

# **A WAY FORWARD FOR SANCTUARY 2019 AND BEYOND**

*a recommendation from Rev. Dr. Susan Corso*

Very few of us know how laws or sausages are made. Even fewer of us know the entire inner workings of a successful faith community, especially one that is becoming. We tend to focus on isolated aspects of the process rather than the whole.

The congregational mandate of Sanctuary for 2018 could be summed up in one unanimous word, “Sustainability!”

Having been Reverend Wendy’s spiritual director for more than six years, having consulted organizationally for the congregation since before the sale of the building, and having consulted on sustainability and development for Sanctuary since January 2018, I respectfully submit this proposal to all of Sanctuary to ask one question:

Do you know what is required to achieve sustainability?

## **I. WHAT IS**

Over the past few years, Sanctuary has developed numerous blossoming ministries, and in relationship with community groups, has both incubated and launched several organizations, among them the Lakota YouthStay (LYS) program.

Reverend Wendy is over-stretched, diverted from the purpose to which she believes she is called, which is to grow Sanctuary into a self-sustaining faith community, and be a community leader in Medford.

Now, LYS has grown beyond the limits of Sanctuary’s capacity. Relationships have frayed to the degree that those involved in LYS and those involved in Sanctuary are not resolving their differences. At this point, there is public damage, there is professional damage, and there is personal damage.

The Leadership Circle has recommended that Sanctuary release LYS to its own future. I whole-heartedly second that recommendation.

In the world of philanthropy, Sanctuary has a tough row to hoe.

First, Sanctuary is legally a church. Church and philanthropy have an uneasy partnership at best. Most of the granting organizations we approach want assurances that we will not use their funds to speak of, let alone spread, a religious message of any kind.

Second, Sanctuary has an endowment. Most granting organizations asking to see our financials would be highly unlikely to fund a group that has well over two million dollars in the bank.

Third, and most important, because of the strain of serving LYS, Sanctuary has been diverted both from creating new programs, and growing existing programs. Without clearly delineated, growth-focused, member- and partner-invested programming, granting organizations bow out.

Over the past nine months, Reverend Wendy and I have brain-stormed to create growth possibilities for programs that could generate funding for and perpetuate Sanctuary’s vision. However, without the actions of members and partners, including their time, talents and treasures committed to carrying out these programs, there is little point in creative visioning.

## II. THE BRIDGE

*Please take this suggestion as I mean to offer it—in a spirit of humility.*

One of the questions of conventional wisdom in the entrepreneurial world is: Are you working *on* your business, or are you working *in* your business? Because of the challenges inherent in transition, building a brand new enterprise, and conflicted views of what Sanctuary is to be, coupled with the needs of LYS, the role of the professional leader of Sanctuary has been hijacked repeatedly into working *in* the business instead of working *on* the business.

In 2013, Reverend Wendy was called by the Congregational Church of West Medford to take the church through the *Crossroads* discernment process and then the transition required to pursue the outcome of that process. Assumptions, not mutually agreed roles, have followed into the experiment that is Sanctuary since that transition. Those assumptions have included traditional pastoral expectations as well as the unequivocal demand to make Sanctuary a success, an unquestionably entrepreneurial role.

Sanctuary's success has been conflated with Reverend Wendy's success. The weighty pressure of the desire for success has come to rest principally on Reverend Wendy's shoulders. This is not correct, and not useful.

A bridge that will create the transition between Sanctuary as it currently exists and the Sanctuary that can be, as outlined below, is a highly-specific redefinition of the role of the pastor for the purpose of creating a plumbline that is one hundred percent transparent both to the pastor and the participants.

A deliberate, thoughtful discernment process about the pastor's call, and the gifts and graces needed to move the Sanctuary experiment forward, is vitally needed.

I would suggest that the leadership circle, members, and partners consider the idea of *recruitment* as the central tenet of the lead pastor's role in Sanctuary. The position requires inward-facing recruitment of staff, volunteers, and ministry leaders as well as the establishment of infrastructures that support the varied ministries; it also requires outward-facing recruitment of additional members, partners, supporters, and cheerleaders for Sanctuary in the greater Medford community, the world church community, and beyond.

