

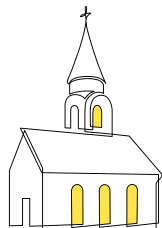
Volume III



Sacred Spaces Innovative Places

Reimagining Church Property
and Facilities as Assets

Introduction



In the years since CBF published Volumes I and II of *Sacred Spaces, Innovative Places*, interest in new uses for church properties has only continued to grow. Congregations hold a variety of motivations for exploring new ways to use their spaces: an interest in increasing/ diversifying church revenues, a calling to explore new expressions of ministry, a desire to deepen their engagement with their neighborhoods and communities, and more.

In response to this interest and the growing number of churches reaching out to CBF for information

and guidance on this subject, CBF is excited to offer Volume III of *Sacred Spaces, Innovative Places*.

Like its predecessors, this latest edition of the report includes stories and recommendations from churches around the CBF fellowship who have been engaged in the work of reimagining the use of their properties.

There are also some notable new features in this version of the report. First, the report is organized by sections that correspond to different stages of the process of establishing new uses for church properties:

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PART 1: DISCERNMENT

is intended for congregations that are interested in beginning conversations about new or different ways to use their church property.

PART 2: PROJECT SELECTION

is intended for congregations that have agreed to pursue new opportunities and are attempting to identify the best uses for their property.

PART 3: PROJECT LEADERSHIP

is intended for congregations who have chosen a new use for their property and are considering how to best lead and manage the work.

PART 4: PROJECT EXECUTION

is intended for congregations who are actively engaged in the work of establishing or maintaining a new use for their property and addresses some of the most common challenges or questions that are encountered in the midst of this work.

Additionally, this report offers resource directories related to each section of the report. These directories include expanded descriptions of some of the specific materials and organizations that have been developed for churches involved in this work.

We hope this new volume of Sacred Spaces, Innovative Places will be a helpful resource for your church. As you read the report and embark on this work in your own context, we encourage you to reach out to CBF to ask questions and share your stories so that we can continue to learn the best ways we can serve the churches in our Fellowship.

Thriving Connections

In 2020, CBF embarked on an extensive listening project with churches across the Fellowship called “Toward Bold Faithfulness.” In conversations with over 1,000 pastors and lay leaders, CBF staff were able to develop a deeper understanding of the current state of the churches they serve. They heard stories of excitement and hope for the future and also learned about the challenges and fears confronting our congregations today.

During the review of all the information that was gathered in these conversations, patterns were seen emerging around points of experience or interest that were held in common across many of the churches in the Fellowship.

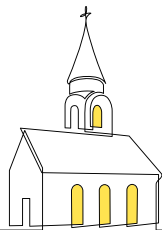
CBF was particularly interested in the patterns that it discovered related to church health. Despite all the differences and unique circumstances that are found in our Fellowship, many churches shared similar stories when talking about the ministries, programs and qualities that provided their members with the greatest sense of life and hope.

These patterns of church health were eventually summarized into five categories that CBF now calls the “Thriving Traits.” The Thriving Traits include: Compelling Clarity, Dynamic Collaboration, Rooted Relationships, Faithful Agility and Holy Tenacity.

CBF is committed to celebrating and cultivating the Thriving Traits as a way of promoting the long-term health of the Fellowship and supporting the witness of our churches to the transformative power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To that end, each congregational story in this report is accompanied by a short reflection that considers the ways that the Thriving Traits show up in the work of reimagining the use of our church properties. We hope these reflections help you develop a deeper understanding of the Thriving Traits and can help you better see the ways these qualities may already be at work in your own congregations.

Part 1: Discernment



No matter what led a church to consider new uses for its properties, it is important for congregations to prepare for these changes with a time of discernment. These internal conversations can increase the likelihood of long-term success by addressing concerns, aligning new uses with the church's mission and vision, and strengthening overall congregational support.

Start here if your congregation wants to begin conversations about new or different ways that you could use your facilities.

Stories from the Fellowship: First Baptist Bristol, Bristol, Virginia

Success begins in the pews. Innovative ideas, dynamic partnerships and unique opportunities can all be critical factors to achieve new uses for your church property. None of them will go far, however, if the congregation does not stand behind the vision.

In 2025, First Baptist Church of Bristol in Bristol, Virginia, reached out to CBF to request support to help its congregation explore possible new uses for their church.

Like many long-established churches, First Baptist Bristol's campus was constructed at a time when its membership was significantly larger. Its facilities now offer more space than the congregation needs. This, combined with the rising maintenance costs of a historical building, led church leaders to begin considering ways to open their building to new users.

On paper, the church possesses many qualities that should make it a natural and attractive destination

for these types of opportunities. It features a beautiful building in a central downtown location and a congregation with deep ties to the Bristol community. What it lacked, however, was a sense of clarity among its members regarding how to move forward in this work.

“In the past, there were some members of the church who were opposed to the idea of opening our building to other programs or organizations,” explained Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Kris Aaron. “Today, most of our congregation is open to these possibilities, but there still isn’t broad consensus of how we should determine whether a new use is or isn’t a good fit for our church.”

This lack of a clear sense of direction led to disagreements and extended deliberation periods whenever new opportunities were presented to the church. Partnership requests and grant deadlines have come and gone with the congregation still debating if or how they should proceed.

To help First Baptist Bristol better navigate these questions, Pastor Aaron reached out to CBF for help with leading a discernment process for the congregation. His goal for this effort was not to decide a specific use for the church building, but

instead was to establish a set of guiding principles that could help the congregation determine which opportunities align with the church’s mission and goals.

“I don’t want our church to develop a plan that locks us into a specific approach and potentially prevents us from responding to unforeseen opportunities that God brings to our church,” said Pastor Aaron. “Instead, my hope for our congregation is that we can establish clear criteria that can help us respond to the opportunities that do arise in a more timely and assured manner.”

After initial conversations with Pastor Aaron, a CBF representative made an initial visit to the church in the fall of 2025 to tour the campus and meet with a committee that had been formed to lead the church through this process. In two virtual follow-up calls, this committee helped develop a draft set of guiding principles and organized an afternoon congregational workshop in May of 2026.

