction business is still red hot but showing some signs of slowing down. Certainly interest rates are on the rise. I believe that in the next 12 - 24 months, we will hit a bit of a sweet spot where highly skilled workers will be available at fairly reasonable prices and interest rates will still be affordable. If we act now, we will have a renewed worship space ready to greet potential new members.

Aside from external economics, we have talent in our leadership roles that are highly skilled in areas of engineering, construction and finance who are very excited to tackle this project. We may never be better positioned from a leadership standpoint to get this done. So please, support their efforts. Offer assistance where you can. And DO NOT be a gossip. Please talk to these folks if you have questions. They would love to hear from you.

What About our Mission – *Love God, Love Neighbor, Serve the Community?*

Our mission remains our number one priority. I told Church Council on Saturday that we can have the most beautiful sanctuary on the planet and it would be meaningless if we are not focused on our mission. The most meaningful worship service I ever participated in was at night in a field in Arkansas just over 40 years ago at summer camp. There was no air conditioning, no organ, no choir, no pew cushions, and no pews – not even a drum set. Just 200 kids and God. Now I'm not proposing that we tear down the building and sit in a vacant lot singing Kumbaya but in the grand scheme of things, the building is just not that important.

However, the building is the outward shell by which we are first judged by those who don't know us and it is our Church home. Home. We all want a home we can be proud of. We have reached a point that our sanctuary detracts from our mission and for this reason, I feel it is urgent that we address it. We absolutely cannot allow differences of opinion in this drive a wedge through this Church like I've seen happen so many times before on other issues. If you have concerns or aren't happy with what is taking place, talk to me, talk to Tom, talk to any of our Church's leaders and get the facts. **WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!!!** My goal is simply to see our Church down this winding road hand in hand, whatever the outcome might be. I desperately need your willingness and help to do that. Remember, all things ARE possible with God!

Thank you for your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness,

Steve Cook