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GROUNDBREAKING IDEAS FOR CHURCHES

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It is always the first step of the journey that seems to be the hardest. Once a project is underway, a certain momentum sets in to keep the project moving. The completion of one step automatically opens the way and creates the need for the step or steps that immediately follow. This is also true in a church building program, when physical expansion is needed. There has been an abundance of talking and dreaming. The planning process has finally reached completion. The vision has been cast. The drawings are done. Funds have been raised and the permits have been pulled. Now the long process begins, but it still begins with the first step.

With many congregations, this first step is a groundbreaking ceremony. On these occasions, congregations gather to symbolically, and sometimes physically, demonstrate their commitment to the program being launched. Once the ground has actually been broken, the first step will be underway. The ship will be moving at last. It is a meaningful ceremony, and it should be, because it is the future being celebrated. It is the people, being of a mind to work, saying so. It is a sharp and sudden focusing of the vision that has long been sought, and without such a vision, the people perish. .

What should ideally be included in such ceremonies? There is where the main question arises concerning groundbreaking occasions. Ceremonies can be as different as the congregations holding them. Who is involved varies widely. The truth is; there is no one perfect ceremony that fits all, just components included and prayed over to make the occasion perfect for you. Ideas for such components listed below are just a starting point for discussion. They have been pulled from various projects with which we have been involved. It is not even remotely suggested that all are applicable. None of them may be. As mentioned, they are simply a starting point for discussion. These ideas are as follows:

- Have the church laid out as much as possible on the site. Set stakes and run strings so it will be easy to visualize the perimeter of the facility.
- Once the facility perimeter has been established, locate where the choir will stand and where the pulpit will be. If there is singing and preaching included in the ceremony, have it done with the participants in the location they will occupy in the future. This should also be true of the congregation.
- Dig a small square hole below where the pulpit will rest in the future. Have a small concrete slab already poured at the base and refill the hole with loose dirt. Have the oldest member in the congregation “break” the ground below which the concrete slab has already been poured. Various representatives of the church would then dig dirt out from on top of the concrete slab below where the pulpit will be. The youngest in the congregation who is able, finishes uncovering the slab. Wrap a Bible in plastic and place it in the hole. This will symbolize the commitment of the leadership to only teach and preach the Truth of scripture from the pulpit of the church. It will symbolize a commitment to be founded upon the Word of God. Have a wheelbarrow, some ready-mix concrete, and water handy to mix up concrete for use in covering the Bible.
- Other symbolic uses of scripture might involve placing plastic wrapped Bibles in four corners of the foundation before the footings are poured. If this is done, placement should be approved by the structural engineer responsible for the footing design, as Bibles bear weight differently than concrete.

- Another symbolic use of scripture might occur after the floor has been poured. Before flooring is placed on top of the substrate, have each member of the church write their favorite verse, perhaps on a subject matter such as the promises of God, on the floor surface. Then cover these promises with the flooring the congregational members will also stand upon.
- As people enter the existing auditorium, prior to moving the service to the new site, they could sign their names to a witness list to be displayed in the future sanctuary. It could perhaps be designed in the format of the Declaration of Independence. Give everyone who signs it a copy and display the original in the lobby of the future building.
- Everyone can decide ahead of time what they might want included in a time capsule in the building. This capsule could be a PVC tube with lids cemented in place and set with the cap above ground in a small garden. It might also be a cornerstone capsule made for the purpose and kept in the existing lobby until installed as part of the masonry of the new facility.
- Have a dedication service begin in the existing auditorium. Some of the members who were present when the original facility was built could speak briefly on their hopes and dreams for the original building, before it was built, and the part it has come to play in their lives.
- Announce that the congregation will follow the choir outside, but before exiting, they are to pick up a good sized rock from one bucket and a small flat one from another bucket to carry with them to the new site.
- After arriving at the new site, congregate as remotely as possible from the new auditorium. Let the choir begin singing, then while singing, lead the congregation out to the new site, (like Judah, leading the Israelites in praise while traveling to their new home.) The choir would finish in the new choir area, the leadership in the platform area, the congregation in seats in the auditorium area, and the ceremony would continue on the new church site.
- The church could mark their names on each stone brought from the old facility. The larger stones would be placed into a bucket and later mixed into the first cubic yard of concrete poured into place for the building. The smaller flat stone would be placed in pockets and purses to serve as a reminder to pray for the new facility and the ministries it will serve, and the privilege we have in worshipping God in lieu of the rocks.
- Have older members who spoke earlier about the past, speak briefly on their hopes and dreams for the new facility, and the part they hope it will play in the lives of future generations.
- Gratitude could be expressed to anyone felt deserving of recognition.
- A sermon could then be preached.
- White doves are sometimes released during the ceremony to symbolize the presence of the Spirit being invited to reside there.
- After the ceremony has been completed, dinner could then follow on the site of the church.
- Alternately, it could be announced ahead of time, that after the dedication, dinner will be “on the church.” Have the church supply paper products, drinks, and a main course, and have everyone else bring a covered dish. After the events, dinner will be “on the church,” within the limits of the new church facility.
- Have the media on hand to witness the event. Tell the community why the project is being done.

Ultimately, the point of these groundbreaking ceremonies is for them to be enjoyable, memorable, and significant. They should leave the participants with a sense of pride regarding the congregation to which they belong and the future in which they are investing their efforts. The ceremony should reinforce the purpose for the effort. Regardless of actual events, if these goals are met, any groundbreaking ceremony will be successful in its purpose.

May God bless your endeavors at this special point in the ministries of your congregation.