

First Presbyterian Church of Ambler

4 South Ridge Ave.

Ambler, PA 19002

Visitation March 17, 2013

Observations by: Ms. Amanda Smoot, Philadelphia Liturgical Institute Representative

On Sunday, March 17 2013, I was one of three representatives of the Philadelphia Liturgical Institute asked to visit 1st Presbyterian Church in Ambler, PA to observe their two very different worship services and to give impressions as a newcomer.

My first observation is about signage. It would be helpful if there were a sign (for Sundays only) on the front lawn of the church saying "Parking is available behind the church" or something similar. A newcomer might turn the corner, find all the street parking taken (as I did) and not know what to do next. There is a sign marking the back entrance to the church, thankfully, and there is a greeter there, but while there are arrows pointing to various rooms, I don't believe I saw an arrow to the sanctuary. Acting as newcomer, I just followed most of the people going upstairs. The greeter at the door shook my hand but did not ask any questions or give me any information. The greeters at the door of the sanctuary handing out bulletins were friendly and asked if I was visiting and made me feel welcome.

THE TRADITIONAL SERVICE

I noticed that most of the congregation was middle-aged or older, but there were some there with young children, perhaps because children were playing in the bell choir. This was the only time children were actively involved in the service.

I felt that the congregation was engaged from the beginning. The singing was sincere and the praying was certainly communal. I had been told that Lent was not observed (very much) and that was certainly true in the selection of the first hymn. "Joyful, joyful" would not be a choice in a more liturgical church during the Lenten season. But then, having the service start with the confession quickly brought a Lenten "flavor". Still in regard to observing Lent, Langdon was wearing a purple stole and I wondered if the reason for the seasonal color had ever been explained to the congregation.

The bulletin was very helpful for a newcomer. Having the asterisk marking times to stand took away uncertainty on that point and giving the musical pages for even short liturgical responses like the doxology was a way to not leave someone out who is not familiar with the service.

People were friendly at the time of sharing the Peace. It was more chatty than in my tradition where we are only to say "The peace of God be always with you" and answer "and also with you." Here it was a time for introductions and asking questions. That was not off-putting for me, just a surprise. There was a very gracious spirit present.

Where to place announcements is always a problem. No matter where they are placed within the service, they break the flow. Here they were an obvious break between parts of the service: The opening/praise hymn/confession/pardon/peace... and then everything else. On this particular Sunday, I assume that the announcements were perhaps longer than usual. Besides clergy announcements, there was the announcement from Christine(?) which, though important, I felt could have been shortened by cutting out most of the background of the person she was talking about and concentrating only on the program. Probably congregants making announcements are given time limits but maybe they should be shorter. Then there was the conversation with the sculptor. This was very engaging. If this had been the only "extra" in the announcement period, it would not have felt like such a lengthy time away from the service.

But then, a very good thing happened. The anthem drew us back into a worshipful frame of mind and heart. I commend you for the decision to not make this the time for the collection. This was therefore a time to concentrate on the music, especially on the words which certainly, for me, fit a Lenten theme.

The scripture reader, who also gave the prayer for illumination (which is a lovely addition), was excellent. She was obviously well-trained. At the café afterwards, I complimented her. She seemed surprised and maybe shy and she said, "Well, I had good material." It was good that a woman had this role, giving a bit of diversity to the service, besides the children in the bell choir and the women in the adult choir.

In our prior conversations, topics were brought up that I will speak to briefly now. Involvement: The congregants were strongly involved in the sermon. Many were taking notes and there was no sign of squirming or making noise that I observed. Movement: Langdon moving as he preached was very effective. Certainly there was no sense of a "fourth wall" present. Technology: Because the sermon used sculpture as an illustration of his main point, being able to show it in a slide was necessary. And the other pictures were effective too, as in the animals in the car. I don't know if pictures are always used at the traditional service, but they were an integral part at this one and therefore not disruptive. Preaching: the question was, "Was the Word preached and read with clarity and passion?" I give a resounding "Yes".

