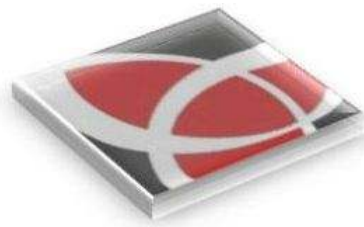


THE DEADLY SINS

*7 COMMON BUILDING MISTAKES THAT CHURCHES
MAKE AND HOW TO AVOID THEM*



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The statistics are sobering.

- The average tenure of a pastor after a significant building project is 22 months.¹
- More than half of U.S. churches have plans that will never be built.¹
- Construction is the second most litigated industry in the U.S.²
- 20% of pastors leave the church due to a difficult construction project.³
- Less than 30% of construction projects come in on time, on budget and within specifications.⁴

When churches go into design and construction projects without properly planning and preparing, they pay a heavy price; not just in time and money, but in people and ministry.

There is a better way.

The following are the seven common mistakes that churches make, along with recommendations as to how to avoid them and a case study of an actual church that has dealt with the issue.



Sin #1: Hiring Only an Architect Instead of a Team

One of the most common mistakes that churches make is hiring an architect and counting on the architect to design a facility that meets their budget. They hire the architect. They tell the architect everything that they would like to have in their facility. The architect designs them a great building that fulfills all their expectations. They put the project out to bid and are shocked to find out that the project is so far over their budget that they would never be able to build it. They are angry with the architect. They are discouraged and frustrated. They have wasted large sums of money and a lot of time, and a great deal of good will with the congregation. It can be a devastating experience for a church and can take many years to recover.

... it is important to understand the limitations of an architect.

How can a church avoid this common mistake? First, it is important to understand the limitations of an architect. Architects are great at designing buildings that function well, look good and serve their intended purposes. However, an architect is not good at determining construction costs. So, when a church depends upon an architect to design a building within a budget, there is a significant likelihood that they will be disappointed with the results. Determining the cost of a building requires a different set of skills and up-to-date construction experience that few architects possess. It is difficult enough for an experienced builder to accurately determine what a building will cost.

So what approach do you take? The better way is to take a team approach that includes a church planner, a church architect and a church builder. The church planner will help to insure that you are building the right building for your ministry and vision. The church architect will help to insure you have a good design that will meet your needs. And the church builder will help insure

that what is planned and designed fits within the established budget. By working together as a team, a game plan can be developed that insures the successful execution and completion of the project.

Case Study 1: FBC Hickory Withe

This church had enough foresight to understand that they needed to develop a master plan before they built their next facility. The church had already gone through two expansions and realized that they needed a plan for tying everything together rather than just adding another building. They hired a local architect to help them develop a master plan. At the beginning of the process the church established a construction budget of \$2M. One year and thousands of dollars later the architect presented the church with a master plan, including as a first step a much needed sanctuary. The church put the plan out to local builders to get preliminary pricing. The initial bids came back at over \$5M; more than double the established construction budget. Needless to say, there was a great deal of disappointment and frustration. A lot of time and money had been wasted and they had made no progress toward getting the new sanctuary that they needed.

The committee made contact with Trinity Design Group and, after an initial meeting, hired Trinity to help them move forward. After an initial evaluation of current facilities and a meeting with leadership to clarify their vision, a Strategic Master Planning process was begun. With the team meeting every two weeks to evaluate the vision, needs and resources of the church, a comprehensive Strategic Master Plan was developed in a period of eight weeks. The result was a master plan that accurately reflected their vision for the future while developing a Phase I plan that met their current needs and fit within their established budget. As the Strategic Master Plan was shared with the entire congregation, a great deal of excitement was generated and everyone was motivated to move forward as quickly as possible.

After spending a year developing a plan that would not work, within two to three months after hiring Trinity, the church was moving forward with architectural drawings and permitting for their new sanctuary. A few months after that, they were moving forward with construction. Going through the Strategic Master Planning process accelerated the church's design and construction project, while giving the leadership and the body a clear vision for the future. This vision wasn't just for buildings but for the ministry that would be carried out and the growth that could take place as they moved into the future.



Sin #2: Not Planning Properly Before Starting

Most churches wait until it is already too late before they endeavor to address growth needs. So, when they get to the point of doing something about their need for more space, there is a sense of urgency to get something done. This can lead to moving right into a design process without first taking the time to do a proper evaluation and to develop a plan that reflects the church's vision, resources and needs.

