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## "FROM A TO Z ON CHURCH BUILDING AND REMODELING" - A SYNOPSIS

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The church is full, the pews are packed, and...that's a problem. In fact, it has been for some time. Visitors have to excuse their way into the vacant center of the pew. There is no room in existing classes, much less available space to begin new ministries. The foyer is too small, the basement ceiling too low, the walls are leaking, the wiring needs replaced, more parking is needed, and the list continues. Balanced against these needs is the knowledge that real growth at the current site is nearly impossible. Any money spent on the existing facility will most likely be lost when the church must acquire another building or site to continue growing. If any of this sounds familiar, the dilemma of physical growth is probably being faced. Will a building program help or harm the growth of the church? Typically, this is faced with a certain amount of trepidation. Tales abound concerning everything that can go wrong in a building project; yet, some work out just fine. The key is knowledge beforehand and the ability to communicate correctly. What follows is a limited synopsis of a resource for pastors and building committees entitled, "From A To Z on Church Building and Remodeling", written and published by Paul Spite. It is designed to produce confidence in both the ability and desire to embark upon the physical growth of the church.

**Functions of the Church:** The first question needing answered before any project begins is why the church wishes to build. The early church, established by the followers of Christ, had no buildings, spread the gospel from home to home, and in doing so, personally evangelized their world. Three hundred years later, Christians were finally allowed to meet openly in buildings. After centuries of "church" attendance, we now seem content to come to weekly services and support pastors as they minister to the needs of the congregation. Yet, we are all called to be ministers of the Gospel and the Word. Unless the congregation is committed to spreading the Gospel on a personal level, growth will not occur past the number of people to whom the pastor can minister. This is not to say a building is not needed. It should merely be recognized that church buildings are only a tool the real church uses to minister to the needs of the body of Christ and the community. A building project should be entered into only to enhance the effectiveness of this tool.

The ministries the building must facilitate fall mainly into categories of worship, education, and fellowship. The establishment of the tabernacle of David makes it clear God considers worship a key element of His relationship with mankind. From corporate worship, we tend to draw strength as individuals. Regardless of the form of worship, the design of the facility should be derived from it, rather than allowing the building design to dictate what form of worship is possible. Any liturgical elements should be considered in the design. Acoustics and sound systems should accommodate both speech and various types of music if used in the services. Spaces should be flexible enough to be easily adapted for special occasions and observances. Places for personal worship, such as altars, confessionals, prayer rooms, etc., such should be included in the design. Education in the Word and Christian living is a need most churches attempt to address. Classrooms need to be flexible to handle changing class sizes as ages and programs change over time. Along with these spaces comes the need for offices, restrooms, and circulation space. Storage is always a concern, more so when spaces are planned as multi-purpose. The degree of fellowship to be accommodated is sometimes a controversial topic. Those who say the supper room should not compete with the upper room, forget they were usually the same room. Unless the entire facility is designed as multi-purpose, a fellowship space of some size will be needed. This usually entails an adjacent kitchen, pantry, and storage spaces. Conference rooms, libraries, vending machine locations,

restrooms, coat rooms, and nursery availability are also usually considered as fellowship functions. When a building is contemplated, many needs will be voiced. Some will feel recreation need be accommodated. Code concerns will have to be addressed. Community needs, handicapped accessibility, and requirements to handle special services will generate additional demands for facilities that must be met from the funds and energy of the congregation. Eventually, the availability of funds will force priorities on providing space for various activities. The degree of importance assigned to them will depend upon how the church views its role as an ambassador of Christ and how critical each area of ministry is to the congregation.

**When Not to Build:** Building projects are at best a distraction from the real ministry of the church and as such should be entered into carefully. At the beginning of the process, the question of need should be addressed. Does the church really need to build now or would its interests be better served by delaying the project till more funds are raised? What can be done to buy time and meet immediate needs? These questions of stewardship are addressed in a book "When Not to Build", written by Ray Bowman with Eddy Hall. This book establishes three basic principles against which any decision to enter a building project should be measured. These are: A church should build only when it can do so without shifting its focus from ministering to people to building a building. A church needs more space only when fully utilizing the space it already has. 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. The first deals with the idea that building buildings is not, and should not be, the primary work of the church. The second instructs us to use funds for building only when no other option exists. The third deals with trusting God to supply needs, although not necessarily our wants.

**The Want To:** The will to succeed must also be found. Is the motivation to build based on an immediate need to increase the effectiveness of the building as a tool for ministry? That would seem to fit into God's will for His gospel to be spread. If the pastor is willing to provide strength of leadership, to be questioned every step of the way, and to have those less committed abandon their leadership, then a second element is in place. The final will to succeed must come from the congregation, for pastor plus people equals a ministry. The people must have a vision of growth of the kingdom of God and a will to work for it in personal ministries. The leadership to nurture and sustain this growth will come from a committed lay ministry. A plan for physical growth must be combined with a plan for outreach and development of ministries.

