

A Preliminary Design for Merging Fair Haven UMC with Chapelwood UMC

The discernment process is a time of discussion, reflection and prayer to find an answer to one question: Would a merger help Chapelwood and Fair Haven in accomplishing their shared mission — "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world"?

The Fair Haven study team — Debbie Eng (chair), Mark Hughes, Lisa Johnson, and Bob Wolfram — met with a small group from Chapelwood headed by Chapelwood Senior Pastor John Stephens on Jan. 17. The discussion about the possible merger was positive, thorough and frank. The Fair Haven study team presented a full range of questions and the Chapelwood representatives answered candidly.

The following is a summary of the discussion.

Part of Chapelwood's vision for reaching Houston for Jesus Christ includes revitalizing its current worship communities and developing new worship communities where God leads. Several years ago, the church made a commitment to be open to partnerships that could advance the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Currently, Chapelwood has a unique structure, with six different "worship communities": Sanctuary (the main campus at 11140 Greenbay St., with three services), Mercy Street, Contemplative, The Branch, Upper Room, and Holy Family. Fair Haven UMC would become the Fair Haven Worship Community of Chapelwood United Methodist Church.

Chapelwood "worship communities"

Imagine a "church within a church." In close keeping with the United Methodist model of connectionalism, Chapelwood is one large church composed of six smaller churches, each with its own look and sound, but all with the same shared mission.

Each worship community has its own pastor, who preaches, counsels, motivates and guides in that community. Occasionally, the community preachers may be invited by another worship community to come and preach.

Each worship community has its own leadership Core Team. Working in collaboration with the broader leadership of Chapelwood, the Core Team helps shape the ministry in its community, carrying out the vision of the whole church, but in its own unique way. There are resources and training, along with encouragement and accountability, to help the Core Teams lead effectively.

Each worship community has its own worship style. Music, preaching and all aspects of discipleship happen in the way that is most effective for its particular context. Each community works within the broader discipleship goals and priorities of Chapelwood, and uses resources that connect all the communities.

The worship communities love, care for, support and serve each other. Retreats, churchwide programs and a variety of shared resources create a deep connection among the communities that reflects both unity and diversity across the whole congregation.

In short, Fair Haven would become a worship community of Chapelwood UMC, fully Chapelwood in every respect, but living out its unique ministry in its own context, with its own unique identity.

Strategy and Mission

Fair Haven would keep its name and engage in its own unique, contextual ministry to reach the community around it. The Fair Haven Core Team, together with Chapelwood leadership, would study the Fair Haven worship services and would develop a plan for schedule, style, etc. If additional Chapelwood worship communities could thrive at the Fair Haven location, helping the Fair Haven worship community to accomplish its overall mission, that could be an eventual option. Additionally, families from other Chapelwood worship communities would move to the Fair Haven community to help it grow.

The goal for Fair Haven staff members would be to identify the best ways for them to bring their skills and knowledge into the new relationship. They would need to believe in this relationship, and be ready to work together with Chapelwood. Appointed clergy positions would be worked out with the District Superintendent and Bishop, based on input from the Fair Haven Core Team and/or the Board of Governors.

To make sure the Fair Haven campus is in top physical condition for accomplishing its mission, the property and facilities will be evaluated and any necessary repairs and upgrades made.

Structure and Leadership

Members of Fair Haven UMC would become members of Chapelwood UMC - worshipping and participating in the Fair Haven community. It would have the same structure that is in place for all the Chapelwood worship communities.

The current Fair Haven Board of Governors would help name the Core Team through prayerful discernment, and new Core Team members would be added as the community grows. The chair of the Core Team serves on Chapelwood Ministry Council and Chapelwood Board of Stewards. Other members of the Fair Haven community will serve on Board of Stewards, and, when other communities have ministries that overlap with the Fair Haven community, on Core Teams of those communities.

The Senior Pastor and Staff Parish Committee of Chapelwood, with input from the Fair Haven Core Team, would select the pastor of the Fair Haven community after prayerful study and discernment. Fair Haven staff members would be under the leadership of the Community Pastor of Fair Haven, the Chapelwood Lead Team, and the Chapelwood Staff Parish Relations Committee.

Financial

All finances of the Chapelwood Communities are handled through the Chapelwood UMC finance and business office. This also includes the Chapelwood School for Young Children. The Chapelwood finance and business office would take on the administrative function for Fair Haven accounting, giving, payroll, benefits, etc.

