

Notes from the two congregational conversations
March 20th and April 10th, 2016

On Sunday, March 20th after the second service and on Sunday, April 10th after the first service, the AUMC Church Council and Staff held a congregational conversation regarding a new mission outreach at our Heritage Campus. The purpose of these meetings was to (1) share information about our pending lease agreement and a covenant relationship with Just Neighbors and our other Heritage Campus remodeling, and (2) listen and respond to questions, suggestions and concerns.

The following is brief summary of these meetings:

Question: What does Just Neighbors provide?

Response: Allison Soulen, Executive Director of Just Neighbors responded: We provide immigrant legal services with the goal to offer a trusting environment that allows for discerning what is needed and what can be provided. Heritage Campus will be the headquarters for Just Neighbors. **Note:** the following appeared in the last Witness Article that further elaborates this response. *“Just Neighbors’ work helps to unite families that have been separated, to allow victims of domestic violence and other violent crimes to live in the U.S. safely and securely, and to obtain employment authorization for eligible immigrants so they can support themselves and their loved ones. Just Neighbors provides accurate, reliable information and services to immigrants, who are often exploited by unscrupulous legal practitioners. Since its founding, the organization has delivered much-needed legal services to more than 7,000 low-income immigrants from more than 115 countries. In 2013, Just Neighbors handled 1,162 cases, most of them residents of northern Virginia who immigrated from more than 65 countries.*

Question: What is the vision/mission of Just Neighbors?

Response: The following are the vision and mission statements of Just Neighbors that is on their web page [www. JustNeighbors.org](http://www.JustNeighbors.org):

- **Vision:** Immigrants in northern Virginia will be welcomed into the community and take their places as self-sufficient, contributing members of their communities.
- **Mission:** The mission of Just Neighbors is to provide immigration legal services to low-income immigrants and refugees of all faiths and nationalities, especially those who are most vulnerable. We also seek to foster enriching experiences that enhance community and mutual understanding among our clients, volunteers, and staff.

Question: Are we remodeling the space for Just Neighbors?

Response: We are remodeling/renovating the sanctuary space to accommodate office space for Just Neighbors.

Question: What are some of the renovation issues?

Response: Among other things, the renovation/remodeling includes bathrooms, lowering the sanctuary ceiling, creating working spaces and a conference room allowing for confidential conversations and assessing the current HVAC system.

Question: What is our financial commitment?

Response: The initial estimate is \$200,000 for the remodeling. Just Neighbors has pledged \$30,000 towards the renovations.

Question: What other renovation work is being planned for the Heritage Campus?

Response: There are several other major renovations being planned. (1) Remodeling/renovating the large room under the current sanctuary to create a new worship space for use by AUMC and our two other covenant congregations – New Light Korean UMC and the Seven Day Adventist Church. This work, among other things includes new restrooms and entrance, ensuring complying with all handicapped accessible requirements and addressing some water and drainage issues. (2) Remodeling the current kitchen bringing it into code with the County; (3) Assessing and updating the HVAC for this part of the facility; and (4) Remodeling the current Fellowship Hall.

Question: How will this be financed?

Response: The Church Council approved the Trustees recommendation to sell the parsonage that AUMC inherited from the merger. This property has been sold with closing anticipated by the end of April or first part of May. We anticipate receiving \$450,000 to \$500,000. By UMC regulation, these funds can only be spent on capital expenditure such as these renovations as well as some of AUMC's main campus facility needs such as a new chiller. In addition, Just Neighbors are putting in funds of about \$30,000 and we are looking for other donations.

Note: It should be noted that the Heritage Campus has been using more funds than it has been generating. Just Neighbors will be paying rent each month which will exceed the rent we have been receiving from the parsonage and the two other churches using the Heritage Campus. This lease arrangement with Just Neighbors will have our Heritage campus generating a net income for years to come.

Question: What are we calling this relationship with Just Neighbors?

Response: This is a lease agreement with a covenant relationship. The lease agreement with Just Neighbors will be long term. This partnership with Just Neighbors was, born in the Methodist church at Culmore UMC about 20 years ago. Over the years, Just Neighbors needed to find space other than at Culmore UMC, so it is wonderful to have Just Neighbors back in our church. This is a way to connect with our Annandale community in addition to providing food/clothes on Thursdays and tutoring/mentoring on Wednesdays.

Question: How long will our lease agreement be with Just Neighbors?

Response: The lease agreement and our covenant relationship will be for 10 years with an option for two additional 5 year renewals.

Question: Where does Just Neighbors get its funding?

Response: It is on the back of the Just Neighbors' brochure (Governments (Commonwealth of Virginia, Fairfax & Arlington Counties) churches, foundations and individuals).

Question: Are you looking to partner with other programs?

Response: We are looking to partner with other programs such as FACETS, Fairfax County schools, and others. We will be looking for more after school programs such as tutoring to help kids stay away from gangs.

Question: Are we giving aid to undocumented immigrants?

Response: Just Neighbors helps people file the proper paperwork with the federal government so that they stay in compliance with immigration laws. If Just Neighbors determines that there is no immigration benefit for them, Just Neighbors is unable to assist them further.

Question: What about the playground? There are many children from SDA on Saturdays who could take advantage of a nice playground as well as children from the neighborhood.

Response: The playground will be evaluated including any liability insurance that might be needed.

Question: Who approved us entering into this covenant?

Response: Final approval has not yet been made. In the January meeting, the Church Council approved the motion of the Board of Trustees to enter into a lease/covenant relationship with Just Neighbors pending the Council review and approval of the final lease/covenant agreement. Nothing has been finalized or signed as yet. As part of the deliberation and review process, two congregational conversations have been held. One after the second service on Sunday, March 20th and the second after the first service on Sunday, April 10th. In both meetings many questions were asked and information provided as part of the ongoing deliberation and analysis.

Question: Why did the church not vote on this?

Response: Entering into a lease/covenant relationship with Just Neighbors is in line with and furthers Goal 3 which is: "Mission outreach to our Hispanic, Immigrant and low income neighbors at our Heritage Campus leading to a potential faith community". The Congregation participated in creating and adopting Goal 3 several years ago. According to the Book of Discipline, The Trustees and Council have the authority to take initiatives to implement Goal 3 and it was determined that congregational voting was not needed.

Communication: If you have questions or comments, you are invited to send them to a dedicated email address that will be checked regularly by AUMC staff and reviewed for response and follow up by the leadership team. Please send questions and comments to HeritageDrive@annandale-umc.org.