



**“Our Faith, Our Foundation, Our Future”**  
**Scripture – John 15:1-17**  
**Sermon preached by Gregory Knox Jones**  
**Sunday, July 9, 2017**

Look around at this space where we worship. Gaze at the sturdy stone walls and the vaulted ceiling that lifts our spirits. Scan our beautiful stained glass windows that portray stories from the Bible and display prominent symbols and people of faith.

Architects know that the way space is designed and light is used have an impact on our emotions. In fact, the way a place is designed can have a physiological as well as psychological impact on us. Think of the difference in how you feel when you enter a small, dark space with a low ceiling, and how you feel entering a building where the ceiling is thirty feet high and light is pouring through the windows.

We can worship God in all types of spaces, but some act as a thin place, where the boundary between heaven and earth is especially permeable. These places evoke a sense of reverence because our awareness of God is more palpable.

Several times I have led people into our sanctuary for their first glimpse of our worship space. Entering from the back and walking into the sanctuary, their eyes are drawn upward.

Of course, Christians find it moving. They quickly spot the communion table, the baptismal font, the cross and the Resurrection window. But the reaction has been the same when I have led Jews and Muslims into our sanctuary. Their voices drop and they speak in hushed tones because the space evokes a sense of reverence in them.

What a gift previous generations of Westminster members have given us: this amazing sacred space where we come week after week to worship together as a church family. Where we listen for a word from God, voice our concerns through prayer, and have our souls stirred by music. We come here to make sense of our lives and to have our hopes revived. We come to this majestic space to transcend our small self and to glimpse our greater self as one created in the image of God. We come to this awe-inspiring place to step out of the immediate and to ponder the eternal.

We are so grateful to those Westminster members who at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century heard God’s call to make a leap of faith and build a sanctuary not simply for themselves, but for generations to come. There were only 300 members, but they decided to build a sanctuary that would seat nearly 500.

For some people, the sanctuary and chapel are about the only part of our building they experience. They miss the classrooms and conference rooms, more intimate spaces for smaller groups. They are unaware of our offices that

house our church staff who form much of the backbone of our ministry and mission. Those who only slip into worship on Sunday and then back out again, miss the fellowship and the many other activities that take place in Community Hall.

Anyone who does not step into our building other than Sunday morning misses the beehive of activity that occurs seven days a week. Our 180° youth meetings; Session, Deacon and Trustee meetings; numerous committee meetings, choir rehearsal, Stephen Ministry training, Men's Fellowship, Bible study, book groups, our knitting group that knits prayer shawls, our annual Bazaar, Christmas boxes, and on and on.

However, our marvelous facilities are not only for our multiple Westminster groups. There are 30 community organizations that rely on us for a place to meet.

How many groups can we name that use our building? Name a group that comes to mind.

Urban Promise – Monday through Thursday during the school year, 40 inner city youth gather downstairs to receive help with their school work, learn Christian values, and ways to settle conflicts peacefully. During June and July, 75 children and youth are here for throughout the day for Camp Promise. Without it, many of them would be on the streets trying to avoid trouble.

Family Promise – four weeks a year we house mothers, fathers and children who are temporarily homeless.

Nine separate Alcoholic Anonymous and Narcotic Anonymous groups; each group has 30 – 40 people who are finding the support they need to overcome their addiction.

Write to Heal – how journaling can heal your mind, body and soul.

The Mental Health Association provides women's support groups.

Child Inc. provides parenting classes.

Girl Scouts

FISH – people who drive people to doctors appointments.

Rainbow Chorale – a community choir for the LGBT community.

Peace Drums, Pacem in Terris and Churches for Middle East Peace, three groups that work for peace and justice in our world.

Friendship House offices are in our Daughtry House, and in Burton House we provide transitional housing for men who are trying to make their way back into society.

The garage in Burton House allows us to collect donated furniture and then provide it for women graduating from homeless shelters. It has helped our refugee family and others who are referred from local social service agencies.

More than 30 local service groups use our facilities. That is one of the things that makes Westminster unique. A number of churches only allow their buildings to be used by their members. Not here. Not us. Our building is a major part of our mission to help people in our community.

In today's passage, Jesus provides a wonderful metaphor that represents the church. He says that he is the true vine, and we are the branches. When we remain connected to Jesus we can bear great fruit. But, when we are not connected we wither.

Jesus goes on to explain how we can remain linked to him – by loving one another.

The church is to be a family where we care for one another, where we support one another, and where we challenge one another. Yet, the church can only be the true church when we look beyond ourselves and serve the needs of the world. Throughout the gospels, Jesus calls on his followers to be engaged in healing the world by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the ill, liberating the oppressed, protecting the vulnerable, and striving for peace.

On Sunday mornings, we use nearly every inch of our space, and the other days of the week, our building continues to be a bustling place. Our magnificent edifice allows us to live out Jesus' command to love one another and to extend compassion and healing to our community.

