



Transcript of Pastor Rock's February 20, 2018 Facebook Live address

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During this session I want to address from the lead pastor's perspective the **five most frequently asked areas of questions** regarding our Expanded Influence Next Gen initiative. Those five areas are **vision, stewardship, debt, succession planning and community impact and witness**. Rather than taking those five categories one of the time in order I'm actually going to be moving back and forth, flowing back and forth between those, but I guarantee you I will seek to answer every one of the questions that were put before me. These questions come from Pastor Blaine and Pastor Ross who have been diligently conducting informational meetings throughout the week online and on Sunday during service times. They've compiled the questions that have been asked most frequently.

Let's begin with vision. What is the vision behind Next Gen?

When this church was established, it was established by A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. He asked a well-known friend by the name of E.D. Whiteside to superintend the work of God in Pittsburgh - the work of the Alliance in Pittsburgh. And as you've probably heard before, Whiteside's famous response was, "I am not capable of superintending God's work in Pittsburgh, but if the Holy Spirit will superintend the work, I would gladly run errands for Him." That is the DNA of ACAC. We have always sought to listen for the Holy Spirit and then simply run errands for him.

Toward that end, 34 years ago God called me to ACAC. At that time, it was a declining congregation of 400 people, most of them senior citizens, highly discouraged, with a bad reputation in the neighborhood. Most of you know the story, but what I haven't always shared is that when I came, God told me several things. He said He was going to do a wonderful work of renewal in this place. He said it would take time. He said it would be difficult, but He said it would happen.

And after it happened, He said we were to share what He had shown us with the broader kingdom of God, with other congregations, other churches, other believers in Pittsburgh, in the nation, and around the world. God also told me, that after my first 10 years here, we would have a thousand people. It was exactly at the 10-year mark that we began averaging a thousand people in attendance. From there we kept growing to 1,500 to 2,000, 2,500 to 3,000 and we came to the place where logic said we should build. We should expand our sanctuary, expand our facilities, or else we ran the risk of stopping the growth and becoming plateaued.

Well, in line with E.D. Whiteside's approach to ministry, I sought the Holy Spirit's leading, our leadership sought the Holy Spirit's leading, and we felt God was saying 'do

not build. It's not wrong to build, but I'm not calling you to build at this time.' And so it was about eight years ago, when all the literature said you've got to build or else you're going to lose your momentum, we listened for God. God said don't build and so we did not. And that was a unanimous decision among our leadership. We didn't have to wait long to find out why God had told us not to build.

Six months after we made that decision, the stock market crashed, the housing bubble burst, and we entered into a protracted economic recession. If we had been in the mix of a building program, incurring debt at that time, we could have found ourselves in a very, very hard place. In addition, as I look back now, I realize had we expanded we didn't have the parking to adequately cover increased attendance. And I also now know in hindsight, we didn't have the necessary support of the community at that time. So in hindsight, it became very clear why God told us don't build.

Now all of that to say this - a few years ago I felt the Lord clearly communicating to me now it is time to build. Not to expand the sanctuary. We can multiply our service times. But it's to expand our youth, children, educational space and primarily our fellowship space where community really happens. Because community doesn't happen during a worship service – we're focused on God. We're focused on the Word. Community happens in growth groups and in casual conversations before church, after church, or while we're waiting to go into the next service. And we've been deficient in having space that would facilitate community and connection. And so the Lord began to communicate to me "now it is time to build". I vetted that, as I always do, with our leadership, with our elders, with our Ops board, with our staff. And they agreed now is the time to build. So all of this introduction to say this: Expanded Influence Next Gen is not us throwing something at the wall to see if it'll stick, or just doing anything to see if we can spawn another season of growth. Expanded influence Next Gen, I believe, is obedience to a clear commandment of God. The God who once said "don't build", I believe is now telling us it is time to build.

I've noticed as I read through these multiplied questions, that a lot of folks see this as if it were a zero-sum game.

What I mean by that - in a zero-sum game if somebody increases their share or their holdings, somebody else loses out. It is like dividing up a pie and if somebody takes two large pieces, it means somebody else gets a small piece. That's a zero-sum game.

