

The North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church

New churches NTC churches complete Sacred Places training

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Editor

March 1 marked an important milestone for twelve NTC congregations in urban Dallas as they completed the final day-long "New Dollars/New Partners for Your Sacred Place Training."



The intensive training is part of the on-going mission of Partners for Sacred Places, a national, non-sectarian, not-for-profit organization dedicated to the sound stewardship and community use of America's older religious properties.

Partners for Sacred Places Texas Office is located in Fort Worth, and the recently-completed training program is the organization's first partnership with the North Texas Conference.

In addition to the comprehensive "New Dollars/New Partners" training, Partners for Sacred Places also offers entry-level consultations and presentations and seminars. To qualify for the program, churches must have a sacred space at least 50 years old, have capital needs beyond the financial capability of the congregation to meet, to want to deepen community connections, and to be committed to using their buildings more effectively.

The NTC churches that committed to the "New Dollars/New Partners" training did so in the knowledge that the program does not represent a hand-out, but a major effort on the part of the congregation to learn how to broaden and diversify the circles of potential donors and partners who can help support the care and use of the properties.

The March 1 training at historic Oak Lawn UMC, Dallas, concluded with presentation of certificates of completion for the participating Dallas United Methodist churches: Oak Cliff, Saint Paul, Grace, Oak Lawn, Elmwood, Kessler Park, Owenwood/Foundry, Cochran Chapel, Casa Linda, Munger Place, Pleasant Mound/Urban Park, and Tyler Street.

Sarah F. Peveler, senior trainer for Partners for Sacred Places, led the final session on "Tapping Funding Resources from the Community." Ruth Ann Rugg, who has been working as director of the Texas Regional Office, shared leadership responsibilities.

Peveler emphasized the church's responsibility in leading fund-raising efforts. She noted that statistics show that internal fundraising must come before external. "That is where you have the greatest impact; nevertheless, community sources are key," she explained.

The statistics cited show that in fundraising, 39 percent comes from congregations, 23.9 percent from individual donors, 2.9 percent from other faithbased groups, 7.5 percent from private sources, 6.0 percent from fundraising, and 6.2 percent from other sources.



Texas Regional Office Director Ruth Ann Rugg addresses the March 1 training session in the Oak Lawn UMC Fellowship Hall.

One of the keys to successful fundraising is to list individuals, such as former members and families, who have an affinity for what is happening at the church. Another is to know groups and individuals who are interested in historic buildings, neighbors interested in the well being of the area, and colleagues and friends of members.

How does one find people with natural affinities for a congregation? Peveler said one tip is to write down the names of individuals listed on stained glass windows and trace them back to find out who they are and the location of their families. Resources for the everpopular genealogy research can be helpful in these searches.

The issue of public value can be the most important message you have to say to your community," Peveler noted. The day's activities included opportunities for the participating congregations to share accomplishments and future plans. Some of these included:

- * Saint Paul UMC, which is located near the entrance to the Dallas Arts District, is developing an identity around being an inclusive, spiritual center in this fast-developing area. The congregation recently entered into a partnership with Highland Park UMC, Dallas, which involves a congregational capital campaign and \$3 million dollar gift from Highland Park to rehabilitate the historic structure. The church also hosts Tuesday Night Jazz every second Tuesday of the month and has also hosted an Arts District street festival.

- * Oak Lawn UMC, which received a \$100,000 Meadows Foundation grant for its community house, given to honor a deceased Foundation member. (Meadows is representative of Foundations that do not give to churches, but will make grants to churchrelated programs benefitting the community.) The church is also planning a communitywide garage sale in its large parking lot in which spaces would be leased out to those who want to take advantage of the strategic site.

- * Kessler Park UMC, which is in the process of developing a forested area on the church property, received a \$3,000 matching grant from the community to plant new trees to enhance the area that is greatly appreciated and enjoyed by the church's neighbors.

- * Casa Linda UMC, which is participating in the "For Love of the Lake" music events in the White Rock Lake area, sees this as a friend-making outreach there.

- * Munger Place UMC, which is planning an April 4 Peace Concert, for the church and community (See the related article on page 4A of this issue of the North Texas Conference Reporter)

- * Oak Cliff UMC, which is planning a parking lot garage sale in conjunction with Cinco de Mayo, and planning to rent spaces to neighbors. The church also gained attention recently for its renovation of a neighborhood park and is considering hosting a carnival in the park on the day of the garage sale.

The experience also prompted partnership ideas between churches.

John Lovelace, a member of Oak Lawn UMC, who participated in the training, remarked on the wonderful diversity and opportunity presented by the proximity of Oak Lawn and Saint Paul. Commenting on Saint Paul's strategic location, he said, "I am fascinated by the wonderful potential of Saint Paul. We were here first, and all of these multi-million dollar buildings, including the new 7-11 headquarters, are now at our doorstep."

Citing numerous examples of successful partnership and fund-raising efforts in cities throughout the U.S., Peveler emphasized that collaboration is not easy. "It is hard, hard work, and it involves change," she emphasized.

She also noted that it is critical that churches seeking partnerships know their assets and come at their efforts from an attitude of abundance rather than an, "Oh, poor me, attitude."

As the group celebrated completion of the 2007-2008 training, Peveler suggested reconvening in the fall to evaluate progress and offer new tools, resources, and a framework to determine the next steps on the journey to preserving the sacred places of our NTC heritage. Sacred Places will also launch an ecumenical training for churches whose buildings are registered as architectural landmarks with the Texas Historic Commission.

For more information, please call the Texas Office at 817-965-5072 or visit the Website: www.sacredplaces.org.

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