

Put your facilities manager at the table

By Jim Couchenour

One of the first things a church will do when considering a building program is “seek wise counsel” (Proverbs 1:5) and talk with other leaders and pastors who have built a new facility or remodeled an existing facility. More often building teams will visit other church facilities to gain an understanding of how other ministries have designed their buildings to meet their ministry needs.

But oddly enough, the very people who might be expected to be a part of such building committees and boards, able to give expert advice and input, are seldom at the table.

A survey by Cogun Inc. (www.cogun.com) has shown that only 36 percent of church facility managers are on the building committees of the churches that employ them. These are the professionals on staff of larger churches who maintain the buildings, schedule church functions, and lead teams of staff and volunteers on church campuses day in and day out. A variety of functions are covered, but often they are custodial, maintenance, food service, and planning for new facilities.

Facility managers for congregations is a growing field as churches grow in size in membership as well as in square footage, and are used throughout the week and not only on weekends. One such manager is Dean Johnson, facilities director for First Baptist Church, Lubbock, TX, where he has responsibility for 300,000 square feet and 18 staff for the 6,000-member church.

His church seeks his advice when remodeling their facility, that was first built in 1949. “But there are people in my position,” he says, “who are not privileged to that information until it is done, the plans are handed to them and they are told to make it work.”

Three points of advice

The Cogun survey revealed three main points when facility managers were asked what they would tell their building committees when designing a new facility:

Provide more storage. Find creative ways to increase storage space in the new building design, even if other “useable” floor space has to be sacrificed. A typical rule of thumb is at least one large storage closet for each 10,000 to 15,000 square feet, assuming it does not include telephone

switchgear or elevator equipment.

Johnson notes that one setup of 300 chairs in a room might the next week need to be stowed away for a different type of function. “In our case we utilize Sunday school rooms for storage that are not being used, but with the growth of the Sunday school areas, we now haul everything to an off-site building,” he says.

Consider how the design will enhance the ministries that are planned. Too often buildings are not as well tuned to specific ministry needs as they could be. Is a commercial kitchen needed or will a warming kitchen suffice? Is it better to invest in a higher-grade floor covering in the beginning that resists stains than to replace the less expensive covering sooner than necessary?

Says Johnson: “It is important to shop for quality carpet. Getting a deal on less quality will cost you more money in the end.”

Design state-of-the-art mechanical systems into the new building. The facilities manager’s wish list also urges building committees to consider mechanical systems (heating, ventilating and air conditioning) that have a central system that can be operated manually or automatically. They should be carefully zoned so that areas can be heated and cooled independently.

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Fast Facts on the National Association of Church Facilities Managers

Founded: 1995

Purpose: Promote networking and educational advancement opportunities for facilities management professionals.

Membership: 300, and growing

Contact: Vice President for Membership Dean Johnson
(former president of NACFM, 2003-2005), dean@fbclubbock.org,
(806) 747-0281

National convention: Boston, MA, 2006

Website: www.nacfm.org

Compromises on the mechanicals

"In most cases," says Johnson, "ministry and programming comes first, and when you get to air conditioning rooms, the church could be out of funds. So the church air conditions the rooms the best they can with the money they have," he says, noting that compromises are made with quality mechanical systems.

It is a question of having a four-pipe chiller loop that provides independent cooling or heating through areas over a two-pipe system that gives only heating in the winter and cooling in the summer. Temperatures can be better controlled with a four-pipe system.

"Senior adults are likely going to be a little bit colder than most, and if you have only one control you are going to have a lot of uncomfortable people. Multi-zones are preferred, but cost more too.

"A lot of members want the room they are in to be like their house. They have HVAC control at their house and they want to have the same convenience at the church too," Johnson says. "So if they are uncomfortable, they are not going to come. Energy costs also play a real part in the decision to have zoned controls."

The Cogun study revealed church facility managers represent some of the larger churches in America, with an average attendance of 2,716 and campus square footage of

181,488. They oversee an average of 23 people who make up a combination of six full-time, four part-time, and 13 volunteers. The average tenure for a manager is seven years, while some have been on the job as long as 30 years.

Improvements inside and out

When asked what could be done to improve the exterior of church buildings, facility managers answered:

- Landscaping, 49 percent
- Painting, 38 percent
- More funds/budget, 13 percent

What could be done to improve the interior of church buildings brought these responses:

- Painting, 46 percent
- New floor covering, 38 percent
- More funds/budget, 16 percent

Each of these responses indicates that more money spent on key areas, such as wall and floor covering, will pay off with reduced maintenance and recovering as the years go by. In these areas, an industrial grade is definitely worth the initial cost in the long run.

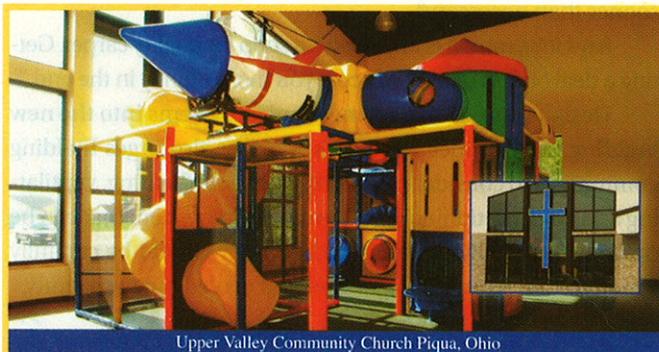
The maintenance issue requiring most of the facilities manager's time in any given day is mechanical systems — mainly repair issues but also including ongoing maintenance and control.

Beyond that, time consumers for the manager are set up/tear down, personnel issues and cleaning. One respondent suggested finding a better way to change light bulbs that are 57 feet from the ground.

Three-quarters of the churches represented in the survey are either building or considering building in the next five years.

Finally, building committees should be thinking about future ministries that the church might undertake, and how the building design will impact them. Dean Johnson says the installation of a café or coffee shop has impact on people flow, drainage, and water and sewage lines, "and you can't plopp one of these down just anywhere."

The best way to hedge against changing ministry needs is a more flexible, changeable building design.



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Jim Couchenour is director of ministry services for Cogun Inc., which has partnered with more than 630 churches to design and build new facilities. Cogun is a founding member of Cornerstone Alliance, an organization that is conducting research in church design and construction issues. He can be reached at jrc@cogun.com or at 800-258-5540.



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