# Shall I not love that great city?

God, Jonah 4:11

# Seek the peace and prosperity of the city.

God, Jeremiah 29:7

# Maitland Alexander

# Maitland Alexander

- 32 years old when called to FPCP as senior pastor in 1899.
- "Exodus" of congregations moving out of the Golden Triangle.
- FPCP appeared to have "passed the zenith of its power and influence."
- "Pittsburgh and FPCP were like Siamese twins, born locked together, and to separate them would require radical surgery."
- Alexander's ideas "terrified the trustees."

# Maitland Alexander

- By 1903, the third church building had been torn down , the Revolutionary War Cemetery with remains of Pittsburgh's heroes removed, and the cornerstone of the new building laid.
- Elected moderator of the General Assembly in 1915 – by acclamation.
- The honor "demonstrated the Assembly's satisfaction at the miracle of a renewed and rejuvenated downtown congregation, one steeped in tradition at that."

# Overview, April 2019

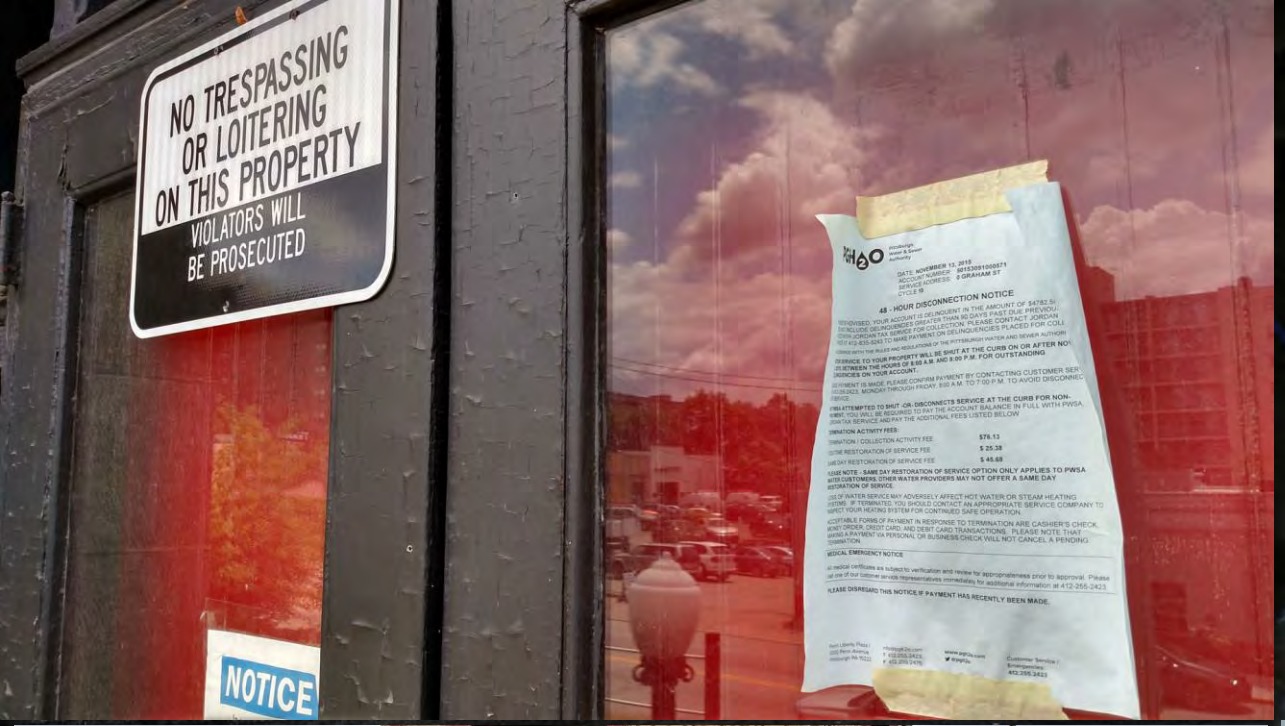
- What's the situation?
- What's *our* situation?
- What are our options?
- What is God calling us to be and to do?

