

GENERAL CHURCH BUILDING GUIDELINES

The follow church building guidelines are an excerpt from the authors' book, "*Before You Build*". These church building guidelines have been compiled from a variety of sources including years of experience seeing what really works, and what doesn't. Use these guidelines as a starting point for planning, but please note these are general guidelines for a church building program, and every one of these has exceptions and modifiers based on your particular needs.

- In general, you should estimate approximately 1 acre per hundred people. This allows for your building, adequate parking, green space, recreation and storm water management. This space requirement would be greatly reduced in a metropolitan area where on-street or public parking is available.
- Plan for 1 parking space for every 2.25 people on campus at one time. This will probably be less than the required parking by the city or county, but will more accurately reflect actual need. Initially you will be able to get away with less parking, however, you need to plan for adequate parking for the total capacity of the facilities, even if you decide to grow into it over time.
- To get a good idea of parking requirements for a future building program, have someone go into the parking lot and count cars over a several week period along with taking a good attendance of everyone on campus. Divide the total average attendance (men, women and children) by the average number of cars. The result will probably be somewhere around 2 to 2.5 people per car. Multiply this number by the capacity of your new facility and this will tell you how many parking spaces you will eventually need in order to park everyone to fill your building to capacity.
- Estimate on-site parking to be approximately 100-110 cars per acre. Structured parking (parking decks/garages) is VERY expensive. While structured parking can dramatically increase parking per acre, use only as a last resort due to the high cost of construction.
- Sanctuary seating requirements typically range from 10 to 15 square feet per person, depending on layout, seating type, seating pattern, and total size of the sanctuary. Stage area should be calculated separately from seating area, which may vary greatly between churches.
- Using chairs instead of pews will generally allow you to seat more people in the same space, perhaps as much as 20% more. Chairs also allow you to reconfigure your sanctuary as needed to support various types of use (weddings, Sunday morning service, events, community use, fellowship, etc.)
- The Vestibule/Lobby/Narthex should be about 2 square feet per person in the worship center. Normally this will be approximately 15-20% sanctuary seating space. If you plan on running multiple services, you should consider increasing this to facilitate the "shift change".
- Classrooms range in size from 12 square feet per person (for adults) to 35 square feet per person in the room (nursery and toddlers), depending on the age group using the space.
- Almost no church is built with enough storage, janitorial and working space.

- A high school size basketball court is 50x84 feet. Adding modest space around the edge of the court for out of bounds, plus allowing for restrooms, storage rooms, multipurpose rooms, etc., means that you are probably looking at a minimum of 7,500-8,000 square feet of building.
- Individual offices are usually recommended to be a minimum of 120 square feet and pastor's offices a minimum of 150 square feet (with a recommended size of 300 square feet). Cubicles in open workspace areas range from approximately 48 to 105 square feet, although they may be as small as 4'x4" (16 square feet).
- Round tables in the fellowship hall will reduce seating capacity by 20% or more. In calculating space needs, plan on 12 square feet per person for square tables and 15 for round.
- Overall, a building with dedicated spaces for sanctuary, fellowship, education, administration and multiuse space may require from 35-55 square feet of space per person, depending on programs, ministries and other factors.
- A building with multi-purpose rooms (some rooms used for multiple purposes) may require as little as 23 square feet per person.
- Plan on nearly twice the amount of restroom capacity for women than for men.
- Hallways should be no less than 6 feet wide. Seriously consider wider halls if you run multiple services in order to facilitate "shift change". This is especially important around the Sunday school rooms, and area that always seems congested.
- Handicap ramps have a slope of no more than 1 inch of drop for every linear foot unless handrails are provided.
- Budget approximately 10% of the building cost for new furnishings.
- Generally speaking, first floor space on grade is cheaper than basement or 2nd floor space. If you have the room, it is generally better to spread out horizontally instead of vertically in order to minimize cost.
- One way to estimate the cost of furniture is to take the floor plan of your new facilities and do a room-by-room inventory of what you would need to buy for that room. The easiest way to do this is in a spreadsheet with columns for room, item description, quantity, item cost and total cost (formula of quantity times item cost). Open a church supplies catalog and assign reasonable prices for each item and let the spreadsheet total the results.
- None of the above points should be construed as advice as to what to build, but only as points of reference to be used in your planning and budgeting process.

With this information, you are now equipped with some general ideas on church construction. As they say, a little knowledge can be dangerous, however, it is less dangerous than a lack of knowledge.

It is generally in the church's best interest to find an outside consultant, either within the denomination or an independent church building consultant to help mold these general concepts into a definitive plan for your church's building program. Outside counsel is almost always a wise move as the gap between knowing and not knowing about a matter is much smaller than the gulf between knowing something and doing it right.

Mistakes are easy to make. For more information on how to address critical church building issues, read “*Before You Build: Practical Tips & Experienced Advice to Prepare Your Church for a Building Program*” available for [immediate free download](#).

In addition to leading his church through a building and capital stewardship campaign, Steve Anderson is a church building consultant, seminar speaker, past contributing editor for Church & Worship Technology Magazine and author of the eBook, "Before you Build": Practical Tips & Experienced Advice to Prepare Your Church for a Building Program.

To download the book, or for more information on church building and construction financing, visit www.ChurchBizOnline.com