



---

## Master Planning: An Investment in Tomorrow's Generation

Planning for the future growth of your congregation and creating a compelling vision of the ministry opportunities are a common challenge that today's church faces. A Master Plan is the result of many events and actions. Master Planning means planning for people that you may never meet, in facilities that you may never see built. In summary, a Master Plan is the big picture of the possible – your church's vision in graphic form that looks at the past, the present, and the future. It outlines a logical phased growth plan that makes maximum use of the site and the church's financial resources.

A Master Plan is not just an investment for today's building project, but also an investment in generations to come. Planning today for future development will save the church tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of dollars over the life of a growing congregation while at the same time creating an exciting vision of where the ministry is heading. The Master Plan can be the catalyst that propels a church to the next level of ministry to reach those who are lost. Church has changed dramatically over the years from a spectator sport to an interactive experience. Forty years ago, the church existed to meet our spiritual needs. Fifteen years ago the church moved into counseling to meet our emotional needs. Ten years ago the church moved into community service and has continued to accelerate to the point where the facilities are used almost seven days a week.

A comprehensive Master Plan is more than the picture hanging in the lobby. A Master Plan is the result of many things prior to the "pretty picture":

- 1) Prayer
- 2) A Clear Vision and Mission
- 3) A "Healthy" Body of Believers
- 4) A "Healthy" Building Committee
- 5) Facility Modeling
- 6) Financial Analysis
- 7) Ministry Pre-Programming
- 8) Site Challenge Analysis
- 9) Facility Programming
- 10) Master Planning

### *Prayer*

Many times, we get so focused on doing the Lord's work that we forget that we can do nothing without the Lord. During Master Planning, we should be especially prayerful. The future for generations to come is being shaped during this process. "Pray without ceasing" for the Lord's leading and protection. What better time for Satan to sow chaos and discord? Put on the full armor of God and prepare for His richest blessing.



---

## Master Planning: An Investment in Tomorrow's Generation

### *A Clear Vision and Mission*

If the church cannot build a paragraph around their Vision, don't try to build a building around it. The Vision and Mission provide the cornerstone and true bearing for the building program. Vision and Mission cover four key areas that will affect a future building program: Purpose, People, Program and Property.

- 1) Purpose: Must be more specific than "Reaching the Lost".
- 2) People: Who are you trying to reach? Understand your internal and external demographics.
- 3) Program: Facilities must be designed around the Ministry Program.
- 4) Property: Can the property accommodate the Ministry?

Winston Churchill stated, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us." A building program that begins with the Vision and Mission of the church will enhance your ministry effort and shape generations to come.

### *A "Healthy" Body of Believers*

The average tenure of the senior pastor after a major building project is now 22 months, up from 18 months. There are several factors that contribute to this unfortunate statistic: the inability to delegate, the lack of leadership support, and poor planning. A greater and unquantifiable factor is the "health" of the congregation. Even the best building programs can be stressful. That stress is the "last straw" needed for "unhealthiness" to arise and for the pastor to become the proverbial lightning rod. Prior to beginning the process of even designing a new facility, understand the "health" of your congregation. There are several low cost tools to help you evaluate the health of your church. The most common is Precepts and Church Central's evaluations.



---

## Master Planning: An Investment in Tomorrow's Generation

### *A "Healthy" Building Committee*

The bible makes no reference to Building Committees...the only conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that they are a result of the Fall. All joking aside, how often do building programs run aground due to internal disagreements and personal agendas within the Building Committee? There are many more characteristics for a healthy Building Committee than we can list. The following list highlights some of the most important for a Committee made up of three to five Prayer Warriors:

- 1) Fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.
- 2) Full support of the Ministry Vision and Mission.
- 3) Emotional Stability.
- 4) Respected within the Body of Believers.
- 5) Common Sense.
- 6) Team Players and Consensus Builders.
- 7) Varied Backgrounds and Professions.
- 8) Diligent and Committed to the Process.
- 9) Creative Planning Skills.
- 10) Construction Knowledge.

The Building Committee has been commissioned to work with a design and build team to take the church's vision and make it reality. This committee must strive, at every step, for Community of Spirit, not 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 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 – the pastor should be "insulated" from the stress and strain of a building program.
- 4) Have a staff representative on the committee – a communication link.
- 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.



---

# Master Planning: An Investment in Tomorrow's Generation

## *Facility Modeling*

Unfortunately, the only place that a new church facility can be built with the finest of materials and at half of the cost is in the middle of a Building Committee meeting. Facility Modeling helps establish the expectations of the church as it relates to the amount of square footage needed to support the ministry, the costs associated with building the space, and the materials desired to be used. Again, there are tools in the market that can help you establish ballpark assessments of your ministry needs. The P3 Program used by the National Association of Church Design Builders is a free tool that can be found online at [www.nacdb.com](http://www.nacdb.com). Facility Modeling is best done with the key leadership of your church. The key leaders typically have the best grasp of ministry needs (not wants) to support the Vision and Mission of the church. With this information, an early assessment of the size of facility can be established along with a preliminary budget to construct the facility. Make sure that you have a complete budget from a builder that includes not only the construction costs, but also the design and engineering, the site work, and the fixtures and furnishings that will be needed once the facility is complete.

## *Financial Analysis*

Alignment of the ministry needs for building space with the ability to finance it may seem obvious, but often times is not. Creating a pretty picture with out the ability to actually fund the endeavor can be devastating. The typical church has the \$5 million Vision and the \$2 million ability to fund it...that is OK. This church just has \$3 million of future Master Planning Phases. The time to adjust the expectations of the church is NOW. Prior to actually getting into the Pre-Programming, Programming or Drawing, come to grips with the financial fact that you will probably not be able to build your entire Vision in phase one. A good financial analysis will keep your Build Team on the right track from the beginning and keep you focused on the possible parts of your Ministry Vision.

