

Life Center at St. Thomas Episcopal Church

Questions and Answers

1. What is the St. Thomas Life Center?

The Life Center is a new building which will house St. Thomas' administrative, educational, social, and outreach functions. It will replace our current parish hall and the surrounding offices and other facilities.

2. Why is it being built?

St. Thomas is experiencing steady growth as a parish and has outgrown its current space. From Sandwich Makers and Stephen Ministers to choir practice and coffee hour, St. Thomas is expanding in every direction and needs more room to grow. Whether for worship, fellowship, outreach, or education, our parish needs more meeting rooms, Sunday School classrooms, parlors, restrooms, offices, and an upgraded kitchen.

To live into our promise of practicing the hospitality of God, we need these improved spaces both for our own uses as a church and also for the various community groups that rely on our facilities, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, the Boy Scouts, the Keith Highlanders Pipe Band, and so on. St. Thomas has evolved into a community resource for West Bellevue, which has no public gathering spaces. In fact, over half the users of our current parish hall are non-parishioners. Between our own ministries and programs and the many groups we welcome to St. Thomas, we have simply outgrown our current parish hall. We need new space in which to grow and to continue practicing the hospitality of God.

3. Why can't we just remodel the current building?

Remodeling the current building would require costly upgrades such as seismic retrofitting, installing a sprinkler system, reinforcing the foundation, and bringing mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems up to code. Completely overhauling the existing building would cost as much as or possibly even more than building a new structure. Remodeling would be impractical, inefficient, and a poor use of our stewardship dollars. It makes more sense financially and practically to tear down the current building and start from scratch to build a structure that truly suits our current and future needs.

4. Why can't we use the space in Saint Thomas School instead of building our own?

The existence of the school is not an answer to the needs of the church. The church needs its own spaces for classroom instruction, meetings, fellowship, children and youth activities, and more. Borrowing space from St. Thomas School is a Band-Aid, not a solution.

St. Thomas School is a separate institution, entirely independent of St. Thomas Church. The church has almost no rights to space in the school. As a tenant on St. Thomas Church land, the school has a contractual obligation to provide one conference room and one classroom for church use, and no more. Construction of the school was financed with Washington State bonds. State law regarding bonds prohibits religious institutions from meeting on a regular basis in a state-funded building.

St. Thomas School is too far from the church to be practical for meetings, classes, and children and youth activities. It is locked on evenings and weekends when we need it. Its classrooms and meeting areas are not our own. But most importantly, it simply is not available to St. Thomas Church for our use.

5. *How much will a new building cost?*

The Life Center will cost \$18 million, including a \$1,000,000 endowment to maintain and sustain the building in the years ahead. While \$18 million is a lot of money, St. Thomas has been putting huge amounts of money into maintaining, patching and repairing the current parish hall, which after six decades is at the end of its life span. It makes more sense to invest in a structure which will truly meet our needs as a parish as well as the needs of the communities which use the building, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Boy Scouts, and Congregations for the Homeless.

6. *Wasn't there an estimate for a lower-cost building?*

Yes, but that was for a one-story building that only replaced and modernized what we have today. Because it would not add any additional space, it would not accommodate our growing parish or meet the needs of the outside groups that rely on St. Thomas as a vital Eastside gathering place.

7. *Who will pay for the Life Center?*

The generosity of St. Thomas parishioners will pay for a large part of the Life Center. The church is undertaking a capital campaign whose goal is to raise needed funds through pledges from parishioners. About \$500,000 in cash, pledges, and in kind gifts have been donated to the Life Center already.

8. *Will parishioners be the only ones paying for the Life Center?*

The Life Center will be a community resource, meeting space, and emergency shelter for many people on the Eastside, so friends, neighbors, and community organizations in the area likely will also contribute to the effort.

9. *Are there other ways to pay for the Life Center? What about renegotiating the lease with the school and charging more? Could the church take out a loan? How about charging outside groups for the use of our space or charging for parking?*

The school holds a long-term lease with the church which was negotiated in good faith. Demanding an increase in rent would be inappropriate, would likely sour our relationship with the school, and would not be enough to have a material impact on the amount needed to fund the Life Center.

If the church were to borrow \$1 million, we would need to pay back about \$100,000 per year. This payment would have to come out of the operating budget, which is funded by annual pledges and which simply could not absorb an additional expense of \$100,000 per year.

