

Maximizing Unused Space at Pulaski Heights Baptist Church

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pulaski Heights Baptist Church (sometimes referred to as, PHBC) is a longstanding religious institution within the Hillcrest community of Little Rock, Arkansas. For a variety of reasons, its congregation has seen a decline in church membership - currently it has about 60 active members. The church engages in faith-based activities including sermons, bible study sessions, fellowship meals, and the Farmer's Market throughout the week. The Hillcrest Farmers Market is a volunteer run outreach program of PHBC occurring each Saturday on the front steps of the church which draws in community members from around the city and farmers all around Central Arkansas. The Jubilee ministry operates out of the church and provides debt assistance, rent assistance, mutual aid and a food pantry to the community. With so few members and so many charitable programs, tithings are not covering the costs anymore.

The approximately 60,000 square foot church is a very valuable piece of property with many rooms and spaces which the church does not use. These spaces, primarily on the west side of the building, could be re-purposed to fulfill community needs and generate supplemental revenue for the church. Pulaski Heights Baptist Church is already leasing space to 5 entities: A Beautiful Life Photography, Arkansas Women's Outreach, Cooking in Bloom, the Central Arkansas Chapter of Parents of Murdered Children and Mom and Pop. Many more people, businesses and nonprofits are eager to use the church's space, as it is in a prime location in the neighborhood and because the church is able to offer the space at a very affordable rate. However, it is important to ensure that the partners invited into the church share the values of the church and that the needs of the partner can be met by the church. There are many ways to go about renting space within a church and also many ways to disappoint or frustrate the community, church congregation, and potential or current partners. There are also other factors to

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consider when renting space to the community such as the possibility of facilitating community engagement and improvement and increasing church membership.

The research goals of this project included determining best practices of developing church-community relationships involving renting space, determining potential problems with those relationships and how they might be mitigated, creating a community space needs and interests survey which Pulaski Heights Baptist Church can distribute to the Hillcrest community and making recommendations to the church about how to maximize their unused space. To achieve these goals, we engaged in conversations with representatives of churches that rent space and a few Hillcrest community leaders. A few churches which did not participate in a discussion but which had information about their rental processes online were also considered in analysis when possible. In total, 11 conversations and 16 data points constitute the basis of research outside of the literature review for this project. Understanding what other churches, both locally and nationally, are doing will help the church set its own standards. Insight from Hillcrest community leaders may be crucial in deciding the path the church wants to take in using its space for community enrichment while also finding a way to cover the church's expenses.

Our recommendations include forming partnerships, developing a strategy to maintain a cohesive purpose for the way the church allows the community to use its space, updating facilities, renting gym space through an online application process, obtaining community input via the survey provided by this research team and reaching out to the select contacts who were identified in the data collection period as being potential partners to the church in their renovation and remodeling needs.