One place for some improvement is unity within the service. The hymn immediately following the sermon was certainly linked to the message, but other music could have emphasized more our complete dependence on God. The last hymn spoke of Jesus' love for us but not our great need for Him.

Question about Prayers of the People: This was clergy led but does not have to be. The clergy can write the prayers if need be, but a congregant can lead them as they are the prayers of the People and it would be a sign of their ownership. I noticed that Ryan prayed them in an extemporaneous manner, so it would feel different if they were written but it might be worth it. For last minute prayer requests that don't have time to be written, the clergy could join in at the end and add them and begin the Lord's Prayer.

After the Service: Jan Nader (I believe that was her name?) was sitting in the pew with me and asked if I was going to stay on. I said yes and asked where the café was. We talked the most going out and to her

question about why I was there; I said I was looking for ideas to take back to my own Presbyterian church. She asked which one and, although I hated to be specific, I named St. John's in Devon. I was getting nervous but a lightning bolt did not appear. She insisted on giving me a newcomers' bag anyway which was gracious of her. She was not going downstairs but asked someone else to take me. That person was not going down either but pointed the way.

So I arrived downstairs alone. No one came up to me. I went looking for water and someone near the kitchen did assist me briefly then. Then I wanted to see the sculptures up close. Others were doing the same thing. If we spoke at all, I initiated it. People were not unfriendly; they just did not make the first move. There could be some improvement in hospitality in the café.

THE SOUTH RIDGE SERVICE

The first thing to notice: the people were indeed younger, but not all people there were young. There was a mix. Also there was more diversity in that African-Americans were there and some people of Asian heritage also. There is immediate warmth and sense of community furthered by the music.

And about the music: The bulletin says "Worship in Music" and a lot of time is given to this. By my watch it was almost 20 minutes. We had been standing since the beginning and someone of my age with certain physical needs was finding that quite tiring, so I sat down. At first I felt uncomfortable doing that, but I kept on singing and then felt that no one was judging me. I also saw just a few others sitting.

The young person reading scripture and reading prayer was fabulous. She was poised and obviously spirit-filled, a very good "advertisement" for the effectiveness of that service. Langdon's sermon seemed just a bit shorter, although I am not sure.

The reason I bring up the time question is that the time for Stations felt very rushed. And perhaps that is why I would like to see the music portion shortened to maybe 12 minutes. I wanted to visit every station and did not get to do this. Also I noticed that first almost everyone wanted to take communion. I wonder what this says. Is it true only of this congregation? Should communion be offered more often at the traditional service? There seemed to be literally a spiritual thirst for it at South Ridge.

The stations are a new and different thing within a worship service and, although some newcomers might not want to participate, others might find them magnetic but would have been chagrined to find them as rushed as they were that Sunday. What I am suggesting is looking at the time distribution within that service. The leaflet in the pews explaining the stations is pretty clear and certainly necessary, as is the verbal instruction. Even so there was some confusion, for instance, about where to stand and wait for the Reflection stations to open up.

In closing, it was a privilege to participate in the two services at 1st Presbyterian. The church is alive, the people are being fed, the true Word is being preached with vigor and love, and the gospel message is being taken into the world with compassion and good works.

Respectfully submitted, Amanda Smoot

First Presbyterian Church of Ambler

4 South Ridge Ave.

Ambler, PA 19002

Visitation March 17, 2013

Observations by: Rev. Dr. Jennifer Phelps Ollikainen, Philadelphia Liturgical Institute Board Member

Worship Visitation 3/17/2013

The Rev. Dr. Jennifer Phelps Ollikainen
and daughter, Eva (6 years old)

Overall:

Overall, it was a pleasure to worship at First Presbyterian Church! The focus in worship was clearly on God's action, the music well-presented and worship optimistic and hopeful in tone. The congregation was friendly; many introduced themselves by name and inquired gently and hospitably about who we were. It is clear that the congregation is vibrant and connected as a community. Folks seem to enjoy being together and welcome newcomers.

