

STEPHEN ANDERSON



PREPARING TO BUILD

*Practical Tips and Experienced Advice
to Prepare Your Church for a Building Program*

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**If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the
edge, then he must use more strength;
but wisdom brings success.”**

Ecclesiastes 10:10

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Your Church for a Building Program**

Stephen Anderson

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*Dedicated to helping churches
in advancing the Kingdom of God
and winning Souls for His Glory*

With Special Thanks

To my best friend and dear wife, Candace, who encourages me in so many ways, not the least of which was in the writing of this book.

To my dear Mom and Dad, without whose love and sacrifice none of this would be possible.

To my Lord and Savior for the calling and His equipping in my life, for truly “*Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.*” 1 Thessalonians 5:24

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Foreword

In church ministry, the phrase “Building Project” can raise emotions of both excitement and dread. The excitement comes because a building project has the potential to grow a congregation’s faith in God like nothing else can. They tend to dream about the ministry potential of the new space and what God is uniquely calling them to do for His kingdom. The congregation will often pray, sacrifice, and invest in the life and ministry of the church in such a way that the on-looking community can’t help but notice. Yes, building projects are exciting.

While exciting, building projects can also evoke some serious emotional dread. They have the potential to be poorly led, put excessive financial strain on a congregation, and severely damage relationships. Too often we hear the horror stories of churches that split and projects that never get completed. Building projects also can strain the pastoral staff! One statistic thrown at me when we were starting our program was that 83% of pastors leave their church within 12 months after the building project is completed, either because of personal burnout or the relational damage during the project. Maybe dread isn’t a strong enough word...

Factually, pastors and their leadership teams often lack the “nuts and bolts” know-how of building programs. The concepts of budgeting for construction, reading architectural plans, leading capital campaigns, and working with contractors are foreign to many church leaders. This leaves us wide open to poor decisions which could cost a congregation thousands of dollars in unnecessary costs, months of extra work, and compromised relational trust.

That is why both Stephen Anderson and his book, *Preparing to Build*, are such a blessing to the Church. From personal experience, Stephen's insight and principles helped us realize the purpose God had in our building project. Stephen first laid out the realities of a building project, and then gave us practical and orderly steps to take. He showed our church leadership teams how to lead in such a way our people felt a strong sense of ownership in the project. He stressed cultural sensitivity and gave us latitude to make the process personal. Ultimately, he helped us discover the answer to the all important question, "What is God calling us to build for the sake of vision fulfillment in the context of what we can afford?" And he did this while never letting us forget what we are about is truly is "Bigger than a Building!"

Like Jethro being a blessing to Moses, Stephen's insight, experience and principles will be a blessing to so many pastors and church leaders who believe God is leading them to trust Him in a building project. Before entering into your building project, as a leadership team I urge you to prayerfully read and apply *Preparing to Build* to your unique ministry context. It will be the best first step you can take if God calls you to believe in him in for a building journey that lay ahead.

Dr. Paul W. Smith

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Preface

The Call

I am often reminded of a short encouragement that Paul wrote to the church 1 Thessalonians 5:24, “*Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*” I know that I know God has called me to minister to His church in His name for His glory. He has both called and equipped me for the work of helping churches expand their ability to reach the lost and disciple the saints. The calling is His, the equipping is His, and the Glory is all His.

As a result of having spoken with literally thousands of people over the years about church building programs, God has provided me both insight into the process and an appreciation for how desperately many churches need wise counsel regarding building. I am privileged to be used in this process, but the glory belongs to Him

The secret to a successful building program is to be found in the planning and preparation process; you must plan well in order to build well. Unfortunately, many church leaders are neither equipped by training or experience to lead their church to the optimal conclusion of a building program. This is further complicated by the fact that *churches don't even know what they don't know*. Ignorance is bliss and many churches blissfully enter into building programs only to be rudely educated later in the process. My motivation for writing this guide is summed up in these three statements...

- Building is not easy and mistakes can be very costly to the church emotionally, spiritually, and financially.

