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**June 4, 2017**

## IMPORTANT NEWS FROM FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH ON FIFTH

Dear families of the FBC Children's Center,

For the past year and a half, a group of 13 church members and three pastoral staff members at First Baptist Church on Fifth have been part of a working group called the Special Committee on Facilities and Mission (SCFM). The charge given to us by the congregation was to "align the mission of the church with its physical assets (buildings and grounds), with special attention to our urban context, sustainability, usage, and emerging needs" and to "present a comprehensive blueprint for addressing the challenges realignment presents." The creation of such a group has followed years of difficult churchwide conversation about our aging facilities, professional studies and research about how to best address the many urgent needs and unsustainable costs of our 114,000-square foot plant, and a renewed energy in the church to clarify its mission and vision as a downtown presence.

Tonight the SCFM is sharing that comprehensive blueprint with the church. The presentation captures our commitment to stay in our current location and our vision for a more nimble, efficient, consolidated campus through which to do ministry. The proposal includes:

- Exterior restoration and new roofing that is necessary to save the 1924 Sanctuary building, a key component of our decision to stay in our current location;
- Interior renovation of that building to allow for the entirety of the church's operations to consolidate within;
- A significant reduction of our building's footprint by tearing down the two educational buildings on the back end of the property;
- Once the two educational buildings are cleared, the addition of a 4200-square foot multi-functional space onto the back of the Sanctuary building and creation of an outdoor chapel in the footprint where the physical chapel stands now.

**The SCFM is also recommending that the church ends its 50-year ministry of full-time, 5-star childcare and close the Children's Center as of May 31, 2018.**

Unquestionably, the recommendation to close the Children's Center has been the most challenging and emotional decision the committee has made. We know so well the Children's Center's role in our community as a leader in providing quality, safe, and affordable childcare for 150 children each year. Since it began in 1967 as the first racially-integrated educational space in Forsyth County, the Children's Center has been a pioneering force in Winston-Salem and touched the lives of thousands of families in the critical years

infant through pre-K education. And there's no doubt that the incredible teachers and administrators Center are among the most compassionate, creative, and capable educators around.

However, **it has become clear that our church simply cannot afford to continue this ministry.** Due to the significant spending on the Children's Center building within and beyond the church budget, recent urgent maintenance needs have led us to this critical moment. All of us in the Center have experienced these particular challenges in recent months, with the perpetually-fluctuating heat and air in the building, the closing of our kitchen this fall due to plumbing issues, and the water leaks that constantly need attention. Beyond these major issues, the fire code, building code, and educational code regulations change often enough each year, such that we are always - and increasingly so - bearing the expense of keeping up with the changes they demand. This is part of the reason that churches are increasingly unable to sustain a high-quality, day, five-star childcare; we're the only remaining NAEYC-accredited church childcare center of this kind in the county. And in all of these things, the simple cost to run and operate the buildings represents a quarter of our annual church budget and hundreds of thousands of dollars each year over and above the restricted funds for the building. When nearly all our annual income for the church comes from individual donations, what was more easily handled by a congregation of 2000 members when the Center opened in 2007 has become nearly impossible for a congregation with an active membership of 500 in 2017.

In our work as a committee, we spent many months exhausting every option we hoped could be available to find new life for the Center. We worked with an architect both to price a free-standing Children's Center building on our property and to explore the first-floor possibilities around our buildings. We talked with other church leaders about moving the Center off-site to a partner organization, a business, or another church. We worked with developers about including a Center within another type of development on our land. We researched grant opportunities that could be available for capital improvement. Each of these options was met with either limited or no interest from potential partners or was prohibitively expensive to the church.

