

Three Directions--Congregational Discussion

The congregation will hold three meetings to discuss three possible paths St Paul could follow. Each meeting will focus on one of the paths and use the Road Ahead document to structure the conversation.

- The first meeting: Keep two focal points for our ministry
- The second meeting: Return ministry to downtown
- The third meeting: Move ministry to the school

The goal is to explore our options and capabilities, and prepare us to pick a direction at the September Congregational Assembly.

Brief background: The 20/20 plan was decided upon, and the congregation began to implement it. Along the way, we lost staff, faced financial challenges, and have not grown as originally planned. Our members continue worship in a gym at Earhart. Our budget is trying to maintain ministry at two locations, without the growth that was expected to help support it. This is a good opportunity to re-evaluate the direction God would like St Paul to follow. These discussions are intended to help everyone explore and more fully understand the advantages and challenges of each option.

First meeting, June 9

The first path: Keep worship at both sites and develop both to the best of our ability.

Second meeting, July 26

The second path: consolidate worship activities at the Liberty site

Discussion comments & questions from June & July meetings below:

Question: Are we limited to these three paths?

Response: To help work through the discussion, the first meetings will stay focused on the Road Ahead paths. If the congregation would like to explore other possibilities, these discussions could be added to the third meeting, or a fourth meeting might be held. This way information can be prepared and provided beforehand to give more shape to the factors involved in the other paths.

Question: Has anyone discussed dividing the congregation into two bodies?

Response: For many years, the congregation has considered it very important that it not be divided. In the self-study survey, the vast majority of the congregation members said they wanted to maintain St. Paul as one congregation (meaning the body, not the locations).

Question: Has anyone considered making Earhart a mission congregation?

Response: [This question was tabled for possible discussion at a later meeting]

Question: When the congregation voted to establish a worship site at the school, was it decided to give up worship at Liberty?

Response: No. The 20/20 plan was to develop worship at both sites.

Question: What is meant by "discipleship" in the stated challenge: "This is the option that demands the highest commitment to discipleship on the part of the congregation in order to make it work"?

Response: In order to successfully focus ministry at two sites, a high level of discipleship is essential. Members need to volunteer quickly and easily. To support more staff, more offerings will be necessary. A third pastor will be required, so that the congregation can maintain a connection between sites without spreading the pastors too thin. Discipleship includes a devotion to reaching out to those around the church--being concerned about a community many of us don't live near or know well.

Question: Does the same standard of discipleship/outreach apply to Earhart?

Response: Outreach at Earhart comes more easily. The people the Earhart ministry reaches are attracted to the school and are drawn from a wide area.

Question: How would we use three pastors?

Response: The 20/20 plan was to have one pastor committed to each site, and a third one to administer over both sites. During the congregational self-study, Jeff asked Pastor Kasper how many pastors he would expect to support a church the size of St Paul. Pastor Kasper replied that he would expect 5 pastors because of the school and the size of the congregation.

Question: Regardless of whether worship is held at Earhart, St Paul still has 2 sites to maintain. Will moving all worship to Liberty save money?

Response: The weekly service at Earhart does not cost much, other than the cost to staffing. But, how long will people be happy worshipping in a gym? Building a new sanctuary is a major cost.

Question: How much time do volunteers put into setting up and taking down worship at Earhart? Is it a significant amount of time that could be invested in outreach?

Response: Typically it takes 6-10 people 1 1/2 hours each week.

Question: Many of the listed challenges of the first path are a consequence of having worship at Earhart. What have been the benefits of establishing worship there?

Response: When a service reaches around 80% full, congregational growth has tended to stop. An expected benefit of splitting the congregation's worship between 2 sites was the creation of more room. Based on earlier church plants, we expected the congregation to grow into the opened space. This has not happened. Another challenge is that we did not adequately anticipate how 2 sites would impact staff presence (teachers, pastors, and office workers). However, having worship at Earhart has given the school staff and school families a better sense of the school as a place of ministry. Further, worshipping in the gym has led at least one member to look at worship in a different way. She stopped focusing on the space so much.

