

INFO SHEET

INVESTMENT IN TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE

August 2, 2021

WE BEGIN WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION: “ *WHO?*”

WHO is the focal point of our worship? GOD.

Worship is FOR God. It is so easy for us to lose focus on the purpose of worship. All of us struggle with this as we can easily create barriers to worship through prioritization of our preferences, over-prioritization of maintaining the physical space where communal worship takes place, over-prioritization of creativity/innovation, and even over-prioritization of the building up of our church family. None of these things are bad in their intent or desire. It's just that we can easily confuse these things as “worship” and Worship is always about God.

WHO IS BEING INVITED TO WORSHIP GOD? All of us.

No matter how we slice it, there will always be tension centered on who is being invited to worship God. It happens over and over again in the Bible (see multiple encounters with Jesus and Temple Leaders, stories Jesus tells about people coming to worship in a synagogue, etc.) and every generation of Jesus followers have struggled just the same. What feels like worship to some ends up feeling like the opposite of worship to another. Because worship isn't for us....or even about us.....we know that it is important for US to make it accessible to everyone. Everyone means lifelong members. Everyone means non-believers and first time visitors. Everyone means young and old. Everyone created in the image of God.... Everyone that struggles with sin.....Everyone longing for something sacred.

The SECOND MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ARE “WHY?” And “WHEN?”

WHY ARE WE USING TECHNOLOGY IN THE SANCTUARY?

Communal Worship is the time when everyone is invited to come together for the sole purpose of worshipping God. Worship is active...never passive. It's meant to be a time for all of us to engage. Anything we can do to give people an opportunity to fully engage in worship is a good thing. For well over 140 years our little church has embraced change with courage, deliberateness, and with expectation that God will use our efforts to meet needs in the present moment while simultaneously preparing us for a chapter down the road.

Who would have ever thought the introduction of the livestream ministry in the early 2000s would have been such a gift to so many people in 2020/2021? I continually find myself perplexed, in the best of ways, by the number of active worship participants that live in other states and countries. One of the most surprising gifts God has given us over these last couple of years is the gift of sharing the Gospel with so many people that would have never stepped foot into our physical sanctuary. Technology has given us an opportunity to evangelize.

Technology has also given us an opportunity to remain deeply connected with one another. A few years ago, had Bill and Jean Finley left for Maryland, they would not have been able to remain so closely connected to their church in Richmond. What a gift it is that technology has been a vehicle for connectedness.

Embracing of technology in the sanctuary is meeting needs in the present moment and continued innovation/investment in technology will create new

pathways for connectedness (fellowship), discipleship, evangelism, and worship.

WHEN? NOW.

1. We need to continue to embrace innovation. God has given us a bounty of giftedness, creativity, and resources and God expects us to be good stewards of everything we've been given. If technology gives us an additional opportunities to "Go ye therefore", it is our responsibility to explore and experiment.

2. Embracing a steady approach (constant experimentation) helps us discover new pathways, avoid costly mistakes through wisdom gained in experience, and keeps the learning curve within constant reach. Tabernacle has been very fortunate in that we haven't made significant expenditures on technology nobody knows how to use. Generally speaking, many churches have found themselves in the difficult position of spending a lot of money on equipment they don't really need or know how to use.

3. In this next season ahead, we need to explore possibilities on what worship might look like in bringing together "online" and "in person" congregants in Communal Worship. Simply offering a "birds eye view" of people worshipping in the physical sanctuary isn't an authentic invitation to those desiring to worship beside us. If we believe that technology is a tool to help bring people to come together to worship God and if we really believe that Worship should be participatory in nature....then online congregants and guests should be given an opportunity to participate. In the season ahead, we need to experiment with new forms of participation. We'll discover what this looks like as we live into it together.

4. Whereas, we are very hopeful the virus/pandemic will continue to diminish, we need to be prepared for a resurgence. It's pretty clear that we don't know what this next chapter looks like. Continuing to invest time and energy in technology in the Sanctuary will help us pivot....should it be needed. It's important the church understands that we cannot re-create the same form of worship we used in the quarantine period of 2020. We're in a

different place now and energies are needed elsewhere. Investing in technology infrastructure will help our AV folks continue to serve effectively and give our staff more time/energy to lead the church in this pivotal moment.

