



Photo courtesy of Maranatha

Understanding Life-Cycle Costs

By Bernie Satrom

It seemed like a good idea. The church could save 25% on the carpet, compared with the carpet that was specified on the plans. The church hired a construction foreman and bragged at how they had exercised good stewardship by “Saving God’s money.” The church had several programs that uti-

and will likely “ugly out” before it wears out. The cost per year or “life-cycle cost” of the more expensive carpet is actually a fraction of the cost of the cheaper carpet.

There are multiple areas where churches in a building program can exercise good stewardship by spending a little bit more

lete within a few years. By thinking and planning through the full development of the property, a church can avoid millions of dollars of mistakes.

Second, plan for the future. By developing a good strategic master plan, the church can avoid obsolescence and have a clear



see what appears to be a history of architecture. Pews are sold for little or nothing, and sound systems become obsolete. Nothing fits aesthetically, and, worse yet, the interior becomes a maze that is a hindrance for assimilation of new attendees. It is cheaper to take out some classes to expand the sanctuary and build an education wing than it is to keep building new sanctuaries.

By thinking ahead, you are less likely to waste land by having sprawling buildings, less likely to develop a confusing maze, and less likely to develop spaces that are poorly utilized. It is less likely you will develop a building that looks like a hodge-podge mess, less likely to have roof problems as the different buildings are hooked together, and less likely to lose the focus of where the entrance to the building is. Plus, you can save a massive amount by avoiding unnecessary remodeling costs. If every church in America had a good strategic master plan for their properties

and followed it, we could double our missions and outreach budget.

Third, it is important to have an attainable expansion strategy because once you reach 80% of capacity, your growth will be stifled. I have often said, "The chickens will die off to fit the size of the coop."

If you have a building that is expandable but it is not easy and economical, it is the same as if it was not expandable at all. Many churches have outgrown new facilities quickly. With 14 or 29 years left on the mortgage, additions are usually not financially possible, but by having a proper design and an expandable building, you can take

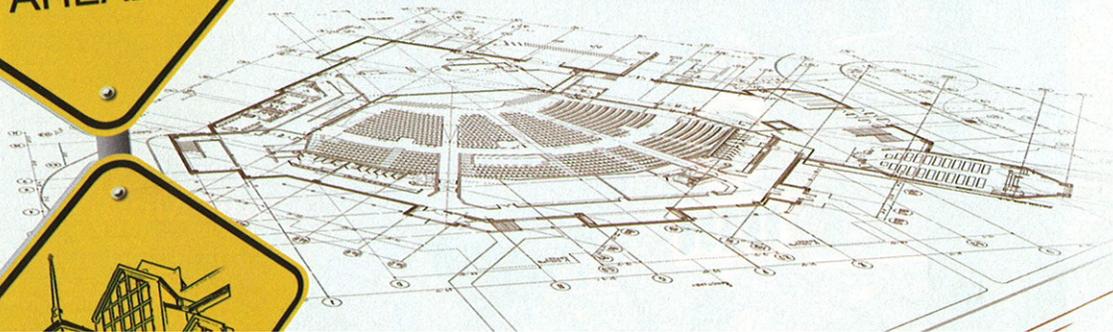
out some rooms and keep on growing.

It is important to note that there is a difference between additions, expansions, and buildings that are easily expanded. Any building can be added on to, assuming there is adequate property. Some buildings are expandable, but usually it is an afterthought, and the quality of the added space is typically poor. A properly designed building that is easily expanded should actually be designed backwards. By starting with a perfect worship space of the ultimate capacity and working back to today's needs, you are able to have a building in which the quality of the worship environment actually improves as the

By developing a good strategic master plan, the church can avoid obsolescence and have a clear roadmap for future development. This helps utilize existing facilities to their fullest.



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phases unfold. By thinking about future needs for all of the systems, considerable savings can be realized as the church moves forward. An example would be the electrical system. By anticipating future electrical needs, you can bring in adequate service to handle future phases. By designing the mechanical system with the future in mind, you can remodel rather than gut and replace the mechanical system. By thinking about structural issues, you can receive a 10 times savings for each dollar spent. By thinking about the total site and spending a little more planning and thinking through the topography, you can avoid costly fill, hauling, and tearing up of pavement.