If we were to take this single word as a clarion call for the lead pastor's role in Sanctuary, we could use it as a plumbline to ask the question:

Does this [task, action, role] directly contribute to recruitment for Sanctuary?

If it does, it's the lead pastor's job, and if it doesn't, it isn't.

*Below you will find four made-to-order development opportunities for Sanctuary to function as a community service organization, which is what granting organizations are willing to fund. These would go a long way toward sustainability. I'll describe each one, and then delineate what is needed **from Sanctuary** to make it happen.*

### III. WHAT COULD BE

#### **MassHumanities Discussion Grant**

Discussion Grants are made for public humanities projects that center around moderated discussions—along with any other humanities-based project format.

Faith & Film is the program I recommend for this grant. However, Medford Film Collaborative and Medford Conversations might also collaborate on this work. Could there be a way to combine all three? If there were a fundraising team to bat some of these ideas around, we might come up with just such a way. At this point, the only two people focused on action steps toward sustainability are Reverend Wendy and me under the watchful, encouraging eye of the Leadership Circle.

Reverend Wendy tells me that discussion has been ongoing for two years about taking Faith & Film out into the wider Medford community; on the road, if you will. She mentioned doing a Faith & Film screening and discussion for Sanctuary, then taking it to the senior center and facilitating discussion there. Another possibility would be with youth and Medford High School.

One of the things MassHumanities stresses in their guidelines is taking the humanities to new audiences. The Faith & Film Road Trip idea would do that.

*What is needed from Sanctuary:*

A Faith & Film team of at least three dedicated people who not only come to Sanctuary and help to facilitate the program on the night of the event, but who also promote the screening alongside the Sanctuary staff. This team would also support the creative process of our facilitators, the Revs. Anna and Chad Kidd.

This team needs to lead Faith & Film; to explore what it will mean from a licensing standpoint to screen a film more than once and away from the church venue; to reach out to local organizations and arrange for Road Trip venues. Then the team, and partners, need to go to those venues with the screening equipment, set it up, screen the film, facilitate the conversation, break it down, and bring it all back to Sanctuary for the next Film Road Trip.

The Quakers talk about putting hands and feet on their prayers. Who will be the hands and feet that grow the Faith & Film Ministry of Sanctuary? Whose personal ministry is this?

#### **Calvin Institute Worship Grant**

This is a year-long grant for congregations, and other worshipping communities in North America, especially focused on projects that connect public worship to intergenerational faith formation. They mandate that grant proposals be developed through a collaborative process. Proposed projects need to: have the potential to generate renewed interest, thoughtfulness, and energy for public worship at the local, grass-roots level; be linked with the worship life of a particular Christian community or congregation; include a component of theological reflection on the meaning and purpose of public worship.

I recommend this grant be applied for in 2019 for the following year to encourage the unique gifts of people of all ages to be used in planning and leading worship at Sanctuary.

This grant particularly fired up Reverend Wendy's enthusiasm for building a markedly different Sanctuary worship experience that could attract a varied set of seekers to live alongside the intimate circle currently in place; and begin to build a larger network of supporters and participants for eventual leadership.

*What is needed from Sanctuary:*

A team of at least three passionate members and/or partners who step up to lead those who currently attend worship at Sanctuary to begin a process of self-reflection and deep discernment about where worship is headed at Sanctuary and what those who participate really need and want; to survey those who are not yet participating (our neighbors) about what they really need and want in worship from Sanctuary; consider possible partnerships in regards to worship; and develop a series of recommendations that could be written up as our collaborative proposal for this \$15,000 grant.

The Institute is looking for a team of church leaders who wish to enliven the worship experience in new and exciting ways. They are quite specific that a pastor is not to take the lead for deploying this grant. The pastor is encouraged to support the process. The goal is to create worship out of the needs and desires of those who are worshipping rather than using a traditional pastoral, or lectionary model.

