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# KEYSTONE BAPTIST

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## Managing Your Facility For Effective Ministry

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**H**ow important is your facility (read: building(s) to your ministry? How well would you be able to minister to your people without your facility? Then again—Is your facility meeting the needs of your church ministry goals? Perhaps you have thoughts and ideas on improving your facility, but you don't know who can help you implement them. Who can you call that will consult with you to properly turn your facility vision into reality? We, Susan and I, have been *helping churches do their job* for over 28 years by consulting with Baptist churches with their facility needs. In this article we have compiled some elementary guidelines to help the pastor and church leaders make an in-house evaluation of their facility. We have also included a section that is a step-by-step guideline that may be useful to those considering more extensive upgrades to their facility and to those that have more extensive problems. This section would also be particularly useful to church leaders that are planning additional ministries that require the use of additional building facilities.

The Baptist church building in America today is quite different from the one room meeting hall, as it may have been 100+ years ago. Today Americans want and expect a safe, comfortable, and well-maintained building in which to worship, to minister and to have fellowship. The role of the of the building/facility as it relates to ministries of the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may be more significant to reaching the lost in your community than in any other time in the history of the New Testament church. The ministry of the church building is constantly changing to meet and enhance the ministry needs of the advancing Baptist church. Those facilities need not to be lavish but they do need to be up to date and attractive and should reflect the same level of upkeep and maintenance as its neighbors in the community. The church leadership should make attempt to comply with the local zoning regulations and building code criteria that have been established by the government. Churches leaders need to carefully evaluate their facilities so as to be able identify areas where their facilities are not enhancing the ministry and then they need to seek a solution to correct the deficiency.

### I. Guidelines for Evaluating Your Facility:

"First impressions are lasting impressions." "I never noticed that before!" When evaluating your facility keep these two very familiar quotes in mind. Carefully consider

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what it is that visitors are really seeing and what you and your congregation are no longer seeing.

To evaluate the effectiveness of your building facility, there are three main areas to look at:

- **general building maintenance**, both interior and exterior. An old building is not necessarily a bad or ineffective building if it is well maintained
- is the facility sufficient to handle the **ministry goals** that have been established by the church. Present and future goals must be considered when determining the sufficiency of the facility
- what are the **requirements of current building codes**. Obeying the laws established by the government enhances our testimony as well as providing for our safety.

### **General Building Maintenance**

Building maintenance, both exterior and interior, is very important. It is what is seen by visitors and by the community and it gives them a first and perhaps lasting impression about your care of the facility. If you don't care for your facility they may think that you do not care for them either. Poor maintenance produces a negative impression, and it can also result in various health hazards. Proper maintenance can also improve efficiency; thereby the church is a better steward of God's provision. There are two aspects to maintenance that need consideration, the **visual aspect** and the **structural aspect**.

The **visual aspect** of your maintenance includes both exterior and interior. The grounds surrounding your facilities need to be kept up, i.e. trimmed, mowed, weeded, etc. Walkways should be kept in good repair and be well lit, as should your parking area. If your parking lot is graveled, watch for areas of wear, being sure to keep soil covered so that mud and dirt can't be tracked into your buildings. The exterior of your building should be kept up, i.e. painted surfaces not cracked nor peeling, fascia materials not loose nor rotted, windows not cracked nor broken, etc. These may seem elementary, but we have observed these deficiencies on more than one occasion.

Your church sign is a very powerful tool for reaching into the community. Critically evaluate your sign. Is it attractive? Can you read it as you drive by at the posted speed limit? If your church sign has movable letters, we suggest that you don't waste space with times of services rather use the space to tell people **WHY** they should come to your church. Make the phone number legible and if they are interested they will call for service times.

Regarding interior maintenance, one of the major items that we see needing attention is clutter, such as the items that no one ever claims and that invariably get left on coat rack. The problem with clutter is that after it's been there for a while, we begin to just step over it and

eventually don't see it anymore. But visitors do see it! If you don't need the items they should be discarded or given to one of the recycling ministries. If you will need the items at some point in the future, then provide adequate and organized storage for them.

Another major item is the lighting. Good quality lighting is essential and provides a welcoming environment. Non-functioning lights should be repaired or replaced. Bare florescent lamps should be covered and the lens covers maintained.

Another area that needs periodic maintenance is the ventilating system. Proper maintenance can help prevent mold and mildew problems that can be unsightly as well as unhealthy. Particular attention needs to be taken in areas where children's ministries are performed.

The second aspect to your maintenance would be the **structural aspect**. Roofs need to be well-maintained and there needs to be adequate attic ventilation. Proper maintenance in these areas prevents unsightly water spotting of ceilings and walls. Stairways, flooring and floor coverings should be kept free from excessive wear. Good floor maintenance reduces tripping hazards. Inspect the foundation for failures that could produce problems with uneven floors and walls. Also inspect for breaches and cracks that would allow ground water to infiltrate causing damage and mold growth, resulting in odors and poor air quality.

