

# SPACE NEEDS

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THE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF CHAPEL HILL UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

## The Space Exploration Team Reports to the Congregation

The Community Church is a busy place on Sundays, and the need for more space for religious education classes is apparent every week as classes meet every place from Marion Hirsch's office to the Jones Building Community Room to Preschool classrooms.

And, busy as we are on Sundays, our church hosts much more than Sunday services. As we live our church's mission, our buildings are much-used day and evening throughout the week, bringing people together for many types of fellowship.

More space is needed for adult classes, committee and ministry meetings, welcoming activities for new members, covenant groups, meditation and smaller group services, and other church activities. This is due not only to the growth in religious education classes but also to the addition of new adult programs and meetings. Ten years ago, there were no Spiritual Exploration classes for adults and no covenant groups. In addition, there are more community service and social

justice groups, as well as choirs, than there were 10 years ago.

As a result, many groups attend meetings in hallways, lobbies, spare offices and oversized venues, such as the Sanctuary and the Jones Building. Other activities are restricted or are not held because of a lack of space.

This newsletter includes just a few examples of space needs, some proposed solutions, and information on the decision-making process.

## 10 Years Ago, There Were No SEA (Spiritual Exploration for Adults) Classes

SEA needs most of the church for classes each Thursday. Sometimes special events intervene, forcing classes to move on short notice to unaccommodating spaces.

For example, when the Building Your Own Theology (BYOT) class arrived for its second session in the Kirby Room, the Demonstrating Our Values through Eating (DOVE) class was there, having been bumped from their regular meeting place in the Manse, which was unavailable due to roof repairs. BYOT couldn't meet in the Community Room, because the Tai Chi course was there. They couldn't use the Commons, where they had met the previous week, since the musical was using that space. They ended up meeting in a preschool classroom. During its five weeks, the BYOT class had to meet in three different rooms.

SEA routinely collects evaluation forms at the end of its classes. Items that get marked down

more often than any other are related to facilities. Complaints are especially important when they are related to people's ability to feel comfortable sharing personal stories and to hear each other.

Two spaces used for classes and meetings are not private: the Commons and Administrative Office lobby. Church groups meeting in either space must deal with people walking through to get to other spaces. Holding courses like BYOT in open spaces like the Commons can discourage participants from sharing their beliefs freely.

Having to hold larger courses, such as Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time, in the Community Room means that many participants report having trouble hearing due to the cavernous character of the room. This is especially true when the HVAC system is cycling on and off.

## More Examples of Space Needs

The Newcomers' group had to meet in the Administrative Lobby in December. Twenty-two newcomers crowded into this small space. Welcoming committee members had to stand in the hall and trade places when they participated with the group. To get to the Administrative Lobby, the newcomers had to walk through the Community Room where children were in RE classes. The Board and the Church Council meet in the Commons and have people coming through to get to both the Straley Room and the Sanctuary. This is very disruptive for the meetings and embarrassing for the folks who have to walk through. There are only two meeting rooms that are private.

During the recent greening of the church and setting up for the chili supper in the Community Room, the children in the Christmas pageant had to rehearse in a corner of the Community Room, while dinner preparations went on around them.

Marion Hirsch, Director of Lifespan Religious Education, has to use a folding table as a desk so that she can clean it off and clear out of her office every week, not only for RE, but also for other church groups when there is no place to meet. The meditation group, for example, had to meet there while another meeting was going on nearby in the Administrative Office lobby.

Many committees and ministries need more storage space for items in recurring use, such as signs, banners, displays and other items that communicate with congregation members and visitors. People often have to store these in their garages or homes between uses or they become lost or damaged.

## Exploring Solutions to Our Space Needs

Growth of programs and change are driving forces leading us to explore ways to meet our church's changing space needs. Last year, a Space Assessment Task Force conducted a year-long space needs assessment to obtain congregational input. Activities included soliciting specific needs from large church programs and Church Council, four church-wide listening sessions after Sunday services, and written input from congregation members. Committee members also reviewed assessments from 10 years ago, when previous building renovations were done. That project had deferred the building of needed program space due to budget constraints. More recently, the Strategic Plan, adopted by church members, includes a mandate that the church address space needs.

As a result, the Task Force concluded there are significant space needs that need solutions and a Space Exploration Team was formed to address these needs. A report to the congregation is on the Space Exploration Team's web page <http://www.c3huu.org/space-exploration.html>. It includes these highlights: There is a need for six new, multi-use spaces. One multi-use space could serve as a small chapel for meditations, weddings and funerals; as an RE classroom; and as a meeting space for groups too big for the Straley or Kirby rooms, but too small for the Community Room. We need more storage and gender-neutral bathrooms. More meeting/classroom spaces are needed, including three for Preschool, which would like to bring their other site here.

Solutions will include adding space, remodeling existing space, and doing this as environmentally soundly as possible. The church's mission will be the guide for making difficult decisions based on priorities. There is no specific timeline yet, but there is an outline of steps. Congregational members will be informed and also be involved at many points during the process. No new mortgage or binding commitments will be made without congregational approval.

**First steps:** A Space Exploration Team member will meet with Church Council in January to provide information that Church Council members can share with their groups or ministries. On February 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, Space Exploration Team members will be tabling in the Community Room after each service. There will also be updates in the newsletter and Within These Walls talks, as well as on the Space Exploration Team's web page.

**Space Exploration Team** (<http://www.c3huu.org/space-exploration.html>): Mary Hulett (chair), Gary Giles, Marion Hirsch, Brad Kosiba, Hank Rodenburg, Anna Waller, Cecilia Warshaw, Steve Warshaw