

The myth of the master plan

Will We Ever Get Our Sanctuary Built?

By N. Vernon Blankenship

In an article published in a *Cutting Edge* issue in 1997, I described my experience in joining a congregation with a 10-year-old building which offered many barriers for handicapped persons. This was to be the first unit in a master plan to be constructed in three phases. The first phase, the present building, has a multipurpose worship space on the ground floor with a basement which includes a nursery, four small classrooms, a small fellowship area, and two offices. It also includes a kitchenette area.

Four years ago the congregation employed a local architect to design a master plan for future buildings and site development. It is a very pleasing layout with two additions to the present building. This included a large narthex, offices, and preschool rooms. The third unit would be the sanctuary.

The three units were joined by hallways.

Soon after my wife and I had joined the congregation, one of the members showed me the three drawings, in color, which were hung in the foyer. The drawings showed the architect's conception of the total site plan, a floor plan

Inside Pages

Architectural Awards
Invitation

Answers on Master
Planning

Vertie Powers Leads
New Church
Establishment

of the building, and an exterior picture of the completed master plan. They were impressive.

However, I quickly said to the member, "You should take these down and put them away." I'm sure he did not understand the implication of my statement, and I did not have an opportunity to explain.

At that moment, my mind went back to many such pictures I had seen in the hallways and offices of churches across the country over the past three decades. A large percentage of these master plans had never been completed. And many would never be completed as originally conceived. In some congregations there was a feeling the church had failed because it was not able to complete the master plan as originally approved. Then the paintings were taken down and quietly placed in a closet to be forgotten.

In some congregations the master plan had become a part of the congregational mythology and had been held as a guiding hope

(continued on page 2)



Members of New Fellowship Christian Church, Columbus, Ohio, place a "future site" sign on their property. This will be the site of the first Vision Builders! Construction Volunteer building project set for May-July 1999.

(The Myth of the Master Plan, continued from page 1)

for 10 to 20 years. In a few instances an expensive model had been made of the master plan and ultimately it had been stored because the church was not able to complete the plan as had been initially envisioned.

Purpose of a Master Plan

In Church Extension's planning guide on "The Master Plan," the statement is made, "while there is no planning that can anticipate all future changes, there can be planning for orderly changes to accommodate growth and change to serve the people effectively. This is master planning.

"Sites can be planned for the best use of land, the best presentation of the building, and the most efficient traffic pattern." The mistake that many churches make is that they invest too much money in details in the master plan and get the plan set in their minds as

the only way to go. Most master plans must be modified to keep abreast of the changes that take place over time.

Rarely is the original master plan completed without modification. Changing program requirements, growth projections which materialize differently than anticipated, and other factors will inevitably call for modification of a master plan. I recall working with a new congregation in Texas that employed an architect and developed a master plan for a congregation of significant size. He did it in such detail and took such time that it cost the congregation \$15,000.

When it came time for the church to build its first unit, leaders found it was too expensive and threw out the whole plan. The congregation then went to a church builder who built a single unit without a master plan. This

was partly due to over planning for the first stage and the reaction to the architect's mistake. (See Church Extension's planning guide, "The Building Plans Committee and the Architect," available from BCE.)

The master plan for a building to be built in segments does not need to be highly detailed. The master plan would be a line drawing which would be a "footprint" for the ultimate site development and building location. Of course there needs to be significant planning so that the program requirements of the church will be cared for in the first unit and in the expanded units as the church grows.

Master Plan Evolves

A master plan should not be set in stone but should be an evolutionary plan that may change with the changing requirements of the community and the congregation. Therefore, I feel it is a mistake for a congregation to spend much money, time, and effort developing a plan in detail which will not be immediately built.

The immediate concern is for the space which the congregation will be building at the moment. Then as the time comes for the additional unit, the congregation will restudy the needs and will undoubtedly find there are changes that need to be made in the master plan. If the congregation has not invested too much time and money in the original master plan, it will be adaptable to change.

