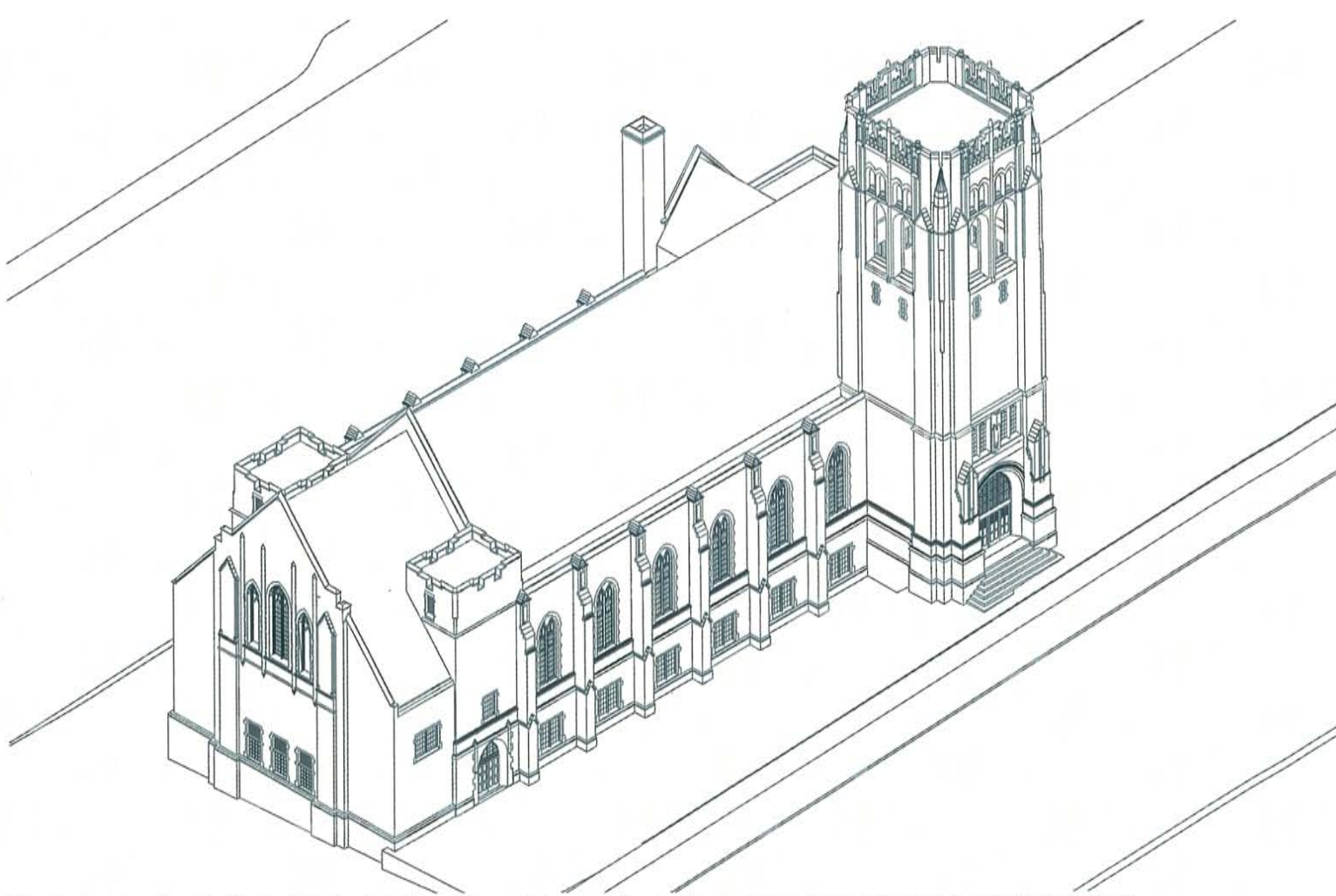




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EDUCATION ISSUE:
Greening God's House



The University Temple (United Methodist Church) would become the anchor building of the proposed Ecumenical Campus.

