

TO: ~ ~ ~ **2018**
A Grant proposal for a nature learning shelter for mental health:
from First United Methodist Church, WL a 501 (c) 3 organization.

There are approximately 15 acres of natural woods located behind First United Methodist Church (FUMC) at 1700 State Road 26W and US 231 intersection, West Lafayette, IN. This property is a veritable green schoolyard, an outdoor laboratory. Owned by the church, it has been underutilized.

This is a proposal for funding to construct a learning center for appreciation and care of this natural environment. A free standing structure, about 684 square feet area, with cement foundation and with features for physical disability access is the goal. Pavers to be laid down as pathway from the parking area, as well as to surround the foundation are on the drawing board. Each brick or paver will be an opportunity for the members and friends of the church congregation to purchase and etch a name of a person they want to honor, remember or buy for their own namesake. A smaller fee for children under 18 years old to buy bricks will be included. This fundraiser will help contribute to the costs of building. This proposed structure will be referred to as the Nature Learning Shelter (NLS) in this proposal.

There is growing evidence(1) that contact with nature, as in green space, wooded trails, streams and wildlife, bring health and wellness to persons of any age, but specially to children.

Childhood experiences are critical to mental health development. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) report 10.3 per cent of children aged 3 to 17 years have a current diagnosis of conduct and behavioral health disorder. An additional 3.0% and 2.1% account for those diagnosed with Anxiety and Depression, respectively (CDC, 2018).(2)

Benefits of contact with nature have been increasingly documented in many nations including the United States. That nature is good for you is the basis for mental wellness promotion as in eco-therapy practice and Horticultural (gardening) therapy programs. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) summarized scientific research about green schoolyards (gardens, trails, trees) benefits to school outcomes, physical activity and mental health/wellness of children and families (AAP Chicago Convention, Sept 2017). (3) Researchers in Australia report high levels of mental wellness associated with increased learning, creativity, and productivity as well as positive social relationships (beyondblue.org.au 2010).(1)

VISION

The NLS will be a meeting place for individuals and groups to learn about nature, identify useful and safe plant species, insects and birds, and employ all senses to enjoy the woods. It is also a place to reason out care, maintenance and all possibilities for the future of the woods as a learning environment and as a vehicle to enhance mental wellness.

The FUMC existing governing board supports 3 church visions/missions: (They are the direct beneficiaries of the NLS)

1. Embrace the students, teachers, staff and families of Klondike Elementary school
2. Embrace Purdue University students through Wesley Foundation; and,
3. Nurture and care for one another as members of FUMC church family. **In addition,**
4. The FUMC Village Nursery School (VNS) has an enrollment of about 140 : summer vacation bible school (VBS) gets an average of 205 participants and Children's Sunday School average attendance is near 20. Wesley students lunch bunch average 25 per week.

The NLS may be used by any of these groups as an outdoor classroom . In addition, there is a Boy Scout troop that meets in the church; and the Korean church leaders group that meets weekly as well. They all will benefit from use of the NLS.

5. Furthermore, the NLS may serve as an occasional summer worship center.

6. For a fund-raiser, the church will hold a yearly garage “Trash to Treasure “ sale, that could be held in the NLS. Funds raised from this activity will be used for the maintenance of the shelter and the woods.

Budget being prepared for the NLS

Estimates to include:

a shelter of about 684 square feet

concrete foundation

possibly plumbing,

need for electric power source, and LED lighting

Rectangular or octagonal shape, number of beam support

sturdy sheet roofing, to match the church’s existing roof type

Pavers or bricks for fundraising

American Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements will be met

Care and maintenance of the NLS

1. Phone FUMC office to schedule the use of the shelter.
2. A fee for use may or may not be issued; however, a written covenant for use and care will be discussed and signed by the applicant user and church board of trustees member.
3. A yearly “Trash to Treasure” Sale will be held, on a Friday and/or Saturday in the shelter; all funds will be devoted for the maintenance of NLS & the woods. The church youth group or the Wesley students will have priority if hiring work/labor. The Youth Pastor or Youth ministry head will be consulted by the Governance Board regarding hiring for maintenance work, job specification and remuneration

References cited:

(1) Beyondblue.org.au : Beyond Blue to Green: The Health Benefits of Contact with Nature in a park context - literature review. 2010.

Mardie Townsend, Professor

Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing, and Behavioral Science,

Deakin University, Australia

(2) CDC.gov websites 2018

(3) AAP.org: Green Schoolyard Support Healthy Bodies, Mind and Communities

Stephen Port, MD. UTAustin Dell Medical School, AAP National Convention & Exhibit, Chicago, IL. Sept. 15, 2017

**Respectfully submitted by *Leticia Mitchell, member of First United Methodist Church*
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Jim Beaty, member