The planning process ... can be done in a timely manner and can actually accelerate the design and construction process.

The planning process is the most important stage of the church's design and construction project. If the church will invest the proper amount of time and energy into getting all the questions and issues addressed up front, before moving forward with the actual design and construction process, they can be assured of a

successful outcome. The planning process does not need to delay the overall project. It can be done in a timely manner and can actually accelerate the design and construction process.

If the church does not invest the time and energy into developing a comprehensive game plan, they are sure to run into issues and challenges that may put the entire project in jeopardy. Finding problems and addressing issues in the middle of a construction project can be a very costly experience. It is far better to go into the project well prepared; having addressed as many of the issues as possible before moving forward. If the church will engage a firm that can lead them through the process of evaluation and planning, they can move forward with confidence.

Case Study 2: First Apostolic Church

FAC had been growing quickly and was very active in ministry to their community. But when they had filled their sanctuary, the growth stopped. They would get up to certain number, then it would go back down a little and the cycle continued. They desperately needed new space as soon as possible. They hired a civil engineer to look at their property and develop a site plan to submit to the planning commission. The civil engineer needed an idea for what they would build, so they had a building supplier provide them with a building plan. The plan was submitted to the planning commission.

While awaiting initial approval the pastor was encouraged to talk to Trinity Design Group to get a professional opinion as to what they were about to do. After the initial consultation, the pastor realized that he needed to pause briefly and put a real game plan together. Eight weeks later, FAC had a clear vision for their future and how they would achieve that vision step by step. They had a plan that met their budget, which the first plan did not. They had a plan that matched their vision, which the first plan did not. And they had a plan that met their immediate needs, which the first plan did not. The comprehensive package was presented to their very conservative lending institution; approval was gained and the project was started in a very timely manner.



Sin #3: Focusing Only on Today's Needs / Not Planning for the Future

Too many churches focus on what they need to do to meet their current needs without taking into consideration what their needs are going to be five, ten, twenty years down the road. They end up having a church that looks like a patchwork quilt over time because they did not have a master plan for how they will grow into the future. As the church continues to grow, this haphazard approach to building expansion begins to hinder the church's ability to do ministry and inhibits the church's ability to continue to grow.

Having a master plan for your property and facilities can literally save you millions of dollars in the future, while making sure the money you are spending today will have a long term benefit. When the church has a game plan for where they are going and what their needs will be, a great deal of flexibility and expandability can be designed into their current facility to accommodate that future growth.

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The best way to accomplish this master plan is to start with the vision and mission of the church. The facilities are simply a tool to be used to accomplish the church's God-given vision. It becomes much easier to establish the master plan when everyone is unified behind that vision and committed to carrying it out. This comprehensive master planning approach takes the church through this process and puts everything together in a way that gives the church great tools for communicating that vision and master plan to the entire body.

Case Study3: FBC Center Star

FBC Center Star has been a growing, dynamic church for many years. As the church had grown, they simply built what they needed at the time and moved on. But they finally came to a point that this approach simply wouldn't work anymore. Older buildings were interfering with access to newer buildings. People were walking long distances between key ministry areas and traffic flow through the buildings was a nightmare. The church had come to the point of needing to expand again, but was at an impasse for years as they debated their options.

Trinity Design Group was brought in to analyze existing facilities, to help them clarify their vision and to help them determine a realistic budget based upon available resources. In less than eight weeks, a fully developed Strategic Master Plan was completed including color site plans, color floor plans and elevation drawings for all current and future phases of construction. In addition to the drawings, a color rendering of the next building project was provided along with a detailed construction budget.

After years of frustration and confusion, the leadership and the congregation are once again excited about what the future holds and their game plan for achieving the vision that God has given them.



Sin #4: Hiring an Unqualified Architect and/or Builder

Church projects have unique design and codes issues that are not common to traditional residential and commercial projects. When you are designing spaces for a larger number of people, with a wide range of age groups and a wide range of activities, all kinds of issues must be thought through and addressed and you want a team who deals with these issues day in and day out. One simple oversight could be devastating to the church, whether it is a limiting factor to the ministry of the church or a codes violation that dramatically affects the building process. A church does not want to risk the increased potential of an inexperienced architect or builder making these mistakes.

