

Sunday Service Space Needs Report from the UUCDC Sunday Morning Expansion Team

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Submitted January 22, 2010

Request

In June 2009, at the request of Rev. Peter Friedrichs, a UUCDC "Sunday Morning Expansion Team" was formed to address space expansion in the areas of Parking, Religious Education, and Sanctuary. The Team is comprised of church members Pete Bretz, Rich Cairncross, Mike Mitchell, and Connie Roggio with Peter Friedrichs providing assistance as needed. It is recognized that Expansion Committees have been created in past years. Having been involved in previous UUCDC expansion efforts, Connie Roggio has provided insight into previous findings. In addition Brad Randall and Bob McClennan have each offered input into previous findings.

Statement of Issue

Dating back to the church year 2007 - 2008, UUCDC has been experiencing Sunday morning services with full parking lots, near capacity RE classes, and service attendance regularly exceeding 80% of sanctuary capacity. The UUA generally uses 80% of capacity as a figure for recommending a congregation explore expansion. "If overcrowding persists, congregations are at best, in danger of reaching a plateau in membership, and at worst, in danger of actually shrinking." (Adding Worship Services, UUA, 2004). UUCDC has reached this 80% plateau and must develop a plan to address overcrowding in parking, children's religious education and the sanctuary, lest we experience a reduction in membership and attendance.

Parking

Our parking lot can accommodate 102 cars, including handicap, visitor and reserved spaces. During the church year 2007 - 2008, parking lot usage has been tabulated on 18 separate Sundays. The average usage was 110 cars, with a low of 66 and a high of 144. Over the course of the current year, 2009 - 2010, data has been tabulated on 11 separate Sundays. The average usage was 106 cars, with a low of 58, and a high of 150. By exceeding 100% capacity, people attending services are forced to decide where to park on the grass, if they're to attend service. It is clear that parking lot overcrowding is not a new problem, and it has been a part of our Sunday morning experience for at least several years now. When the parking lot is full to overflowing, newcomers receive a message that there is no room for them.

The following solutions were considered to solve the parking issue:

- Carpooling
- Buy or rent a bus and have selected pick-up points around the county
- Reconfigure parking spaces
- Shuttle service from Rose Tree Park, Springton Lake Middle School lots, or the Rose Tree Corporate Center
- Valet parking
- Buy or rent more land for additional parking
- Build more spaces on existing land
- Prohibit Sunday meetings to discourage two-car trips to church
- Share parking with Lutheran church
- Broadcast worship to a remote location
- Relocate church to a larger facility (existing, larger church, vacant mall/retail property)
- Add a second service
- Start a second church

Each of these solutions either requires church expenditures to increase the size of the parking lot, church members to change their current Sunday morning routine of attending service, or a church expenditure in conjunction with a change to members' routines.

Religious Education

RE attendance during the 10:30a Sunday services has been tabulated over the past two years. In general, total attendance in pre-K to 6th grade regularly is in the range 35-50 students. Some classes are reported full if not close to full. All the classrooms in the Church are being used each Sunday morning, and at times classes are held in the downstairs lobby and un-finished basement. Because three classrooms are shared with the Rose Tree Day School it is not possible to modify classroom configurations.

The following solutions were considered to solve the Religious Education overcrowding issue:

- Use Fellowship Hall for classroom space
- Non - Sunday RE classes to allow for more use of church space
- Finish/utilize basement space, including relocating various file cabinets, Thespis materials, etc.
- Dig basement space under Fellowship Hall
- Rent trailers for temporary space
- Expand building to add RE space

Each of these solutions was discussed regarding feasibility and cost. Finishing the basement space under the sanctuary to create multi-purpose rooms for classes and other church activities would provide the most flexibility. Each of these solutions requires a significant expenditure from the church, or a change to church members' routine.

Sanctuary

Attendance in the Sanctuary for the current church year 2009 - 2010 has been tabulated. In general, attendance has averaged 119 attendees. Not included in this average is the January 10, 2010 service which had over 165 attendees and the January 17, 2010 multigenerational service with an attendance of 194 children and adults (including 13 first-time visitors and not including 7 children in child care). Perhaps more telling is the total church occupancy during Sunday morning services over this past year. Occupancy has averaged 175 attendees (88% of capacity) with several services exceeding building occupancy limits of 200.

The following solutions were considered to solve the Sanctuary overcrowding issue:

- Expand the sanctuary
- Move to two services

During the construction of the sanctuary, architectural considerations were made to allow for expansion of the sanctuary. While requiring additional construction costs, an expanded sanctuary could easily accommodate 100 additional attendees. However, this would require relocation of church offices.

Recommendation

Our initial approach to solving these problems, was to consider them each as separate problems. However, it has become apparent that we cannot solve one problem without increasing overcrowding in the other areas. By only providing more parking spaces, we will allow for more people to attend RE classes and Sunday services which are both at or near capacity. Expanding the sanctuary to allow for more people to attend services will require more parking, and potentially more space for RE classes. It is therefore our recommendation that the church add a second worship service on Sunday mornings. Two services, if structured correctly, will encourage a below 80% capacity attendance at each service, while allowing for an overall attendance at both services to grow. As a by-product, parking lot overcrowding will be reduced. The two service structure will also allow for parents of RE children to attend a service while their child(ren) are in RE.

The Expansion Team, with the church staff and other interested volunteers, will immediately begin evaluation of an optimum structure for two services. It is recommended that the church investigate thoroughly previous efforts by the church to sustain 2 services. The congregation will be consulted and advised in an open and transparent process as we develop a plan to add a second service. The Expansion Team will present a proposal for implementing two services at the May congregational meeting, at which time the congregation will vote whether or not to proceed. It is this Team's recommendation to begin to hold two Sunday worship services in September of 2010.

Respectfully submitted,

The UUCDC Sunday Morning Expansion Team