



December 14, 2022

Dear Selwyn Friends,

As our eyes are drawn toward a star, the season of Advent always guides the Church toward the threshold of a cattle stall. A threshold offers a unique perspective. Looking back there is evidence of God's faithfulness and abundance along the way. What a year! And, as we turn our eyes toward the manger, we are beckoned toward a future of possibility and hope for all God is doing within our community and beyond. What a bright future!

For more than 82 years SAPC has been a place to be truly known and to belong. Since Selwyn has been back into 'full swing,' I have been humbled in gratitude for the simple gifts of singing a hymn, celebrating a baptism, or gathering for study with you.

For many, these last few years forced an existential question to the surface of daily life, 'Does the Church really matter?' Maybe our understanding of God was challenged. Perhaps we outgrew the theology of our childhood. Some were confused and exhausted by the daily news. Some new relationships have formed, others have been strained. Most of us have felt lonely. Teenagers have navigated tremendous emotional and social challenges. Degrees have been earned! Some have been diagnosed, some successfully treated, others still navigate hospital hallways. Some have new homes, some have downsized, some have changed jobs, lost jobs, or retired. We all have grieved loved ones who have died. We all have changed.

We have changed, but God's steadfast love among us has not. Here at Selwyn, you still belong. While we remain faithful to Christ, our patterns of togetherness and support were understandably disrupted. Not unlike our need for physical well-being, our spiritual lives may seem anemic without exercising spiritual habits like worship and study. Although the relational fabric of every faith community has been stretched, our congregation has been reconnecting and reestablishing patterns of worship, mission, study and togetherness.

Does the Church still matter? With a resounding, joyful voice I say, YES! By the look of things at Selwyn, the Church is thriving and matters more than ever.

In this season of anticipation, preparation, and prayer, I hope this letter offers insight regarding the wellbeing of Selwyn Avenue Presbyterian Church. While this update offers an administrative overview, more details regarding the worship, mission, and programming of SAPC, can be accessed on our website. As always, I encourage you to be in touch with questions, concerns, thoughts, and ideas.

With Advent Hope,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Rev. Lori Archer Raible".

Rev. Lori Archer Raible

Selwyn's Strategic Plan

In January of 2020, the SAPC Session adopted several recommendations made by a planning taskforce. The Session had two goals in mind, and after three years of disruption, they remain relevant.

1. Strengthen and stabilize SAPC's administrative scaffolding *in order to*,
2. Engage Selwyn's members and mission partners in deeper, more transformative ways.

Although COVID required SAPC to respond to several unimaginable challenges with agility, many dedicated elders, staff, and members remained focused in our mission together. Now SAPC is poised to realize God's call toward abundance within and beyond our community. Below is a summary of each strategic priority.

(1) Establish a long-term facilities plan to address regular maintenance, budgeting priorities, life-safety, deferred maintenance, and other capital expenditures.

The proximity of SAPC's campus on Selwyn Avenue and Woodlawn is a tremendous part of our identity and potential impact. From generation-to-generation Selwyn members have faithfully cared for their buildings. During the 2019 renovation substantial issues were discovered and addressed (i.e. roof replacement, fireproofing, ADA access). While overall costs exceeded expectations, several other projects remained. Since 2020, a comprehensive assessment of maintenance and capital needs has been underway. These include re-paving the driveway, repairing windows and our beloved steeple, new signage, refreshing the Bowman building, replacing the Sanctuary AC and eventually the boiler. Fear not! These projects are being prioritized and addressed in a variety of ways.

(2) Target a stable staffing model to support engagement and growth.

After years of stable leadership, Selwyn's pastoral staff changed significantly in 2020. During these transitions, the personnel committee researched and adopted a faithful, affordable staffing model that aligns with SAPC's ministry goals.

Ideally, SAPC will maintain:

- A Senior Pastor/Head of Staff
- A Full- Time Pastor (or Christian Educator) for Formation and Youth
- A Part- Time Director for Children and Their Families
- A Full-Time Associate Pastor for Mission and Congregational Life

In 2020 the Session voted to call an Associate Pastor for Mission and Congregational Life to deepen member engagement and propel SAPC's on-going mission with partners addressing issues of homelessness, hunger, and children. However, the efforts to stabilize our staff were paused as SAPC re-oriented itself financially through the pandemic.