Question: Why couldn't extra services be added at Liberty, instead of having services at Earhart?

Response: While some members could walk to church, many drive. Our limited number of parking spaces can be a hindrance. The bulk of worshipers want to worship on Sunday mornings. If we want to consider other days and times, we would have to determine who is willing to attend and what their preferences are. Different groups of people may be more drawn to different times or days. For example, many college kids may appreciate an even later service on Sundays.

Question: The school is close to several other LCMS churches. How would moving all of our worship to Earhart impact these other congregations and our relationship with them? Also, wouldn't this increase the competition for members, making it harder to grow?

Response: Each church attracts different groups of people. Individuals seek specific values, styles of worship and ministries, and will drive to wherever the thing sought is located. The

congregations complement each other, instead of compete. The worship at Earhart for the past decade has not negatively impacted these other churches. St Paul tends to be attractive to those who are a bit more conservative and typically drive in from areas surrounding Ann Arbor.

Question: If St Paul tends to attract those who live around Ann Arbor and drive in, why does having our worship at Liberty mean that our focus is on reaching down town, instead of the group we already appeal to?

Response: We can meet the needs of people who live downtown, too. Canvassing the area did get people to come, and they continue to come, because we are a church family. We want to grow, but we also need to continue to minister to those who are already here.

Question: What do we need to do as a congregation to grow and support worship and buildings at both places?

Response: The congregation needs to be invigorated and to refresh its spirit. We can't afford a level of complacency if we want to continue with as broad of a ministry as we have now. We will need more giving and much more volunteering. The question is what we want to invest in. The church buildings need refreshing to be attractive. For example, a foundation needs repair and rooms have not been painted for over a quarter of a century. We also need to invest in enough staff to handle the spread out ministry.

The congregation needs to be willing to do something different and to loosen some traditions in order to reach out to others in need of a church home. This can be a real challenge. For example, the Saturday night worship service was originally intended to be more contemplative and to be inviting to those who are not as comfortable with a traditional church service. However, over time, we turned this service into a typical Sunday service that happens to be held on Saturday night.

Question: What forms of outreach was Pastor Wentzel trying to accomplish? Was there an outreach committee?

Response: Pastor Wentzel put quite a bit of effort into a number of outreach ministries. He was looking for people who were particularly interested in reaching residents of the Old West Side. There are lots of people who worship at Liberty that could get involved, but it hasn't happened. He also asked various members if they would be willing to move to Earhart if a new sanctuary was built there, and was often told "yes." These things made Pastor Wentzel believe that there was not a deep commitment to ministering to the people in the area around the Liberty site.

It would be nice to get a pastor with outreach strengths. We have quite a mixture of people within a half-mile radius of Liberty including the homeless, Old West Siders, and young condo-dwellers. We need to consider how important the souls around us are compared with any particular site.

Question: How many preschool families come to church, participate in church activities, and/or become members?

Response: The preschools serves a variety of families including those lapsed in their faith, the unchurched, and members of other congregations. The important thing is that many are specifically looking for a Christian program for their children. The goal is to minister to families, whether they join St Paul or not.

Question: Looking 5-10 years down the road, is it economically feasible to try to maintain 2 sites? Is there a real concern now that this could be an issue?

Response: Yes, the last 3-4 years, we have had difficulties meeting the budget. John Burch is putting together a committee to look at the past, the current financial health, and our capability to grow. The committee will investigate St Paul's financial sustainability. The raw maintenance and facilities cost for the 2 sites together in 2014 was about \$327,000. In 2011 Liberty's raw expenses were \$118,000 and in 2014 they were \$142,000. Earhart cost \$185,000 in 2011 and \$186,000 in 2014.

Challenges stated for the first path:

At times it feels like a house divided.

The congregational self-study revealed that many members believe that our weaknesses stem from having spread ourselves so thin. Opportunities such Sunday school have been very difficult to provide. It has also reduced pastoral presence at both sites.

