

**Park Avenue Faith Community
Fourth Planning Meeting
April 10, 2008**

Attending:

1. Chris Andersen, *First Presbyterian Church, Church & Community Concerns Committee*
2. Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede, *United Methodist Ministries, Leavenworth Neighborhood Assn.*
3. Brenda Banks, *Angels on Wheels*
4. Jodi Cooper, *Mosaic Community Development*
5. Fr. Damien Cook, *St. Peter Catholic Church*
6. Jodi Durbin, *King of Kings Lutheran congregation member & local bible study leader*
7. Christian Gray, *Mosaic Community Development*
8. Brittany Hanson, *Mosaic Community Development*
9. Tony Jackson, *Mosaic Community Development*
10. Kevin Marik, *Metropolitan Community Church member & deacon*
11. Fr. Peter Pappas, *St. John's Greek Orthodox Church*
12. Pastor Judith Rainforth, *First Lutheran Church*
13. Rev. Kate Rohde, *First Unitarian Church*
14. Heidi Sampson, *neighbor & local bible study leader*
15. Dr. Dick Skelley, *First Presbyterian Church*
16. Brian Smith, *Coram Deo Church*
17. Mathew Smith, *Core Community Church & MCD*
18. Dr. Russell Smith, *University of Nebraska, Omaha*
19. Stephen Stout, *Good Neighbor Ministries*
20. Bob Toy, *King of Kings Lutheran Church member*
21. Zoe White, *St. John's Greek Orthodox parishioner*

Overview

Members of the faith community in the Park Avenue area met on April 10, 2008. The purpose of the meeting was to hear back from the previously formed task forces, discuss reformatting the group's collaborative meeting times, and continue working together toward developing and implementing the group's ideas.

The meeting was held at St. John's Greek Orthodox Church from 12:00 - 2:00 p.m. The meeting was facilitated and notes were taken for reporting back to participants. Twenty-one people participated in the meeting and planning session.

Several newcomers were present and the meeting began with a quick round of introductions. Copies of the previous meeting's summary (March 6, 2008) were available, as well as a tentative list of community events happening in the area throughout the summer.

Russ Smith reviewed the agenda and took any questions and requests for additional agenda items. Russ Smith also noted that as he begins to transition out of his role facilitating the group, Brittany Hanson will begin to transition in.

Meeting Format Discussion

The collective group then discussed ideas about how the meeting times and schedule could be reformatted in order to foster the development of the group and ensure that the group remains accessible and productive. The question of how the group should proceed in order to transition to meeting on a continual basis and sustain specific initiatives was posed. In addition, the group was asked to give feedback related to three specific meeting components: length, frequency, and content/purpose.

(a) Length

Several participants noted that the current two hour meeting length is beneficial. Although it can be difficult to juggle meetings and other activities, two hours allows time for building community and trust among participants. It was acknowledged and understood that some participants may need to occasionally come late or leave early.

It was agreed that there would be a small change in the usage of the two hour time block. The first hour will be used specifically for Task Force work; during the second hour the group will collectively gather for updates, discussion, collaboration, etc.

(b) Frequency

Many suggested that continuing to meeting every four to six weeks would be advantageous. Additionally, determining an automated monthly schedule would begin to create a rhythm and allow participants to plan ahead.

A few participants have weekly standing commitments that restrict their ability to attend Thursday mid-day meetings; additionally, lunch meetings are ideal for many, but difficult for others. In response, the group will search for an alternate meeting day and time that is optimum for most. Brittany Hanson will coordinate the scheduling logistics with participants through e-mail.

(c) Content/purpose

A few ideas were presented to aid conversation, including adding an educational component to the collaborative hour. This component could potentially include short presentations and discussions about topics pertaining to the work of the group (e.g. community development, community organizing, collaboration, etc). Several participants offered potential cautions and possibilities presented by bringing in speakers or highlighting specific topics.

This started a good conversation regarding how the group would like to make use of its time together. Some identified specific ways meetings could be structured including three specific pieces: fellowship, learning, and strategic thinking. Others reiterated a desire for a greater emphasis on strategic thinking as a collaborative group, and noted it would be good to have an opportunity to hear the perspectives of others in the group.

