

“We Need to Build, But Can We Afford It Now?”

Building Projects often have starts and stalls! Getting started is one of the most exciting things a church does. It has all of the hope that a farmer has with Spring planting. It brings the hope of multiplied ministry and fruitful lives because the tool (that’s all it is!) of a new or larger facility has started a process towards a goal.

Of course, one of the biggest stalls is the uncertainty of the present economy. No church should ever embark on a building project they cannot afford in a good or poor economy. However, when a stall happens, it can be a real blessing in disguise. To understand why that is beneficial, we have to realize all the important elements that went into the decision in the first place.

A church initiating a good and necessary project will have looked at several factors before beginning.

- They will have clarified and communicated their Vision, mission and core values.
- They will set goals and determined present and future needs in a master planning context.
- They will have evaluated their present facilities and site to see if they can accomplish the Vision they feel God has given. That may include a decision to re-locate.
- They will have done a thorough financial analysis and structured a plan that is within their budget and abilities. Checking on sources for financing and considering a Capital Stewardship Campaign becomes a part of the process.
- They will have developed their design criteria based on all of the above factors. Those factors have to come into alignment to avoid building too much or too little! It can be as detrimental to a church to build too small as it is to presumptuously build too big.

(This is what [WL Perry](#) does in its signature “[Ministry Driven Design](#)” process)

Again, all of this process should happen regardless of the economy’s state. What do you do, though, when it looks difficult financially, if not impossible, to move ahead with a project, even though the church is out of space and growing. After all, one of the challenges is that churches can grow numerically in periods of economic, social and political instability. It seems folks start to get serious about the Lord when their previous “pillars of strength” begin to fail!!

Consider these thoughts. (These thoughts are not new and are echoed by many ministers, church consultants, architects and builders who are interested in healthy growing churches – not just selling a product for short term profit.)

- **Vision – faith required!** When God lays a Vision on a church community’s heart and they are experiencing growth because of that Vision, be assured that faith will be required to fulfill it! God always seems to ask us to move beyond our resources and trust His abilities. God will make a demand on our faith/trust in Him, no matter what the economy says! After all, God is bigger than any economic cycle. Abraham learned it. Isaac lived it. Joseph, Moses, David and the Disciples experienced it, too.

- **Caught or not!** If a stall in a project comes your way, the hidden blessing will be that it makes the church re-examine their Vision and Mission. “Why are we doing this?” “Who are we and who does God want us to reach?” “Is our Vision compelling?” Most importantly, we get to re-assess how widespread is that vision *caught* among the congregation. A healthy church has genuinely shared vision. Not just leadership saying this is good, but the church as a whole ready to move forward in unity around a compelling Vision.
- **Finances and steps.** Giving may in fact be smaller during this time. So, the answer may be to re-visit design and see if it can be accomplished in smaller steps. The key to any good design is the flexibility of the design and engineering that goes into it. In looking at a Master Plan, most good architects will design in phases. The question remains, can you break those phases down into smaller steps. Or do you have to go back to the drawing board (computer!) and start over. A good partnership between an architect and builder can be helpful at this point.

Financially, the church may have to seek a different source of financing. Bank financing may disappear. However, many churches have found a good source of financing in reputable [Church Bonding company's](#)*. In the process making sure that the church's income and budget align with the steps being considered in a project.

Biblical stewardship principles should be taught on a continual basis, especially during difficult economic times. That allows folks to focus on God's economy and not on the 24 hour media cycle of discouraging economic news.

- **Sacrifice, now?!** Yes, that's right, now! No matter the economy, folks will sacrifice for genuine Kingdom projects more than some “nice” project. Deciding just to create nicer fellowship space for the folks already there will not attract resources in a difficult economy. People will sacrifice for projects that will fulfill Kingdom objectives. Challenge people to sacrifice and watch them respond! If you want to wait till folks have more money, you will find they didn't save it during the economic downturn! They usually will not have any more at a later date than at present. Many, many churches and families remember with fondness the sacrifices they made for things that touched God's heart. They do not count their sacrifice as loss, but gain! And it is sacrifice that helps them focus and organize their lives around important things. Often in abundant economic times, people tend to drift and take it easy. When tough times come, they get back to basics, like a renewed devotional life, good stewardship, getting back to putting God first in the use of their time and money, attending church regularly(!) etc. As the church attenders/members individually and as a whole begin to focus on God's priorities, the “ask” for sacrifice is a joy and not an unwelcome appeal.
- **Planning!** During a project stall is a great time to dive into planning for the day when that pressure is relieved. It is even a great time to begin thinking about initiating a project. A farmer plans his fall harvest and desire for profit in the dead of winter, when there is no possibility of even planting! If you wait till spring to plan, your harvest will be much smaller. If you wait till better times like the summer, you might not have a harvest at all! The engaging of a good architect that has experience in church design and has a thorough pre-design process (like

[Ministry Driven Design](#)) can be the best remedy for tough economic times. It gets the church God focused and forward thinking. The way we change our Present is by focusing on God and His Future for us!

The most powerful thing a church can do in this economic environment is to not let it stop you, but allow for adjustments. Yes, many churches are experiencing numbers growth and facility needs, but also experiencing overall less financial giving. Churches still have a variety of options, not the least being to trust God more than ever! This can truly be a time of strengthening and encouragement because "...for we walk by faith and not by sight...". There are always a variety of paths to keep moving forward.