The goal of the congregational workshop was three-fold. First, it was used to share information with the broader church membership about the value and importance of opening their building to new

users. This conversation included the presentation of case studies about the ways that other churches have used their properties in new ways. Together, these materials were intended to help expand the congregation's imagination about what could be possible in their space.

Second, the workshop provided time for congregation members to review and edit the draft guiding principles that emerged out of conversations between CBF and the church's committee members. It included time for small groups to provide input on language, express support or concern with the proposed principles, and suggest additional considerations that should be included in the criteria.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the workshop was intended to help cultivate a sense of shared vision and purpose among the congregation. Instead of feeling like these changes are marks of failure or are being forced upon the church from the outside, they can be embraced as exciting new opportunities that reflect the aspirations and dreams of the congregation itself.

The feedback gathered from these conversations was incorporated into the guiding principles document, which was brought before the

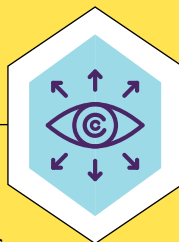


congregation for formal approval in the summer of 2026.

Once approved, these guiding principles will serve as an initial rubric for evaluating any proposed new uses for the church property. They will not eliminate the need for prayerful discernment and conversation. Rather, they will establish a baseline of understanding that should help the congregation feel more confident and united in the decisions they make moving forward.

Put simply: When the pews stand united behind the vision and open to the new opportunities, there are no limits to what God will be able to do.

Thriving Connections: Compelling Clarity



CBF describes the Thriving Trait of Compelling Clarity as, “Knowing who you are as a congregation, your mission and how to communicate it clearly to inspire action and focus.”

Clarity of purpose and values is essential for churches that are interested in using their properties in new ways. This does not mean, however, that a congregation must begin this work knowing exactly how it intends to use its property. Many churches that have established new uses have found that their most successful spaces and partnerships are not the ones that they would have imagined when they set out on this journey.

Instead, clarity means that a congregation should understand how these new uses align with the goals of their individual church and the mission of the Gospel. New users or spaces should be perceived as natural extensions of the congregation’s mission and identity. This type of clarity will not only help the congregation identify the best uses and partnerships for their spaces, but can help sustain motivation and commitment in the face of unexpected changes and challenges.

Recommendations

No matter what reason or combination of reasons led your church to begin these conversations, it can be helpful to enter a time of intentional discernment as you consider a path forward for your church. Support for these changes within the congregation will likely be stronger if members feel that their voices have been heard and if you are able to clearly articulate the ways that the new uses align with the church's mission and values.

Some questions that might help you begin these conversations include:

- What will be required for your church to live into some of the dreams that you have?
- What are the biggest challenges and obstacles that you foresee as your church continues to steward your property and facilities?

- Other than financial gain, what do you see as some of the biggest potential benefits for your church in better using your facilities and properties?
- Which relationships, both inside and outside the church, need to be leveraged as you discuss facility and property use?

Truthfully articulate how a new use could align with and support the broader church ministry. Does this new use help the church advance its mission and purpose? Does it generate cash flow for the church to support its primary ministries and activities? The answers to these questions are important for the church's approval and acceptance of future opportunities and might also have bearing on important tax implications.

Resources for Discernment

TOOLS AND DOCUMENTS

Abundant Outlook Resources

Church Buildings for Collaborative Partnerships (CBCP)

The “Abundant Outlook Resources” section of CBCP’s Resource Library provides guidance for churches that want to better understand and measure the value of their property and assets. Resources include:

- Asset Based Framework for Decision Making
- Economic Halo Effect Explained
- How to Conduct a Facilities Walk
- Public Value Tool

Link: <https://www.cbcpindiana.org/resource-library>

Dawnings

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Dawnings is a story-based approach to personal and congregational discernment that equips your congregation to discover and fulfill its God-given mission.

Link: <https://cbf.net/congregational-ministries/dawnings/>

Facilities Walk Worksheet

Partners for Sacred Places

This guided worksheet can help you identify the amenities, resources and gifts that your property could offer to the wider community. It is intended to help notice opportunities and imagine new possibilities for each of your congregation’s individual spaces as well as your entire campus.

Link: <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:488e2297-673c-4573-ba52-e36860b697e1>

Good Futures Accelerator

RootedGood

Good Futures Accelerator is a course that can be purchased to help a congregation to align money and mission by exploring how to creatively use their church buildings and property to further their mission and build financial resilience. The seven to nine month self-directed course includes a variety of dynamic content and activities that are provided by RootedGood.

Link: <https://www.rootedgood.org/good-futures>

Let's Talk about Faithful Generosity

Lake Institute on Faith & Giving

Let's Talk about Faithful Generosity is a free tool for facilitating creative and imaginative conversations about how congregations can use their resources in service to their local community.

Link: <https://lakeinstitute.org/resource-library/lake-institute/lets-talk-about-faithful-generosity/>

Mission Matters Resources

Church Buildings for Collaborative Partnerships (CBCP)

The "Mission Matters Resources" section of CBCP's Resource Library provides guidance for churches that are working to develop mission statements for their congregation or properties. Resources include:

- Creating a Property Mission Statement
- Defining Mission and Vision
- Value of a Congregational Mission Statement

Link: <https://www.cbcpindiana.org/resource-library>

Preparing to Share Resources

Church Buildings for Collaborative Partnerships (CBCP)

The “Preparing to Share” section of the CBCP’s Resource Library provides materials that can help churches assess their property and personnel assets to help discern what types of uses might be appropriate for their church and what changes may be needed to prepare the space for other users. Resources include:

- Accessibility: A Ministry of Welcome
- Asset Inventory Worksheet
- Property Assessment for Property Stewardship
- Security and Other Details
- Why Sharing Matters

Link: <https://www.cbcpindiana.org/resource-library>

CONSULTATION SERVICES

Church consultation services can provide congregations with experienced professionals to help lead them through discernment and develop recommendations for next steps. In addition to wisdom and experience, these services can also help a church identify specific people or resources that can help them achieve their goals. Nation-wide church consultation organizations include:

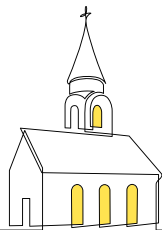
Center for Healthy Churches

Link: <https://chchurches.org/>

Ministry Architects

Link: <https://ministryarchitects.com/>

Part 2: Project Selection



Each new use that a church establishes on its property represents more than a new source of income. It will also function as an extension of the congregation and its ministries. Because of this, it is important to seek uses and partnerships that are aligned with your church's values and serve the communities or issues that are meaningful to the congregation.

