

The Impact of Church Facilities on Church Growth

By Tim S. Smith

The debate addressing the impact of church facilities on church growth has gone on for years. Some believe that new buildings will always lead to church growth. They have a “build it and they will come mentality”. Others have a more conservative viewpoint which is expressed in a desire to address new facilities when the present facilities are full. So, the question is, “Who is right?”

Much research has been done and most experts agree that between 70 - 80 percent of all churches are either plateaued or declining. The most common cause for this situation, related to facilities, is the lack of space.¹ The lack of growth in many churches has been caused by poor planning or no planning at all related to facilities. There is a great need for church leaders to better understand how to plan for church growth as it relates to the area of facilities.

When a church facility is approximately 80 percent full, the likelihood for growth or the potential for growth is minimal. The “80 percent” rule is not only applicable to the entire church facility but also to the basic elements within the facility. An example of this would be a church that has ample space for adults but in the preschool area all rooms are at 80 percent of capacity. The result will



be that the growth of the entire church will be hindered. Another example would be a church with plenty of space in worship but the parking lot is full. The result will be – no growth.

The opening paragraph asked, “Who is right?” The answer is “neither”. The truth is that there is a very delicate balance that must be kept. Too early and the space will be difficult to pay for but too late and there will be no reason for additional space. This is why church leaders should be ever diligent in evaluating their church facilities.

The aspects of church facilities that should be evaluated are land, parking, worship and education space. As a general rule, each acre of useable land that the church owns should allow for 100-125 people in attendance. In evaluating the worship space, twenty-one inches per person per pew will accommodate all ages. To determine worship space capacity, measure the length of the pews and divide the total inches of pews by twenty-one. Parking is also very important and without it churches cannot grow. To determine a church’s possible attendance based on parking space, count the number of identifiable parking spaces and divide the total by two. Evaluating education space is more complex than any other area.

The education space is usually divided into four age groups: preschool, children, youth and adults. To evaluate the space it is necessary to know the square footage of each room. Once the

¹ Mike Hawkin, Church Business Magazine. “A Waste of Space”, April 2005, p 28-30.

square footage is determined, divide it by the square feet recommended per person. Each age group is different: preschool - 35, children - 25, and youth and adults - 18.

It is also important to know that if a church has no rooms available to start a new class then the church is limited in its growth potential. Starting new classes is critical to church growth and without space for a new class; growth will be minimal even if the existing classrooms have space for new members.

In all areas of church facilities it is very important to study the quantity that they will provide but it is equally important to study the quality of the space. If a facility is unkempt, cluttered and dirty it portrays the wrong image to the community. If a facility is run down and out dated guests will not have a favorable first impression of the church.

These are just a few issues related to church growth and church facilities. If your church needs assistance in better understanding your facilities, please contact the Sunday School/Open Group Ministries of the Georgia Baptist Convention at 1-800-RingGBC ext 285 or visit our website at ssog.gabaptist.org.