Ministry is not a zero-sum game. What do I mean by that? Why am I saying that? Because many of the questions ran along this line. If we built and focus our energies on this building project, will we sacrifice our ministry to the poor? Will it hurt our devotion to world missions and specifically Alliance Missions? Will we drop other important things because we'll be distracted by the demands of the building project?

Those are fair questions but do you hear the implied truth behind each of them? The implied truth is that, if you do one thing you run the risk of losing another. That a new

initiative threatens an old initiative. I simply want to say in all my answers I'm going to point out that is not the case.

For example, there are churches in our nation that focus a good bit of their resources on community ministry. There are churches that focus a lot of the resources on worldwide evangelism. Rarely do you find churches that do both. But at ACAC, we do both. We've been doing that. We've been doing both for decades. And the more we have increased our programs designed to assist the poor and the broken and the despairing in this community - at the same time our missions giving, our missions involvement, our people feeling call to missions have all increased. Focusing on the community did not jeopardize our focus on missions.

In fact, you may not know this, but we are the number one giving church to world evangelism in the Christian and missionary alliance. Now, if you look at the official statistics, it says we're third, but that's because some of our people don't give through ACAC's coffers. They give directly to the Alliance. When their giving is factored in, we are and have been for years, the number one giving church to missions, even though we have sister churches three times as large as us in affluent suburban communities. We have no business being number one, but we are. At the same time, we've been doing aggressive community ministry, because ministry is not a zero-sum game.

So, the concept 'If we build we'll lose our way. We'll lose our focus on the poor. We'll lose our focus on missions' is not true. The reality is, if God is calling us to build and we don't build, then our disobedience and lack of faith will jeopardize everything we do. So, you will hear me reiterating that concept again and again in my answers. Doing this doesn't mean you're going to lose a piece of this.

Can't we do this project at less cost? Instead of doing a Lexus model could we do a Chevrolet model?

Let me simply say - we're not doing a Lexus model. When we employed an architectural firm that has vast experience in helping churches design ministry space, their first designs came in at around \$20 million. We said no, you've got to cut it. It went to \$15M, still not enough. \$12M, still not enough. And finally, to just under \$10 million. So we didn't start with a Lexus and say "let's add some bells and whistles." We worked our way down to a figure that we felt represented wise stewardship but still required faith. Because if what you're doing for God doesn't require faith, you probably aren't obeying God. He always leads us in paths that require faith. So could we do it cheaper? Well the answer to that is you could always cut something, do something less but I want to caution you. There comes the point where if we get so hung up on the cost, we lose sight of the value.

I remember a renowned Alliance leader once, in an Alliance Council, stood up after the delegates had been debating the cost of something and he said, "Gentlemen it occurs to me some people know the cost of everything but the value of nothing." It was his way of reminding us don't just look at cost look at value. What will come from this

investment? And I think after cutting and cutting and cutting again, if we were to go back to the architects and cut even more, I think a few years down the road we would look back and regret and say while we were at it, why didn't we do it right? Because to go back and do it right now is going to be twice as expensive and very complicated if it's even possible. So, no right or wrong answer here, I'm giving you my heart. I believe we have picked a model that represents conservative stewardship but yet still requires faith.

Would Union Place work for us as a new space for our children?

Interestingly enough, when we began looking at possible models, I asked that very same question. In fact, there was a time when I was really juiced about using the first four floors of Union Place for our children, incorporating the second floor gym, incorporating the cafeteria. At first blush, I thought this would really work. But, then upon further review, how often do we say that in life, I realized trying to do children's ministry on the first four floors of Union Place would be a security nightmare. And that was quickly pointed out to me because there are so many places of access and egress in those first four floors of Union Place, that it would be virtually impossible to create a safe, carefully-monitored space for our children. In these days, sadly, safe space for our children is a premium. We cannot sacrifice the security and the safety of our children. The design we're proposing, clearly controls the flow of traffic into the children space, in that space, and out of that space. It will be very easy for us to secure. So yes, Union Place was considered, but it would be a security nightmare.

What about the warehouse for our children?