Physical Surroundings:

From the main road, it is not immediately clear where one should park when coming to the church. One must read the municipal parking lot signs carefully in order to figure out that you do not need to pay to park on Sunday.

The entrance is clearly marked and we arrived at a time when others were also arriving and could therefore "go with the flow" of people. Eva and I were immediately noticed as newcomers resulting in the gift of a welcome bag and instructions about where to hang our coats. "Christine" took particular care for us, introducing her young daughter (about Eva's age) and sharing details about Sunday School.

Thank you for the brochure in the pew rack about the stained glass windows. It was lovely and helped me feel like you cared about sharing the story of your worship space with me, a visitor.

As you warned us, the sound system was very muddy and difficult to hear.

Traditional Service

Opening Sentences:

I was surprised when we started worship. The Opening Sentences seemed to begin out of nowhere without a sense that we were beginning. Folks were visiting with one another in the sanctuary before worship and generally "felt" when the pastor was ready to speak – but not all complied, it seemed. Perhaps, there could be a more distinct sense of a beginning of worship.

The sending of children to Sunday School:

As a parent and first-time visitor, this sending caused great anxiety in me (not for Eva who was willing and able to go with anyone, anywhere!). It was not clear who the adult leader was in leading the children out of worship. With my newcomer eyes, it looked like children were just leaving the sanctuary without structured direction which is fine for those who know the building and trust the movement but

not for me who did not know either. It was not clear where the Sunday school rooms were. In fact, I was told "they are going to the third floor where you can pick her up after worship." It was not clear to me what might happen if my child had a problem and I needed to be contacted.

After Sunday School, I had to ask another parent where I would pick up my child. When I found the correct hallway, I had to figure out which room my child was in while being barred from entering any of the rooms until they were finished. Once the class was finished, the teacher asked me to fill out an informational card about Eva and was complimentary about Eva's participation in class ("She's on fire for Jesus!" LOL).

Welcome and Announcements

It wasn't until later when I re-read the bulletin that I realized that I should have filled out a "yellow" card from the pew. In the time of announcements during worship, the people with whom I shared the pew were very concerned that I fill out and pass the pad in the pew on which I wrote my name. Therefore, I missed the fact that I could have submitted a prayer for the prayers of the people.

The announcements were rather lengthy, especially with a child who was anxious to go to the Sunday school. Perhaps this was an exceptional day with the presence of the sculptor who was fascinating to me – but not my 6 year old.

Sermon

I won't comment on the content of the sermon, only the use of the technology. I found it distracting that Langdon walked away from the screen while pointing our attention to it. I didn't know what to look at, the speaker or the screen. You may consider blocking your movement around the chancel to be standing in the sightline of the screen when you refer to it.

Prayers of the People

As I noted before, I missed the written invitation about the yellow prayer cards. Therefore, I felt like I missed something when these were named at the beginning of the prayers.

Prayer of Dedication

The content of this prayer would be helpful before the act of collecting the offering to give the offering meaning and spur generosity. It was a lovely prayer.

Between the services:

I was shepherded to the fellowship space by very hospitable folks. During the fellowship time, a few people introduced themselves to Eva and me. I felt very warmly received but not overwhelmed.

South Ridge Service:

Gathering and Music

The musicians are fascinating and easy to follow if you know the songs they are singing. I knew them -- but wonder if others who didn't would have difficulty following it.

Prayer

This prayer was unexpectedly long and thorough to me at this location near the beginning of the worship service. And to me, it felt like it was too much too soon. I understand prayers of intercession to

be a response to the proclamation of the word and so the clear calling of grace upon the broken places of the world seemed premature.

Offering

Like the prayers, this seemed to me to be early in the worship service. I feel like it was asked for before I had a chance to have the good news proclaimed to me to which I could respond by offering. Gracious “out” to the visitor in the bulletin.

