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Church Buildings: Asset or Albatross

Often, when we think about “the church” we think about the place where people go to worship and build community. In much of our vocabulary, church is synonymous with “the building where worship and ministry takes place.” While we at the Good Friday Collaborative would argue that church can happen anywhere, buildings have become an important tool for ministry. Buildings that don’t serve the needs of a current congregation can also be an incredible albatross, dragging down the ministry and mission of the church. All of us could name church buildings that are far too large for the ministries happening inside them. Many of us have wondered how to fix the next looming building maintenance crisis, or struggled with what to do once the crisis occurs. Still others know that our buildings do not function effectively for the work we are called to do. Buildings are tremendous assets for the work of ministry, and they can also be insurmountable burdens.

In every church I’ve served, I’ve had to have hard conversations about their buildings. In one place, we began talking about replacing the roof their “new addition” (almost thirty years old!) whose mortgage was not yet paid off. In another, we addressed their disused spaces, which had become unusable through storage of items that should have instead been donated, recycled, or simply thrown away. In another, we talked about roping off parts of their very large sanctuary, so that it wouldn’t feel so empty when the congregation worshipped with less than 10% of its capacity. In every place, we’ve had to wrestle with the fact that our building repair and replacement funds were far less than what it would cost to do the work required to be a right sized, fully functional, welcoming space. But the desire was there. The people understood that if they effectively leveraged their buildings, they could do tremendous ministry in the

name of Christ. They only needed to figure out what their best options were as they faced the reality of the current congregation and planned for the future. Strength in this category provides a stable foundation for dreaming about possibilities and living into your mission.

Here are a few signs your congregation may be strong in the **Building** category:

1. **Your building is available to meet the needs of your ministry.** You have adequate space to house your ministry, and your space is accessible and ready to use (not used as storage, rented to another entity, the wrong size or configuration, etc). Rentals can be a missional and financial source of vitality for congregations, so long as the building is available for the ministry needs of the church and the church's mission (which can include community groups) comes first.
2. **Your building receives regular maintenance and there is a plan for larger capital improvements.** Church leadership knows the age of major building components (HVAC, roof, water/sewer, appliances, parking lot resurfacing/repair, etc.) and has a plan for replacing those when it's time. Funds are actively being collected and earmarked for these major purchases.
3. **It feels good to be in your building.** Your building is welcoming and inviting. You have appropriate, clear signage directing people to different areas. The building is clean and has a pleasant smell. Things are well maintained and cared for. Your space is accessible to persons of all abilities.
4. **The outside of the building and the grounds are well-maintained.** Playgrounds are safe and in good repair. The lawn and landscaping are attractive and well-kept. Parking lots and sidewalks are free of cracks and hazards. Entrances are well marked with appropriate signage.

If your congregation is strong in the Building category, you have incredible opportunities to utilize your building for transformational ministry in your community and your future is open to a number of possibilities, depending on your strength in the other assessment categories: [Spiritual/Emotional](#), [People](#), and [Finance](#).

So, is your church building an asset or albatross? Your building can be an amazing gift to the community, a resource for ministry, and a tool for mission—if it's the right building, in the right place, and able to be cared for. Without those things the building can

become an albatross, weighing down the ministry and sucking resources away from mission. Churches that struggle with their buildings may need to consider faithful options for the future. See our [Financial Assets blog](#) for more information! Utilizing the gift of our buildings can produce amazing results and partnerships in the community, particularly if a congregation is willing to do the hard work of reckoning with and recognizing its capacity to care for the building and property. Strength in this area may lead a congregation to partner with others outside its walls, to the benefit of the whole community.



*Curious about your congregation's strengths? For a more in-depth analysis of your Spiritual/Emotional, People, Financial, and Building resources, download our **Congregational Self-Assessment** or—if you are a regional leader—the **Judicatory Leaders' Assessment**.*

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