

Dear Chester Bethel UMC family,

I am composing this letter to share with you the current state of our building plans. As many of you may remember, before the pandemic, we sought to expand our church building by constructing a “new wing” adjacent to our current Fellowship Hall. As you may also remember, this project was delayed by DelDOT, which imposed upon us the cost of adding a turn lane to our area of Foulk Road in the name of safety. They also imposed a need for us to add landscaping, parking lot lights, and a water retention pond to our property. This cost amounted to nearly \$500,000 to the total project cost; and it vastly exceeded our budget. The pandemic additionally delayed further inquiry into our options.

Now, in post-COVID times, we find ourselves poised to steer the project with renewed vigor. For the past year, our Building Committee has been meeting with our architect, Joe Farina, and our contractor, Jeff Nowland, to discover our new options. The post-pandemic price hike on construction materials has immensely impacted our ability to proceed with a new wing, or even a building addition. This limitation coincides with our need to do away with our current modular building, which was originally assembled as a temporary structure housing our classrooms until such a time as the new wing was built. However, we simply do not have the funds to construct a new wing.

Therefore, we share this current iteration of our most feasible option with you:

1. In lieu of any new construction, we plan to renovate the space that we already have.

Given that we must do away with our current modular building due to the increasing cost of the lease and the deterioration of the temporary structure, and given that we have no new wing in which to house students, the current layout of our church building must house both our Preschool/ Daycare *and* our church functions.

2. This means some change is in our future.

This will mean decreased enrollment for our Preschool, which will result in a decrease in income from our current enrollment capacity. It will also necessitate the renovation our building in order to abide by both state and preschool licensing requirements: for instance, we will need to add a certain number of child-sized toilets to our bathrooms in order to host so many students in the one building. We will also need to construct a temporary classroom in the back corner of the Fellowship Hall for at least the 2025-2026 school year. This space would still allow the church to set up for up to 100 guests in the Fellowship Hall.

Perhaps the greatest change will be that Room 1 (currently our conference room to the left of the Church Office) will be repurposed into a classroom for students. This means that we will need to create additional meeting space in the Narthex outside the Sanctuary. We will be reconfiguring the area closest to the back windows and the side door in order to maintain a setup that will accommodate church committee meetings, preschool staff meetings, Al Anon meetings, etc.

3. There is so much good news!

This renovation means that our church rooms will have updated paint, facilities, and other features. It's exciting! We will have the opportunity to breathe new life into a church building that already houses such life-giving ministries.

Additional good news is that the renovations will allow all our current Preschool families to continue here through graduation. While enrollment will decrease due to the loss of the temporary structure currently located behind the building, a viable solution is to discontinue our program for age 2. All our current families will move up to age 3 and 4 classes (and the current 4s will graduate), allowing the current children to continue their education here. The preschool looks forward to the return to being fully located in the church space again and to further strengthen the connection between our church, our students, and their families. The preschool eagerly anticipates returning fully to the church space, aiming to enhance the connection among our church members and friends, our preschool students, and their families.

We hope that these renovations will be the beginning of something even better for our church and for our Preschool ministry. The Building Committee has not lost hope that we can further expand our enrollment capacity in the future. We will do what we need to do at this current juncture, while leaving room for further expansion in the years to come!

4. We want to talk about it with you!

Chester Bethel will be holding a “**town hall**” meeting during which I as your pastor, Vicki Antignani, our Preschool Director, and our Building Committee plan to update you about our Preschool Building Project. During this meeting, we will further explain our current, post-COVID situation, discuss building plans, and answer your questions to the best of our ability.

Where: Sanctuary at CBUMC

When: Nov. 23 at 3 PM

The Building Committee, your pastor, and our Preschool Director are committed to continuing the great legacy of Chester Bethel Preschool in our area. I cannot impress enough upon you how many folks I meet in the community who either were educated here or sent a child or grandchild here for preschool! We are a vital ministry in this community, and we intend to remain vital for years to come. This is why we are in favor of the plan that I have outlined for you, and which we will discuss in greater detail during our Town Hall meeting. We hope that you will come to this meeting ready to ask a lot of questions and voice your opinions about this building project!

Blessings,



Rev. Kelly Conner, MDiv, ThM
Pastor of Chester Bethel UMC and Mt. Lebanon UMC in Wilmington, DE