



First Presbyterian

CHURCH OF EASTON



February 10, 2023

Dear Members and Friends of First Presbyterian Church of Easton,

On Sunday, February 5, we held our annual congregational meeting. We reviewed and celebrated the ministry of 2022. So many people have been generous with their time, money, talents and truly given of themselves to support the mission and ministry of this church. We have worshipped together, prayed at bedsides of the sick and dying, shared a meal and laughter, read scripture and shared sacraments, fed our hungry neighbors, sung and rung praises to God, and found strength from being the Body of Christ, together. God has been faithful, for certain.

In addition to giving thanks for the faithful service of our members and friends, at the meeting we named difficult realities our congregation faces. With declining membership, we have financial challenges. In 2022 we were able to pay all our bills but only by pulling from our cash reserves. And in 2023 we expect to have more expenses than income. The finance team has projected a deficit of \$50,000 in 2023. This is hard news to hear for a community that has faced so many setbacks over the years and rededicated themselves time and again to doing God's work in downtown Easton.

Wanting to be proactive, the Session has held discussions with the Presbyterian Foundation and Lehigh Presbytery. They have also engaged the services of a highly recommended Easton real estate agent, as we recognize that our church property is a tremendous asset. The Session is entertaining three possible ways to address the financial crisis. Each way forward utilizes our building and grounds. The most drastic would be the selling of our property. A summary of the PowerPoint outlining ways forward, presented by Elder and Session Clerk Art Charlton, is included with this letter. Please review the presentation. The congregation voted to hold a **30-day period for feedback** regarding these options. You can address your thoughts and questions to our Session – either through the mail or to our office email at office@eastonfpc.org.

While the Session's presentation focused primarily on solutions to our budget crisis, our congregation faces an underlying challenge. We are and have been a congregation in decline. Can we engage our membership and reach out to our community in ways that invite more people to partner with us in our mission and ministry? How can we best serve God here and now? These questions must be a part of our deliberations and planning if we are to faithfully discern God's will for First Presbyterian Church of Easton.

The Session will call another congregational meeting in approximately 60 days (most likely after Easter). You are welcomed to offer your honest thoughts, to give your time and talents, and most especially to pray for our entire church community as we listen to where God is leading us.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Stefanie Muntzel

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First Presbyterian Church of Easton Annual Meeting 2023 Some Financial Options (Report from Session)

Discernment

- Session discussed our financial challenges as a group and with representatives of Presbytery and the Presbyterian Foundation
- Obtained recommendations on commercial real estate agents, and met with an agent who is very familiar with Easton and the real estate market here and in the region
- Obtained a title search of our property
- Realtor studied comparable properties to determine potential of First Presbyterian Church of Easton for increasing income, through sale or rental.

Option 1: Sell the Property

- Estimated value between \$750,000 and \$1 million for the buildings
- Estimated value of \$200,000 to \$500,000 for parking lot
- Total sale estimated at \$750,000 to \$1.5 million in today's market
- FPCE uses money to rent worship/office space, stays together, starts fresh, OR
- FPCE merges with another congregation, AND/OR
- FPCE uses money from sale to leave a legacy as a new church development fund or support for a mission, or something else that we would determine.

Option 2: Cut Expenses, Raise Income

- Part-time Pastoral Staff: Move to a part-time pastoral staffing model, reducing expenses by \$25,000-\$30,000
 - Churches need a minister. A 30-hour a week position would need to be streamlined – for example the pastor would devote time JUST to worship, emergency pastoral care and the transition. The congregation would need to step up and do more Christian Education, Fellowship, Administration, etc.
- AND Rent part of building in short term leases to increase income by \$15,000-\$20,000
- AND Continue to discern a future.

Option 3: Sell Half of the Parking Lot

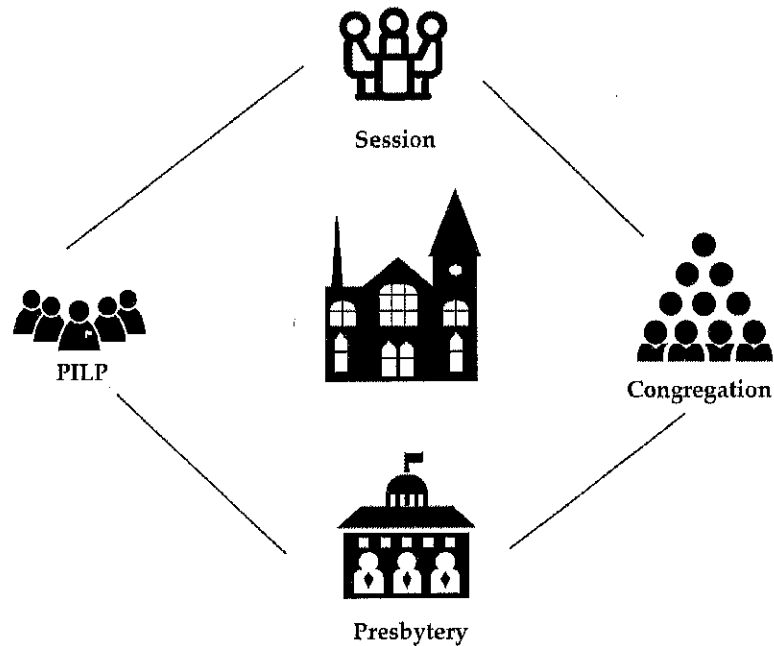
- Sell approximately half of the Parking Lot
- Use estimated \$200k-\$500k revenue to reduce or pay off mortgage
- We will lose part of the \$24,000 yearly income we currently make from the lot
- We don't know how that land would be used
- AND aggressively rent out new spaces in building to make up for loss of parking income (Must add \$25,000-\$35,000)
- AND Parking Lot must still bring in revenue (\$10,000-15,000)

KEEP IN MIND

- Parking Lot was included in the loans, so our loan holder (PILP) would need to approve its sale.
- We would need legal assistance to sell all or parcel out the lot.

- Any change to pastoral terms of call must be approved by the congregation, and by Presbytery and its Committee on Ministry (COM).
- All sales of property must be approved by congregation and COM/Presbytery.
- All long-term leases must be approved by Presbytery.
- We need to figure out taxes on rental income.
- Rental fees must cover utility and maintenance costs.

Who Makes These Decisions?



We Want Your Feedback and Ideas!



- Send comments via email to the church office
- Call or speak to Rev. Muntzel or any member of Session
- Motion was passed: Send comments within 30 days, Session will call another congregational meeting in approximately 60 days.