

Dear Members of Hope,

God's blessings to you this Easter season. Without Easter we are wasting all our time and money. Without Easter, without the Resurrection, our faith is in vain (1 Cor. 15). But Jesus IS risen, just as he said! Jesus is Risen and has promised to guard his One Church around the world against the gates of hell. They will not win. He does.

From the congregation that gathers on mud floors to the most beautiful of cathedrals, it is God's Hand that blesses, guides, and grants the Victory. It is His Word and His Sacraments that are at Work, in the Holy Spirit, to create, to build, to absolve, to redeem, to save.

So if He does the Work, and buildings don't ... why bother with buildings at all?

Throughout the Scriptures we see that while a building is not needed for there to be a Church, the people of God have used their gifts and resources to establish places of worship with a mind toward reverence and good order. We see this in the Tabernacle and Temple, which were richly adorned and beautiful. In the New Testament we find gatherings in homes and synagogues. We find needs for "table waiters," for collections for the poor or the widows, and collections for missionary journeys. In other words, we see the building blocks of infrastructure that, again, are not needed for there to be a Church, but are used by the Church to facilitate sharing the Gospel.

This continues throughout Church history as Christians use bishoprics, manuscripts, and ships to spread the Good News and promote order. The list goes on further to printing presses during the Reformation, to radio and the Lutheran Hour, to the internet in our present day and age.

Does the Church need any of those? No. They only need God and his Word. But they use them.

And here we are in Idaho Falls. Many Midwesterners moved here for their careers and had a vision of a congregation with a school. They built it, with God's grace, and they named it Hope. Are we still a people of Hope? Hope not in our efforts, but in the Resurrected Lord of the Church? This facility has blessed the proclamation of the Gospel (or is it the other way around?) for years and years. Let's be thankful. Even as we ask: How might we use a new facility and some updates?

Is this just for looks or is there a purpose behind it? A purpose that can better help us fulfill our mission statement: Sharing the Certain Hope of Jesus.

The easy answer is: More classrooms make room for more students to share Jesus with. True enough! But what if we can't fill the rooms? What if something goes horribly wrong?

We lean, as a people of Hope, once more on the promise of God: We can proclaim Jesus crucified and Risen on dirt floors! And so the thing that scares us the most: potential failure, receives comfort from the very question we already asked, "Why build at all if God does all the real work?" Folks, if all we need is the Word and Sacrament – then why must we fear failure? We will always have the Word and Sacrament! Those gifts are free. So there is no need for fear.

This is not to say we shouldn't "count the cost". See Kurt's document regarding that.

Here, let us think of people, people for whom Jesus died, people He longs to have with him forever.

As mentioned, more rooms, more seats, more kids. And once more we wonder, "But what if the school fails!?" Firstly, the school is arguably in its best spot in recent years with a motivated and capable Headmaster, a "better" deficit than in previous years, a directed vision and curriculum, and a Gospel, Lutheran, Christ-Centered message. Can we honor that progress with this investment? Secondly, if it fails, are there not ways to share the Gospel using that building? Community events, leased daycare, or a self-run pre-school come to mind. Furthermore, can we be people of Hope in regard to the school?

But what of other purposes beyond the new building?

Let's start from the outside in.

If our goal is to have more people whom Jesus loves receive his gifts, then a new parking lot, with more parking spots, and more handicapped spots will let more people of all ages be able to come receive his gifts with convenience.

Once inside, a useable fellowship hall will ensure that those people, whom Jesus loves, might be able to meet and encourage one another before or after Worship. They might also, in a fellowship hall, attend classes that offer resources (a whiteboard!) so that they receive better instruction in those times they are present. Not to mention, this would provide space for small groups or community events.

Walking the halls of the updated building, you might see more classrooms freed up for music, or meeting rooms, or for potential future Church workers. You will see more storage for the many groups and orgs that use the Church facilities. And you will see new bathrooms with pipes that drain more efficiently, and offer more ease of use for the aging or very young, members and guests.

Moving into the sanctuary, with the removal of popcorn walls and more uniform texturing in the chancel, we hopefully achieve an aesthetic that shows how we long to honor our Sanctuary and set it apart in reverence. With seasonally appropriate banners we can seek to educate and celebrate the richness of scriptural imagery and the traditions of the Church. We may even find more room for extra pews for our growing congregation, perhaps even a section with kneelers so attendees can kneel during confession and prayer if they so choose. In short, this project would offer opportunities for the time spent in the Sanctuary to be reverent and meaningful, with the focus remaining on God's Work: Word, and Sacrament. The Strategic Planning Committee envisions a separate Committee, formed by the Voters, to specifically explore and recommend these options.

In addition to more focused use of the sanctuary, with HVAC in the sanctuary, we can use it more often. Yes, even on hot summer days for weddings, VBS opportunities, and more. This HVAC installation also extends beyond the sanctuary into the surrounding hall offices, lowering the number of furnaces in closets, and even impacts the gym and kitchen! That should make serving in the kitchen during the summer much more bearable for our volunteers.

Thank you for giving thought to this project. We pray, regardless of the decision, that we might be good stewards and Hopeful of God's promises in our midst and, again, for his entire Church around the World. What a blessing to be Called His Children and to be a part of His work in the world. Rejoice! No matter what outcome... God will bless his people, he has promised it.

Psalm 127:1 "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."