

Co-creating the “greenest church in Iowa”

In some ways our journey toward building the Greenest Church in Iowa began in the early 1990s, with several intermittent stops and starts. But from another perspective, our journey began on January 27, 2013.

Our 10 S. Gilbert church had served us for over a century, but limitations were becoming increasingly apparent. Accessibility, space for large gatherings, energy/environmental wastes, and other problems had been recognized by many since at least the early 1990s. Several groups formed and disbanded over more than a 20-year period to attempt to address these limitations, each exploring and learning about various options. Remodeling plans had been carefully drafted and considered but failed votes had been divisive, creating groups pitted against each other. There was a continuous pattern of hard work followed by no agreement to action. Even though there seemed to be consensus that the facilities were less than adequate, there were also broad and deep emotional attachments and fond memories of weddings, funerals, and other important life events that took place in the little church that looked like a house at 10 S. Gilbert Street.

After a 2011-2012 facilities task force once again learned a lot but didn't get traction with the congregation, at the January 27, 2013 congregational meeting one of the members of that facilities group announced a gift and a challenge. Adam Ingersoll stated that he recognized the decades-long impasse on facilities, and thought this might help us get unstuck: He announced that his family would donate \$107,000 to the Society (\$1000 for each of the building's 107 years of existence), and \$262,000 matching two-for-one funds from his family, *if* the Society raised \$131,000 or more toward facilities *and met another condition*. The total gift would be \$369,000, and with the Society's \$131,000, we would have half a million dollars to jumpstart a facilities project. But he added this important condition: The \$107,000 gift was to be spent on facilities if we chose to commit to a decision about facilities, and *if we did not* it would remain as a gift to our general operating budget, *but* the \$262,000 match would not be made. Those matching challenge funds would be given only if we made a decision about facilities by the congregational meeting on May 4, 2014. The decision could be to remodel, to tear down and rebuild, to move to another location – any of many options was acceptable, but *not* deciding would mean that the challenge wasn't met and the \$262,000 donation would not be made. This created a sense of urgency that followed recent momentum (the Society had, in the past year, created a new mission and vision, and had just voted on a new strategic plan at this meeting). Now for the first time we had a deadline regarding facilities. This

sense of urgency, along with the anticipated half million dollars to jumpstart a capital campaign, made things different.

To address the financial challenge the board created a Faith in Our Future (FIOF) fund, and established a committee to ensure that we met the challenge. Members were Barbara Haring, David Jepsen, Jan Locher, Jerry Nordquist, and Paul Pomrehn. Over the course of the next year and a half, contributions to the fund, including the match, grew to approximately \$600,000.

Next, in April of 2013, the board created a Facilities Steering Committee (FSC) with two deadlines. The first was to conduct a vote no later than November 17, 2013 to determine the Society's willingness to move forward, and the second was a vote no later than May 4, 2014 that specified what we would do (remodel, tear down and rebuild, move, etc.). The FSC would also "lead and coordinate" the Society's efforts, was charged with recruiting additional volunteers, and the board promised to support and advocate for what the FSC recommended. The FSC was chaired by Tim Adamson, and included Kris Barrash, Jill Stephenson, Theresa Ullerich, and Kirk Witzberger, with Rev. Steven Protzman as an ex officio member. Kirk had led the 50+ member workshop that created the new mission and vision statements in September of 2012, and Tim and Kirk both served on the committee led by Sue Otto that created the new strategic plan approved at the January 2013 congregational meeting, so the committee was rooted in this recent work.

The FSC read volumes of documentation from past facilities committees. It noted the divisiveness of past efforts, and so, with the board, the Society set a threshold of an 85% supermajority affirmative vote in order to move forward. Many found this daunting, but we stated that we were doing this together "as an intact community or we're not doing it. We care about our beloved community more than bricks and mortar." The FSC conducted many listening forums to learn what mattered most to members, regularly shared the results of what was heard, created a "top ten" list of members' priorities for facilities, and worked with the board and staff to conduct a vote on November 10, 2013. Leading up to the vote specific details were provided as to what we thought we could afford (\$3 million) and why remodeling was not feasible to accomplish our goals. The FSC created a campaign designed around the tagline "Journey Together," and the theme "Imagine." Between the early and late morning Sunday services we displayed, on computer monitors, hundreds of various facilities images, and asked members to imagine and consider what was possible. We distributed and often referred to a brochure with a dozen or more phrases that began with the word "Imagine." For instance, "Imagine inspiring, welcoming, light-filled worship space where we share our values and beliefs, and nurture our spiritual and ethical growth." John Lennon's "Imagine" was played frequently during this facilities project.