Very, very costly. The warehouse is filled with steel beams and cement pillars and cement partitions based on its past use. To gut that and have tremendous cost before we even begin to remodel it, would actually increase our costs. In addition it wouldn't lend itself as well to the security and the traffic flow issues that have informed our design. And between you and me, I personally think God has a future for the warehouse that isn't a part of this building program, but that God will reveal to us in the future. I don't think it's the warehouse's time. I think God gave it to us for reasons, but I don't think this is the time for it.

How will the poor of our community perceive this? Will they look at ACAC building some new edifices and say they've lost their way? (They're putting their money in buildings, rather than putting them into putting money into our lives.)

Here's my response to that. Immediately after we announced the Expanded Influence Next Gen initiative several weeks ago, the people who flocked to me, to let me know their enthusiasm and their excitement, were almost entirely lower-income men and women from the north side neighborhood. They were jacked. They were pumped. They were so excited. And I've got a hunch why.

In the United States of America, believers who live in suburban areas generally have the best of everything where churches are concerned. If you look in the Pittsburgh area - the north suburbs, the south suburbs have numerous gospel-preaching megachurches with world-class facilities, children space, youth space, counseling services, etc. What I like to call cradle to grave Christian care and congregational life. People in the suburbs can choose one or another or another or another or another, but you look around the north side and that's not the case. In fact, if you look around any urban community in the United States of America, generally, there aren't vibrant churches large enough to offer specialized, much-needed ministries from cradle to grave.

Instead, what you find, are struggling churches with bi-vocational pastors in deteriorating buildings, where the children and youth have to sit with mom and dad, even though they don't understand what's going on, because the church can't even afford to support a pastor, let alone the children's workers, youth workers, counselors and so on. I've always asked the question why? Why should believers who live in the city have to always settle for less than believers who live in the suburbs or in smaller communities or edge cities? Why? I can't believe that is pleasing to God.

So when we build on this corner, what I'm hearing from lower-income men and women in this community - I'm hearing excitement because we are driving our stakes deeper. We are not going away. We're not moving out of the city so that we can buy 30 acres and build. We're staying on less than 2 acres of land in the heart of the north side because God placed us here. God told us to stay here. God has called us here. We are committed to people in the urban setting having a quality congregational experience. So if you're concerned about what the poor will think, they're excited. And our investment says we're here for them. You may not know it, but recently when some affluent people in the north side stated their opposition to us remaining here, feeling that this space would be better used for retail and housing and that we ought to just go somewhere else, when they voiced that it was the poor of the community who rose up in mass at those public meetings and said no we want our church here.

So, rather than being concerned with poor people thinking we're all about building - which, please, we're not doing the Taj Mahal, we're doing a hub - the contrary is the case. I know that from living in this community. I know that from talking to poorer men and women in this community. They're excited that ACAC is driving its stakes deeper - that it isn't going to go away and that we want them to have the best ministry possible for the honor of Christ and for their welfare. Again, building/ministry to poor - it's not one of the other, it's both. Let me remind you of this fact. We know anecdotally and otherwise that we have had people visit ACAC who love everything about it, but the complexity of the campus and leaving their children in a separate building across the street is a non-starter. Those are people that liked us but didn't join us because of our unintentional hindrances. When you lose people, you're losing the income necessary to aggressively help the poor. You're losing the workers and the volunteers to man the ministries that aggressively help the poor and the refugees and so on.

So if we focus on ministry to the poor and see it as 'well we can't do that and build', we will actually end up undermining our ministry to the poor. One of the things that's unique about ACAC is we have a large contingent of people from Pittsburgh suburbs who were called by God's spirit to bring their resources here, thereby enabling us to do aggressive community ministry. Most urban congregations don't have that, we do. But we need to keep that model moving forward into the future.

What if the congregation votes no, what would we do?