My recommendation is that the first master plan not be developed into a model nor should there be an elaborate color rendering of the plan. The simple line drawing will be sufficient to provide a footprint

(continued on page 3)

A note from the editor

Master planning is vitally important in church facility planning.



Ryan D. Hazen

Such a plan helps guard against "plunking" a building down on a site only to wish it had been placed 20 feet further east when plans begin for phase

II. Throughout this issue, however, you will see that too much detail in a master plan ties us to something that will inevitably need to be modified. I am so grateful that Vernon Blankenship has shared his wisdom from his vast experience in working with churches.

In this issue as well, you will meet Bob Kirkland, an Atlanta, Georgia, architect serving on the Vision Builders! Construction Task Force.

Vision Builders! is a new arm of New Congregation Establishment. It will assist in raising funds for NCE and will oversee volunteer new church construction. The first Vision Builders! construction volunteer project will be New Fellowship Christian Church in Columbus, Ohio. Contact Chuck Babcock (cbabcock@bce.disciples.org) or BCE for more information on how you can help!

—*Ryan D. Hazen*

Architect, Robert Kirkland, Answers Master Planning Questions

Q What is master planning and when should it be done by a church?

A A master plan is a planning response to the anticipated needs and established program requirements for a particular site. It shows, in the site plan form, the entire build-out of the property from day one until all program needs and requirements are met. It's a "road map" that shows architecturally how to get from here to there. A master site plan should always be done.

Q What kinds of questions should be thought through by a congregation prior to employing an architect?

A The congregation should ask itself what is our mission and how do we plan to accomplish our mission with the current ministries and in the future as we grow.

Q Can an architect help with the master planning "pre-work"?

A A planner or architect can help with strategic site and building planning. Planners and architects know the right questions to facilitate establishment of present and future needs related to the building program.

Q What do you include in a church master plan?

A The plan should show, in a scaled drawing, the: boundary; topography, with existing trees and other site conditions; constrictions to building, such as flood plains, zoning, setbacks, or other site-related information; buildings, with related parking, sidewalks, and landscaping; other related uses such as play areas, recreation fields, or other outdoor functions.

Q How often should the master plan be revisited and revised?

A The plan should be reviewed as significant growth occurs and at the least, yearly. The plan should be modified if and when program changes occur. For instance, if the congregation decides to add a ministry to the existing programs, then those building requirements, if any, to serve the new ministry needs to be added to the revised master plan.

Q Is the master plan process usually contracted separately from other architectural services? What might a congregation expect to spend on average?

A Master site planning can be a separate function, but it can also be the responsibility of the building architect, if he/she has been selected. But, generally speaking, the master planner is needed prior to the selection of the building architect. Fees are generally based

(continued on page 4)

(The Myth of the Master Plan continued from page 2)

of the master plan.

Allow for Future Changes

Experience throughout the years with new congregations has been that most do not grow rapidly or as greatly as they anticipated in the beginning. Therefore, I have seen many new congregations that built a multipurpose first unit with the anticipation of building a new sanctuary within five or 10 years. Many of these congregations ended up converting their first unit to the sanctuary, and building additional space of a different type.

The most disappointing thing has been the long gap in time be-

tween the completion of the first unit and their ability to build a second phase. If the congregation has a beautiful color painting on its wall of the final unit that they had hoped to have built by this time, there is some feeling of failure. However, in many instances the second or third phase was not practical in the first place, and they have found better solutions to their building needs.

As I indicated earlier, our congregation has need for additional space and to make the building accessible. We have proceeded with plans to develop an accessible driveway—bringing people to the main entrance of the church. We will have additional accessible parking. Then the task

of developing a plan for the next unit will begin.

It is my hope that our building committee will not be tied to the original concept, but shall be open to planning a building that will answer the needs of the church now. There has been some reluctance to consider this idea since the church invested several thousand dollars in developing the master plan. It is my hope that we can take those three pictures down from the hallway some day and say that our building is now a reality and not a myth of the past.

