

Lyndale United Church of Christ is located at 2822 Lyndale Ave. S. Minneapolis, Mn. 55408 and is part of the Minnesota Conference, Great Lakes Region. Lyndale is a 115 member, spirited, justice seeking congregation who celebrated our 125th Anniversary in 2009. Don Portwood, has served as Lyndale's Pastor for 30 years. We voted to be a Just Peace Church in 1988 and an ONA Church in 1991. In 2006 we were one of the first congregations to vote in favor of equal marriage rights for all couples, regardless of gender. We no longer perform weddings for opposite gender couples at Lyndale, only blessings ceremonies for all couples. A commitment I've also made, whether the service was on church property or not.

<http://www.uccmn.org/ministrygroups/onalgbt/ONALGBT%20Resources/Lyndale%20UCC%20Takes%20Stand%20for%20Marriage%20Equality%20for%20All%2004.06.pdf> In 2007, Lyndale voted to add transgender people to our ONA statement.

If Lyndale Church should win the contest in our region, I would like our Moderator, Michael Vanderford and his wife Mary, to represent Lyndale. Michael has provided faithful, detailed, 2nd mile leadership through this whole long process and deserves the trip.

Don Portwood, Pastor Lyndale United Church of Christ

The Shorter Essay

What are your options when your building is too big and costly and your congregation too small? Improve.

The 115 members of Lyndale United Church of Christ, Minneapolis, Mn. inherited from our forebearers a beautiful sanctuary with gorgeous stained glass windows and a dark wood ceiling. We also inherited 25,000 sq ft. to heat with an aging boiler, deteriorating walls and ever increasing fuel bills. Sharing space with people in the community helped the congregation for many years. But in 2002, we recognized we had to begin doing something to have a sustainable (economically and environmentally) ministry into the future.

Following an evaluation of the buildings "ministry" we arrived at the goal of having "a beautiful, environmentally and financially sustainable, multi-use building at our current location that houses not only our church, but senior housing". We'd seen it done at an Episcopal Church by the University of Mn. We weren't alone in our problem though. Salem Lutheran Church, 3 blocks away, housed unsustainably in 45,000 sq ft, began conversations with us. We discovered our site was too small to develop, so we put our energies into partnering with Salem and developing their site. That's partnering, not merging with a Lutheran Church, though denominationally they weren't as glbt friendly us. An issue for some in the congregation, though their pastor was an out lesbian.

By 2006, CommonBond Communities proposed demolishing the entire Salem Church building, (1904 limestone sanctuary and 1950's addition) and building a mixed use development on Salem's site with affordable housing and a new stand-alone church building. We would have our sustainable building and support affordable housing. What could be better?

Two problems. The neighborhood didn't want more affordable housing and the Minneapolis Historic Preservation Committee wasn't going to allow the demolition of an "historic" church. Not good news. Salem shuttered up their building so they wouldn't have to go through another winter and moved in with us on All Saints Sunday, November 1, 2006. Their traditional service at 8:30 a.m. worshiped in the sanctuary, as did our 10:30 a.m. service. Their jazz service worshiped at 10:30 a.m. in our 2nd floor "dance studio". As both Sunday Schools "happened" to be using Seasons of the Spirit, it was easy to combine Sunday School and our small youth group appreciated joining another small youth group. A prayer Salem shared with us became our prayer and theme, "Gracious God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ. Amen".

To make a really long story shorter (see long story below), by the Spring of 2007 we had found a developer who would build affordable condos on the site and renovate the old 15,000 sq. ft sanctuary building for a ministry center with two sanctuaries, fellowship hall and kitchen, offices, classrooms and "rental" space.