**Consider the Options:** If both the need and will to expand the facilities are present, there are at least four major ways to accomplish this. Time can be gained by renovating facilities at the current location to handle minor problems and properly matching ministry needs to space sizes. The facilities can be added onto at the present location with moderate alterations to the existing, if the site will accommodate expansion. An existing facility may come available as another work expands or decreases in scope in the community. This option is usually more affordable than new construction. The most expensive option is building a new facility. Location of the site in reference to the existing congregation and the ministries of the church is of primary importance. Equally critical is the ability to handle at least twenty-five years of growth at the proposed site. Caution is advised when accepting "free land." Sometimes hidden problems, getting utilities on site, and the cost of preparing the site for building can make free land very expensive.

**Keeper of the Purse:** Finances are a subject that must be considered prior to beginning any aspect of expansion. Obviously building debt free is the most desirable option. While debt is not sin, it is a form of slavery. Better to make do with what God has provided while saving for new if possible. If funding is sought, sources are many and varied. There is often money available in existing income that has not been dedicated yet to ministries. Pledges are often used to stimulate increased giving and an increased awareness of need. Many parent church organizations have low interest loan or grant funds available. Many also offer expertise and guidance. Existing real estate has value that can be utilized, if not to expand

upon, then to sell. There may be some in the existing congregation who are not interested in moving and would like to establish themselves as a branch work. These could be the first of potential buyers of the existing building. Volunteer labor, used carefully and in conjunction with a builder, has a monetary value as does any donation of professional expertise. Extra land, if developed in partnership to eliminate risk to the church, can be a valuable asset to raise building funds. The building itself can be designed with spaces providing an income stream, such as a gym or fellowship hall for rent, day care facility rental, shared resource office rental, classroom or conference room rental, etc. An added benefit to these types of facility use is the stream of people brought into proximity to the church's ministries. Fund-raisers should be used as long as they return more than the value of the time of the volunteers, are fun for the participants, and do not create a negative image of the church in the community. They can even be used as outreach tools. Traditional mortgages can be used, but historically, few lenders are eager to risk the necessity of foreclosing on a church in their community. Non-traditional sources have also arisen such as companies setting up bond issues that are sold to members, friends, and the community. Ultimately, funding a project might come down to a core concept. If God has promised to supply all of our needs according to His riches in glory, and we do not see a way to obtain funds for what we desire, can we accept that God might not agree we have a need?

**Building Committees:** There are a few disadvantages and many advantages to establishing a building committee to oversee expansion. Disadvantages include blurry vision due to multiple focuses, inefficiency in decision making, and hurt feelings as majority rule crowds out minority opinions. Advantages include multiple focuses to eliminate blind spots, wisdom in the multitude of counsel, many hands to make the load lighter, a political impression of democracy, and a number of shoulders to take the blame when the new facility is too hot, too cold, too large, too small, etc. It will be. A good formula for the makeup of this committee is to begin with a design committee comprised of leaders of the church's ministries. After the building is designed to facilitate ministries, a second committee comprised of those with business and construction expertise should oversee the implementation process.

**Choosing Your Partners:** A decision must be made early in the process, which delivery method will be used to design and build the project. One option is the traditional approach in which an architect designs the building and oversees its construction by a general contractor. Another is single source, or design-build, in which one firm designs and builds the building. Construction management entails retaining an expert employee to make purchases, contract with, and coordinate subcontractors while the church pays all bills directly with no mark-up. Firms supplying pre-engineered buildings, such as pole buildings or steel buildings, often supply additional drawings for a fee. Some design services are offered by vendors supplying building components such as cabinets. Some firms offer the use of stock plans at a discount with an additional charge to tailor them to specific needs. All these methods have benefits and drawbacks and these should be weighed before any methods are implemented. Partners must then be chosen.

Whether an architect, design-build firm, or construction manager are to be used, they should become involved as quickly as possible. The fee will not change substantially, but their guidance would be welcome and valuable. Normal fees start at ten percent for small remodeling projects, seven percent for larger remodeling, and move to a range of four to seven percent for new projects, depending upon the scope of the project and services needed. Churches should approach decisions regarding a fee carefully. The time and effort expended on the project will be relative to the negotiated fee. The designer must be willing to learn about the needs, goals, vision, corporate structure, and decision making process of the church. They should be willing to attend some services to become familiar with how the congregation worships. Designers or contractors are best chosen by consulting previous clientele of the firm concerning service and how well the firm communicates. Determine how they reacted to changes in scope and price, how easy it was to get changes made, how many levels were involved in reaching decisions, and so forth. People deal with people. Ultimately, their ability to exchange information, expectations, etc., person to

person, will dictate how they deal with the church. Many problems in construction projects arise not from poor intentions, but rather from poor communication.

**Master Planning:** Master planning is the art of keeping options open. This starts with the question, "What if we decide to...?" Then the developing design is weighed against what future options would be possible or precluded. A site plan should be designed for twenty years of growth with present needs as the first phase. The current building project should be designed as part of a larger future complex with openings, structure, finishes, etc., designed accordingly. Systems and metering should be oversized, extended, equipped with valves, and capped off for future use. Spaces should be designed for flexibility and multi-purpose use. Provisions, such as empty conduits, should be designed in to accommodate future technology. Even furniture used should be movable, modular, stackable, and removable to allow for quick space usage changes. Ultimately, the facility should not be a barrier to new ministries being added to the church as growth occurs.