N. Vernon Blankenship is retired from Board of Church Extension where he was Vice President in charge of Field Services. He and his wife, LoAnn, now live in Lexington, Kentucky.

Powers Leads New Congregation Establishment Ministry

We welcome The Rev. Vertie Powers to our staff as director of New Congregation Establishment. Vertie began her new responsibilities on September 1, having completed her ministry as pastor of Fellowship Christian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Her new responsibilities include helping regions strengthen the establishment of new congregation ministries and supporting pastors of new churches. New Congregation Establishment is a Disciples churchwide ministry housed with Board of Church Extension.



Vertie Powers

“Vertie brings a wonderful combination of experience in life and passion for ministry,” said James L. Powell, president of Board of Church Extension. “She will be both a great leader for this churchwide priority and a wonderful colleague for all those with whom she will work.”

The Rev. Richard L. Hamm, general minister and president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) praised the new director for the gifts and grace she will bring to her new ministry. “New Congregation Establishment is a critical part of our mission as Disciples and I’m pleased that Vertie will be an essential part of that focus,” Hamm said.

Powers was instrumental in establishing a new congregation in the Washington, D.C., metroplex during the 1980s, working primarily on demographic studies and site selection. Her vision for her new responsibilities, however, are centered upon the need to evangelize and reach the unchurched.

Powers graduated from Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, in 1992 with a master of divinity degree. She completed a bachelors degree in 1989 at Trinity College, Washington, D.C. She also earned a certificate in Clinical Pastoral Education from Duke in 1990.

While pursuing her degrees, Powers served chaplaincy and student pastorates in Butner, Rockingham, Chapel Hill, and Hillsborough, North Carolina. She was interim pastor at Twelfth Street Christian Church, Washington, D.C. prior to being called to her current position four years ago.

Before entering the ministry, the new director was a customer service representative with Bell Atlantic and a cable television program coordinator in Apex, North Carolina.

The native of North Carolina was ordained in 1992 at Twelfth Street Christian Church in Washington, D.C. She is the parent of one son, Darien Sean McGriff.

(continued from page 3)

on effort required for a specific building program. A range of \$4,000 to \$20,000 could be expected. On average, I would say \$10,000 to \$12,000 of fees might be expected for a congregation planning to grow to 600 to 800 members, with the appropriately sized piece of land.

Q Describe your work with New Fellowship Christian Church, Columbus, Ohio, and how you worked with its members to develop the project.

A New Fellowship has been selected to be the first building for the Vision Builders! construction program using volunteer labor. At this point of selection, the congregation knew that it wanted to build its first-phase building—a ministry

building, but were somewhat unclear what could happen after that construction was completed. Members of the congregation and I met, discussed their program and established an understanding of what their ultimate goal was regarding buildings to support their ministries. We are currently in the process of developing a schematic floor plan and elevations for their ministry building and master site plan that will direct how they will proceed with their building program based on their current growth projections.

Q If there was one piece of advice you could give a congregation in relation to master planning, what would it be?

A I would say, “Use a professional who has previous experience in planning, and don’t fall into the

trap that the fees are unnecessary or that we can do it ourselves. Thousands of dollars will be spent in construction. Start the process correctly.

Q How can the congregation be helpful to the architect in the process?

A The congregation must have a clear, well-defined mission and program. As the process proceeds, the congregation should provide to the planner input from a single source (Chairperson of the Building Committee), who represents the committee and the congregation as a whole. Other technical data as it becomes available, should be furnished.

Robert H. Kirkland, AIA, ASID, Architect and Planner is a member of Peachtree Christian Church, Atlanta, Georgia.

