

Seven Mistakes Around Church Property And How to Avoid Them

1. Cheap to Build – Expensive to Run

Unless the building is efficiently planned, it is likely to contain wasted space, unnecessary corridors or oversized rooms that will have to be cleaned, maintained, heated, cooled and eventually refurbished. Studies have found that these running costs can add 4 to 5 times the original construction cost of this floorspace over 30 years.¹

An efficiently planned building, where everything is carefully considered and corridor space minimised needs more time in the design process than a simple box solution. The marginally higher fee to pay for the time to create a better design is quickly covered by having to build less floor space and is then rewarded many times over with lower ongoing costs for the users.

2. Building Church Property Is “Spending on Ourselves”

Sometimes members will minimise contributions to church building projects as spending money on “ourselves”, preferring to give more to the Third World instead. Of course we must support the work overseas.

However I suggest we should also be investing in a facility that will enable the church to carry out its mission to future generations for decades to come. We are investing in our successors in the faith.

3. Iconic Architecture Without Purpose or Symbolism

Unlike many commercial developments, the church has always had an opportunity for spiritual symbolism and in this, contemporary architecture is no different. For some churches icons and symbols are essential elements of building design. For others the very absence of traditional symbols is important for the church's ministry.

The church's buildings now need to convey a sense of invitation, of welcome and the provision of hospitality. We can also create wayfinding community landmarks, showing sustainability and marking the presence of a Christian community, such as at Mooroolbark Salvation Army Church.



Combined thermal chimney and landmark at Mooroolbark Salvation Army Church

4. The New Church Set Behind the Car Park

The challenge is to locate the church buildings so that they have an attractive connection to the main road and the passing public with a friendly cafe so that its people can be seen inside the foyer enjoying one another's company. The entrance and foyer should be accessible both from the few people that might access from the road as well as the majority that will access from the car park. The roadside entry may rarely be used, but its symbolic invitation to enter that it offers to the passing public is important. This requires inventive design by your architect.

5. Payment in Advance For Building Work

Some building contractors will ask for an advance payment before commencing work, “to enable them to buy the materials”. On larger projects builder might ask for staged payments during the progress of the work and these may or may not have been predicted in advance. How does the church know that the value that is claimed has been achieved by the construction on-site?

Standard building contracts administered by architects contain a number of clauses to safeguard against these situations and protect their clients' interests. Architects will carry out a valuation of the work completed by each



trade on a monthly basis before certifying payment from the client to the builder. On this basis the client is secure in the knowledge that they are getting an expert opinion on the value of work done before payment is made.

6. One-day-a-Week Buildings

It seems that almost everyone wants to attend church at 10 AM on Sunday mornings. Do we build multiple worship auditoria to enable it to happen and leave our facilities comparatively empty for the remaining six and a half days each week? How can we claim to be sustainable users of the planet that has been entrusted to us if our property is so underused? By having church services at different times during the weekend we get much better use of our buildings by sharing one worship auditorium.

In addition, providing the buildings are suitable, we can make them available to others in the community during the week, charging them an appropriate rent and simply sharing. We can make our buildings available for business seminars, reconciliation meetings, counselling, concerts, dinners, exhibitions, drama events, art workshops, local school use and many other needs. We can host school homework clubs, book clubs, board meetings and more. By having suitable facilities and someone available to manage the bookings our buildings can be used and valued by the community around us.

7. "Heritage Buildings Can't Be Changed"

Heritage Church buildings have a significance based upon a number of factors, one of which is that it continues to be used by its original owner. This can be an important criteria to highlight when negotiating for changes to meet new mission needs, in order to retain the building's usefulness and avoid redundancy. Conservation has recently been described as the management of change that will best sustain a building's heritage values, whilst recognising opportunities to reveal and reinforce these values for present and future generations.

Legislation in the UK and Australia allows for internal alterations to many heritage buildings, particularly if required for "liturgical purposes". Change is possible at many levels particularly where it enhances the appreciation of heritage elements and maintains the building's usefulness to its users.

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¹ "Improving Standards Of Design in the Procurement of Public Buildings" published by CABI in UK, Oct 2002

