From Vision to Reality

Lessons from Leadership

In today's economy, a growing church that is contemplating a building program cannot afford to make mistakes. When hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of sacrificially given dollars are on the line, how you engage your congregation in the "process" can be the difference between success and failure. The following is a summary of how one church in central Indiana worked to make their vision a reality.

Grace Church, in Mooresville, IN, had problems: a dated building, ad hoc additions to the facility, multiple levels with limited handicapped access, mold in the basement, inadequate space in every ministry area…and a growth rate of over ten percent per year. So how did Senior Pastor Jim Taylor and Administrative Pastor Gene Deverick lay a foundation for relocation success? They guided their congregation of 400 through four key steps to take their ministry from a vision to a reality:

1) Understand the Need
2) Cast the Vision
3) Build Unity
4) Spread It Around

Understand the Need

According to Pastor Taylor, because their current facility was maxed out in every ministry area, this was the easiest. "We worshiped in a gym, our youth played in our sanctuary, and our children met in the basement. The building that we were using was actually hindering our calling and our ministry. The building was simply not designed for the way we were using it."

Many times, buildings are "hindering" ministries, but may be ignored or dismissed by those in leadership who are not in tune with various ministry areas. A simple analysis of the church's space can create an awareness of these ministry "hindering" areas. With the following information, a clear understanding of the need can be established:

- The number of people being ministered to in the space
- The size and configuration of the space
- The location, or adjacencies, of the space in relation to other areas in the facility

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Cast the Vision

Church leadership hosted a weekend event that started Friday night and ended Saturday morning. The event was called "Vision Quest". A church consultant advised and contributed to the event to provide the "third-party, unbiased, expert opinion". The consultant walked them through presentations (made by ministry leaders) about the church and the community:

- The Church
  - General history of the church
  - Historical attendance growth patterns and examples of lack of space
  - Demographics of the congregation
  - Specific ministry reports with attendance and examples of lack of space

- The Community
  - Historical growth of population
  - Demographics of the population
  - An assessment of the church's strengths with the community's needs

- The Vision of Leadership
  - The ministry call that the Lord had given for the church
  - The alignment of that call with the needs of the community
  - The clear "hindrance" that the current facility was creating for ministry

The focus of the weekend event was to gain total congregational unity before initiating any of the phases of a building project. Pastor Deverick said that at the end of the event, nearly everyone stood up and said, "We need to change our facility to match our vision." Vision is one of the most critical steps that must be completed prior to starting a building project. Pastor Taylor, Pastor Deverick, their Leadership Team, and many of the church's members had invested several months developing the Vision that was presented at "Vision Quest".

Kevin Ford, of TAG Consulting, would simplify the process of clarifying the church's vision to three steps:

- Assess your situation
  - Research your local community – future trends and needs.
  - Survey your congregation – future trends and needs.
- Discern your DNA
  - Review the congregation surveys
    - Who are you? Make sure you have a clear sense of who you are.

- Discover your vision
  - Development of a Mission Statement
    - The best Mission Statement's help you say "No" to certain things.
  - Development of a Strategy
    - Strategies are priorities. How to be the most effective with limited resources.
  - Development of a Vision
    - A picture of the future that assumes successful implementation of the strategies.

Build Unity

"Vision Quest" was the kick-off to build broad based unity through out the congregation. The key, according to Deverick, was keeping people informed. A "Dream Team" was formed and began the process of working with the design and build professionals for the new facility. A video was one of many things used to keep the entire congregation up to speed on their new home. Along with the weekly announcements, video, power point renderings, and plan review sessions, Grace Church also began to change their ministries and expectations to match how they would be using their new facility. Deverick commented, "Change of any type can be challenging. We wanted to eliminate as many of those change barriers before actually making the transition to a building program."

They say that the quickest way to find who the uncommitted people are in your congregation is to enter into a building program. Grace's approach paid off. At the annual congregation meeting, a unanimous-100% vote of the membership to move forward was received.