Finally, quality doesn't go out of style. A church needs to work with a designer who understands fads and fashion and can steer you clear. Many buildings look good by today's standards but likely will look very dated in 10 to 20 years. An example of this concept is the avocado and harvest gold appliances available in the 70s. I personally be-

lieve that the stronger the fad, the stronger the repulsion in the future. By the way, back in the 70s, there was another color available that is still popular today: white. As you think through finishes, colors and aesthetics, you can avoid many future problems by taking a conservative approach. Bonus thought: If you have an option between something that looks just like the real thing or the real thing for a little more, spend a little more and get the real thing.

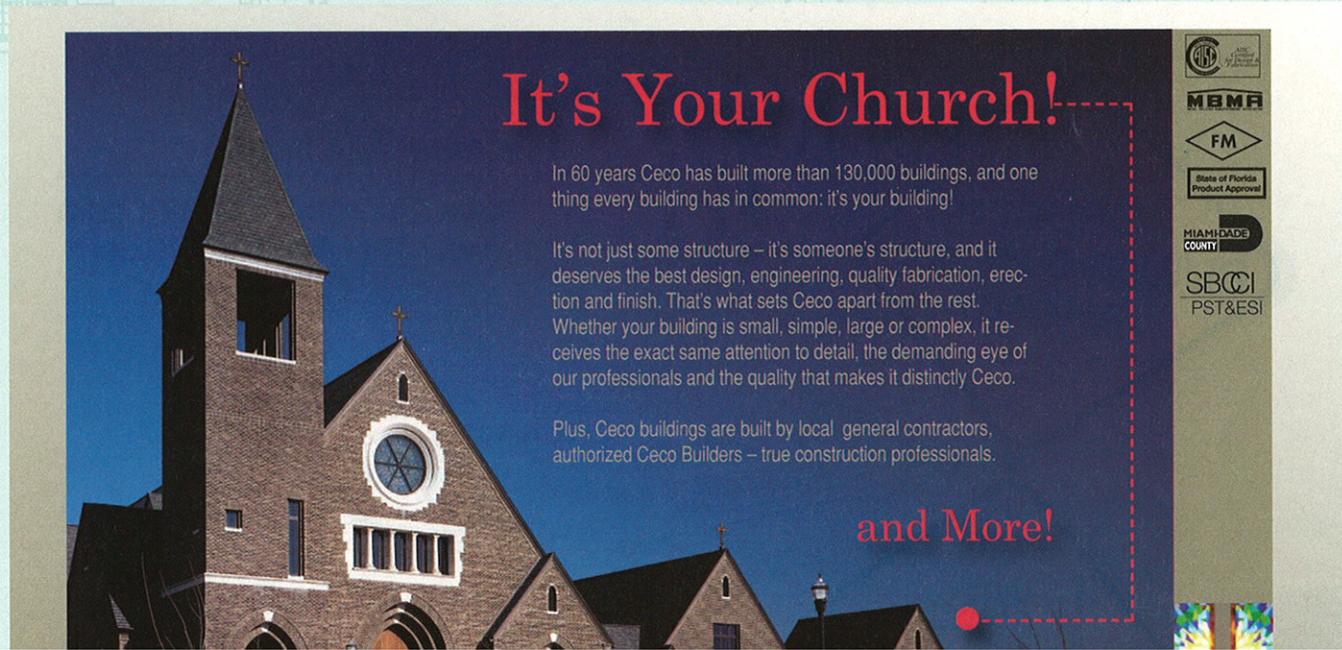
Carefully consider your culture and the type of building you are building. Whether we like it or not, our buildings create an impression of what we are. It is tempting to look for raw space and make it work. But, by ignoring energy and upkeep, acoustics and aesthetics, we can hinder the growth of the church.

In our experience, it's easy to pay off a building that people love. Many of our buildings are paid off in five to seven years. Some years back, I noticed that when people cut corners to save money, it actually

took longer to pay off the building.

When things are done in a quality way and with integrity, we have seen God provide in miraculous ways. I have also witnessed the opposite, where people have used manipulations and deceptions to try to save money, and God has taken his protection and blessing away from the project. As someone once told me, "God's work done God's way will not lack for God's resources." May we seek a Godly vision and may we do all things heartily as unto God, not as unto man! **RPN**

Bernie Satrom is the founder and president of Maranatha Custom Churches, Inc., www.Buildingbyfaith.com. The company specializes in high-quality, expandable, energy-efficient buildings at a reasonable cost. Maranatha provides full architectural, engineering and construction services in all 50 states.



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