

All Souls staff members have been asked repeatedly how they see the decision to move or stay affecting their programs. The following statement is based on close-up day-to-day knowledge and experience of the functions and the internal workings of a program.

Shannon Boston

CHILDREN'S RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



I have thought of All Souls as my church for more than 40 years. When I attended Channing Day School, it was housed in what is now the Family Room. When I sang with the Children's Choir in 2nd grade, we rehearsed in what is now the Majestic Theatre, and, once we grew beyond those bounds, we moved to the Presidents' Room because there was no choir room; the building simply ended after the Chapel. I occasionally played hooky from Sunday School by hiding under the Choir Director's Desk, in what is now the art supply closet, and the 6th grade haunted house was in the coat closet because it used to have a door at each end and that small space was all we needed. There was no Memorial Garden, but we did plant a tree on the west lawn to remember the Richardsons, when they had to move to Louisiana (it was taken out when we expanded the building past the Chapel). When I was in the youth group, there was no Sponge Room. There were so few of us that we met in what is now Rick Fortner's office beneath the bell tower. At noon each Sunday, I was released from my classes (there was no concern about signing children in or out) and sent to Emerson Hall to find my parents. They were always there, because after attending the only service available to them, there were no other classes or activities in which they could participate.

With every shift and expansion and re-purposing, I have had to mourn the loss of the familiar. To this day, if I'm not paying attention when I exit the Children's Programming entrance, I twist my ankle on what used to be a step, but is now a graded ramp for wheelchair accessibility.



As the Children's Religious Educator at our church, I find it very difficult to express how important it is that we reluctantly leave behind the hallowed grounds that we know, and move to a new facility.

Shannon Boston (CONTINUED)

There are two key reasons for this move: growth and safety.

Growth: Not because we want to grow, but because we have grown. Down in the Children's Religious Education Department we are bursting at the seams. We have so many infants and toddlers we've had to open a third nursery room to avoid turning away parents who want to attend worship, and this takes away a classroom from the older children. Most Sundays we have over 20 children in our pre-kindergarten class, and the classrooms for our older children are often at capacity. Not only are our classrooms full, but there are too few classrooms to do what we need to be able to do to with our children. We have to choose between activities at tables and group activities on the floor because there isn't enough room to do both in most of the classrooms. There is only one room large enough for physical activities (like yoga, dance, group games, etc.). Our gathering spaces for adults are woefully lacking. When the sanctuary is full or perceived to be (which is more often than you might realize) adults come to the Family Room to watch the service, leaving no place for parent meetings. Every week I vie with other programs - Music, Youth, and Adult RE - to find space for Children's Religious Education programs. And don't even get me started on storage.

Safety: The west wing (the children's wing) is frighteningly porous. With a staircase at either end and four entrances and exits to this wing, it is impossible to monitor who is entering and who is leaving our building no matter how hard we try. I long for a central check in/out area that will allow us to know what children are under our care and what adults are working with them. We are currently in a very vulnerable situation that requires constant vigilance by teachers, board members and parents. Even our architects in the first Master Plan admitted that this safety element would not be possible to fully address given our current structure without a complete tear down of the wing.

There are two options which I feel must be considered: 1) expansion and renovation at our current location and 2) moving. After hearing all of the arguments, I am convinced that a meaningful renovation of our current space has an extremely small chance of happening and will be more expensive than moving. The Maple Ridge neighborhood would like All Souls to be an 800 member church - like the one in which I grew up. We are not that. We are an 1,800 member church and, whether we like it or not, we are continuing to grow. I believe any meaningful change at our current locale will be blocked, maybe rightfully so, by the neighborhood. It may seem counter-intuitive, but having renovated several homes and businesses, I (and the architects) believe that it will cost at least as much to renovate as it will to build anew.

I love our church. I love almost everything about it. But I love our children and families more. I want them to have what I had growing up. A welcoming community that teaches love beyond belief. That is why on Nov. 20, I will vote to accept the generous gift of a parcel of land that will allow us to create a new home for All Souls, my church. If it is the wish of the majority of our congregation to stay at this site, I will continue to devote my energies toward creating the best possible religious education program for our children.