

How to Develop a Church Building Program

First of two parts

Meeting with the Community and Establishing Needs

"Why do we need to build a new church, a cultural center, school or gymnasium?"

If you find yourself asking this question, the answer lies within those individuals who experience the transition from a group to an organized cohesive parish community.

by Steven Papadatos-AIA

There are many factors that lead to such a transition. Expanding and/or merging communities that outgrow their facilities may see a need to build, or re-build, in order to continue to offer the ministries and programs required for healthy growth.

Or perhaps you are an existing community that has decided your changing neighborhood has negatively impacted membership.

Whatever the reason for transition, once the community has agreed to take action, that action must be defined in a written program that outlines the community's present and future needs.

To determine those needs first requires interviews with each individual church group (i.e., Philoptochos, Sunday School, Greek School, Choir, GOYA, Seniors, etc). The answers given allow the church community, as a whole, to understand the wishes, needs and concerns of each group.

Group interviews, as opposed to individual interviews, provide more accurate responses with a greater focus on the needs of these groups, which in turn, reflect upon the entire community.

During the development of a program, it is important to interview everyone, regardless of seniority, position, or wealth in the parish.

Get children involved

Here, I would like to make a particular note about involving the church's youngest members in this process.

Young children, kindergarten through GOYA age, have provided some of the most imaginative and intuitive ideas for the building program.

Children tend to be more direct when expressing their thoughts. They possess no agendas, nor are they as easily influenced as adults.

They say it how it is. It is important to recognize that children influence their parents as much as parents influence their children.

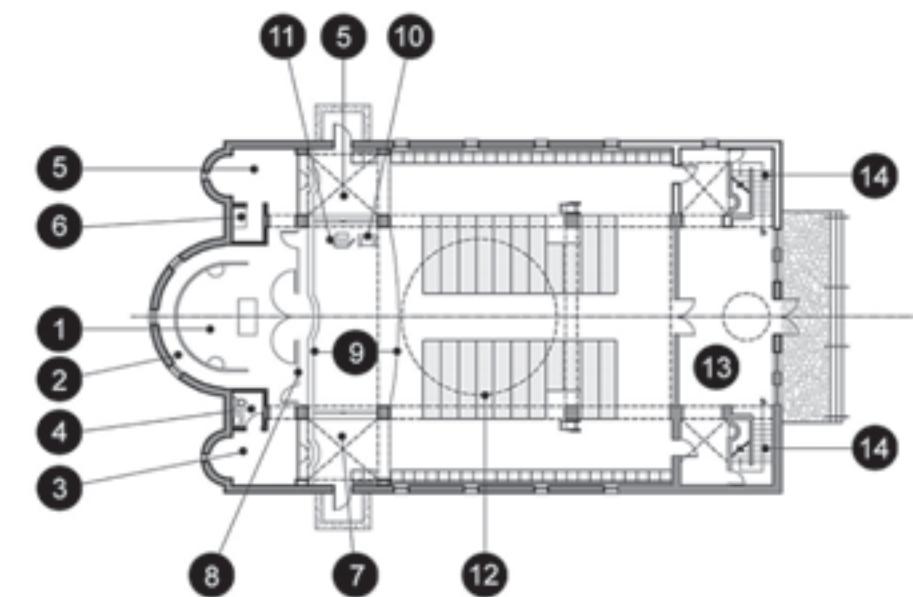
As a parent, can you argue against this? The data gathered from interviews with the children is crucial information towards organizing the building process.

How?

The children become an integral part of the decision-making for their new community, and recognizing their input as helpful advice secures their position as members of the developing church community.

This experience will stay with each of them throughout their entire lives, creating a positive impact on our Church's future. The more the children are involved now, the stronger the Church will be in the future. For the children to participate further in the design process, we request the Sunday school teachers assign a special project to each child; the task of drawing an Orthodox Church.

It is amazing to see their interpretations. So many of the children have a surprisingly keen eye and high level of design



4. Toilet
5. Boys Sacristy
6. Sacristy Sink
7. Side Altar
8. Icon Screen
9. Solea
10. Bishop's Throne
11. Cantor's Stand
12. Dome
13. Narthex
14. Stairs leading to Balcony Level

The width of the side aisles should be as wide as possible within reason, and should maintain proportion to the nave. The side aisles should provide substantial space for standees during holidays.

The side aisles along the walls are an excellent area to place stathidia. Since they are narrow, placement of stathidia does not take away usable space, but adds valuable seating capacity and aesthetics to the interior space of the Church.

By tradition, the church must face east

Therefore, select a site that is conducive to proper orientation of the church. The property should also accommodate all other facilities of the project, including pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Site design and orientation will be addressed in detail in the next issue.

Chapel

A chapel that seats 35 to 40 people can be very valuable for the community. If the new project is replacing an older church, the chapel becomes a perfect place where existing church appointments can be incorporated into the new design.