HOWEVER, the Fair Haven worship community would retain its own operating budget and a “cost to serve” model — that is, each worship community of Chapelwood shapes its own budget based on its ministries and programs, with many operating costs – such as utilities and maintenance — would be covered in the overall Chapelwood budget. The Core Team would then send the budget to the Chapelwood leadership team and Finance Committee. They would either approve it or provide feedback to help the worship community pastor and Core Team revise it. Having one Finance Committee that oversees the budgets of all the Chapelwood worship communities makes it possible to support a wide range of ministries in settings where the individual communities might not have the resources on their own.

At the same time, funds such as memorials and endowments given for specific uses at Fair Haven United Methodist Church would be maintained within the Fair Haven budget and would be used solely for their original designated purpose. Honoring the wishes of those who have loved Fair Haven for a lifetime will always be a priority for Chapelwood.

Business concerns

Chapelwood is a unified, multi-campus church with a single, central Board of Trustees that oversees all property owned by Chapelwood. The Fair Haven campus, along with the two homes owned by Fair Haven, would become the property of Chapelwood UMC and would be managed by the Chapelwood Board of Trustees. For example, all maintenance and repairs would be directed by the Board of Trustees, in consultation with the Fair Haven Core Team, and the costs would be covered in the Chapelwood budget, not from the Fair Haven budget.

Because all properties are held in trust with the denomination, the Texas Conference of the UMC would oversee and approve a merger between Fair Haven UMC and Chapelwood UMC.

NOTE: If the two houses were sold, the proceeds would be used to support the Fair Haven Worship Community.

Questions answered

The following are questions from the Fair Haven study team and from Fair Haven members.

1. What will be the plan for keeping Fair Haven as a Worship Center long into the 21st Century?

In addition to prayerful study and strategic, collaborative envisioning, the Fair Haven community would receive coaching, resources and pastoral leadership to help it grow and flourish in its mission to make disciples.

Together, we would determine ambitious, yet achievable, goals for the growth of the Fair Haven worship community. The Fair Haven community pastor and the Fair Haven core team would work with a professional coach, currently Paul Nixon of Epicenter Consulting, to help them build effective ministry. The coaching would include monthly calls and regular site visits.

2. What about the various worship services and communities?

Currently, Fair Haven has four “in-house” worship services plus a fifth worshipping group (Korean). But the church is finding it difficult to grow.

The first step would be a thorough and rigorous study of how best to revitalize the existing communities for growth. The new Fair Haven Core Team, the Fair Haven Worship Community pastor, and the Chapelwood Lead Team would create a plan together.

What do we want to achieve together? These are the basics:

- To have worship that is vital and engaging, and glorifies God
- To fully employ all our combined gifts, talents and resources for growth
- To plan worship times and spaces to foster growth
- To learn from the neighbors around Fair Haven — what are they seeking? What do they need? What do they long for?
- To be good stewards of our talents and resources
- To consider whether bringing more than one worship community to the campus will help us reach more potential disciples

Chapelwood would invite the Korean congregation to participate in the merger as a separate worship community of Chapelwood, but the Korean group may also decide to stay independent.

3. What are the plans for and commitment to the Food Pantry?

The Food Pantry is a vital ministry serving thousands of people in the Spring Branch community, and Chapelwood has been a partner for many years. The Food Pantry is a top priority and will continue. In fact, we would begin to consider how the ministry of the Food Pantry could be expanded!

4. What is the plan for the Day School?

The work of the Fair Haven Day School is a valuable ministry to families in the community. The staff and leadership would design a plan to make sure the school successfully does the following:

- Plays a vital role in the disciple-making mission — not as a “separate” entity, but as a ministry within the church
- Stays vital and healthy
- Ministers to children and families
- Works with the Fair Haven worship community to provide ministry to all families in the surrounding area
- Becomes a part of the Chapelwood Family Discipleship Ministries, and staff receives training, resources, equipment, etc., needed for vital ministry

The intent is to retain all Day School staff members who are ready to work cooperatively to make the merger a success, and to help achieve the church’s mission to make disciples.

5. The Congregación Hispana - What is the plan and commitment for this vital ministry?

The growth of the ministry to Hispanic worshipers at Fair Haven has been steady and impressive, and it will be a priority to continue its effectiveness and expand its reach. Hispanic leaders from Chapelwood worship communities would meet with the Core Team and other Fair Haven leaders to explore ways to create an even greater ministry to and with Hispanic families in Spring Branch. The Fair Haven campus will be vital to the growth of this ministry.

