

What about the Partnership for Sacred Spaces initiative? What does this have to do with that?

This is a new initiative, apart from, though related to, COH's attempt with Partnership for Sacred Spaces (PSP). We've moved away from PSP for several reasons, deeply regretful at what that attempt cost the church but mindful that it was bearing no fruit after a lot of attempts.

This "fruitlessness" can be accounted for thus.

First, PSP is more of a consulting firm than "hands on" about the work required in congregational renewal. This means that it comes to the congregation to most of the actual work. But COH just doesn't have that labor force ready for deployment. We're too small to need consulting; we need actual workers.

Second, any such partnerships that PSP might have opened a way for relies on the likelihood that there are suitable partners out there. But this proved not to be the case in the Berkshires. In suburban and urban settings, PSP likely meets with more success.

Then there's the fact that, as soon as COH hired PSP, the pastor (Rick) retired, following closely on Natalie's retirement, which left the congregation without steady pastoral leadership. This at a time when we'd just take on a major initiative was a major stumbling block. So, now the congregation had two major challenges, the Partnership and a pastoral search.

We're in a different position now than when COH first considered PSP. First of all, Bill Goessel's gift was a game changer. Having received it two years ago, we now have seed money to stop searching for someone out there to save us, instead to rely on Christ to save us and to act accordingly on our own behalf.

Second, steady pastoral leadership is the obvious, but often overlooked, keystone to a church's success. It almost doesn't matter who the pastor is, as long as he or she digs in and stays. All of the turnover here happened for understandable reasons. No one's to blame. But it's made forward movement very hard.

All this said, PSP wasn't a waste (though it is hard to forget that \$40,000. 😞) James Hundt knows PSP's work and found a lot of useful information and creative thinking in what he took from the church office and what he got from PSP's office. It also might have freed up the congregation's thinking about the buildings, how they could be reconfigured to accommodate more sorts of gatherings.