- Very few churches have the knowledge, training, or sufficient experience to minimize the cost, risk, and effort of building.
- I desire to minister to your church to help it become the vision and accomplish the mission God has planned.

In the mid 90's I approached my pastor and shared my thoughts about how our small but growing church needed to make plans for getting out of the rented school in order to expand our ministry. We needed to prepare for growth, and even more importantly, not be dependent on the grace of the school district to have a place in which to hold church.

My proposition was we needed to plan for the future, become financially prepared to build, find some land, and build a building where we could "do church" seven days a week instead of 3 hours on Sunday. He wholeheartedly concurred, and to demonstrate that no good deed goes unpunished, he placed me in charge of the building team.

At that time I knew next to nothing about building a church, and thankfully I recognized that important fact. My lack of knowledge drove me to begin the process of discovery, learning, and experience gathering that continues even to this day. Looking back, it is easy to see the hand of God on my life preparing me for not only that responsibility, but also for the calling He put on my life to minister to churches in their building programs.

In my research, one of the things the Lord did was lead me to a small Christian firm dedicated to helping churches build. I was very impressed with what they did for our church and God began to call me to the same work. After much prayer and wise council, I quit my corporate job at the pinnacle of my career to work with them for a season. As that organization eventually changed focus and direction, I was led to start my own firm to continue what which I felt called to

do, ministering to other churches in their building programs in God's name for His glory. Through this book, I would like to share some of what I have learned:

- Leading my church through this process.
- Talking to other churches about their building programs.
- Working with like-minded professionals.
- As a consultant/coach working on church projects both large and small.

One of the many things that have been impressed upon me over and over again is how consistently churches end up making the same types of mistakes. I have found most of these mistakes are the product of a poor process caused by a lack of practical experience. Fortunately, this is a problem that is readily solved if the church will seek qualified assistance.

I need to be clear that this book is only a high-level guide; it is not a comprehensive “how-to” manual on church construction, which would take an encyclopedia set, not a book. What this is, however, is a book that will minister to churches with a need to build and help prepare them for that task. I believe God called me out of the world to minister to His church and help equip it for its mission of winning souls for the Kingdom of God. Along with my church consulting services, this book is one of the ways for me to accomplish that task.

One of the things you may notice throughout this book is the number of times I strongly encourage the church to get some expert help. This is neither meant to be self-serving nor undue criticism of the church, its leadership, or building committee. Church leaders often need help because they are taught exegesis of the Word and pastoral care, they learn how to marry and bury, and they get instruction on church planting and church growth strategies; however, no one teaches them

what to do when they are successful and need to build! It is my hope that this guide will, at least in part, help meet that need.

As a leader in your church, if you were to perform an impartial assessment you would probably determine that, as a whole, the church leadership team does not have the *real world practical experience or training* to know the proper questions to ask, how to translate those answers into an effective building plan, and then execute that plan in the most effective manner. Simply but directly put, most church building committees lack the “across the board” combination of church growth, financial analysis, church design, and church construction experience to effectively and objectively guide a building program to its best and most successful conclusion.

There is a tremendous need for this type of help - whether the church realizes it ahead of time or not. If you had seen what I have seen and heard the things I have heard over the years about churches getting in financial trouble, getting ripped-off by people who knew more about building than the church, disheartened congregations, wasted time, and effort, and churches split down the middle, then I believe you would have the same burden to help as I have.

Special Building Challenges for Today’s Church

The majority of churches planning on building today will find themselves in the position where they need to do *all of the following* without the benefit of either substantial training or experience:

- § Determine all of the proper steps that need to be taken in a building program, *and then...*
- § Learn how to accomplish those steps in the proper order, *and then...*
- § Execute those tasks with excellence *the first time!*

In its totality, this is a daunting set of tasks; and unfortunately ones the church rarely executes as well as it should. Due to a lack of

experience, churches often start down a bad path without even being aware of it. From my experience with other churches I can confidently state that it is usually very painful and expensive for churches to backtrack and recover from a poor beginning. It can be terribly embarrassing and painful to stand in front of a congregation and inform them that the building plans presented to them cannot be built.

