

2018-11-11 Welcoming

Welcoming

November 11, 2018

Pastor Scott Austin

artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

In this current teaching series which is leading up to the end of the liturgical year and into the season of Advent, we are revisiting our fundraising campaign from last fall. It's called Growing in Faith Together, and we're doing a little 2.0 version of it this week, and last week, and in the next couple of weeks. Just as a quick reminder, or maybe the first time for people who are newer here, the purpose of this campaign is to raise money to expand and improve our building. Particularly to make our children's ministry space bigger and a lot better, and also to make the whole building more accessible and more inclusive, and by my calculations we are just about 6 months away from breaking ground on that project. Maybe a little bit less - we had some conversations this week that led us to believe we might be able to start some things inside before the ground thaws. But at any rate, in the spring is when we're going to get going with that. It's very exciting and it is happening. We raised enough money last fall to ensure that we can do the projects responsibly, and actually as you go out today you can take a look on on your left as you walk out down the hallway there's a little visual representation. Very "Artisan" way of doing it's not a big red thermometer that's going up, it's all organic and floral. So take a look at that, it's kind of where we're at with things that might be of interest to you.

But what we're doing right now - the reason we're bringing this up again - is because we would love to push the fundraising effort over the top and to be able, not just to complete the project as I said we already know we're going to be able to do that, but to complete the project without taking on any additional long term debt. Because every dollar of long term debt that we carry as a church is - this just the same way as in your household - is a dollar that we can't spend on doing other things that are important to us. On doing ministry that's more kind of active and on the ground. So my hope in revisiting this campaign for a few weeks this fall is that many of you were not part of Artisan when we did it last year, or maybe who were but weren't in a position to do anything to contribute to the campaign in a significant way. But maybe you are now! My hope is that the group of people will be inspired to join in and become part of this. And actually, I will not shy away from saying that there may be people who are already participating in the

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campaign who have maybe got a big raise this year, or a bonus, or whatever it might be, and you might be able to even go to the next level up in your giving.

So that's why we're revisiting it now. And as I said this is the second week of the rest of this series. Last week we talked about growing. Specifically - how our kids are growing up and how we need to prepare them and ourselves for the day when they kind of take the reins that are Artisan, and when they become the adults at Artisan. When they become the shepherds that the Israelite young people became for that community on their way to the promised land. And that was last week. Let me say something else again that I said last week because it's important for me to say this, and I will say some version of this every time we do this fundraising thing. I want you to know it's incredibly important for me pastorally that we don't take our focus off of the purpose for gathering together on a Sunday just because we're in a season of fundraising. Our purpose when we're here on Sundays is to worship God together. To express our mission to encounter God, embrace people, and engage culture in the way of Jesus. And I believe in this project wholeheartedly, believe me my friends, I would not be doing this if I didn't believe in it. You couldn't pay me enough to do more fundraising if I didn't believe in it. But I do, and I do hope that you will all be involved, but what I've always said about fundraising is just as true now as it was every other time I said it which is that: if it causes us to take our focus off the central purpose of being together, than we have bigger problems. Problems that can't be solved by expanding a building and making it bigger. In fact, those problems would probably be worse if we made it bigger. So it is my sincere hope that throughout this series, for everybody, even if you have no capacity or no intention to contribute financially or in any way to this Growing in Faith Together campaign, that you will still find your experience of being in worship here to be meaningful and enriching. And I really do want feedback on that. I welcome it. If I'm missing the target on what I just said I really want to know about it. Don't hesitate to tell me, because that would be again, a sign of something that needs to be addressed.