The board was not neutral regarding facilities, as had been past practice in previous decades, and it and the FSC advocated for what we perceived to be the approach that met the needs our members expressed. We overtly asked members to vote "Yes" to the following: "I believe that in order to strengthen our ministries and fulfill our mission and vision, we, the UUSIC, must find new facilities," essentially eliminating the remodeling option. On November 10, 2013, 91% of us said, "Yes."

The FSC immediately recruited members to investigate the many options for "new facilities" and the following subcommittees were formed in the following days:

- Committee on 10 S. Gilbert (10 SG; tear down and rebuild, possibly with partnerships)
- Committee on Land (find a lot where we could build)
- Committee on Properties (find property with a building that could be repurposed)
- Committee on the Greenest Church in Iowa (investigate sustainable practices for any of the above)

Amazing members volunteered and worked diligently in each of these committees, and on March 26, 2014, the following members attended a celebration, dinner and drinks in Channing Hall (the fellowship hall in the basement beneath the sanctuary), appreciating the progress already made, and a pay-it-forward appreciation for future work. Each person below was given a unique, signed appreciation card that included a short note about his or her specific contribution to date:

- Tim Adamson (FSC)
- Kris Barrash (FSC)
- Sharon Beckman (Property)
- Pete Brokaw (Board)
- Kirk Cheyney (Greenest Church in Iowa)
- Barbara Haring (10 SG, FIOF Fund)
- Kurt Hamann (architectural assistance)
- Sally Hartman (Greenest Church in Iowa, Board)
- John Hayek (10 SG)
- Adam Ingersoll (10 SG)
- David Jepsen (FIOF Fund)
- Jim Laughlin (Land)
- Russ Lenth (10 SG)
- Jan Locher (FIOF Fund)
- Christopher Malloy (Property)

- Diane Martin (Board)
- Mary McMurray (Property, Board)
- Tom McMurray (Property)
- Mark NeuCollins (Greenest Church in Iowa)
- Jerry Nordquist (FIOF Fund)
- Sue Otto (Land)
- Paul Pomrehn (FIOF Fund, Board, Land)
- Steven Protzman (ex officio, Board and FSC)
- Deb Schoelerman (Greenest Church in Iowa)
- Vicki Siefers (Board)
- Jill Stephenson (FSC)
- Chris Taylor (Board)
- Peter Thorne (Greenest Church in Iowa)
- Doug Wallace (Board)
- Kirk Witzberger (FSC)
- Theresa Ullerich (FSC)
- Mark Yuskis (Land)

One of the top 10 priorities was to remain downtown, and enormous effort was devoted to making this happen. Maureen Patterson, who co-chaired the 2011-2012 facilities work, joined the 10SG committee, and this group explored partnerships with 10 developers, examining how we might be able stay at 10 S. Gilbert as part of a larger downtown project. These partnerships were extremely complex and time-consuming, and we realized we would not meet the May 4, 2014 deadline for the matching funds. The Ingersolls agreed that if our good faith efforts would continue, the deadline would be extended. At the May 4 annual meeting, Tim, as the FSC chair, asked every member who was working on any of our subcommittees to stand and be recognized. In addition to those listed above, this also included a “Preservation Committee” (Jill Stephenson, Sherry Dolash, Steve Vincent, Gay Mikelson, Jeanette Carter) who took on the task of discerning the items of historical significance that would move with us to a new setting. We had proxies stand to represent those not present, so that the congregation could see over three dozen people standing, each helping them fulfill our shared goal. We wanted it to be clear and visible that this facilities effort was different – most members knew and respected at least one of those standing, and this was a large, inclusive, representative effort that was going to succeed (we just didn’t know how yet). We also took steps to aid in the coordination and communication regarding this complex project: At this same May 4 meeting Kirk was voted to the board and became a liaison between the FSC and the board, Maureen began helping the FSC with written communications, and the FSC began conducting monthly “supercommittee meetings” in Channing Hall – working meetings where every subcommittee openly discussed what they were doing, where their efforts might overlap with another subcommittee, what they needed support with, etc.

Members of the board and members of the Society were invited to witness the work in action, and some were present at every meeting. Many other meetings were conducted as needed to hear from members about their opinions and perspectives on specific issues.

After giving it much more than the old college try, we learned that staying downtown was both too complex and too expensive. In the process we became clearer about what we wanted and about the value of our property on the corner of Gilbert and Iowa streets. We increased our original estimate of that value from \$800,000 to \$1 million, and we increased our facilities budget to \$3.5 million. One of the enduring gifts of our 10 S. Gilbert home was that its sale would fund a large portion of a new building, and we would forfeit those funds if we stayed and rebuilt at 10 S. Gilbert. We sadly but realistically conceded that we would move outside the downtown area.