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The church should utilize an experienced, team oriented approach that greatly decreases the potential for these oversights. By bringing together an experienced church planner, church architect and church builder, working together with the church as one team, there are a multitude of checks and balances that insure a high quality design and construction process. This

team works together through each phase of the project; planning, design and construction; to insure that what was planned is carried through to the design and the construction phases for a successful project from beginning to end.

Case Study 4: Fellowship Bible Baptist Church

FBBC has been on a continual growth curve from the very beginning. As they outgrew the land that they started on, they were able to purchase fifty acres across the street. This property enabled the church to dream bigger than ever before as they now had plenty of room for growth. As they started to plan for the future, God gave them a unique vision that generated a tremendous amount of excitement. As the church moved forward, they hired a design/build firm to help them with their unique vision.

The design of the facility moved forward at a painfully slow pace, taking much longer than should be expected. Construction was started with limited drawings and the promise that the rest were on their way. As subcontractors were hired, there were constant complaints about the lack of detail on drawings and the inability to move forward without answers. As more drawings were issued, it became obvious to the church that both the design and the construction project were out of control. Sight lines, capacity of spaces, traffic flow and a host of other issues were going to greatly limit the ministry of the church, if they moved forward with the design. Also, in the early stages of the construction project, they were projecting to be significantly over the established budget.

Trinity Design Group was brought in to evaluate the design and the construction project. Trinity was able to confirm the church's suspicion that they had a design that would not work and made recommendations as to how to move forward. After an accelerated redesign keeping elements that were too late to change, a plan was put into place that met the church's vision and needs, while working within the limits of the budget that had been established. A much needed strategic master plan was also put into place as to how they would move forward in the progressive realization of their God-given vision. The team was then able to move forward with confidence that they would have a project that was within budget, at a high level of quality and would be completed on schedule.



Sin #5: Taking the Traditional Approach to Construction

A church construction project is different than a traditional residential or commercial construction project. A church usually has a team of people (such as a committee) who are responsible for the project. Usually, this team is responsible for keeping the body updated and informed as the project progresses. A typical contractor does not work in that environment and is not “set up” to provide the church with the kind of information that is needed for effective communication.

The traditional contractor is also very secretive when it comes to actual costs related to a project, which makes it very difficult for the church to know if they are getting what they are paying for and just how well the project is going. An open book approach, which allows the church to see every penny that is being spent on the project, is a much better option. This option also provides detailed monthly reporting that gives the church team the kind of information they need to have a good handle on the project and to communicate with the body.

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This approach allows the architect, contractor and church building team to work together as a team to make good decisions and to make sure that the project is being done in a cost effective manner. This open book, team approach allows the church building team to thoroughly examine project costs and decisions. It also creates a high degree of accountability for the architect and contractor. As a result of this more effective approach, the savings that are incurred through better decisions, value engineering, material purchasing and contract negotiations go back to the church.

Case Study 5: Fayette SDA

This church had struggled for over a year trying to decide what to build. They had a broad set of needs and a limited budget. Setting priorities for what should be addressed first was difficult. Every option they explored had short-comings that were hard for everyone to accept. Finally, with Trinity Design Group's help, a game plan was developed that progressively met each need based upon the amount of money that could be raised and the amount of savings that could be realized during the construction process. With the open book approach, the team met every month to analyze costs and make decisions. As the church worked to raise more money and the team worked to reduce costs, the entire project was completed and all the identified needs were met.



Sin #6: Trying to Build a Facility Themselves.

In an effort to save money or to get more for their money, some churches will try to get a discounted set of drawings and do the construction of the building on their own. They may have someone in the church with residential or commercial construction experience or they may simply count on figuring it out as they go. The problems with this approach are two-fold. First, a discounted set of drawings can cost a church far more than they save. Discounted drawings lack the detail and the specifications that are needed to control costs and quality, leaving everyone to

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figure it out on their own. Additionally, the design may not even remotely reflect the church's vision and ministry. Secondly, the lack of experience on the church's part can create huge problems. There are many facets to church construction projects that an inexperienced person would likely miss. These issues may mean that a project may never get started or even worse gets started but never gets completed.

