

Team Leader

Selecting an Architect For Your Ministries' Future

By Kurt Williams

Building facilities for your growing ministry may be the largest project undertaken by you and your committee members this side of Heaven. The magnitude of the decisions made is reflected in a few sobering statistics:

- ▶ Over one-half of today's churches have a set of plans that they have paid for but will never build.
- ▶ The average career span of the senior pastor, upon completion of a significant facility expansion or relocation, is 18 months.
- ▶ The construction industry is the second most litigated industry in the United States.

Granted, the above statistics occur for a myriad of different reasons. However, the selection of the right professionals to guide through the turbulent process of facility design can greatly decrease the likelihood of becoming a statistic yourself. Often, the architect is selected as the first team member to begin the adventure.

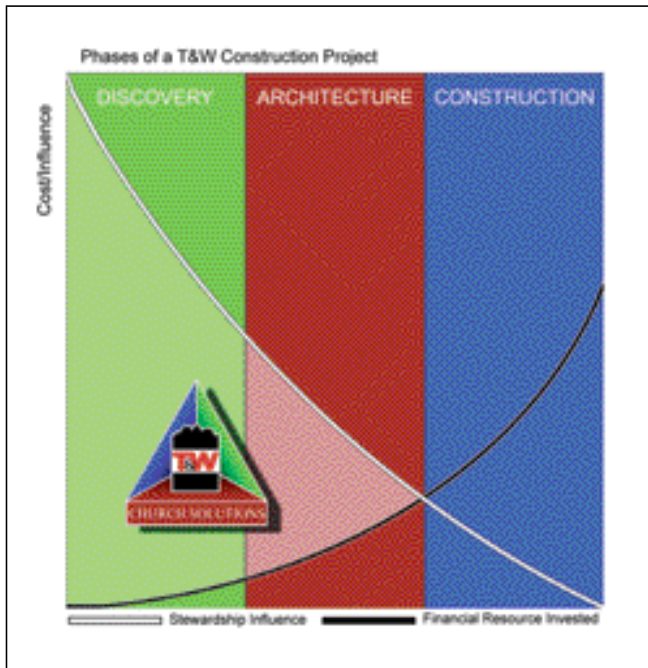
Design Professional

There are several things to look for in your design professional. To start with, does the architect have a true passion to design places of worship? A life committed to Jesus and a passion to serve His church is a must. A heart to understand your ministry and a joy in discovering the solution for your ministry is contagious and energizing to the process. Many times I have been asked, "Why do you work with churches? Don't all those night meetings get old?" If your architect does not view your project as more than "bricks and sticks," find a new design professional. Those night meetings are a blessing.

Does the architect have a true understanding of, and connection with, you and your ministry? A passion to design churches without a true understanding of you, your denomination and your worship style can result in well-intentioned, but ultimately bad design. Rarely will an experienced liturgical designer be able to effectively design worship space for a congregation with a contemporary worship style and vice versa. The best scenario is that your architect—and your entire project team—be active in a church with similar characteristics as your own.

Does the architect have experience designing places of worship? Church facilities are commercial buildings on steroids. The complexities inherent with church design typically exceed the experience of an architect that is focused strictly on commercial office facilities. Hands-on experience with church facility design and building committee management is a must. Without hands-on experience, the design process can take valuable time, and thus momentum, from the building committee and the ministry. An experienced architect with an experienced builder can keep "first things first" through the adventure of the design process, thus keeping the church focused on the ministry.

Does the architect have experience designing commercial facilities? Commercial experience is not a contradiction to experience with places of worship. It is a complement. Today's church is not being designed like yesterday's church. Many cutting-edge design features in today's churches are coming directly from the



commercial secular world. Places of worship are now becoming performing arts theaters. Fellowship space is now café and bookstore venues. Children's areas now rival theme park design and attraction. The commercial markets survive by drawing people to their places of business. The church can learn from commercial business and the architects with experience in that "world" can be great assets to the design of your church.

