

How to Develop a Church Building Program

by Steven Papadatos-AIA

Second of two parts

Administration Area

The administrative quarters are typically one of the most poorly designed areas and overlooked spaces within a complex. And yet, the quarters prove to be one of the most important functional spaces of the church. There is a tendency to consider the administrative area as merely a group of smaller offices without understanding the impact behind the design.

The quarters are often the first place a guest visits, serving as the meeting place for religious leaders from other faiths, politicians, or possibly a prospective new member seeking to meet the priest.

The first impression will be a lasting impression of the entire community.

The priest's office should resemble a chief executive office, because that's who he is.

The offices, reception area, and the entire administration area is a representative interpretation of the community as a whole. If the office is of small stature, or appears shabby, that is how the entire community will be perceived.

While teaching at a New York architectural college, I always told my students the most important lesson of all is, "If you want to be treated like a king, you must act like one."

Dignitaries, politicians and others who assist your church will meet with the priest and parish council.

The space they meet in must be impressive or else your church will not be taken seriously. Even though some will disagree, it is fact.

Offices should be provided for the following various groups: Philoptochos, Sunday/Greek School directors, GOYA, AHEPA, and the other organizations.

The more privacy these organizations are allotted, the more they will volunteer because the gesture conveys ownership to them. The volunteers should be provided with their own pantry. Providing personal amenities makes a world of difference. The space should be conveyed as a home away from home.

Educational Facilities

Unless your architect understands school design, he will not be able to provide a state-of-the-art approach to classroom design. Most parishes are content with marking small rooms as classrooms without taking the time and effort to create spaces that engage children, teachers and parents to share the spirit of learning.

Building committees rarely understand this concept. It is therefore up to the architect to educate and promote collaboration in planning, design and research to create effective learning facilities.

There are a few principals that can be integrated into the overall design scheme to create a unique educational environment, conducive to learning. These principals are divided into Educational Facility Planning; and, Design Process Principles of Primary Educational Space, Community Spaces, as well as outdoor Learning Spaces.

Parishes often fail to take a creative approach to classroom design, feeling that the few hours spent in each classroom is not significant. This is true only if the parish places a low value on education. However, if planned well, these "educational units" can be utilized everyday and during the evenings for various community programs.

It is essentially up to the parish, whether you care to create excellence or retain the norm. Abundance of storage is required to keep the educational facilities organized. Besides the conventional storage spaces,

To Finance a Building Program

For those parishes considering a building program, the Archdiocese Department of Parish Development stands ready to assist as a resource to assist with raising funds for capital improvement, expanding stewardship, seeking grants for parish programs, establishing a parish endowment and other fund-raising guidance.

The Office of Parish Development can be contacted at (847) 825-1432 or via email at jminetos@goarch.org. Headed by Development Officer Jerry Minetos, the department staff can discuss specific needs and provide over-the-phone guidance or hands-on assistance by visiting your parish directly.

there are other options. Perhaps you design storage units along the exterior window wall, which is particularly good use of space for younger grade classrooms, and provides additional seating areas for various functions.

Offices for a Sunday school and Greek School director should be provided with a small lounge and pantry. These offices give teachers a place to meet and discuss the day's program. The more time teachers can collaborate on a class program, the better the school will perform.

Each classroom should have Internet and direct video connection for viewing church services. This is critical to helping youth understand the Patriarchate and Archbishop.

A link from the Patriarchate and from the Archdiocese to each classroom should be developed for the youth to speak to His All Holiness and Archbishop.

The link will also help when developing a worldwide program. Conversations with the Patriarch and Archbishop should follow a similar concept to the "fireside chats: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered via radio. The difference being that the Mother Church is able to respond to questions from our youth.

Children able to talk with the Patriarch, Archbishop, and Metropolitan today, are the same children who become the church leaders in the near future.

Banquet Facilities

Banquet facilities can be designed to any capacity. Your program must determine capacity that provides adequate accommodations for the community at the time of construction and sufficient capacity for the future. A rule of thumb for determining capacity of a banquet hall is to allocate 15- to 17- square feet per person. There are several ways to determine capacity for the banquet facility.

The first is to define the size of the parish. If the hall is used for a community dinner dance, how many parishioners will attend? In the future, perhaps 10 years down the line, how many more families will join the community?

Using other church banquet facilities as a guide for your own does not serve as an accurate depiction of the potential success of your proposed facility.

An exception can be made if these facilities are state-of-the-art design, since most of the banquet facilities in our communities are not capable of competing with commercial hotel-type facilities.

If your community plans to use the banquet facility as a revenue source, it must be approached as a business. The space should compete with and surpass the quality of surrounding banquet halls.

