



# Church Growth and Church Facilities

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**What is the relationship between a church's growth and its facilities?** Most of us know either intuitively, or by experience that buildings do not cause churches to grow. If that were true, the great commission would have contained a command something about building facilities, but it doesn't.

We also know there does seem to be some relationship between facilities and growing churches. If it is not "If you build it they will come", then what?

**Buildings are like tools for growing churches.** We all know something about tools. We use tools in our garages, in our kitchens, and around the house. Tools help us accomplish a task. If we have the right tool, the job is easier.

If you wanted to drive a nail to hang a picture on the wall, you would want a hammer to help you. If you didn't have a hammer handy, you might pick up a rock, a shoe, or some other makeshift object to act as a hammer. It would not be as easy, but it might work. The point here is that tools help us accomplish the task, and some tools are more helpful than others, just as some buildings are more helpful to our ministry than others.

**Have the right tool for the job.** It is also true that different tools help us do different jobs. Scissors are great for cutting paper, but they would make a mess trying to cut a tomato! So, if you want to worship, teach preschoolers, do administrative tasks, or have a fellowship dinner, you need different kinds of spaces, or tools. Different rooms need to be designed for these jobs.

Preschool rooms need hand-washing and toilet facilities in each room to facilitate children going to the rest room and workers washing between each time they clean up spills or "body fluids", or change a diaper. If you have to go down the hall to a rest room every time this happens in a preschool class, you will not spend much time in the room!

The worship space you want to be very different from those preschool rooms, with nicer finishes, a platform for good visibility, room for instruments, etc. It is a whole different kind of space because it accommodates a different function. You need to have the right tool for the job.

We also need to be sure the tool is sharp. Ecclesiastes 10:10 (TLB) says: "**A dull axe requires great strength; be wise and sharpen the blade!**"

Chopping down trees with an axe is not a lot of fun, but make it a dull axe, and it is really a chore. Instead of chopping down trees the church is here to teach, worship, minister, build fellowship, and do evangelism. Church buildings are some of the tools we use to do those things. If they are not in good condition they act like that dull axe, and make the job much harder than it has to be.

A good tool helps you get greater results from the same amount of work. Just as the right tools can make yard work less effort, well-designed buildings can make your efforts at evangelism and

discipleship more effective. An attractive building might get people into the building that would be repelled by the “typical” church building.

The sad truth is many of our church buildings are like that dull axe! They aren’t attractive at all. These churches need to sharpen their tools! Some need to build, others may just need to update the appearance. Some churches are doing pretty well in spite of the inadequacy of their buildings. Imagine what they could do if they had the right tools for the job?

### **What could your church do if it had the right tools for the job?**

A good place to start is to evaluate your facilities. This needs to be done in two respects: First in quantity, then in quality. Both are important. To evaluate your space you will need to establish criterion to judge the adequacy of it as a tool. You may want to get someone objective from outside your church or community to come and help you with such an evaluation.

### **Quantity**

One of the first things to check is the amount of space you have. Do you have enough space to do what you need to do in ministry? A key here is to understand that all space does not necessarily add to the capacity of your church to contain growth.

**We need to know the difference between growth space and support space.** At the LifeWay Church Architecture Department there are three types of space we classify as growth space in our evaluations: WORSHIP, EDUCATION, and PARKING. These are the containers that define the growth capacity of the church. All other space is support space that may enhance the ministry in some way, but they do not define the basic capacity of the church to grow the way these three key areas do.

Balance among these three is a key. When any one of these three reach capacity, it will tend to slow down, or even stop the growth of the entire body over time.

We have found that some churches have been able to stretch the envelope for a time, but if something is not done about the amount of WORSHIP, EDUCATION, and PARKING space, the church will eventually find itself limited in its ministry.

What we find, then, is that *buildings don’t cause growth in churches, but they can stop it!*

**In worship, the church can easily calculate its capacity by using a rule of thumb** of about twenty inches per person on pews. There is good news here: sometimes Worship space is the easiest to multiply by simply going to a second worship service.

Beware, however, that going to a second worship service will rarely help with the growth of the church if the other two elements of education space and parking are not present in sufficient quantity. Unless you have taken care of these areas as well, going to two worship services may just produce frustration and a response like, “I told you it wouldn’t work!”

**Education space is also of great importance when evaluating the quantity of space for ministry.** Plan for recommended areas in individual classrooms. It takes about 35 square feet per preschooler (birth through age 5), 25 square feet per child (grade 1-6), and 12 to 15 square feet per person in youth and adult classrooms.

**Parking is the most frequently overlooked of the three types of growth space.** Many of our churches were constructed in a time when a large portion of the population walked to church. Research shows that it is common to find churches ministering in suburban, urban and even rural communities where the average ratio is about two people in attendance per car.

Don't allow local building officials or architects to trick you into planning for less than you really need by telling you they only require one space for every four seats in the worship center. That is not a growth-driven regulation, and is a fraction of what you really need to grow. Plan for one car for every two people you want in attendance.

### **Quality**

When you set out to evaluate your space from the perspective of its quality, **start by examining the homes, offices and retail space in the area of the people you are trying to reach.** Let this establish a standard of quality. The homes they live in, the offices they work in and the stores they shop in can communicate a level of expectation they have for their space.

If they are building modest homes, they will be satisfied with modest church facilities. But if they are building large, expensive homes, work in nicely appointed offices, and shop in upscale stores, you will know they will not feel comfortable in dated, aging, or unattractive buildings.

Some in the church may say this should not matter. The truth is, it does. We must remember *these are the people we are trying to reach.* Their hearts are not necessarily right with God. They may be **lost**.

To have an opportunity to minister to them we may need to be understanding enough of their culture to address their basic desire for a nicely built environment. Their culture and expectations may be as foreign to us as ministering in a foreign country, but we usually must learn to "speak the language" of their culture to be effective.

Church Buildings can have a great impact on the ability of the church to fulfill its purpose. Do not underestimate or neglect to plan for this important element in the life of the church. To provide space that is a more effective tool for ministry, consider both the quantity and the quality of your facilities.

*Help is available from the Church Architecture Department of LifeWay Church Resources. Call (615) 251-2466 for information.*

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