The University District, home to the massive University of Washington, is a complete urban neighborhood. It's an active commercial center, with recreational, dining, and cultural opportunities, dense housing, and great transit connections. During the past ten years, comprehensive regional planning has led to zoning changes, expansion of public transit options, and other changes in land-use policy. The results of these changes are now being felt. Land values are rising quickly, and pressure is increasing for higher-density redevelopment.

Abiding within this context is a community of churches that have shared the University District for a century. As "metropolitan congregations," these urban churches draw their members from the greater Seattle metro area. Their outreach ministries include support for a broad range of social service organizations vital to the community. More than 20 service providers call the neighborhood home, many of which are housed within church buildings dispersed throughout the neighborhood.

In recent years, these churches have been transforming themselves into the "University District Ecumenical Parish." This cross-polity group is a local expression of the international ecumenical movement that has been spreading among many Christian denominations for the

last half-century. The growing movement is a deliberate counterpoint to the disunity which has characterized so much of the Church's history. Locally, the Ecumenical Parish has reinforced already strong bonds between the University District churches. Manifestations of this unity include a variety of shared worship services throughout the church year: "pulpit exchanges" wherein clergy exchange preaching duties in each other's congregations; diverse fellowship; and educational opportunities.

COMMON CHALLENGES

On February 1, 2004, 150 people from ten University District churches gathered on a Super Bowl Sunday for an event dubbed the "Ultimate Potluck." That day, they shared a meal and a discussion about the unique ecumenical relationship binding their congregations together.

That first meeting led to the realization that these churches have much in common, particularly with regard to their most daunting challenges. Like many urban churches, they are confronted with the realities of aging, unsustainable, single-use facilities. Their membership numbers are significantly smaller than when their World War I vintage buildings were constructed, meaning that the congregations

are often poorly matched to their facilities. Issues commonly include safety and accessibility deficiencies, aging building systems, and poor energy efficiency. Parking shortages are common. Contractors and consultants have to be paid for work once done by member volunteers. Deferred maintenance lists grow longer each year.

These challenges, however, stand in marked contrast with the lively, progressive culture that the University District churches share. As they look to the future, these congregations remain committed to sustaining vital, activist ministries emphasizing social justice and peace, community engagement and inclusive fellowship.

THE LEARNING CURVE

Looking forward, it seemed that a collaborative approach among the churches might serve their collective best interests in the pursuit of new strategies that had previously eluded them. An ad hoc task force was formed to learn as much as possible about the particular circumstances of each congregation. Meeting monthly, this "Ecumenical Stewardship Task Force" evolved into an active working group, with representatives appointed by the governing bodies of eight neighborhood churches: Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal,

Congregational, Disciples of Christ, American Baptist, Quaker, and Christian Science.

The task force gathered and examined a mountain of data: institutional, historical, financial, and architectural. A thorough analysis of all existing facilities was conducted, including the preparation of measured drawings of every church building. (In addition to eight parish churches, this study also included Covenant House, an ecumenical facility housing campus ministry programs for seven denominations.)

The buildings of these institutions contained more than 314,000 square feet of floor space, and occupied 313,000 square feet (over seven acres) of highly valued real estate. Amazingly, the churches owned all of this property outright, with almost no debt. To their astonishment, they realized that together they held developable real estate with a market value in the neighborhood of \$60 million! To leave this abundance untapped was poor stewardship of their resources, at a time when their progressive goals for service, mission, and ministry were growing more ambitious than ever.

THE "BIG IDEA"

As the conversation expanded, an idea emerged: What if some of these aging, single-use facilities were sold, and the equity pooled

into a new mixed-use facility that could house multiple congregations? At first murmured cautiously, the idea started to gain traction as the ongoing conversation began to give shape to the concept. Here was a group of faith communities with much in common. Still, each denomination had traditions that were deeply valued, mostly centering on their distinctive approaches to corporate worship. If a facility could be created that would permit each congregation to worship according to their unique traditions, yet enable them to share other facilities as part of a larger faith community, great advantages might be found. Since they already valued a great sense of community, shared fellowship facilities made sense. As all of the churches have enriching programs of adult study and discourse, as well as educational programs for children and youth, shared classroom space is also beneficial. Shared building infrastructure and parking are obvious benefits as well.

