



First Church Berkeley UCC

First Congregational Church of Berkeley UCC (Berkeley, CA) - Who We Are

First Church is an open and affirming congregation that welcomes, includes and supports people of diverse backgrounds and identities in celebratory worship, spiritual nurture, social justice and community-building. Founded nearly 150 years ago to serve the then-young University of California at Berkeley, we have expanded our mission to serve the entire East Bay. One of our modern mantras is to “Come be a We” in a society and a time that is increasingly isolating and lonely.

We believe that to follow Jesus closely is to make a real difference in the world, as well as to keep evolving and maturing ourselves. We do this through worship and spiritual work with a strong emphasis on practical, actionable, self- and world-changing faith.

We are a community that values radical inclusion and artful worship, where belonging is more important than belief, and joy is a guiding principle. We are a restorative sanctuary for the suffering and weary, a space for creative and contemplative ritual, and a hub for transformative moral action on the justice issues of our day.

We have a Vision Statement that we discerned that God called us to:

- Grow in intimacy as the “weird and wonderful Body of Christ”
- Provide a diversity of open but distinctly Christian, creative and liberating worship forms to nourish the spiritual lives of the current community and reach new seekers
- Follow Jesus’s urging to minister to the “least of these” [Matthew 25] by addressing our region’s most visible and urgent human needs: ending homelessness in the East Bay, and its intersecting justice issues

Community Rebuilding Proposal – Spring 2023

In 2016, our program building (offices, Sunday school, kitchen, large assembly, small assembly, library, archives, etc) was destroyed by fire, hobbling our capacity to worship and serve flexibly and robustly. Nearly 6 years later, the remaining structure has finally been demolished and we are ready to begin building our smaller but more efficient and multi-use community center, which will take about a year to complete.

The budget for the project is approximately \$8m. It will have lovely outdoor space including a sheltered terrace for indoor/outdoor programming, socializing and worship.

Insurance proceeds will provide the bulk of the budget for our new building. While our original plans for the community building were under that budget and even included a 15% contingency, pandemic related supply-chain issues and mounting inflation and labor costs have increased the budget 20% over the last calendar year. We have stripped out some of the more costly, nonessential features of the building, cutting \$1.3m from the original budget. Now we need to raise funds to complete the permitted building, and, God willing, enhancements to the basic design. Our values and capacity will determine whether we are able to add to our building: a functional cooking kitchen, integrated audio-visual equipment in the large assembly, a tiled labyrinth for outdoor worship and beauty, or a sculptured patio screen that would both contain our outdoor space and signal our welcome.

Our rebuilding plans will create a light-filled, fully accessible and highly energy-efficient facility. The specs are:

- New 9,675-square foot 2-story building includes a Large Assembly suitable for a wide variety of church and community functions, a kitchen, staff offices, library/co-working space, 4 flexible classrooms/meeting spaces/youth spaces and a wide balcony above the terrace
- Open spaces include an entry garden off of Dana Street near the cloister and a terrace that opens off the Large Assembly, for indoor-outdoor worship and fellowship space as well as playspace
- Accessibility improvements, including ramp entries and an elevator

We may consider including one or more other ministry-enhancing purposes to this building campaign, such as:

- A tithe to partner churches, such as St. Paul AME Zion Church in Berkeley, or Bethlehem Lutheran Church in New Orleans, LA, to support their own affordable housing projects in the work
- A scholarship fund for lower-income, POC and young adults to attend a planned June 2023 First Church pilgrimage to the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, AL to continue our multi-decade spiritual work in unlearning system racism and building Beloved Community.