1999

You're Invited to Enter the Presidents' Award for Architectural Excellence

- Purpose:**
- To recognize Disciples congregations/organizations and their architects and design professionals
 - To award building programs throughout the past 10 years
 - To lift up projects demonstrating design, vision, creativity, and functionality
- Categories:**
- Awards available for new construction, renovation/restoration, accessibility, and visual arts
- Awards:**
- A \$500 gift in each category to an outreach ministry designated by the winning congregation
 - Up to three awards per category with plaque or certificate
 - Presentation at 1999 General Assembly in Cincinnati
- Entries:**
- Entry fee is \$50 per submission
 - Entries must be postmarked by July 1, 1999
 - Contact BCE to receive "Presidents' Award Application Portfolio"

Architectural Awards Deadline July 1, 1999

Board of Church Extension is seeking nominations for the 1999 "BCE Presidents' Award for Architectural Excellence."

This church architectural recognition, formerly known as the Wickes Award, will honor congregations and other organizations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and their design professionals for quality architecture in recent building programs.

Jurists will consider awards in the following categories: new construction, renovations/restoration, accessibility, and visual arts. Any congregation or organization listed in the *Year Book and Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* that has completed a religious building or work of visual art since January 1, 1990, is eligible to enter the competition.

A jury composed of design professionals and other consultative staff to the Board of Church Extension will determine the winners of the awards. The jury will consider many factors in judging the entries, including how the project facilitates the congregation's or organization's ministry, stewardship, design aesthetics, environment friendliness and accessibility.

Awards will include honor certificates plus a \$500 cash gift to the top award winner in each category, given to the outreach ministry of the winner's choice. All award recipients will be honored at the October 1999 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Cincinnati, Ohio.

To enter, either a representative from the congregation/organization or the design professional should contact Board of Church Extension for an application. Board of Church Extension may be contacted at P.O. Box 7030, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204; by phone at (800) 274-1883; or by E-mail at bce@bce.disciples.org. There is an entry fee of \$50 and entries must be postmarked by July 1, 1999.

Previous recipients of the BCE-sponsored Wickes awards for architectural excellence in church facilities include First Christian Church, Portsmouth, Ohio, in 1983, and Saguaro Christian Church, Tucson, Arizona in 1989.

BCE Services Offered

Board of Church Extension offers a staff of professional consultants to help congregations with the planning and financing of capital projects. These services are available simply for the asking:

General Counseling—On-site visits are made to help congregations explore objectives, evaluate financial resources, and develop time schedules for capital projects at no cost to the congregation.

Strategic and Building Planning—Newly established congregations plus growing, declining, and relocating churches receive field consultations, that provide staff leadership, research materials and evaluations to define missions, set goals, and identify requirements for housing present and future programs at no cost to the congregation.

Faithful Planning—Staff help outline an intentional planning process to assess a congregation's strengths, weaknesses, and resources. Board of Church Extension, Homeland Ministries, and several regions provide this service. BCE-led events are provided without cost to the congregation when offered as part of an ongoing planning process.

Fund Raising—Materials and staff direction help raise funds for capital projects, debt reduction and in some cases, funds for operational and special needs. A nominal fee is charged.

Loan Services—Church Extension loan services are available to congregations and organizations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for the purchase of sites, parsonages and equipment, construction and remodeling of church buildings, construction of facilities for regional and general units of the Church, campus facilities and student centers for

church-related colleges and seminaries, development of camp and conference centers, and all other capital projects.

Listening Conferences—Teams of consultants meet with congregations to gather input from membership and prepare recommendations to resolve struggles with hopes, expectations, problems and opportunities for ministry and prepare recommendations to help them move forward. This service is provided for a nominal fee.

Site Selection Counseling—Field visits and written reports are made without charge to evaluate proposed sites for new and relocating congregations.

Special Counseling—On-call architectural, sacred design and data processing specialists provide consultations to help resolve issues in these special fields. These services are provided at a nominal fee.

LATEST LOAN OR INVESTMENT RATES?

Go to www.disciples.org/bce

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