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## Architects offer pre-construction advice

**By Vicki Brown**

*Word&Way Correspondent*

Congregations often consider building a new structure or adding on when its sanctuary is bursting at the seams or not enough space is available to begin a new class or program.

Before having construction plans drawn, church leaders might want to heed the advice of a couple of Missouri architects.

### Motivation

Church leaders and members need to examine their motives for building. "It's the hardest question to consider," Larry Phillips of Springfield-based Pellham Phillips Architects and Engineers.

"They must ask themselves if they are building because they want the biggest and the best facility or if they are trying to have a bigger building than the church down the road," Phillips said.

### Mission

In addition to motivation, congregants must consider ministry needs.

"You don't just build a building. You build the ministry then build the building around it," St. Louis architect John Littlefield emphasized. "You must make sure the main thing is the main thing."

### Experts

The congregation must determine its need for an architect, construction manager, sound engineer or other consultants. Phillips and Littlefield believe some expert assistance is needed. A church can determine its need for experts based on ministry vision, size and budget.

When hiring an architect, the church should follow up on references. "Since you're going to spend quite a bit of time with the architect, it needs to be a person you enjoy and who is comfortable to be around," Phillips said.

He added that hiring an architect who specializes in churches isn't necessary as long as the chosen expert "is well-rounded and has a wealth of experience."

### Flexibility

A competent architect or engineer and church leaders should discuss when and how the building will be used throughout the week. They should determine an easily accessible location for the church office and should discuss technological needs.

### Consensus

No plan, no matter how well thought out, will please everyone. But the architects agreed that church leaders should work hard to build consensus within the congregation. Consensus building starts with making members feel they are part of the process. An architect can help everyone understand how different building aspects fit together.

### Future growth

As a church builds to meet current needs, it also should look to its future, Phillips and Littlefield noted.

"Architects don't just design buildings," Phillips said. "They help the congregation prepare for future growth and to plan for the future."

Church leaders and members should develop a flexible plan that provides for growth, Littlefield added.

**Faith**

Littlefield and Phillips believe the congregation must center itself in faith – in God’s direction for the future and for the resources to realize its vision.

“In 30 years, I’ve never seen a church build too big,” Phillips said. That’s part of what he means by “stepping out in faith” to develop a “growing and vital” church. “It’s important to make a distinction between the building and the church,” he added.

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