In order for us to have the \$1.4 M needed to join Salem in renovating the building, in February of 2008 we put our building up for sale. We were told it could easily take a year to sell. By June, the neighborhood plans were approved for the affordable condos and our Ministry Center. What could go wrong? Surprise! Someone wanted to buy our church and if we sold it we'd have to go somewhere else before the Ministry Center was done. Over the summer of 2008 the negotiations continued and on September 2nd the Council affirmed that we were ready to sell the building even if we didn't know if the Ministry Center Project would go forward. Stepping out in faith, again. A great practice to be practicing because on September 16th, the worst economic crisis since the great depression began. And in the midst of that, on October 7th, Lyndale UCC and New Wine Church agreed on a purchase price for the building. On December 7th, the Lyndale congregation by a unanimous vote, approved the sale of our property and a purchase agreement was signed by moderator Michael Vanderford, on December 17th. That was the good news. But with a condo market that had tanked, Brighton Development now had to go back to the drawing board and proposed building affordable rental housing for the project. It was the only way they could get public money. We were thrilled again that it was affordable housing. Not so the neighborhood. A new round of meetings to try and get their ok began. Meanwhile, we had to move forward as if our building would really sell and we'd really have to move. By the grace of God and the bad economy, we found a place that needed our rent money. Intermedia Arts had been hit hard by the downturn. And they were ½ block from the Salem site. In December we organized an ST² (store, toss, sell, take) team to start organizing to clear out the building, if the sale went through. How fortunate too, that we were chosen as one of 5 churches for the project entitled, "Creating Significant Worship in Times of Change and Challenge", though United Theological Seminary.

By February 2009 a Design Team formed to begin planning for the still very uncertain Ministry Center and March 22nd the congregation hosted a building farewell worship service and open house for members and friends of Lyndale, present and past. New Wine Church was having trouble getting all the financing they needed to close, so on March 29th at an emergency

congregational meeting the Lyndale congregation approved loaning new Wine \$120,000 so they could close on our building. March 29th in the midst of an emptying building, the last worship service for us at 810 W. 31st Street took place, if the closing happened. The pulpit and communion table were taken out during the service. On Tuesday, March 31st, another miracle, in the of the worst economy since the depression, documents were signed and we sold our building to New Wine Church, a predominantly African immigrant, Pentecostal church.

Palm Sunday, April 5th, Lyndale and Salem processed from our former church, past the sites of previous Lyndale Church buildings at Lake and Aldrich and Lake and Lyndale, to the corner of Lyndale and 28th to see where we hoped to end up. Then we walked back to 2822 Lyndale for a joint Palm Sunday service. (Normally one congregation worships in the theater space and the other in the gallery space.) Here's a brief clip of that procession from the news.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-UfSpQcOmDk>

The economy was creating havoc on affordable housing tax credits and in August of 2009, the project was put on hold while Brighton tried ways to close a \$900,000 gap. Yet, we had to move forward as if, hiring a contractor in January 2010 for the Ministry Center renovation. God wasn't done with us yet. On April 12th, Pastors Don and Jen reported to the Partnership Team that they have met with the Pastor of 1st Christian Church, Disciples of Christ who had sold their building in the neighborhood (and were renting back) and were interested in discussions about our Ministry Center concept. In June we receive a \$1400 gift from Advent Lutheran and Broadway UCC in New York City, who were celebrating the 10th year of sharing a building. We developed a video thank-you. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQfyncgEDXc>

That summer of 2010, things began to happen more quickly. On July 11th the official Ministry Covenant was signed between Lyndale and Salem Churches following worship. August 3, a capital campaign committee recommended hiring the Ackley Consulting Group to guide Lyndale through a Ministry Center Capital Campaign to raise the \$300,000 needed to buy into the project, along with the money from the sale of our building. By August 23rd the Lyndale Stewardship Council was formally introduced to the interest in making 1st Christian Church a 3rd partner in the Ministry Covenant and the Ministry Center. In order for the housing to start on time, a north wall had to be stabilized and asbestos needed to be abated, so on September 26th the Lyndale congregation unanimously approved authorizing up to \$500,000 for pre-closing payments for a building we didn't yet own. November 7th a joint worship service for the three congregations to "worship and meet" was held at Intermedia Arts, followed by a shared lunch and folk dance at 1st Christian's building. Finally, as ducks miraculously lined up, and even though the closing hadn't happened as planned, a groundbreaking ceremony for the Greenleaf Commons Affordable Housing and Salem/Lyndale Ministry Center was held on Friday, November 19th attended by the mayor, city council person and Director of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, where the final gap money to close the deal was provided. Another whole story could be written about how the bond market had a major hiccup on November 23rd, while the closing was happening. Another miracle occurred after much perspiration and worry, the documents were signed and Brighton became owner of most of the site, except under the now Salem/Lyndale sanctuary.

