



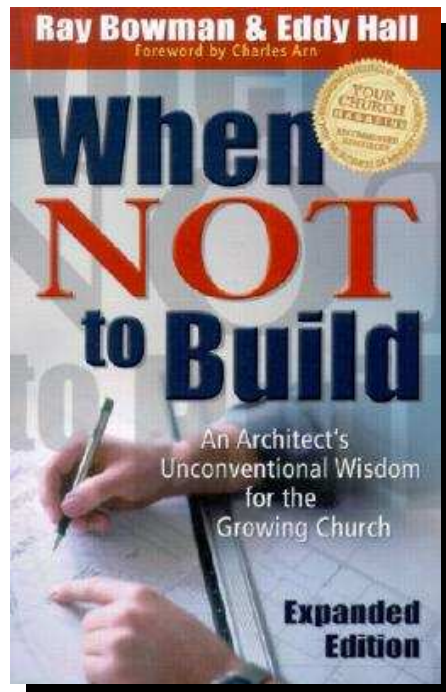
When Not To Build...

Why Build New Buildings, When You Can “Repurpose” Existing Ministry Space for Half the Cost?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “Repurpose” as “to use or convert for use in another format, to give a new purpose or use to”. The Investment Dictionary defines “Repurpose” as “The use of something for a purpose other than its original intended use. Repurposing an item can be done by modifying it to fit a new use, or by using the item as is in a new way.”

Today’s economic climate has created great savings opportunities for churches who want to purchase design and build services. At the same time, there is a sensitivity to investing too much into the “bricks and sticks” of buildings while many of the churches members may be struggling to make financial ends meet. So, what is a growing church to do to accommodate the people growth when their financial growth is flat, or even declining?

The answer is to Not Build new buildings, but instead to look at what you have and how you might use it better for your ministry needs. I receive funny looks when I hand a pastor, or building chairman, a copy of Ray Bowman and Eddy Hall’s book, When NOT to Build. I am a fan of their simple logic and most importantly the stewardship lesson that they convey in this easy read.





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Mr. Bowman and Hall have boiled down church facility expansion to three simple principles:

- The Principle of Focus
 - A Church should build only when it can do so without shifting its focus from ministering to people to building a building.
- The Principle of Use
 - A Church needs more space only when it is fully using the space it already has.
- The Principle of Provision
 - A Church should build only when it can do so within the income God has provided and without using funds needed for the church’s present and future ministries to people.

At first glance, the answer to all three of the above principles may be in the affirmative, or are they?

- The Principle of Focus – **Check!**
 - New space is needed so that we can minister to the people.
- The Principle of Use – **Uhhh???**
 - A great percentage of the time, further evaluation may lead the church to question how they are truly making the best use of their existing space, or how that space might be reconfigured to accommodate their growing ministry.
- The Principle of Provision – **Uh Oh!!!**
 - If we build it, they will come...along with their tithe’s and offerings is a dangerous and faulty assumption to make.

The Answer: Re-Purposing your Existing Space

“We’ve never done it that way before”, echoes through dying churches across America that are failing to find new ways to reach current generations with the gospel. It is also the sentiment of some churches who are spending vast amounts of their precious financial resources building new square footage when, they could be spending upwards of 60% less by working with what they already have.

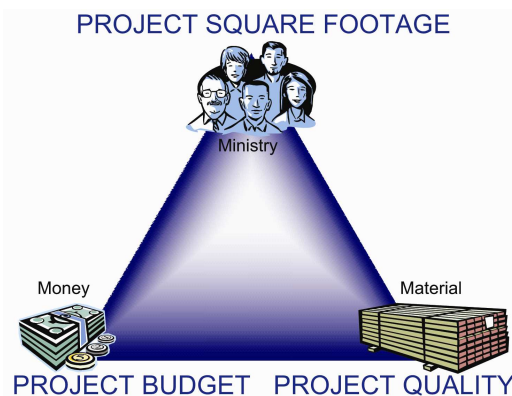
George Barna, of the Barna Group, has determined that church attendance from 1991 to 2004 has dropped 6%, from 49% to 43% respectively. The U.S. Census Bureau shows that the population in the United States has risen from 256 million to 297 million, in the same time period, for an increase of 16%. Also in that same time frame, Construction Cost Data indicates that “religious construction” grew 60%, from \$5 billion to almost \$8 billion per year.



