

Plan & Plan Again

WITH PROPER PLANNING YOU CAN AVOID COMMON CONSTRUCTION PITFALLS

By Kurt Williams

The groundbreaking ceremony was a success. The excitement has been building for many months, and now, the big equipment is on the site, and the dirt is flying. Before much longer, other things are flying; the Pastor isn't as accessible as he was before; the building doesn't look exactly like what you were shown, and it even looks a little smaller than you expected, and now a new term has been added to your vocabulary—change order. The last and most unfortunate part of the story is that the reason that Pastor has not

been accessible is that he has been following a “call” to leave and pastor at another church. The progression of many church construction projects tends to follow sad, but predictable, stages:

- ▶ Enthusiasm
- ▶ Disillusionment
- ▶ Panic
- ▶ The search for the guilty
- ▶ The punishment of the innocent
- ▶ Praise and honor for the non-participants



The common pitfalls that church construction projects face are: lack of prayer, poor pre-planning, poor budgeting, pastoral staff too involved, lack of change order management, poor material selections and improper legal protection.

Prayer

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” —James 5:16

Anything without prayer is destined to fail. Yet so many times, prayer is extensively used during the planning and designing phase of the process as we seek God’s wisdom for the design that will fulfill the ministry requirements at the prescribed budget; only to forget to pray during the construction phase. I cannot over-emphasize the power of prayer for a construction project: the safety of the workers, the unity of the church, the continued commitment to financial giving, the influence of God for your community through this facility, the Saving Grace of our Lord to be understood by the men working on the project.

Pre-planning and Master Site Planning

“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” —Proverbs 15:22

Pre-planning covers a multitude of issues and challenges that the church, if not dealt with today, will face tomorrow. The lack of pre-planning may not impact the most current construction project, but will most definitely affect subsequent phases, or eliminate the possibility for future phases to even take place. A comprehensive master site plan of your entire property is an absolute must. Utility location, parking lot configurations and placement of future structures will save money in future phases and will also cast the vision for the future with the congregation. A good master plan will also help you determine if you have enough property to support the long-term ministry vision and help in developing a future property acquisition plan.

Budgeting & Control

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?” —Luke 14:28

Every growing church suffers from the “eyes bigger than the pocketbook” syndrome. It usually takes on the form of the \$5 million vision with the \$3 million financial capacity. Though good for the master planning of the entire property, drawing and showing

the \$5-million building, without fully understanding the budget impact, can become a crippling hurdle to get over. It is often said that the only place that a church facility is built with the finest materials and a 20 percent less cost than all the “other churches” in town is in the building committee meeting. Seek professional advice early when planning and budgeting for your new facility expansion. Poor budgeting in the planning stage of the process results in crisis management followed by hard decisions of what to cut back on to bring everything in line. Reducing square footage, deleting architectural features, or opting for lesser quality materials are common approaches to the budget crisis. Good planning and budgeting will greatly reduce this particular line of stress.

Protect Your Pastoral Staff

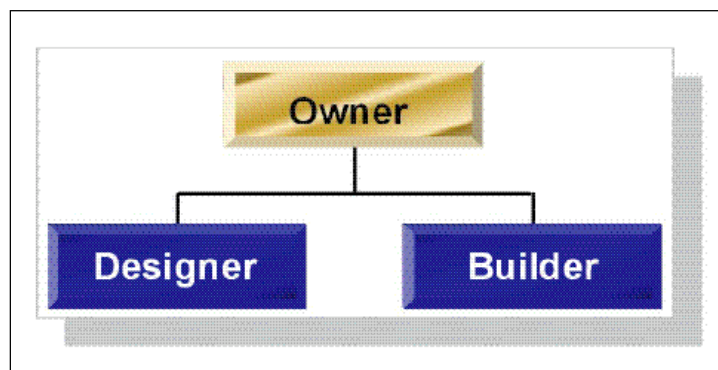
“Moses’ father-in-law replied, ‘What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.’ But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.” —Exodus 18:17, 21, 23

The impression we have of our pastor’s abilities and capacities are much greater than our own abilities and capacities. Some might even say that we hold our pastors up to a super-human standard. “The construction of our new building is only going to take a few months, surely Pastor can handle that!?” Before you know it, the congregation feels that the pastor is not meeting their needs, and he has just received a call to pastor a church two states away. The pastor is there to shepherd the flock—build people, not build buildings. Most pastors cannot do both. A “point man,” typically the building committee chairman, is a vital component to the building project and to the pastoral leadership of the church.