Sermon

I was surprised that there was not a clear reading of scripture before the sermon time unlike the first service. Langdon included the scripture during the sermon but doing it that way made them feel less prominent and central as the foundation for the sermon.

Stations

Thanks for the helpful and succinct instructions. The brochure in the pew rack was also helpful. Graceful recovery from the broken chalice! Nicely done.

The “Stations” timing felt very short. I felt like I just figured out what was going on and got my bravery up to move around the worship space when it was time to sing and be done. It was helpful that most of the assembly immediately got up and dispersed into the stations. That gave me the permission to explore, myself. I wonder if the sermon time could be shorter to allow more time for the station exploration if time is, indeed, limited.

Benediction

I wanted to linger. I wasn't ready to go.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Dr. Jennifer Phelps Ollikainen

First Presbyterian Church of Ambler

4 South Ridge Ave.

Ambler, PA 19002

Visitation March 17, 2013

Observations by: P. Michael O'Rourke, Philadelphia Liturgical Institute Board Member

Site/Location Observations:

First Presbyterian Church is located at the corner of Butler Ave. and South Ridge Ave. in the Town of Ambler. There is a small municipal parking lot on the side of the Church that offers free parking on Sundays for congregants. In addition, there are several remote parking areas used by church members including: limited street parking (both metered (though free on Sunday) and un-metered), a small parking lot located across Poplar Street at an adjacent Public Elementary School, a municipal parking lot located at Lindenwold and Butler Ave (several blocks away), and a Septa parking lot off of Main Street near the intersection with Butler Ave. (several blocks away). Ambler is served by both train and limited bus public transportation. First Presbyterian Church also provides a Shuttle Bus service to pick-up/drop-off elderly and infirmed congregants attending Church functions.

Directional signage is provided at the side parking lot; this signage is helpful for visitors to find the main entry on the side of the Church. There is a provision for handicapped accessible parking in the Municipal lot adjacent to the Church. An exterior ramp off of South Ridge Ave. provides accessibility for the handicapped at the Narthex vestibule (located on the Main Level). There is a small playground located at the Fellowship Hall end of the building on the Poplar Street. The end façade of the Sanctuary has a strong presence at the corner of Butler Ave. and South Ridge Avenue. A small outdoor seating area is provided for the community; there is a clearly identifiable sign for the church at this corner location as well. However, there is no signage to direct visitors to the parking lot behind the church – perhaps this is because it is a municipal lot that the Church is able to use free of charge on Sundays.

Though there are certain inherent assets being located in the town of Ambler, convenient parking is clearly one of the challenges posed. The Church appears to be doing everything possible to mitigate this challenge but lack of convenient parking will probably be an on-going issue in the future. It is not clear how many congregants, if any, walk to Church.

Building/Facility Observations:

The existing stone building was built in the late 1960's and consists of three floor levels. The building is attractive and is well cared for. The only inconsistency in the building's appearance is the side that faces the adjacent municipal parking lot which includes an entry portico / vestibule and elevator addition completed in 2001. This addition, finished in stucco, does not integrate successfully with the remainder of the building which is predominantly built of stone. Because of its adjacency to the side municipal parking lot, the entry portico serves as the main entry to the building; however, it is somewhat

compromised due to the circumstances of the building orientation. The addition does not present a particularly welcoming entrance to the Church and is hard to find unless one is aware of the backside parking lot which is accessed from Poplar Street (behind the building).

The Basement/Ground Floor Level includes the Fellowship Hall and kitchen, choir rehearsal room, entry vestibule from the side parking lot, and the main mechanical room. The Main Floor Level includes the Worship Space, Library, Parlor, Day Care Facilities and Church Administrative Offices. The Third Floor Level includes Christian Education Space and balcony seating open to the worship space. An elevator provides accessibility for the handicapped to all three levels. An interior ramp provides accessibility to the Fellowship Hall / Kitchen which is several feet lower than the side parking lot entrance vestibule. Interior directional signage is provided – because of this, it was not difficult to navigate through the building, even with the multiple floor levels.