Does the architect have an openness to equal partnership with the building contractor? Today's church is growing increasingly complex. It is becoming virtually impossible for one firm to cover all the latest trends and technological advances. The design-build concept has continued to gain popularity as a delivery system to address this situation. A Penn State University study has determined that a partnered design-build relationship will reduce construction costs up to six percent over the more traditional approach of design-bid, while also producing the lowest rate of change orders on the project. The cost/influence graphic clearly shows how early cost feedback supplied by the building contractor

can greatly reduce the cost of the project when the least amount of resources are being expended. A truly open, trusting and collaborative relationship between owner, architect and builder will produce some of the most creative and cost-effective worship facilities to reach the lost in our society.

Process Elements

Does the architect follow a process that is tailored for church facility design and construction? Process is good—and bad. A design process that takes on an ISO or QS type approach tends to lend itself to factories and warehouses, not necessarily places of worship, where creativity must have the freedom to flourish. A process that gives the church leadership confidence that nothing will be missed, yet allowing for personal involvement and creative liberty, is what you are looking for. A process that includes continual cost feedback from the builder will reduce expensive re-design and "backing up" that results primarily from exceeding budget constraints.



Elements of a good process include several steps, including discovering who the church is and how they conduct ministry through the use of:

- ▶ Existing facility analysis
- ▶ Projected new facility model
- ▶ Financial analysis
- ▶ Building committee selection and coaching
- ▶ Facility needs, demographic and congregation analysis
- ▶ Site challenge analysis
- ▶ Site survey and topography
- ▶ Financing and fundraising assistance
- ▶ Construction costing and projecting

After discovering the foundational challenges facing the church, it is time—architecturally, to wrap a building around the ministry by developing:

- ▶ Facility design
- ▶ Acoustical and audio/visual analysis
- ▶ Mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) analysis
- ▶ Civil/survey/geo-technical analysis
- ▶ Master site planning
- ▶ Financial loan package
- ▶ Subcontractor qualification
- ▶ Open book bidding and contracting
- ▶ Guaranteed maximum price (GMP) with 100 percent of all savings given back to the church

The construction phase is when the vision of the ministry begins to become reality. Several steps take place during this stage such as:

- ▶ Subcontractor and supplier bidding
- ▶ Construction quality control, including:
 - Daily quality control checks, safety and security walk-thru, construction progress reporting and photo journaling
 - Weekly safety reporting and meetings
 - Bi-weekly owner progress meetings
- ▶ Systems demonstrations and operation manuals

Leadership Focus

Does the architect possess team leadership or coaching abilities? Or is an individual already on the team responsible? Leading the design process for a church has been likened to herding cats. The previous attributes and experiences are important for the leader/coach, though the position is rarely the designing architect. This role is often times filled by another member of the design-build team. The task of the leader/coach is to make sure that the various professionals are integrated, getting the proper information and staying on track. The goal of the leader/coach is to make sure that the church stays focused on ministry, the architects stay focused on design, the site engineers stay focused on the site, the acousticians stay focused on sound, the MEP engineers stay focused on electrical and heating/cooling, the builder stays focused on value engineering the subcontractors stay focused on current and accurate pricing, etc.

After satisfying the previous requirements for a good architect, there is one last requirement that is probably the most important—do you like him/her? The perfect architect does not exist. Problems will occur. Are you working with individuals that you like, enjoy spending time with, trust, respect and are willing (together) to fight the good fight with? As you strive to build God’s kingdom, failure is not an option. Having the right architect and builder with the above requirements can take an overwhelming time of potential ministry distraction and make it a joyful time of ministry focus. ❖

Kurt Williams is a design-build veteran at T&W Corp. with more than 20 years in the industry. An active contributing member of the National Association of Church Design Builders (NACDB), T&W Corp. is a design-build firm dedicated to serving the churches of Central Indiana. For more information, contact Williams at kwilliams@twcorp.net, call 371.244.7637 or visit www.tw-corp.com. Ministry advice on church building is also available through the NACDB at www.nacdb.com.