

Building a Vision Together at Tapestry

Introduction

Why would a church plant like Tapestry even consider buying property in one of the most expensive places in the world?

Not only is it expensive to buy, but buildings are costly and challenging to maintain properly: Taxes, maintenance and janitorial, the added administrative burden of caring for a property, and of course having to deal with things like break ins or broken pipes.

So why would it make sense for Tapestry to take on that kind of responsibility? Because we believe it is a faithful step toward becoming who God has called us to be as a church.

The vision of Tapestry Church from the very first day has always been to be a ***people of many cultures woven together into the fabric of Oakland to display the beauty of God's story.***

It's a vision we've pursued in myriad ways, through our preaching, hiring, curriculum, paycales, service projects and worship styles. Through our language and our lives we have pursued this way of being the church because we believe God's beautiful story can change lives, change communities and change the world.

However, there's a step between vision and execution: Strategy.

Strategy is not the vision of a church, but the way in which we will intentionally seek to live that vision more fully. Strategy is where idealism and pragmatism embrace.

As the current leaders of Tapestry Church, we have become convinced that a key piece of a fruitful strategy for our vision will be owning property in Oakland. Let us explain.

People of many cultures

*"...my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations."
The Sovereign Lord declares—
he who gathers the exiles of Israel:
"I will gather still others to them
besides those already gathered." (Isaiah 56:7-8)*

We believe that the church is meant to be composed of people of many cultures. It was Isaiah's vision that the nations would be gathered together to worship. It was Paul's vision when he clarified for the multiethnic Ephesian church that Jesus had broken down the walls of hostility between them (Eph 2:14). It was John's vision in Revelation 7:9, when he saw people from every tribe, nation and language gathered before God in worship. And we are the bearers of that vision today.

How does a building help us do this?

One of the things social scientists have taught us in recent years is that the built environment shapes us. Live long enough in a big city, and you'll start to walk faster. Live long enough in the Fruitvale, and you'll stop ducking when you hear fireworks. Amble in the serenity of a forest, and your heart rate slows.

A building is not a church. We are the church. But a building is the primary built environment in which the church gathers. And it shapes us. It shapes our worship. It shapes our culture. It shapes the experience of welcome (or not) that a guest from a particular background may experience.

Owning a building gives us creative license and capacity to design a space that celebrates the beauty of the various cultures of our congregation and the city of Oakland.

We can have a Hammond organ, a cafe with third wave coffee, and a distribution center for our sermons translated into the various languages of our church. We can create dedicated kids and youth spaces, designed for the intercultural reality of our church.

In our own space, the possibilities for highlighting, celebrating and welcoming people of many cultures in our community is limited only by our imagination and resources.

Woven together

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Like threads in a tapestry, we believe that God created each of us flimsy on our own, but designed to be woven strongly into community. We have always said that if our church is a racially diverse church on Sundays, but throughout the week we only associate with people like ourselves, then Sunday morning is more or less a photo op.

Instead, we believe that a church that genuinely reflects the beauty of God's story in its diversity is a church in which people of many cultures are truly woven together in their day to day lives.

It's why we value representation in every level of our congregation and leadership, from behind the scenes teams to the worship stage, from pastoral leadership to connect group co-leaders.

How does a building help us do this?

Currently we only have space to meet once per week as a church. Moreover, there are significant limitations on ways we can meet and the types of events/gatherings we can have. We are blessed to be able to meet in a space currently that gives us so much flexibility on Sundays, but we have to acknowledge that may not always be the case. We depend on our gracious landlords at Learning Without Limits to continue that relationship.

On the contrary, if we own a building, we can host groups, classes, service projects, movie nights, barbecues and cookouts, committee meetings, support groups, birthdays, funerals, weddings, and more.

Whatever ways we can dream up to work, play or pray together, a building of our own can accommodate.

It's not that we can't be woven together without a building. We've been doing an admirable job of that! And it's not that a building is the only place in which we are woven together through the week. It also happens around our dinner tables, at local parks, at movie theaters, restaurants and trails in Roberts Regional.

However, a building will doubtless deepen our togetherness by being a central meeting place for many of the ways we do what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called, "Life together."

Into the Fabric of Oakland

"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

At Tapestry, we've always believed that one of the most incredible things about the church is that it is one of the only communities in the world that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not yet its members. We are not only called to be woven together but woven into the fabric of Oakland.

This is what it means to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. Yes we are to stand out. But we are not to stand aloof. Jeremiah's exhortation to the exiles of Israel is a good word for the church today. Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens. Watch them grow. Stay long enough to eat

the fruit they bear. Create households. Seek the prosperity of the city. Tie your prosperity to the prosperity of the city?

Why? Because that is a picture of the gospel. The good news is that God himself settled down on earth in Jesus. He stayed. He built. He prayed. He tied himself to humanity. The risen Jesus still has a human body. Have you ever realized that the Son of God, for *eternity*, tied himself physically to humanity?

