First UMC Long Range Plan

(Honest Questions and Answers about Why We Need to Grow)

Q: Do we really need more space?

A: First United Methodist Church (First UMC) has a 125-year history of working to bring all ages, interests and cultures into a positive, enthusiastic ministry that makes our church an integral part of our community and each of our lives. Right now, we have

- 4,000 members,
- 67 programs and
- 37 outreach programs

First UMC is proud to offer small groups, large groups, children's groups and every age and interest group. There are meetings in our church seven days a week, all hours of the day and night. Last year alone, 316,000 people walked our halls at some point. First United Methodist Church is God's work in action, it's full-to-the-brim with both people and enthusiastic joy–and the time to plan for tomorrow is now, if we are to keep the flow going.

Q: What's the Long Range Planning Committee supposed to do?

A: Our Long Range Planning Committee has been charged to identify our church's needs and wants, as well as our path ahead. They spent months interviewing, watching, meeting, asking, mingling and praying. They looked at other churches, congregations programs and directions. Then they pulled out pencils and asked questions, measured walls, counted parking, met with city planners, neighbors and members. You'll want to know their findings, their priorities, the reasons behind them, and the numbers that pull it all together.

Q: What's all the talk about increasing security?

A: Our current campus is simply too large and open to allow for responsible crowd control at any given event or time. The truth is that there's no way to know who is on campus at First Church, when they came, where they are or whether they left. In today's world, we need to be mindful of the safety of both the children and adults worshipping or working, playing or meeting here.

Q: Will the new plan close our church up?

A: Not at all. The new plan revamps our current access points by adding welcome stations, (not walls), convenient parking, updated entryways and inviting sidewalks to make walking around the perimeter beautiful and easy. The end result will produce a

pleasing, park-like atmosphere to those approaching our church, easy, welcoming access for all, and security for visitors and members alike.

Q: Where will we park?

A: Current parking is already inadequate for our special programs, special needs or special weather. We use the library and museum for overflow parking, but the connecting sidewalk is narrow, and walkers have to cross a shale (crushed rock) parking lot that's tough to walk on.

Our new plan has to include better parking. Since we're still looking at possibilities, there are several options, but each choice is built around realizing that First UMC is part of a group of community centers that includes the Polk Museum and The Lakeland Public Library to the South and The Magnolia Building to the North.

Above all, First UMC wants to be a good neighbor to every participant affected by our growth. We will eventually need at least 150 additional parking spaces; we must choose the ones that best meet both church and community needs.

By creating a series of convenient parking lots that connect each venue's parking by way of wide, winding sidewalks, sprawling mini-parks, we enhance the neighborhood and provide shared space. Our vision is a peaceful, greenery-filled "one-neighborhood" look and feel that draws every participant in, and allows ample parking with multiple uses.

Q: Have we outgrown this location?

A: If we are to remain in the center of our beautiful and historic community, we will have to grow creatively and with the help and goodwill of our neighbors and community.

Q: What exactly will we add and/or change?

A: Our buildings are operating at capacity, and although no final drawings have been accepted, the long-range committee proposal includes:

- maintaining the Sanctuary, which is a Lake Morton presence and a piece of our history,
- expanding our great lawn and lakefront exposure for church activity
- updating beauty of facades campus-wide
- adequate new building space for the programs we provide
- building multi-use meeting and convention spaces
- additional parking required for visitors to be able to attend without stress.

- These requirements must be filled with the blessing of our community if we are to continue to grow and flourish. The alternative is to simply relocate, leaving our neighbors, traditions and ministries behind.

Q: What would happen if we stayed as we are?

A: Useable space encourages productivity. Right now First UMC makes adjustments to allow our ministries needed space. But we're bursting out all over. Our pre-school is full, we've outgrown our meeting spaces, Sunday Schools have moved repeatedly and even our administrative offices are split.

If we're going to be here for the long run, we must begin to balance tradition with the need for change, and charge forward with growth that is good for all. The new plan will provide the kind of space that Lakeland and our neighborhood can use, including:

Children's ministries and preschool expansion
Fitness center with regulation basketball court and bleachers
Exercise equipment, walking track, children's play zone
Expanded clothes closet
Food collection center
Multi-use meeting and conference rooms of all sizes

Let's make our new campus the hub of our community, with convention and meeting spaces we can use and offer to our community. We will put Christ squarely in the middle of our circle. And for those who come to our church for meetings, activities, services and more, we, it's members will be ready to say, "Welcome, and come back soon."

Q: If we grow too big, won't we lose the personal touch we have worked so hard to maintain?