January 9, 2011, following the first Joint Ministry Covenant meeting between Salem and Lyndale, the Lyndale Congregation passed unanimously and Salem passed with 86% a motion to

invite 1st Christian to join the partnership. On January 23rd, 1st Christian Church voted 84% to join the partnership. This February we've been reworking the plans to include three congregations. March 15th the demolition of the balcony in the sanctuary begins as well as construction of the new entrance on the west side of the building. We are waiting for final numbers which we should have the end of March and renovation will continue through the year with a more green friendly, sustainable building to house three congregations completed (we've been told, but we're practicing non-attachment) by Thanksgiving of this year. We voted unanimously on March 6th to have a capital campaign to raise \$400,000 for the renovation, operations and maintenance of the ministry center.

Who knows what tomorrow will bring? Whatever it is, we seek to be a witness to the still speaking God and how 3 small, but vital congregations can faithfully improvise with what's set before them, with trust and playfulness, hope and non-attachment, prayer and vision, never imagining how much more God has in store for us, than each of us originally thought.

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The longer, more detailed version

This chronology of events over the past 10 years doesn't capture the faith, trust and persistence that kept us going towards this Big Hairy Audacious Goal*.

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Lyndale Congregational Church was founded in 1884 and housed in a temporary wooden chapel at the corner of Lyndale Ave. S. and Lake Street. Within a couple years the church had grown and built a new facility one block west, at the corner of Lake and Aldrich. Lyndale Church continued to grow and in 1924 finished a new building to be home to our 900 members one block south, at the corner of Aldrich and 31st St. That building served the congregation and neighborhood well, but after a peak of membership in the 50's, the congregation got smaller and smaller and the building costs got larger and larger.

As a result of a "Circle Forum" evaluation of the ministry of the Lyndale Church building (based on the book by David McMahill, *Completing the Circle: Reviewing Ministries in the Congregation*) held in 2002, the Stewardship Council of Lyndale Church commissioned in January 2003, a Building Discernment Task force "to develop and recommend a one-year process that examines what type of building 1) best supports Lyndale's present and future mission 2) is financially affordable over time, and 3) is sustainable over time".

Their report and recommendation at the Annual Meeting in January 2004 recommended that "Lyndale UCC adopt and ratify a goal to be in a new home within 5 years by taking the following actions: seek congregational support for and ultimately erect a beautiful, environmentally and financially sustainable, multi-use building at our current location that houses not only our church, but senior housing".

At that same meeting a Fourth Foundation team was established (this would be the 4th foundation we'd ministered from) which would seek approval of the recommendations and develop options. Interim UCC Conference Minister David McMahill called together three other UCC churches facing similar issues. Towards the end of the summer of 2004, our pastor Don Portwood, began discussions with the outreach pastor of Salem Lutheran Church, Jen Nagel, located 3 blocks away, to talk about their similar situation.

At the Annual meeting of the congregation in January of 2005, the congregation expanded our building goals to allow the Fourth Foundation Committee to "explore possible alternative building solutions that may involve sharing ownership interests or sharing worship space with another church". Throughout 2005 there were at least 4 congregational forums, 15 Fourth Foundation meetings and 14 meetings with people from Salem Lutheran Church. By early in 2005, the dream of church/senior housing had been rejected by most developers. Salem had CommonBond Communities do a feasibility study for affordable housing for their site at 28th and Lyndale. They also did a study on our site and in November informed us that they could not come up with a feasible mixed use development because of parking requirements and the small size of our lot.

Better news for Salem. CommonBond proposed demolishing the entire Salem Church building, (1904 limestone sanctuary building and 1950's addition) and building a mixed use development with affordable housing, retail space and a new stand-alone church building. In December of 2005 the Fourth Foundation Team recommended partnering (not merging) with Salem. (Both Lyndale and Salem also had discussions with two neighborhood Methodist Churches about joining the partnership.)

At the Annual meeting in January of 2006, the congregation voted 50 yes, 4 no, 1 abstain "to pursue partnering with Salem Church in its development with CommonBond of a mixed-use facility for two churches including worship, education, social and administrative spaces". People opposed to the partnering didn't want to partner with a church whose denomination (ELCA) wasn't open to gay clergy, even though Jen Nagel by this time had become Salem's interim Pastor and was in a committed relationship with another woman, a UCC pastor in the Twin Cities.