Near the end of 2014 we found a 3-acre property in the northeast corner of Iowa City (the Larson farm, adjacent to ACT) and we explored this option thoroughly and conducted a two-month campaign to persuade members to buy this property and move our congregation there. Maureen introduced Kevin Monson of Neumann Monson Architects (NM) to the FSC, and the FSC introduced him to the congregation at a November 16, 2014 facilities forum. We conducted a programming workshop with NM at St. Patrick Church on January 17, 2015 – it is notable that our church was too small for this 100-person interactive gathering. The purpose of this workshop was to help our architects know what we wanted to accomplish in our new building, and the results were not tied to a specific location or design. We scheduled a vote on February 1, 2015, and Maureen and Kirk (with lots of help from Tim and several others) prepared a nine-page *Guide to the Facilities Decision*. The vote was delayed to February 8 because of inclement weather, and on February 8, 2015 92% of us agreed to purchase the Larson farm property. SUCCESS!! But no. Our two-month-long open and transparent campaign for a “Yes” vote allowed a developer to be aware of our intentions, and he bought the property days ahead of our vote. We were back to the drawing board, but in the process we had created a solid relationship with NM, and they had bigger drawing boards.

The FSC was originally chartered to conclude its work in May of 2014, and by the time the February 8, 2015 vote was concluded its members had gone above and beyond what was originally envisioned in both time and intensity. A new committee, the New Facilities Committee (NFC) was created to take us the rest of the way (into a new facility, where ever and however that might occur). Kirk Witzberger stayed on to ensure continuity, chair the committee, and continue as liaison with the board. Adam Ingersoll agreed to co-chair and be the liaison with NM. Other committee members were Deb Schoelerman, Jeffery Ford, Jane

DeWitt, Steve Locher, and Sue Otto, with Rev. Steven Protzman as an ex officio member. The committee had its first meeting on Feb 23, 2015, creating a seamless transition, and the supercommittee meetings continued, with flexible changes as some committees completed their work (e.g., Properties), and other committees were added at various times (e.g., Transition Task Force).

We agreed to partner with NM in November, even before we knew where our new location would be, and this proved a fateful choice. They were working with Jesse Allen, a local developer, on a potential downtown project, and were able to navigate political ground that enabled our historical church on 10 S. Gilbert Street to become part of a larger partnership between Jesse Allen and the City of Iowa City. With hopes and plans but no firm commitment, we made plans to sell our property to Jesse Allen with a gentleman's agreement that he, NM, and UUSIC members would try to keep the old church from being demolished. But included in the political maneuvering we needed to demonstrate that we were willing (though not wanting) to demolish the church. A vacant lot downtown at the corner of 10 S. Gilbert was worth far more to a developer than a lot with an old church that some community group might fight to keep from being demolished and developed, and the new owner would pay us considerably more if we agreed to demolish the church. The prospect of this unofficial historical site being demolished was not desired by anyone, and though board president Vicki Siefers had 95 thoughts and feelings against it, she asked our indulgence and posted a demolition permit on the church door where it remained for weeks. This was emotionally difficult for a majority (perhaps all) of us, but along with other back-channel maneuvering it allowed Jesse Allen and NM, with our support, to create a downtown project next to the old church, and we would be able to sell the property for \$2.4 million, three times our original estimate and a record price per square foot in Johnson County. Now we could build something... if we had a place. And we needed a place soon because if we executed this as planned we had a buyer who wanted possession in September of 2015.

In early April of 2015 we learned that Duane and Jill Miller were selling 5.55 acres of what seemed like a mini-nature reserve at our current location, 2355 Oakdale Road in Coralville. The setting would allow us to connect with nature more than any place we had seen, but a developer had just made an offer on the property. Duane and Jill were former Peace Corps folk, had a soft spot for our UU principles, and were pleased to hear that would leave much of the property in its natural state. They had a pending offer from a developer, and asked us to make an offer within one week. We learned from the Larson farm process, so within a day or two Tom McMurray (on the Land Committee), Vicki Siefers and several others strolled through the property on a beautiful day, and the board immediately negotiated and signed a purchase agreement contingent upon congregational approval, and gave the Millers earnest money. It helped in our

negotiations that we could demonstrate that our previous votes were 91% and 92% “Yes.”