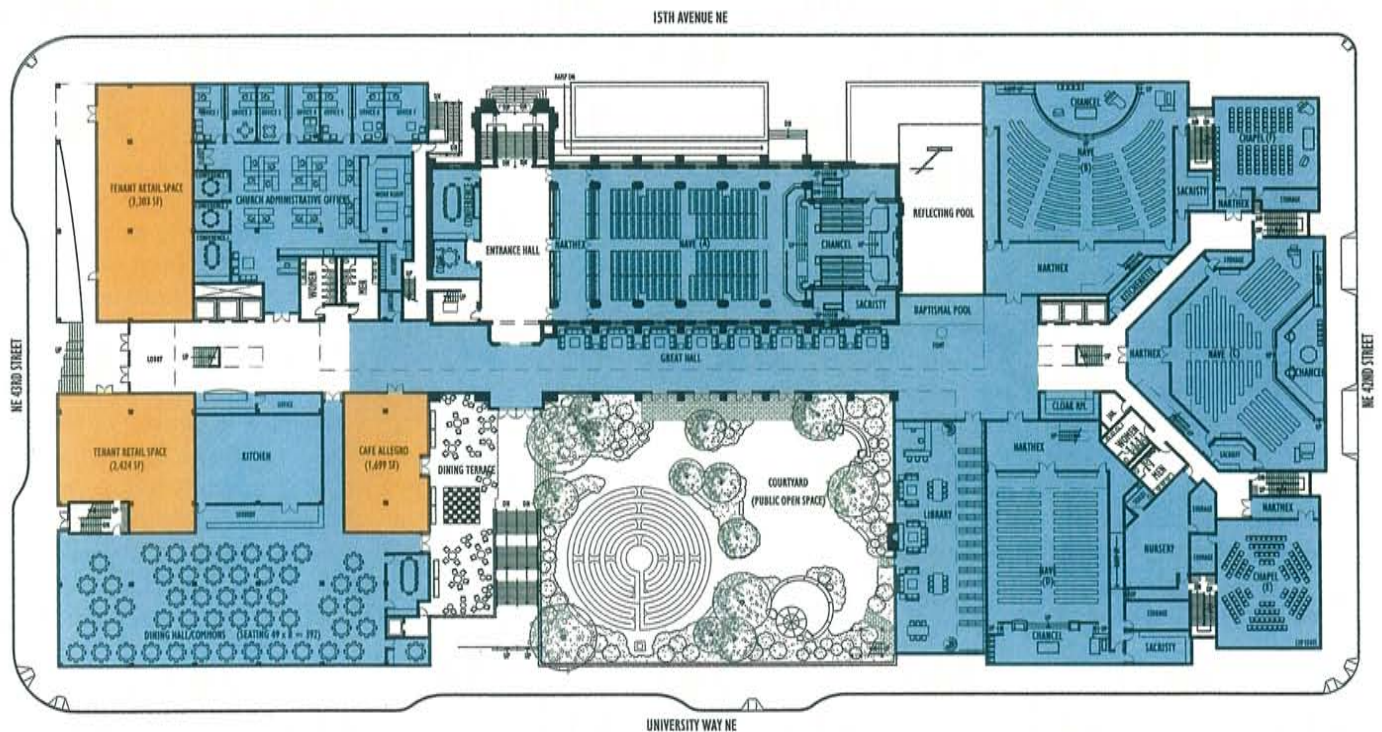
Deepening their commitment to a variety of social service providers, the churches can also provide better facilities for these essential services, now scattered throughout the neighborhood. Gathering several of these operations into a single, flexible location, the churches can provide more space of higher quality than the cramped and inefficient spaces now available.

