Proposal for Shared Space

Background

In July 2014, the First Methodist Ad-Hoc Leadership Committee recommended, and the Administrative Board affirmed, that we would not (1) split Downtown and Westchase into two different churches; (2) merge Westchase with another United Methodist congregation; or (3) sell the Westchase campus.

This has not changed.

The Committee made two recommendations that are pertinent. First, that a task force be organized to investigate opportunities to increase Westchase campus facilities’ usage and revenues, and second, to significantly reduce or eliminate the Westchase campus financial gap of approximately $800,000 by the end of 2017.

Progress has been made. Giving at Westchase has increased by approximately $50,000 and reductions in staff, while painful, have lowered costs.

A task force has been studying other feasible revenue sources, including the possibility of leasing a portion of the Westchase property, on the corner of Westpark and Beltway 8. To date, this option is still under consideration. If we were to secure a lease for the property, the revenue generated is not likely to exceed $100,000 annually and would reduce available parking spaces.

Another idea under consideration is the possibility of selling the property we own at 3663 Westcenter, the Youth Building. This property is owned by our Foundation. If we sold it, the sales proceeds would go into the Foundation rather than the church’s general operating funds. Still a positive, it could potentially generate as much as $50,000 - $80,000 annually in earnings from the invested principal and we would also benefit from reduced operating costs.

In other words, if giving increases by $50,000 annually and we continue to pursue other options, we could narrow the Westchase financial gap. However, even with these efforts, it is difficult to see how the gap can be resolved by 2017.

This is where the Ad-Hoc Committee’s recommendations effectively left off, recommending vigilance through regular financial reviews and that we continue to seek innovative ideas.

What has changed since July 2014?

First, the church took steps to reorganize the staff in order to bring the two campuses into a closer working partnership. We have also developed a strategic evangelistic outreach (Deep and Wide), and
built more advertising into the 2015 budget. Along with these initiatives has been the goal to grow the contemporary worship service at Westchase.

Early in 2014, Apoc Antu began as Worship Leader for the Westchase contemporary service. Apoc and the worship team energized the congregation and Apoc is excited about the opportunity to make disciples through that service. The worship center, however, creates several challenges to what he and his team are trying to achieve. First, there is the cavernous space, which does not lend itself to the intimacy of a contemporary worship experience. Second, the configuration and furnishings in the sanctuary are traditional and can be barriers to creating a genuine contemporary worship setting. (By contrast, look at hillsong.com and watch a video of their worship services.)

Independent of any other circumstances, Apoc suggested that we consider moving the contemporary service out of the main worship center. To do so would require re-tasking the Stansbury space. This idea was in its infancy when Bishop Huie called Dr. Wende with a unique proposal, as described below.

Proposal

What is the proposal that is under consideration?
First Methodist was approached by our Bishop, Janice Huie, to consider sharing our Westchase facility with Covenant Glen United Methodist Church for an agreed upon monthly fee and for a specified period of time between 36 and 60 months. The agreement would include an option for early termination that either party could exercise should the arrangement prove unsatisfactory.

Why did Bishop Huie approach First Methodist with regard to Covenant Glen?
Bishop Huie saw two needs: Covenant Glen has outgrown its worship space and has a sale pending for its property. They are in need of a “home” while they raise funds for a capital campaign. Bishop Huie also knows that First Methodist Westchase has a 2200 seat worship center that is under-utilized and that we have worked to strengthen our finances in order to increase our ministry and evangelistic outreach. She is keenly aware of under-utilized assets within our conference, such as those at First Methodist, that might be used to further Kingdom Work. She believes that there is great potential in a collaboration between the two churches that could result in a positive future and faith energy for both congregations, the chance to enlarge the church in a more diverse setting, and to possibly become a new ministry model that exemplifies the synergy present when two churches help each other.

When were we approached and what is the timeline for making a decision?
Bishop Huie contacted Dr. Wende on March 2, who responded by calling Dr. Clines to consult with him and then calling Larry Harman, Chair of our Administrative Board. Dr. Wende then brought together a team of lay leaders representing both campuses for the purpose of exploring the possibility of sharing space with Covenant Glen. They met with the Bishop on March 9. Meetings with the various lay leadership committees and staff began shortly afterwards to consider implications. Covenant Glen has
signed a sales contract on their current property with another church who will plan to close the contract in mid-May. Covenant Glen would remain on the property until the first of August.