They are most inclined to support projects that, in their own words, are "visionary and realistic," and, above all, that are collaborative.

The Quakers talk about putting hands and feet on their prayers. Who will be the hands and feet that grow the Worship Ministry of Sanctuary? Whose personal ministry is this?

## **The DEW Foundation**

Formerly the Dale and Edna Walsh Foundation, DEW is a family foundation that joins hands with effective charitable organizations to meet human need and promote the common good worldwide. They have a particular commitment to religion and the arts intermeshed in such a way as to couple organizational resources and leadership with winning ideas and vision to meet pressing needs and fulfill vital missions.

I recommend that Sanctuary reach out to partner with local Jewish and Muslim congregations in Medford and environs to Adopt-An-Artist, specifically Gay Cox, and her ambitious Psalms Project. As you know, Gay had seven Psalm paintings up in the Gallery this year. There are 26 completed Psalm pieces with a plan to paint all 150 Psalms.

Reverend Wendy and I have discussed a brief outline of what such a project could be, by no means written in stone. Some of our ideas include: enlisting all the local banks in Medford, each to host several pieces; hosting a moveable feast to visit the Psalms; renting a space to display all of her current pieces in one place for a longer time; workshops by Gay, and those she trains as Psalm Docents, as outreach for high school students, seniors, domestic violence survivors, prisoners, homeless shelters; an ongoing project over the years it will take Gay to complete her 150 pieces.

We have also considered developing exhibitions over time, starting with the 26 Psalms, another when there are 50, then another at 100, and then the crowning glory of all 150 Psalms displayed in one place.

We also would like to publish or have published an illuminated Psalter as part of an ongoing income stream for both Gay and for Sanctuary. In addition, from the beginning, we'd like to enlist the artistic skills of a documentary filmmaker to chronicle the process of collaboration that this ambitious project will require; this might require another grant.

We have floated this idea with Gay and she jumped immediately at the chance to participate in just such an endeavor with Sanctuary.

*What is needed from Sanctuary:*

Once again, a dedicated team of members and partners who are willing to serve a long-term project of faith formation such as the Gay Cox Psalms Project. This team will need to follow-up on Reverend Wendy's outreach to local congregations, and enlist volunteers as point persons for these People of the Book participants.

They will also do select outreach to create workshop opportunities for Gay to train Psalm Docents, and to engage specifically marginalized communities that might not otherwise be able to go out and see the Psalms—instead we will bring the art and the artist to them. This will likely require photographing, formatting, and displaying the artwork via digital means.

In addition, there is a need for commitments to curate such a large-scale project, as well as all the mechanics that go toward presenting a fully-fledged art exhibit, wall statements, promotion, postcards, social media, and, of course, hammering, nailing, and ladder-climbing.

The Quakers talk about putting hands and feet on their prayers. Who will be the hands and feet that grow the Arts Ministry of Sanctuary? Whose personal ministry is this?

*As a potential furthering of the DEW Foundation Grant ...*

### **MassDevelopment Commonwealth Places**

This is a maximum \$50,000 matching grant program. Their website describes the program: “Have an idea for making your downtown more beautiful, livable, and creative? Want to find funding for a planned bike path, community garden, or public art installation?”

“Over the past year, communities across Massachusetts have used this program to create dynamic and engaging public spaces through local grassroots efforts. A kayak launch in Athol, a community garden in Roslindale, an international mural festival, artwork and interactive underpass lighting in Lynn, and a new town square in Ashland have all leveraged the power of this innovative matching grant program to fund high-impact, community-driven placemaking projects.”

*What is needed from Sanctuary:*

This is a program that would require a team interested in learning to fundraise the matching funds to sponsor a single venue for the Psalms Project by artist Gay Cox.

The Quakers talk about putting hands and feet on their prayers. Who will be the hands and feet that further grow the Arts Ministry of Sanctuary? Whose personal ministry is this?

The call of the Divine is always a personal one. Please be with your God, and consider what you are called to do for Sanctuary.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Corso".

Rev. Dr. Susan Corso