Alright, last week was talking about growing. This week's topic is "welcoming." How can we make our whole building reflect a posture and inward reality of accessibility and inclusion that we feel in our hearts? Because I've got to be honest with you, feeling something in your heart, having good intentions and wishing people well doesn't do them any good if you don't address problems that exist. To use an example - that's not a perfect analogy, but maybe will help drive this idea home - it wasn't enough to say to African-American people in the 60's: All are welcome. And if there were there were places in America that had 2 drinking fountains, one for whiter people and one for the other group of people, they had to rip one of those drinking fountains out of their physical structures in order to indicate by that space the reality that was now, if not in their hearts, at least was was the legal reality of the land. And similarly we could we could want to welcome people with disabilities and people who are LGBTQ all day long and

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it wouldn't mean quite enough just to wish people well. We have to make the space a part of that. So here's what I want to do in our brief time together today: I want to give you three statements made during the formation of the early Christian church. These are scriptural statements, and each one of them has something to do with the major dispute that the church was finding themselves in that day, which was: How do we include Gentiles into the Christian faith given that the Christian faith was born out of Judaism? Not to put too fine a point on it but how much are we going to require a gentile to become a Jew before we let them become a Christian? And it's not our particular problem today, but the idea of the widening of the doorways into God's Kingdom, I think, applies very strongly to the things that we're thinking about today. Now here's the thing - each one of these sentences, each one of these statements made during the formation of the early Christian church deserves its own sermon. It might deserve its own sermon series as a matter of fact, and I have actually preached those sermons and those series. So if one of these three really lights you up, come talk to me afterwards and I'll send you to a particular date where you can listen to the podcast or you can read my sermon notes, whatever works for you. But I have to be quick to get through this because I want you to hear all three of them. And so what I didn't put, like, spaces between the slides it's just bang bang bang [Pastor Scott makes hand chopping motion to indicate brevity] three statements and we've got to get through them quickly. So that's the way we'll make it work.

But here's what happens, I believe, that these statements and what happened in the early Church is evidence of a comprehensive movement toward broader inclusion of all people into God's Kingdom. People who had previously been left out were now being welcomed in, and that set the church on a trajectory which I believe we are still on today. A trajectory that was set in motion by the work of the Holy Spirit, and we're still traveling on that line today. It's kind of like the [Pastor Scott mimes checking notes] Voyager spacecraft. I'm not a space nerd, but I am told that there are spacecraft that NASA launched 40 years ago that are still on that trajectory. They have achieved escape velocity, which is a thing that has to do with gravity, and now they're out in space and they're still beaming their information back to us for the time being. We don't know how long that will be, and after they stop beaming it back to us - here's the really fascinating thing - they are going to keep on going. And so we have this trajectory that we are on and the problem is that the the gravitational pull of exclusion is stronger relative to the movement of inclusion than the gravitational pull of the earth is relative to the Voyager spacecraft. Does it make sense? So we're combating this is human nature pull to exclude people, to set up boundaries, to keep those people out so that we know **we** are in. We have to fight that constantly. So we need to recognize consciously that we're on this trajectory that was set during the early church.

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OK here's the three sentences I'm going to be covering. The 1st one this one was spoken by a eunuch, an Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch said, "Look, here is water, what is to prevent me from being baptized?" This is an interesting occasion, one of my favorite stories in Scripture, and I'm going to have a real hard time not preaching the whole sermon right now. But here's what happened. Philip - one of the leaders of the early church - was traveling on a road and the spirit nudged Philip and said "Go over that chariot right there." And in the chariot was an Ethiopian eunuch who had traveled to Jerusalem to worship. But what I'm not sure he knew was that because he was an eunuch, he was not going to be allowed to worship in the temple. That was against the Mosaic Law. And so he's in this chariot and he's reading from the prophet Isaiah, and Philip says "Do you know what you're reading there? Do you understand it?" And the eunuch says "How could I understand if no one is here to teach me?" and so Philip says, "I guess that's why the Spirit sent me here" and he proclaims the Gospel of Jesus to this person. And then they passed by some water, and the eunuch says, "Listen I'm in! There's some water. What is to prevent me from being baptized?" And Philip, I'd like to imagine Philip thinking "Oh wow, I wasn't quite ready for that just yet. I was proclaiming the gospel to... you usually this thing takes some time." But in the end he (Philip) says. "Nothing" and they go down in the water and Philip baptizes this man. And then the Spirit whisked him away. Very very spooky!

