



The Top 11 Things That Pastors Wish They Knew Before They Built

Here's the bad news: The average tenure of a pastor after a significant building project is twenty-two months. Over half of the churches in the U.S. have a set of plans (stuck behind the pastor's door) that will never be built. To top it off, construction is the second most litigated industry in the U.S., behind medical. Some pastors will deal with these statistics by never building. Some will forge ahead alone and often become one of these statistics. The good news is that others will seek out those who have built to gain counsel and wisdom.

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed"

– Proverbs 15:22

"Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding"

– Proverbs 3:13

Discussions with hundreds of pastors about the good, the bad, and the ugly of building projects has produced a "Top Eleven" list of advice and wisdom that may keep your church from becoming one of those unfortunate statistics. Without further ado, let's take in the wisdom of those who have already survived the adventure of designing and building a new facility. The Top Eleven things that pastor's wish they knew before they built are:

- Church Health – Congregation readiness for a building project.
- Vision and Mission – Alignment/unification for a building project.
- The Finance Process – The requirements and time involved.
- Building Committee Structure – The right people with the right heart.
- Delivery Systems – How the facility would be designed and built.
- Managing Expectations – The "wants" of the people vs. budget.
- Stewardship Choices – Cheap decisions today will cost tomorrow.
- Property Issues – The requirements and time involved to build on the land.
- Building Codes – The State and Local requirements to build.
- Building Plans – The ability to read and understand the plans.
- "Kicking the People Out" – The building is not the destination.



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Church Health

A Church Health assessment remains the most neglected, but most critical step for most churches. Dr. Thom Rainer, author of Simple Church, Surprising Insights from the Unchurched, and The Unchurched Next Door, states, “I would not consider a building program without first conducting a church health assessment”. There are several different tools and organizations that can conduct a health assessment, ranging in cost from a few hundred to several thousand dollars. In light of a several hundred thousand to several million dollar building project, the cost is almost negligible. Pastors who were surveyed, felt that when, not if, a problem arose on their building project the health of their congregation determined the ferocity of the response from their members. The healthier congregations tended to respond in a less aggressive and more trusting way toward their leadership. The un-Healthy congregation tends to find the first construction problem to rally around and make it the catalyst for all other perceived woes of the church’s leadership. Make sure that your people are ready and healthy enough for any sized building project.

Vision and Mission

A clearly defined, communicated, and understood vision and mission is imperative. Almost every one of the “Top Things” hinge and will be guided by vision and mission. Every Pastor agreed that without a clear vision and mission, that everyone understood, effective progress in designing and building their new facility would have been nearly impossible. When a church is aligned and focused on why they are here and what the building needs to do to further the ministry, the design process and all of the decisions that are made during that process suddenly become easier. Make sure that you have a clear vision and mission for your church and thus, your building project.

Finance

Church financing has changed dramatically over the past fifteen to twenty years, for the better. More and more financial institutions are familiar with church finance and understand the unique dynamics that a church budget creates. With that said, an increasing number of churches wait until the last moment to get their finance in place. A good friend has often said, “Money is not everything, but it is kind of like oxygen”. Every Pastor should know exactly how much their church can afford to finance and the monthly effect that the payments will have on their budgets. The most common “I wish we would have...” comment/advice that I heard, of all the topics, was to have a financial advisor as part of the church team. The financial advisor needs to be someone in the industry that can talk the same language and understand the requests and comments of the financial institutions with whom the church is working. With the number of fine institutions that offer financial services to the church, there is really no excuse for not having your financial house in order. Make sure that you have a financial advisor and a great financial institution on board early, and know exactly how much you can afford to build before bringing on the architects and builders for your project.



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Building Committees

The Building Committee is truly the “right hand” of the Pastor. The individuals who make up this committee will not only determine the success of the project, but the level of wear and tear on the Pastor as the project advances. Building committees are greatly important and can become greatly distracting, if not solidly grounded. How often do building programs run aground due to internal disagreements and personal agendas within the building committee? There are more characteristics for a healthy building committee than we can list. However, the following are some of the most important:

- 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.

Make sure that you have a solid group of three to five individuals to lead the building program for you.

