
GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

New Buildings are Important

A few years ago my friend, Thom Rainer, conducted research to determine what unchurched people said about church buildings. He discovered four key insights. First, church buildings were not the motivating factor that attracted unchurched people. The primary motivating factor was the Holy Spirit working through friends, family members, and personal needs. Second, the worship auditorium was the unchurched person's favorite area of the church building. They often commented on the attractiveness, beauty, and functionality of the worship venue. Third, attractive and well-maintained facilities did attract unchurched people. While, fourth, unattractive or unkept facilities were viewed critically.

Rainer surprisingly found that 81% of churches experienced increased attendance after a building program, and most said it was critical to the church's growth. Looking back, the leaders said if they could do it again, they would build bigger and expend more funds.

Clearly, while not the most important aspect, church facilities are an important part of a healthy church growth mix.

Options for Improving Facilities

There are several options for improving church facilities.

First, upgrade the church's present facility. Assuming that the facility has enough growth potential for the future (see last month's *Growth Points* for insights), a church may choose to upgrade. The most beneficial improvements are found in the worship auditorium (including the lobby), children's classrooms (including nursery), the parking lot, and restrooms (particularly the ladies). [Note: for every 100 seats, estimate one male and two female fixtures in the restrooms].

If you decide to improve your current facility, budget \$40-50 a square foot for improvements. The most costly aspects are the restrooms, bringing fire prevention and handicap space up to code, and larger remodels, such as, lifting or moving the stage (costs around \$50,000), adding an elevator (about \$125,000), or building a coffee shop in the lobby.

For an evaluation of your church, Email Dr. Gary L. McIntosh at cgnet@earthlink.net for full details.

Second, locate new property and build new construction. This option has been taken by numerous churches, but it always seems to take longer than anticipated, costs more money than expected, and often is not finished by the pastor who started the building program.

There is not enough space in this issue of *Growth Points* to discuss all of the details (a church is always wise to obtain the services of professionals), but the following are a few insights on building new construction.

- A church should not allocate more than 30% of its monthly income towards debt reduction. Doing so hampers other aspects of ministry.
- A church can normally borrow approximately \$4,500 for each adult attendee.
- A church can expect monthly payments of approximately \$6,000 for every 1 million in loan value.
- A church will typically need about 25% to 30% cash down payment on a loan.
- A church normally needs three years of audited financial records, three years of attendance figures, complete resumes of leaders, and Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws to obtain a loan.

Third, purchase an older building and remodel it for use as a church. Examples include:

- Retail establishments that have closed, e.g., former grocery stores, big box stores, and shopping centers or strip malls. These facilities are easy to revamp into church space, and have adequate parking space.
- Movie theaters that have closed. While these buildings are often offered at below market rates, the cost of improvements to remodel them into what a church needs can be very high.
- Restaurants that have closed make good facilities for smaller churches, but are usually too small for a church that desires to grow.
- Industrial buildings and complexes are affordable options with lots of available parking space, since most other tenants are closed on Sundays. Industrial building are easy to remodel into church facilities, but need strong marketing to help people find them.

Fourth is to purchase or unite with another church that has a more attractive facility. However, churches that wish to merge or are for sale, may have been neglected for years, leading to costly improvements, such as, upgrading restrooms. However, enlarged space for worship or parking make such acquisitions worthwhile.

What are your best options for improving the beauty, function, and attractiveness of your church facility?

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Gary L. McIntosh (Ph.D., D.Min.) is a speaker, writer, and professor. Phil Stevenson (D.Min.) is a writer and speaker who has served as a national and district executive, coaching pastors in evangelism and church multiplication.

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