We shared an earlier than usual worship service with Salem on February 19th when some of our boiler pipes froze creating waterfalls in the boiler room, lakes around radiators and no heat in the building. In the spring of 2006, Lyndale, Salem and CommonBond continued to make presentations and proposals to the Whittier Neighborhood Association to obtain the neighborhood support for this new multi-use proposal for the old Salem site. Many in the neighborhood opposed adding more affordable housing and demolition of the Salem Sanctuary and in June, when the Minneapolis Historic Preservation Committee was preparing to vote against demolition, CommonBond withdrew the permit request and suggested looking for a developer who could re-use the sanctuary building.

In July, the Lyndale congregation voted to share our building with Salem and established a Partnership Team to work with Salem for sharing space at Lyndale and developing a new space at Salem's site. Salem spent the summer and fall closing up their building and with an approved

Interim Partnership Agreement, on All Saints Sunday, November 1, Salem moved the 4 blocks into our building. Their traditional service at 8:30 a.m. worshiped in the sanctuary, as did our 10:30 a.m. service. Their jazz service worshiped at 10:30 a.m. in our 2nd floor “dance studio”. We combined our small youth groups and Sunday Schools as both congregations were using the “Seasons of the Spirit” curriculum. Salem shared a prayer that becomes our prayer at all joint meetings, “Gracious God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ. Amen”.

In February 2007, the Salem/Lyndale Partnership Team reviewed development concept proposals from seven development teams. In April, the team accepted the concept of developing the Ministry Center within the shell of Salem’s 1904 sanctuary and got more details from two developers. In June, in a tight vote nearly split along congregational lines, the proposal of Brighton Development was accepted. Giving in to neighborhood demands, they planned to tear down the newer addition to Salem and build market rate condos, while restoring the 15,000 sq. foot sanctuary for a ministry center with two sanctuaries, fellowship hall and kitchen, offices, classrooms and “rental” space. In September, a Governance Agreement Team formed to develop a permanent partnership agreement. In November, Salem voted to officially call Jen Nagel as Pastor and she was ordained January 19, 2008 at our shared building in an “extra-ordinary” ordination not recognized by the Synod.

In February the Stewardship Council decided to begin actively marketing our building for sale, including hiring a realtor, in order to further the objectives of our development plan with Salem and Brighton. After interviews in April, Tom Dunn was selected and was confident a buyer could be found within a year who would want to continue to use the building as a church. In June the Whittier Alliance Board approved the development plan for 28th and Lyndale, including our Ministry Center. In July, representatives of New Wine Church, St. Paul, toured the building and made the first offer we had received for purchase. Over the summer there were more negotiations. On September 2nd the Council affirmed that we were ready to sell the building even though we didn’t know if the Ministry Center Project would go forward. On September 16th, the worst economic crisis since the great depression began and miracle of miracles, on October 7th, Lyndale UCC and New Wine Church agreed on a purchase price for our property. With the condo market gone, Brighton sought money for affordable housing and in November received a large grant. On December 7th, the Lyndale congregation approved by a unanimous vote the sale of our property and a purchase agreement was signed by moderator Michael Vanderford, on December 17th. Meanwhile, a contingency team began looking for an interim place for two churches to worship following the sale of our building. We investigated 32 places, visited 20 and came up with 4 possibilities, settling on Intermedia Arts at 2822 Lyndale, ½ block from the Salem site. In December an ST² (store, toss, sell, take) team started organizing to clear out the building, acting as if the sale would go through. How fortunate too, that we were chosen as one of 5 churches for the project entitled, “Creating Significant Worship in Times of Change and Challenge”, though United Theological Seminary.

In February of 2009, a Design Team formed to begin planning for the still very uncertain Ministry Center and March 22nd the congregation hosted a building farewell worship service and

open house for members and friends of Lyndale, present and past. March 29th in the midst of an emptying building (the pulpit and communion table were taken out during the service) the last worship service for us at 810 W. 31st Street took place, if the closing happened. New Wine Church was having trouble getting all the financing they needed to close, so following that “last” worship service, an emergency Congregational meeting was held and the congregation approved loaning new Wine \$120,000 from the proceeds of the sale, so they could close and we could sell. On Tuesday, March 31st, (miracle of miracles), in the worst economy since the depression, documents were signed and we sold our building to New Wine Church, a predominantly African immigrant Pentecostal church. Pastor Tony and many of the congregation are from Nigeria and Kenya.