Providing space at no cost to outside groups is part of our outreach to the community; charging them rent would have little positive impact on our bottom line but significant negative impact on our ministry to our surrounding area. Similarly, charging for parking would be an unwelcoming practice which would raise insufficient funds while violating our mission to practice the hospitality of God.

10. *Is building the Life Center the best use of our money? Wouldn't it be better to apply our money toward direct outreach needs?*

One of the best ways St. Thomas can serve those in need is by creating a base for ministries and service groups, a facility out of which church and community volunteers can work on causes ranging from hunger and homelessness to alcohol addiction and interfaith understanding.

Additionally, the Life Center will attract families who are currently turned off by St. Thomas' crumbling infrastructure and inadequate facilities, particularly those for children and youth. The Life Center will nurture generations of future Christians, whose faith in action will have a positive influence on the community and the world.

Lastly, the current parish hall is definitely in its final years of life. Were St. Thomas to devote all its resources to outreach rather than to replacing the parish hall, the facility eventually would need to be shut down, denying a home to groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, the Boy Scouts, and Congregations for the Homeless, thereby cutting off another vital means of outreach at St. Thomas.

11. Why aren't we calling this a "Parish Hall?" Why "Life Center?"

The new building will be the CENTER of our parish LIFE. It will provide the facilities we need for fellowship, Bible Study, children and adult formation, outreach, and the many other ways we practice the hospitality of God. But it will also be about much more than just our own parish, which is why we are not calling it a parish center. Our new home will also be home to many different groups from throughout the community. It will be a gathering place and meeting point, a center of life for the many people in our area who have found a welcome at St. Thomas.

12. When will it be built?

We hope to begin construction in late 2011 and to open the doors 15 months later in early 2013.

13. Why build the Life Center now, when the economy is still so weak?

The decision to build the Life Center now is based first and foremost on the needs of the parish and the communities who use our structure, and only secondarily on economic conditions. Our growing church desperately needs expanded and improved facilities for the many people and groups who call it home in good times and bad. St. Thomas is acting on faith that the stewardship of our parishioners will make this building come to life even in challenging economic times.

14. Couldn't we make do with the current building until the economy improves and then build the new building later?

St. Thomas' current parish hall is on its last legs. Each time something breaks down in the building, St. Thomas ends up pouring good money after bad. Continuing to patch and repair the structure is no longer cost-effective. Waiting to build until later will mean more money lost to repairs. In addition, construction costs may well rise once the economy strengthens, making it potentially more expensive to build if we wait until later.

15. Could the design be scaled down to make it less expensive?

Scaling down the building would make it less expensive but would involve a significant tradeoff. Well over half of the parish hall's users are non-parishioners. St. Thomas could downsize the Life Center by building a smaller structure for parishioners only. Doing so would make the project less expensive for the parish but would undermine our mission of practicing the hospitality of God, by excluding from our campus the community groups that for decades have found a home at St. Thomas.

16. Is the Life Center going to be built on the footprint of the current parish hall?

The current parish hall will be torn down, and the new Life Center will be built in its place. The Life Center will have a slightly larger footprint, as it will be 15 percent larger than the current building, adding as much as 2,000 square feet on the ground floor. The larger footprint will be achieved by narrowing the space between the current facility and St. Thomas School. The size of the Close also will be reduced slightly. However, glass bi-fold doors opening onto the Close from the Life Center will create a seamless flow between the outdoor and indoor spaces, and a newly landscaped Close will derive more usable space from the available square footage.

17. What will the Life Center look like?

The Life Center was designed in an English country cottage style, with Tudor elements, to complement the look and feel of St. Thomas Church. Every effort was taken in the design to match the church and create an integrated look for the whole campus. The steep pitch of the roofline, a hallmark of English Tudor architecture, will match the slope of the church roof. The dimensions of windows and stone pillars in the Life Center will match those of the sanctuary. The same building materials used for the sanctuary will be used for the Life Center, most notably the exterior Wilkeson sandstone, a Washington stone noted for its warm neutral colors and fine texture.

The Life Center will have three stories, with one, the undercroft, built below ground to keep the roofline even with the sanctuary. Floor-to-ceiling windows adjacent to the Close and skylights along the main ridgeline over the Great Hall will fill the first and second stories with light, while glass brick laid into the ground outside the undercroft will allow light to flow even into below-ground spaces.

Architectural drawings are on display in the current parish hall conference room and provide a vivid look at the beautiful structure St. Thomas will soon bring to life.