Start here if your church has agreed to pursue new opportunities and is attempting to identify the best uses for your property.

Stories from the Fellowship: First Baptist Morrow, Morrow, Georgia

What if “yes” became your go-to answer?

First Baptist Church of Morrow in Morrow, Georgia, has been striving to embrace new ideas and opportunities. When the church was founded more than 120 years ago, Morrow was a small rural community located about 15 miles south of Atlanta. As the city steadily grew, however, Morrow was gradually enveloped within the metro area and began to feature shopping malls and office parks along with suburban neighborhoods.

As First Baptist Morrow has watched its own community transform outside its doors, its leaders have been preparing its members to respond to the needs of a changing world. In the 1990s, it was led by a senior minister who emphasized the importance of missions and outreach. He encouraged the congregation to become more involved in ministries such as service trips, opening a medical clinic and food pantry on their campus, and supporting refugee families in their local community. This work instilled values of generosity

and community engagement within its members that continue to this day.

Several years ago, they began to consider how these values might change the ways they use their own space. After working with the Center for Healthy Churches, one of the recommendations that emerged was to find ways to lease space in their building to outside users.

When the church began its search for a new senior minister shortly thereafter, they specifically focused on candidates who would embrace this vision and would be willing to think outside the box. This search eventually led them to call Rev. Devita Parnell to lead the church. Pastor Parnell had spent many years working for CBF National and was very familiar with the changing landscape of church life in America. She was excited to serve a congregation that was willing and eager to explore new options.

“Instead of perceiving change as a kind of death,” said Pastor Parnell, “I wanted to be in a place that was asking, ‘how might these changes be an opportunity for new life?’”

Pastor Parnell and the congregation at First Baptist Morrow do not expect the answer to this question



to be simple and straightforward. Instead of trying to come up with an answer themselves, they are striving to be open and responsive to the opportunities that come to their door.

“It is very tempting to look for the one big idea that is going to fix all of your problems,” explained Pastor Parnell. “Nobody gets to the big thing overnight, though, or goes into it knowing what that is going to be. Instead, you have to do the small things over time and see where they lead.”

Some of these opportunities may seem ordinary. For example, First Baptist Morrow has long partnered with other, smaller congregations to provide space for their worship services. Several years ago, the pastor of one of these churches asked if they could start a day care program in their facilities. This initial program recently closed after a few years of operation, but another day care program is already moving forward with plans to use the space.

Other opportunities, however, are more unique. The church has partnered with a local university, community groups and other congregations to host musical concerts at the church. Even more unexpectedly, a location scout for Netflix approached the church last year to ask if they could film scenes for an upcoming show in their sanctuary. The congregation was unable to use the space for several weeks during the project. In addition to paying to use the space, however, Netflix also paid for renovations to prepare the sanctuary for filming.

Responding to these types of opportunities requires the church members to hold an open and generous posture towards their facilities. “You cannot be territorial about your space to do this well,” says Pastor Parnell.

Being open does not mean being unprepared, though. “You need to think critically about your space and talk about what you really need to function,” explained Pastor Parnell. It is also important to have good systems in place to receive requests. First Baptist Morrow has a committee to review all agreements and set prices, and another committee to think about the long-term vision of

the church and lead the search for new opportunities.

Equally important is learning to see other users as extensions of your congregation. They are not outsiders coming in to use your space, but are fellow members who are helping to reveal God’s broader vision for your community.

Looking ahead, Pastor Parnell hopes to establish regular meetings with all the users of the church property to have a time to share their goals and needs as a way of promoting greater cooperation and deepening relationships.

Unlike a rigid institution that is constrained by set and structured practices, the future of First Baptist Morrow may look more like a diverse ecosystem of partnering initiatives. Natural ecosystems are famously well able to adapt to changing circumstances and may have important lessons to teach our churches today. This new model may not look like the church of 50 years ago, but it will be far better able to respond to the world of tomorrow.

There is no telling where God will lead the church on this journey. But a good place to start is by saying “yes.”

Thriving Connections: Dynamic Collaboration



CBF describes the Thriving Trait of Dynamic Collaboration as, “Working together across diverse teams and partnerships to participate in God’s work more fully and creatively.”

For a new use of a church property to serve as an extension of the church’s mission and witness, its facilities should not be treated like standard office or event space. The relationship with users and partners should not be limited to a commercial transaction that is fulfilled with contracts and rent payments.

Instead, truly collaborative relationships involve mutual care and support between partners. In return for the space you provide to new users, they can offer expertise, services or perspectives that complement and advance the missional goals of the church. This kind of dynamic collaboration can transform a simple space lease into a new ministry of the church that advances God’s healing and transformation of the world.

Recommendations

It can be tempting to rush the project or partnership selection process when opening a church to new uses. Members understandably want to know what to expect and often bring their own favorite project ideas into these deliberations.

While these ideas may be very helpful and good, it is important not to rush to answers when deciding whom or what you will invite into your church's space. The best ideas are not always the most obvious and may need time to grow and gradually emerge into their final form.

Some recommendations to help you consider partners or projects include:

- Begin with the people you know. Reach out to individuals and organizations with whom you already have established relationships and ask if they or the people they serve have needs that could be met in your space.
- Walk through the neighborhood around your church. Have conversations with residents, business owners or non-profit leaders to ask what needs or interests they perceive in the community.