On March 24, the team of First Methodist lay leaders met directly with leaders from Covenant Glen. With significant information now in hand, First Methodist will hold church-wide meetings on April 12 at both campuses to provide a briefing and to let all of our members begin to discuss and pray about this possibility.

Who is Covenant Glen United Methodist Church?
Dr. Robert Childress has been the pastor of Covenant Glen United Methodist Church for more than 25 years. Membership at Covenant Glen, located in Missouri City, has grown from 35 to an average of 800 to 1,000 in Sunday worship attendance. It is predominantly an African-American congregation that aspires to become more diverse. Approximately 60% live in Missouri City, 15% live in the communities that border Missouri City and 25% travel considerable distance to worship at Covenant Glen. Wednesday night Bible study is an important component of their spiritual growth. They have a strong outreach program that has included community development with a newly constructed subdivision. It currently focuses on family ministries, prison outreach, and local missions.

How is this proposal different from 2014 conversations regarding Covenant Glen?
The current proposal is not for a merger or for our congregations to unite, it is simply to share space. It is possible that the two congregations might discover ways to share resources or work more efficiently by working together in specific situations. However, Bishop Huie has explicitly discouraged a merger. Protecting the distinct identity and legacy of each church is an important priority for First Methodist and Covenant Glen.

How does this proposal support the mission and strategic planning of First Methodist?
Two major goals for the Westchase campus were identified by the plan adopted by our Administrative Board in July 2014. Those goals were to increase attendance at the Westchase campus and to improve its financial strength. We believe that the proposal under consideration has the potential to support these goals. First, we believe it could situate our Westchase campus for the opportunity to reach more individuals for Christ by creating a more effective contemporary worship space. (See section on contemporary worship.) In addition, this would position our Westchase campus as a unique Christian community that ministers to all people, offering Biblically based worship in a variety of stylistically different services and settings. Finally, this proposal would provide the possibility of financial support for the immediate needs of the Stansbury renovations, and then, on-going support for evangelistic and ministry outreach.

How will the decision be made?
Our Coordinating Committee (made up of leaders from both campuses) and the various administrative committees have taken on the responsibility for investigating and exploring the feasibility, advantages, and disadvantages of this proposal. In doing so, they have spent time with representatives from the
Covenant Glen leadership team, First Methodist staff, representatives from the Texas Annual Conference, and our District Superintendent. If a recommendation from the Coordinating Committee is made to the church, the final decision will be made at a called Charge Conference, a meeting led by our District Superintendent with our Administrative Board, in which a vote is taken.

**Logistical Considerations**

*What steps have been taken to ensure the financial viability of this agreement?*
Covenant Glen has provided audited financial statements which are being reviewed by staff from the First Methodist finance office, as well as leaders on the Finance Committee.

*What is the likelihood that current Covenant Glen worshipers would make a transition to a new location, such as the Westchase campus?*
Dr. Childress is confident that 80-90% of his congregation will follow him to a new location and would enthusiastically embrace the transition.

*What type of legal agreement will be considered?*
Because the agreement would be for shared space, rather than traditional leased space, we are being advised by legal counsel to consider a license agreement rather than a rental or lease contract.

*Would the funds generated by a license agreement directly benefit the Westchase campus?*
We are one church. The funds generated will significantly reduce the financial gap between giving at Westchase and its share of operating expenses. These funds will make possible stronger financial support for the Stansbury renovations, then, ministering to our members and evangelistic outreach.

*What are the incremental costs, such as insurance, security, electricity, technology, housekeeping, maintenance, etc. and how have these been factored into the evaluation of the proposed fee payments?*
There will be some greater expense as a result of greater usage. These will be addressed in the licensing agreement, so that these shared costs are paid by both churches based on usage.

