

Good afternoon, and thank you for staying for this forum and presentation of the process and plans for our worship spaces – especially the sanctuary – that are being proposed as a part of the Faith for the Future capital campaign. In fact, the plans under consideration serve as a major focus of the coming campaign, and are certainly a significant part of the vision for this church for the future.

It is indeed a privilege to be able to speak with you today about the challenges with which we are faced, the process that has been followed over the past 18 months or so, and the excitement with which we hope to move forward in realizing this vision. I am pleased to share the presenting today with two persons who have been pivotal to the unfolding of this process. Betsy Marvin and Jon Sheppard have co-chaired two groups which have met and worked literally for hundreds of hours in the past year-and-a-half – and I thank them for their participation today and for their leadership in this process.

Today's forum is only a beginning point for broader conversation and consideration of these plans by members of the congregation. Today's session is intended to give a good background understanding of what has been considered, and the current status of proposals for the sanctuary. In mid-March, we will have the privilege of hosting another congregational forum (on Sunday, March 16) with Terry Byrd Eason, the outstanding liturgical designer with whom we have been working, in order to fill in even more of the rich historical, architectural and liturgical context in which these proposals have developed and to which they relate. So, while many of your questions may be answered today, even more will be possible with the next forum!

Before we move to an outline of the process and proposals, I think it is important to say a few words about this space – what it means to us, and from where it has come. This is indeed SACRED space...and it is sacred on several different levels. It is sacred by definition because of the divine purpose for which it was built – the worship of God. It has been made even more sacred over the last 115 years by the generations who have worshiped here and been nurtured in the faith within these walls. So it also has an element of sacredness that has developed in a historical sense for the congregation and community. But it is certainly also more than a sacred building. It is a living and breathing testament to the faithfulness and vision of this congregation over many generations.

I point this out in part to emphasize the deep sense of gratitude and the care, seriousness and prayerful consideration that has permeated the discussions among the various committees involved in the development of these plans. The prospect of change always carries with it not only excitement and great hope based on a vital vision for the future; it also carries with it a certain level of anxiety and hesitancy – uncertainty about what we will miss, what will be different and how that will affect our own personal devotion. At the same time, we must move forward with FAITH, as our predecessors have at critical points in years past, that God is leading us in important directions that will give life and vitality to this congregation and to the larger Church long after we are gone.

As many of you are aware, the congregation of Third Church traces its beginnings to 1827. As we just marked our 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a congregation this past year, it is interesting to note that major markers in the history of the congregation have occurred just about every 60 years or so, give or take a few – roughly the span of two generations. During the first 60 years, as the congregation and the community grew, Third Church occupied several different buildings at various locations in the downtown area, west, and just east of the river. In the late 1880s, however, the congregation made the bold –and some said irresponsible, even crazy – move further east of the river to the largely undeveloped area of East Avenue. The first building on this site was built around 1887 on Meigs Street, and within just a few years, the present sanctuary was built to accommodate the rapid growth that was occurring in the area. Portions of that first building, of course, still exist and are now incorporated into the Parish House, most evident in the spaces of the Chancel Choir Room and the Moot Room.

Almost 60 years after the opening of the new sanctuary, it was determined that the space did not adequately meet the needs of the growing congregation or of its worship patterns. So, in the early 1950s the chancel was dramatically altered in a neo-Gothic style, re-positioning the choir and organ, pulpit and lectern, and adding the stunningly beautiful window above the reredos and communion table.

Here we are, almost another 60 years later in the history of Third Church, and again we are at what many feel is a critical junction in the life of the congregation, full of challenge, but also of great opportunity. It is a point where the inevitable structural needs of an aging building coincide with the realization that while we still worship in a very traditional pattern, that the way we experience that worship is vastly different than it was in the 1950s, with larger numbers of participants in worship leadership, specifically in choirs, and much more participation by the congregation in the form of spoken and sung responses, prayers and hymns. As a result, our current worship experience is no longer fully supported by the space. As we move into the rest of the presentation, it is our hope that you will catch a bit of the vision for what can be – as the plans interestingly recall some of the best features and functions of the original sanctuary design, as well as build on the strength of what was added over 50 years ago, while boldly preparing for and anticipating the next 60 years in enhancing the worship life of this great church. \*