Thinning out has reduced some of the opportunities that are good for our children's faith walk. Keeping our resources together does not merely have an economic impact. Concentrating resources may be critical to the viability of the Congregation's faith as well.

A challenge is developing the worship site at Earhart. Some members who worshiped at Earhart returned to Liberty, because they got tired of worshipping in a gym.

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Third meeting, August 30

This was an informational session for questions and comments regarding the consolidation of worship and congregational activities at Earhart.

Question: All of our school ministries are important. If worship is focused at Earhart, how could we continue the downtown preschool? Would they lose their facility?

Response: If the congregation chooses to consolidate the ministry at Earhart, it will then need to decide whether or not to continue the Liberty preschool. If so, they will need to decide whether to acquire or develop another facility; or to make an agreement with whatever body takes over Liberty that the preschool could continue to use the facilities.

The preschool at the Liberty site serves about 50 families and 55 children from infant to 5 years old. The site is the only Christian center in the area for infant and toddlers that is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The Liberty preschool is licensed to serve 42 children a day, so ideally, new facilities would need to accommodate at least that many. Most of the families served at Liberty live or work downtown or at the University of Michigan.

Question: How many of our Liberty preschool, Earhart preschool, and day school families are assimilated into St Paul? Are these families typically from different faiths?

Response: The Liberty preschool serves a mixture of families. Quite a few are already St Paul members. Many of the families are looking for a Christian program, and are from other congregations. Unchurched families also have children at the preschool. The families are invited to attend services, but Nancy Rosenzweig says a lot more can be done as a congregation to invite these households into the St Paul family.

Some families do come through the program and become members. The new member class starting in September has around 30 people, many of whom have children at Earhart. Pastor Neuendorf observed that in 2012, most new members began at the Liberty site. Since Rachel Potts began as admissions counselor, most begin at Earhart--probably due to being invited to the Earhart community and services. Now, the new members who start at Liberty are primarily people who looked on the Internet for an LCMS church in the area.

Rachel Potts, who is the director of admissions, said that about 1/3 of the kindergarteners come from the preschool programs. This year, one of those came from the Liberty program. Quite a few of the preschoolers who continue on in St Paul's kindergarten are from unchurched families.

Question: How many families with children at St Paul Lutheran School leave once their kids are through school?

Response: Unfortunately we don't have those numbers.

Pastor noted that the families that leave are often people who have been really involved in the congregation. While they are here, we get to share the Gospel with them. However, the family also contributes to the body of St Paul; the service goes both ways while they are here.

It isn't only school families that leave. St Paul has lots of coming and going. Pastor estimates that about 1/2 of the membership has changed in the 14 years he has served here. There are many reasons for changes in membership, including deaths, new jobs, and moves to new communities. John Burch also noted the high turnover when looking through old directories. St Paul needs to consider how it reaches families with the Gospel, so that when families leave, they are carrying the Gospel with them.

Question: Are the children who leave St Paul still in God's kingdom and serving the Lord?

Response: God has provided St Paul with lots of families with lots of children to serve. We are able to share His Word with them at a time when they are particularly open to receiving the Word and growing in it.

Question: Would the presence of a sanctuary at Earhart have an impact on the spiritual life of the students who attend St Paul School? Would going to chapel each day at the same place where they worship with their families have an effect?

Response: A church working side by side with a school can't be found everywhere and is valuable. However, whatever path the congregation chooses, Bob Burgess is ready to make it work. The main goal is to bring the children closer to God. If the sanctuary is in one place, and the school in another, it still can work, God is everywhere. Bob saw that St Paul students were able to truly worship in the bleachers.

When the sanctuary is at the same site as the school, the children have increased opportunities to see adult Christians at funerals and other activities. It can also mean additional adults are more involved at the school, ready to do activities with the kids.

Regardless of where the sanctuary is, the important thing is to have a place that draws in people. Bob pointed out that we should make the road chosen into a freeway. Whatever is chosen, we are going someplace!