5. Ready or not.....all churches must face the reality.....there's no going back. From this point forward hybrid classes, communal worship, hybrid church meetings, etc. are a given. We need a physical space at Grove and Meadow to facilitate large hybrid gatherings. Making an investment in technology in the Sanctuary feels wise and prudent. It's the logical space for an investment in resources. We worship in that space but we can also meet in that space.

AND THEN WE REACH THE LAST TWO BIG QUESTIONS.....

“WHAT?” And “HOW”.

Installation of four 75” HD TV Screens and a special processor that turns them into one big screen directly in front of the platform.

(Likely in configuration of a rectangle but possibly a square?)

Without getting into the weeds too much here. After lots of experimentation and conversation, the AV Team has determined that our next investment should be temporary in nature. That said, we want to prioritize responsible financial stewardship.

Eventually, we'll need multiple classrooms to have mounted TVs for the purpose of hybrid classes. “Loaning” those televisions to the Sanctuary project allows us to experiment for a season, before moving the screens into their eventual permanent homes. The vast majority of physical materials we will utilize in the sanctuary can be shifted to classrooms when we are ready to close out this next experimentation phase.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO SEE ON THE SCREEN DURING WORSHIP?

Good question. The Staff and AV team will be working closely together to implement new forms of participatory worship. Whereas, first steps will be very simple in function (e.g. artistic/informative visuals), we would anticipate slowly introducing opportunities for engagement (e.g. worship leadership through zoom). It's our hope this experimentation phase will eventually grown into something more complex, but this would require a larger AV Team and likely staffing needs. Putting the screen up, in the season ahead will let us experiment, grow, dream, etc.

Making use of strong visuals, some that match the traditional elements in the room and others directly building on the liturgical theme of the current season, will help the screen to feel less intrusive. Adding periodic visual prompts will help folks better understand the flow of worship and what to expect next. When we utilize the zoom capability of the screen, we will see the faces of meeting participants, worship leaders, etc. When the screen isn't being actively used during a meeting or worship, it should be assumed that we'll project some kind of visual image that diminishes the presence of the "screen". Think of it as wallpaper specifically designed to blend in with the space itself.

The key here is to start "simple" and prioritize strong deliberate visuals that make sense to the moment we're experiencing together. There should never be a moment, in a service or meeting, when the screens aren't projecting some kind of basic or complex visual element. If/when we aren't using the technology, it should be assumed we will drape some form of appropriate/dignified drape over the screen. We don't want folks sitting in the pew looking at televisions in the off position.

CAN THE AUDIO/VISUAL TEAM AND STAFF PULL THIS OFF?

While it may seem counter-intuitive, this proposal makes for much less work for the AV folks, at least in the beginning phase. The key here is starting simple and keeping it simple until we're ready to add complexity. Much of what we'll create can be run from a single tablet operated by a single user. Zoom would be operated on a dedicated computer in the balcony. As we begin experimenting with more complex ideas, the need for a larger coordinated AV Team will be inevitable.

The church has trusted the staff in the past as we've made creative/respectful use of the Sanctuary space to create liturgical installations together. [Several years back, our congregation was nationally recognized in a leadership journal in our strong use of collaborative design to facilitate our worship of God.](#) We ask for your continued patience and trust and really look forward to continuation of our sacred/ collaborative "work" together. (*Liturgy means "work of the people"*).

HOW LONG WILL THE TVS BE ON THE PLATFORM?

At a minimum, it would be there through the end of the Epiphany Season, likely longer. There's just no way for us to know. If Sterling were to guess right now, they'd be up through the end of next year's Lenten Season. We had initially hoped to move forward with this project in late summer and begin with experimentation in August. At this point, we're not sure how long it would take to finish designing and get it installed. Once it's functional, we would want to be sure there was enough time to actually experiment with it.

BUT WHAT ABOUT ADVENT/CHRISTMAS?

We, like every other church in the world, are in uncharted territory. There is no way to know what we should expect, on any front, through the remainder of the calendar year. Multitude variables and variants are making it impossible to see a path clearly. Fortunately, we worship a God promises to guide our footsteps as we make that path by walking together.