**Contemporary Worship Considerations**

*What are the reasons that we are considering the possibility of renovating the Stansbury Building as a contemporary worship setting?*
While moving from the worship center setting to a smaller setting may feel, to some, as if they are giving up something, those who specialize in this worship style tell us that a modern contemporary space that is designed to be smaller and more intimate has proven to increase a sense of community for those who are gathered, create a more energized worship environment, and provide a means for the worship team and pastor to more fully engage with the congregation. The smaller setting also allows us the opportunity to improve the sound quality and light at a lower cost than in a large space like the worship center. Please see the end of this document for more information on this important consideration.
What does the contemporary worship leader think about the plans to renovate Stansbury?
“People are looking for a vision. We have a dynamic worship experience, powerful preaching, and ways for people to connect. We already have a lot of things in place and what we lack is the environment. This renovation allows that last piece to be put in place. If we are serious about the contemporary service, this is the next step. For some people, legacy is found in the building but millennials are not impressed by pews. They are impressed by what we are doing and why. For millennials, legacy is more about the impact we’ve left on the earth.” Apoc Antu, Contemporary Worship Leader

Is the contemporary service moving because Covenant Glen needs the space?
Although informal discussions (i.e. talking and dreaming) about the possibility of moving the contemporary service began as early as fall and winter 2014, no substantive plans had been developed. The shared space needs of Covenant Glen became a catalyst for moving the project forward.

Why not use the Youth Building?
Unfortunately, the Youth Building does not have enough seating to accommodate the Contemporary Service and it is structurally not suited to the needs (i.e. stage, ceiling height, etc.). Plus, since the target audience will be young adults, the nursery needs to be in close proximity to the worship location, rather than across the street.

What if the congregation outgrows the space?
We estimate that the renovated Stansbury Building will accommodate up to 400. If the attendance at this service grows beyond capacity, which is our hope and expectation, a second service will be added.

Shared Space Considerations

Has a space feasibility study been conducted?
Yes. Members of the First Methodist leadership team have studied the current space usage of First Methodist Westchase and Covenant Glen to determine if enough space is available. The review included space considerations for worship, children and youth, adult education, outreach, administration, choir, and clubs, such as Boy Scouts. It appears that there is sufficient space for both churches to host the events and activities they are accustomed to offering, with the understanding that some adjustments will be made for times and schedules.

How would our traditional worship service be impacted if we shared space?
The 9:15 traditional service will remain unchanged in format, style, and location.

How would other space considerations be made?

Office space? The office space in the Youth Building and the renovation of the children’s nursery area, including current offices and classroom space, provide sufficient space for administrative offices for both churches.
Children and youth? Assuming that children and youth from the two churches meet separately, youth would perhaps meet in Quillian and in the Youth Building. Children will share classrooms at Wesley Academy. Space for large group children’s worship is limited to the Ripple Room (capacity approximately 100).

Adult education? Covenant Glen has limited need for adult education meeting locations on Sunday mornings as their congregation tends to come together during the week for Bible study. Therefore, Westchase and Covenant Glen adults will have sufficient space by making use of Wesley Academy classrooms. When necessary, larger groups can be accommodated in the chapel.

All the other events/activities that take place on our Westchase campus? Events that take place during the week such as Stitches of Glory, DGroups, choir practice, etc. will be largely unaffected, while providing ample space for Covenant Glen weekly activities. Our choirs do not typically rehearse on the same evening.

What if we run out of space? If we run out of space that means that God is working in a tremendous way! If that should occur Covenant Glen has expressed their willingness to adjust schedules so that our shared space agreements can succeed. We have space to meet the needs of both congregations for the foreseeable future. Calendaring conflicts will be handled the same way we presently handle calendaring issues. First Methodist will continue to maintain and set the calendar of events on the Westchase campus.

What renovations would be necessary to accommodate the needs of both campuses? In order to accommodate the needs of both churches, renovations would be necessary to remodel the Stansbury Building to host the contemporary service and to reconfigure the early childhood (i.e. nursery) offices and classrooms as office space.

How would we guide worshipers to the various locations? A communications plan will be designed for members of both churches, as well as visitors. Several possible solutions to this question have been offered, which include signage and parking lot greeters to welcome and direct individuals. We believe that we can learn from other churches who are successfully sharing space.

