Church Together

SOWING SEEDS FOR THE PROMISE OF RENEWAL

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church is a small church in the heart of Silicon Valley. We are situated at the corner of Leigh and Moorpark Avenues and right across from San Jose City College. On a good Sunday, we worship 10 members. Our pastor works full time as a psychologist and we are thankful he leads Sunday worship and Tuesday Bible studies.

Two years ago we were faced with difficult decisions. Saddled with a $800,000 loan that we couldn’t pay off, the church council looked at a number of options, including selling the church and leasing out our fellowship hall to a non-profit organization. Also, we looked at partnering with a non-profit developer to build affordable housing.

San Jose, CA is one of the most expensive places to live in California, and in the entire country. A two-bedroom apartment goes for at least $2,500 per month. A family of 4 making $60,000 a year is considered low income. And workers struggle to find employment where they can make a living wage.

Hebrews 13:1-3 talks about welcoming the stranger. Hebrews says,

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.
Guided by this scripture, we decided to partner with Mid-Peninsula Housing. We decided to lease the northern portion of our property to them for 99 years. They are working with us to design a community with 106 studio units to house the formerly homeless in a permanent supportive housing environment with wrap around services provided by the County of Santa Clara and Mid-Pen. The screening would be done by the County which has a waiting list of thousands of people anxious to move off the streets. Mental health, job readiness, addiction counseling, case management, veteran services and more would all be available to the new residents.

In exchange for the 99 year lease, we would get a lump sum payment of $2.6 million dollars. This infusion of cash would help us pay off our loan and it would pay for the construction of a new fellowship hall where we hope to continue providing after school day care, provide meals to the homeless, offer a space for homeless men and women to learn job skills, and be a place of sanctuary. This would leave us about $800,000 to help us renew our mission.

This isn’t the first time that our church has partnered with a non-profit developer. Years ago, we completed a project to build low income affordable housing for seniors above our huge parking area. It was dead space during the weekdays. Now we have a secure parking facility that fits more than enough cars for Sunday services and we have several floors of housing above the parking area. Maximizing our space to serve people by providing housing to the poor is something we take pride in.

Recently, the County of Santa Clara voted to approve $16 million dollars for the Mid-Pen project. The City of San Jose has conditionally committed $10.9 million. Philanthropists John and Susan Sobrato of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation have committed $2.6 million. And there are other sources of funding which Mid-Peninsula Housing is lining up to complete the project.

By Easter of 2021, God willing, we will celebrate the ground breaking for the housing project that would provide a place for the formerly homeless to call home, and we will celebrate renewing our church’s mission to provide hospitality to the poor and those who suffer the injustices of this world.

By Erik Larsen, Council President

Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to mic@spselca.org.