



I am writing to invite you to become intentionally and enthusiastically involved in the greatest opportunity for service we have faced in a long time. We are stronger as disciples and as a church family when we are all personally struggling with a vision, investing ourselves in prayer, and opening ourselves to risk in attempting great ministries together.

For ten long years we have grappled with the problem of buildings which hinder and pose a barrier when we want to spend time together or reach out to our neighbors. There is no space large enough for us to gather for fellowship. Even when we decide to meet, often scattered across the seven different levels of our buildings, some of the very people we miss seeing the most are discouraged from joining us because the halls and the restrooms are inaccessible.

We will not automatically be more welcoming or faithful if we tear down structures that have existed past their usefulness. Building functional, multi-purpose fellowship, office, library and kitchen space will not make us better disciples unless, just like that 1995 organ purchase, we utilize these new tools creatively for ministry in the name of Jesus. By becoming involved in this vision, sharing the struggle, investing ourselves in prayer, and taking the leap to try, we will be changed. And as a changed people, we will fill that new space with God's love for all to experience.

We could easily allow the current recession to erode our confidence and make us rethink our resolve. Everyone struggles with doubts about God's vision for our selves and our church. Difficult times can add to those doubts. But is God's leading tied to what is going on in today's economy? What about tomorrow, and

50 years from now? What do we want Bush Hill to be in that future? If we can't do what is needed now, when can we? If not us, who? Prayerfully trusting God for this vision will make us stronger, more vibrant, more connected disciples.

We share a vision from God, to touch lives with the regenerating forgiveness, love and acceptance we have received from Jesus. We live this vision through excellence and creativity in worship, Christian nurture and mission. These practices are transformational and become ministry when our efforts lead us to experience and share Christ.

It is not essential for us to own and maintain buildings in order to worship or grow spiritually. But think of all the investment in pews, pulpit, carpet, heat, air conditioning, classrooms, Catlin Chapel, Calvin Hall and the Dickson Room. These tools enable and enhance the experience of Christ in our midst. As we welcome Christ into our friendships, they become more than nice relationships—they have become sacred. Our trust in one another isn't just about being dependable, the gift of faith we have received makes this trust credible. We begin to live into what we are becoming, not only what we have always been. We overcome, endure, and embrace hardship which otherwise would devastate us individually. All this is possible because we live together as a faith community, a faith family. We literally rely on one another to see Jesus in the same way others rely on us to experience Jesus. This personification of Christ is the most important reason we exist.

Our building plan is part of God's vision for us—discerned over many years of prayer and study, soul searching and divine guidance. I know this now more than I did four years ago because I have seen the depth of love you share for one another. I have experienced the length you will go to help others and have been awestruck by the commitment of time and money you will invest in worthy ministries for yourselves and others in Christ's name. I am convinced this church family is capable and willing to obtain the tools we need to become who we believe God is asking us to be. Yes, it is a daunting challenge and Yes, God is more than able to meet our needs!

Grace to you and peace,

An Abbreviated Chronology: The Road We've Covered

April-December, 2001 – Handicap

Access/Building Study Committee assesses the facility and the needs of the congregation and recommends that a major renovation study be undertaken.

January, 2002 – December, 2004 –

“Vision for the 21st Century” Committee (V21CC), working with Kuntz and Associates Architects, considers a variety of renovation options and ultimately presents to the congregation a concept for a new building to replace the existing chapel and CE building.

November, 2004 – Carl Rush is called as our pastor.

January, 2005 – The congregation votes to accept the V21CC report and asks Session to name a new Building Committee to pursue the proposal.

Carl Rush is installed as our pastor.

April, 2005 – Building Committee is formed and a Stewardship Campaign is launched, working under the guidance of Resource Services Inc. (RSI).

July, 2005 – The Committee and Architect Fred Kuntz present the congregation with a schematic design for the new project, with total cost estimates in the \$4.6 to \$5 million.

December, 2005 – The Stewardship Campaign is deemed a huge success, having exceeded its “stretch goal” of \$1.5 million (3 times the church’s annual budget), to be contributed by the end of 2008. Fewer than 20% of church capital campaigns achieve this 300% mark.

January, 2006 – We apply for Fairfax County Special Use Permit.

August, 2006 – Special Use Permit approved; begin Site Plan approval application.

January, 2007 – Submit Application for Fairfax County Site Plan approval

Begin developing transition plan, with demolition anticipated as early as August, 2007.

January, 2008 – No approval in sight; transition and construction are delayed until it is received.

March, 2008 – With congregational and Presbytery approval, we buy the property next door to the church for \$360,000. The property is now rented out, awaiting church decisions as to future use or disposal.

April, 2008 – Begin design of second capital campaign with RSI

September, 2008 – With no approval on the Site Plan yet, the second phase of the Stewardship Campaign is delayed.

November, 2008 – Site plan approval is finally received, almost 2 years after application. By year’s end, the Building Fund contained around \$777,000 in cash and stocks, in spite of significant declines in stock values during 2008.

January, 2009 – Design work begins for the final Fairfax County permit – the building permit.

March, 2009 – Work begins on the Second Stewardship Campaign. The “stretch goal” this time is \$1 million—about twice the church’s annual revenue. According to RSI statistics, achieving this goal would again place us in the 80th percentile of all churches running similar campaigns.

April, 2009 – Kuntz & Associates anticipate submission of building permit documents.