The building interior is fairly attractive and well maintained. There are restrooms on all floors; it appears that an adequate number of fixtures are provided. Some of the restrooms appear to provide for handicap accessibility.

The internal layout creates a degree of “stratification” because the building is stacked on three floors. Corridor circulation was observed to be somewhat congested on the main level during the period between Services. In our pre-visitation meeting, the Church leadership mentioned that the Narthex would ideally be larger. Potential exists to incorporate floor space from the adjacent Library to increase the size of the Narthex. A larger Narthex would help provide the space required to disperse the assembly and allow for congregational fellowship space before and after services. The Library is well kept but apparently it is not used as much as it was at one time – probably due to the availability of on-line resources. If the Narthex was made larger with the incorporation of Library square footage, some of the existing Library resources could be adapted into the new space with cabinetry/shelving etc.

The Worship Space with its stained glass window lancets, simple plaster walls and wood ceiling, is attractive. Though there are improvements that could be made, the space is reasonably capable of adapting to the two distinctly different worship services. There is an upper level balcony which overlooks the main worship space. Seating is provided in rows of pews with a center aisle and two additional aisles. The roof and supporting walls of the Worship Space are framed with structural laminated wood arches and laminated wood decking. Provision for seating in wood chairs rather than pews might be considered to give the Worship Space greater seating configuration flexibility.

The raised chancel platform is large and accommodates a choir area, the altar table, and a pulpit. Ample Chancel space exists to accommodate a bell choir when needed. An area of the Nave has been cleared of pew seating to accommodate floor space for a small ensemble band. The Baptistry is located near the Chancel to the left side. The baptistry location might be reconsidered if the Narthex space is ever enlarged. At this revised location it could be incorporated as part of the Worship Space entry experience.

The Building’s main functional drawback is its lack of a clearly identifiable, inviting, and secure main entry point. Designation of the main entry point off of the public corner square at Butler Ave. and Ridge

Ave. (where an entry currently exists) would certainly provide a welcoming entrance into the Narthex of the Church. This entrance is probably not heavily used due to its remoteness from the closest available parking. There is also a second entrance further down South Ridge Avenue that is adjacent to the church offices; however, this entrance leads to a split level stair which is not accessible for the handicapped.

Artificial lighting, sound, and projection could be improved but these systems seemed adequate.

The building is not equipped with an automatic fire suppression system.

Worship Space Acoustics are above average (Music sounded lively and the spoken word was intelligible).

Worship Services Observations and Recommendations:

I was warmly greeted at the church entry and again in the Narthex as I entered the Worship Space.

Though I had visited this facility in the past, the interior signage was helpful as the main entry off the side parking lot is at a different floor level than the Worship Space.

The two services I attended at First Presbyterian Church were presented in very different styles and yet both were memorable to me. At our pre-visitation meeting, the Pastors described how the Church was attempting to attract new members while retaining the existing ones. In order to achieve this goal, two distinctly different services were created; the traditional service offers long-time members a familiar worship style while the "South Ridge" service attracts new and somewhat younger members looking for a contemporary worship style.

Traditional Service:

The 9:30AM service does indeed have a traditional feel to it. I noticed that the congregation warmly greeted one another and seemed to genuinely enjoy one another's presence. I sensed there was a strong "community" connection formed by the congregants. The service was attended by an older age group for the most part.

I found the music (which included traditional hymns and a bell choir) to be of high quality. The choir was well rehearsed and they sang the hymns gloriously. The congregation contributed to the singing as well. The organ sounded very good in the space. The music certainly contributed greatly to the dignity and reverence of the worship service.

There was a rather lengthy "announcement" period at the beginning of the service which seemed to "stall" the remainder of the worship experience a bit. In addition to regular announcements, there were two presentations – one about an up-coming financial planning lecture and another about a visiting artist who was showing some of his sculpture at the church that day. It's probably difficult to plan the best point of a service to have these announcements; but it did not seem to work well where they occurred at this Service.

