***A Reformed Approach to Worship***

***Studying a Reformed, Architectural Place of Worship***

Chapter One: Sessional Goals for Phase Three

 Ever since the initial discussions for construction of our present facility, there have been thoughts and designs on paper for further expansion as needed until the whole of the project would be complete. That means that back in 1986, when the first phase of the building was completed, there were already plans on paper for a second phase, a Christian Education wing, as well as a final, third phase which would include a larger worship room, expanded offices and other necessary elements, plus a redesign of the phase one rooms. Not knowing if the church would ever grow to need it, the plans were wisely designed to accommodate such expansion in the years ahead if required.

 Then, just after my own arrival here in the fall of 2001, the construction began on the second of those three phases. The growing congregation, along with a growing school ministry, required more room. The plans for that second phase had to be revisited and become more specific due to the more concrete requirements and restrictions we were under – one of those modifications being the addition of the gym. At the time, the cost for the gym made it a risky venture but, boy, are we glad we have it now!

 We have not yet come to phase three, but in some ways we have already prepared for it. A few years ago, the session experimented with turning our growing congregation sideways in the worship room. That was, actually, pretty significant in many ways. First, it instantly changed the attitude of worship – everyone was nearer the pulpit and each other. Second, the platform was much more usable for a variety of assembly demands. Third, it permanently absorbed the former fellowship hall, which meant the use of the gym for fellowship meals a requirement. And fourth, it allowed us to absorb some of our growth in numbers before we were ready to financially consider expanding our facilities with phase three.

 But now, many signs are pointing to our need to consider phase three. Our membership and staff, as well as our regular attendees, have been on the rise, our present mortgage is being aggressively paid off, and more room is going to be needed in our future.

 The elders and deacons and their wives convened for a Leadership Retreat last October, and one of the questions we discussed in depth was how to approach the building of this final phase. Even long before that, I have given this quite a bit of thought. Along with all the pragmatic things a new wing will call for – offices, storage, etc. - of first importance to us all has to be the design of the worship room. At the retreat, we all realized several things:

* that we will be in that room for a long time,
* that the size and shape of the room effects the worship dynamic, and that this worship dynamic, therefore, needs to be clearly defined,
* that the design of the room should not dictate priorities to us but reflect them and that these priorities should not be merely subjective but reflect biblical, Reformation teaching as much as possible.

 I am glad to report that the elders and deacons eagerly welcomed the thoughts we shared together and saw the wisdom in taking our time to examine these issues. As a result, two steps were determined to be taken in 2009:

* that a Program Committee would be erected by the elders – consisting of some elders and deacons but also some others from the congregation – for the purpose of studying these things in more depth and to consider how they will be developed into actual plans. Then, they will begin meeting with an architect to improve upon our existing plans for phase three with a view to moving us forward toward the actual construction project; and
* that I would include in the monthly Beacon for 2009 a series of articles that would help explain some of the points we learned which would help us all to grow together in our appreciation for the direction in which we want to go.

 I would like all of our members to read these articles in the months ahead and to pass on to me any questions or comments that come to mind. Not only do I want to do something we all will like but I also want us to be aware and understand the reasons why our new wing, particularly our worship room, should be built in such a way that when we gather together before the throne of grace, we will know we meet with God in spirit and in truth.

Pastor David Barker