6. Fair Haven is considering hiring a new youth minister, but it is essentially on hold now. What would the future plan be for children and youth ministries?

The Chapelwood Family Discipleship Ministry, led by Rev. Heather Sims, has great resources that are used by all the worship communities. In consultation with the Fair Haven Core Team, Chapelwood leadership would identify potential staff for youth and children's ministries at Fair Haven. Chapelwood would provide resources and training to help Fair Haven build ministries to children, students and youth, and children with special needs.

7. What would happen to special funds at Fair Haven?

All finances, reserves, endowments and other business matters would be managed through the Finance and Business office of Chapelwood. Donors' intent would be honored, and money designated to help the Fair Haven campus would be used for the Fair Haven campus.

8. What will happen to funds raised through the Day School?

The day school would have an income and its own expense budget every year — as the Chapelwood School for Young Children does. Tuition and other income are listed along with expenses, including salaries. Additional monies raised through special events are simply part of the income of the school. The management of finances, payroll, accounts receivable and payables would be handled through the centralized Chapelwood accounting department.

9. What will happen to Fair Haven clergy and staff?

All appointed clergy — Paul Thomasson, Bob Luton, and Jairo Ortiz — are under the authority of the bishop and district superintendent. The pastors, the district superintendent and the Fair Haven Core Team would work together to discern the best design for growing the Fair Haven community, and their recommendations would be forwarded to the Conference for consideration in making clergy assignments. If replacements were indicated, Chapelwood leadership would help Fair Haven recruit, rather than being limited to the Conference pool.

Other staff members would be invited to be contributors to the mission and ministry of Fair Haven Worship Community. This will be a new structure and a new way of organizing and managing, and employees who are dedicated to adapting and collaborating will be considered for a place in the ministries of Fair Haven.

Custodial work at Chapelwood is managed by DTK services. All custodial staff would have the opportunity to continue to work at Fair Haven by applying to work through DTK. This relationship would bring them better pay and benefits, and backup staff to fill in when needed.

10. Will Fair Haven be loosely partnered with Chapelwood or 100% a part of Chapelwood?

Fair Haven would be 100% part of Chapelwood – the Fair Haven Worship Community of Chapelwood UMC. The Fair Haven Core Team would work with other community ministry teams for ministry development, and other leaders from Fair Haven would be invited to serve at the overall Chapelwood level on SPRC, Finance, Trustees, Ministry Council, and the Board of Stewards.

11. Will Fair Haven be able to keep its name?

Yes. Chapelwood would incorporate the Fair Haven Worship Community into the Chapelwood family.

12. What does the future of Fair Haven look like?

Here is the vision:

Together, Chapelwood and Fair Haven will be more successful in reaching our communities in West Houston.

The Fair Haven community is growing, with new people drawn to worship, the day school, the youth and children's programs and other ministries. In a few years, 500 people are worshipping at Fair Haven every Sunday!

We are at the center of a large, dynamic, multi-cultural ministry in Spring Branch within Methodism, with a powerful impact on the neighborhood, both inside and outside the church.

Every Sunday, dynamic worship is highlighted by outstanding music and inspired preaching.

Fair Haven is "headquarters" for mission in Spring Branch as we partner with many services and organizations — the Food Pantry, MAM, job training, ESL, after-school programs and more.

How would this happen?

From the 2012 United Methodist Book of Discipline:

¶ 2546. Merger of Local United Methodist Churches— Two or more local churches, in order to more effectively fulfill their ministry (¶ ¶ 201-204), may merge and become a single church by pursuing the following procedure:

1. The merger must be proposed to the charge conference of each of the merging churches by a resolution stating the terms and conditions of the proposed merger.
2. The plan of the merger as proposed to the charge conference of each of the merging churches shall be approved by each of the charge conferences in order for the merger to be effected.
3. The merger must be approved by the superintendent or superintendents of the district or districts in which the merging churches are located.
4. The requirements of any and all laws of the state or states in which the merging churches are located affecting or relating to the merger of such churches must be complied with, and in any case where there is a conflict between such laws and the procedure outlined in the Discipline, said laws shall prevail and the procedure outlined in the Discipline shall be modified to the extent necessary to eliminate such conflict.
5. All archives and records (including membership) of churches involved in a merger shall become the responsibility of the successor church.

A covenant would be created and the charge conferences of each church would vote regarding property, membership, and finances. The covenant framework would be discussed and created by Fair Haven and Chapelwood leadership.

