

Facility Use Research Task Force
Meeting/Building Tour with ELCA Mission Investment Fund
October 7, 2019

The Facility Use Task Force met with Ann from the ELCA Mission Investment Fund on Monday, October 7. Ann is a Church Building Consultant who helps congregations assess building needs so that facilities effectively support their mission.

Ann emphasized that church building decisions should always be made in relation to our mission and ministry priorities as identified by the congregation.

Discussion began by assessing first impressions from the eyes of a visitor. Ann recommended additional signage to help identify the front entrance. The group identified the triangle of grass near the boulevard of Court Street and the parking lot entrance leading directly towards the front entrance canopy. Other exterior wayfinding signs needed included signage at the west side to point out direct access to the Fellowship Hall, at the entrance west of the canopy to identify direct access to meeting rooms, and at other doors, such as the original main entrance to the old narthex, to help visitors find the main building entrance under the canopy.

Ann recommended identifying some parking spaces for visitor parking, and to eliminate the sign stating “No Parking on Sundays.”

Interior signage focused on wayfinding signs to direct visitors to restrooms, sanctuary, offices, fellowship hall, and elevator.

Within the sanctuary, discussion centered on how to best accommodate guests, such as eliminating the pew against the back wall to provide a more comfortable way for people to navigate between the center aisle and north side aisle. The group also discussed current worship attendance and how to best adapt to changes – whether we grow back to two services or stay at one service. Ideally, a sanctuary should be no more than 80% full and not less than 50% full. We shouldn’t be talking about adding a second service unless average attendance has the sanctuary averaging more than 80% capacity, excluding Christmas and Easter services. If we start talking about a second service at some point, one idea suggested was to use the chapel for a second service and present it as a more intimate worship experience, rather than having a second service in the main sanctuary that looks poorly attended. However, using a second location would add work for staff and others who prepare the spaces for worship.

Sight lines for the choir loft are poor. Most sitting there can’t see the altar. Ann recommended placing a second altar – an open-legged table that doesn’t block the view of the main altar – closer to the steps.

The group viewed all other spaces within the church and then focused most discussion on the Mothers’ Room and Nursery. It was recommended to leave the Mothers Room as it is, and the nursery should either be staffed by an adult, or unstaffed and used only with parental

supervision. Another option would be to close the nursery unless we identify it as an intentional ministry of the church. It should not be staffed by a minor only. If we choose to close it, in announcing the closure, it should be noted that we've made spaces within the sanctuary to serve families with young children.

Ann suggested taking on some smaller, more immediate projects – such as signage, rearranging furniture, placement of a communion altar, and possibly changes to sanctuary seating – before tackling larger projects. For larger projects, she recommended a three-step approach for us:

1. Review input gathered from the congregation three years ago during the call process. Poll the congregation again: What do you like about First Lutheran? What do you care about? What would you like to see? Keep conversation focused on mission rather than specifics about the building.
2. Talk to users of each space – both internal and external users: Does the space fit your current needs? Will it meet your needs in five years?
3. Make copies of floorplans, one set for each day. Color in the spaces used each day so people can visualize actual usage and see opportunities to use space more efficiently.

Conversation regarding immediate issues such as condition of windows, roof leaks in part of the education wing, worn carpet, and failing AC units in sanctuary: ELCA Mission Investment Fund has consultants who specialize in capital campaigns. Others are available who specialize in church projects. Avoid consultants who say they take a percentage of what is raised.

The first thing we need to determine is if the congregation has the appetite for contributing to annual giving at a level to support additional pastoral staff, for contributing to a capital campaign project, or both. A consultant can help lead us through the process of determining such feasibility.