**Church is not just a place. And church is a place. Covenant is not just some building on some street. And yet Covenant is a building—*our* building on *our* street.**

**Covenant is where you come each Sunday as part of your familiar routine.  Covenant is the smiles you know, the warm hugs you feel, the reconnection you need.  But Covenant is also the sidewalk, the flower-lined path, the clear glass doors, the open vista into the Narthex.**

**Covenant is the beauty and profundity of silence as its own form of worship. And it is the way the sanctuary chair sets your body into a particular posture, regulating your breathing during the silence.**

**Covenant is the stirring choral and instrumental music that says what words alone cannot say about awe and wonder and praise and gratitude.  And Covenant is the smooth hard surfaces and the precise shape of a sanctuary that allow the sound to reverberate in a way that acoustically captures even the smallest note.**

**Covenant is the sermon that compels you to see a well-known story in a new light.  And it is the ray of light moving across the sanctuary wall that you stare at after the sermon, as you absorb and dissect and revisit Laura’s words.**

**Covenant is where our youth stun us with keen observations about our world, revealing wisdom far beyond their years.  And it is the awkward dismount into a bean bag chair and lock-in supplies and an empty antique bathtub that serves as seating or storage depending on the day’s mood.**

**Covenant is where we study the Bible, appreciating its poetry, understanding its authors, learning its context afresh with each reading.  It is also the intimate classroom and the old fireplace and the French doors.**

**Covenant is where we baptize one another, the public profession of faith that after 400 years remains our denominational namesake.  And it is also the vessel into which we climb for this passage, the hot tub we jokingly call it. Covenant is the water into which we are submerged.**

**Covenant is where you come to contemplate during a meditative walk of the Labyrinth. And Covenant is the ever-turning brick-lined path that you travel, the crunch of gravel beneath your feet.**

**Covenant is where you came out of your shell as worship leader, sharing both the inspirational and the deeply personal with our church family.  And it is the lectern—tall, strong, sturdy—that you leaned against during the harder parts of that experience.**

**Covenant is where you learned to appreciate the children’s choir in all its zeal and enthusiasm. And it is also the classroom where practice takes place, the upright piano, the rhythm band instruments.**

**Covenant is where you fellowship over food, during the coffee hour, during a Seder, with your deacon’s group, at a committee meeting.  Covenant is also the refrigerator and the sink. It is our beloved coffee maker and the assortment of mismatched platters.  It is the forgiving Narthex carpet.**

**Covenant is where we educate our children about God, and Jesus, and love, and acceptance, and hope and peace.  It is also the playground and child-sized tables and glitter glue and a grassy field.**

**Covenant is the celebration of the Advent Season, the stories in the lectionary, the singing of carols, the rare visitation with long-missed friends.  And it is also the Advent wreath, the piano and the songbooks, the crock pots full of wassail.**

**Covenant is where your children were wed, where you married when you thought you might never love again, where you finally wed your partner of four decades.  And Covenant is also the literal aisle you both walked, it is the site where your loved ones sat, witnessing the very making of your family.**

**Covenant is where we challenge ourselves, our assumptions, our comfort levels through adult education, focusing on learning more about how to understand and improve the world around us.  And it is the handheld microphone and the whiteboard and the classroom with enough room for all curious minds.**

**Covenant is the darkness of Lent and the light of Easter, the putting away and bringing out of Hallelujahs, the tragedies and miracles and unresolved questions of our most important season.  It is also snuffed candles. It is the meaningful changing banners and paraments and stoles.**

**Covenant is where we say goodbye to our loved ones and where we grieve their loss.  It is where we call out their names on All Saints and All Souls Sunday.  But Covenant is also the room we came to for comfort in the face of tragedy.  It is the cup of tea and hand holding our hand and the office where we planned a memorial service.  Covenant is the candles we light, it is the pictures we display to recognize the pieces of us who are now gone.**

**Covenant is where we dedicate our babies, where we promise to be a community of faith, love, and support for them.  And it is also the sanctuary with a clear view of a baby being passed from family to minister and back again, where there are no bad seats for important life events.**

**Covenant is where we give of our monetary resources, where we scrimp and save in order to give as a testament to ourselves, to God, that this community is one of our priorities.  And Covenant is the process of creating a new space for our community.**

**We do not—would not—divorce our spiritual experience from our aesthetic experience. We recognize that the physical informs and affects the way we commune with one another and with the sacred. With that appreciation in mind, we look forward to the designing of our new space together—reusing what others so lovingly built and adding to it for a campus that meets our needs, enriches our community and enables us to continue being a prophetic voice of progressive Christianity in Houston.**

**Thank you so much for being here tonight. Your presence is a gift to us and to this project. I want to recognize that two of our three architects and their partners are able to join us this evening. Unfortunately, Carrie Glassman-Shoemake is attending a family wedding out of state this weekend. However, please join me in welcoming architect Ernesto Maldonado, and architect Katie Ormond and her husband Eric Ormond. Thank you so much for being here.**

**I want to also say a special thanks to Susan Wegner and Carl McAliley for setting our evening’s tone with your beautiful musical offerings.**

**And while others will no doubt echo this sentiment, I want to acknowledge that this evening would not be possible but for the indefatigable efforts of Nancy Henry, who orchestrated almost every aspect of this event. Helping Nancy to realize her vision of tonight’s dinner were Michelle Bennack, Pamela Jones and Joyce Courtois. Thank you for your service to this community of faith and for organizing this incredible dinner.**

**Finally, those of you who were part of Covenant years ago will recall that Jackson Hicks generously donated a special dinner before our last capital campaign. Jackson’s generosity truly knows no bounds. Tonight’s dinner was lovingly provided and substantially underwritten by a similar donation from Jackson and Company. Thank you for this amazing meal!**

**And for everyone else, again, thank you all for being here and welcome.**