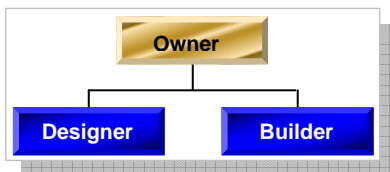


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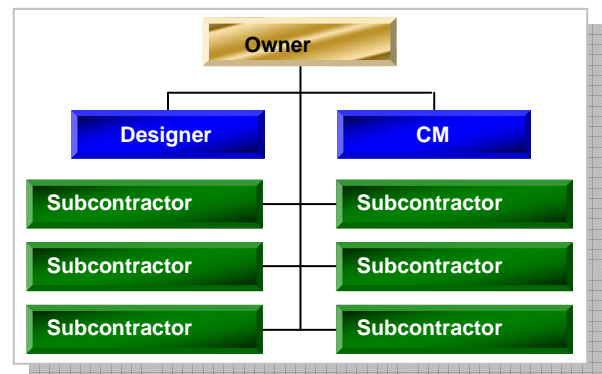
Design and Construction Delivery

Church building committees spend countless hours wrestling with the approach they will take to design and build their new facilities, and with good reason. Construction still remains the number two most litigated industry in America today behind medical. The result is almost \$.20 of every construction dollar goes towards claims and litigation. So how does a church protect themselves from becoming a statistic, while building positive relationships with their designers and builders? Often the approach taken to design and build is a reflection of the building committee, their comfort with risk, and their personal past experiences with similar projects. Today's church building committees face a harder task of selecting an approach than their predecessors, due primarily to the "hybridization" of the traditional three delivery systems: Design-Bid-Build, Construction Management and Design Build. There are distinct Pro's and Con's to each approach. Make sure that you understand the pro's and con's of the various delivery systems and have identified who (you, the architect or the builder) will be responsible for the various situations that will occur on your building project.

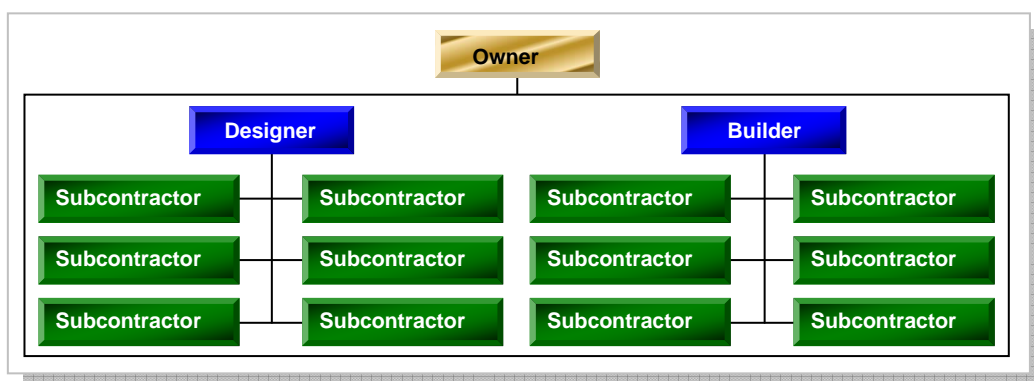
Design-Bid-Build



Construction Management



Design-Build





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Managing Expectations

Pastors consistently noted that the expectations of the congregation were typically in excess of reality in several arenas of the project. Facility modeling can help 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. 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. 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 without 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-construction phases of your process, you need to come to grips with the financial fact that you will probably not be able to build your entire vision in phase one. Good “expectation management” will keep your build team on the right track from the beginning and keep them focused on the priorities of your ministry vision.

Stewardship Choices

There is a saying that the only place that a building can be built under budget and with the best of all materials is in a building committee meeting. There will always be a tension between the square footage needed for ministry, the funds available to build with, and the quality of the materials that you might use. A common “crises” that churches face is too much building, not enough money.