The money that could potentially be saved by the church doing their own project could be more than offset by one major oversight. It is far better to work with a team that is willing to let the church sit at the table, evaluate the costs and be involved in making decisions related to the design and construction of the building. This team approach opens up many opportunities to save money while insuring that the project is being executed in a professional manner and according to codes and standard practices.

Case Study 6: Name withheld.

They were a young church that was growing and impacting their community. They were renting a facility that they only had access to on Sunday mornings and were desperate to get their own place. They were encouraged to contact Trinity Design Group for help in figuring out how to move forward. Trinity Design Group helped the church to clarify their vision, determine their needs and evaluate their resources. The church found a piece of property that met their requirements and a Strategic Master Plan was created that included phased site plans, floor plans and elevations; a color rendering and a detailed construction budget.

The church was excited and ready to move forward with their vision. As the building committee evaluated the detailed costs, they came to the conclusion that they could get an acquaintance to draw up an inexpensive set of drawings that they could walk through codes “without needing all those details”. They also felt they could get the construction work done “without having to pay a builder”. Without the help of design and construction professionals, the project has never gotten off the ground. The money that they felt they could save pales in comparison to the frustration and protracted delays that they have experienced.



Sin #7: Not Considering the Importance of Aesthetics

As much as we wish it weren't so, people draw immediate conclusions about a church based upon the appearance of their facilities. The church's facility is the first thing people see and many people will decide whether they visit a particular church based upon their initial impression. How well the buildings are maintained, the architectural style, colors and finishes, site features and landscaping, all speak to the type of church that meets inside. The conclusion that is reached may be completely inaccurate, but the conclusion is made and unless something happens to change that conclusion, it will not change.

When designing and building a new facility, the personality of the church, the surrounding environment and the people the church is trying to reach should be major factors that are taken into consideration. If done well, the design can enhance the ministry of the church in many ways. The right design will create the initial impression that communicates who the church is. It can be an attractive addition to the surrounding environment and it can attract the people that are drawn to the particular design elements that are used. Once inside, it is just as important that the interior environment complements and completes that initial impression.

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Case Study 7: Bridges of Hope Fellowship

This church was a young dynamic church that was desperate to get into their own space so they could better carry out their ministry to the community. Being so young, they felt that all they could afford was a plain, vanilla, inexpensive metal building. It was not exactly what they wanted, but being in their own space was critical and they thought that they would just have to live with it. Trinity Design Group was hired to master plan their property and in the process was able to show the church how they could have a building that was both cost effective and a true reflection of who they were. When the strategic master plan was presented to the church body, they could not believe that the rendering that was revealed to them could actually be their church. With great excitement and enthusiasm the church moved forward with the design and construction of their new facility.

Yes, the statistics are scary and, as you can see, there are many factors that play into these results. Trinity Design Group has a proven system for helping the church avoid these common mistakes and to come out on the positive side of these statistics. No matter what stage of the process you are in, Trinity Design Group can help your church to achieve the successful execution and completion of the planning, design and construction of your project. There truly is A BETTER WAY.

For a free phone consultation, webinar, seminar, or committee meeting contact Trinity Design Group or visit our website at www.TrinityDesignGroup.com.



Statistical Resources:

- 1: Associated Baptist Press, 2009
- 2: American Bar Association, 2008
- 3: Church Lender's Directory, "Pastoral Turnover" Doug Turner 2009
- 4: Quality Digest Magazine, "Lean Construction" Dennis Sowards Nov 2007

About the Author:

Rick Thurman uses his gifts, abilities and experience to help churches translate their vision for ministry and mission into a well developed game plan. Professionally, Rick was trained in engineering and organizational management and spent many years designing and managing large commercial, retail and religious projects.

Spiritually, Rick has been very involved in almost every aspect of church life; from teaching and preaching, to deacon and elder, to ministry staff and ministry leadership. Out of those experiences, a passion for missions and the expansion of God's kingdom has taken Rick to many parts of the world as he has both lead and sent over a thousand people on short-term mission trips.

Rick's passion for the expansion of God's kingdom and conviction that the church is God's instrument to do so, has led him to focus on helping churches to effectively execute their God-given ministry. Utilizing his extensive project, organizational and ministry experience and working with a team of design and construction professionals, Rick is able to help churches develop a comprehensive game plan for moving their ministry toward the purposeful, incremental realization of their vision.