Question: If ministry is consolidated at Earhart, how do St Paul's staff members think that will impact their respective programs?

Response: Tom Strode thinks the music program would benefit. Consolidation would provide a needed critical mass, which would engender even more numbers of people to participate. A

couple of years ago, the staff did an assessment of who was involved at each site in the various programs. The choir had about 30 members, but they were split between 2 sites.

Kathy Duvendeck finds it difficult to build community when the youth are split between two sites. The students in last year's 8th grade confirmation class were from 15-16 different schools. Youth in particular, like to be with one another, and critical mass is very important. Additionally, having 3 or more adult mentors makes a huge impact on keeping kids in the faith. When the youth are split between sites, it is difficult for them to forge and maintain these various relationships. Kathy also notes that it is logistically very difficult to effectively use time and money when the ministry is split over two sites. She thinks that bringing all of the staff together on one site is very important for efficiency and effectiveness of ministry.

Nancy Rosenzweig shared that the preschool program is not easily consolidated. The Liberty and Earhart sites serve two very different populations of families, who tend to use the center that is close to where they work or live. Physical space is also a problem. The different phases of building plans at Earhart do not include additional space for the preschool programs to add classes there.

Comment: If a sanctuary is built, as many members of the congregation as possible need to be engaged in making it happen. Otherwise, most of the debt will need to be payable by maybe as few as 35 families. If the loan was for \$6.5 million at 4% interest over 30 years, Mark Smith calculates the payments would need to be close to \$900 per month for each of those families. Even if the congregation signs a loan of only \$4.4 million, he calculates the monthly increase for 35 families would be \$600-\$675 per month. This does not include costs for insurance, maintenance, and utilities.

Comment: It is not only the current families who will need to pay off the mortgage. Quite a few of the more elderly members attending these Road Ahead meetings "won't last long enough" to pay it off. The future membership will need to be able to pay it, too.

Question: The number of people in the population who are interested in joining a conservative church seems to be shrinking. If the church is deeply in debt, will it really be able to grow enough to carry the debt?

Response: John Burch shared that St Paul has a current debt of about \$1.9 million held by the Church Extension Fund. This indebtedness is secured by all of the facilities at Earhart and Liberty. CEF is the source for borrowing, and they say they can reasonably service a maximum debt of \$2 million to a church the size of St Paul.

Comment: Steve Kemp is a CPA who has served as both treasurer and President of St Paul. So far, St Paul has managed to carry its debt, but Steve wondered if it was possible for St Paul to carry more if it decided to build the sanctuary, at an estimated cost of \$5.5 million.

- If the Liberty properties are sold, he thinks we could get roughly \$2.5 million, based on appraisals done 2 years ago when the rental house on Third Street was sold.

- It is possible to have a 5-year campaign to raise giving 25% of current offering amount. In the 80's and 90's, St Paul successfully did so. This would raise approximately \$1.5 million dollars.
- Steve reviewed the 2014 budget detail and determined that about \$110,000 was budgeted that year to maintain and run the Liberty buildings. Some of that cost would transfer over to Earhart if the buildings were sold and a sanctuary was built, but quite a bit would be saved. If the savings were \$55,000, that would be roughly half of the annual debt financing in our current budget. We currently have about \$2 million in financing. Potentially we could obtain an additional \$1 million and pay for it without impacting our operating budget, because of the savings from only having one site.
- Steve noted that a new total debt level of \$3 million sounds like a lot, but this is a debt being taken on by the entire church family. With roughly \$2 million in operating revenue (all sources) this would be the equivalent of a family with \$80,000 in annual income carrying a mortgage of \$120,000

Steve believes it is possible to take on more debt and build the sanctuary. He estimates about 1/2 million dollars-worth of the project would need to wait until the money could be raised later. For instance, wait to build the special driveways and entry ways.

We don't want to take on too much debt, but we need to move forward. Ultimately, we want to go where God would have St Paul go, and we know that God will make it possible. If God leads us to consolidate at Earhart, it is important to get the details on paper, keep the inertia going, and build things as we get the money.