Here We Are

With no single space large enough for all of us to gather for fellowship, we compromise by scattering fellowship events across seven different levels of our buildings. Still, too many are unable to join us because the halls and the restrooms are inaccessible. Our nursery and classroom spaces are uninviting, and

What will it cost? Our original construction estimate at the time of the *Forward by Grace* campaign, was \$4.5-6 million. We have reason to hope that as a result of the current state of the economy we will get lower bids than previously imagined. This is one of the silver linings of an otherwise terrible situation that we may be able to use to our advantage.

This vision, our vision is to touch others with Christ. And it requires that we do something more than just sitting around talking nice theology. If building the particular building that we've been planning over 10 years isn't God's plan, God surely has another plan for us to make the most of our situation. We will only know for sure by trying to raise the needed money. One thing is clear: God's plan never means doing nothing but sitting around growing old together.

Our "Giants" The book of Numbers tells us a compelling story: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites.'" [13:1-2a] When these spies returned, all but two, Joshua and Caleb, brought back terrifyingly negative reports:

"Then the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we.' So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, 'The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. There we saw the Nephilim [giants] (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.'" [13:31-33]

Now, as it turns out, this story did not end well for the Israelites. They feared the giants more than they trusted their God. With this in mind, we have compiled a list of things some of us have perceived standing between us and the "promised land" of a successful building project. Let's see if our "giants" are truly as fearsome as they seem:

- Why are we doing this—can't we just improve and renovate the existing buildings?

The initial studies by the Building Committee demonstrated that a simple renovation of existing structures would be very expensive and provide minimal benefit. The situation has since gotten worse, not better. The buildings are older and the legal requirements on any alterations have gotten more difficult and costly to meet.

- We can't afford this building.

As we saw above, in many ways we can't afford not to build this building. The deficiencies we have been documenting for almost two decades simply continue to grow worse. They will not fix themselves, and the strategy of patching old conditions will continue to drain our congregation's energy and resources, while dragging our ability to reach our mission goals downward.

- We should spend more money on mission instead.

We must position ourselves to do more in the future. That will require that we have a future congregation re-energized on the goal of increasing mission, both within our own community and outside it. We must give them the facilities that support, rather than hinder, their visions.

- Does this new building meet our church's mission?

We won't be a better people because of a building. What we will be, however, is a better enabled people. The building won't do the mission—we will. But we need to remove the obstacles that the present building creates.

- There aren't enough people in the pews to sustain the cost of this project.

Look at what we have done in the past 4 years. In the face of unremitting delay, we have persevered toward our vision. We can do this if we just keep going. It's not easy, but nothing worth doing ever is. Let's look to the Lord in prayer and see if this is still the vision that is laid on our hearts.

- This is bad timing—the economy is in turmoil.

Have we been given this time? How do we account for all the delays and extra costs? If this is truly a project that has come from a foundation of prayer and seeking, is there a reason for the time coming now? Construction costs have, it is reported, been going down significantly in the last year. Is this a blessing that we need to realize? If we don't test these conditions now, when will the right time come?

- What if all the delays to date are an omen—is God speaking to us through the Fairfax county Planning board and saying this is not the right direction for us to take?

Or, is God saying we need to wait and seek a better time? We don't know. All we know is that this challenge has always been a huge one for our congregation. Today, we don't know if it is more or less daunting than it was 4 years ago when we decided to move ahead. Unless we test that boundary, we will never know.

- Has somebody really done all the homework/prep work that prudence requires?

We continue to do what we can do with the information we have. Our calculations are wide open to scrutiny and improvement. All are welcome to help us make them as realistic as possible.

- People are unprepared for a second capital campaign.

We have always known that one campaign was not going to do what we needed to do. Instead, we must all recognize that this vision is a long-term one, and that the commitment we have all made to its success was not a "one-time" shot. We won't realize all the money we need in a second campaign, either. A long-term commitment to this vision is the only thing that will succeed.

- Some wonder, why didn't we just plan to get a mortgage based on the \$1.5 million we collected in the first campaign.

A mortgage has always been in our plans. Future members need to help pay for the facilities they will use. But we have also recognized that the more we can raise up front, the more feasible our long-term obligations will become. Thus, our goal is to raise as much as is possible at this time, to make our long-term obligations as reasonable as possible.

- BHPC responds when they understand the task. How much do we really need to raise? Some folks need to know the specifics—they want a goal for which to aim.

We estimated the need for \$4.6–\$5 million in 2005. Then, we watched construction costs escalate 10–15% a year for 3 years. That could have run the total cost to close to \$7 million. Now, we have seen costs decline. We don't know where the bids will come in, but we are hoping for \$5.5–\$5.7 million. Adding in the contingencies and inspection costs, that could mean somewhere in the \$6–\$6.3 range. We hope it's lower, but we need to brace ourselves for the more expensive possibility. We need to raise \$1 million in this second campaign to make that feasible. We raised \$1.5 million before. Can we do something like that again? That is the question that only prayer can answer.

Where do we go from here?

Our options at this point seem to be:

1. Give prayer a chance to inspire us. See how much money we can raise and how much the construction will actually cost. When we can make a reasonable and reasoned business plan, we will move forward.
2. Scale back the project, sell the house next door, etc. This would likely involve another extended delay from the county planning board.
3. Regroup and decide what other options we have. In any event, we'll have the money that was raised in the first and second campaign to use for God's vision here at Bush Hill Presbyterian Church.

Selected Scriptures

Psalm 37:23–26

²³The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way;²⁴ though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.

²⁵I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.

²⁶He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing.

I Peter 14:10–13

¹⁰As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

¹³But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

BUSH HILL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Campaign Newsletter No. 1

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