

On Building Up The Church
First Christian Church
Topeka, Kansas
June 6, 2010

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There were three brick layers who were working together on a local church building project, and one passerby noticed that two of them had kind of laborious looks on their faces and the third guy was whistling and smiling ... and exuberant ... obviously incredibly energized by the work he was doing. So the man passing by decided to question the three to attempt to understand the differences in their demeanor. The first guy with the obviously pained look on his face ... the pedestrian asked him "Hey, what are you doing here?" And bricklayer number one answered ... "Just layin' bricks, man. Layin' bricks. One after another, after another ... after another." The passer by walked on down the way just a bit, and asked the second man ... "Hey what are you doin' here, man?" And the second brick layer looked up from his work and he said ... "Buildin' a wall. Buildin' a wall " So the interested observer walked on down a few yards, where the third worker was going at his brick laying with such enthusiasm, whistling smiling. And the interested observer asked him ... "Hey man, what are you doin' here?" And this third worker looked up and with a sparkle in his eye he said ... "I'm building a great cathedral! Soon there will be people coming inside these walls to give praise to the creator. Isn't that just fantastic?" You know what the difference was between those three brick layers? They were all doing the same thing but it was their perspective that made the difference. And bricklayer number three saw the big picture ... and he understood himself to be on a mission. Numbers one and two were doing a job. Number three ... was on a mission.

One thing I have discovered in my life, after all these years as an ordained man of the cloth ... is ... when you are under stress and duress ... it helps to keep the big picture in your mind. It helps immensely to keep reminding yourself of your mission.

It all started last August 8 ... the actual construction, I mean. Last August 8th. The dust began to fly ... jack-hammers began their incessant cacophony ... the old crow who always made his perch on top of the sanctuary cross on the peak of the roof ... built himself a new nest somewhere far away from the confusion of 1880 Gage ... front doors of the sanctuary were locked and a new ... more "narrow way" ... into and out of the sanctuary ... became the norm for entering God's courts of praise. A darling little porta-potty soon found its way to an amazingly centralized location in the front and center of our campus entry (I can still remember the days when a few churches had what they called outdoor facilities ... but they were never located on the front lawn ... but this was temporary.) And no matter how diligent our building workers were to try to keep the drive and walkways somewhat clear ...and they really did try! ... but we still ended up in the midst of the most snowy winter and rainy spring ... walking through bits of gravel ... and a tad of mud ... from sanctuary to fellowship hall. The kitchen became a new hallway ... as well as the chapel ... and some of our adults had the pleasure of sharing their learning space ... with two year olds! In times like these ... it's good to keep the big picture in mind. WE ARE ON A MISSION! WE ARE BUILDING ON TO THE CHURCH SO THAT WE MIGHT MORE EFFECTIVELY BUILD UP THE CHURCH.

This morning, as we have come together in this worship service to dedicate our newly constructed gathering space and corridors, and the renovation of our education centers, I want to lift up two icons out of the sacred story of our faith tradition. One of those icons ... is Soloman, the one man in the entire narrative of both Jewish and Christian sacred literature ... who is known for his building ON. Solomon was a builder. A bricks and mortar guy. He felt that God was calling him to a mission ... to build a palace and a place for the Israelite people to worship God. He enlisted ... get this ... 70,000 laborers and 80,000

stone cutters from up in the mountains ... and he brought in 3600 men to be the over-seers! Big project! Solomon sends a note to the king ... which is what you heard from the Chronicles passage this morning... the note said .. "I am about to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, and dedicate it to him for offering fragrant incense before him." And then ... catch this sentence ... "The house I will build will be great ... but who is able to build God a house?! Heaven ... even highest heaven ... cannot contain our Creator. Who am I to build a house for God... except as a place to make offering before God?"

The whole purpose of Solomon's adventure with rocks and clay and wood and steel and fabric ... was for one purpose ... to bring people together to worship ... to bring sacrifices ... to bring honor and glory ... to sing praise ... to the one God.

If you have ever traveled in Europe you have no doubt seen the great cathedrals scattered all over that great land. Solomon's principle of a great building for a great God was taken over by the medieval church, which channeled immense economic resources into magnificent cathedrals that were showpieces of artistic beauty. Most churches can't afford that kind of building in these days ... and even if we could ... most of us are a little more in tune with human need and would feel guilty pouring such resources in to that kind of building. But let it be said ... church buildings are a silent witnesses to the faith of the people who worship inside those buildings. The thousands of people who drive up and down Gage Boulevard see in our building... a reflection of the faith of those who worship inside. At least I'd like to think that is true! And FOR THAT REASON ... ONE ROLE OF A CHURCH BUILDING COMMITTEE (and I doubt Solomon would argue with me) IS TO COMMUNICATE THEOLOGY.

