

News Release

Biltmore United Methodist Church
376 Hendersonville Road, Asheville, NC 28803

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On-site interviews and photos available upon request



CONGREGATION WILL SELL PROPERTY, INVEST IN LOCAL NEEDS

A new way to proclaim the Gospel

Asheville, July 14, 2021 – Imagining a new model for what a faith community can look like, the congregation of Biltmore United Methodist Church has voted to sell its property and devote its energy and resources toward responding to Asheville’s most pressing social needs.

“The church is the people – not the building,” said Mike Moyer, chair of the Biltmore UMC Church Council. “We are a smaller community now, and we want to be free to be the hands and feet of Christ.”

The decision comes after more than two years of study and listening sessions to consider the church’s financial condition, prospects for growth and market value of the 1.9-acre property.



Assisting with the sale is Wesley Community Development Corporation, a United Methodist-affiliated, non-profit real estate firm that helps churches re-purpose and/or sell property with an eye toward ministry and stewardship.

Acting as stewards of the history

Biltmore UMC’s stately, red brick campus overlooking Hendersonville Road has welcomed Methodists since the years after World War II, a time when church attendance peaked in the United States. As recently as the 1990s, the church was drawing 250 for Sunday worship.

But the opening of Interstate 40 next to the campus created geographic challenges. The church found itself separated from central Asheville, overshadowed by an interchange, and, in more recent years, surrounded by medical offices and commercial buildings. Meanwhile, population growth shifted southward toward Skyland, Arden and Fletcher, making it harder to attract congregants.

COVID-19 added a new layer of difficulty. The church halted in-person worship and community support groups, and ceased operations with the Asheville Creative Arts Preschool.

Faced with ever-increasing expenses for maintenance, utilities and upkeep, the leadership team began considering a different future. Church leaders drew inspiration from their experience in Seeds of Change, a series of workshops led by Wesley CDC for churches to learn how to better use their properties for more effective ministry.

Wesley CDC is the official property manager of the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. Part of its mission is to help United Methodists explore the demographics and challenges of their communities.

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Responding to needs in Asheville

Wesley CDC emphasizes the idea that churches serve as anchor institutions of their communities. Oftentimes, however, the physical spaces are outdated and no longer suited to the needs of the users.

As President Joel Gilland puts it: “We help your assets serve your mission and ministry better.”

In the case of Biltmore UMC, the mission resides in places where people are hurting. Proceeds from the sale will fund an endowment to address homelessness, food access, health care, children’s needs and other priorities in partnership with local nonprofits. These are big issues in a city with the highest cost of living in North Carolina, according to a recent analysis.



The congregation will consider multiple options for a new home – perhaps leased space or a shared arrangement with another church.

Woven into the vision is a commitment to racial justice. The protests following the murder of George Floyd last year prompted the congregation to embark on conversations and calls of action to end personal and systemic racism.

“My hope and prayer is that we, as the Church, can rally around the injustice in our midst such that our world can be changed,” Pastor Lucy Robbins told the congregation. “And that begins locally.”

Biltmore UMC already partners with a number of local organizations, including Haywood Street Congregation, a United Methodist mission church that engages adults living with mental illness, addiction and homelessness.

The endowment could provide seed money for nonprofit partners to launch new initiatives. Church leaders envision an ongoing ministry of presence for whichever projects they take on.

“There’s no shortage of things we could plug into,” Moyer said. “And we don’t want to just give out money - we want to be invested. If it means turning dirt, painting a wall...we’ll still be Christ’s disciples.”
