

Do Church Buildings Matter? Part II

In this article we are continuing to answer the question, “as we plan to replant Christ Covenant Church at 3100 Covenant Road why should we care about buildings and property?” Or, put another way, “Why should we generously invest in the revitalizing of the buildings and property at Covenant Road?”

Last week we saw that church property in the neighborhoods in our city are for the common good. When the church has no visible presence in the neighborhood, it's not just the church that loses. The neighborhood is affected negatively also. Covenant Presbyterian Church has been present in the Forest Acres area in the City of Columbia since the 1950's, and now as Christ Covenant Church it is time for us to continue to invest in this property as a place for a viable gospel witness to the community for the common good of all.

So what can we do as a church to maintain a viable presence in the neighborhood for the common good?

First, we must commit ourselves to a biblical vision of service, neighbor, and the common good. When we were living in our trespasses and sins, going the way of misery, sin, and death, we were not constrained by love. But when we were given life by the gospel of Jesus Christ we were constrained to put the needs and interests of our neighbors above our own. The life we have been given is not our own, neither are the gifts, possessions, and buildings. All we have been given by grace is for the benefit of our neighbors.

Will we use our church buildings as a fortress to meet our own needs and protect ourselves and our children from a hostile world? Or will the property we've been given serve as a kingdom outpost, through which we serve a broken and hurting world? We must be committed to see our property as a strategic opportunity to do creative ministry in the neighborhood where God has placed us.

Second, we must be committed to practicing the catholicity of the church. Christ Covenant Church is not the only faithful witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the city. There are other churches in the neighborhood we need to build relationships with. We must be committed to cultivating a deeper connection, with not only our sister PCA churches, but also other churches of other denominations, sizes, races, etc.

Practicing faithful partnerships with other churches in the neighborhood and city will enable us and other churches to weather the difficult times our churches go through and enable us to maintain a faithful witness from different corners of our city. It will also be a witness to our city of the work of the gospel in our lives that brings people together as one in Christ Jesus. This is needed in a divisive culture. We must consider how to build these relationships with other gospel preaching churches in our neighborhood and city using our buildings and property.

Third, we must be committed to seeking creative ways to raise capital for the renovation and preservation of our church buildings. Buildings that are 50 years or older have outlived the neighborhood. Just as the homes in the neighborhood need renovation and preservation, so does the church property to maintain a viable witness and usefulness to the neighborhood.

We face a financial challenge to meet a yearly ministry budget for the church - doing ministry in the city, paying staff, paying the bills, and partnering with ministries nationally and around the world. We must also face the financial challenge we have for renovating and preserving the property God has chosen as the place for his witness to the neighborhood in this part of the city.

Generally speaking, we cannot take on the projects needed at Covenant Road on our own. We will need to partner with kingdom-minded benefactors who embrace our vision of the gospel in the city and the church's role in promoting the common good. We need to be asking, “Who are the people in our lives who will help Christ Covenant Church remain in this kingdom outpost?” We need to be committed to creative ways to build relationships with others who also share our desire to see God glorified in his church in this neighborhood of this city.

Finally, we need to discover or recover, and then be committed to a robust theology of place and space that promotes the value of the built environment. Too often, the churches mantra on buildings is: “The church is not a building.” This is true, the church is the *ekklesia*, the gathered people of God, a family of living stones being built into a spiritual house. The church is not brick and mortar. We value community. However, the architecture and aesthetics of the places where we gather for worship and life together shape our communion with Jesus Christ and our community in him week after week. The buildings we gather in are what we see, hear, feel, and smell. They are place, and there is a theology of place and space that we as Christians must engage as we do other theological truth. We print each week on the front of our order of worship:

To all who are weary and need rest;
To all who have questions and seek answers;
To all who mourn and long for comfort;
To all who feel worthless and wonder if God even cares;
To all who are weak and fail and desire strength;
To all who sin and need a Savior;

This church opens wide her doors

With a welcome from Jesus,
The mighty friend of sinners,
The ally of his enemies,
The defender of the indefensible,
The justifier of those who have no excuses left.

This welcome acknowledges a theology of space and place. We have doors we open to welcome people into the presence and communion with God and his people. Without the gospel of Jesus Christ we cannot be a welcoming place or space, and with place and space a gospel extending community is a refuge for weary pilgrims.

These theologically rich convictions convince us as the church that our buildings matter and are worth investing in. The architecture and aesthetics of brick and mortar, walls, floors, ceilings and windows, are a part of the habits of our lives that shape our loves. Just as the theology of our worship shapes our loves each week, so does the theology of place and space where we conduct our worship and life together and from where we commit ourselves to ministry together each week.

Our God left heaven to incarnate himself in a body to save alive his people dwelling in the earth. He was raised bodily from the dead leaving behind an empty tomb. The church is made alive in Jesus Christ through his bodily death and resurrection. We are incarnate beings. Our life of faith and repentance is embodied. Our whole life of worship is embodied. We are physical bodies in physical space. Jesus Christ is reconciling all things in heaven and earth to himself, our physical bodies and our physical spaces. Therefore, we inhabit architectural spaces alive with aesthetics for the common good. Our forefathers understood this and made investments of thought, time, talent and treasures into the architecture and aesthetics of the buildings where we worship. Let us, then, embrace church buildings for the common good.

Catalyst Planning

As we follow our timeline for 2019 we are preparing to engage in Catalyst Planning. We will begin in July as we spend 3 Wednesday evenings brainstorming goals, refining goals, and prioritizing goals that will enable us to develop a plan for fulfilling our Mission and Vision.

- ❖ Brainstorming Our Goals - Wednesday July 10th 5:00 - 7:00 PM
- ❖ Refining Our Goals - Wednesday July 17th 5:00 - 7:00 PM
- ❖ Prioritizing Our Goals - Wednesday July 24th 5:00 - 7:00 PM

The gatherings will begin at 5:00 PM with dinner provided. At 5:45 we will provide a nursery for children 0-4 and a children’s program for boys and girls ages 5 - 11. Students 12 and up are encouraged to participate in the Catalyst Planning sessions with adults.

We will begin with a brief large group orientation at 5:50. At 6:00 pm we will divide into smaller groups led by facilitators. The facilitators will lead the small groups to accomplish the groups purpose for each night. The small groups will re-gather together in a large group to share what they have accomplished. Each week during July the information that the groups share will be provided to the congregation so that we can share together in the Catalyst Planning process. Please make plans to participate by signing up for our gatherings in July. You can sign up on the sign up sheets in the Narthex at Barnwell Street or in the back of the Sanctuary at Covenant Road. Or, you can sign up online by **[following this link](#)** or by going to the church website and clicking the banner (**[ccotc.org](#)**).