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A quick summary of the figures produces a pretty bleak return on investment. The US Church has invested a tremendous amount of financial resources (\$8 billion) to reach a growing population (297 million people in 2004. The figure for 2010 is 311 million.) with a return of only reaching 43% of that population, and that percentage is decreasing. There are a number of possibilities and discussion points about why the church is failing to reach the other 57% of our population (169 million people). The focus of this piece is how by “Repurposing” existing space we can reduce the amount of money required to provide relevant space for the ministry to effectively reach those 169 million people who do not know the Lord.



There is always a balance of “The 3-M’s”: Ministry (square footage), Materials (finish level) and Money (money!!!). There will always be a tension between the square footage needed for ministry, the quality of the materials used and the funds available to build with. A common “crises” that churches face is too much building, not enough money.

Bowman and Hall, again, hit the nail right on the head when they state, “If the church’s mission is to minister to people in Christ’s name, church buildings can have only one legitimate function: to serve as tools to help church members better fulfill that mission. We can no longer afford to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on “sacred” but unnecessary buildings that lie vacant 80 or 90 percent of the time. If our focus is truly on people rather than buildings, that reality will shape the kinds of buildings we design, how we use them, how much we spend on them and how much time, energy and money we keep free for the real work of the church; meeting people’s needs”.



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Jon Byrum, principal architect for Byrum Architects of Indianapolis, chimes in to say, “As designers, we’ve always looked at ways to re-purpose existing spaces in solving the needs of our clients, at ways to double-up the use of spaces by making them multi-functional, and considered future expandability in our design solutions. In today’s climate, when budgets are tighter than ever, the re-purposing of space has taken on a more critical role in helping our clients get the most from the resources available. Our design approach has always been to re-use, re-purpose, re-new, and most importantly be re-sponsive to the client’s needs.” Byrum goes on to say, “The first response to the feel that space is limited is to build more space. Many churches are surprised that simply by looking at the spaces a little differently and by slightly rearranging within the existing four walls a very solid solution presents itself rather quickly.”

Mel McGowan, president of Visioneering Studios, has coined the term “architectural evangelism” to describe how the design of a church’s interior spaces and exterior elevations “preach the gospel to people in ways that meet the eye”. In an interview with The Christian Standard, McGowan, commenting on the “message” that a structure sends to the community, answered, “Part of good stewardship is understanding you not only meet the bare bones functional needs, but when designed with excellence, you actually convey the church’s unique identity and story to people driving by and entering the front door.” McGowan continues, “The idea of a multi-million dollar facility that sits empty six days of the week and is an economic and social black hole in the community is something that just is not appealing to a lot of next generation leaders.” Repurposed, multi-use space should be the stewardship goal for every church, especially in this time of economic concern.

Re-Purposing space is a very cost effective solution for those churches that are already feeling the disconnect between their facility, those they are trying to reach and their ministry efforts. A few questions to ponder to see if repurposing space, in lieu of new construction, might be the solution:

- Are funds for any facility/capital project extremely limited?
- Does your facility “say” who you are, or is it dated and un-welcoming?
- Do you feel that the space you currently have is being used effectively?
- Do you have space that is undesirable, and thus not used at all?
- Has the vision or the DNA of your church changed?
 - Can your current facility support the new ministry direction?
- Has the demographic or target of who you are wanting to reach changed?
 - Can your current facility support the new ministry direction?



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In closing, Bowman states, “To meet the needs of the growing church and preserve its growing edge, a different kind of architect is needed, one for which most architects have not been trained. The growing church needs not a single-use facility but a multi-use facility – one where almost every space is designed to be used for multiple functions seven days a week. My work with growing churches has forced me to abandon many of my traditional design ideas and to adopt – often from the churches I work with – designs with innovative multi-use features.”

T&W works with growing churches in central Indiana assisting them through the process of designing repurposing and building worship facilities. Our website (www.tw-church.com) contains valuable information about T&W and the process that we use with our church clients. The NACDB (National Association of Church Design Builders) website (www.nacdb.com) is another great resource of information for growing churches that are considering expansion and you will also find that T&W is the only NACDB Certified Firm in Central Indiana.

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.