

The Facilities Task Force

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For the Lord has chosen you to build a temple as a sanctuary. Be strong and do the work...Do not be afraid or discouraged for the Lord God, our God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished.

I Chronicles 28:10,20

Arising from the strategic work of the 21st Century Task Force, in June 1994, the congregation enthusiastically adopted a Mission and Vision statement which would, in fact, lead us into the 21st century. Hyde Park's mission of Making God's Love Real would primarily be fulfilled through worship, educational opportunities, caring relationships and ministries of witness and service.

Each element of this mission would require bold steps in staffing, lay engagement and facilities, the latter being the most formidable. The existing buildings and property footprint limited both the types of ministry expansion and the physical capacity needed to accommodate the planned growth of the congregation.

A Facilities Task Force was convened to assess and set the course for changes that would be needed to accomplish the ministry growth envisioned. Members were elected at the November 1994 Church Conference: Jim Cloar, Jim Ferman, Jr., Kim Foss, Mike Hogan, Peggy McMichael, Warren Rendall, Hugo Schmidt, Bill Studer and Bruce Tigert. Jim Harnish, Senior Pastor, and Lynn Roberts Osborne, Church Business Administrator, rounded out the team. Little did they know the adventure that awaited them. Jim Cloar was named as Chairperson. When he moved from Tampa, Jim Ferman, Jr. and Bruce Tigert became Co-Chairpersons.

This group's first task would be to meet in neighborhood gatherings and in ministry settings to listen and discern how the facilities would serve our needs best. It was soon clear that the physical limitations of our campus would require creative and collaborative solutions. The existing three buildings, Knox Hall, the Sanctuary and Wesley Building, plus parking lot were surrounded by sidewalks on the four sides of a city block that prevented outward expansion. Because the church resides in the Hyde Park Historical District, the height of all buildings was limited to three stories. There was just no way that each ministry would be able to have their own individual space, uniquely designed for their needs. Almost every room would need to be multi-purposed, sometimes housing one set of activities on Sundays and other activities through the week.

In February 1996, Architect Chris Bell of Robbins Bell and Kreher presented a master plan that would develop a large parking lot south of the main block, replace the education building, construct a new activities center with adjoining ministry offices, and expand Knox Hall and the Sanctuary. All the buildings would orient to a central courtyard and circular drive improving accessibility and fellowship. Although the master plan was a big milestone, the Facilities Task Force's work was just getting started.

Over the next two years, they would select J.O.DeLotto & Sons as the general contractor and The Bank of Tampa as a financing partner. Working with the Board of Trustees and Committee on Finance, a budget for Phase I was developed and a generosity consulting firm was engaged to kick off the first of two capital funds campaign. Only then were we able to break ground and begin actual construction in June 1998.

The placement of the existing buildings dictated the sequence and phasing of construction. The old education building had to be demolished first to make way for the new Wesley Center and concurrently, the Activities Center and Ministries Offices. The Knox Hall expansion and renovation came next and finally, the Sanctuary, completed in August 2003.

At each step along the way, it became increasingly clear that each of the Facilities Task Force members had been called by God for "such a time as this." Certainly, the members brought professional expertise arising from careers in business, architecture, construction, real estate development and urban planning. Perhaps even more important were their spiritual gifts like wisdom, faith, and leadership which gave voice to the Spirit to speak into many of the hard places along the way. At various times, there were both celebrations and frustrations, clear vision and cloudy confusion, conflicted discussions and unanimous decisions. Nevertheless, this team's commitment to the vision God held for Hyde Park remained steadfast and even grew stronger over time. Individually and collectively, they brought the skills, the tenacity and the heart to build the facilities that would support ministry for many years into the future.