The chapel becomes a testament to the forefathers who built the previous church.

The chapel can be used for services during the week where attendance is low. Such usage will have a positive effect on energy savings since the main church is not used for smaller attendance.

Families may also prefer to use the intimate space of the chapel for baptisms and small weddings, instead of the large church, which may feel empty and impersonal.

Finally, a chapel serves another important purpose: to preserve pieces of the original church to maintain the historical context of a site.

Stylistic elements such as iconography and stained glass from the original church are often used in a new chapel to preserve the identity of the older structure. This provides parishioners with familiar interiors, stretching back to their childhood. Who knows – certain elements may have been donated by their parents and grandparents. The chapel becomes a very important design element in the overall project, providing emotional ties to the past.

A good example of a chapel is that of Holy Trinity, in Dallas. The existing church's narthex serves as the entrance to the chapel.

Another example is Sts. Constantine and Helen, in Newport News, Va., whose chapel was made a separate structure, connected to the church and community facility via corridor.

Both plans work well considering their respective site configurations.

A different approach to the chapel design can be seen at the James Pihos Cultural Center at the Annunciation Church in Milwaukee.

This chapel was designed within the same structure of the cultural center that is a separate structure from the church. The chapel serves the Sunday school children and any other visitors.

The St. Iakovos Chapel in Milwaukee is oriented adjacent to the multi-purpose room that is also utilized as a bride's room.

comprehension.

For others who do not possess this propensity, the task still serves as a wonderful introduction to Byzantine architecture.

The most valuable lesson of all for the children is their achievement and sense of ownership in the final design and completion of the church.

Upon completion of all parish interviews, it is the responsibility of the Building Committee to develop the wish list into a feasible and realistic program. If necessary, the Committee should present a project timeline to the parish council.

Once the building committee and parish council are in agreement, the final program is to be presented to the general assembly for approval.

Upon approval from the parish level, the committee should next submit the timeline to the Metropolis to keep them informed and seek their counsel.

Establishing a Growth Pattern

Establishing a growth pattern for the community will have a substantial impact on the future requirements of your church's program. When analyzing potential growth, specific factors should be considered.

Once a pattern is projected, it should be considered in almost every aspect of the design.

How is growth determined? In previous times, immigration data served as the main factor for projected community growth.

Today, however, this data is inconsequential because the major immigration period has slowed and a new generation of Orthodox Americans has developed. Demographic, economic, and social aspects are now the key factors to determining growth within a community.

Increase of membership will come from the following sources:

First, families of similar faith who are not living in close proximity to their houses of worship. For example, Russians, Romanians, Bulgarians, and other Orthodox Christians where immigration is still quite active. Usually these families will visit for the holidays, and eventually become members, particularly if they have young children and if they are warmly accepted into the community.

Second, newcomers to the community will include non-Orthodox individuals who marry an Orthodox parishioner and settle in the vicinity of the church.

Once these couples have children, they become very active members, making significant contribution to the growth of the church and taking on leadership positions within the church.

Third, there are newcomers of other religions, who are drawn towards Orthodoxy. There is a current trend to recognize

and understand Orthodoxy as the original faith. A cohesive community should understand the value of newcomers of any kind and embrace them.

Finally, if your church is located in a desirable upscale area, there may be a tendency to draw new members from other communities not as fortunate.

These other communities may be in a less desirable location, or they may lack the opportunity to build the facilities needed for their church's programs.

Another instance may be that they lack the space to accommodate parking, an issue commonly found in urban areas.

What Facilities Does a Community Really Need?

Next is a guide of requirements necessary to develop a preliminary program. The purpose of a preliminary space program is to analyze the required size of a complex, and to determine the financial feasibility of the project, given the projected size.

Once the parish retains an architectural firm, the preliminary criterion will be re-analyzed and an accurate square footage allowance is developed.

Here, we will discuss the various parts of the complex, the needs of each space, and alternate solutions. Although most parishes appear to have the same needs, programs will always vary, depending on such factors as location and specific requirements of the parish.

Church

A church has several fixed areas that must be designed properly, regardless of the seating capacity.

These areas include an altar area and apse. The solea in front of the icon screen must be a minimum of 12 feet deep so it may accommodate the sacraments that take place there, such as baptisms, weddings and funerals.

The solea is usually where the bishop's throne and cantors (psaltis) are situated.

In addition, adjacent to both sides of the altar area are spaces for the priest's and boys' sacristy. On the opposite end of the nave is the location of the narthex, and if preferred, an exo-narthex.

The proportion of the narthex is typically one-eighth the size of the nave. These spaces are somewhat fixed and do not change with more or less seating. In cases of significantly large congregations, say 600 to 800 members, the altar, apse, and solea should be larger than average to fit the proportions of the capacity of the nave. (See illustration plan of typical Byzantine church)

Illustration 3:

Plan of Typical Byzantine Church

1. Altar
2. Passage behind Apse
3. Priest's Sacristy