We prepared a 14-page *Guide to Our May 31 Facilities Vote*, describing and including maps of the Miller property, outlining the process of selling 10 S. Gilbert, discussing the transition period, summarizing the new budget of \$5 million, including FAQs, the text of the legal resolution, a full report from the Land Committee describing why this was our best option, and more. The guide asked our members to vote “Yes” to the following: “Shall the congregation authorize the board to purchase the Miller property on Oakdale Road (Resolution A), to build a new facility there, and to sell our property on Gilbert Street?” It contained the unanimous endorsements of the board, NFC, and Land Committee, listed at the end of the document:

<i>The Board of Trustees</i>	<i>New Facilities Committee</i>	<i>Land Committee</i>
Vicki Siefers	Kirk Witzberger	Paul Pomrehn
Jim Olson	Adam Ingersoll	Jim Laughlin
Diane Martin	Sue Otto	Tom McMurray
Adam Ingersoll	Deb Schoelerman	Linda Fisher
Chris Taylor	Jane DeWitt	Dave Martin
Pete Brokaw	Jeffery Ford	
Steve Vincent	Steve Locher	
Mary McMurray	(and Tim Adamson)	
Kirk Witzberger	(and Maureen Patterson)	
Steven Protzman		
(and Jessica Zimmer-Saltzman)		

In addition to the above, distributed throughout the guide were 18 testimonials endorsing the vote, including a sentence or short paragraph from past UUSIC presidents (and one president-elect) from 1992, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015.

On May 31, 2015 222 members voted (77% of our voting members, some via absentee ballot), 202 voting yes and 20 voting no, so again 91% voted to purchase the Miller property for \$600,000. (Soon after we purchased these 5.55 acres Adam Ingersoll negotiated a charitable gift of an adjoining 2.3 acres – from the bank where we agreed to have our mortgage – so that our total property is about 8 acres.)

We were now able to purchase the Miller property and sell the 10 S. Gilbert church as planned. There were tense moments when the demolition of the church seemed more likely than we hoped in order to make other pieces fall into place, but Jesse Allen, and Dave Zahradnik of NM, with support from members of UUSIC, were able to delay and eventually not only avoid its demolition but have it named a historic landmark – a permanent part of Iowa City's visible history.

Leading up to this May 31 vote a Capital Campaign Committee (CCC) was formed with Jamie Sharp and Jeffery Ford as co-chairs, with members Barbara Haring, Jim Laughlin, Dave and Diane Martin, Vicki Siefers, with Kirk Witzberger in the initial phases. This group, with members of the board, met on June 2, 2015 via videoconference with Mark Ewert, a capital campaign consultant. After he came to Iowa and interviewed several of our members he estimated that we could raise \$1.5 million in our campaign, with \$1.8 million as a possible stretch goal (this was in addition to the \$600,000 generated by the FIOF Fund).

The NFC worked with NM to help them understand our nine priorities (having eliminated the option of staying downtown and renovating). We told NM three of these priorities were non negotiable: 1) capacity to comfortably meet as a whole congregation at one time, 2) exceptionally accessible, and 3) exceptionally green/sustainable. We said that we wanted our phrase "The Greenest Church in Iowa" to not just be an expression but to actually be true. Another priority was "affordable," which didn't mean inexpensive, but early conversations with NM about what met our desires were in the \$8 million range. There were many conversations to discern how far we were willing to push – we did not want to revisit this in 20 or 30 years and have another building project and another capital campaign, yet we didn't want to bankrupt the Society. In addition to NM we partnered with McComas Lacina Construction (MLC), and together we worked to determine what we might build at a few price points. One of our options was to build in phases, constructing a fellowship hall that would double as a sanctuary in the first decade or so, and adding a sanctuary later. Several of us knew of other churches that had done this, and some never made the addition, so the board, with deep input from the NFC and other members, chose to go all in, took a deep breath, and set \$6 million as our budget. This was far beyond our initial estimates, but we knew that our 10 S. Gilbert property was

selling for a record amount, this new location seemed a great venue where we could generate income from weddings and other event rentals, our Society's Endowment Committee had done a superb job of establishing a \$1 million endowment (from which interest income could be used for the mortgage), and the engagement and energy we were seeing led us to take a leap of faith that our capital campaign would hit its stretch goal.

On Tuesday, June 23, 2015 we held a Design Workshop with NM, again at St. Patrick Church. 130 members attended this 3.5 hour workshop on a weekday night – we were engaged! At this interactive workshop we generated creative possibilities for how we might design our new place. NM printed dozens of images of various churches and gave each of our 130 participants three dots to place on the ones we liked the most. A clear consensus emerged (which they said was unusual): lots of glass in a design that helped us connect with nature.