Do we have adequate parking for Sunday morning? We presently have 660 parking spaces. Given the “in and out” of Sunday morning traffic, that is enough for approximately 1,650 people, not including the street parking surrounding the church. When we grow to exceed that number we have parking opportunities down the street with companies that we presently use for Wonderland parking.
What is the potential impact on Wesley Academy?
Wesley Academy’s present operations will not be affected. The proposed plan for sharing space may require that the classrooms currently used during the week for early childhood also be used for church events on weekends and sometimes, week nights. A greater number of Wesley classrooms may be used during non-school hours for small groups and adult education. Wesley Academy will continue to use the Stansbury Building for the activities that currently take place in that location, such as lunch, physical education, chapel, and special events.

What is the potential impact on Quillian?
Quillian’s present operations will not be affected. The proposed plan for sharing space may require the use of the Quillian facilities to accommodate junior and senior high youth on Sunday mornings. Set up would include the placement of a protective covering on the gymnasium floor, as well as moving chairs, etc. Some adjustments in start times for Sunday recreation events hosted at Quillian would need to be considered. Quillian will continue to use the Stansbury Building for the activities that currently take place in that location, including lunch for summer campers and large space for gross motor activities, such as gymnastics.

How is our new Westchase campus pastor, Rev. Leo Tyler, being informed and involved in the proposal under consideration?
Our pastors and administrative staff are communicating frequently with Rev. Tyler to keep him abreast of plans and discussions. He is excited to see how God is working in the First Methodist congregation.

Report of Director of New Church Development for the Texas Annual Conference
Because the repositioning of the contemporary worship is so crucial to this proposal, the report concerning this worship follows.

I met Apoc Antu at the Westchase campus for an assessment and evaluation of current and possible worship space. We spent considerable time walking the sanctuary and talking about how the service is structured, who attends, the logistics, and hopes for the future. We then walked the possible proposed worship space for the contemporary service imagining how it might be used if a transition is made.

The current worship space is beautiful and well—designed for traditional worship. It lacks, however, the ability to be used fully for a modern worship service and worshipping community.

My most recent comparable case study comes from The Woodlands UMC. They have had a contemporary service called The Harvest, which has met in their sanctuary for a number of years. The service plateaued around 500 in the sanctuary (this space has seating for over 2,000).

Almost two years ago a new pastor was appointed to lead the service while new space was planned and constructed for this worshipping community. The service grew with their exciting new leadership but only by 150—200. In February of this year the new modern worship space was completed with 1,000 seats. This worshipping community of 650—700 began with the intention of moving to two
services once the first one filled with critical mass. They had to go to two services on week 3 in their
new space and now less than two month later they are worshipping around 1,400 between their two
services. This would not have happened in one larger space. What is different in this scenario? The
preacher and band are the same. What has changed is they now have more intimate worship space
designed specifically for the community and people have two opportunities for worship on Sunday
morning.

You can’t manufacture momentum and emotional energy. What does it mean when someone leaves a
service and tells a friend, “It felt dead”? If you have been in church long then you have experienced
worship which felt ‘alive’, and you have experienced worship which felt ‘dead’. But if I asked a person
what made the service feel dead they will most likely have a difficult time explaining. It is a feeling, not
born of logic, but of emotion.

Modern contemporary spaces are built in more intimate venues designed for multiple services. A
purposefully designed modern space can:

- Increase a sense of community to those who are gathered.
- Increase attendance.
- Create a more energetic worship environment.
- Allow the band and pastor to more fully engage with those gathered.
- Remove the invisible barrier in which physical space creates emotional distance.
- Give an experience of authenticity community and engagement.

An architect familiar with modern design would be most helpful if a move to this new space is
determined. At first sight, however, there are both some exterior and interior design changes to be
made to the proposed space. The exterior needs to be designed to give the sense this is a main
entrance. It will need new signage and a larger redesigned entry. The interior will need a larger lobby,
more doors into the worship space, better acoustics on the wall and with floating acoustic ceiling
panels, new flooring, lighting, stage design, seating design, and sound system. If attention and
investment is truly given to new worship space, then there is little doubt the next best step for this
contemporary worshipping community is to move from the current sanctuary.

Together with you in Christ,

Jeff Olive
Director of New Church Development Texas Annual
Conference