Instead, Selwyn benefitted from the leadership of Rev. Lisa McLennan and Ashlee Anderson who led and ministered in part-time capacities until March. Selwyn has been blessed with the significant gifts of Rev. Margo Fraga. Due to an affordable program for young pastors offered by the PCUSA Board of Pensions, Selwyn was able to ordain and install Margo into her vocation at Selwyn in November 2021. As Selwyn fully relaunched this summer, we welcomed two part-time Parish Associates. Both experienced and well suited for Selwyn, Hillary Cheek (Mission and New Members) and Brian Hovey (Pastoral Care) are serving in temporary capacities. Last month, the Session re-launched plans to explore and eventually call a full time Associate Pastor for Mission and Congregational Life.

(3) Develop a process for ongoing planning, visioning, and outreach.

As the planning team of 2020 made their recommendations, the Session appointed a new team to maintain continuity and progression toward the future. Currently Elders Ed Thomas, Hannah King, Lou Waple, and JD Yearwood, serve alongside Janice Finein and Ghazale Johnston.

(4) Consider a more concise vision and mission statement for the future.

In 2022, Selwyn focused on remembering and reestablishing our patterns of worship and togetherness. As we move through the threshold of Advent, our eyes look toward the future as Selwyn begins to dream again. Although the work of listening and planning is ongoing, the *Thriving Congregations* initiative should lead toward a more focused vision and mission (see below).

Thriving Congregations

In 2021, Selwyn and eight other congregations were invited by Black Mountain School of Theology and Montreat Conference Center to join an exciting initiative funded by the Lilly Foundation. *Thriving Congregations* equips, coaches, and trains leaders in the practices of community organizing. For two years, a cohort has been traveling to Montreat bi-annually for training, discernment, and planning. SAPC's cohort includes Ashley Armistead, Ghazale Johnston, Courtney McLellan, and Dick Metzler.

This cohort has dedicated a significant amount of time to research, listen, discern, and organize on Selwyn's behalf. They have explored Selwyn's identity, and studied our history, values, hopes, failures, and challenges. Collectively, they have held over 30 one on one relational meetings, hosted three listening sessions, and one house meeting to share an update on their work.

They plan to expand the table and build momentum in their work by listening and understanding your passions and hopes for your church. Currently, they are meeting with community partners and leaders in Charlotte. Their visioning work will eventually align with the work of our strategic planning team of the Session. So far, their work has affirmed three very important truths about Selwyn.

Selwyn Members
place a high value
on authentic
relationships.



Members hope to
engage Selwyn's
mission in deeper,
'messier' ways.

Selwyn's long-standing commitment to
children is vital to our identity and purpose.

These findings reflect who Selwyn is and what Selwyn values while affirming what Selwyn already does well. These truths will inform the decision making of our leaders, and soon we hope to cast a bold vision that will not only inspire our membership but impact the city in transformative ways.

The next Thriving Congregations update is Sunday, Jan. 22nd at 7pm- ZOOM.

(5) Adopt a plan that clearly illustrates SAPC's financial capacity and wellbeing

Because Selwyn navigated many financial snares and toils these last few years, there has been a concerted effort to communicate more often and in greater detail about our financial wellbeing. For two years both Selwyn's programming and budget retracted. However, Selwyn was able to sustain our staff and every financial commitment to our mission partners through the pandemic. Now Selwyn's stability and growth depend on a fully funded budget, alongside other bold initiatives to stabilize Selwyn for a long and vibrant future.

Selwyn is working toward three major financial goals:

Fully funding the 2023 annual budget will allow Selwyn to:

- Address *some* property issues (including the driveway).
- Fund all mission partnerships, worship, and programming.
- Absorb increases in personnel and operations due to inflation.
- Call an Associate Pastor for Mission and Congregational Life.

Launching the Bates Society and Rebuilding Selwyn's Building Fund

- Invite members into the joy and fellowship of planned giving.
- With Selwyn Spirit, share news of the need to *rebuild the building fund*.
- Address *major* property needs (i.e. steeple and window repairs, sanctuary AC and boiler).

Adopting a plan to alleviate 2019 renovation debt.

- Considerations include both Selwyn's current financial footing and future mission and vision.
- Plans will be in place before, the original loan is set to mature in 2024.

Annual budget and Stewardship

Selwyn is a vibrant and dynamic community. Selwyn is comprised of about 535 confirmed members, and an overwhelming number of children! While SAPC's worship and programming reflects the quality of many 'large steeple churches,' we prioritize authentic relationships within and beyond our walls.

