

## Stewardship, Trust, Boundaries in Church Construction

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When undertaking a construction program, church leaders must realize that God takes trust, leadership, boundaries and stewardship very seriously. Throughout Scripture, he discusses the benefits of these traits, what can happen when they are followed, and just as important, what can happen when leaders stray from the Word of God.

During both economic hardship and in boom times, pastors and elders must closely analyze the construction process and realize that God has placed them in a position requiring them to do what is right for the congregation – financially and spiritually – so it can further and build God's Kingdom.

Keep in mind that these church leaders must follow God's Word in all they do, but the Word is particularly appropriate and timely when it comes to large-budget construction projects. Throughout Scripture, we have seen how large sums of money and ego can lead to ignoring God's will.

Leaders must stay in tune with church needs, build appropriate facilities and spend wisely when moving forward. During construction, leaders show these actions by selecting proper materials and by placing a premium on cost controls and projected maintenance fees. In short, God continually urges us to be good stewards in all that we do. "And he called him and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward" (Luke 16:2).

There are consequences to not being a good steward: "Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? For my Lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed" (Luke 16:3). There's no question that construction can be a complex process, but if leaders always focus on what God wants, it can be simplified. We just have to look for and recognize his guidance.

There are many ways to be good stewards when it comes to construction. For example: ...

1. There are many low-cost, high-quality construction materials.
2. There are ways to conserve energy through air-conditioning, low-energy appliances.
3. There are materials that over the long-term require less maintenance than other materials.

Church leaders owe it to the congregation to analyze and investigate all of these important options that will result in high-quality structures that will promote the Gospel for the short and long terms.

Again, God teaches us to avoid ostentation and pride in all we do – especially when building. "Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies" (Psalms 40:4).

Much of what we do in advising congregations is making sure the "building committees" are leading in the best interests of the congregation. Often, leaders enter the process with hopes of building a facility that is inappropriate for their needs.

For example, one strategy is to build a structure that can easily be expanded as needs increase. A gym can double up as a worship center until the congregation grows. A school can be gradually expanded as enrollment increases. Likewise, the master plan of the building/campus can be planned in phases.

God teaches us that there are serious consequences when leaders betray this trust: "For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and (they that are) led of them are destroyed" (Isaiah 9:16) and "Let them alone; they be blind leaders of the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14).

Leaders must also set and respect the boundaries and limits God has established. We have seen many situations where congregations have planned to move forward with projects that they couldn't afford. There have also been instances when they hoped to build a facility that was inappropriate for the time. For example, they may have wanted to build a larger sanctuary when a growing youth ministry clearly pointed to providing a safe place for teenagers to "hang out."

These limits are important in God's Kingdom: "And I remind you of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged. God has kept them chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for the day of judgment" (Judges 1:6).

Similarly, God advises: "But we will not boast of authority we do not have. Our goal is to stay within the boundaries of God's plan for us, and this plan includes our working there with you" (2 Corinthians 10:13).

Scripture teaches us continually about trust, stewardship and boundaries. Church leaders should keep this in mind in all they do and apply it to a building program that will satisfy God.

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