I love the story so much. It's so often the person who is part of the kind of marginalized community who says to somebody who's not - who's kind of already "in": Hey. What's to keep me from coming into that space with you? And if you're sensitive to the spirit we consider that question and go: Well, nothing! Come on in the water's fine! That's the 1st statement from the church: ***What is to prevent me from being baptized.***

Here's the second one. This is by Peter. Now Peter writes - Let's read the sentence - "I truly understand that God shows no partiality and that Jesus is Lord of all." Peter was kind of like, moved into this interaction with a Roman soldier. A Roman centurion, who was also nudged by the Holy Spirit. And they kind of had this this meeting of the minds that was never going to happen in the normal everyday life, because Jews were not supposed to go into the houses of Gentiles and you couldn't get more gentile than a Roman centurion. When the Romans are oppressing the Jews and a Roman soldier invites a Jewish leader into his home. When they start to have conversations with each other, and when Peter has a dream - and it happened - where the Lord says to him: "Hey don't call anything unclean that I have made clean." Peter goes back to his friends and says "I was mistaken before, but now I know that God shows no partiality and it doesn't matter if a person is a Roman or a Gentile or a soldier or an agent of the empire that has our whole people group under its thumb!" When he (Peter) declares Jesus as Lord, Jesus is Lord. ***God shows no partiality.*** That's the second sentence.

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And because of encounters like this between Philip and the eunuch and between Peter and Cornelius, the church was kind of launched - embroiled - in this controversy what are we supposed to do when the Holy Spirit seems to be working in the lives of these Gentiles and converting them to the way of Jesus don't we have to make them Jews first? Don't they have to follow all the laws but they have to undergo all the rituals?

And it came to a head in Acts 15 when the church convened a council. They had a dispute and they heard from both sides. They heard the reports of Peter, they heard all of the things that God seemed to be doing, and James, the brother of Jesus, and the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Eventually, after all this dispute and debate, they pronounced this decision and the church's decision: we should not make it difficult for those Gentiles who are turning to God. We'll ask them to obey these particular rules - which by the way, appear to be all about pagan idolatry and temple worship - but other than that our job is to get out of the way! And it was about Gentile inclusion at the time, but we don't really have that problem now because almost all Christians are Gentiles at this point. We have our own new list of people who we get in the way of when they're turning to God. How long would it take you to make a list of five groups of people that the church has gotten in the way of their attempts to turn to God? Would it take you longer than a minute? It would not take me longer than a minute. I could make that list very quickly. In fact, there's almost nothing I'm more passionate about in my pastoral ministry than getting out of the way and helping my church, our church, get out of the way. We should not make it difficult for anyone or any human being made in God's image to turn to God.

I said a few minutes ago that these three statements from the early church established a clear trajectory that the early church was set on by the work of the Holy Spirit, and that we're still traveling that trajectory today much like those Voyager spacecraft. But that unlike them we have the gravitational pull of exclusion to deal with, to contend with day in and day out, week in and week out, year in and year out. And that that pull unfortunately is very strong, so I think it's crucial that we do everything we can in our power to escape the pull - the gravitational pull - of exclusion, and that we make our physical space as accessible and inclusive to all people as we possibly can. You know earlier I mentioned the segregated water fountains, and I certainly don't mean to suggest that the issues we're facing today are exactly like that. I certainly don't mean to suggest that all marginalized people are marginalized in the same way, or experience it to the same degree, but I wanted to make that that analogy, that connection, because I think it is true that our space, our physical structure, effects people. And I think it's probably more true than most of you know. It certainly was more true than I was aware of. I thought we were great. And then some people said: Not so great, and here are the ways! And we've been on this path, trying to fix that ever since. So I want to show you a video. [Speaking to volunteers in the tech loft] And when you can, go ahead and get that ready while I introduce it. This is a video

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that we made last year for this kind of aspect of our campaign and it really helps to...I think it helps me to understand some things that I would like you also to understand. [speaking to volunteers in the tech loft] Go ahead sir.