A common response to the "gap" between the facility model and the financial analysis is Value Engineering. Be careful that you truly Value Engineer and don't fall into the Pit of Cheap. The National Association of Church Facility Managers has determined that over the forty-year life of a church facility the total costs involved from construction to maintenance and upkeep breaks down as follows:

- 75% Maintenance, Upkeep and Repair
- 14% Finance Costs and Interest
- 11% The Initial Cost to Construct the Facility



---

## Master Planning: An Investment in Tomorrow's Generation

Don't let your first response to the "gap" to be one of cheapening the materials used. Often times, that decision today becomes a tremendous burden tomorrow. When trying to make the best decisions for your church, consider a balance between the Ministry Space (Project Square Footage); the Materials (Project Quality); and the Money (Project Budget). A good Design-Build Firm can help you discover the pro's and con's for every material considered and the cost (both long term and short) implications with that decision.

### *Ministry Pre-Programming*

Pre-Programming is typically done with senior leadership of the church. Once there is a clear understanding of the Vision and Mission of the church, and initial alignment is established between the possible size of the facility and the ability to finance it, the Leadership Team has some hard questions to answer:

- 1) What is the Growth Strategy for your Church?
- 2) What are the Strengths of your Ministry?
- 3) What are the Challenges facing your Ministry?
- 4) What makes your Ministry Unique?
- 5) Why is your Ministry Growing?

It is imperative that Church Leadership understands who they are, why the ministry is growing, and what they will do as they continue to grow. Projecting the potential growth of the ministry is difficult. Analysis of local demographic trends as well as internal trends will allow your design-build team to evaluate and counsel you on the best approach.

The result of Pre-Programming is typically Ministry Space (Project Square Footage) in excess of the Money (Project Budget). A process of continually aligning and balancing Ministry Space, Materials, and Money is critical. Make sure that your design-builder is vigilant in with this alignment and is prepared to offer Value Engineering ideas to maintain the balance needed. Remember that when you are spending the LEAST amount of money in the process, you have the MOST amount of influence on the project. The most valuable, cost effective changes to a building plan are made on paper early in the process.



---

# Master Planning: An Investment in Tomorrow's Generation

## *Site Challenge Analysis*

The Vision and Mission of the church along with the programs and ministries offered will dictate the amount of land needed to allow for future growth. Several factors impact the actual amount of useable land that is available for construction. It is during the Site Challenge Analysis that churches may find that they cannot meet the growth of their ministry at their current location and need to acquire adjoining property, investigate relocation, or begin the process of planting new churches in the surrounding areas. A detailed Site Challenge Analysis will supply information that is absolutely critical in the development of the Master Plan as well as establishing the costs involved in developing the property. Key issues that a Site Challenge Analysis should address are:

- 1) Parking Requirements
- 2) Egress/Ingress Issues
- 3) Right-of-Way Expansion
- 4) Easements and Set Backs
- 5) Green Space Requirements
- 6) Topography
- 7) Wetlands
- 8) Flood Plains/Flood Ways
- 9) Storm Water Retention
- 10) Water and Sewer/Well and Septic Requirements

Once again, step back with the information that you have gained to this point and evaluate the budget allowed for the site improvements. Site work is becoming a larger component of a building project due to utility extension costs and water quality control and retention costs. Don't get blind-sided with site improvement costs in the final stages of Master Planning and Design that can be quantified early in the process.

## *Facility Programming*

Programming takes place when the net is cast wide, gathering information from every ministry area of the church. The information gathered is the Ministry Space that is needed, as determined by those actually involved directly in that ministry. Key components to Discovering Ministry Space are:

- 1) A clear understanding of the current demographic makeup of the church.
- 2) A clear understanding of the current and future needs of the ministry.
- 3) A clear understanding of the community demographic and projected trends.



---

## Master Planning: An Investment in Tomorrow's Generation

A “Balanced Space” approach is the best approach to Programming and Master Planning. The model is when your worship space is at 70% capacity, so is your classroom space, your fellowship space, and your parking lot. Your church will seldom grow beyond your lowest limiting factor: Worship, classroom, fellowship or parking lot. A comprehensive program will determine your limiting factors and provide the information for a Master Plan that will provide for phased growth in each ministry area at a financial pace that will not outgrow your financial capacity. At the risk of beating a dead horse, once again, step back with the information that you have gained to this point and evaluate the budget allowed for your building project. In a typical process, detailed drawings have not been developed yet. Barna states that over half of churches in America have a set of plans that they will never build, due primarily to being over budget. Determine what you can afford prior to drawing it. A Master Plan truly casts the Vision for the future, but the phase one of that Master Plan is what your congregation is the most excited about seeing become reality. Make sure that the first drawings that they see are in line with the financial capacity of your church. Nothing is more discouraging than getting excited about the next step, only to find that when that step is finally taken, it is much different than anticipated.

### *Master Planning*

We are finally to Master Planning. You may find it interesting that in and of itself Master Planning is not an event. Sure, the product is a “Pretty Picture” in the lobby. But it is so much more, it is a road map for people that you may never meet, in facilities that you may never see built. Master Planning is a Vision of the future, developed with and by people who have a heart for the Lord, for their church, and for future generations.

Kurt Williams, 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. Kurt can be reached at [kwilliams@twcorp.net](mailto:kwilliams@twcorp.net).

Article as Published in Church & Worship Technology Magazine, February 2007  
and taught at the NACDB Certified Church Consultant Training in Arlington, TX  
for annual training and certification.