



Buildings Do Not Cause Growth, Architect Tells Church Leaders

By Charles Willis

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--"A new church building does not cause growth; it merely permits growth," Davis Byrd told pastors and church staff during the National Conference for Church Leadership.

"The purpose of a church is not a church building, but church building," said Byrd, director of the church architecture department at LifeWay Christian Resources. "Building church facilities is a problem of purpose long before it is an architectural or financial problem," he observed. "Too many churches do property and facility planning as if there were no connection between the kind of space provided and church growth. Others plan a new building with a vague hope that just constructing a building will lead to growth."

Studies of growing churches, Byrd observed, consistently show that property, buildings and space are major factors in sustaining growth patterns. But, he emphasized, "It takes people and planning to make growth happen.

"Your future is what you, under God, set out to do," he continued. "Put a prayer committee to work first before you have a building committee."

Using prayer, God's word and God's mission for his church are the first steps in a potential church building program, Byrd said. Others include knowing where you are, who you are, who you want to become and what you need to do.

Knowing who you are includes a study of your community, people needs, area economy, climate, demographics, codes and regulations, local infrastructure and property surroundings. Knowing local building requirements and existing services, such as roads and utility services, can help a church avoid purchasing the wrong property.

Knowing who you are includes the perceptions, attitudes and spiritual health of the church members, a profile of the congregation and church organization and physical circumstances.

"How comfortable are our people with being uncomfortable? Consider if the need to park a distance from the church or if emotional ties to specific buildings or rooms will create problems," he said.

Knowing who you want to become includes knowing the mission, purpose and vision of your church. Byrd said the mission is God's eternal intention for his church. The purpose is a contemporary restatement of God's overarching intention that grows out of each church's unique relationship with God. Its vision is a clear mental image of a preferred future state and behavior.

"Communicate the vision," he urged church leaders. "You can't focus on fog. Know what you need to do. Develop strategies and a schedule, recruit and assign leaders, train leadership and put money behind the process and establish measures to assess your church's health.

"No church is truly ready to deal with property and building issues until it has developed a comprehensive ministry-growth strategy. You don't have a strategy until you have a plan that involves a particular place, a particular time and a specific way of accomplishing your goals," he said. "If you can't build a paragraph around your ministry-growth strategy, don't build a building around it."

Byrd cautioned leaders to "go with your strengths. No church can do everything. Do a few things well. Develop your strategies around your strengths; develop your ministries, programs, activities and events around your strategies; and develop your property and buildings around your ministries, programs, activities and events."

Finally, Byrd said, "Do it. Act, pay attention to the results, learn, modify and act again. When you get to groundbreaking wisely, construction is not hard. It's just coordination of a bunch of tasks that are well defined. It is difficult when the proper planning was not done. There is no right way to build the wrong building."

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