# The situation

Silent Sanctuaries

FOR SALE
Tim Fabian 412-480-6978
Bonnie Katz 412-513-7566
OFFICE

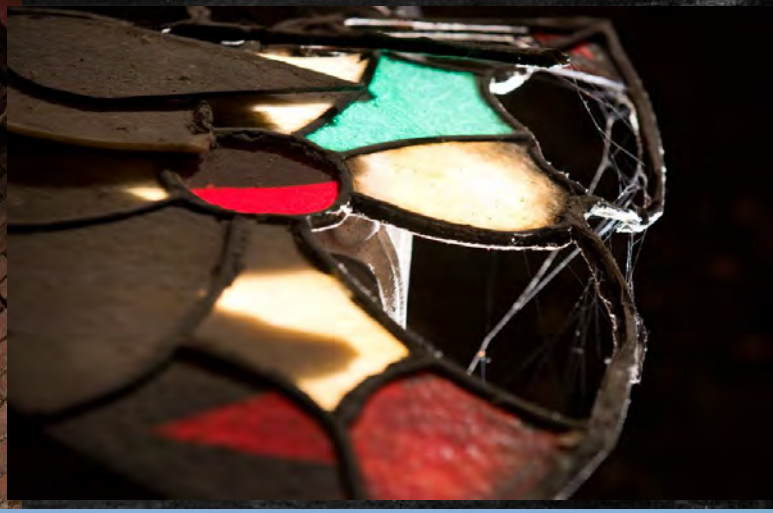
NEW PORT HUB


NO TRESPASSING
OR LOITERING
ON THIS PROPERTY
VIOLATORS WILL
BE PROSECUTED
NOTICE
48 - HOUR DISCONNECTION NOTICE

JOHN WESLEY
A·M·E·ZION
CHURCH
1836—1944

HANNA
FOR SALE
412.261.2200

501



COME TO ME ALL YOU WHO LABOR

HOLY
FAMILY
CHURCH

BRS

# The Dormont Community Presbyterian Church was acquired by the North Way Christian Community.

"The [Dormont] Presbyterian church reached a similar point as many congregations in changing neighborhoods. They're good people; they just didn't have the energy to reach into a new community.

The Rev. Sheldon Sorge, general minister for Pittsburgh Presbytery.

“They (churches) go from community-based congregations to commuter-based congregations, where you have people coming back into the church because they have some heritage there. But they have lost just about every bit of connection with the community. If the congregants don’t adopt the community as their own, the clock is ticking.”

Rev. Jeffrey Johnson, regional pastor for the American Baptist Churches of Pennsylvania and Delaware.

"Pollard Baptist was no longer the church that community needed, and instead of changing, they chose death. I've done a lot of church consultation. Churches are making that decision all across America. 'I will not change, even for my grandchildren.' They won't say it that way, but their actions will say that."

Rev Dr Matt Shamblin, Rose Hill Baptist Church, Ashland, Ky

“Communities are going to constantly change. If you have the mentality this is who we are, and who you are is not who the community needs you to be, you will lose the community. If you have a drive-in congregation in the middle of a neighborhood, you’re in trouble.”

Rev Dr Matt Shamblin, Rose Hill Baptist Church, Ashland, Ky

"Studies have documented the life cycles of churches. Some that have been on the verge of closing have been revived to find a whole new life. Others disband and dissolve. Some limp along for decades until their stalwart generation is gone, leaving no option other than to close the doors."

Mark Maynard, *Kentucky Today*.

# The situation – the challenge isn't new

"The base of the entire modern missionary enterprise is but steadily being dechristianized. David Barrett* has calculated that , in Europe and North America, an average of 53,000 persons are permanently leaving the Christian Church from one Sunday to the next."

David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991

*Source: Barrett, David B. 1982. *World Christian Encyclopedia*

# The situation – the challenge, cont'd.

- 85% of churches in America have stagnant or declining membership.
- Over 80% of the Greatest generation belonged to a church.
- Less than 25% of the Millennial generation *attend* church.
- Generation Z will be the most unchurched ever.
- People say they are "active in church" if they attend once a month.