This is not a hypothetical problem. *Millions of dollars every year are wasted on architectural plans that are never built by the churches that paid for them.*

Those who have worked with me in the past have heard me tell churches over and over again that getting answers to questions is easy; it is knowing what questions to ask that is hard!

You are probably reading this book today because you are...

- Thinking of building in the future and you are looking for good information in order to better understand the process.
- Ready to begin a building program and are looking to discover the “what” and “how” of building a church.
- Already in a building program and beginning to realize the water you jumped into is cold and deep, and you are looking for help.
- A denominational resource looking for building tips or insights to assist in your work with your member churches.

Regardless of the reason you are reading this book, I believe it will be of great help to the church. Regretfully, the further the church is already into its building program, the less helpful this information may be in *this* building program. The reason for this is quite simple; the majority of this book is about what to do before you start the design and construction of your new church, as this is when the most basic and fundamental assumptions and decisions are made and when ideas can be implemented at the lowest cost.

Any builder will tell you that a good building can't be built on a bad foundation. Likewise, projects that do not start off well tend not to end the well. The goal of this book is to get the church started on the right path and outline a process to help the church understand where it needs to go and how to get there, providing that firm foundation on which to build.

The Wisdom of Solomon

If the church does not have substantial experience at building, where should it turn? Whether it turns to a denominational resource or independent consultant, *the church often needs to look outside the walls of the church for wise counsel*. Remember, very few churches have the “across the board” experience in needs analysis, finance, design, and construction in order to adequately minimize the cost and effort of a building program.

Through wisdom is a house built; and by understanding it is established... For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counselors there is safety. (Proverbs 24:3, 6) Once you go through a building program, you may have a much better appreciation for the war reference. A question for discussion is how your church will work out this Proverb in its building program.

As we look at the examples of two famous men of God in their building programs, we learn something of importance; both Moses and Solomon got outside counsel and assistance in their building programs! In Exodus 31:1 we see that God provided Moses with an expert to lead his project with *"the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship."*

Later, Solomon, in his wisdom, recognized the need for someone experienced to help him with his building program. When he proposed to build the temple after the death of King David, the first

thing he asked of the King of Tyre was for help from someone with the type of skill that only comes from experience:

“But who is able to build Him a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him? Who am I then, that I should build Him a temple, except to burn sacrifice before Him? Therefore send me at once a man skillful to work in gold and silver, in bronze and iron, in purple and crimson and blue, who has skill to engrave with the skillful men who are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom David my father provided.” (2 Chronicles 2:6-7)

With respect to building, there is one particularly noteworthy difference between these two great men of God. As portrayed in the 31st chapter of Exodus, it does not seem to occur to Moses to ask for help. It seems that God had to “volunteer” someone for him; He had to tell Moses He was sending him help in the form of Bezalel. On the other hand, Solomon was wise enough to know *even extraordinary wisdom was no substitute for experience*, so he sought a skilled man to help direct his building program, and God provided Hiram.

In the latter part of the very next verse, I believe Solomon provides a good example of the church working with outside experts where he says, *“Also send me cedar and cypress and algum logs from Lebanon, for I know that your servants have skill to cut timber in Lebanon; and indeed my servants will be with your servants.”* (Chronicles 2:8) I believe that what is described here was the church bringing in the experienced help they needed which labored *along side* of the church to maximize its results.

As you enter the realm of church construction, you may find that the water is deeper and colder than it looks. My hope is this book will impart some wisdom and understanding to your church, help you ask the right questions at the right time, and possibly, to seek your own Bezalel or Hiram to lead your church through a building program with minimal effort and maximum results.

Skill, birthed out of experience, is a precious commodity. Keep in mind the Wisdom of Solomon and give serious consideration to seeking experienced help for your building program. Outside resources will have the real-world experience, the tools, and proven process that will help *objectively* determine the best solution for your church. Prayerfully consider how God provided experienced help to both Moses and Solomon in their building programs and how He can do the same for you.