It was suggested that we focus on valuing the voice of neighbors by hearing directly from people in the area, perhaps through inviting local individuals and families to share with the group about their experiences in the community. It was noted that any activity along these lines must acknowledge and affirm the diversity of the area, and additionally that the Leavenworth Neighborhood Association has conducted an in-depth needs assessment.

During this discussion, many established the importance of developing the identity of the group. Similarly the necessity of identifying areas on which the group can work together was highlighted.

Task Force Reports

The Community Events Task Force and the Community Meals Task Force were developed during the Feb. 14, 2008 meeting. These working groups were created in response to a few “root” issues the collaborative group identified it was interested in addressing together: hunger, poverty, and relationship development. The task forces presented a summary of their recent work and ideas to the group for discussion.

Before hearing task force updates, Bob Toy noted an interest in having a group gather monthly to pray together. The idea of prayer walking was suggested by another participant. Those who might be interested were directed to contact Bob Toy through e-mail (bobtoy2@cox.net).

The idea of some participants gathering together to pray, lead into a rich conversation regarding the identity of the collaborative faith leaders’ group. Many questions were raised about what the group may or may not be able to do together due to a diversity of theological beliefs. Others wondered if some assumptions may have been made about the faith leaders involved in the group.

Some noted that there may be voluntary events or activities in which individuals might choose not to be involved, and there should be no judgment about a faith leader’s level of commitment based on such a decision. This raised questions about how the group should title its activity, especially in terms of spirituality and striving to maintain the group’s unity. Another participant encouraged the group to remain inclusive from the standpoint of serving together in the neighborhood.

This dialogue naturally enveloped the Community Events Task Force update as well.

Community Events Task Force

This task force focused on one major idea generated during previous meetings: public neighborhood events. The first event was planned for May 17, 2008. The event, as planned, would include hot dogs and games for neighbors, an aspect of Christian witness, and music. A main goal was noted as getting people connected to local churches.

The previous discussion about the collaborative group’s identity continued with this task force update. Some participants noted they would not be comfortable with ‘testimonies’ or an aspect of explicit Christian witness. It was observed that the more particular the language or message, the narrower the potential or possibility of participation for many local faith leaders.

One participant asked what would the group like to see and could agree upon in a community gathering. The collective group found relative agreement of the following components:

- Food
- Family activities
- PR Platform—making known and available local services & resources for those who need it
- World or ethnic music
- Relationship/community building

The group continued to dialogue about how the group defines what it is working on, asking what kinds of work and initiatives could appeal to all. One suggested that the group be a marketplace of ideas where the faith community can come together to accomplish good in the neighborhood. The way in which decisions are made both within the task forces and the collective group was discussed.

It was decided that the May 10 event would be cancelled, and the three other events would remain tentative until further notice to give the Community Events Task Force an opportunity to regroup. Much appreciation was expressed for the work this group has done so far; though some refocusing may occur in light of the discussion, many expressed that this group's work has not been done in vain.

As the discussion wrapped up, it was emphasized that finding a way to honor the perspectives of all participants while coming together in common service to meet the needs of the community is key.

Community Meals Task Force

Fr. Peter Pappas gave an abbreviated update. Due to busy schedules, the Pastor Kip Mickelson and Fr. Pappas (co-chairs) had difficulty meeting during the interim between meetings. Fr. Pappas reported that specific logistics are to be determined, and he has not yet heard about whether or to what extent approval has been granted for the use of the First Baptist Church location. It was noted that a marketing packet for petitioning support and volunteers will need to be developed.

Wrap-Up

Due to the length of the previous discussions about the identity of the collaborative faith leaders' group, the meeting ended after the last task force update. All participants were encouraged to continue participating with the group; despite, or perhaps because of, the stretching nature of the discussion, much was accomplished and understanding is being built among participants.

It was determined that the group would meet again in a month or so. Brittany Hanson will coordinate the next meeting as well as the previously mentioned scheduling logistics.