

ECHO PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Application for Equitable Compensation 6 months, beginning July 1, 2023

Section C:

How has the Echo Park UMC budgeted to make up its arrearage of \$35,644.62 in relation to the pastor's pension and health benefits?

The congregation of the Echo Park United Methodist Church has struggled since COVID with significant shortfalls in budget, mostly related to a drop-off in income from rentals of church property to permanent tenants as well as for occasional events. Unfortunately, we have also experienced an uptick in costly issues related to building maintenance and repairs.

Income from tithes and pledges has also dropped because of people's reduced capacity to give. Some families have not yet recovered fully from the economic crisis caused by COVID; others have retired and now find themselves on fixed incomes.

Finally, funding that might otherwise have supported the general congregational budget has, over the last few years, been regularly diverted into support for EPIC (The Echo Park Immigration Center). While we don't regret the establishment of the Immigration Center or the Hospitality Center that we were in the process of developing in conjunction with EPIC and the Los Angeles Welcome Collaborative, we were unprepared for the financial impact that these projects had on the financial viability of the church congregation itself.

In February of 2024, our problems worsened when we were forced to close the church building after learning that the church tower had been seriously compromised and was in danger of falling. Although our neighbors and others have stepped up to provide funding to help us address the building's structural issues (a little more than \$16,000), those funds are designated for a particular purpose and are not available to support the overall church budget. And, in spite of the faithful efforts of a few generous donors in the church, we continue to struggle with a level of giving that is too low to fully support our needs as a congregation facing a crisis.

This being said, we have budgeted funds to cover the cost of the pastor's pension and health benefits for this year, as well as \$1,500 more to begin to address the arrearage. We plan to continue budgeting funds toward this arrearage during upcoming years.

More significantly, it is becoming increasingly clear that we will not be able to repair the church building. Not only do we not have the capacity to raise adequate funds to do so, but the building has significant structural issues that cannot be appropriately addressed by making repairs. We are convinced that the building needs to come down and be completely replaced. We are working with a developer on a plan that will hopefully produce up to 120 units of low income, very low income, and work force housing, as well as parking and 8,000 square feet of worship/community space, offices, classrooms, etc. We anticipate that, if all goes well, we may be able to sign a development contract either later this year or early 2025. We further anticipate that we will receive a significant influx of cash upon the signing of this contract that will allow us to pay our arrearage to the conference in full.

Section D:

Narrative of Echo Park UMC's Unique Challenges and Signs of Vitality or Potential for Revitalization

For more than a century, Echo Park UMC has been a symbol of hope for the community of Echo Park and beyond. In recent years, the congregation has:

- Partnered with the SELAH Neighborhood Homeless Coalition to provide much needed services to our unhoused neighbors;
- Partnered with Showers of Hope and the County of Los Angeles to provide free showers;
- Partnered with other faith communities in the neighborhood to hold monthly Laundry Love events;
- Housed countless Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step recovery groups;
- Birthed and then partnered with EPIC to provide community, caring, and services to asylum seekers crossing the border
- Worked with the Los Angeles Welcome Collective, CLUE, EPIC, CHIRLA, Carecen and others to open a temporary hospitality center for migrants who had either crossed the southern border or been bussed to Los Angeles from Texas who needed a place to stay while seeking more permanent accommodations;
- Provided a warm welcome to cultural and community groups, labor organizations, arts organizations, and others who needed a place to gather for celebration, mourning, organizing, etc.

In the face of COVID and its aftermath, the congregation has continued to provide vibrant worship in both English and Spanish and both in person and online. We are in the process of developing plans for revitalizing our programs with children and youth and for holding regional gatherings to support the needs of our far-flung congregation. We are also in the process of re-establishing a strong Spanish language ministry to serve the needs of our Spanish speaking neighbors. We are also in the initial stages of considering how to do a better job of reaching out to our Filipino neighbors living in Historic Filipinotown, as well as to the young creatives that have made Echo Park a creative center, primarily for the indy-music scene.

Before our current problems with the tower, we had already begun to consider how we could use our property to serve the diverse needs of our community. This includes low or very low income housing for our unhoused or soon to be unhoused neighbors. It also includes the creation of space that can be utilized both to serve the deep spiritual needs of people living in Echo Park as well as other community needs for artistic expression, community development and organizing, cultural celebration, artistic expression, etc. We are in conversation with Sandee Furuta from the Conference Office, the local City Council office, various community groups, and a potential developer to create a new space on our current site that could potentially provide 8000 square feet of church and community space, up to 120 units of low income or very low income housing, and parking. Of course, we will do our best to preserve cultural artifacts in the building such as our stained glass windows and to maintain an architectural vision consistent with the iconic status our building has had for the last many decades.

We believe that there is yet much life in this small but scrappy congregation. And, we believe that we have clearly heard God's vision for the direction that God is calling us to go. We have fallen on financial hard times, but we have hope for our future and for the continuation of God's ministry at the corner of Alvarado and Reservoir.