So ... what are we communicating ... what are we saying about God ... what we saying about God's claim on our lives as disciples ... through this beautiful facility which we have come to dedicate today. Let me list a few things I think we are saying ... but I'm sure there are more, and this discourse would do well ... to continue into the future. Here's what I think we are saying:

- **Number 1 ... our building ON, with Solomon as our icon ... is for the purpose of building UP the church. To me,** the Apostle Paul is the icon for building up the church. I get the feeling that Paul wasn't all that keen on physical building programs. I don't remember any stories in the letters he wrote ... about encouraging his new little churches ... to build buildings. He may not have been opposed to building buildings ... but Paul talked about the temple being in our own body (1 Corinthians 6) ... and that our body is like a tent. And when the tent wears out, there will be an eternal tent for us in heaven. Paul may not keen on building ON ... but Paul was keen on building UP the church. His plea was that every person in Christ use their God given talent/ability ... to the glory of God for the building up of the church. Paul is the icon for BUILDING UP. **Our building ON, with Solomon as our icon ... is for the purpose of building UP the church, with Paul as our icon.**
- **Our God calls us to UNITY and community.** Consider this ... and you know ... I may be just way off base here ... I have been before ... but consider this: Our North American culture made it's way through decade or so emphasizing the free spirit and individuality of we human beings. You may remember the 1960's ... some of you. It was the decade of the fire at old First Church downtown, and the original building of building's here at 1880 Gage. It was an era of independence .. "I've Got To Be Me" ...kind of summed up the mind-set of American culture, in many ways. The bottom line was ... the idea of community ... was not talked about much, as I remember. In church, or anywhere else. And the buildings we built ... didn't accommodate community ... or necessarily promote unity.

In October of this year, our new gathering space outside the sanctuary will be dedicated as Unity Hall ... and as we do that we will remember that *unity* .. the coming together of people ... is one of the most ancient core values of the Christian tradition. Jesus prayed for unity among his disciples .. on the night before he was to go to the cross. Christian unity has been emphasized from the onset of the movement which today we refer to as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We are trying to tell the story over and over again of the historic sermon in the sanctuary of Old First Church downtown Topeka by the Reverend Peter Ainslie in 1910 ... which brought into being what is now

known as the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ. This church has played a significant role in fostering the message of Christian Unity through the Disciples movement. The statement the Disciples of Christ use today as an identity statement is ... “We are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.”

Christian unity has to start right here in the corridors of our own sacred space. You can't be a prophet for family values if you don't practice and experience family values in your own home, right? You can't be a prophet for Christian Unity if you don't practice it on the home front. I have to tell you a story. Several people from our congregation ... long time members ... have commented, since we have begun to use Unity Hall ... about the lovely children's Art mural leading in to the Nursery Center ... “Oh my, who did that lovely mural?” Well ... that mural ... has been there for 10 years! You just haven't seen it ... because you have not been in that building. Now ...you are seeing what our children see everyday! We are the church ... together! One church. You should have seen that mural years ago! The kids did! Our new space speaks to us about unity ... it gives us gracious space for being together ... for radical hospitality! Unity Hall and the new corridors tie us together so that physically ... we really are ... ONE CHURCH!

- Here's something else I believe we are saying through our buildings. Our renovations in the Children's Center and Adult Center and Nursery Center all speak about **priorities of the church**. They speak about the importance of education. As someone once reminded me ... we are always only one generation away ... from barbarianism! Have you ever considered just how really important Christian education is? The message we communicate as we enter into nicely furnished, clean, orderly, updated education facilities ... gives testimony to the importance we place on teaching and demonstrating God's word.
- Another thing we are saying along these lines is that we want education ... especially for our kids ... to be fun, and interactive ... and pertinent. I can well remember as a kid going to Sunday School in the basement of Polo Christian Church. It was damp, and full of mold. Of course, in those days we didn't know we were allergic to it. There were single light bulbs that hung from the ceiling by the electric wire ... concrete floors ... and room dividers that served only to keep us from seeing what the other classes were doing ...but not from hearing everything that was said. And you know, I didn't really think anything about being in any way abused by such a crude learning environment. But today, we have learned so much about what motivates kids to learn. It has a lot to do with environment. Our building renovations will say to all the parents who come to this place ...Jesus loves the little children ... all the children ... and your kids are important to us. That's what our buildings are communicating.
- Have you ever been in a church building where ... when you walk it ... it smells like something that's 200 years old ... with carpet on the floor that's appears to be 200 years old ... and pictures that look like they were taken 200 years ago ... What does a building like that say to you? It says to me ... that there have been some visionary people around this church ... but they haven't been here for a long, long time. Our lovely space here does say something about you ... my friends. It says that **you think what happens here is worth investing a lot of money in** ... to say nothing of all the time an effort and leadership. It says you have a vision ... and that you take discipleship seriously. That's what it says.