During the summer of 2015 the NFC met frequently with NM and MLC to finalize the design concept for the new facility. This was an iterative process, learning and changing the design three times, each with congregational input after meetings in Channing Hall with NM or the NFC presenting NM's next round of a design concept. At the end of August we agreed on a general concept, and NM began working with MLC to create specific blueprints that fit our budget and specifications.

One benefit of the Miller property was that Miller's house could be used as our Society offices after we sold our old church and while we were building our new one. In September 2015 our staff moved to the new property, but we needed a place to hold Sunday services. We made arrangements to rent space at the Sanctuary Community Church in Coralville, just two miles from the new location, where we held *afternoon* services for the year or so that our new building was being constructed. A Transition Task Force, led by Meredith Gall and Katrina Ingersoll, helped recruit and coordinate volunteers who did some heavy lifting, emptying the 10 S. Gilbert property, helping the staff move into the old Miller house, and preparing for a new Sunday experience. Many members helped sort, pack, move and do whatever else was needed. Various members stored our grand piano and other items at their homes. Early estimates had us moving into the new building in the spring of 2017, but some delays pushed this to the fall. We chose to move our Sunday services to the Kirkwood Regional Education Center at the beginning of the fall so that we could once again have morning services. This location is a four-minute walk, less than a quarter mile, from our new property, so our members became familiar with their new commute.

On Sunday, September 13, 2015, our congregation held a *Gala Celebration*, including a potluck meal/picnic under a big tent on our new property,

and our future building's actual footprint was outlined on the ground in rainbow ribbons. Steve Vincent and other members of the board and NFC arranged the event to celebrate the first large gathering on our new property, the terrific work of our Transition Task Force, the process of the NFC and the approved building concept by NM, the success of the Endowment Committee, and the launching of the capital campaign. 75 volunteers helped with this event that was attended by over 200 members. We started with a *Water Communion* Sunday service, followed by specific, heartfelt appreciations. Jamie Sharp, co-chair of the CCC, made the closing remarks, announced the official launch of the capital campaign, and stated the goal of \$1.8 million. Once again we were practicing our belief that *generosity follows appreciation*.

The NFC continued to meet regularly with NM over the fall and winter months, with board president Jim Olson often attending, but the NFC remained quieter with the congregation as the CCC took center stage. Many of our members were extraordinarily generous, and the CCC was warm, professional, and successful in its interactions with the congregation as a whole and with each individual member. In the end it outperformed the consultant's stretch goal, and our members pledged over \$2.1 million!

By the start of spring, blueprints were complete enough to begin construction. On Earth Day, April 22, 2016, we held a groundbreaking ceremony at the property. Earth Day was the appropriate day to begin to build the Greenest Church in Iowa, and the building was designed so that, with the solar panels, it is expected to draw zero energy from the electrical grid on an annual basis, and at the time of this writing the plan is to be certified as a Net Zero building. (Deb Schoelerman led much of our green efforts, including having the solar panels become a reality on our property.) About 100 people attended the groundbreaking ceremony, and board president Jim Olson, Mayor of Coralville John Lundell, NM architect Matt Krieger, CCC chair Jamie Sharp, FSC chair Tim Adamson, NFC chair Kirk Witzberger, and Rev. Steven Protzman each made brief remarks. Then anyone with a shovel, of any age, formed a large circle and participated in breaking ground.

During construction there were still thousands of decisions to be made regarding furniture, phones and security, kitchen, signage, AV, liturgical furnishings and unexpected construction issues that emerged. Each member of the NFC took the lead in one of these areas and usually helped in others. During this time our full-time staff (Emma Barnum, Saunia Powell then Jessica Zimmer, and Peggy Garrigues) and Theresa Ullerich, who led the furniture effort representing the Aesthetics Committee, attended NFC meetings and contributed immensely to the big picture and the minutia involved in these decisions. Deb Schoelerman became increasingly active, ready to provide indispensable leadership frequently

as weekday meetings regarding construction and other issues arose. Jim Laughlin also became increasingly involved as construction progressed.

In the fall of 2017 we were ready to move in. Another Transition Task Force, led by Kris Barrash and Peg Voelker and again involving dozens of members, gathered and moved the many artifacts that had been stored in members' homes, and helped our staff move out of the house and into the church. Over the months of planning and making choices we increased our budget from \$6 million to \$6.4 million, and the building turned out better than expected. We held the first service in the building of our dreams on October 15, 2017. We held a public Open House on Sunday, October 29, attended by 856 people! The formal Dedication Ceremony for our new building was held the following Sunday afternoon, November 5th, at 4 p.m., with Rev. Steven as the master of ceremonies and the sermon by Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs, co-minister of Unity Church Unitarian in St. Paul, MN. Then some of us rested.