A: If we're really going to win our world over to Christ, we'd better have a place where we can bring that world in and meet face-to-face, person-to person and heart-to-heart. Already, our disjointed service times and places make it difficult for our different congregations to come together in fellowship.

Our growth plan includes a Vistabula Street entrance with a central and welcoming entrance–including a coffee shop, bookstore and breakout rooms. We'll have a "front door" that says, "Welcome" to all.

The new plan also creates a joint meet-and-mix space. The Sanctuary, Fellowship Center and Chapel will exit onto a new common meeting ground, which offers casual

seating, small areas and ample room for small group conversation as well as private chats.

What's really exciting is that First UMC's growth plan will highlight the visible excitement that makes our church such a wonderful, welcoming place to be. The Children's Building, the first phase building, is located up front–we want to show the pride we take in growing our next generation in Christ.

Whatever architecture plan is decided on will incorporate similar design elements throughout the campus. The goal is to pull a more spacious and welcoming First Church together in a pleasing, unified look that says, "We're glad you're here."

Q: But isn't our church pretty wonderful the way it is?

A: Absolutely. We're more than 4,000 members strong, with eight buildings. But with no real layout, many people are unable to find their way from the Clothes Closet to the Friendship Center and on to the gym. The confusion is because we've always grown from need, with no time for careful planning.

Worse, our different services never intersect. The growth plan includes a meeting pavilion where we will all have a chance to meet and greet.

The new plan helps simplify our campus. We'll be bigger, better, easier to use–and more unified. By opening up halls, connecting buildings with landscaped pathways, and creating gathering spaces, we will find our center. Every building is easily seen. New signage will make directions simple and effective. It's a plan based on welcome, openness, ease of use and friendship.

Q: How big do we really want to be?

A: We're the fourth largest church in the state, our sanctuaries are full–and we're still growing. It's time to get planning, building and starting on the future.

Considering our city's demographic growth plan, we know the people are coming. We've spent months counting classes, people and parking spaces. *Over the next 15 years, we will need to double the square footage of First UMC if we want to continue to provide the level of service we currently provide.* That's a tall order, but the proposed plan does it. We've used the congregation's list of "order of growth importance" to know that family growth, leadership and security are all key items, to be phased in first.

It's an ambitious plan, but we are an ambitious church, following a God who knows no bounds. It won't happen in a year or three or even 10. This is a 15-year capital plan custom-designed for First UMC by architects, city planners, Christian leaders and lay people who care.

Q: What should I do?

A: Start thinking. Look over the plan. Come to the meetings:
http://www.firstumc.org/committees/LRPC/2010%20Public%20Calendar%20LRPC.pdf
Think about it. Pray over it. Talk about it. We can tweak the plans, move the parking, rearrange priorities. But let's get started. The year 2025 is coming fast.

Q: How much will it cost?

A: *The total project is estimated at this time to be about twenty-million dollars. That's a huge number, but remember it is planned to be spread in three phases that will span at least 15 years. Our goal is to keep First UMC a growing, moving, integral part of our community--with a positive, Christian impact on everyone we touch.*

Q: How will we raise the money?

A: *It will take a capital campaign, and we're still in the planning need phase. But it's never too early to begin thinking, and now is a good time to include the church in your planned giving--and let us know that you have. Keeping First UMC vibrant in our growing, changing community will take every one of us getting involved in the planning, giving and carrying out process.*

Q: Is this a poor time to raise money, given the economy?

A: It sure is, but growth is coming, and as one of the 10 churches in our 82-church district classified as growing, we have a responsibility to answer God's call. A campaign this year is premature, but it's never too early to plan.

Q: When do we plan to start raising money?

A: *We'll need to put together a tremendous and joy-filled Capital campaign, but that is not even a consideration until the Long-Range Master Plan has been approved by our congregation, our city and our neighborhood. Next, using a formal bid process, the builder for Phase I will be selected and actual costs determined. Only then can we move to a Capital campaign. Now is the time to ensure that every member, every neighbor and every person that First UMC touches understands the size and scope of the need and the plan. The $20 million cost is a very preliminary estimate of the total build out costs, and we will raise money one phase at a time.*

Q: What if we can't / don't raise enough?

A: *If we are not able to fully fund the first phase, we will supplement funding with a loan, (insofar as we can service the debt on that loan).*

Q: When will we break ground?

A: *The very earliest is three years, and more likely four years. See what we meant by Long-range planning?!*

Q: Which building is first?

A: *Phase I calls for the building of the new Children's Ministries multi-story building first. Our children's program is the most pressing need, with every classroom in use and waiting lists on the board.*