This building which we have come to dedicate this morning... I don't think I have to tell you ... this has been a long process ... a process that I define as faithful discernment ... in asking God to give us direction as we seek to facilitate ministry. I want to share with you a quick history run-down ... before we do the actual dedication ... just as a reminder to you of the detailed process we went through to get where we are today.

It started:

*Feb. 21, 2006 Christian Ed asks Cabinet
for more adult classrooms

*Church Extension was asked for renovation help

*Church Extension reminds us:

“The church does not set its own agenda.

Jesus Christ, sets the agenda”

***KEY QUESTIONS:**

Church extension helped us to ask the right questions! Specifically these two:

Where are we now?

Where is God calling us to go?

How do we get there?

FAITHFUL PLANNING PROCESS

(Aug. 2006-May 2007)

*Congregation takes survey

*Team assesses spiritual gifts,
gathers neighborhood demographics,
identifies congregational strengths

*Information shared with Congregational
Leaders; Church Extension Consultant
Bill Bass leads visioning for future

*Faithful Planning Team identifies
Mission Opportunities and Core Values;
writes Statement of Calling and Motto

*Team Members with Ministry Teams
write Ministry Plan

*Each step shared with Cabinet, Board,
and Congregation

BUILDING EVALUATION COMMITTEE

(May-June 2007)

*Sub-committees complete sections
of Building Planning Workbook

*Evaluations of facilities are shared

*Tele-conference with Bill Bass recommends:

- 1) More adult education, small group space
- 2) Dedicated area for children's worship;
- 3) Expansion of Narthex as welcoming space;
- 4) More storage throughout FCC;
- 5) Easier accessibility among FCC buildings.

BUILDING COMMITTEE

(August 2007-May 2009)

*Bill Bass orients Building Committee;
defines role based on Ministry Plan and
Building Evaluation Team recommendations

- *Committee interviews 7 architects;
selects Schwerdt Design Group
- *Committee works with architects
to design building plan
- *Plans presented to Board, Cabinet,
congregation groups for discussion
- *11/11/07 Congregation affirms Ministry Plan
priorities; okays asking Church Extension for
capital fund-raising help; empowers Committee
to work with architects to design plan meeting both

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN (Jan.-May 2008)

- *Bill Bass orients Executive Committee
- *Members recruited for Advanced Pledge,
Meals Committee, Publicity, Faith
Foundations, Team Leaders and Secretaries
- *"Building Up, Building On" committees fulfill duties
- *Letters sent, visits made, calls begin
- *Commitment Sunday 4/27/08
- *Celebration Sunday 5/11/08

BUILDING COMMITTEE (August 2007-May 2009)

- *Committee meets monthly with architects
to reconcile plans to pledges
- *Small group meetings gather
congregational comments on plan
- *Congregation approves \$1,400,000 building plan
- *Committee chooses McPherson
as pre-selected contractor
- *Committee works with architects,
contractor to trim costs
- *May 21, 2009 Committee finalizes
alternatives

CONSTRUCTION SUB-COMMITTEE (June 2008-May 2009)

- *Completes 8-page Church Extension
Mortgage Loan Application
- *Oversees construction beginning
August 17, 2009
- *Approves necessary change orders
- *Approves and makes payments
to architects and contractor

So here we are today! Thanks be to God. It has been amazing to me ... that we have accomplished this incredible goal and have come out basically unscathed! There are not many battle wounds ... none that will result in permanent scars. We are a stronger church today than we were when we began this work in 2006.

There is one thing that I pray for ... and that is that you will always remember that this is a mission station. There will be scratches on the wall ... black marks on the floor ... some things will get broken ... because you are going to use this place as a safe and loving space for people of all ages to gather .. and learn ... and play and laugh and pray. Let these buildings be used. There are all kinds of great cleaning products out there on the market! They will clean up the black marks and the broken pieces can be put back together. Don't make a museum out of your beautiful new building. Continue to make it a mission station ... and God will be with you and you will witness the growth of the body of Christ and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

Amen.