

## ARE YOU READY FOR A CAPITAL CAMPAIGN?

Given that *money* tends to be a highly emotional subject for almost all of us, the development of truly faithful and trustworthy philosophy and practice in raising funds for any capital expansion or renovation project undertaken by a local church will perhaps be one of the most important and challenging responsibilities taken up by your leadership team. The investment of energy and focused concentration that is required by a successful capital campaign often becomes a significant source of unintended *distraction* from the very ministry priorities and practical commitments which initially seemed to require such tangible enhancements to the facilities of your church. And since your leadership team will probably need to devote their careful attention to fundraising for a significant period of time during any capital campaign, it seems particularly wise and appropriate to give consideration to some initial questions which can help you determine whether or not your church is truly ready to enter into such an important endeavor. With this in mind, the following discussion is intended to help your leadership team check and evaluate some of the common assumptions that often accompany the emergence of a successful capital campaign. Rather than questioning the faithfulness or viability of the vision that is taking shape within your congregation, it is our hope to support and encourage you in pursuing the purposes of God for your ministry by sharing some of the tangible help and insight which has been gained through the experience of other churches.

As your local church begins to give its consideration to a potential capital campaign to renovate your existing property or build a new ministry facility, the most significant question to evaluate *will not be* to first determine how much such a project will cost. The core question to be resolved prayerfully and successfully by your leaders and congregation will be to ask, *Why?* Why do you really need to renovate, buy and/or build? Let's sketch out some familiar but inadequate answers to that question that outline two initial reasons why your congregation *should not* enter into a new capital campaign:

1. Whether or not we feel comfortable admitting this to ourselves, it is very easy to see that sometimes pastors and the congregations they serve will

adopt what might be described as the *Field of Dreams* rationale for their proposed capital campaign: *If we build it, they will come!* In other words, if your church has become convinced that a capital renovation project is a way to effectively build attendance and support for a ministry that is now experiencing stagnation or decline, we would strongly encourage you to engage in a very deliberate season of *Strategic Ministry Planning* which is thoroughly saturated in prayer while you seek the Lord's guidance for a more effective future together. The best wisdom we can relay from the experience of vital and thriving congregations is to affirm that while it is usually true that *people will come to visit a new or renovated facility out of curiosity, they only seem to stick around to grow and deepen in their faith because they have experienced meaningful and effective ministry!*

2. A second variation on this theme speaks to the rising tide of momentum that often emerges among church leaders and congregants who become determined to pursue a capital project after witnessing apparent success in the ministry of some other local church which has recently concluded their own building campaign. Again, we want to offer a cautionary note: Don't let your capital planning process develop as the result of "steeple envy" regarding what another congregation may be doing at present. *The effectiveness of a capital expansion project by any local church generally arises out of the clarity of a truly God-given vision for a transformative ministry within the surrounding community!* Another way to say this is that most successful capital campaigns usually reflect a very patient and intentional effort by the church to pray until God's guidance is both *clear* and *confirmed*, enabling the local leadership team to remain very open and consistent with members in explaining why some significant *ministry* purpose will be initiated or enhanced as a result of the building project.

Knowing that what has been written above suggests that local churches can enter into capital campaigns without fully recognizing how their own motives can be unintentionally compromised by pride and insecurity, we also want to offer a