Closing a center like ours is never easy, but we felt certain that the best path forward was one in which we closed on our own terms, rather than an immediate forced closure due to a building crisis or a change in code regulation. It was also of highest priority to ensure the smoothest possible transition for staff and families, giving ample time to find new placement and end well. With that in mind, **the anticipated day of closure will be May 31, 2018.** We know that you join us in caring deeply for our Children's Center staff, many of whom have worked with the Center for decades. Members of the church staff and Special Committee met together with the Children's Center staff this afternoon to share this news, and we will meet again in a couple of weeks to talk through employee benefit packages to help in the transition. We are already at work to find the best, most comprehensive way to celebrate the work of our beloved staff.

In a day and time when information seems to travel faster than the speed of light, the Special Committee discerned together that the best way to communicate this information to you was through email. We value highly the value of transparency from us to the widest circle possible at the same time, which is why you are reading this on your phones, tablets, and laptops rather than hearing it from us in person first. However, **we invite you to bring whatever questions and comments you may have to a meeting with church leaders and members of the Special Committee this Tuesday, June 6, at 5:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary.**

Because the day-to-day work of running a Center is a full load in and of itself, the Special Committee wanted to ensure that our staff was not solely bearing the substantial weight of closing the Center as well. We created a Transition Team to come alongside Cynthia and Cheryl over the next year, allowing them to focus their energies on leading our fine Center with assistance from this team in the logistics of closing. The Transition Team will be managed by Shawn Martin as Transition Manager. Shawn is no stranger to FBCCC, having led as director for 12 years and serving now in a part-time role as Special Projects Assistant for the Children's Center. She knows our Center intimately, understands licensing regulations inside and out, and maintains wonderful connections with other centers here in town which will be hugely helpful during the transition for families and staff alike. The Transition Team will be made up of the following people: Mary Thompson (Chair of FBC's Children's Center Committee and CC parent), Mary Foskett (member of Special Committee and former CC parent), Amy McClure (FBC's Associate Pastor for Children, and

Adults, and Pastoral Care and staff liaison with the Children's Center), and the remaining members church's Children's Center Committee: Mitch Phipps (CC parent), Whitney Webster (CC parent), McGee (CC parent), Minerva Fox (FBC member), and Vickie Mendenhall (FBC member). Please know this wonderful team of folks are committed to walking this journey with you every step along the way.

Tomorrow, our kids will come to school... and the day after that, and after that, and so on. Each and school day for the year ahead, the church and Children's Center will do together what we've done years -- educating our children and sharing all the love we can muster as they learn to love God, love other, and love themselves.

Ending such a vibrant ministry of First Baptist Church on Fifth brings with it certain grief and loss for all. From our pastor to several committee members, our kids and our families' lives are or have been enriched through the ministry of the Children's Center. We know that this is hard for everyone, so remember that we will be praying for you and your families in the midst of coming transition. We remain certain that the passion for educating children through First Baptist has not gone away in the slightest, but rather that passion renewed and focused on finding what shape and form it will take next. In all things, we hold fast to the promise made real in Jesus Christ, that death and loss and endings never have the final word. For we know and trust in the promise of resurrection, a promise we feel profoundly today when the Church universal celebrated Pentecost, the day a new Spirit rushed among Jesus's followers and the Church was born.

What may God birth next through First Baptist? Like expectant parents readying for a new arrival, we know what the future will hold. But we trust at the end of this labor, there will be new life on the other side. And for that, we say 'thanks be to God!'

With deepest affection,

Emily Hull McGee, Pastor

Kelly King, Chair of Deacons

Amy McClure, Associate Pastor for Children, Senior Adults, and Pastoral Care

David Williamson, Associate Pastor for Worship, Arts, and Administration

Gary Knight, Chair of the Special Committee

Preston Cook, member of the Special Committee

Alice Cox, member of the Special Committee

Martha Davis, member of the Special Committee

Carla Diehl, member of the Special Committee

Mary Foskett, member of the Special Committee

Chris Gambill, member of the Special Committee

Ray Hawley, member of the Special Committee

Annice Hogsette, member of the Special Committee

Larry Hovis, member of the Special Committee

Randy Peters, member of the Special Committee

Meredith Smith, member of the Special Committee

Gary Stiffler, member of the Special Committee



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