**Rules and Regulations:** Various legal constraints will also affect decision making. Covenants are legal guarantees running with the ownership of a piece of real estate and restrict how it may be used. Zoning ordinances govern how, and for what purpose, a particular piece of land may be used and include setbacks, height restrictions, parking requirements, etc. Building codes determine the materials and methods required in the construction of the building. They are always found at the state level and sometimes at the county or city level. Easements are right-of-ways which have been purchased across someone else's property and limit the use of that property once given. Permits are required written permission before beginning construction and information on such requirements is best sought at the local building department with jurisdiction over the project. Inspections are made to insure what was approved is being built. Finally, a certificate of occupancy is usually not given until a final inspection and approval of the building is completed.

**Practical Concerns:** The final cost of the facility will also be dictated largely by decisions made concerning the structure, the systems, and the finishes. These choices are best made with input from the architect, but the following guidelines can be used to help organize thoughts along this line. Basements are heavily discouraged by code requirements for assembly use and have become fairly expensive space as a result. The larger the clear span, the more expensive the structure. Higher roof slopes result in less snow load, more wind load, create more drama, more space to heat and cool, more cost to finish, and more difficulty to transport pre-engineered components. Sloped floors are difficult to finish, to use for multiple purposes, or to add on to in the future. It is easier to upgrade finishes in needed space at a later date than to build additional square footage later. Some materials are better suited for volunteer labor and expertise. Locally available material is usually cheaper than those which must be transported over distance. Moveable walls and freestanding space dividers are more expensive initially than fixed partitions. Any cost difference can usually be recouped the first time they are moved. Rectangular plans offer more seating efficiency up to a capacity of 500. After this, a fan shape usually works better for ministering. The more difficult a product is to install, the more expensive the labor will be, as well as the labor required to repair or replace it later. Initial material costs should be weighed against their life expectancy. Determine the cost and frequency of maintaining materials, especially flooring. Find out the cost and procedures for cleaning different materials being considered. Determine whether this material will enhance or dampen sound reverberation and transmission, and how this will affect the use of the space. In a cold or wet climate, it will matter if the material is slippery when wet. Some materials are heavy enough to require bulking up the structure below to accommodate them. Consider whether a material is fragile and easily damaged. Some materials are susceptible to moisture if not regularly treated. Needed square footage should not be sacrificed to allow for better finishes. If space needed to permit outreach and ministry is sacrificed for appearance, pride has probably been substituted for obedience to the great commission.

**Loud and Clear:** Acoustics involves creating conditions allowing for comfortable listening and the control of noise. There is little point in coming to hear preaching or teaching if what is heard can not be understood. This clarity can be designed in and should be a part of the budget during the initial planning. Both sound transmission and reverberation time can be controlled. Sound can be controlled with barriers to direct it, materials to diminish or reflect it, and materials to absorb it. On a simple level, transmission can be controlled by not locating spaces, which simultaneously generate sound, next to each other. Reverberation time and the effect it has on speech and music can be controlled by volume shape, direction of sound, and material choices. Sound systems, if used, should be treated as a sound source, not as an after thought. Most churches usually spend up to six percent of their building budget on a sound system. Some do it up front while others do it painfully over a period of years. There are things to consider when choosing sound systems. Get professional advice from several sources before deciding what your needs really are. Get professional training for operators as part of any package deal. The cheapest component with the lowest level of technology, that is part of a sound delivery system, will probably determine the sound quality of the entire system. The system should be capable of easy reconfiguration for new uses and setups. It should have enough capacity for years of growth. If this facility is outgrown, can the components be reused in the next couple phases of growth? Will the system adapt to new technology such as RF transmission, DVD Players, or computer input? Establish and record baseline settings for all controls that can be reset to when the system becomes imbalanced or the settings are altered.

**Where Do We Go From Here:** These are examples of a few decisions and thought processes awaiting growing congregations with facility needs. While a building project can consume time and energy, it does not need to consume or destroy faith. Nor should it be allowed to distract the congregation, the real church, from its commission of ministry. Answers to many questions that arise can be found in a variety of sources. The scriptures and prayer are the best sources of guidance. Other churches that have been through the process can provide direction. Local professionals in design, construction, and government can supply insight. Finally, building manuals such as "From A To Z on Church Building and Remodeling" can help guide churches through this process. This is done by arming them, not only with extensive knowledge in the subject areas mentioned above, but also with various forms to acquire, track, and communicate decisions.

This synopsis is excerpted from "From A to Z in Church Building and Remodeling" by Paul F. Spite of AFD Consulting. That resource and "Avoidable Mistakes in Church Building and Remodeling" can be ordered by contacting Paul at (931) 261-3269 or [afd1@frontiernet.net](mailto:afd1@frontiernet.net).