



Williamsburg
Unitarian Universalists



Worship/Music/Sanctuary Small Group Meeting Notes

February 24, 2014

Worship and Sanctuary

- Worship – a holy time in a space where people feel safe to explore their own spiritual growth and well-being
 - Weave music and other elements together to guide people into that space, without distraction
 - Critical element to services is the people who are there – instead of auxiliary space, have everyone in one space together – may be willing to sacrifice some elements of existing character if this can be achieved – majority feel that it's a priority to have everyone in one space for a service
 - About 20 seats available for “overflow” currently in narthex
 - Everyone gathering in one community, all together in one space for large service

Sanctuary

- Worship service is a time set apart – this should be a sacred space that is different from all other spaces inhabited during the week – people, music, soaring cathedral ceiling
 - Worship is not just another weekly meeting – multi-purpose use of the space sometimes takes away from the “sacred” of the space – time to gather for worship is different from other times we gather in the sanctuary for meetings, etc.
- Feeling of the holy from the ritual, sense of peace, quiet before service
- Space is used for worship in different ways
 - Important to investigate semicircular/circular views of each other, configurations
- Asheville – amphitheater seating, but not a soaring ceiling – gives a more intimate feeling, even though it's bigger
- Keep windows that connect congregation to nature, world outside – like the immediacy of connection to outside
- Also consider horizontal views – what's here around us on earth – but, relate to lofty existing spaces
- Configuration of the people – prefer to be arranged to see the faces of others – see and enjoy space but see everyone together
- Would like to see space for the choir to perform – choir currently gathers from all over the sanctuary – want to feel a part of congregation without facing them from front
- Silent meditation

- Nice that current building is so tall – it enhances the space and experience – provides a mystical experience – height is throughout, giving a processional approach, into narthex, through sanctuary
- Flexibility of space is important – need to be able to move things around
- Idea of sanctuary being open all the time – accessible even during off-hours – people could be alone, meditate in sanctuary – public space

Choir/Music

- Choir – 48 congregants (about 20%)
- Procession of choir – where to start, continue, finish
- Congregation is basis of choir – choir is not “separate” from congregation – should space be reserved for aisleways to keep choir in congregation with ability to approach front?
- Tabernacle band – seating for a few rows during services where they perform
- Space between rows is crowded currently – 16” clear between rows – fill chancel with chairs – only seats 24 members of the choir
- Sit on either side, rather than face crowd? Choir stay on one side – no robes, off to side, sacred space – logistically, all on one side, in one space with congregation – don’t dedicate space to something that only occurs a few times a month
- Process of choir approaching front is time consuming and chaotic – views from side of sanctuary are limited, can’t see from side – also, crowded when whole choir is up there
- Rehearsal Space - practice somewhere other than sanctuary proper, acoustically work on singing
- Store music – Jamie to provide linear footage needed for music storage
- Rehearsal close to chancel – practice, enter for service without disruption of other congregation members entering from narthex
- Access performance area without coming through narthex and sanctuary
- Instrument storage – near sanctuary
- Potential for performances other than worship music – perhaps fellowship areas
- Choir practice before service conflicts with congregation arriving early to sanctuary

Seating Capacity and Layouts

- Challenge of more sense of community, worship in semicircle, less efficient seating layout – tradeoff and prioritization
- More critical to have sense of community than it is to seat more people
- Currently, 200 chairs is maximum seating, in rows only, 16” clear between rows
- Flexibility is still important – chairs can be reconfigured, more room up front for orchestra, dance, etc.
- How to create aisles for circulation – perhaps expand to sides to allow aisleways?
- Special Services with peak attendance
 - Easter, St. Cecelia, Charter Sunday, Water Communion
- If sanctuary is more than 80% full, it can negatively impact impression – “too crowded,” uncomfortable

Acoustics

- Accommodate the hearing impaired – difficulty hearing in sanctuary
- Lack of spoken word clarity, especially in rear of sanctuary
- Song, enunciation blends too much at rear
- Ideally, sanctuary is sacred space only – weddings, child dedication, funerals, worship only, rehearsal space for band (as opposed to rehearsal in a dedicated room for choir)
- Spoken word needs to be accommodated – if anyone speaks from congregation, mike must be used
- Williamsburg Choral Guild, youth choir
- Acoustical separation between:
 - Narthex and sanctuary
 - Kitchen and sanctuary
- Provide undistracted, sacred experience
- Preserve some of the existing acoustical benefits of sung sound – speakers could address clarity

Finishes

- Existing concrete is durable , but also provides challenges with acoustics – chairs and people help that
- Possible retreatment and stain of concrete – change color, texture
- Conduit in slab from a/v to front of church, chancel for instruments, support

Electrical/Lighting Needs

- More receptacles needed by the piano
- Lighting – for performance
- Podium lighting – extremely backlit currently for speakers
- Dimmers on incandescent lights need replacement – maintenance
- Lights out for screen visibility, but simultaneously, have to be able to see elsewhere
- Sanctuary at night – need all lights on for visibility
- Lighting at side walls – tabernacle band – difficulty
- Currently, lights don't "glare," creates a nice atmosphere

Meditation Space

- Talk, share experiences – want to be quiet, but inaudible – don't want to use microphone
- Another space for meditation? Small chapel?
- Over 100 people – 20 to 40 people for meditation sessions – small chapel
- Small chapel could be "all hours" open, intimate space
- Narthex used for qi gong, but another space could accommodate this
- Small chapel with "softer" materials, colors – children's chapel, visitors, etc.

Outdoor Worship

- Seasonal celebrations – solstices, equinoxes – space for fire, benches in a circle, semicircle
- Address four cardinal directions in ceremony
- Labyrinth
- Outdoor spaces are screened from parking areas (Parker House right up against lot)

Additional/Other Comments and Thoughts

- Light a candle for joys and sorrows – personal moment – Virginia Art Museum – Richmond (Buddha) – alcove inside of sanctuary, perhaps
- Needs to be more space for people to exit – when people are trying to leave, there's congestion – spoils the experience – inaccessible for handicapped
- Give them options to get in, get out, but still see each other – perhaps coffee, gathering off to side in same space
- Space in narthex to sit down and have a conversation
- “Spiritual airlock” – transition from sacred world to social world
- Look at size of Wellspring UMC – entrance
- Auxiliary worship space
 - From some perspective, families are possibly comfortable with being elsewhere (remote chapel or space for overflow)
 - This auxiliary space could encourage youth, teens to attend – how to appeal to them
- Possible cry room? Current A/V room would be a good location
- A/V room needs to be “open” to sanctuary – not glazed – acoustically connected with no window
- Storage room
 - needs to accommodate 200 chairs for sanctuary (upholstered) plus 80 folding chairs, especially if multi-use/social functions still are conducted in sanctuary in the future
 - rectangular pedestals, other worship items
 - often, items must be stored up on the chancel, and are screened from view with folding screens
- Projection Screens
 - Provide an aesthetic way to prevent sunlight and glare on presentation screens – shade projection screens or windows, gain visual comfort
 - Ideally, have a single screen at center? With two screens, difficulty seeing from center of church – however, one screen would be obtrusive when in place