April 5th, Lyndale and Salem had a Palm Sunday procession from our former church, past the sites of previous churches at Lake and Aldrich, Lake and Lyndale, to the corner of Lyndale and 28th to see where we hoped to end up, then back to 2822 Lyndale for joint Palm Sunday Worship. It was covered briefly by the tv news.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-UfSpQcOmDk>

In August, we learn the economic recession had reduced Brighton’s tax credit value for their part of the partnership development. This created a financial gap of \$900,000. The project was put on hold until the City and State made decisions on additional affordable housing grants, scheduled for December 2009 and February 2010. Oh yeah, during 2009 we also celebrated the 125th Anniversary of Lyndale Church.

In October of 2009, the Partnership Team brainstormed ideas, if the development fell apart during the winter. In November, Lyndale voted to use this “wilderness” time to conduct a visioning process over the next year. In December, Brighton Development separated their commercial development from the Ministry Center renovation in order to save the churches money. The plan remained for each congregation to put \$1,400,000 towards renovation. Lyndale would have to raise at least \$300,000 to make our \$1.4M. We continued to move forward as if our project would happen.

At our January 2010 Annual Meeting, Watson-Forsberg was hired as the contractor for the Ministry Center renovation. In February, Brighton reported only a \$500,000 funding gap. By March they told us City Planning staff were confident the gap would close and we’d be closing in September. On April 12th, Don and Jen reported to the Partnership Team that they had met with the Pastor of 1st Christian Church, Disciples of Christ who had sold their building in the neighborhood (and were renting back) and were interested in discussions about our Ministry Center concept. In June we received a \$1400 gift from Advent Lutheran and Broadway UCC in New York City, who were celebrating the 10th year of sharing a building. We developed a video thank-you for their gift. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQfyncgEDXc>

On July 11th the official Ministry Covenant was signed between the two congregations following worship. August 3 a capital campaign committee recommended hiring the Ackley Consulting Group to guide Lyndale through a Ministry Center Capital Campaign. On August 23rd the Stewardship Council was formally introduced to the interest in making 1st Christian Church a 3rd

partner in the Ministry Covenant and the Ministry Center. Representatives from the three congregations had met several times to explore the concept.

September 26th the Lyndale Congregation unanimously approved authorizing up to \$500,000 for pre-closing payments for wall stabilization and asbestos abatement in a building we didn't yet own. November 7th a joint worship service for the three congregations to "worship and meet" was held at Intermedia Arts, followed by a shared lunch and folk dance at 1st Christian's building. Even though the closing hadn't happened as planned, a groundbreaking ceremony for the affordable housing (Greenleaf Commons – named for John Greenleaf Whittier, Whittier being the neighborhood's name) and sanctuary renovation (I kidded about calling the Ministry Center "The John") was held on Friday, November 19th, attended by the mayor, city council person and director of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, who provided the final gap money. Another whole story could be told about how the bond market had a major hiccup on November 23rd, while the closing was happening, but miraculously, the documents were signed and Brighton became owner of most of the land, except under the now Salem/Lyndale sanctuary building.

December 1st, members of 1st Christian were invited to join the design team to discuss changes, if they became partners in the Ministry Center. January 9, 2011, following the first Joint Ministry Covenant meeting between Salem and Lyndale, the Lyndale Congregation passed unanimously and Salem passed with 86% a motion to invite 1st Christian to join the partnership. On January 23rd, 1st Christian Church voted 84% to join the partnership.

In February of this year, we reworked the plans to include three congregations. We may have 3 sanctuaries and three congregations worshipping at 10:30 a.m. (if everyone walks or takes the bus.) March 15th the final demolition in the sanctuary of the balcony is to commence and the new entrance on the west side of the building is to begin. By the end of March we hope to have final numbers for the project and hope to be in the renovated building by Thanksgiving of this year. Lyndale voted on March 6th to have a capital campaign to raise \$400,000 (a Big Hairy Audacious Goal* for this congregation) for the renovation, operations and maintenance of the ministry center.

We look forward to our joint witness together, 3 churches of different denominations combining our youth groups and Christian Education for our children. Able to now afford a commercial kitchen with which we can literally serve the neighborhood. Who really knows what tomorrow will bring? But whatever it brings, these 3 small, but vital congregations have faithfully moved forward with trust and playfulness, hope and non-attachment, prayer and vision (the last visioning team meeting will be March 28th) never imagining how much more the still speaking God had in store for us, than each of us originally thought.

*From Curt Ackley of the Ackley Consulting Group