word of affirmation for those times in which a congregation may quite rightly see a need to address challenges that will hinder future growth and effectiveness. For instance, *capital campaigns to reduce/retire building debt or address unresolved maintenance issues may pose a challenge to church leaders* hoping to articulate the rationale for additional funds for needs that do not at first seem to involve any sort of significant *ministry* purpose. In the case of debt reduction campaigns, we want to encourage congregations to consider the ways in which the present and future ministry potential of the church may be unleashed more fully once the church has been able to move beyond the status quo in its ability to devote financial resources to ministry programming. And similarly, we encourage local churches to consider engaging in regular “facility audits” to evaluate the present appearance, mechanical systems, and functionality of ministry facilities to determine whether any potential capital campaign will allow the congregation to strengthen and enhance its appeal to the surrounding community. Because a church facility can typically be seen and understood as “the most expensive member of our ministry staff,” it is appropriate and necessary for congregational leaders to give sustained attention and care to its ongoing physical needs precisely because church buildings offer silent witness to our neighbors regarding the importance and value of the ministries we share. Does your building extend a warm and inviting *Welcome* to persons who are in need of God’s grace, or would the general aesthetic condition or disrepair of your facilities raise questions regarding the viability of the church in the mind of potential guests? So when the most significant and pressing need of your church is debt reduction or deferred maintenance, these concerns should be seen as legitimate *ministry* needs when you begin to develop a “case statement” (outlining the project priorities and rationale) for a potential capital campaign. But ultimately, before launching such a campaign for capital renovation and/or expansion, local church leaders will want to be crystal clear in stating both *Why* the project will be crucial to the ministry of the congregation as well as *Who* will most likely benefit from such an investment?

In light of the preceding discussion, another preliminary consideration may be of benefit to a local church attempting to determine whether or not its members are prepared to enter into a capital campaign requiring the services of fundraising counsel. Assuming that the strategic ministry plan of the congregation outlines the potential benefits and ministry purposes of new capital expansion or renovations, *the design and construction of the building itself should come last in the process of*

*discussion and planning for church leaders.* To put it simply, too many building projects in local churches suffer from inadequate investment in what is known as *architectural programming*, a process in which the design professionals, church leaders, and congregants give careful consideration to the ways in which the space to be built or reconfigured can be profitably put to the service of ministry aims and objectives. While the requirements and potential uses of the church facility which is beginning to be discussed by congregational leaders may seem so self-evident and obvious that the painstaking work of architectural programming is considered to be a waste of time by some, experience shows that such work will yield benefit to both the fundraising and construction phases of the project. By beginning this process with a careful focus on documenting real needs, congregational consensus can be developed in ways that will pay off richly in future stewardship. But when local churches begin with some sort of building already in mind, it is often the case that some congregants immediately express initial resistance to some of the ideas represented by the new facility which has been proposed. Feeling pushed beyond their initial comfort zone and ill-equipped to discuss these new ideas because of a sense of inadequate consultation or communication, congregants may quickly rise to oppose the project while wondering how their leaders moved so far and so fast in their own building plans. In time, such initial resistance can also harden into a sense of suspicion regarding estimated costs which erodes confidence leading into the fundraising phase of the project. In short, we want to remind church leaders to be very deliberate and intentional in cultivating congregant involvement in the type of architectural programming process that contributes to a good ministry design. The best advice here is for leadership to recognize that *in a building campaign, you do not get a second chance to make a good first impression.*

Given the rich heritage of evangelistic outreach and compassionate ministry that has been embodied in our movement from the very earliest days of the Church of the Nazarene, one final observation deserves mention. Just because we *can* see our way forward to design and build a new ministry facility does not mean that we *should* attempt to achieve our initial dreams. In other words, for congregations that share our commitment to the doctrine of holiness and the way it has always called us to share our lives redemptively and sacrificially with others, a note of caution is perhaps necessary whenever we give consideration to the nature and scope of what we might build. Very early in our history, Phineas Bresee himself articulated this

concern in outlining his vision for the emerging Church of the Nazarene: “We were convinced that houses of worship should be plain and cheap, to save from financial burdens, and that *everything should say welcome to the poor*. We went feeling that food and clothing and shelter [rather than expensive or impressive buildings!] were the open doors to the hearts of the unsaved poor, and that through these doors we could bear to them the life of God. . . . The Gospel comes to a multitude without money and without price, *and the poorest of the poor are entitled to a front seat of the Church of the Nazarene*, the only condition being that they come early enough to get there.” Against this background of Nazarene tradition which counsels us to keep an appropriate balance whenever we begin to design building plans for our ministry facilities, we simply encourage local congregations to give consideration to the same issues that captured the hearts and minds of our ancestors in the faith.

[Jeff Crosno, Northwest District Advisory Board, 3/2015]