The 2023 goal for stewardship is \$950,000. This ambitious increase from 2022 (\$780,000) is due to Selwyn's ongoing commitment to our mission partners, building repairs, and inflation (including overall costs and personnel). The annual budget affords all operations and ministries of the church. If the 2023 budget is met, it will also support the eventual shift toward an Associate Pastor for Mission and Congregational Life.

With 279 households, Selwyn's budget depends 100% on the generous support and pledges of our members. So far, 100% of the Session and 91 households have pledged a total of \$595,642. Of these commitments, 13 are new and 50 increased from 2022. SAPC's pledges range from about \$50 to \$40,000 per year. *Thank you so much for faithfully giving to Selwyn Avenue.*

SAPC will reach our stewardship goal,

- If those who pledged in 2022, faithfully pledge again and,
- If every household who *never* pledged before, gave between \$20 and \$100/month (tax-deductible).

If Church matters to you, please consider pledging in 2023.

Endowments, Loans, and The Bates Society

Besides the annual budget, Selwyn has four modest endowment funds. Three of these endowment funds were established for designated purposes, The Parker Fund (for spiritual enrichment), The Turner Fund (for new initiatives), and The Building Fund. Currently, Selwyn is working to '*Rebuild the Building Fund*' (currently \$50,957) to address some of the major capital needs on the horizon. The Memorial Fund is a non-designated fund generated in memory of the many Saints of the Church. While these funds cannot be used for the on-going functions of the church, they have been a great source of sustainability and growth over the years. These funds are reviewed and managed by a sub-committee of the finance committee.

Knowing SAPC must deepen and strengthen our financial footing for future generations, Selwyn recently launched *The Bates Society*. Nell Bates, a beloved CMS schoolteacher and Selwyn member, bequeathed the largest ever single gift to SAPC upon her death in 2008. Thus, Selwyn renovated the Nell Bates house. You are invited to join *The Bates Society*, a joyful fellowship, through planned giving and estate planning!

Lastly, as additional issues with the existing building were revealed during the 2019 renovation a loan was utilized to cover the unexpected overages. Currently \$870,000 is being paid down and managed through SAPC's annual fund. The Session is committed to addressing this debt prior to the loan maturation in 2024.

(6) Undertake a complete feasibility and land use assessment for all properties.

In 2019 Selwyn purchased the property adjacent to the Bates House on Selwyn Avenue. Selwyn also owns a significant piece of land behind the main campus. While the real estate market suggests both properties have increased substantially in value, the strategic planning task force is exploring potential land use (valuation for sale and feasibility for development) for the sake of Selwyn's long-term mission, vision and stability. This research is happening in tandem with the work of *Thriving Congregations*.

(7) Re-imagine and recommit to a detailed plan for member welcoming and on-going engagement.

Selwyn is an intergenerational community of faith. We strive for authentic relationships with one another and our neighbors in the name of Christ. And yet, during COVID our singers had not been singing together, many children had not been baptized, ushers had not been ushering, groups had not been grouping. Can you imagine joining Selwyn without experiencing the fullness of our community? And yet, many did!

*SAPC welcomed 31 faithful adults during the pandemic years and 32 this year.
Selwyn also celebrated 13 confirmands in 2022.*

I am in awe of God's activity and abundant grace among us. Instead of establishing a new plan of welcome and engagement, we've been keeping it intentional and simple. With additional fellowship plans on the horizon, Selwyn have been focused on rebuilding practices and committees, reconnecting in worship and study, and recommitting in mission and stewardship. It has been a great joy.

Does the church matter?

Selwyn Avenue Presbyterian Church matters. If you are still reading, I suspect you agree. Whatever makes Selwyn... *Selwyn*, is alive and well. It is sacred. I am pretty sure it is the Holy Spirit. It has sustained us through hardship and separation, and now it draws us together with energy, imagination, intelligence, love, and a whole lot of grace.

Thank you for your steadfast care. As you support the ministry of our church and anticipate the beginning of a new season, we stand on the threshold of Advent. My hope is you will look back on 2022 and consider God's presence in your life. Despite all that kept us apart, you were never walking alone. Now, as we turn toward Bethlehem, let's keep moving! The address is 2929 Selwyn Avenue, let us meet this newborn King together!

***"What has come into being in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." John 1:3b-5***