- Invite community leaders to tour your church and ask them how they would use the space. They may learn new things about your church's assets and may be able to offer ideas that you have never considered.
- Tell your local government officials about the availability of your space for community members that approach them for advice or recommendations.
- Encourage big dreams. Even when concepts are not realistically feasible, they may contain kernels of inspiration that can lead to an implementable idea.

As you consider new opportunities, be thorough in the due diligence process. Work with the church's leaders and trusted advisors to carefully, completely and honestly consider the opportunity—its varied forms and structures, benefits, risks, costs and probability of success. Consider various scenarios—selling, leasing or partnering to achieve the desired outcomes. Ultimately, you want to know if the realistic benefit

of the opportunity will make it worth the costs necessary to execute and maintain it.

- Research examples of other church models in your area or around the country. Learn more about the needs they serve and the steps they took to meet them.
- Be willing to start small. Consider ways to try things out on a limited and experimental basis before making major commitments of space, money and resources.
- Do not treat unsuccessful ventures as failures. Know that God is still at work in those experiences, helping you discern your gifts, your needs and the opportunities that will help you move forward in this work.

Resources for Discernment

TOOLS AND DOCUMENTS

Community Engagement

Bricks and Mortals

This document introduces some key strategies that churches can use to understand the wider context of their community and identify uses that can best serve their neighborhood.

Link: <https://www.bricksandmortals.org/new-resource-community-engagement/>

Community Profile Builder

The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA)

This tool assists church and community leaders in accessing free online information about their communities. The initial map shows the location of other churches in your area and the Community Profile Builder provides you with social, economic and religious information on the community or neighborhoods you select.

Link: <https://www.thearda.com/us-religion/community-profiles/build-a-profile-of-your-community>

Creating Spaces: Performing Arts in Sacred Spaces

Partners for Sacred Places

This 2015 guide explores the research supporting mutually beneficial space sharing relationships between congregations and arts organizations.

Link: <https://sacredplaces.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/933961586160313874-creating-spaces.pdf>

Facilities Walk

Partners for Sacred Places

Envision your sacred place as a vibrant hub of new activity by rediscovering the amenities, resources and gifts that your property could offer to the wider community. Use this facilities walk exercise to help you notice opportunities and imagine new possibilities for each of your congregation's individual spaces as well as your entire campus.

Link: <https://sacredplaces.org/resources-publications/#>

Seek and Find Partnerships Resources

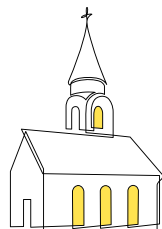
Church Buildings for Collaborative Partnerships (CBCP)

The “Seek and Find Partnerships” section of CBCP’s Resource Library offers guidance to churches that want to discern partnership opportunities by gaining more clarity about the needs and existing assets in their community. Resources include:

- Asset Mapping Process Overview
- Community Stakeholder Conversations
- Neighborhood Walk How-To
- Quick! Tell Me About Your Church

Link: <https://www.cbcpindiana.org/resource-library>

Part 3: Project Leadership



Once your congregation has selected a new use or partner for your space, it will need to establish personnel and processes to execute and manage the project. This work may involve complex legal, financial and administrative tasks that fall outside of the typical operations of the church. This makes it important to identify leaders and advisors who have the necessary knowledge and experience to complete these tasks well.

Start here if your congregation has decided upon a new use for its facilities and is assembling a team of people from within and outside of the congregation to lead project implementation and management.

Stories from the Fellowship: First Baptist Greenville, Greenville, South Carolina

In today's ever-shifting social and religious landscape, the role of the church in our communities is not always clear. Many congregations are looking outward and exploring new avenues of outreach and engagement. Sometimes, however, the most effective way to build community is to create spaces that inspire others to come to you.

One such space can be found at First Baptist Greenville in Greenville, South Carolina. For nearly 75 years, the church has hosted the First Baptist

Day School—a preschool serving children from infancy to five years old. Since the beginning, First Baptist Greenville has regarded the school as an important ministry of the church.

As a result of both the quality of education and the abundant classroom space available on the church campus, First Baptist Day School has grown into a very large preschool. Currently it serves about 220 children in 16 classrooms. The school operated as a half-day program for most of its history, but added

afternoon extended-stay options 10 years ago in response to the changing working schedules of parents.

Another notable change in the life of the school occurred in the late 1990s, when the school director shifted from a more traditional preschool education model to an approach known as Reggio Emilia. This model emphasizes the importance of engaging children as full members of the community who have the right to make decisions about the things that they are doing in the classroom. “Learning happens in relationship,” explains School Director Julie Fayssoux. “For children to learn well, they must feel safe, connected and honored for their thoughts and ideas.”

First Baptist Day School was drawn to the Reggio Emilia approach in part because of the ways that these principles align with its own Christian values. It affirms the integrity and value of every person’s life and follows Jesus’ way of acknowledging the full humanity of children.



Reggio Emilia also emphasizes the importance of community life. It strives to help children feel a sense of belonging and respect not only for their classmates, but also among their families and the surrounding community.

For the students, one of the most immediate and obvious connections to community beyond the school is with the church itself. During the week, the school has become part of the very fabric of life at First Baptist Greenville. “Our staff always loves it when school is in session,” says Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Carol McEntyre. “The halls come alive with the sound of children’s voices and laughter.”

Beyond mere proximity, the church and the school have numerous formal structures to facilitate their communication and cooperation. Day School Director Julie Fayssoux is a member of the church staff who reports to the director of church operations. She attends weekly staff meetings to help both school and church leaders know each other’s needs, concerns and upcoming plans.

On a congregational level, the church also maintains a Day School Committee that receives updates and provides input on important events or policies at the school. It also sets budgets and must approve any

significant policy changes. The church prefers to select committee members with current or former connections to the school that allow them to better understand its work and teaching philosophy.

When it comes to establishing a sense of community and belonging, however, it is often the small gestures of hospitality that make the largest impact. Whether it is the regular presence of pastors in the halls and at school events or the willingness of building facilities staff to show their tools to the children, simple and ordinary gestures can provide a deep sense of belonging. Director Fayssoux notes that actions like these communicate that, “we are not someone just occupying space in the building, but are a valued ministry of the church.”

