

Leave the cleaning to the experts

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Outsourcing your janitorial needs means you have more time for ministry work

by: Maria Jolly

As the pastor of administration at Germantown Baptist Church, Germantown, TN, Ron Chandler spends his time overseeing the smooth operation of a 390,000-square-foot worship facility on a campus of 94 acres. He has oversight of the church's various departments and ministries - from budget and financial planning to food service and facilities maintenance. An ordained pastor, Chandler helps the church leadership define and fulfill the mission and vision for the church.

However, overseeing housekeeping is one area where he just doesn't have the time to directly supervise, so he puts his trust in an outsourced company. Chandler began outsourcing his church's housekeeping and grounds care needs 10 years ago when his church took up residence in its present location.

"One of my biggest frustrations before we began to outsource was the time it took me to supervise just 10 people," says Chandler, noting that he would spend his entire day supervising and inspecting jobs and solving problems. He had to be sure he was fully staffed for sick leaves and unexpected absences. He says finding a housekeeping staff was a challenge because Germantown, located in the suburbs of Memphis, TN, is not close to a pool of people that he could hire and train at a moment's notice. He would also need people who could clean his buildings overnight.

"One of the aspects of a 21st century metropolitan church facility is that it's basically open almost 24/7 especially if you have programs like we do with our recreation ministry that opens at 5 in the morning and closes at 10 at night," Chandler explains. He says the 60,000-square-foot recreation facility features two full-sized college gymnasiums, workout rooms, and racquetball courts. In addition, the facility is used for dozens of fitness classes. A bookstore and a snack room are also accommodated in the facility making it a high-trafficked environment.

Chandler says a tight cleaning turnaround is needed in the worship center between Saturday night and Sunday morning. If a wedding is held on a Saturday evening, Chandler says the cleaning crew may not be able to get in until after 10 p.m. "They need to make sure the facility is sparkling and shining for the Sunday morning services."

Chandler says he decided to find a company that had access and resources to meet the church's housekeeping needs "so we didn't have to invest ourselves in interviewing, hiring, training, and the time that goes along with that."

Request for proposal

Chandler sent out his first request for proposal 10 years ago and has since continued to solicit bids every few years to ensure that he is getting the most cost-effective price and high quality service possible. Currently he contracts Kimco Corporation, Chicago, IL, a company with offices in Memphis, TN.

Chandler says it is important that churches interested in outsourcing their cleaning needs spell out exactly what they are looking for from an outsourced company.

Chandler always asks contractors if they have an abundant supply of manpower and from where they get their workers, how they train their employees, and if they can perform background checks on the individuals who would be working onsite. He also asks about the types of cleaning supplies and equipment the company uses. For example, are the cleaning supplies anti-bacterial? Does the company use a large commercial vacuum cleaner for large spaces that may be 100-feet long? How much is the company charging for the cost of the supplies and equipment?

Chandler says a reputable cleaning company will be able to provide a worksheet that will detail all of its costs. A company should be able to spell out the cost for supplies, wages, workmen's

compensation, and other items all the way down to the toilet paper, he adds. "You'll need to know how much it is costing per hour for all these things," he says. "We know how much they are making off our job and what their overhead is."

He is also particular about the quality of supervision the company provides. He says that in his experience it is better if there is a full-time supervisor on hand to manage the staff rather than somebody who just drops in occasionally.

Another important question to ask, according to Chandler, is if the company is equipped to handle requests for special needs such as help in clearing sidewalks and parking lots in the event of an unexpected ice or snow storm. He says church leaders should also ask the outsourced company if it would be able to quickly respond to unexpected events.

According to Chandler, companies that best understand the needs of churches are those cleaning providers that work with schools. Just like in schools, he says, large churches have multiple facilities wherein many activities are scheduled throughout the day. The housekeeping staff, he adds, is most often needed to clean the facilities at nights.

Getting the job done

Many large outsourcing companies across the country offer a myriad of services - from janitorial services to groundskeeping and pest control and any other maintenance services a church may require.

UNICCO is another such company that has contracts with religious institutions. Its clients include Holy Cross College in Notre Dame, IN; Capital University in Columbus, OH; and St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School in Alexandria, VA.

"The core competency of the pastor is to tend to the flock," says Bert Ouellette, director of business development at UNICCO Service Company, Newton, MA.

"Our core competency is facilities."

Ouellette says his company employs PDAs (personal data assistants) equipped with software inspection program to record and report onsite inspections and provide reports on cleaning projects. He says by providing detailed work reports, his company can keep track of the cleaning that is getting done. "We are taking away the workload from whoever is in charge of the maintenance in the church or school," says Ouellette.

For his part, Chandler values the fact that he doesn't have to be a hands-on housekeeping manager on top of his other administrative responsibilities. "The time saved is invaluable," he says.