

Board explores a future for Minneapolis's Wesley building

By Victoria Rebeck, United Methodist Reporter, July, 2011

The Wesley Church building in downtown Minneapolis may become a meeting center for faith groups and community organizations, as well as a performance space.

“A United Methodist-related nonprofit is being formed and is exploring possibly running the building,” said Rev. [Dennis Alexander](#), Minnesota Conference director of intercultural and urban ministries.

The 120-year-old building, which was home to the former Wesley United Methodist Church and an experimental satellite congregation of the Recovery Church (based in Saint Paul), came under the care and ownership of the Minnesota Conference on Jan. 1, 2010. Space is rented for meetings, events and weddings.

Two Minnesota Conference new-church starts meet there: New Harmony United Methodist Church (Rev. Greg Renstrom, pastor), and STORM Faith Community (Rev. David E. Brown, pastor).

Although the building was never actively listed or marketed, the trustees did explore the possibility of a sale that was presented to them. When that did not materialize, the conference trustees asked a group to explore forming a nonprofit organization that would manage the building.

The organization's interim board has identified these purposes: to provide space in the building for functions that benefit the surrounding community, to continue a United Methodist ministry presence in downtown Minneapolis, and to preserve the historic structure by raising funds and preparing a long-term restoration plan.

Varied ministries

Some of the space would continue to be available for events. Other parts might be leased for offices or commercial ventures. Ministries such as a weekly community free-lunch service and several Twelve-Step meetings will continue at the site. Faith groups like New Harmony and STORM may continue to meet there for worship and gatherings.

Interim board members are Rev. Rick Ireland (chairperson), Marcia Alexander, Burt Berlowe, Chip Jamison, Steve Schroeder, and Lisa Schroeder. Conference staff members are assisting the board.

Alexander said the group has fourteen “prerequisite” tasks to accomplish before possibly assuming management of the building on Jan. 1, 2012.

These tasks are

- Create a clear and compelling statement of mission and purpose
- Prepare a decision-making chart showing who will decide various questions
- Develop a project timeline to Jan. 1, 2012
- Develop an interim budget
- Outline the categories of representation on the board of directors
- Develop a job description for board members
- Nominate board members
- Create a database of “Friends of Wesley”
- Draft bylaws
- Develop a staffing plan and job descriptions
- Prepare a 2012 budget
- Prepare a three-year business plan
- Develop a plan for the building
- Hire initial staff

A planning document identifies the “values for building use” as respect for others using the building, support for connections of other faiths to one another, exchange of information and dialogue about different traditions, and the fostering of discussion of beliefs and experiences.

The interim board is carefully studying other models of nonprofit boards’ managing community and church use of historic United Methodist church buildings, such as Calvary Center for Culture and Community (Philadelphia) and Grant Avenue Community Center and Sacred Place (Denver).

The building is located in downtown Minneapolis, adjacent to the Minneapolis Convention center. Designed by the region's most eminent architect, Warren Howard Hayes, the church was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. An adjoining Wesley Temple building was completed in 1929 and sold to Robert Short in the late 1960s. The Short family sold the building to the city of Minneapolis, which razed it in the 1980s to make way for the Convention Center.

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