[Video plays] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29ATDCd6Ojk>

Speaker 1 (sitting in front of the Artisan stage, wearing a blue shirt): I think one of the biggest things that I've learned over my time at Artisan is that God's Word isn't good news for anybody if it's not good news for everybody. We've been working on racial reconciliation. We've been working to be more inclusive of people with disabilities and people who are LGBTQ. I'm sure that we'll discover there are many other ways that we need to open our doors wider, but really "God's people" encompasses everyone. God wants to reach the whole world and if we're just looking for people who look like us or act like us or talk like us we're putting a limit on who God wants to reach.

Speaker 2 (sitting in front of the Artisan stage, using a pink wheelchair): So I've seen a lot of big changes and little changes. One of my favorites is the ramp. When I first started at Artisan there was this big push for aesthetics and beauty. And I was worried that a ramp would be viewed as un-beautiful. And I was really excited when we were able to make a ramp that is so beautiful and aesthetically pleasing and fits both within the ideology of Artisan, but also with accessibility, and the ideology of accessibility and everybody being welcomed here. The cloth on the (communion) table was there for aesthetic purposes but it's something that wheelchair users get their wheels stuck in a lot. And so every time I would go to take communion I would wonder if I'm about to burn the place down. I think this table is absolutely gorgeous and we found a way to again keep it beautiful and accessible for everybody.

Speaker 1: When I think about Artisan's mission to encounter God, embrace people, and engage culture in the way of Jesus, and when you look at use his ministry and how he reached out to those who have been marginalized in society, it's clear that we're called to do the same thing. We need to be looking for the people who've been left behind and bringing them in. Giving them space at the table alongside everyone else.

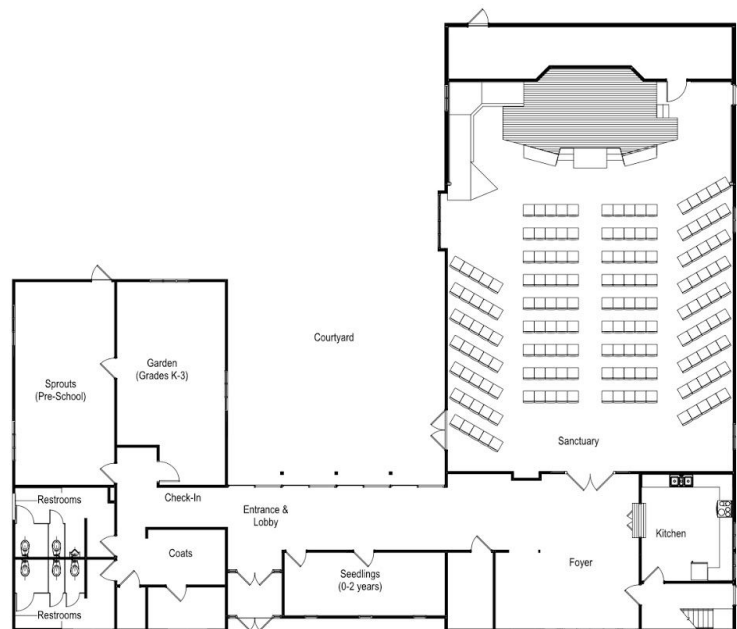
Speaker 2: I don't think people recognize how hard it is to navigate backing up into one door trying to open another door and creating enough space between the two. So it would be really great to have doors that have automatic openers. I don't think that I would be the only one utilizing them. People with disabilities would love them but so would children. Kids love buttons! And I think parents who have strollers, or their hands full, or honestly anyone who's

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bringing anything for a potluck, is really going to appreciate some automatic doors. Accessibility is for everyone.