Rev. Ryan Balsan and Rev. Landon Palmer both did a superb job in greeting the congregation and in leading the prayers. The lay ministers/congregants who assisted with the readings also did a great job as well. Ryan and Langdon are warm and engaging individuals who are also gifted Pastors in my opinion. The congregation appears to have real affection for them as Church leaders.

School age children were dismissed to attend Sunday School/Children's Liturgy and the service continued on.

The sermon by Rev. Landon Palmer was well composed, relevant and skillfully presented. I felt very engaged as Langdon gave a sermon entitled "Laying bare your Primal Stance" which was based on the scripture reading (The Pharisees and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)). Langdon used a Power Point presentation of appropriate and arresting images to support his sermon - I found the multi-media approach to be interesting and helped to bring the point of the scripture reading to life. During the sermon, he used several relevant analogies along with images of a Charles McCollough sculpture to illustrate his points. The sculpture's subject matter was on the very same theme as the scripture reading and happened to be on display at the church that day. There were several points in the sermon that seemed a bit "theatrical" to me; but all in all it was very engaging.

Later in the service, the congregation was offered an opportunity to greet one another – they did so warmly. It was obvious that the community spirit of the church is alive and well. As a visitor, I too felt warmly greeted.

After the 9:30AM service, the Pastors shook hands and had conversation with members of the Congregation in the Narthex. Many congregants moved to the Fellowship Hall to share coffee and donuts together.

On display in a roped-off area of the Fellowship Hall, was Charles McCollough's religiously themed art work. Many congregants took the opportunity to view the work. Refreshments were served and I was able to converse with several people (but it was by me engaging them rather than the conversation being initiated by them). It was great to see little children having fun in the Fellowship Hall along with the adults. I enjoyed seeing Charles's joyfully religious art work.

South Ridge Service:

The 11:00AM service is a contemporary service that includes a contemporary folk band of approximately 5-6 talented musicians including singers, guitarists, drums, keyboards and other instruments. The lighting levels are dimmed for the service and a multitude of candles were placed around the Sanctuary and on the altar table. The service utilized contemporary music as a form of worship – again the quality of the musicianship and participation of the congregation seemed very good to me.

The Pastors did not wear vestments as they had for the earlier service. Though the "South Ridge" service is a bit less formal than the earlier one, it is no less spiritually meaningful. I noticed a number of young families who brought their young children; the family members seemed spirit-filled and happy to be in attendance.

The lay minister (Tamara?) who helped lead the service was excellent. She presented the scripture reading and prayers in a respectful way. The South Ridge service is definitely more informal than the traditional service. The congregation was younger and more diverse as well. The same scripture reading as was read at the previous service was read at the second service. Langdon gave a similar though not identical sermon as the previous service; it was given in a slightly different style with a cadence that seemed appropriate to the Contemporary Worship Style.

One of the most interesting parts of the service occurred after the sermon: Interactive “Stations” (behind Asian style rice-paper screens) were set up around the perimeter of the Worship Space. The congregation was invited to queue up at the 4-5 station points. Individual stations included opportunities to produce artwork, reflect on the scripture readings by interacting with the hands-on exercises, etc. Communion in both forms was also offered at the same time. The communion line was longer by far than the lines for the various stations (but the stations were certainly used). I had the feeling that the time period was rushed – there wasn’t enough time for the congregation to participate in the various offerings. The lines seemed too long for the time allotted. Music was played throughout the stations/communion portion of the service.

The Worship Space is being utilized as it exists without any substantial modification to accommodate the stations or the queue lines. Perhaps a solution can be found to adapt the space in order to accommodate the stations in a more flexible way in the future. This might require rearrangement or removal of some pews in order to generate space for the station areas. Perhaps flexible seating could replace some of the pew areas in order to provide more flexibility.