Well if the congregation votes no, we would go back to the drawing board. Because, again, we do have to bring our children back across the street, we do need to improve our student ministry space, we do need to improve our growth group space, and we desperately need to make places where families can fellowship - not rush out to beat the traffic, to get across the street, to get to their parking space and never connect and grow relationships. So what would we do? We'd go back to the drawing board. I'd keep preaching the Gospel. We'd keep telling people about Jesus. We keep giving the missions. We keep serving the poor, but we would have to go back to the drawing board. Because the problems that are confronting us and the challenges that confront us, they're not going to go away by us doing nothing. So we would have to go back to the drawing board and start the process all over.

That leads me to the matter of succession.

A number of years ago I knew I needed to set a date for when I would step down as the lead pastor of ACAC. Doing so was a rather arbitrary exercise. After all, how do you know what your health will be, what your life circumstance will be, how you will be feeling, how you will be received?, etc., etc.

But I prayed and took over a year to make that decision. And I felt God gave me the number 72 years of age. That's just a little over three years from now. I want to leave my successor positioned for greater effectiveness in ministry. I do not want to leave my successor a box full of problems that should have been solved on my watch. So if this were not to pass and if we had to go back to the drawing board, and if we had to do the lengthy procedure all over again, I would not be here to see the project through to completion.

And I think it would be unfair to ask a new pastor stepping in, before he's had the chance to really establish his own identity and credibility, to ask him to lead a large endeavor like this. It just would not be fair nor would it be wise. I want to see this through to completion so that my successor has solutions where I inherited problems so that God can take ACAC to the next level and when He does nobody's going to cheer any louder than me because this has never been about me this is always been about God's glory and God's ministry.

By the way, I'm not going to quit ministering at 72. I'll lay aside the mantle of overall leadership. But I want to stick around and teach God's word, in small settings, supplying

the pulpit occasionally. I want to mentor young leaders, the leaders of God's church tomorrow. So I'm not going to go fish all the time. I will fish more but not all the time! I'll be around but I will remind you, 34 years ago I came here and people were concerned about a man my age taking the lead of this congregation. I was an unknown. But I knew God had called me. And God blessed the ministry. Well it's God who has produced this miracle we know as ACAC. Do you really think that God hasn't been preparing my successor for years, even though He doesn't know it and I haven't known who he is? Don't you think God who started this wants to continue it and take it further? Don't you think God has been raising up the right man for that purpose? He'll be an unknown initially, but so was I!

The day will come when you won't want to see him leave either, but let's trust God for the whole issue of succession. Well I need to move along here so we can cover everything.

Is it fair to lay a burden of debt on the next generation?

I have no interest in laying the burden of debt on the next generation. Our intent has always been that this project would be completed within three years and largely if not entirely paid off within three years and we can do that, trust me we can do that. So it's not going to lay a burden on the next generation because we're not going to take out a 30-year mortgage. The reality is I don't want to borrow very much at all - nobody wants to. We have set ourselves a debt ceiling level of 50% of the total cost but we don't want to borrow a dollar if we don't have to. We might have to borrow start-up costs before everybody's pledges and gifts come in, but we want to keep the amount to a minimum. And I know that \$5 million is a big number. I don't deal with that number every day and neither do most of you. Let me help you put it in perspective. Our annual income at ACAC is around \$5 million, our missions giving is another million-plus - so we take in \$6 million a year, if you will. That doesn't count all the giving carried out by our faithful people to Urban Impact, Compassion Int'l, World Relief, Pine Valley and many other fine Christian organizations. The reality is ACAC people probably give \$7 million a year to the work of God's kingdom. So if you made \$50,000 a year would you feel frightened to take out a \$50,000 home mortgage? I don't think you would. In fact, if you make 50K and could get a home for 50,000 you be delighted. And unless you have a criminal record any bank in the country would be glad to write up that loan for you because it's a very, very safe margin. Well, even if we went to the ceiling that we set, and are suggesting that you affirm, it's less than our annual giving. It's like somebody makes 20 grand with a \$20,000 mortgage; a \$100,000 income with a \$100,000 thousand dollar mortgage. That's very, very manageable! See the Bible doesn't prohibit debt, that one of the worst interpreted passages of God's Word. What the Bible prohibits is putting yourself in over your head so that you can't make your payments. The reality is debt isn't always a horrible thing for the people of God.