The combination of formal and informal practices has created a deeply symbiotic relationship between the church and the school. The school benefits from access to the robust facilities and grounds of First Baptist Greenville and also enjoys the connections with both the church and the other groups that host activities on the campus. In return, the school contributes funds to expenses such as building and grounds maintenance and serves as a critical point of connection between the church and

the greater Greenville community.

Although the school openly identifies itself as part of First Baptist, it does not impose specific faith formation practices on any of the students. This, combined with the education itself, makes the school a popular choice with families from a wide variety of backgrounds. At any time, the students attending the day school are likely to include children from families that attend other churches, hold other faith traditions, or that do not hold a faith background whatsoever.

Families do occasionally join the church after becoming connected through the day school, but the church benefits from these relationships even if a family never attends a service on Sunday morning. Not only does the Day School provide a space to help community members to learn more about First Baptist Greenville, but it allows the church to remain engaged with and aware of the needs and gifts of the community that might otherwise be hidden from their view.

At the heart of it all is not a groundbreaking approach to outreach or a bold engagement campaign, but a simple willingness to invest in relationships and help create spaces that the community will love.

Thriving Connections: Rooted Relationships



CBF describes the Thriving Trait of Rooted Relationships as, “Building deep, meaningful connections within and beyond the congregation that nurture faith and clarify God’s calling.”

Many people identify a sense of community as a major motivation for attending church. As we are reminded in passages such as Paul’s description of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12, however, these relationships are not merely sources of enjoyment for us. God also intends for these bonds of community to be the basis of the life and witness of the church.

Establishing new uses in our churches can be a powerful way to enter more deeply into these kinds of relationships. We are not only finding new ways to support people in our community, but must also learn to recognize and utilize the many gifts that are present within our own congregations to execute and manage these efforts. Cultivating and nurturing these relationships will not only contribute to the success of our initiatives, but promise also to grow our faith and help us better understand God’s calling on our lives.

Recommendations

Engaging the appropriate experts to advise, represent and protect the church when making significant changes to church property is critical. The legal regulations, fiscal responsibilities and tax implications can be complex and carry significant risks. Professional knowledge and experience should not be avoided or undervalued. Key experts that you should consider involving include (but are not limited to):

- Attorneys
- Certified Public Accountants
- Insurance Representatives
- Certified Appraisers

In addition to the experts that you may enlist from outside the congregation, your church should also establish a team of staff and lay leaders to evaluate, execute and manage the project. Carefully consider who will be involved at each step in the process from the beginning through the ongoing management after the transaction is completed.

For very large redevelopment or construction projects that will last multiple years, consider creating a building project administrator staff position for the duration of the effort whose sole responsibility is to oversee project execution.

Once a new space or use is established and the church shifts into a managerial role, it is important to identify congregational leaders who are knowledgeable of and invested in the success of the initiative. If staff and congregation members lack a skill or perspective that is particularly relevant to your efforts, consider what members of your larger community could be invited to participate in project leadership for a single event or on a recurring basis.

Resources for Project Leadership

CONSULTANT SERVICES

In addition to the church ministry consultant organizations identified in Part 1, there are numerous organizations that provide resources, funding or expertise to help churches manage different aspects of property renovation or redevelopment projects. Several of these organizations are listed below:

Enterprise Faith-Based Development Initiative

The Enterprise Faith-Based Development Initiative provides houses of worship with the knowledge and tools to develop underutilized land into affordable homes and community facilities. Primary areas of engagement include grants and capital, training, technical assistance, peer-to-peer learning and access to development experts.

Link: <https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/impact-areas/preservation-and-production/faith-based-development>

Oikos Institute for Social Impact

The Oikos Institute for Social Impact helps congregations strategically respond to the disorienting effects of gentrification, disproportionate unemployment, and changing local demographics by harnessing the power of their assets to be a catalyst for communal transformation and economic renewal.

Link: <https://oikosinstitute.org/>

Partners for Sacred Places

Partners for Sacred Places offers a variety of tailored consulting and training services to churches that are exploring new uses for their facilities or properties, with a particular focus on churches with historic properties. Their

staff can help address subjects such as discerning new uses for your space, engaging with your community, demonstrating public value, and transitioning your space.

Link: <https://sacredplaces.org/>

Proximity Project

Proximity Project provides visioning, design and implementation services for churches seeking to leverage their property and facilities to serve their unique surrounding neighborhood context.

Link: <https://www.proximityprojectinc.com/>

Threshold Sacred Development

Threshold Sacred Development combines property development experience with a deep knowledge and love of houses of worship to help churches develop their property for the good of their community. It provides integrated and mission-aligned support along the entire development journey from imagination to construction to completion and beyond.

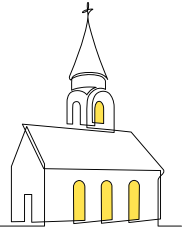
Link: <https://www.thresholdsacred.com/>

Wesley Community Development

Wesley Community Development is an innovative, full-service, non-profit real estate firm uniquely qualified to partner with faith-based organizations in helping them reimagine, repurpose and redevelop their physical assets to live into their vision.

Link: <https://wesleycdc.com/>

Part 4: Project Execution



The best new uses for each church property will vary depending on its unique context, resources and congregational values. There are, however, some common issues and questions that arise for all congregations that are engaged in this work. This section seeks to draw from the collective wisdom of the Fellowship to help you gain a better sense of what to expect and how to address the issues that may arise.

Start here if your congregation is actively engaged in the work of establishing or maintaining a new use for your property and is looking for recommendations related to common challenges or questions that are encountered in the midst of this work.

Stories from the Fellowship: First Baptist Church of Abilene, Abilene, Texas

Remarkable things can happen when our curiosity about God's unfolding reality is stronger than our assurance in the things we have always done.

First Baptist Church of Abilene in Abilene, Texas, strives to embrace this spirit of healthy and faithful curiosity. The church was founded 145 years ago and is a prominent institution in their community; but the congregation has not allowed its age or stature to lull them into

complacency. Instead, they have long been on the leading edge of innovation in ministry.