Spread It Around

There is a startling George Barna statistic that within eighteen months of a major building project, the senior pastor will move on to another church. Pastor Taylor's advice to other pastors: "Bring good people into the process, empower them to make decisions, and then step out of it. My gift is building people, not building buildings." Pastor Deverick worked with a very capable building committee as the "ministry representative". Ninety percent of the effort of working with the architect and builder to get the new facility designed and built was performed by lay leaders in the church, allowing the ministry leaders to stay focused on people, not the "bricks and sticks".

The building committee is a critical link that has been commissioned to work with the design and build team to take the church's vision and make it a reality. This committee must strive, at every step, for Community of Spirit, not necessarily Unity of Perspective. The varied

backgrounds, perspectives, and professions of a healthy building committee will provide a mosaic of "best practice" ideas for your growing ministry to reach out to the church community and the community that surrounds you.

At a recent National Association of Church Design Builders Training Event, Jack Coffee, the building chairman for all of Southeast Christian Church of Louisville, Kentucky's building programs, shared six keys to improve the operation of your Building Committee:

1) Keep the committee small – three to five people.
2) Include communicators on the committee – a strong chairman is important.
3) Keep the Senior Pastor off of the committee, but informed – the pastor should be "insulated" from the stress and strain of a building program.
4) Have an empowered staff representative on the committee to function as the communication link to the pastor.
5) Choose people who will work well together – each member must have a humble, servant's heart.
6) Remain focused on the Mission of the Church.

Over the past twenty years, I have seen the good, the bad and the ugly when it comes to church building programs. Successful projects always have strong leadership, a shared vision for the ministry's future, and a phenomenally supportive and bought-in congregation. Grace Church is an excellent example of what makes a building project successful.

The above steps were taken two years prior to beginning construction of Grace Church's 46,670sf facility for their congregation of 400. Since occupying their new home, the results are amazing:

1) Attendance has increased by 100% to 800. An average increase of 15% per year.
2) The annual budget has increased from $600,000 to over $1,100,000.
3) Upwards Basketball, that they were unable to host prior to building, exceeds 300 kids every weekend.
4) Volunteerism has increased by 400%, from 50 to over 200 every weekend.
5) Attendance in every ministry area, in the new facility, has increased by over 100%.
6) Grace Church always wanted to be a "Community Center":
    - Grace Church is now a designated Red Cross Emergency Center.
    - Grace Church hosts several community events in their new facility, free of charge to the various organizations

Pastor Taylor summed up their facility situation by explaining, "The facility restrictions that we had before are now gone, allowing Grace Church to focus on ministry. The building has been an excellent platform to allow the Spirit to move our ministry and serve our community."

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Every congregation has different people, situations, finances, dynamics, locations, and challenges. One size will never fit all. Again, in today's economy, a growing church that is contemplating a building program, cannot afford to make mistakes. When hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of sacrificially given dollars are on the line, how you engage your congregation in the "process" can be the difference between success and failure. My hope is that by sharing the example of how Grace Church approached their program, you might benefit from their experience for your upcoming program.

If you are in the early stages of dreaming, thinking or planning for a building project, T&W Church Solutions can help. As central Indiana's only National Association of Church Design Builders (www.nacdb.com) certified firm, our NACDB Certified Church Consultants can assist you through the process of planning, designing and building your new facility. You can learn much more about T&W Church Solutions, the T&W People, their Passion and their Process at www.tw-church.com.

Kurt Williams, NACDB CCC, LEED AP, is a Design/Build veteran at T&W Church Solutions with over 25 years in the industry, 20 of those years guiding over 100 churches through the various stages of Planning, Designing and Building their new facilities. T&W Church Solutions is a Design/Build firm who partners with ministry-focused architects to serve the churches of Central Indiana as well as the only NACDB (National Association of Church Design Builders) Certified Firm in Central Indiana. Kurt can be reached at kwilliams@twcorp.net.