

## **The Planning Behind Plymouth Church's Emerging Expansion Proposal**

The church expansion proposal that is emerging this fall is actually the result of a multi-year planning process. In order to ensure that any proposal would be consistent with future needs of the church, definitive answers were required for four questions:

1. What mission components most accurately define the mission we envision for our church?
2. What current factors most limit our ability to fulfill this mission?
3. How large should the ministry on this site grow before additional church sites become a better alternative? (Given the size of our property and the high-density zone we now find ourselves in, growing our site will become increasingly difficult.)
4. What would future facilities need to look like in order to support the mission of this fully-grown church?

In the fall of 2002, the Church Council created a Strategic Planning Committee to address the first three of these questions with the help of Alice Mann, a senior consultant at the Alban Institute. Based on the results of open meetings with a large number of church leaders, mission and value statements were developed and approved at the July 2003 Church Council meeting and can be seen today in the narthex. These same open meetings were also used to generate a list of change factors that church leaders believed were most needed to support our mission. Using this list along with concepts that had been developed by Alice Mann, three factors were determined by the committee to be of greatest need:

- The size and configuration of our paid staff
- The infrastructure in place to support member care and involvement in the church
- The capacity of our facilities to support our main services and programs (in particular, the space available for Christian Education programs and the low number of available seats at our 10:45 service).

To address the ultimate size of the congregation at our site, the Strategic Planning Committee conducted a Worship Attendance Growth survey to ascertain the collective vision of our congregation. Seventy-four responses were returned, representing approximately 150 members of our congregation. Two questions, in particular, helped define this vision:

- When asked to select a planned target weekly attendance level (the point at which we stop growing at this site and begin to divert our energy toward spawning a new congregation at a different site), roughly 74% chose a target of 450 people - roughly the capacity of two services (the remainder was evenly split between those wanting smaller and larger goals).
- When asked whether we should we plan for a larger sanctuary that allows us all to worship at a single time, or continue to utilize our existing sanctuary with multiple services to achieve our attendance goal, roughly 82% chose to continue using the existing sanctuary.

These responses, which showed that the congregation is fairly united in its vision, became the basis for the committee's proposal.

In January 2004, the Strategic Planning Committee presented its final report for adoption by the Church Council. For those who did not get a copy of this Strategic Plan, which clearly defines both program and facilities directions for our church, one can be obtained through the church office and is well worth the time to read it.

Through its adoption of the Strategic Plan, the Church Council chartered the Long Range Planning Committee to develop a Facilities Master Plan that followed the proposed facilities directions. The Long Range Planning Committee began this development by enlisting the

services of RB&B architects in February 2004 and conducting group meetings with church leaders and staff in the following functional areas: Christian Education, Youth Programs, Music, Sanctuary, Facilities, Fellowship, Kitchen, and Other Programs. Based on the results of these meetings, the committee made a preliminary Master Plan proposal to the congregation in October 2004 and solicited feedback, which, among other things, improved its ability to meet the needs of our music program. The current version of the Master Plan was adopted by Church Council in February 2005 and is now available for the basis for expansion proposals.

Also through its adoption of the Strategic Plan, the Church Council chartered a Capital Campaign Exploratory Committee to develop a Capital Campaign Proposal that addresses the top-priority needs of our church. To accomplish this task, this committee was charged to enlist the support of an appropriate consultant to establish priorities based on areas of greatest need and congregation support (including facilities improvement, organ and mission giving) and to investigate the feasibility and scope of a capital campaign based on them. Through much deliberation and additional open meetings with the congregation, this committee is now poised to present its findings to the congregation.

It will be exciting this fall to finally see the fruits of all of these labors. We are truly grateful for the enormous amount of work that so many church members and staff have put into this effort.

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