18. Will it be significantly different from the current parish hall, in terms of both look and layout?

The Life Center will be 2.5 times as large as our current parish hall, but it will look similar in size to the current building. Offices, classrooms, fellowship areas, restrooms, child-service areas and the kitchen will all be brighter, more modern, and more efficient. While the look of the Life Center will remain consistent with our current campus, the level of activity and energy will increase considerably, with new spaces for children and youth, music, alternative worship services, much-needed storage, and a community emergency center.

19. What were the highest priorities for the design?

The highest priorities were to complement the architecture of the church, provide much-needed spaces for youth and adult programs, expand and upgrade restrooms, and provide larger gathering places for fellowship (coffee hour, social events, receptions, etc.) and sacramental events (weddings, confirmations, funerals, etc.). In addition, we are striving to create a durable and sustainable building that will last until the end of the century, so that no one alive today will need to fund another campaign for the Life Center.

20. How many new bathrooms, classrooms, etc. will the Life Center have?

The main floor of the Life Center will have a women's restroom with five toilets and a men's restroom with two toilets and two urinals. The undercroft will include a women's room with four toilets and a men's room with two toilets and one urinal. Unisex restrooms will be placed throughout the building, with two on the main floor, three on the upper floor, and two in the undercroft. The children's activity area and pre-K classroom will have restrooms with two toilets each.

The upper floor of the Life Center will house three classrooms for grades 1-8 that can be divided to make six rooms, in addition to one classroom for senior youth, one for pre-K, and the adult forum space. The main floor will include two classrooms just off the Great Hall that can double as meeting rooms.

The expanded children's activity area will be four times larger than the current space. The Great Hall will accommodate 250 people for a sit-down meal, which can be prepared in the modernized kitchen featuring larger food-preparation areas and a more efficient workspace. Half a dozen meeting rooms and music practice rooms will accommodate parish and community groups of various sizes.

21. Where will St. Thomas staff work during construction?

The Great Hall will be demolished at the beginning of construction. The staff will work in portable offices on the eastern edge of the campus, nearest 84th Street. These units will be in place well before construction begins, to serve as temporary offices for the city of Medina when it remodels its City Hall. Medina's remodel is projected to run from October 15, 2010, to fall 2011. During the time, the city's leadership and staff will be tenants on the St. Thomas campus.

22. Will Medina pay St. Thomas for the use of its space?

The city will not pay rent but will offset St. Thomas' construction costs in numerous ways, such as paying to install the modular units, paying to pave additional parking spaces, paying for tree removal and replanting, and waiving certain fees, permits, and hearings.

23. During construction what will St. Thomas do for other parish facilities, such as Sunday School classrooms, meeting areas, and space for coffee hour or other fellowship activities?

St. Thomas will strive to maintain life as normal as much as possible during construction and will continue to hold Bible Studies, Sunday School, coffee hours, meetings, and so on. The church may rent modular units for these needs and/or use some of the facilities of St. Thomas School. Community groups such as AA will find alternate locations during construction but hope to return as soon as construction concludes.

24. Who is in charge of the project?

The Vestry, as the governing body of the parish, and Father Lex appointed a Steering Committee, chaired by former Senior Warden Bonnie Palevich. The Steering Committee appointed a Building Committee and a Capital Campaign Committee, which are leading the project, along with Project Manager Bob Simeone, a parishioner and former Senior Warden. The Vestry and Father Lex have ultimate authority over the Life Center project.

25. Who designed the Life Center?

Parishioner Mark Nelson designed the new building. A licensed architect, Mark also designed the chapel attached to our church sanctuary. Mark generously donated his time and talents to the Life Center project, providing his expertise at no cost to St. Thomas from 2006 to 2009. In 2010 the vestry hired him to serve as the architect on the Life Center. In addition to the St. Thomas chapel, public examples of Mark Nelson's design work include the Mercer Island, Yelm, and North Mason libraries, the Kirkland Senior Center, and the remodeled entry to the administration building of the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia.

26. Who will build the Life Center?

The capital campaign's Commitment Sunday will take place on December 5, 2010. Following that event, the Vestry will seek bids and conduct interviews with potential builders.

27. Will the new building have any "green" design features?

The Life Center will be much more environmentally friendly than the current parish hall. The modern heating, cooling, and electrical systems which will be installed in the new structure are significantly more energy-efficient than the antiquated systems now in place in the current parish hall. The new boiler will also serve the church, putting an end to the heating problems we have had to endure during worship.

