

**Leading Church Builders' Advice:
Plan and Plan Again**

Planning; a simple concept. Yet, why is it that we don't always take the time upfront to properly plan for future events? When going on a family vacation do you simply get in the car and go? Of course not; there are travel arrangements to be made, hotels to book, maps to review and packing for the journey. Without proper planning your journey may run into unpleasant detours along the way. The same can be said about your church building project. The roadmap to the final destination—a church that meets the current and future needs of your congregation—is essential to successfully complete your journey and avoid unexpected, and potentially expensive, detours.

We spoke with members of the National Association of Church Design Builders (NACDB), specialists in church design and construction, and asked them to share their advice on the important first steps to consider in your building project.

Master Planning

by Jo Wells

Focus on Ministry

“Master plan, master plan and master plan,” says Kurt Williams, group leader of Church Solutions, a division of T & W Corp. in Indianapolis. “So many ministry properties are rendered useless or are used with great expense due to not thinking about the next phase or the next generation.”

“Improper master planning is one of the biggest mistakes church leadership can make when building a new church,” agrees William M. Derrick, president of Derrick Companies in New Richmond, Wis. “Hire a firm that has experience in master planning of churches, and that will listen to the needs of the church and ask the right questions. Don't make the mistake that many churches make in having an architect design something that is too costly. Hire a design-builder who will make sure that you get what you need for the budget that you can afford.”

Derrick also advises not to get caught up in fitting the ministries into the church design. “It should be the other way around,” he says. “Start with the ministries and make sure that your planning and design will meet the needs of the ministries. Hire a design/build firm with a good reputation for church planning, design and construction. Also, have a good demographics report such as a Ministry Area Profile by Percept. The goal is to make sure that the project is vision and ministry driven.”

Others in the industry agree on the importance of planning to meet your ministry needs. “First, answer the questions: ‘What is our Jerusalem and what is our Samaria?’ and then figure out what your Jerusalem and Samaria looks like now and what it will look like in five years and 10 years,” says Victor F. Erwin, vice president of business development at G.L. Barron Co., Inc. in Fort Worth, Texas.

“Based on this, merge your current ministries with the vision of your sphere of influence—your Jerusalem and Samaria. Thirdly, hire a church designer to perform a needs assessment with the goal of wrapping space around your ministries, *not* pushing your ministries into space they design.”

Planning for future need is a critical element of your master plan. “The biggest mistake a church can make is to build for their existing congregation,” Erwin states.

“A church should build for future generations. This means the people paying for the new facilities have to put aside their desires of ‘how it should be’ and pay attention to how to appeal to the next two generations.”

The second mistake that church leadership makes, according to Erwin, is hiring a designer without significant church experience. Then, buying land before engaging a designer.

Building to Reach Young Families: The Preschool Concept

Some recent studies have shown that the youngest generation in the United States called “the Mosaics,” ages three to 21 years, are only 22 percent Christian. Some pastors believe this means younger families are not getting effectively reached for Christ. What can the church do about this evangelistic void and how does it affect a building campaign?

Many churches believe the answer is Christian preschools. Pastor Dale P. Davis, from the Nazarene Church in Selma, Calif., admits that he was led to Christ as a young father through a preschool that his son was attending. It was a church-sponsored daycare run by the pastor’s wife as an evangelistic outreach. Pastor Dale stated that the positive influence of the Christian workers led him to their church, then to become a Christian.

The amazing reality is that a qualified church design/builder can find room for a preschool in almost any existing church and can also easily design it into a new facility. Even more exciting is that it is usually financially profitable. Rene M. Charest, president of CharestCorp and a certified church consultant has discovered that many church-run preschools are showing net profits between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per year.



Every state has requirements for classroom space and play areas. In California for example, the 18-month to two-and-a-half year-olds requires 35 square feet per student for classroom space and 75 square feet of play area. There are also requirements for restrooms, food preparation, curriculum as well as teachers training. So it is advisable to hire or train a lead person in the preschool to ensure all laws have been met.

The benefits are that classrooms which were once used only on Sundays and Wednesdays are now being used all week long as a preschool. Young families and children who are in need of strong loving relationships connect with the church and may consider attending especially because their children are already comfortable at the location. An evangelistic minded church has the potential of growing with new believers in addition to gaining income to pay for the costs of the preschool facility.

When it comes to financing, Charest recently met with a pastor who was able to qualify for a building loan because of the potential income from the preschool he was going to build. The bank used the potential preschool income to qualify the church and approve his loan.

“Everyone knows that young families and their children need lots of TLC,” says Charest. “The pastor that considers a preschool in their building plans may be sowing the seeds for a strong, vibrant church of tomorrow.”

Consider the preschool concept; it might be the perfect fit for the vision of your church.

For more information, visit the CharestCorp Website at www.charestcorp.com.

Time to Expand

There are several growth indicators to look for in making a determination of when it is time to expand. Erwin suggests the following: When parking becomes a problem. When you are full at the latter two of three services. When you are crowded every service and your growth rate slows abruptly. Lastly, he emphasizes: When you run out of space for children.

Planning space to include ministries to reach today's young families poses a unique opportunity. One answer is designing space for a pre-school in your facility (for more information, see the accompanying article, with advice from Rene M. Charest of CharestCorp., *Building to Reach Young Families: The Preschool Concept.*)

Developing a master plan for expansion of your existing facility is just as important as for new construction. Effective use of the existing space needs to be considered in your plans.

"When planning an addition to an existing facility, the most prevalent oversight is to not consider how existing areas in the building might be used differently, thus eliminating the need for adding area that is not truly necessary," explains Williams.

"Don't be afraid to have multi-use spaces to help with budget constraints," adds Derrick. "Multi-use spaces, along

with coffee shops and hi-tech resource centers, are popular trends for today's modern ministry."

Adequately considering the flow of the new addition with the existing building is all too often overlooked according to Derrick. He also notes that many times church leaders are afraid to demolish old, out-dated and costly buildings. "Do a cost analysis of the cost of building new versus remodeling the existing, and the maintenance cost associated with the existing," Derrick advises.

When the decision is made to remodel, Derrick also notes that many times the church loses sense of where the main entrance is to the facility. This needs to be taken into account when planning the addition.

As with new construction, planning for future growth is essential in facility expansions. "The lack of a master plan to ensure that the additional area being planned will not interfere with future phases is an often overlooked tool with very expensive ramifications, if not explored," says Williams. "Performing additional work to solve today's problem is a painful lesson. Master planning will help the church make wise use of the property that the Lord has given them today and for years to come." ❖



Photo courtesy of G.L. Barron Company, Inc.