From my own experience some of the greatest miracles I've seen in ministry have occurred when ministries or churches I led prior to coming here, by faith, stepped out and embraced conservative, reasonable debt, believing God wanted us to expand

ministries and then watching God do miracle after miracle after miracle to pay that off! You know there are pastors that feel if a church isn't in debt it's probably unhealthy? Now, I don't subscribe to that line of thinking. But the reality is a bit of indebtedness really calls us to pray and to trust and to examine our own giving. I led a camp ministry and its facilities that I inherited were deplorable! They should have been ashamed of them. I can't even begin to describe. I encouraged the people on that board that we take out a loan and start to fix these facilities and believe God. Well as we came to the end of the fiscal year we didn't have the money for the loan. They sought me out and began to attack me like Job's comforters! But the very next day a gentleman put in a check that paid the loan off in its entirety. When they asked him why, he said, "I've been waiting years for the camp to do something. I was always willing to give!" You know three years later that man hand the camp \$150,000 to build a brand new tabernacle debt-free. But if we hadn't entered into debt by faith to move the camp forward, we would have never gotten a nickel of that money that he had always been willing to give - but he didn't give it because there was no need. So again, I'm not a fan of debt but let's remember we bought our house on debt. We buy our cars on debt. We put our kids through school on debt. So let's not hold a double standard and say that's okay for us but not for the church! Again, no debt would be great, the least amount possible - great, but let's not be fearful of that. Sometimes it's necessary.

Let me talk a bit about Urban Impact, because that's a concern.

(By the way all these questions are great questions and they tell me something I already knew - that our people are engaged. When people ask questions that tells me they're taking ownership of the ministry. So we welcome the questions and if I get passionate in answering I don't mean to demean any question. I'm just passionate about these spiritual realities.)

Let me give you a quick story of what's going on with UIF. When we established UIF out of ACAC - which we did many years ago, tasking our then youth pastor Ed Glover to head it up, financing it in its entirety for the first year and then doing a declining subsidy - our vision was that it would one day be what it is today. It's a dynamic force impacting over a thousand children and youth lives in this neighborhood for the glory of God and breaking cycles of despair and hopelessness and violence and poverty.

But as UIF has grown and ACAC has grown, we come to the place where we just can't house all of these ministries on this postage stamp-sized 2 acres of land in the middle of an urban neighborhood. So UIF is looking for some other programming space north of us up into the hills of the north side and that's as it should be. It doesn't mean our partnership has weakened. I would say its stronger today than ever before! We had a joint staff chapel a week ago and it was just like a taste of heaven and the excitement and the presence of the Spirit in that room was palpable! We have a solid relationship but we simply can't do everything on this corner.

Now, could we have built in this project some space for UIF? Absolutely. Did we look at the possibility of doing that? Extensively. So why aren't we? Quite simply. When Pastor

Ed approached the UIF funders who were willing to finance capital expansion projects - brick and mortar - they didn't want to expand or underwrite adding additional floors to the hub or additional wings and buildings to our current campus for UIF's use for a simple reason. Those buildings would be on ACAC property and they would be the property of ACAC. It's like your home. You can't own your home and have somebody else own the master bedroom and the master bath. Well, you can't have two owners of this space here on this corner. So what the funders said was if we finance building additional floors and space for UIF, UIF isn't building any brick-and-mortar equity because the buildings belong to the church. It doesn't matter that they would be solely at UIF's disposal, and we would certainly honor that, it quite simply wouldn't be their property for legal reasons. So for that reason after pursuing that option and researching that option, we came to the conclusion that just isn't going to work.

So with the space that we do have we will continue to gladly accommodate UIF at every possible turn. But, thank God both ministries have grown so the two acres of this campus can't house them. That's a great problem! Give me that problem over empty rooms, unused space and heating and lighting spaces that are never employed in ministry. So our relationship is tight. But just like Abraham and Lot's herdsmen had to find their own pasture lands, ACAC and UIF can't simply do all this grand vision on this corner. We've got to spread out. But as we spread out we're spreading the influence of God's kingdom.

Have you involved our young adults in planning this project, since it's about the next generation?