Speaker 1: I think we need to do everything in our power to make sure that people are feeling comfortable and welcome able to connect with God in the best way they can.

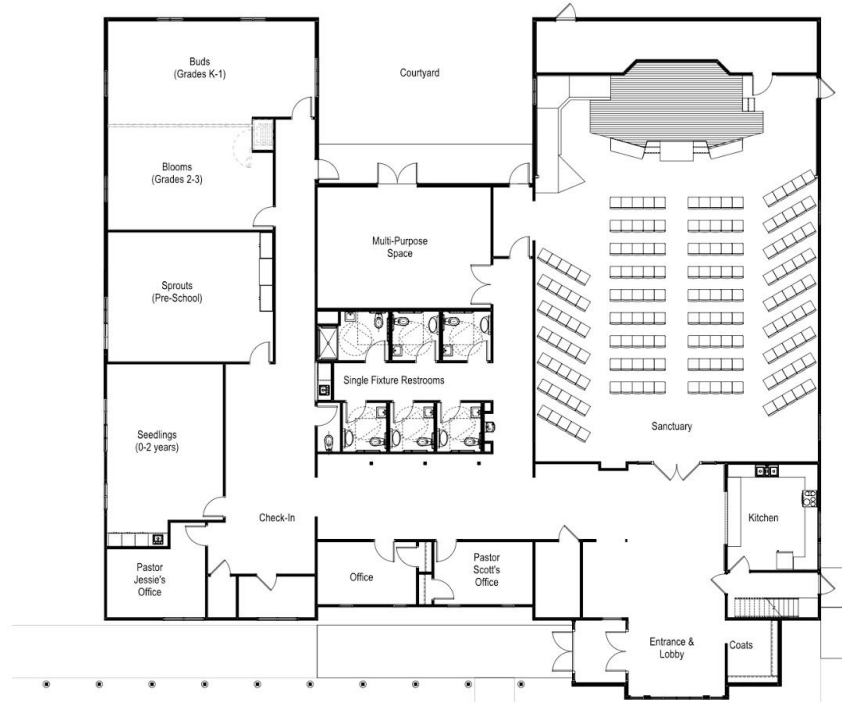
So I hope that that video kind of gives you a sense of some of the realities in our physical space that we can do some work to to address and improve. You may have noticed when you came into the building today that we have some green tape laid out in places, on the walls on the floors. And if you've been outside you may have seen the orange spray paint that we sprayed all over the lawn and some of the sidewalks. We're going to have some more fun with those spaces in a few more weeks more of this, but they're kind of designed to show you where the new walls will be, and where the new doors will be, and how things are going to change in this space. And I wanted to give you just a little bit of a preview of what's happening with this design because I think will make some of what we just saw on the video click with the idea of the design. And you can look at these the designs, they are on the wall as well, you can take a look at them up close after service today if you'd like.



