



Making Good Construction Decisions

I once heard that the only place that a church facility can be designed perfectly, built under budget, on time, and with no stress is in one, or maybe two, Building Committee meetings. It is interesting that the actual construction of a church facility can take from six to twenty-four months, based on the size, yet there is a belief (or hope) that the decisions to make the project possible can be made in six to twenty-four days. This approach of talking on Monday, drawing on Tuesday, and digging on Wednesday has six distinct phases:

- 1) Enthusiasm
- 2) Disillusionment
- 3) Panic
- 4) The Search for the Guilty
- 5) The Punishment of the Innocent
- 6) Praise and Honor for the Non-Participants

Great projects are built on good construction decisions. Good construction decisions are made long before the “bricks and sticks” arrive on the jobsite. The success of any project is directly tied to the Prayer, Planning and Preparation that goes into it. There are two types of Construction Decisions: Cost and Stewardship Decisions and Facility Decisions that deal with Design and Functional Relevance.

Cost & Stewardship Decisions

When the least amount of resources is being invested, the Project Team actually has the most influence on the project design and construction costs. Time spent early in a planning process will directly influence the cost of the project. A myth exists that “value engineering” (saving the church money) can take place after the design is complete. After the project design is complete, the typical approach to “value engineering” is to decrease quality or decrease square footage. This chop and hack approach is not only contrary to positive momentum, but most importantly, it is contrary to the vision and mission of the church. Nearly 50% of America’s churches have a set of plans hidden behind the Pastor’s door that will never be built. On average, the other 50% that did build lost their Pastor within 18 months of the completion of their new facility. The number one reason for these disconnects is the lack of an integrated Project Team and a Discovery Process that guides that Team carefully through planning each unique project. True value engineering and Good Construction Decisions are made early in the process with a Team approach of Owner-Architect-Contractor equally yoked and in step, pulling toward the same goal. A good Discovery Process keeps the Project Team in step and protects the project from potentially disastrous surprises.



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Key components of Discovery are:

- 1) Alignment of Facility Goals with Financial Capabilities.
- 2) Alignment of Facility Needs with Congregational Needs and Involvement.
- 3) Alignment of the Facility Location with the Challenges of the Building Site.

F.W. Dodge, the largest provider of construction analysis and statistics in the United States and Canada, has verified that the average construction project is 30% over budget due, primarily, to beginning construction design prior to understanding (Discovering) the Vision and Mission of the Client and the project challenges that would have surfaced during a Feasibility Study. Good cost and stewardship decisions are made by an integrated Project Team working through a comprehensive Discovery Process together.

Facility Decisions: Design and Functional Relevance

A Project Team dedicated to understanding the church will focus on designing a facility around your ministry by actually connecting the facility design to your church's vision and mission. The above graphic shows that in a growing US population, despite significant investment in building and/or improving our places of worship, we are actually reaching less people. Good Construction Decisions begin by understanding who the church is, what the church's long range goals are, and who is the target of the church's outreach? The Word of God never changes...the way we convey God's Word does. Creating an environment that reaches the first time visitor and serves the long time member is critical. Designing relevant facilities where people can relax, can be themselves, can connect with others, and can become a part of the "community" is nothing new. The Church can learn, and has been learning, from the retail business industry as coffee bars and bookstores crop up with the same feel as Barnes & Noble and Starbucks Coffee. When visitors pull up to your facility with more technology on four wheels than you have in the entire facility...there is a relevant disconnect. The more the Church strives to understand the "lost" in their area and then meet them where they are, via Good Construction Decisions, the more effective the Church will become in drawing the "lost" into their facilities to hear the Good Word.



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Good Construction Decisions are made long before the “bricks and sticks” arrive on the jobsite. A good Design/Build Team can guide you through the process of Discovering the Facility Challenges before you, and Designing a Facility around your Ministry. Discovering who the church is and following the Lord’s leading will be a critical component for a successful project...long before the “bricks and sticks”.

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