

Plan and Build with a Winning Attitude!

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Successful football teams seem to have several characteristics in common. No matter what style of offense or personality of coach, these teams are skilled at blocking, tackling, and other football fundamentals. They expect success, they prepare and execute a game plan tailored to optimize available personnel, and they minimize other costly mistakes.

Experience working with thousands of churches of all sizes has revealed a similar consistent pattern among those that have the most success in their building process and subsequent stages of growth and ministry. Here are a few foundational guidelines that can be applied to help make your next building project a success:

1. Develop a Stewardship Mindset.

The Parable of the Talents found in Matthew 25:14-29 (perhaps more appropriately called the Parable of the Stewards) gives insight into a kingdom investment approach rather than an expense approach. Remember that each steward was entrusted a different amount than the others, and was accountable according to that which was entrusted.

Which steward was ultimately commended? Was it the one that spent the least or the one that invested in the wisest manner? The one who spent the least was rebuked, and ultimately had his talents taken away and given to the steward who invested most wisely.

Far too many churches start planning with a view towards spending as little as possible, thus choosing to limit potential blessings and return on investment. Cheapness is not an approach that can be supported by scripture. How many churches have had intended blessings and resources given to other churches exercising wise stewardship?

Each church is a steward of resources belonging to the Master and entrusted for investment in the kingdom of God. Those resources are not limited to money alone, but include people and leadership resources, property and facilities resources, denominational resources, and time.

The wise church will carefully assess and utilize all these resources to realize a substantial return in touching lives for the Master. Consider all the resources available to your church. How can they be put together and invested accomplish God's purpose for your congregation?

Remember that each steward was not accountable for talents given to another steward, only his own. The important issue is not how much you have, but how you

use what you have. A church should not consider its own success or failure based upon another church, but on how effective it has been as steward of its own resources.

Likewise, in building planning, each church should focus on its own available resources and not on something that has been done at another church. One of the least effective ways for a church to decide what or how to build is to go around looking at what other churches have built. Instead, each church should develop a clear vision of its own future and then develop a strategic plan to accomplish that vision.

2. Develop a Master Plan for Balanced Growth.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that God has a plan to prosper his people (Jeremiah 29:11). Each church has the responsibility to seek out God's plan and define the mission and vision of the church in its community. An effective Master Plan is an essential tool for helping a church clarify that vision and then achieve it.

It is no longer necessary for a church to approach facilities planning and growth in a building by building, trial and error method. Over the past ten years LifeWay Church Architecture personnel have reinvented and redefined Master Planning for evangelical churches. LifeWay's method of Master Planning for church growth involves much more than the old ways of mere site planning for building placement. It involves planning for church growth in financially achievable, demographically balanced phases.

The master plan process helps the church determine its growth potential based upon property resources. It then determines the capacity of each building phase consistent with financial resources. Each building phase is subsequently assessed in proportion to planned growth built upon the capacity planned for the previous phase.

Demographics and planned growth are expressed in terms of balanced, age-proportioned capacities in worship space, educational space, and parking. Attention is given to multiple scheduling formats in worship and Sunday school, as applicable. Priorities are set based upon needs driven by successful growth in each phase until the site capacity is reached.

Winston Churchill astutely said " We shape our buildings and afterwards they shape us". Every church is shaped to a great extent by its facilities. Doesn't it make sense to shape your church facilities to support the desired ministry and growth results?

3. Adopt a Realistic Budget and Stick to It.

Wise investment requires faith, but not foolishness. Jesus admonished us to count the cost, whether in discipleship or in building (Luke 14: 28-30).

The church has three sources of revenue for building and property acquisition:

- ◆ Funds already in hand from savings or sale of existing property
- ◆ Funds which can be raised in a capital-fund raising process
- ◆ Funds which can be obtained through responsible short-term borrowing

A church should begin to set aside up to twenty-five percent of budget in savings as soon as a building project appears on the horizon. This will condition the budget for any borrowing needed later and possibly reduce the need to borrow at all.

Funds from sale of existing property should be cautiously considered when planning a project budget. First, proceeds from church property sales often fall short of expectations compared to land value plus replacement cost of buildings. Second, timing of sale is an issue if the church is still using the existing facilities.

A capital fund-raising campaign will be a part of virtually every successful church building process. The church should use the opportunity to grow its people in stewardship and to reduce or avoid indebtedness. Most churches will raise two to three times its undesignated income over a three-year period.

Responsible borrowing is a legitimate resource appropriate to most building projects. Limit borrowing to approximately twice the church's undesignated income so that debt payments remain below twenty-five percent of budget. Allowing for planned growth; debt can usually be repaid in three to five years after building occupancy.

Cash in hand, funds raised by the church, and responsible borrowing combine to establish the total project budget. Don't forget that the building construction budget will be about seventy-five to eight percent of total project budget, less property acquisition costs.

Once a budget has been established, much diligence and discipline will be required to stick to the budget. Great pressure will be applied to satisfy congregational "wants" at the expense of critical needs. Special interest groups and lobbyists will emerge with an agenda that would make a legislator cringe. Don't cave in. Be strong. Stick to your budget.

Equipped with these basic principles, you should be better prepared to lead your church forward with facilities planning and construction. Don't expect the road to be free from obstacles or difficulties. Like the championship football team, anticipate those obstacles in advance and put together a winning game plan.