Our marvelous facilities provide the firm foundation from which we do our ministry and mission. Sustaining them is vital to our present and our future. However, sustaining our facilities is a challenge that is putting a great strain on our finances.

Did you know that our building has 24 roofs, 60 rooms, 38 stained glass windows, 19 air conditioning systems, and comprises 50,000 square feet?

Our stone structure is not only stunning, but sturdy. However, the mortar between the stones is not as lasting as the stones themselves. Some of you remember 10 years ago, we found a large piece of mortar lying on our sidewalk. It had come loose from our bell tower and fallen. If it had hit someone, they might not have survived. We quickly hired a company to re-point the tower and since then, we have re-pointed other sections of the exterior. Our property committee estimates that over the next 10 years we need to spend about \$400,000 on masonry work.

We also must replace some of the large air conditioning units on top of our building and repair some of our roofs. Stained glass windows last a long time, but not forever. Over time, the sheer weight of the window causes the pieces of glass to bow and if not replaced, they will shatter. Over the next 10 years, we expect to spend nearly \$200,000 repairing our stained glass windows.

Thank goodness that a number of years ago, our wise trustees developed a ten-year property plan that estimates when property items need to be repaired or replaced. The 10 year plan takes into account every piece of physical property: roofs, flooring, heating and air-conditioning, computers, furniture, lighting, electronics, sound systems, the parking lot, and much more.

The bottom line is this. Over the next ten years, we need to spend about \$200,000 a year on property items. Currently, we have \$2 million dollars in endowment funds that are designated for our property. Taking a five percent draw on that endowment provides \$100,000 or half of what we need. For the last ten years we have tried to come up with the second \$100,000 out of our annual budget, but we have rarely had enough funds to do it.

For several years our Joint Finance Committee wrestled with this problem, and slightly over a year ago, recommended to the Session that we embark on a Capital Campaign to increase our Property Endowment by \$2 million. That will allow us to annually draw the second \$100,000, and remove this expense from our yearly budget.

Last December our Session voted to launch a Capital Campaign. The expense of the campaign would come from the campaign itself and the first \$2 million would go to the property endowment. We also decided to challenge

our congregation to go beyond the \$2 million dollars and raise money for mission. Everything we raise beyond the \$2 million dollars and campaign expenses will go to mission.

In January, we recruited a Campaign Executive Committee and three amazing Chairs for our Capital Campaign – Jan Patrick, Patti and Bob Ridout. Over the past five months, the campaign chairs, the members of the committee, and I have been meeting with members of the congregation we believed could give us a strong start to our campaign. Today, we are opening the campaign to the entire congregation. Our goal is \$2.3 million. If all of us make a sacrificial gift, we can not only meet, but exceed our goal.

Please keep a close eye on your mailbox. Over the next couple of days, you will receive a brochure that describes the campaign and our goal. We are asking each of you to make a pledge, payable over five years. The mailing includes a letter of intent stating what you intend to give.

We are naming the next two weekends “Commitment Weekends.” We would like for everyone to either bring their letter of intent to worship, or mail it back to the church by the end of July. A large plaque will be placed in the main hallway listing the donors, and I hope your name will be on it.

After you read the information, if you have any questions, please call the church office and we will have someone return your call.

Over the last few months, as we have met with people about the campaign I have been overwhelmed by the generosity of our members. To date, 67 families have made a pledge. We have raised for our Property Endowment – are you ready for this? Slightly over \$1.85 million. If everyone else in our church family will give generously, we will meet and surpass our goal and bolster our mission giving.

There are defining moments in the life of every church. In 1910, when 300 Westminster members built our sanctuary to seat nearly 500 they destined this church for greatness. In the 1970s, when our trustees purchased land and built our parking lot, they insured our future. Today, there are a number of downtown churches that have little or no parking and their membership has shrunk to below 150 members. If they do not have a substantial endowment, they will not be able to care for their facilities.

Sadly, the Episcopal Church no longer has a cathedral in Wilmington because they could not maintain the building. Over the next 10 years, we will see more churches closing because they can no longer afford to maintain their building. Colleges and universities can not exist without substantial endowments. The same has become true for churches.

Another pivotal moment in our history was the Building in Faith campaign in the 1990s. Some of you were a part of that effort that resulted in our Community Hall, kitchen, classrooms, staff offices, and more. That great effort built our facilities to the point we need to be.

Now, it is our turn. We do not need to do any more building, but we need to insure that our facilities never fall into disrepair. That is what our campaign addresses. We are solidifying our present and guaranteeing our future as a vibrant church that cares about the community and uses its facilities to provide extraordinary mission.

Our magnificent stone structure is our spiritual home. Yet, after being a member for a while, it is easy to take it for granted. May we never forget that for many other community ministries that are changing people’s lives this square block on Pennsylvania Avenue stands as a beacon of light.

This campaign is our opportunity to live our mission and to continue to welcome those who come to our doors. Open your heart and let the love of God prompt you to join this bold effort.