# The situation – the challenge, cont'd.

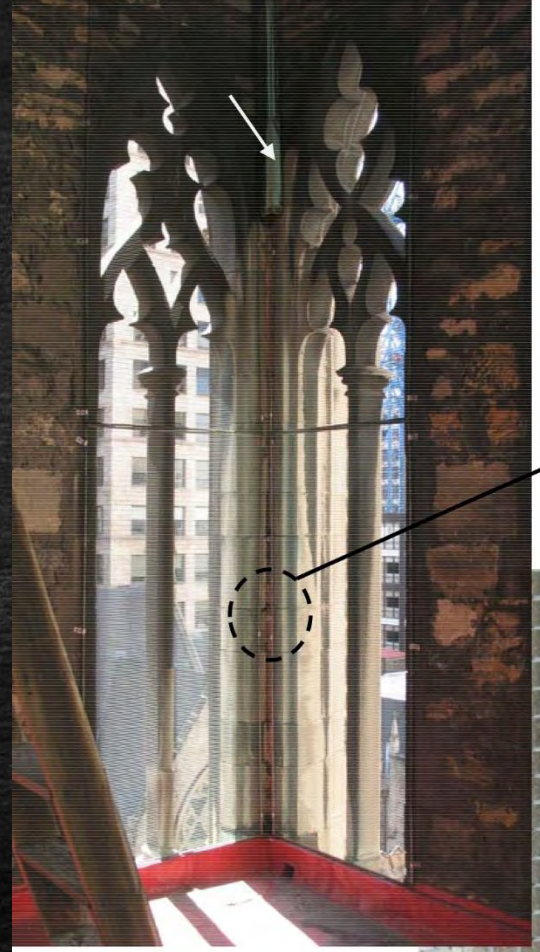
- By the year 2050, an estimated 35 million young people who were raised going to church will no longer associate themselves with the Christian faith.
- The majority of the disaffiliated did not go through a crisis of faith, or intellectually reject church teachings. They left because they just weren't interested in the Christian life they saw.
- This doesn't include those who were not raised in the faith, and have no experience of faith as a reference point

Vincent Burens, President & CEO, Coalition for Christian Outreach

# Our situation – the challenge

- Membership down 92% over 40+ years. About 185 members today.
- Average age is 65, a generation older than the neighborhood.
- Growth of downtown hasn't resulted in church growth.
- Operating budget deficit  over $250K annually.
- Capital deficit (deferred maintenance) about the same.
- Recent estimate: $1 million for roof repairs.
- Major issues with water intrusion, aging infrastructure, etc.

A downspout is rusted off and laying on the floor of the tower



The mortar on the tower wall is eroded away to a depth of several inches.

# Our situation – said another way

- Our roof was meant to last 125 years.  It's now 114 years old.  Some parts have only 5 years left.
- If we fix the roof, we will still have an operating deficit of $250,000 a year, and we'll likely still need an additional  $250,000 a year to maintain our building.
- We can't, in the long run, save our way to health.
- We need to grow, reduce building costs, and find new sources of income.

# Our situation – the opportunity.

- People give to things *that matter to them*.
- 32% of charitable giving is to Christian causes.
  - Christian giving is strong and growing.
- Sacred places lift up neighborhoods.
  - People feel secure; they sense the presence of God, even if they don't attend.

# Our situation – the opportunity.

- When churches flourish, so do their neighborhoods.
  - Churches provide an economic "halo effect," including services, social cohesion, and making the neighborhood attractive for investors.
  - Churches provide economic value, cultural value, streetscape value, and social-services value.
- Some people will join you if they see you making a difference.
- We add $2.3 million in value to our neighborhood every year.

# Our situation – the opportunity.

- Unlike most failing churches whose neighborhoods declined, our neighborhood is growing.
- $8.5 billion invested in our neighborhood in the last 10 years.
- In the 2nd quarter of 2018, there were 30 major projects underway, including 400 new hotel rooms, 1500 residential units, and 500,000 square feet of new office space, making up a value of $1 billion.
- Our neighborhood is growing (largely) with the unchurched.
- 15% of churches *are* growing.
- We still have about $4.7 million in investments to seed the future.

What did Maitland Alexander do?