"First Baptist Abilene was one of the first churches in America to offer programs such as a fully functioning gym and family life center, a counseling center with accredited counselors and licensed therapists, or a full-time day care center," shares Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Ray Miller.

One of the most recent examples of First Baptist Abilene's willingness to respond to God's invitation into new things can be found in the Hope Center—a ministry complex that was completed in 2024 and houses their GLO Day Care program, Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment, and a poverty alleviation program called City Light Community Ministries.

The Hope Center is the culmination of decades of prayerful discernment about First Baptist Abilene's calling in their community. Pastor Miller highlights two of his predecessors who were instrumental in shaping the church into what it is today. The first was Rev. Millard Jenkins, who served as senior pastor from 1915-1948. He is credited with cultivating the congregation's strong outward focus and commitment to serving their community. Pastor Jenkins led efforts to establish a hospital in Abilene and opened the church's first education center in 1929.

A second is Rev. Dr. James Flamming, who served as senior pastor from 1966 to 1983. He pastored the church during a time when rapid growth in the city led some to consider moving the church to a larger suburban campus. Dr. Flamming, however, encouraged the congregation to remain in their historic location

and helped them solidify a sense of identity and purpose as a downtown church.

Thanks to the discernment of these pastors, as well as countless other leaders and pastors of the congregation, the identity of First Baptist Abilene is closely tied to its service to Abilene's downtown community. This calling acts as a powerful source of action and motivation, but also encourages the church to remain open and responsive to the changing needs of the world around them.

Examples of this can be found throughout the story of City Light Community Ministries and the Hope Center. Today, for example, City Light Community Ministries offers a broad range of services to people experiencing poverty or homelessness. It provides hot meals, showers, financial assistance, mail service, worship and discipleship opportunities, and more. When the



ministry began about 20 years ago, however, it was little more than a sack lunch program offered out of a side door of the church. Everything else was added gradually as the church discerned and responded to new ways that they could serve those using the program.

Likewise, the church's relationship with the people they are serving has transformed with time. When City Light Community Ministries began, the church often used "client language" to refer to the people using the program. As time has passed and relationships have deepened, however, the sense of distinction between church members and those they serve has been gradually eroding. "These are our neighbors," explains Pastor for Missions John Moore. "This is our community, and this work is how we build our community." These changes are not limited to language, but are embodied in the space itself. The new ministry facility in the Hope Center was intentionally designed to be beautiful, open and accessible to affirm the dignity of everyone using the space.

This combination of steadfast commitment and adaptability was also instrumental in the creation of the Hope Center. When the Hope Center property came onto the market in 2018, First Baptist Abilene

had already initiated a project to expand the former City Light Community Ministries building. The congregation approved the initial project through a secret-ballot vote and had begun fundraising when this new property adjacent to the church came up for sale. The congregation was willing to pause work, reimagine the opportunity to incorporate more ministries, hold a new vote, and begin a campaign to raise even more money to create the Hope Center. As a testament to the congregation's commitment to these ministries, the \$9.5 million Hope Center was fully paid off before it even opened.

Pastors Miller and Moore share that the congregation's adaptability and responsiveness begin with a foundation of prayer. Prayerful discernment not only offers clarity, but keeps the focus on responding to God's work rather than preserving their own plans.

Additionally, Pastor Miller notes the importance of remaining curious. "The church asks good questions," he says. "Maintaining a healthy sense of curiosity has been a key to many of these changes." Instead of dismissing ideas that don't align with current plans, he notes the congregation has been willing to explore new opportunities to see where they might lead.

Even with everything that has been accomplished, First Baptist Abilene is keeping its eyes on where God will be leading them next. In anticipation of the church's 150th anniversary, the congregation will soon be beginning a prayer campaign called "Your Kingdom Come." "As we look forward into the future," explains Pastor Miller, "we want to be asking who God wants us to be in these next 150 years and what opportunities we need to be open to as a church."

No church can anticipate all the ways that God will call on them in the future. What we can do, however, is cultivate a spirit of prayer and curiosity that allows us to respond and follow when the Spirit moves in our midst. Whenever we do, hope and healing are sure to follow closely behind.

Thriving Connections: Faithful Agility



CBF describes the Thriving Trait of Faithful Agility as, “Adapting creatively and effectively to change while staying aligned with your congregation’s mission and long-term vision.”

Many churches have been motivated to find new uses for their properties by the growing awareness that some of our old models of church are no longer meeting the needs of today’s world. Instead of resigning themselves to failure and decline, these congregations are reimagining what it means to be the church. This work requires agility in our thinking as we consider new forms of ministry, as well as agility in our

work as we navigate the unexpected changes and challenges that we will encounter along the way.

Unlike many of the changes happening around us in the world, however, reimagining life in our churches does not represent a rejection of the traditions and ideas of the past. Instead, it seeks to preserve the faith of our forebears by translating it into expressions that resonate more deeply with people in the world today. We embrace agility precisely so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ can continue to be boldly proclaimed both now and for many years to come.

Recommendations

Churches may encounter challenges in a variety of issues when establishing a new use on their property. The following section includes suggestions or considerations provided by other churches as related to their own work:

Accounting

- Decide the allocation of property-related revenue and costs as part of the decision-making process. Be sure the church has a clear plan and documented process for applying the income and costs of the opportunity. Ensure that the church can provide clear, consistent reporting of the finances to the appropriate parties.
- Income activities financed with debt introduce significant compliance complexities. The federal laws and regulations related to debt-financed income are highly technical and complex. The church should engage appropriate tax counsel as early as possible to strategically plan and advise the church to minimize tax liabilities associated with debt-financed income activities.
- Work with the church's trusted advisors to assess ongoing activities and determine if there are any property and/or income tax implications. These can be from federal, state and local authorities. Continually monitor the situation to identify the relevant regulations and confirm compliance, as legal and tax regulations may change.

