

December 2018/January 2019 Rejoice

Parish Input to be Sought for Envisioning Fowler House and Ross Building 2.0

By Emily R. Bryan, Senior Warden

The Fowler House/Ross building was purchased thanks to the generosity and vision of the parishioners and leadership of our church 25 years ago. The acquisition of the building allowed Christ Church to expand its physical campus, creating dedicated space for our choir, children's programs, outreach activities, teens, and much more. The Fowler House has helped us to grow our programs, and the space it provides is critical to our church's future.

For the last four years, the dedicated parishioners on the Fowler House Committee, led by Chris McMurray, John Weaver, and Jim Coakley, have been exploring our options for what to do if Ross vacates the building. I encourage you to read Chris's articles in the September and October Rejoice for a better understanding of the way the group has approached its work.

Last year, Ross renewed its lease through January 31, 2021. When we told Ross that we were exploring marketing the property and they needed to let us know if they had an interest in remaining beyond that time, they responded that they were not prepared to consider or commit to anything. Additionally, they let us know that if they ultimately decided they were interested in remaining it would be for less space.

The Fowler House Committee has recommended that we enter into discussions with a developer with a history of successful condo development with non-profits and churches. At the November Vestry meeting, the Vestry authorized the group to sign a non-binding letter of intent with that developer. This gives the committee the ability to negotiate terms in a meaningful way with the developer, but does not lock us in to an agreement.

In the current real estate climate, a long-term ground lease appears to be the best option for the church's financial and missional health. In a ground lease scenario, the church would continue to receive rental payments that escalate over time, but would not be financially responsible for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the building. The lessee will likely construct a new building on the site of the current Fowler House. We would retain condominium rights to a mutually agreed-upon space, which we will have 24/7 access to and full control of, to house the programs that currently use the Fowler House space. We would become owners of the updated building at the end of the ground lease period.

Significantly, we would need to rebuild the new space. The very preliminary cost for this, updated from the work which we did for the original Fowler House buildout, is \$1 million. We are confident that the parish will rise to this occasion and will provide the funding necessary to build out the new space, just as our parish has stepped up many times in the past - HVAC, now fully paid off, being the most recent.

Indeed, we have already received a strong indication that a substantial gift toward the redevelopment of Fowler House will be forthcoming. Even if this bears fruit, we will need the financial support of our parishioners to make a new space for our parish a reality.

To protect the interests of the parish, the Episcopal Church canons and the Diocese of Virginia have a significant approval process before any disposition of property occurs. Parish approval, approval of the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Virginia, and the approval of the Bishop of Virginia must be obtained. Additionally, the Circuit Court will need to approve any agreement. In

February, we will begin that process by asking the parish to vote to approve entering into a long-term ground lease.

The Vestry and Fowler House Committee members are eager to speak with as many parishioners as possible. We will host parish Q&A sessions on January 6 and 13. Vestry and Fowler House Committee members will be visiting as many ministries and small group gatherings as possible during the month of January. We will be scheduling visits for January in December; if you would like someone to visit your group and have not heard from us by December 15, please email me at emilyrbryan@gmail.com.

This is an exciting time for our parish, and also one that creates opportunity for creativity. Noelle is in the process of forming committees to envision what our new space could look like and to address how we continue to provide top-notch programming during the construction phase. Please hold these groups in your prayers as they dream and plan for the physical shape of our parish's future.

Over the years, our parish has put numerous faith-based initiatives in place: Mengo Hospital, the HVAC system, Our Little Roses, and the Bag Lunch Program, just to name a few. With your assistance, guidance, and prayers, we are confident that we can have a similarly successful result underway when the Ross lease expires in two years.

Members of the Vestry and Fowler House Committee are eager to answer parishioner's questions about the process. Please seek us out over the coming months with your questions and ideas.