# Alexander's strategy, 1903.

- "Continuous program running every day and almost around the clock."
- "The church's mission would be where the people were."
- The church would relate to the people "close to their business and shopping enterprises."
- Creative partnership with business magnate Henry Oliver.
  - Long term lease of Wood Street frontage & cash payment of $150,000.
- Strong lay leadership.

# Alexander's strategy, cont'd.

- "Lighthouse to the city."
- "Evangelical missionary outreach to every strata of society, and to every area of activity in the expanding city's life. "
- "A missionary church, and its greatest mission field is to be this great city, with its problems and difficulties."
- Multiple service outlets for young people.

This is our “Maitland Alexander” moment.

# “Maitland Alexander” 2.0

- Restore our current building.
  - Assumes building really is viable/sustainable – it might not be.
- Repairs and modifications to make it sustainable, flexible, handicapped accessible.
- Revamp sanctuary to make it more welcoming, and usable for concerts, contemporary worship, meetings, etc.
  - New sound, audio-visuals, air conditioning, etc.
- Restore stained glass windows.
- Restore the cafeteria.

# Option 1 – Status quo

- Maintain current levels of spending.
- One classic worship service.
- Focus divided between city and 30 mission "partners."
- Maintain  partnerships (Like Outreached Arms, Youth for Christ, Pittsburgh Experiment, etc).
- Address emergencies only. Defer capital projects.
- Maintain current organization.
- God is faithful and will raise up future members and donors.

# Option 2 – Death with dignity

- If death is inevitable, find a buyer for building and recipient for assets.

# Option 3 – “Strategic Retreat”

- Deal with deficits in the short term to grow in the long term.
- Partners for Sacred Places is signaling we need to deal with deficit now if we expect major donors for a capital campaign

# What is God calling us to be and to do?

# How do we answer three questions?

“They're good people; they just didn’t have the energy to reach into a new community”

Well, do we have the energy?

"Pollard Baptist was no longer the church that community needed, and instead of changing, they chose death."

Will we choose to be the church the community needs?

“They (churches) … have lost just about every bit of connection with the community. If the congregants don’t adopt the community as their own, the clock is ticking.”

Will we adopt downtown Pittsburgh as our own?

# OK, but how?

What are our expectations for ourselves?

- Are we, as leaders, committed to the mission?
  - Pledging; stepping up to tithing.
  - Hands on.
  - Everybody shows up for worship, key events.
  - Everybody takes ownership for welcoming visitors.
- Are we, as leaders, modelling transformation?
  - Are we growing as disciples ourselves?

# OK, but how?

- Capital campaign feasibility study  by Partners for Sacred Places, results coming June, 2019.
  - Will help us prioritize needs and actions.
- Strategy leading to:
  - Revitalized church community.
  - Sustainable, revitalized building.

# Revitalized church community.

- Hub for social services.
- Venue for the arts.
- Outreach to internationals, college, youth.
- Multiple creative partnerships leveraging every inch of space.
- Expect LCCC to support the mission to the city.

# Sustainable, revitalized building.

- Capital campaign to address:
  - Roof repairs, sustainability
  - Accessibility
  - Heritage (Stained glass)
  - Arts – Make sanctuary viable for concerts, events, contemporary worship, etc.

# My opinion

- If any city-center church can "turn around," it's us.
- Legacy of bold action.
- Where, indeed, would you put a church?
  - The mission field is all around us.
- People are hurting and lonely, and we have the Word of Life.
  - We can make a difference here.
- What greater project do you have in mind for your life?

# My opinion, cont'd.

- People will join us *if we make a difference here*.
  - Some will support the Word going out from the heart of the city.
  - Some will want to preserve historic space, Tiffany windows.
  - Some will support arts initiatives.
  - Some will support safe space for youth.
  - Some will support efforts to feed the homeless, etc.
  - Some will want to make this project part of their legacy.
  - Some will want to bring the energy of the camp to the city.
- I can't remotely do this alone.

# My opinion, cont'd.

- The reason for frustration and burnout isn't the workload, it's fear that leads to indecision.
- We will *soar* if we have the nerve to actually say "no" to the things we need to say "no" to.
- We will experience joy if we are willing to quit worrying about what someone might think or say.

# Our “Maitland Alexander” Moment