The times of simply building a rectangular room and putting up a few chandeliers are gone. Lighting design, as an example, has advanced so much, that today, a good lighting plan can potentially bring a banquet facility to the next level. Your architect would be remiss if he did not retain a lighting designer as part of the consulting team. Also consider that an adequate space is required to serve cocktails before a ban-

quet. A space designed only for cocktails may not be practical. However, this area can serve a dual purpose, providing a more intimate space for smaller receptions and memorial luncheons.

If, on the other hand, a smaller reception area is not required, consider designing the lobby to accommodate the cocktail reception instead. If considered during the very early design stages, you can make room for a wet bar and required circulating space... and perhaps even a possible garden area.

Kitchen and storage

A successful banquet facility should always hold a very functional kitchen. The kitchen should not be designed by a restaurateur, but instead by a kitchen consultant retained by the architectural firm as part of the architect's total services. It is critical for the building committee to understand that the kitchen will not service a restaurant but will need to respond to a banquet and festival setting.

A committee consisting of the parish's restaurateurs and Philoptochos should collaborate together with the architect and kitchen consultant to develop a plan that will provide the best value to the community.

In the design process, the most overlooked space is storage. Banquet facilities need a great deal of storage for tables and chairs. Quick conversion of space from a banquet facility to a lecture auditorium also requires an abundance of storage space, which should allow for easy configuration. One reason storage is often minimized is that it adds area to a complex. However, don't overlook the fact that storage space often results in more efficient use of main space and it can be left virtually unfinished.

Gymnasium

The gymnasium can be sized for a high school regulation basketball court or college regulation court. The high school regulation court will be sufficient for parish use. If circumstances call for a college regulation court, say the gym will be rented, then obviously a college regulation is preferred. But, as with everything, your design needs depend upon your community's requirements and usage. Either way, the gymnasium can be accessorized for volleyball, indoor soccer, handball, and badminton, which are added attractions for the youth.

Retractable spectator seating is preferred over fixed seating so the gym can offer flexibility in program. In addition to ample storage space required for a gymnasium, it is ideal to provide toilet facilities specifically for the gymnasium. Locker room for both the parish team and visiting teams are necessary.

A youth lounge, equipped with vending machines and a pantry serves as an added feature for successful gymnasium design. The lounge allows space for the youth to congregate before and after games.

As for building materials, there is no substitution for a maple wood gymnasium floor. The wood absorbs impact and provides a gentle bounce. If maintained

properly, a maple wood floor will last a lifetime. Other materials for a gym must be chosen to provide maintenance-free surfaces or else the facility may deteriorate quickly from normal use.

Lighting design is once again an important consideration, since the lighting should hold flexible character to adapt to different functions.

Combination Banquet & Gymnasium

If the parish decides to build a multi-purpose building to be used as a combined banquet/gymnasium facility, it is important to visit the James W. Pihos Cultural Center at the Annunciation Church in Milwaukee. Here, you will experience a first class facility that offers the very best in banquet and gymnasium design.

Creating a successful multi-functional space of this type takes enormous patience because you must combine materials that take abuse yet provide aesthetically pleasing space suitable for an elegant banquet.

The successful design at the Pihos Cultural Center was carefully planned. Firstly, the combined banquet/gymnasium encloses the atrium and captures natural light into the space. The atrium is also used for cocktail receptions, which provides a dramatic view into the classroom wing. The unique lighting design causes the atrium to sparkle and brings a whole new dimension to the building in the evening.

Lighting in the main space of the banquet hall and gymnasium, allows for five separate levels: banquets, gymnasium use, lectures, cocktail receptions, and even a designated setting for cleaning purposes.

Sufficient storage space is critical in spaces that have multiple uses. You must be able to quickly convert the space to capture the advantage of a multi-purpose facility.

If the conversion process is complicated and/or time-consuming, it becomes a major inconvenience and nuisance.

Sound system

Acoustics must also be addressed to accommodate multiple uses. The sound system must be able to serve levels from a banquet or a band, all the way down to a lone speaker. Simply selecting the right sound system is not sufficient. The different surfaces and textures are also important in achieving the right acoustics for each situation. The acoustical success of the Pihos Center is attributed to the external and internal curved wood ceiling and the horizontal breaks in the laminated wood beams. The various elevations of the walls and recesses of the surfaces greatly assist in creating excellent acoustics.

Conclusion

So, again, while the reasons for new construction are wide and varied, the approach should always be the same.

First and foremost, a plan is needed. That plan should take into account the needs, intentions and potential growth of all church groups and members. If your building committee hasn't already, once a design plan is developed, an architect and consultants should be brought in on the process.

Their knowledge, experience and skill sets will be invaluable. Also consider visiting other Communities to gather input, insight and inspiration.

Yes, design work, planning and research take much time and effort up front. But the time spent early on will ensure your community develops the facilities it needs to accommodate even the most unexpected needs and programs.

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