The church, as a witness to Jesus Christ, is most effective when it is most intertwined with the life of the city God has called it to love.

How does owning a building help us do that?

First, owning property sends a clear signal to the community that our lot is thrown in with theirs. It is simply harder to move. Harder to leave. And that matters. Without saying anything at all, our neighbors will understand that we are committed to Oakland—committed to them.

And when our fate and future is tied to Oakland, what happens in Oakland will effect us in deeper ways. When the city prospers, we will be impacted more directly as a church with more resources for programming for the community, better streets leading to the building, thriving businesses in and around the property of the church. But when crime goes up, we may have more break-ins. When city planners change traffic patterns in our neighborhood, it may effect the way we get to church. If we are hosting after school programming, when the city cuts funding, it may impact our ability to serve.

None of that is a bad thing. It means we are being a faithful presence with the people of Oakland in the same way that Jesus was a faithful presence with us.

Owning property will also give us concrete resources to weave ourselves into the community throughout the week in various ways.

We dream of a property that not only is a house of worship, but also a homebase for food distribution, mental health services, a medical clinic, affordable childcare, addiction recovery programs, affordable exercise facilities, and renting to other amazing nonprofits and purpose driven businesses.

Property of our own would mean that Tapestry Church could become part of the warp and woof of Oakland in some incredibly tangible ways.

To Display the Beauty of God's Story

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

Our ultimate aim—the purpose to which the rest of the vision points—is *not* that we will save the world. ***Our goal is simply to display the beauty of God's story—that he has already saved the world in Jesus and will return one day to restore all things.*** We bear witness— with our lips and our lives—to the one who has given us new life and promised us eternal, abundant life with him.

Jesus calls his followers the light of the world. Our lives, personal and communal, are meant to shine a light on who our God is and what he has done for us! Without the light of the church, the world will not be able to see the beauty of the Father.

That is what the rest of it is for.

That is what our focus on racial justice and inclusion is for.

That is what our emphasis on genuine, deep community is for.

That is what our work toward holistic, body-and-soul flourishing of our neighbors is for.

To display the beauty of God's story.

How does owning a building help us do that?

Displaying God's beauty ON the building

The type of property we buy will be directed by this value. We are not interested in purchasing a "flipped", recently remodeled building with manicured lawns. We want the building and the property itself to tell a story of God's redemption.

We will prioritize defunct, derelict or abandoned properties. Why? Because with a property like that we have the opportunity to turn an eyesore into something beautiful for the neighborhood. Because we have the opportunity to take a space that communicated despair and divestment, and transform it into something that says, "God is still invested in you. There is hope for this community."

When we redeem space, we put our money where our mouth is. Instead of merely telling our neighbors we love them, we show them.

Displaying God's beauty IN the building

The inside of the property will be just as important as the outside. Two of the primary things that happen inside a church's building are: worship and community. Loving God and loving each other.

Now, as grateful as we are for our current space, and as hard as we work week in and week out to transform it into a worshipful environment, we have serious limitations in a school multipurpose room.

Owning our own property will allow us to create a worship space that reflects the beauty of God's story—a space that feels beautiful, that inspires awe and joy and reverence.

Moreover, one of the most beautiful things that happens in any church's building is the creation and sustenance of relationships. In a word: Community.

Owning our own building gives us freedom to create communal spaces that catalyze the beauty of community and offer a sense of being at home.

Displaying God's beauty THROUGH the building

Finally, a property of our own would enable us to display God's beautiful story not just on the building, and not just in the building, but through the building.

Holistic ministries (like those described above) help people see the gorgeous expansiveness of the gospel. Like a lookout point offering a vista of the whole valley, God's good news is coming for everything our eyes can see: our hearts, our minds, our souls, our bodies, our relationships, our work, our neighborhoods, and our way of life. When you can see that BIG gospel embodied in one place, it is a truly beautiful thing to witness!

But it's beautiful not just for those serving or simply bearing witness. More importantly, it's beautiful for those who have been forgotten, left out, marginalized or run over by our world. For those in desperate need we'll be able to offer the beauty of hope in a more holistic way.

Like the woman with the bleeding condition, our neighbors in need will think, "If I can just make it there, I know I can find help." It's the beauty of a light shining in the darkness. When you're being buffeted by the waves in a pitch black sea, there is nothing more beautiful than a beacon on a lighthouse showing you the way to safe harbor and stable ground.

Conclusion

Tapestry Church is already living our vision in various ways. Yet, there are levels and layers of that vision that remain unexplored and uninitiated.

We believe that owning a property will help us to become more deeply who we already are – People of many cultures woven together into the fabric of Oakland to display the beauty of God's story.

That is why we will work toward, save for and take some faith-full risks in order to purchase the right piece of property for the future of God's kingdom at Tapestry Church.

As a church community, we ask you to pray toward this vision being realized. We ask you to pray that God would provide the right opportunity for Tapestry. And we ask you to pray that, whatever the future holds, God uses Tapestry to further His vision for Oakland.