Sustainable materials will be used throughout the Life Center, including wood from certified sustainable forests, formaldehyde-free insulation, and lead-free, low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint. A "green" roof which can capture rainwater for landscaping is under consideration but may be cost-prohibitive.

Once construction is complete, the parking lot throughout the entire church campus will be resurfaced. The current impervious surface will be replaced with pervious asphalt, allowing water to seep naturally into the ground and significantly reducing the amount of runoff into storm drains.

28. Are we following environmentally sustainable construction practices?

To the extent possible, the builders will reclaim and reuse aspects of the current building, such as the arches in the Great Hall. Any aspects of the current building that are still usable will be reused, whether in the Life Center or as donations to non-St. Thomas construction projects.

29. Will the building be named after anyone?

The current official name is the Life Center at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, also known as LC@STEC. A donor or donors who contribute a significant portion of the project's cost may request naming rights, subject to Vestry approval and compliance with the Vestry's Gift Acceptance Policy.

30. Who's in charge of the capital campaign?

The Vestry appointed a Capital Campaign Committee which is running the campaign on behalf of the Vestry. The Capital Campaign Committee is co-chaired by Sue and Robert Collett and Vesta and Ev Lloyd.

31. How will the capital campaign work?

A series of gatherings, Bible Studies, Prayer Vigils, talks, promotional pieces, receptions, and banquets will lead up to Commitment Sunday on December 5, 2010. On Commitment Sunday, parishioners will make two pledges, one for the 2011 operating budget and a special three-year pledge for the Life Center. Annual operating budget pledges are paid within one year. Capital campaign pledges may be but certainly are not required to be paid over a longer period of time. Anyone wishing to make a pledge before Commitment Sunday should contact Project Manager Bob Simeone at the church.

32. Will there be different fund-raising events – dinners, auctions, etc.?

Multiple events will take place in the weeks leading up to Commitment Sunday, but none of them will be fundraisers and no financial commitments will be asked for. A series of Enrichment Gatherings will use a short video and discussion time to communicate to parishioners St. Thomas' plans for mission and ministry. A number Bible studies will help parishioners reflect on their response to God's call to be faithful servants.

33. How much should I pledge toward the Life Center?

The answer to this question is different for every parishioner. While there is no simple formula to calculate a capital campaign pledge, your gift should reflect both personal sacrifice and strong support for the project. As you participate in the various gatherings and Bible Studies being conducted by St. Thomas for the capital campaign, you will see how greatly the Life Center will benefit the St. Thomas community today and for generations to come. A pledge amount that is appropriate for you will likely become apparent to you, most likely as some multiple of your annual pledge. Attend one or more of these gatherings to learn about the Life Center and to discern the role your own generosity can play in its completion.

34. Can I use corporate matching funds to increase the value of my gift?

Generally, corporations do not fund building programs for religious institutions. If your employer does, be sure to notify St. Thomas' business manager, Gerry Gallaher.

35. What's expected of me, other than helping to pay for it?

Helping to pay for the Life Center is a crucial first step, and St. Thomas is depending on the generosity of every parishioner to make this project a reality. Other than that, you can help build the Life Center by talking about the importance of the project with your friends, family, neighbors and other community members and to encourage them to support it as well.

36. What happens if we don't raise enough money on Commitment Sunday to build the Life Center?

If we don't raise sufficient funds from parishioners, we will scale down the design, most likely by building two stories instead of three. A two-story building will do away with the undercroft, eliminating the possibility of a youth center or senior activity center. A smaller facility, particularly a one-story building, will make it more difficult to accommodate outside groups such as AA and the Boy Scouts. These groups cause significant wear and tear, which a smaller building will be less able to absorb. Additionally, priority for limited space will have to go to parish ministries.

As Father Lex said in a letter about the Life Center, “A perfectly normal question is: ‘Will we be successful?’ I believe God has a far more important question for us: ‘Will we be faithful?’ ... Are we not called to move forward in faith? ... We can rest assured that whatever God provides it will be enough!”

37. I keep hearing about a capital stewardship campaign. Are we also going to have a regular stewardship campaign? Do I need to make a pledge for the operating budget in addition to a capital campaign pledge for the parish life center?

The capital stewardship campaign is a combined campaign, in which parishioners will make both a pledge for the annual operating budget and a pledge for the construction of the Life Center. Your generous and joyful stewardship is needed for both.

“Ask, and it will be given to you.” (Matthew 7:7)