Insurance

- Ensure the church has appropriate insurance protection. Work with the church's insurance representatives to verify that it is adequately covered for the risks to which it is exposed.
- When appropriate, obtain a Certificate of Insurance from other involved parties to confirm they carry adequate coverage to protect themselves and the church. Request to be named as an "additional insured" party on their property and liability policies.

Legal

- Be clear regarding who bears the risk for property-related loss. Determining who is responsible for property-related losses

isn't always easy. Don't assume understanding and agreement for who pays for property damages or claims occurring on the property. Be clear in the written documents who bears financial and legal responsibility for property-related issues.

- Ensure that all terms and expectations are properly documented and approved. All agreements, terms, expectations and understandings should be documented in writing. Follow the church's governing documents to comply with the appropriate order of church approval. Maintain fully executed copies of all agreements related to the transaction.
- Before selling any properties, be sure to examine your church's by-laws to determine if there are any clauses that would direct sale proceeds to local or national church associations. As needed, amend the by-laws to ensure that the congregation can utilize proceeds as intended.

Property Considerations

- If you are considering selling some or all your church's property, use a licensed appraiser to conduct a property appraisal to ensure that your congregation and leadership are aware of the property's fair market value.

- Contact your local government office to determine what land uses are legally permitted on your property. If you are interested in pursuing a land use that falls outside "by right" uses, request information regarding how your church can apply for special approval or discretionary review.
- If new facilities are added to your property that significantly increase activity on the site (such as the addition of housing or business space), be aware that improvements may be needed for supporting infrastructure such as utilities or roadway access. Land-owner responsibilities for these changes vary by state and locality but should be considered as part of development cost calculations.
- If you intend to open your facilities to broader community use, consider what improvements may need to be made for disability access. Many churches were built before modern ADA standards were established and may lack features like accessible entrances or restroom facilities. These improvements would not only provide benefits to new users but will serve existing congregation members as well.

Resources for Project Execution

TOOLS AND DOCUMENTS

Determining the Price when Sharing Your Space

Bricks and Mortals

This how-to guide offers elements to consider when determining an appropriate price for renting your space to outside users.

Link: <https://www.bricksandmortals.org/determining-the-price-when-sharing-your-space/>

Faith-Based Development Guide

Enterprise Faith-Based Development Initiative

This seven-part development guide provides houses of worship with the knowledge and tools to develop underutilized land into affordable homes and community facilities.

Link: <https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/learning-center/resources/faith-based-development-guide>

How-to Guides

RootedGood

RootedGood offers several how-to guides for purchase that help churches navigate issues related to opening your church property to new uses or users.

Topics include:

- How to Partner Well
- How to Rent Well
- How to Develop Well
- How to Sell Well

Link: <https://www.rootedgood.org/resources/how-to-guides>

Maintenance 101

Bricks and Mortals

This comprehensive checklist offers a useful starting point to understand the different parts and functions of a faith-owned property. It can provide information for conversations among your leadership or facilities team about the future of your property when opening it up to the community.

Link: <https://www.bricksandmortals.org/maintenance-checklist-101-for-faith-based-organizations/>

Marketing 101 Resources

Church Buildings for Collaborative Partnerships (CBCP)

The “Marketing 101 Resources” section of CBCP’s Resource Library offers ideas and strategies to help churches market their space to potential users.

Link: <https://www.cbcpindiana.org/resource-library>

Pricing, Policies, Procedures Resources

Church Buildings for Collaborative Partnerships (CBCP)

The “Pricing, Policies, Procedures” section of CBCP’s Resource Library provides recommendations for ways that churches can address pricing, permitted uses and tax considerations. Resources include:

- Space Use Guidelines
- Example Church Building Use Policies and Procedures
- Not-for-Profit Status Issues
- Pricing Guidance

Link: <https://www.cbcpindiana.org/resource-library>

Property Management 101

Bricks and Mortals

This document offers best practices for the upkeep of all property and equipment belonging to faith-based organizations to keep your space functional, safe and presentable.

Link: <https://www.bricksandmortals.org/property-management-101-for-faith-based-organizations/>

Transitioning Older Sacred Places

Partners for Sacred Places

Transitioning Older and Historic Sacred Places helps congregations navigate property changes with a community-focused approach. Explore the guide for strategies to preserve public value and reimagine sacred spaces.

Link: <https://sacredplaces.org/resources-publications/#>

Working with Faith-Based Organizations on Affordable Housing Development

Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)

If your church is considering developing affordable housing on its property, this guide provides the foundational building blocks for engaging in affordable housing development and preservation efforts.

Link: <https://www.lisc.org/our-resources/resource/working-faith-based-organizations-affordable-housing-development/>

FUNDING SUPPORT

Church Building & Loan Fund

United Church of Christ

The Church Building & Loan Fund facilitates several programs that support the development phase of church-based projects and enterprises, and also provides a loan program for site purchase, construction and renovation, building purchase, loan refinancing, energy and environmental upgrades, and disaster recovery. Though operated through the United Church of Christ, these opportunities are offered to churches from other traditions and denominations.

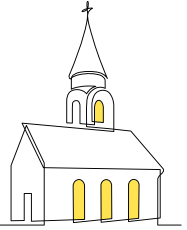
Link: <https://cblfund.org/programs>

Partners for Sacred Places

Partners for Sacred Places offers building restoration and emergency repair grants to congregations looking to preserve their historic buildings and encourage active community use of the space.

Link: <https://sacredplaces.org/our-services/grant-opportunities/>

Conclusion



The imagination and implementation of new uses for buildings and properties represent one of the most exciting frontiers for the life and witness of the church. No matter where your church finds itself in this process today, it is our hope that this document has offered helpful examples, insights and resources that can serve you along this journey.

As we all move forward in this work, we pray that none of us loses sight of the ultimate purpose of these efforts. As CBF describes in its own mission statement:

Led by the love of Christ, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship invites churches and individuals to partner in transforming God's world, working together as a global community to spread good news, justice and hope through impactful ministries, missions and resources.

In the end, the significance of this work will not be measured on budget sheets or membership rolls, but in the healing and redemption of God's children and God's good creation. We pray that all our spaces can become places where this great story of salvation can be told and experienced as God makes this so.

