

May 13, 2021

Friends on Board of the PC(USA), A Corporation:

The last year has taught us a great deal about on-line meetings and how to be more effective in hosting on-line and hybrid meetings. Much like church life at the local level, church life at the national level is highly relational and dependent upon the community gathered to discern the mind of Christ.

The vision I have cast values relationship building with the community and broader church, and calls for sustainable gatherings while in the midst of the on-going pandemic. The impact on the assembly's host community goes beyond economic and enlivens an expansive public theology that speaks to the world.

After a great deal of collaborative work by staff, I am proposing that a conference center within Presbyterian Center be created. Though the genesis of the conversation was around renovation needs to host the 225th General Assembly, it became clear quite quickly that needs related to meetings went well beyond those required for the General Assembly itself. The proposed conference center not only meets the needs of how to meet in a pandemic world, but also will help us anticipate new patterns of meetings and events.

The conference center does require substantial one-time investment coming from multiple sources. However, we believe that there is also opportunity for significant annual savings and even the possibility of income generation. Recognizing that Presbyterian Center is almost 33 years old, the conference center allows us to update some systems, bring restrooms into alignments with code and our commitments to diversity and equity (gender-neutral and family restrooms), create a long-needed space for interpretation and welcoming of visitors, reduce the overall PC(USA) carbon footprint, and create a more efficient and safer food storage area for catered meals. Finally, the proposed conference center has additional intangible benefits, including allowing greater participation in governance through hybrid meetings.

The proposed conference center will allow the PC(USA) to:

- Provide a more hospitable and effective space to host the 225th General Assembly initial plenaries and assembly committees
- Engage the greater Louisville area, including the presbyteries of Ohio Valley and Mid Kentucky, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, other not-for-profit and civic organizations, for gatherings and events
- Provide space for meetings of General Assembly agencies, entities, committees and commissions
- Create space for video and on-line productions for GA agencies and entities
- Enhance our capacity to host hybrid meetings, with participants both on-line and in-person
- Embody hospitality, allowing staff to welcome people to Presbyterian Center in new ways
- Assist in telling the story of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its witness in the world through the Welcome Center

Though the conference space will require substantial investment to become a reality, it will also provide opportunities for significant savings and possible income generation:

- For every agency, entity, committee or commission meeting held at the center, it will reduce meeting related costs

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- Reduction of meal costs (catering to Presbyterian Center is often less expensive than restaurant or hotel meals)
- Staff travel and housing costs will be reduced
- Reduction of technology costs (internet, equipment, staffing)
- Possible co-marketing of space for use by groups at nearby hotels needing additional meeting space
- Possible rental of production studio and equipment to outside individuals and groups

The plans also update a building that is almost 33 years old:

- Updates the security system, which more effectively secures critical spaces and allows use beyond “normal” working hours (i.e., new church development and community events) and creates greater safety
- Creation of gender neutral and family restrooms on the first floor
- New HVAC systems on the 1st floor
- Updated catering kitchen to assist in serving meals for meetings and events
- Updated and flexible technology that allows for upgrades and expansion as technology improves (plans include upgrades to the chapel and existing meeting space)
- Creates a welcome center, allowing visitors to learn more about the history and witness of the PC(USA)

A new conference center at Presbyterian Center would also have several intangible benefits as well:

- Enhanced hybrid meeting capabilities allows the PC(USA) to withstand on-going or new pandemic threats to travel and in-person meetings
- Allows reduction of annual travel expenses that could be redirected toward mission use
- Through hybrid meetings, enlarge the circle of people who can participate in the governance and leadership of the PC(USA) by reducing the amount of required travel
- Creates space that limits distractions of poor sightlines and competing sounds from nearby activity
- Updates lighting, bathroom fixtures, HVAC systems to be more efficient, resulting in less energy consumption
- Reduce the PC(USA) carbon footprint by having effective hybrid and on-line gatherings supported by new technology and the production center, lessening the environmental impact of plane and car travel

Over the past year, we have heard from numerous congregations across the denomination who have seen the online strategy increase participation from those who cannot or choose not to participate in person. Without this innovative approach, many would have never heard the gospel or found an on-line spiritual home.

While the Conference Center represents Phase 1 of changes at Presbyterian Center, we believe that Phase 2, which will allow PC(USA) staff to consolidate on fewer floors, will also have an impact on how we engage the broader community. Phase 2 includes the reimagining of workspace for staff to be more easily adaptable to new and emerging work patterns and leverages the new effective and efficient meeting space in the Conference Center that aligns with current and emerging meeting needs. The freed-up space will allow us to not only to seek out additional income-generating tenants, but will also free up space to be used as an incubator emerging not-for-profits and community ministry efforts, allowing Presbyterian

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Center to foster and support ministries consistent with the commitment to Matthew 25 and the Hands and Feet initiatives.

Thank you for your consideration. I heartily endorse the creation of the Conference Center and the financing arrangements proposed. I look forward to being with you for more discussion.

In the faith that we share,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. Herbert Nelson, II". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "N".

The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)