



Search

Search

Weekly E-mail Newsletter

Subscribe

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

Beware of the Church Construction Bidding Process

Posted on: 09/09/2009

by Lee Walker and Jeff Bercaw

Under the best of circumstances a church construction project is one of the most stressful endeavors that leaders and a congregation can undertake. One of the major stress points is caused by the fact that elders, pastors and committee members are, for the most part, unfamiliar with issues related to construction.

Perhaps the most contentious part of the project is the bidding process, where general contractors and architects are competing for the job. Building committees and church leaders should understand that this initial phase is inherently faulty and frequently results in bidders low-balling prices in an effort to land the contract. As the process moves forward, prices inevitably rise with frequent change orders and upgrades, resulting in a building that goes way over budget.

However, the damages to the congregation are much more significant than just financial. Pastors and elders are accused of not being good stewards of funds when forced to go back to the congregation for more money. Projects can be put on indefinite hold. What started out as a way to build a ministry has become a project that has destroyed a healthy church because of lost confidence in leadership, anger and divisiveness.

It is clear that the bidding process is a system that is inherently not biblical because it lends itself to untruths and deception – all things Scripture warns us against: "Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:7).

This confusion also results in congregations falling prey to disunity and distrust, which is also contrary to Biblical teachings: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalms 133:1).

So, what is this bidding process, and what should church leadership and building committees be aware of when embarking on a construction project? First, it is important to realize that the bidding process among general contractors and architects can be based on a desire for them to get in the door with artificially low prices. This is done by submitting plans that are only 70 to 80 percent complete. In other words, many important details are left out, resulting in expensive additions and change orders down the road.

In many cases, this is intentional and pretty much common practice in building circles. Again, it is contrary to Biblical teachings: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25).

The following are some examples of details that are traditionally fudged in the initial plans to make the cost seem lower:

1. Plans could simply indicate light bulbs and not actual fixtures.
2. Flooring could be linoleum and not more expensive tiling or carpeting.
3. Doors could initially be made of particle board as opposed to something more solid.
4. Stairways could be made of steel, when wood was expected.

These are just some of the details that can result in a low bid and the awarding of a job. This strategy is accepted in many sectors of the construction business and is used because the average person isn't familiar with analyzing plans. In short, it seems like the contractor that makes the biggest mistake has the best chance of getting the job.

Rule No. 1 is to make sure that plans are complete down to every light fixture, faucet and tree. And remember that there's a reason why a particular bid is significantly lower than others competing for the project.

Church building committees should also analyze the cost of operating and maintaining a structure after it is completed. This is known as life-cycle costing. Frequently, these products are more expensive to include at the outset, but as the building ages there will be significant savings. These products can drive up the initial pricing but will pay for themselves in several years.

The following are several examples:

1. **Flooring.** Using low-gloss linoleum requires virtually no maintenance. Money will be saved on labor.
2. **Air conditioning.** Electricity will be saved by using high-performance, energy-saving units
3. **Hurricane shutters vs. impact glass windows.** Impact glass windows are more expensive to install, but there will be labor savings because people won't have to be hired to install them as a storm approaches. Many churches leaders could assume that deacons will install the shutters, but as a storm approaches, people usually have other priorities – to protect their homes and families
4. **Toilets:** Waterless urinals will save on water consumption

Scripture clearly tells us, as part of our responsibilities as stewards, to understand what costs are involved with building a ministry. Costs can also be contained by having the church directly purchase materials – air conditioners, toilets, fixtures, etc. This will save on mark-ups of middlemen, which is also typical in the construction industry. In many cases, it is also appropriate to implement a “gift in kind” program, which involves the general contractor managing sub-contractors (electricians, carpenters, etc.) who are either directly or indirectly within the church’s network. In many cases, these folks support the church’s vision and are more willing to donate time or provide services at discounted hourly rates. Again, God tells us to count the cost in all areas of our lives: “For which of you intending to build a tower sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have (sufficient) to finish it” (Luke 14:28).

These are all steps to take as safeguards against having this process become too expensive which ultimately results in divisiveness within a congregation. And once that happens, the church – and probably the pastor – becomes the referee between the builder and architect. This role must be avoided at all costs and is best done through a nontraditional covenantal relationship among the builder, the architect, and the church.

Avoiding conflict is best accomplished by a “Trinitarian” relationship among these entities from the outset of the project. By insisting on this relationship, churches will better understand the process and put financial controls on every aspect of the building process. It will also avoid projects going over budget because God’s truth is a foundation of building a church and a stronger ministry. Honesty and integrity will be part of the process, as we are taught: “Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned” (James 5:12).

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 and many quality, energy-efficient buildings for more than 35 years. For more information, please call Jeff Bercaw, director of development, Building God’s Way, South Florida, at 561.998.0001, ext.131. He can also be reached at 561.441.0078 or by e-mail at jeffwdc@bellsouth.net.