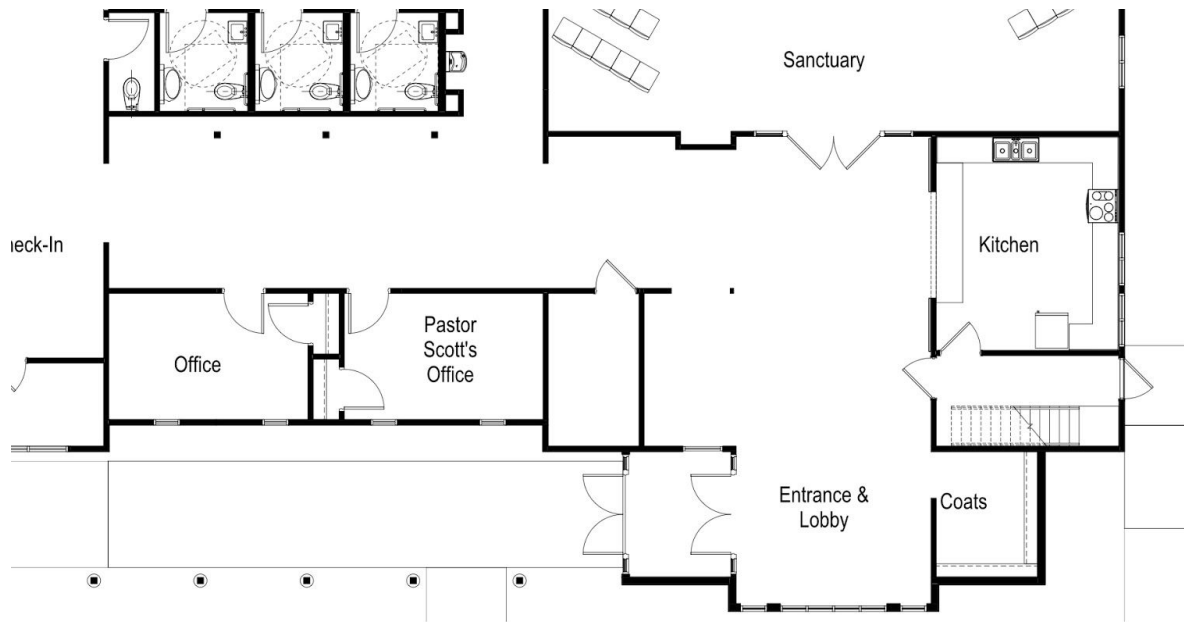
But here's what I do want to show you: the layout of the building as it currently stands this first image. This is what the building looks like right now sort of a "U" shape where the right side is taller than the left side and we're in the sanctuary. Obviously the kids are down in these little

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rooms down here. Keep your eyes on these rooms as we go to the new plan and see what happens.