Change Order Management

“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” —James 1:16-17

Chart 1



The amount of change orders on any given project can be directly tied to the amount of energy and effort given to pre-planning and the delivery system chosen. Pre-planning cannot be overemphasized to decrease the number of “surprises” that arise on the typical project. The delivery system is also a major contributor to changer orders, or the lack there of. There tend to be three primary delivery systems for today’s church to pick from: design-bid-build, construction management or design-build. Regardless the method of delivery, the integration of professionals, as early as possible, is key.

With the traditional design-bid-build, the church invests most of its time with the designer and then asks several builders to submit bids for the work. The builders have had little involvement in the process and thus no “ownership” of the plan. The result of every discrepancy in the design is a change order to the church. (see Chart 1)

With the construction management approach, the church works with the designer and the construction manager to establish good relations and value engineering early in the process. Upon completion of the plans, the construction manager bids out to many subcontractors (upwards of 30 to 50) to establish the final construction cost. The church holds the agreements with the subcontractors and the manager’s role is to schedule, ensure quality and approve payment requests. Every plan discrepancy results in a change order. The key difference between design-bid-build and construction management, is that instead of one change order for each occurrence the church must decipher a multitude of change orders from each individual subcontractor for each occurrence. (see Chart 2)

The design-build approach appears to be the best and most common course taken according to a Penn State study done in 1998. The study found that design-build resulted in 6 percent less project cost, 10 percent less change orders and was 23 percent faster than other delivery systems. The key to the success of design-build and less change orders is that the designers and builders are partnered together from the very beginning. The result of building upon each team members’ experience is an “ownership” of the solution for the church and a drastic reduction in the risk of change orders. (see Chart 3)