Absolutely! We have been very intentional over the last three or four years whenever we were doing staff hires to pass the baton from the Boomer generation the Gen Xers to the Millennials and those who are coming behind them. So if you look at our youth ministry you'll see young men in middle school and high school. If you look at our children's ministry you'll see young people in strategic positions of leadership. And that's true throughout our staff. If you look at our elder board we have been intentional about putting younger men there and same with our operational board. So staff, elders, and ops board were all involved in this planning, praying, seeking God process over a couple of years. So yes, younger people have been very much involved in the process. Let me say this, I always want to see us improving anything and everything we do. I'm never content with anything that we do. I'm always looking for ways we can do it better for the glory of God and for the sake of people who need to see Jesus. And I feel we need to improve our young adult ministry. I'm not saying it's bad. I'm saying we need to improve as we need to improve our children, our middle school, our high school, our growth groups that are adults, our community care and our missions. We're always looking to improve. Because of that, in the arena of our young adults, we recently appointed a young adult task force made up of young adults because I didn't want to hand them programs I thought of. I wanted them to tell us what they feel will work for them to reach their peers and draw them to Christ. They've been working behind the scenes and are going to continue to do so.

So, yes, the thoughts of younger people have very much been taken into consideration and especially young families. Because as you heard in the ministry minute two weeks ago, it's just so difficult when you have children in different buildings and you're trying to find parking, to actually spend quality time with other young families and we don't want that. That's a gap in our ministry. So, yes, young families and young adults are very much on my radar, very much a part of what we're doing. And Pastor Ross started, in response to young adults' requests, a mentoring program that's starting to gain traction. So we don't announce everything we do, but trust me, we care about every age.

With all this talk about Next Gen in children and young families, what about elderly people?

Well again, back to my initial comment it's not a zero-sum game. The fact that we're concerned about young families doesn't mean we are less concerned about our veteran saints. I would suggest you would be hard-pressed to find a congregation that takes better care of its senior saints than this one. We have men and women who because of being in a care facility or health issues have not been to a service at ACAC for 20 years. Do you know they're visited every month? They're served communion, they're prayed for, when they're going to the hospital they're visited and I get a detailed report on how every one of them is doing and I get that report every month and I read every word. So, we are not sacrificing our senior saints on the altar of youth as some fear. Nor are we sacrificing our young people on the altar of senior saints. Remember, we follow Jesus in diverse community and that's not just political, it's not just ethnic, it's also generational. We want to do excellent ministry from cradle to grave. And let me say to you senior saints, you really don't want to be sitting at ACAC five years from now and walk around and see people entirely of your age bracket. Because when a church creates that scenario, that church is already dead - it just doesn't know it yet. A healthy congregation has the very old, the middle-aged, the very young and all segments are growing and interacting so that together we can experience Christ in deeper and more meaningful ways. So, yes, we're talking about helping our families because our older adults don't have to leave children in other buildings. They can just come directly into the worship center. But the fact that we care about one identified need doesn't mean we're ignoring other needs.

Does putting our children in the basement communicate that we don't value them all that much?

Well I don't like the term basement. I prefer the term lower level of the new hub, because that's what it is. But if by basement you're picturing a dark, musty space with no natural light, that's not what we're planning. The reality is the cutting-edge children's ministries in our nation today are going away from children's facilities that have lots of windows and sunlight. They are going to totally enclosed facilities that enable them to use technology to create environments by technological projection. So if children are studying David and Goliath, the walls of the classroom reflect that setting. If they're talking about creation, the walls of the classroom reflect God's creation with projections of nature - many times animated projections. That's also why more and more

congregations do not build sanctuaries with beautiful stained-glass windows. They built totally enclosed spaces with no windows because of the increasing reliance upon projection technology. So don't think 'dark basement'. That's what children's ministry was for me when I was growing up. No, think lower-level space that is designed to enable environmental projection that will make our children's experience even more dynamic. Not because we're going to rely on bells and whistles. We're still going to rely on loving teachers. But we're going to give those loving teachers some new exciting tools that are already being used very effectively by many churches across the country who have wonderful children's ministry.

