



Search

Search

Weekly E-mail Newsletter

Subscribe

Please enable javascript to submit this form.

[Home](#) [Categories](#) [News](#) [Articles](#) [Blogs](#) [Webinars](#) [eBooks](#) [Buyers Guide](#) [Events](#) [Media Kit](#) [Contacts](#)

Construct Ministry Before Constructing a Church Building

With funds in place, churches should be patient, making sure building is consistent with God's vision

Posted on: 12/11/2008

by Lee Walker and Jeff Bercau

In today's difficult economic times, churches should be so fortunate as to have enough money to start a building project. But it's not uncommon for churches to have completed their fundraising efforts or to have a generous donor provide funds for such an aggressive project. All too often church leaders will jump at the opportunity to build immediately, and this can prove to be catastrophic to the congregation. For some reason, congregations believe that a new building will increase membership, solve internal problems and lead to a successful future.

While that may ostensibly be the case, Scripture continually points to the dangers of building for the sake of building. The first priorities are to build the ministry and spread the Gospel, and if a new sanctuary, school, or playground lends itself to this objective, then it is time to proceed. With that in mind, church leaders ought to approach the building process with patience, always guarding against construction becoming a panacea rather than a way to bring Christ more fame. They must also realize that having access to a cash gift or even a parcel of land is a gift from God and should be used accordingly.

The most well-known example in Scripture is the Tower of Babel and the punishment God gave to the community. Church leaders should take note of this: "Come let us build a city with a tower that reaches to the heaven so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the earth" (Genesis 11:4).

As we know, God didn't look favorably on this endeavor and scattered these people all over the earth. The problem with the Tower of Babel – and other contemporary construction projects – is that they are simply examples of great human achievement, monuments to the people rather than a way to glorify God.

As designers and builders, we obviously want churches to move forward with construction, but we want them to move forward for all of the right reasons – and the only right reason is that a new building should promote the vision of the church: to bring forth the Gospel by leading members to take an outwardly focused view of the role of the church as an organization. Churches should all have a vision. Some components of the vision could include:

- Reaching out to the poor
- Helping the elderly
- Building youth programs
- Education (Did you know that in early American History the Bible was the main book used for reading lessons?)

A building project should only move forward if it can help a church pursue its vision. In addition, there may be better uses for this money such as getting the church out of debt. By focusing on the vision of the church, God will direct leaders to make the proper decision at the proper time. This concept is repeated many times throughout Scripture: "And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink, do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things and your Father knows that you need them. But seek first His Kingdom and these things will be given to you, as well." (Luke 12:29-32). The message is clear. Seek the Kingdom first, and God will guide our decision-making tree (Proverbs 3:5-6) and lead us down the proper road.

So, with funds in hand, why should a church take a step back and avoid a knee-jerk reaction to using existing funds to build?

Church leadership may not be in place to undertake this massive project. While the pastor must lead the effort, his major goal involves ministering. A pastor can't become the general contractor. The church must have members to assist with these activities. Other issues:

There may be other things of greater importance that the church should be considering that could lead to promoting the Gospel (i.e. feeding the poor, educating members on how to spread the Gospel, etc.)

- Anticipating the additional costs associated with building. For example, over 10 years, a completed \$1 million building will cost about \$2 million to maintain
- Consider other building options. For example, instead of building a new sanctuary the church could better spend the money by building a gymnasium for kids in the neighborhood – another way of opening doors to non-believers.
- Does the building fit with the vision of the church?

One church in South Florida took this approach to following its vision of ministering to the immediate community. Despite having funds in place to build, church leaders stepped back and revisited its vision and how to improve these efforts. The elders decided to reach out to a largely under-privileged minority community by offering to pay utility bills of those in need. This attracted new members and brought the current members together with a specific plan as to how they could extend the church vision.

With an increased membership and a new-found enthusiasm among members for spreading the Gospel, this church then proceeded with an aggressive building program that more closely reflected its needs.

This church clearly followed one of many Scriptural references regarding building a church/temple: "I tell you that one greater than the temple is here" (Matthew 12:6). In this passage, Jesus is telling his followers that the Pharisees are more concerned with rituals and that they missed the purpose of the temple. It is not a monument to

people, rather it is a place that should attract people to God. And this temple could be a small room in a strip center, or someone's living room.

A number of the so-called "megachurches" today are taking the "Tower of Babel" approach to building massive structures and are not deepening and edifying their disciples' walks with Christ. While many of them are doing great work in terms of building national ministries, some are not focused on spreading the Gospel and building Godly vision and hands-on ministries.

It's important to realize that Jesus never tells us to build big buildings. By saying, "I will build my church," Jesus is saying the goal is to build his ministry. And by building the ministry first, people will come – sort of the reverse of that famous line in "Field of Dreams": "If we build it, they will come."

God clearly wants our faith to be huge, not buildings. In the Old Testament, God downplayed the importance of an elaborate temple, opting for the Israelites to live in tents: "Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I every say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd by people – 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'" (2 Samuel 7:5).

Monuments have no value in God's eyes, and churches must avoid, once again, for building with hopes that a structure will promote the Gospel and glorify God. With proper direction from God and an understanding of a vision, churches can move forward with building with the right project at the right time.

Lee Walker is president of Boca Raton, Fla.-based Walker Design & Construction, which has a strategic alliance with Building God's Way (www.bgwservices.com) and has built dozens of churches in the past decade alone. Walker Design & Construction has been building quality, energy-efficient buildings for more than 35 years. For more information, please call Jeff Bercaw, director of development for Building God's Way – South Florida, at 561.998.0001, ext.131. His cell phone number is 561.441.0078, or e-mail him at jeffwdc@bellsouth.net.