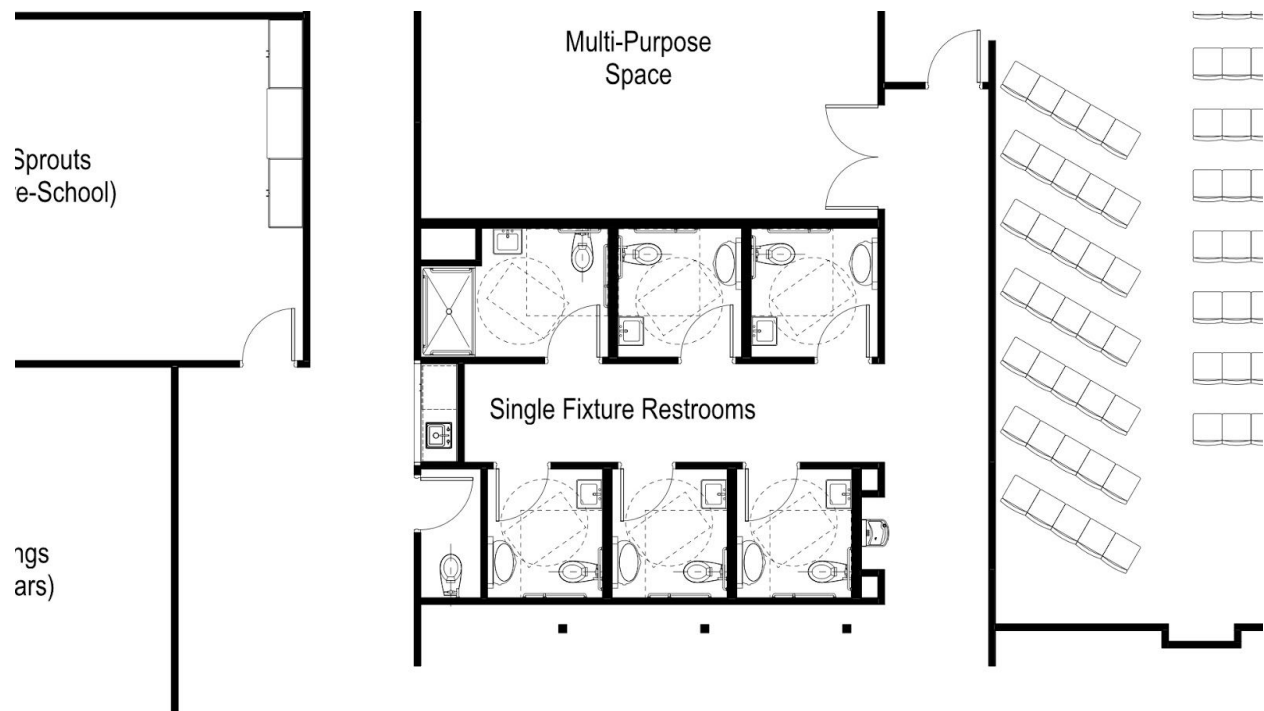


You see how we've extended that "U" end in that the rooms are not only greater number, but they're bigger in size. And then we filled in the courtroom in the middle there. Oh, the courtyard. Excuse me. There's hopefully no court room in here! And then down here you see there's a new entrance and lobby I want to take a little quick zoom in on that. So the next image is the entrance



New Building Plan

In the lobby you can see that you're going to come a little farther away from up there in. The entrance is going to be just opposite me, right along the side there. And you can't see the buttons but they're there! Those doors are going to open automatically with a button, just like when you go to a library or any other place that has accessible front entry doors. We're going to have that, it's going to be awesome. And boy, talk about like checking your privilege, when Stephanie says things like other people benefit from this too, I'm like oh yeah, I carry musical equipment into this building a lot. I would love to have a button! Why don't we have a button for me? You know, and suddenly you realize, I care about it only when it affects me. And that's not a good look is it? So I'm going to get excited about those doors not only because they will help me, but they're going to make it possible for people who've had that challenge getting into our building every time they've ever come here, whether they're carrying anything with them or not. So that's exciting.



And then the last one I want to show you is the restrooms. You know the restrooms were down in the bottom left there. Way down there, you probably use them, they are in disrepair. We're just trying to hold on until spring when we can put new ones in. But here is what's happening with restrooms. Right now there's two gendered bathrooms: a women's room with three stalls, and a men's room with two stalls. And so you've got six total fixtures in the bathrooms. What we're doing is going to six single fixture restrooms. The same number of fixtures. Actually there's one extra one because there's a little one that's there for the little ones that's facing into the children's wing. There's actually a seventh bathroom there. But each one of these six restrooms will have full facilities: toilet, sink, everything that you could want. And they're big enough that you can move around if you're using a wheelchair. There is no gender designation on any of them, so it doesn't matter what your gender identity is. There's no reason why you would feel odd or strange or anyone would look at you differently going into any one of these restrooms. And then as an added bonus, the one at the top there has a shower. That's that rectangle with the X in it. We hope that with our new children's ministry space we will actually be able to become a host church - host congregation - for RAIHN. Right now we go to New Hope and support them in that ministry, which is wonderful. We'll talk about that at the announcements, by the way, but with this much space we could become a host congregation. And having that shower there can be a huge blessing to the guests at RAIHN. And it will get used for who knows how many other purposes as well.

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So that's just a little bit of an overview. I didn't go into much detail with the kids' stuff, but that's out there on the on the walls as well. And again we'll be able to interact with the physical space in a 3-D kind of way in a couple of weeks. But I hope that you find that inspiring, because now I need to ask you to do something. I really want to ask you to participate in this campaign if you aren't already. And I do want to ask some of you who already are, who maybe are in a better place now and can do more, to consider doing more. And I really would love to get us over to that 100 percent mark on the on the end of campaign number so that we don't carry any more long term debt. But even if you can only give a little bit, I think that's the beauty of having a breadth of participation at all levels: some people giving a great deal, some people only giving a few dollars a month, we're all in this together. And it kind of it makes this beautiful picture of us working together, kind of getting around something heavy and lifting it. And some people have the capacity to bear more weight than others, but everybody is involved in the task. And I'm really excited for the idea that some of you might be ready to do this now when you weren't last year, or you didn't even know we were a church last year.