By the way I want to speak to something that we do here repeatedly, this project isn't just about the children. It's about the total congregation. Because again, we currently aren't user-friendly for young families and our young families are the future of ACAC - they are. So this is about young families, and this is about fellowship everywhere. I can picture in the new hub some of our senior saints spending 25-30 minutes with some young people after service sharing their wealth of knowledge about the Lord, mentoring, sharing their stories. We just can't do that now and that's a tremendous resource that we're forfeiting because of brick and mortar issues! So this will improve children, this will improve student ministries, this will improve growth groups, this will improve the visitor experience, but it will most of all improve the Greek word 'Koinonia' Tight knit community and fellowship. You got to have a place to do that.

What's with the jungle gym and whose idea was that?

That was the architect's idea. Why would they suggest that? Because having designed countless churches all across the country they have learned from experience one of the most effective things that they have ever designed – they didn't think so at the beginning (that was their candid admission) - but having done it in a number of churches, they now testify that it is so effective. Why? Because if the little ones can go off and safely play, moms and dads can sit down together and have uninterrupted conversation, build relationships, build community, build care for one another, without having to fight bored children who are talking at them continually and saying they're bored. So it's not about competing with the local playground. It's about facilitating community.

Everything about this design is about facilitating community.

If I were to take a survey and ask if you would you like to see ACAC even stronger in terms of tight knit relationships, everybody would sign off on that. You run that flag up the pole and everybody salutes it. Well you need to make spaces that accommodate that. You need to design experiences that encourage that and sadly our current spaces don't do that. You might ask why did we design it this way? We didn't. God told us to stay in the city, to stay on less than 2 acres of land. So we have been doing the very best we can to have space for a growing ministry. The rental space across the street was God's provision. He gave us favor with the owners who today are charging us the same rental rent that they did eight years ago - that's unheard of! So, you do what you

can with what you have until God opens the door for something better. And now God's opening the door for something better.

By the way, for those of you who are concerned about debt - and again valid concern - do you know in the eight years that we have been renting the children space, that it cost us over \$300,000 a year and between retrofitting and renting, do you know that we have put \$5 million into that children space? And we don't own it. We don't have equity! This project will leave us with things that we own. Equity. Things that can't be suddenly taken away from us by a change in some corporation's leadership. We have a real window of vulnerability in our current children space. Thank God He's given us favor with the owners. But again, it'd be far better still to be masters of our own fate. Well I think I have covered almost everything I had on my sheet.

So let me leave you with this...

In our last elders meeting some of the young men asked if we should wait a bit since there are some things that are unclear. When I heard that, I sent out an email to all of our elders reminding them of this simple fact. When you're following God, if you wait for everything to be crystal clear, you'll never move. That's just the stark reality. If Abraham had waited for everything to be clear before he left Ur, left business, and left society to go to a land he had never seen - not knowing who would be all right when he got there - if Abraham had waited for everything to be clear, Abraham would've never left Ur. He never would've fathered the Hebrew people and he never would've landed in the land of promise.

I have never engaged a faith venture in 40+ years of ministry where I could say I know with certainty everything that is ahead. But in every faith venture I've been a part of, I could say I know with certainty who is with us, who is going before us and who was ordering us forward. And when we get there, when we need to know, we will know. When the provision's needed the provision will be there. When the favor's needed the favor will be there. When the intervention is needed the intervention will occur. If you wait for everything to be clear you don't need faith, you just need a good memory. So, will everything be crystal clear before we go? No, never! But we believe we've crossed our t's and dotted our i's, done our homework, prayed and prayed and prayed in a process. But now it's been well over two years. I know it's coming new to you, but it's been well over two years. I believe God is in this. But if after all of this you don't, vote your conscience and without apology. But I'm just sharing from my heart I believe God is in this.

I am so privileged to be your pastor and I am jacked about the future that God has for us! And, again, I could not appreciate more all of your multiplied questions. Because they tell me you care, you're committed, you're taking ownership, you're not a religious consumer, and that you are a committed member of a vibrant local congregation. And I believe the future for this congregation will be even brighter than the incredibly blessed past we have already enjoyed.