Comment: We want a balanced budget to work with. In his service on the Special Gifts Committee, Herb Frederick has noticed that not enough needs are being put into the budget. Instead, those needs are often being requested from Special Gifts. He stated that needs should be in the budget to begin with, and money should not be spent if the church does not have it. Right now, Herb believes the church is not following this principle.

Comment: Each decision has different impacts and affects the numbers in various ways. For example, if Liberty was sold and some families left, would this seriously impact the weekly offerings amount? To be able to make an informed decision, a member would like more details from the officers of the church. He would like to see the decisions presented as packages, with the different pieces made clear, and the numbers that go with them stated.

Comment: The decision should be based on additional information from these meetings passed on to the entire congregation. Paper ballots should also be provided for the final decision.

Response: John Burch said that the church officers will try to get the information out to as many members of the congregation as they can. They want as many individuals as possible to be part of the decision. With this goal in mind, the Parish Council has decided to hold the actual decision meeting right after the All-One-Family service, with child care provided for young children.

Question: How will we include those who can't attend the decision meetings? Is an absentee ballot possible?

Opportunities and challenges stated for the third path:

Consolidating ministry at Earhart would be advantageous in several ways.

- 1) Members know where to park at Liberty, but guests often do not. Earhart has ample parking and superior access for the elderly and handicapped.
- 2) Consolidating ministry at Earhart would reduce the duplication of effort required from the staff, and stop the staff from being spread so thin. These things cause burnout.
- 3) Ideas have difficulty flourishing with the congregation spread between two sites.
- 4) Some members are tired of worshipping in a gym.
- 5) There could be a total church presence entirely at one site. Bringing back unity as a congregation can make us more inviting to those around us. Many families stay afterward the All-One-Family service and talk. It would be great to be able to do that every Sunday.
- 6) The Liberty structure has become dated. It may not be as inviting to youth looking for a more modern church. The Liberty property has grown in worth. Should it be sold so that money can be used to grow God's kingdom in a new structure?

Beth Frederick is excited about the possibilities. She wonders if God is preparing St Paul to plant another congregation. A wonderful mix of people who need to know about their loving savior is located within a 1/2 mile radius of the Liberty site: the elderly, non-Christians, young families, very wealthy people, homeless people, people in low-income housing, and mentally ill individuals. The Liberty site is a perfect location to reach out and start relationships with them all. If St Paul consolidates at Earhart and focuses on continued care of children, another church could be planted at the Liberty location. That plant might be very different from St Paul. At first St Paul would need to support the plant with members, staff, and other resources. Such a move would require a lot of vision, education, work, and the power of the Holy Spirit, but it is possible. St Paul has been blessed to plant several congregations: Peace, St. Luke, Divine Shepherd, and Whitmore Lake.

A member would like to see the church build in how its members support each other--from meals after surgery to help with projects. If this care for each other is strong, he believes it will be easier to more easily reach out to others. He thinks communication is a key component. He thinks that having each elder contact specific families has been a good step. He would like to see more small groups started, and more use of the website and emails to inform members of specific needs to care for.

If the church does decide to consolidate ministry to one site, Tom Strode hopes to continue to have a pipe organ for worship services. One option would be to move the pipe organ that is currently at Liberty to Earhart.

The school is important. The needs of the people of the Old West Side are also a consideration. St Paul needs to get excited about what its mission is. Consolidation might bring back the energy like that experienced when the school was started and St Paul was growing rapidly.

A member observed that the Sunday services continue to have fewer attendees. He thinks that closing Liberty would further reduce the number of St Paul members. Instead, he would like St Paul to first focus on growth by offering a different type of service, like a contemporary or praise service at least once each weekend. This might attract younger people. If the congregation grew, then the church could consider building a new, larger sanctuary.

Each member needs to remember what our purpose is as a congregation. We are to be witnesses for Jesus Christ, wherever we are as a congregation and as individuals. Any decision we make should enhance that purpose.

We have faith that God has a plan for St Paul.