Chart 2

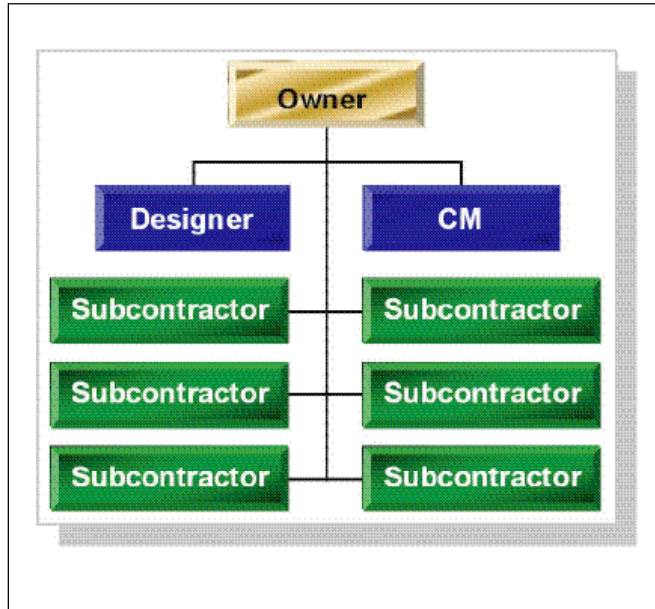
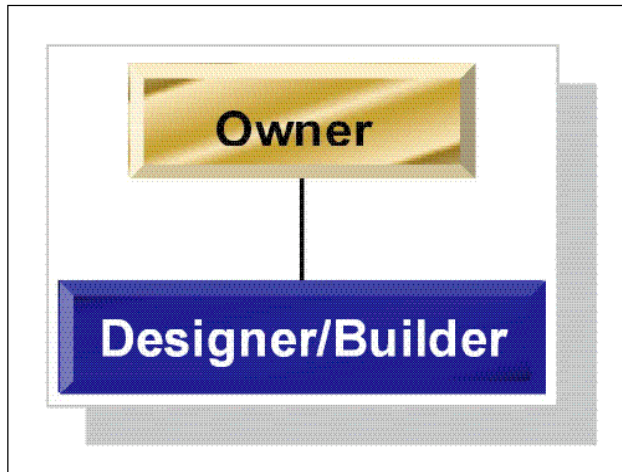
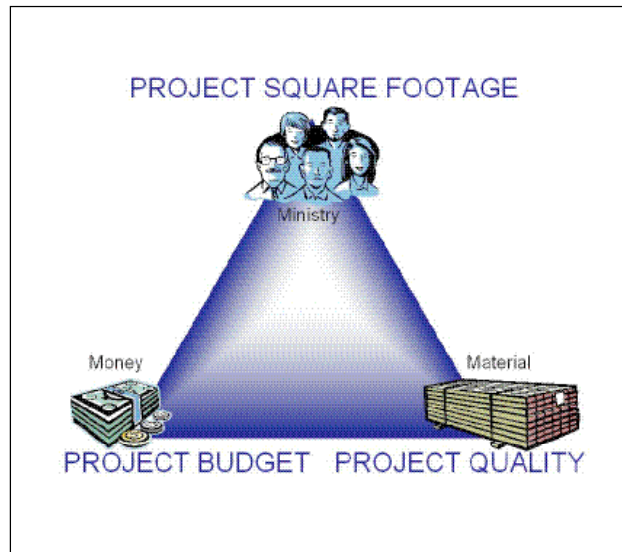


Chart 3



Material Selections

“I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work.” –1 Corinthians 3:10, 12



The balance of the “three-M’s” is a challenge with long-term implications. The “M’s” are materials, money and ministry space. When the budget gets tight, cutting corners on the quality of materials is a common and unfortunate step. The church must take into account that facilities are being used virtually seven days a week in an environment that is slightly less than gentle. Savings can

be realized without sacrificing quality or performance. Another consideration would be the life cycle cost of the materials selected today on the generations of tomorrow. Over a 40-year period of time, it was found that 75 percent of all costs associated with the church facility went towards maintenance and repair, 14 percent to finance and interest, and only 11 percent to the initial construction costs of the facility.

Legal Protection

“There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush to evil, a false witness who pours lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” –Proverbs 6:16-19

Construction is the second most litigated industry in the United States. Due to this fact, over 20 cents of every construction dollar goes toward the funding of claims and litigation. Your contractor can greatly reduce the risk borne by the church through stringent insurance requirements and safety standards for all subcontractors and suppliers working on the project. Requiring lien waivers with every invoice received and paid can eliminate mechanics liens filed by subcontractors and material suppliers for lack of payment. The design professional should also have adequate errors and omissions insurance to cover mistakes in the plans that result in expensive remediation.

A good design and build team, with a heart to serve the Lord, can make what could be a time of ministry distraction into a time of ministry focus. Selecting a team to serve your ministry should be based on the relationship with the team members that you will be interacting with regularly through the course of the process, the past experience of each team member, and the ability of each team member to synergize with the others to develop cost-effective solutions for your project. Every project, first and foremost, is all about God. The next thing a project is all about is people. Great people can steer your church through the landmines of the construction process and protect you and your congregation from the listed pitfalls. ❖

Kurt Williams is a design-build veteran at T&W Corp. with more than 20 years in the industry. An active contributing member of the National Association of Church Design Builders (NACDB), T&W Corp. is a design-build firm dedicated to serving the churches of Central Indiana. For more information, contact Williams at kwilliams@twcorp.net, call 371.244.7637 or visit www.tw-corp.com. Ministry advice on church building is also available through the NACDB at www.nacdb.com.