And I want to say a special word to those of you who have come to Artisan in the last twelve months particularly because of our postures of accessibility and LGBTQ inclusion. If you have come to this church for that reason I think this is an opportunity for you to support the ministry that is very important to you in a simple and tangible way. You might be someone who was not comfortable at a church anywhere else because of their policies on on these matters, but you've seen and found a home here, and I'm going to ask you - to the extent it's possible for you to do so - to kind of put your money where your commitments are. On those things, because the truth is they cost money to do. You know it's obviously going cost money to make a nice fancy bathrooms. We're excited about that, but the truth is that it's quite likely that it cost us a little bit of money just in lost offerings when we published that inclusion statement. Now listen, we would do that 100 times out of 100 again. The money is not the reason, that's not the thing. But it is an opportunity for you who are passionate about that matter to replace whatever might have been lost because of that. And so I encourage you to to consider that very seriously and prayerfully whether whether or not it might be a chance for you to to contribute to something that matters to you.

May I leave you with a thought experiment as we finish here. We're about to take communion together and, I like to think of communion as the banquet table of Jesus. It's like a fancy dinner party where grace is on the menu and everybody is invited. And I want you to imagine that you've received an invitation to a fancy dinner party, and that you've you've arrived there. That you can hear the the noisy din inside the apartment. You can see the disco ball in the window, whatever might be whatever fun might be happening there. And then you get there but the door is locked and you can't get into the building. I want you to imagine that feeling. Or maybe

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you've been invited and you've brought your bottle of wine, and you show up at the party and the table is set with four places and you're the fifth person into the room. And all four of the people are enjoying this dinner and getting ready to enjoy each other's company - they say "All are welcome, we're so glad you're here!" but there's literally nowhere for you to sit. And nobody is moving or making any effort to make room for you, and you're realizing that the words "All are welcome" are kind of hollow if the space doesn't say it itself. And I want you to know that's what church is like for some people for a lot of people. They say they drive by and they see the "All are welcome" sign, and they don't even bother to come in the driveway. Because they're like "I've been there before, not *there* but the last five churches I visited said that too, and when I got there it turns out I wasn't." That's the experience that people have with church.

You know, we always love to talk about the church as the people - not the building - right? In fact you'll never hear me say I'm "at church" when I'm in this building. I'll say I'm at the "Artisan building" and at the "church building." It's important for me, pastorally, to make a distinction between a physical space and the body of Christ, which is the people. So I don't say "the church" when I'm talking about this place, because *you* are the church. I am the church. We together are the church. That is unchanged by the fact that we're in a building, and that building might have some barriers and obstacles that we can address. We should not make it difficult for anyone who's turning to God. Let's pray together.

God thank you for this beautiful picture of the work that your Holy Spirit did in the early church, inviting people into the way of Jesus. Thank you for that trajectory that challenges us to this day to open the doors ever wider, to remove ourselves from being barriers to entry into the kingdom of God. Forgive us for the times when we have made it difficult for people who are turning to you. Forgive us for the times when unintentionally, just by virtue of the space we're in, we've made it difficult for people who are turning to you. And I pray that you would show us that if it's your will for us to be involved in this project, that that's the case, and how we should proceed. And help us to trust you to provide when we make that type of sacrifice. we pray these things in Christ's name. Well our table is open. I invite you to come and receive the body and blood of the Savior. May it be the real presence of Jesus in your life today. And may it be an act of unity with you your siblings in Christ here and with the church around the city and around the world and throughout time. And may it be food for your hungry spiritual souls. There will be a member of the prayer team at the back of the room who will be happy to pray with you during this time as well, but our table's open. Let's continue to worship God there and in song.

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[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com