The service concluded with a Benediction and then the congregation was invited to attend a discussion in the Fellowship Hall with artist Charles McCollough.

I enjoyed attending both the 9:30 and 11AM services; each had strong points and very few weaknesses. I found the bulletins, produced separately for each service, to be very helpful. There is an interesting duality at First Presbyterian Church which seems to be created by the two distinctly different services – a designed duality that offers familiarity to existing members while attempting to attract a diverse group of new members at the same time. There is obviously something good and real about what is happening at the Church. The leadership appears to be doing a good job in helping to revitalize the church community through diverse worship services, educational programs and outreach ministries. My overall personal impression is that the church community at First Presbyterian Church of Ambler seemed spiritually passionate and enthusiastically engaged in its mission.

Respectfully submitted,

P. Michael O’Rourke

First Presbyterian Church of Ambler

4 South Ridge Ave.

Ambler, PA 19002

Visitation March 17, 2013

A FEW AREAS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Signage

We suggest more directions from the front of the church about where to park on Sundays (for free).

Welcome

For one visitor, the greeter at the parking lot door, gave a friendly handshake but offered no information. However, the people at the sanctuary doors recognized all of us as newcomers, greeted us warmly, and answered any questions.

The Traditional Service

A more clear call to begin worship would be helpful.

All found the announcements too lengthy but recognized that it was a special Sunday because of the presence of the sculptor.

Unity within the service could be improved. Langdon's sermon had the clear theme of complete dependence on God. All the music could have picked up this theme and the prayers could have incorporated it also.

Between Services

There was generally a warm and friendly feeling here but most one-on-one chatting had to be initiated by us, the visitors.

South Ridge Service

Something to consider: the length of time allotted to music vs. the stations. All of us felt rushed through the stations and desired more time.

One of us suggested looking at the order of the service; prayer and offering before the preaching of the word seemed out of order.

Others

Given the thirst for communion at the South Ridge service, might the traditional service people desire communion more often too?

More help is needed for new people with children re the Sunday school. Where do the children go? When should they be picked up, etc.?

Prayers: There was confusion about writing prayer requests on pew cards. One of us did not even notice this card. Something else to consider: although clergy lead the prayers, they are the prayers of the PEOPLE and can be led by lay people (at the traditional service too). With some training, lay people could even write the prayers, taking real ownership of them.

Building

Entry Experience - Consideration should be given to improving the experience of entering into the Church Building. Ideally, there would be a central gathering space that would provide a warm and welcoming environment (or if need be, several gathering areas could be created). One possible way to accomplish this, at least in part, would be to expand the existing Narthex adjacent to the Worship Space, and at the same time, enhance the South Ridge side entrance which provides access to the Narthex area. An expansion of space would also provide more area for congregants to socialize after a service. The existing Library might be combined with the Narthex in order to generate the necessary additional space.

Space for Interactive Stations - Consideration should be given to a better spatial integration of the Interactive Stations (along with space for the associated queue lines). Perhaps flexible seating could be substituted in at least some of the pew areas to provide greater flexibility. The idea of the interactive stations and the associated movement of the congregation as part of this Liturgy seemed unique and interesting to us.

Public/Visitor/Daily Entry Point – Further consideration should be given to the preferred primary public entry point for the Church Facility. Perhaps the South Ridge entrance could be enhanced. Ideally, the main entry point would be handicap accessible and would be adjacent to the Main Church Office area so that visitors during the week could be easily accommodated and their access monitored.

Outdoor “Public” area at corner of South Ridge Ave. and Butler Pike – There may be an opportunity to engage with the streetscape of Ambler in a more direct way by better utilizing / exploiting the existing outdoor area at the street corner. Perhaps a “pergola” element or extended canopy could create a direct link from the outdoor court space, across the South Ridge Ave. Façade, and provide access to the South Ridge entry adjacent to the existing Narthex. This visual cue would certainly enhance the South Ridge Ave, side entry and potentially connect the building to the streetscape in a more direct way.