This clustering of services will also improve coordination between providers.

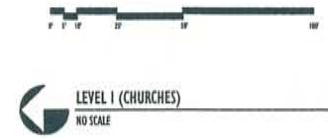
A new building with a variety of assembly spaces and classrooms provides a rare opportunity to connect with the wider community. Diverse civic, cultural, and academic activities promise to activate the facilities of churches that otherwise sit idle too often. Worship calls for spiritually uplifting sacred spaces, but those same spaces can also be designed to work well for secular events.

Since these churches want to be where the most people are, it makes sense to target a location right in the midst of a busy urban center. This also means the new facility will be well located for commercial enterprises behind street-activating storefronts. Incorporating commercial uses into an institutional project helps to capitalize project costs, generates reliable income to cover ongoing operating costs, and helps to knit the whole into the fine-grained fabric of the neighborhood. Locally owned, owner-operated enterprises will be selected for their ability to make a genuine contribution to the sense of a lively and healthy "commons" for the whole community.

Key to the Ecumenical Campus concept is the provision of public open space, privately owned and operated, secured at night and for special events, but otherwise open and available as a gift



The street level plan of the block development shows multiple clustered worship spaces sharing common areas and surrounding a garden at mid-block.



to the community, a public benefit that will further enrich the neighborhood. The University District has a chronic shortage of park facilities. Such “breathing room” will be increasingly important (and increasingly difficult to achieve) as neighborhood density increases.

Finally, existing church real estate no longer needed after completion of the Ecumenical Campus can be made available to low-income housing providers, to create hundreds of housing units dispersed throughout the neighborhood. Affordable housing for University faculty and staff, student housing, low-income housing for disadvantaged populations, and senior housing are all under consideration.

THE VISION

Thus was born the vision for a new building type: a civic commons integrated into the mixed-use fabric of a vital urban center, providing a more sustainable home for multiple faith communities and the campus ministry programs and social service agencies they support. The Ecumenical Campus has the potential to transform these churches, as well as the surrounding community.

The illustrations that accompany this article are from the planning study developed

to model the project concept. The project site has not yet been finalized, but the study shows the project integrated with the existing sanctuary of University Temple (United Methodist Church), a fine Gothic Revival sanctuary designed by noted Seattle architect John Graham, Sr., and completed in 1927. This location, adjacent to the main campus of the University of Washington and central to the business district, is also adjacent to a planned light-rail subway station and to more than 20 public transit routes with direct service to surrounding neighborhoods and the greater metropolitan area. Preservation and restoration of the iconic sanctuary is an important project element.

UDECC

Last year, after three years of steady concept development and consensus building, six worshipping communities made the commitment to form and fund a new nonprofit development corporation for the purpose of completing a full feasibility study of the Ecumenical Campus concept. Additional churches continue to consider joining the effort as full participants. The University District Ecumenical Campus Coalition (UDECC) was incorporated in June

2007, and is expected to deliver its feasibility report to the partner institutions in June 2008. The feasibility study will address project scope, program, schedule and budget, site control, market analysis, governance, and ownership issues (including a great deal of legal work). Each partner institution will then have to resolve for itself the question of whether or not it is ready to move on from its current facility and be collocated with its neighbors at the Ecumenical Campus. Occupancy is projected for mid-2012.

The UDECC logo is a labyrinth. Not only are labyrinths graphically compelling and iconic, but there is also a long tradition in many churches of walking a labyrinth as a spiritual exercise. As you contemplatively wend your way through the labyrinth's twists and turns, you leave one reality behind, and move patiently toward your goal, where a new reality awaits. The process of building consensus within a single worshipping community is daunting, even for the simple decisions. To do so with multiple congregations simultaneously, when the questions are of such existential significance, is a profoundly labyrinthine exercise, yet one that promises a new model of urban church sustainability on multiple levels. 18

Detail of the garden space that would be located on the west edge of the Ecumenical Campus development.