Whereas, we don't know what to expect we do know that it is essential for the Sanctuary to be traditionally adorned in the first season of the church year. During the Advent Season, the Sanctuary is beautifully decorated with Chrismon ornaments, wreaths, evergreen, candles, etc. We find deep value in tradition in the Advent and Christmas Seasons. Whereas, there is no way for us to know what will Sanctuary looks like in December of 2021, it should be assumed that we will decorate the space with the same sacred elements while simultaneously continuing with experimentation.

We would love to paint a picture for you but it would be disingenuous to do so. It just too soon to even try. That said, we ask for your continued trust. In the realm of liturgical installations, and creative use of old sacred space, the staff has an established track record. We ask that you give us an opportunity to figure this out and look forward to working with the church in the continued embrace of "re-traditioning".

WILL THE INSTALLATION DAMAGE THE SANCTUARY?

We will rely on the AV Team, Building and Grounds, and Staff in creating a mounting plan that doesn't damage anything. We've had a strong track record with this in previous years with liturgical installations. Whereas, we can't make any guarantees, we promise to make it priority.

WHY TVs (MERGED INTO ONE GIANT SCREEN) INSTEAD OF PROJECTION?

As we continue to seek out new pathways, and wisdom is gained through experimentation, we anticipate an eventual major investment in technology for the Sanctuary. We have no idea when that happens.

It's important for us to respect the traditional sacred space and it will be very expensive to pull off a long-term solution. Two large projectors + throw lenses + mounted in the back balcony will likely be our best option. As to the location, flexibility, and type of screen(s).....we're not ready to even guess. It's way too soon to know and it would be irresponsible to leap in that direction right now. One day, we'll know, and then we'll trust God will provide what we need to make it happen.

In the meantime, large televisions allows us to experiment without altering anything in the Sanctuary. It needs to be bright so that we can simultaneously keep the lights on in the room. Merging four televisions together gives us the dimension we need for in-person congregants to see. The size of our sanctuary mandates a substantial screen. This is the most effective and cost efficient solution for an essential period of experimentation.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ITS TIME TO TAKE THE TV MONITORS DOWN?

Whereas, we have no idea what the next phase might look like, we do know that this temporary solution isn't the final solution. Chances are, there will be middle solution that emerges?

We know that hybrid classes are a given from this point forward. What a gift it will be to out of town congregants but also future home bound members! It is likely, the four 75" TV monitors will be directly mounted in classrooms for the purpose of facilitating hybrid discipleship formation. Of course, this is just a projection. It's certainly possible the TVs will be needed in some other area of ministry that isn't currently on the radar? Regardless, we are confident the temporary nature the Sanctuary installation gives us an opportunity to "double dip" in use of the hardware. It's good stewardship and forward thinking.

HOW DO WE PAY FOR IT?

We're pleased to report that 100% of this project is already funded. we've had four anonymous donations: \$1000, \$300, \$1,800 and \$5000. The endowment board has also graciously contributed \$1,200. Our technical volunteer expert has spent numerous hours designing the project and, upon approval of either leadership or the congregation-at-large, will take the final steps in completing design and beginning installation. The project would be much more expensive had we not also received donation of some specialized hardware. God's provides!

WHAT ABOUT BAPTISMS AND WHAT ABOUT ASCETICS?

Should we have a baptism in the months ahead, and we hope that we do, we'll figure it out. If the weather is warm, we'll head to the river. If the weather is cold, we have a great opportunity to partner with a sister congregation and likely experience baptism with different perspective and deeper insight into the gift of being baptized into the Big "C" Church :)

WHAT NEXT?

It's difficult to make big decisions right now. It's been increasingly more difficult to gather the larger body together for the purpose of discernment. In this period of necessary simplified structure, we've promised the church we would do our best to keep folks informed and discern best practices with as much flexibility as possible.

I would recommend that folks share their thoughts with the Staff, members of the Administrative Board and/or Finance Team. After a couple of weeks, Judy, Ron, and Sterling can meet with the Admin Board/Finance Team and together we'll determine if we have a consensus or if we need to ask the entire congregation to vote on the project. As you share your thoughts with the aforementioned leaders, be sure to share any of your concerns about this approach for the approval process. We're all looking forward to a day when crisis isn't actively present and things aren't so upside down. It's pretty clear our structure wasn't ready for the crisis but even more clear that the Spirit is guiding us....one step at time. A nimbler structure will eventually need to be created. In the meantime, let's get creative in how leadership should best approach this timely opportunity.