Stories from the Fellowship: First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C.

Discovering God's hope for our future sometimes requires us to let go of the memories of our past.

Memories loom large at First Baptist Church of Washington DC. The church was established in 1802 in the basement of the United States

Treasury Building. It eventually moved to its current location near Dupont Circle, only eight blocks from the White House, in 1890. It has been a fixture of the Washington DC community since the establishment of the city and a place of worship for ordinary residents and U.S. presidents alike.

In its more recent history, the church grew to its largest size in the 1940s and 50s as Washington DC expanded rapidly in the years following World War II. It was during this period that the congregation built its impressive neo-gothic sanctuary complete with ornate stained-glass windows, glimmering pipe organ and towering stone columns.

As with many downtown main-line Protestant churches, however, the congregation's membership has slowly declined since that mid-century peak. By the time Senior Pastor Rev. Julie Pennington-Russell arrived 10 years ago, the church averaged about 100 people in Sunday worship, the large majority of whom were senior adults. Associate Pastor Rev. Eric Mathis described the church during that period as, "large in historic stature, but small in size and scope."



The combination of aging buildings and shrinking membership placed significant financial strain on the church. By the early 2010s, First Baptist Church of Washington DC was consistently operating in a negative position and faced over \$7 million of deferred maintenance on its buildings.

It was around this time, however, that a local developer approached the church to propose constructing an apartment building on the 36-space parking lot located at the back of their property. Instead of selling the land, the church offered the space for this nine-story structure to the developer through a ground lease. This agreement created a long-term revenue stream whose annual payments cover nearly all the church's staffing and operations costs.

While this relieved one portion of the church's financial concerns, it still did not resolve the maintenance

challenges that loomed over their buildings. In 2018, the church officially formed a Facilities Improvement Team to carefully review the situation and recommend a solution.

The team ultimately proposed that the church work with the same developer to construct a second phase of apartments on their property. Instead of a parking lot, however, this new phase would be placed on the site of what was then a four-story office and education wing of the church located behind the sanctuary. Rather than spending money to renovate the building—which had long been plagued with structural issues—the church decided to replace it with a new building that includes church office and community spaces on its lower levels and several floors of residential apartments above.

The church phased the project to include all the necessary maintenance and renovation of the sanctuary in addition to the construction of the new building. The money generated by the new ground lease with the developer pays for these projects. Once the remaining payments are completed in about 20 years, these funds will also be added to the church's annual revenue.

Despite the many benefits these projects have provided to the church, the changes were not all painless. Pastor Pennington-Russell notes that the process forced the church to “take stock of who we truly are now,” rather than thinking of themselves as the congregation they were in the 1950s. Replacing the office and education wing of the church with a smaller and more modest space required them to release any remaining dreams of returning the church to the life it knew many decades before.

Letting go of this past, however, enabled the church to create spaces that better meet the needs of the church and their community today. Instead of offering multiple floors of small Sunday school rooms, for example, the new space features a single education floor with five large conference rooms. Not only does this encourage more interaction between the Sunday school classes themselves, but it allows the space to flexibly host the meetings of a variety of community groups during the week. The church also designed their new space to include numerous storage closets for the partner organizations who would be using their facilities. They even included rooms with bunk beds and showers to host church groups who travel to Washington DC on service trips.

“Sometimes you move into new spaces and suddenly people who have been there forever can reimagine what they couldn’t imagine in the old space,” explains Pastor Pennington-Russell. This applies to outside partnerships and internal policies alike, as First Baptist Washington DC recently revised its long-standing bylaws to help them better reflect and respond to the needs of their community today.

This new sense of vision and identity seems to resonate with people who might not have shown interest in First Baptist in the past. The church has experienced modest growth in weekly attendance and the demographics of the congregation are noticeably shifting. In addition to the senior adult members whose steadfast support and enthusiasm made these changes possible, Pastors Pennington-Russell and Mathis estimate that at least half of the Sunday worship attendees today are young adults in their 20s and 30s.

One of the most important benefits that the church has received through all these changes, however, isn’t found on budget sheets, floor plans or membership rolls. It is found instead in the hearts and spirits of the congregation itself.

After the entire project was complete, the church hired consultants from Ministry Architects to help them look inward and revisit their mission and values in this new space. One of the consistent themes that emerged out of these conversations was the congregation’s newfound optimism for the future. The church now identifies the theological virtue of hope as one of its core values and describes it in the following way:

“We live aware, attentive, and alert to an unknown but unfolding future created by God and not ourselves. This future was made known in Jesus who turned sadness into joy, and introduced a reign in which the dead are raised, the lost are found, and the displaced are brought home again” (Revelation 21:1-5).

This invitation to hope is extended to every church, but the story of First Baptist Church of Washington DC reminds us that responding to it often requires us to hold loosely to the gifts that God has placed in our care. As we follow Christ into this unfolding future, we must turn our faces from what once was and embrace what, in God, is yet to be.

Thriving Connections: Holy Tenacity



CBF describes the Thriving Trait of Holy Tenacity as, “Persevering with steadfast faith in the face of challenges, staying true to your core mission and values through a deep, growing faith anchored in God’s ongoing work.”

One of the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith is the call to worship a God who is both eternal and dynamic; never changing but always moving. Like the disciples who stood with Jesus on Mount Tabor during the transfiguration, we often prefer to stay put in the places where we encounter God. We want to memorialize these experiences with grandeur and permanence. Time and again, however, Jesus calls us to come down from these mountains and follow God once more into the world.

Perhaps this is a season when your church is feeling a call to follow God in new ways to new places. Excitement, fear, hope and sadness are all natural and understandable emotions to experience during these times. Whatever else you may be feeling, however, we urge you not to consider these changes as signs of failure, resignation or weakness. Instead, the willingness to make changes of this kind should be celebrated as a sign of your enduring and tenacious faith in a God who is always doing new things.

God’s work is not done, and neither is our own. In a world crying out for salvation, may God grant us the boldness and tenacity to follow the Holy Spirit into the life God intends for us all.



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