### **Facility Planning to Handle Ministry Goals**

In order to determine if your facility is sufficient to meet the ministry goals, you must clearly define your ministry goals. Once those goals are defined, a Master Plan is developed which details how you plan to use your assets, both the land and the buildings, to carry out the ministry goals. A Master Plan helps avoid unnecessary expenditures as well as the pitfalls of misplanning (or even worse, failure to plan). A Master Plan helps future generations to see the wisdom of your decisions and the direction in which you intended to go.

If your present facilities are not adequate to meet the goals, an alternative must be sought. The alternative could be simple, such as re-arranging furniture, changing a door swing or removing a wall. The alternative may involve a major renovation or a complete re-location. Areas that may need to be addressed in determining if the present location and buildings are sufficient include the historical factor of the building and its location, zoning and local code restrictions, availability of adjacent properties, and the finances of the church.

The comfort, health and safety of your congregation are items that need to be considered when evaluating your facilities. Air quality needs to be evaluated. Traffic flow, both of people and autos, should not hinder the ministry. The age of the population to whom you plan to minister



will be a determining factor in some structural considerations.

### Current Code Requirements

The facility requirements of the law are for life safety and for accessibility. Each locale has its own requirements. Some items need to be addressed for life safety, i.e. the posting of exit signs, proper installation of emergency lighting (which we highly recommend), installation of fire extinguishers, installation of panic hardware on outside doors, lighting of all egress areas.

The Federal government regulates accessibility for the handicapped. It may not be required if you upgrade, but if you desire to have a ministry to the mobile handicapped it should be considered. There are many considerations that go beyond the law that are evaluated by the mobile handicapped if they desire to continue to come to your church.

## II. Guidelines for Upgrading Your Facility

The following three-step guide is given to assist you in finding a workable solution to facility problems you may have. It is recommended that a qualified third party be invited to your facility to perform a “walk-thru” evaluation to help you identify the need. A wise person commented, “Sometimes it takes someone different to see sharply that which has become blurred by familiarity.”

**Step #1 – PLANNING** –to arrive at a logical solution to your problem, you need to know where you are going. We encourage you to start planning early. Don’t wait until you have reached a crisis point. Crisis planning is often wasteful. Develop prayerful answers to the applicable questions listed below: We can help you develop the questions that you need to find answers for:

- a. What ministries and activities do you want to accomplish, particularly as it involves the building facilities?
- b. To what level of activity does the church see these ministries maturing?
- c. To what size would the church anticipate these ministries to grow?
- d. What people/ age groups is the church seeking to target?
- e. What ministries would the church like to establish in the future?
- f. What message does the church want their building (facility) to convey to the community?
- g. How much is the church willing to invest monetarily, including how much is already on hand in a building fund?
- h. What specific facility items need to be addresses, i.e. pre-existing problems?

### Step #2 –Define the Need –

Is yours a cumbersome facility: traffic flow problems (people and/or cars); mobility problem for the elderly; handicap inaccessibility, etc. Is it an inadequate facility: not enough rooms; meeting rooms are too small; rest-room facilities not adequate; no facilities for large group activities, etc.

Is it an unsound facility: water problems, utility problems; structural problems with walls or foundation; infrastructure problems such as heating, lighting, etc.

### Step #3 – Information Gathering –

- Obtain a floor plan of the church building(s). This floor plan could be a good sketch, a scale drawing or an architectural drawing.
- Obtain a property plan on which is located all buildings, all utilities and other items including roadways, driveways, easements, property lines, etc. Check the church’s archives and/or local zoning office to see if a Master Property Plan has been filed for future development.
- Obtain a copy of the local zoning ordinance and building codes. These ordinances will provide the church with information concerning any facility regulations that need to be considered when designing a solution to the building needs.

- Evaluate your “in-house” capabilities.

Often times it is necessary and prudent to enlist the aid of outside professionals (contractors, architects, engineers, etc.) as jurisdictional building and zoning codes will probably need to be considered. Be sure to evaluate the outside professional for credentials, track record, and references, as well as sympathy with and knowledge of your particular work. Fees may be considered but are of secondary importance.

We strongly recommend that you consider professional advice if the solution to your problem appears to involve:

1. Moving walls/exits or structural changes
2. Revising infrastructure or utilities
3. making accessibility modifications
4. Expansions
5. Property acquisitions

### Conclusion:

The ministry of the Baptist church building in this 21st century is very important and there are many aspects to its proper functioning. It is important that church leaders work to maintain not only the investment of their building but its ability to continue to minister to the membership as they reach out to the lost in the community. Until the LORD returns for His Bride, may we be found faithful stewards of all that He has entrusted to us in bringing gain for His Glory.