The first step taken, under the premise of stewardship, is to use lesser-cost materials so as to not decrease the size of the building. The National Association of Church Facility Managers (NACFM) has determined that over the first forty-years of a church facility’s life the total costs involved with the project breakdown as follows:

- 75.0% Maintenance, Upkeep and Repair
- 14.5% Finance Costs & Interest
- 10.0% Building Construction Costs
- 0.5% Building Contractor Fees



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A “stewardship” decision today, often times, equates to a financial burden for the next generation. Every Pastor that had been involved with choosing a “cheaper” material, regretted the decision over time. Make sure that ALL of the costs (today’s and tomorrow’s) are taken into account when wrestling with the balance of ministry space, money and materials.

Property Issues

Many a Pastor has been involved with the donation or purchase of the perfect piece of ground for the church. The due diligence part of any land purchase can make or break any deal. With the church, it is absolutely critical. Several factors impact the actual amount of useable land that is available for construction. It is during a site analysis that churches may find that they cannot meet the growth of their ministry at their current location and need to acquire adjoining property or investigate relocation. 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) Zoning
- 2) Neighborhood issues and requirements/covenants
- 3) Permit fees and restrictions
- 4) Parking requirements
- 5) Egress/ingress issues
- 6) Right-of-Way expansion
- 7) Easements and set backs
- 8) Landscaping and green space requirements
- 9) Topography
- 10) Wetlands
- 11) Flood plains/flood ways
- 12) Storm water retention
- 13) Water and sewer/well and septic requirements
- 14) Environmental hazards and concerns

A comprehensive site master plan should be part of the ministry plan for your property; some might even call this a “vision plan”. Master planning is a topic all to itself. It suffices to say that a master plan, showing land development out to 5, 7 and 10 years, should be clearly defined prior to breaking ground on the first phase. Pastors have been surprised many years later how a simple mistake made ten years ago in the middle of their twenty acre parcel of land has significantly altered their future building plans or cost them significant amounts of money to rectify.



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Building Codes

The number of requirements and the costs associated with compliance to meet the building code was a surprise to most Pastors. Though the burden to meet the building code requirements fell on the designer, the costs associated with them became the burden of the church. Codes, such as the ADA – American Disabilities Act, are fairly well known and easy to comply with. Other codes dealing with such things as wind loads, snow loads, dead loads, and live loads are less obvious, but very important for the design and regulatory approvals by your state and local building permit office. Other important issues that your designer should be familiar with are insulation and ventilation codes, fire sprinkler codes, plumbing codes, HVAC (heating and cooling) codes, and electrical codes. Each individual area in the country has unique adaptations of the major national building codes that have been changed for that specific geography or fire concern. Make sure that your design-build team is familiar with your locale and has experience with you state and local permit offices.

Building Plans

Almost every Pastor struggled with understanding or reading, the building plans. In every situation, the design-builder reviewed the plans, page by page, but much of the detail was not completely understood. Pastors that asked the design-builder to slow down or explain in more detail came to understand very important elements of the design. The surveyed Pastors advised having the building committee chairman familiar with the plans and all of the details of the project (not the pastor) and having an open, trusting relationship with the builder. This allowed the pastor and the building chairman to “relax” about the finer points of the plans and rely on the expertise of their design and build team for a good result.

“Kicking People Out”

Pastors felt that there was a tendency to stop and relax after the building project was complete. Some felt that their congregations stopped all together because the goal, the building, was complete. The building is not the destination; it is simply a tool for ministry. More than a few of the Pastors referred to “kicking people out” of the building to reach out to others in need of the Gospel. A building project can be tiring, and a time of celebration and relaxation is to be encouraged and expected. Reminding the people, from the very beginning of the process, that the building is actually for reaching out to others tends to lessen the “down time” that the congregations needed before getting out and sharing the excitement of their new building with others in the community.



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Every building project is an adventure. Anyone that shares that his or her building project did not have one single challenge has probably suppressed the memory. Selecting a great design and build team, with a heart to serve the Lord, can make what could be a time of ministry distraction, a time of ministry focus. With that said, any design and build team that claims they do not have any challenges on their projects, has not built or are slightly less than honest. Challenges happen. With the wisdom of others who have “survived” the building process and the advice of kingdom-minded design and build professionals, those challenges can be greatly reduced. My prayer is that these “Top 11 Things” that others have already experienced will add to the advice that you seek and that your ministry plans will succeed greatly. Now go out and make your Vision a Reality!!!

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