Beginning with the next chapter is an explanation of a proper process that will help prepare your church to build. We will then continue on to discuss vision, mission, needs, and wants. We will provide an introduction to the process of how to determine if you should build, what you should build, what you can afford to build, and how to pay for it. You will be provided with general church building guidelines which, while generic in nature, will give you a general idea of space and land requirements. Speaking of land, we will discuss land purchase options as well as some special considerations for smaller churches that may be looking at building their first church.

Now please fasten your seat belt and return your seat and tray to their full upright and locked position - we are about to take off!

Chapter 1 - What is *Prepared to Build*?

What Does It Mean to Be Prepared to Build?

Being prepared to build, in its simplest terms, means the church has objectively quantified as many of the variables as possible and developed a building strategy within the financial ability of the church.

A church that is prepared to build will have graduated from *I think* to *I know*. A church that is prepared to build:

- § Can articulate, based on factual analysis, what it needs to build to meet future needs.
- § Understands the cost of construction.
- § Has measured its financial ability.
- § Knows the vision can be built on the selected property.

As you read this book, you will often notice the not infrequent use of the adjective, *objective*. When making decisions that total hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars, you need to avoid making them based on feelings or opinion. The fruit of an objective process is in *knowing* what you need to build and why, what you can afford to build and how you will pay for it, where you will build, and when you will build.

The result of an objective process is objective fact. In the absence of an objective process, all a church is left with is subjective opinion, and in a church of a few hundred people you will have lots of opinions. In the absence of objective fact, any person's subjective opinion is just as valid as another, which makes it difficult to develop consensus.

An objective and fact based process will chart a clear and unequivocal course and provide clear criteria against which you may evaluate options and make decisions.

Proper Process Prevents Poor Performance

An already difficult task can become quite painful by not understanding or adhering to a good process. It does not matter whether you are baking bread, building a space ship, or trying to build a church, *you get better with experience because you discover and apply the best practices that make the job easier and your effort more effective.* This is why experience is such a valuable commodity.

If your church follows a proper process of doing first things first, your building experience will be a much more positive and rewarding one. When most churches think about building, they first call an architect or builder and jump feet first into building design. Doing this puts the proverbial cart before the horse, often leading a church down the path of developing a building plan it cannot afford or does not truly meet the needs of the ministry. ***Until the church objectively understands its real space needs within the context of financial ability, it has no objective way to evaluate any building design.***

I was surprised to learn how many pastors, when they take their new position in a church, find one or more sets of building plans that were never built. A church builder once told me that in his break out session at a church building conference, 20 out of 22 pastors raised their hands when asked if there were un-built plans sitting in a drawer or closet when they took over the pastorate. It is heartbreaking to see the bad fruit that churches reap from a bad process.

The fruit of a poor process can be bitter indeed. I cannot begin to recount the number of churches I have visited or talked with over the years that have each spent thousands or tens of thousands of dollars on plans that will never be built. In two specific instances I know of, a

church and a seminary each spent over \$100,000 on architectural and engineering services only to find they could not come anywhere near being able to afford the project as designed. Millions of church dollars are wasted every year on plans that will never be built! Don't become just another statistic! Look before you leap, or in this case, plan before you build.

Many times churches get to the point of realizing they can't build and blame the lender, architect, or builder, when in fact the root fault is the church and its implementation of a poor process and poor planning.

God is Not the Author of Confusion

If things don't seem to be coming together for your church in its building program, it is quite likely that you have gotten some things out of order or missed an important step in the process.

One could successfully argue that most of the problems experienced by churches in building programs have their roots in poor planning and preparation. Poor preparation can foster a lack of unity and confidence, ruin pastors, increase building costs, and in general, make an already difficult task much harder.

Poor preparation will result in more confusion, wasted time, increased stress and effort, and at worst, can cause a church split. The key to proper planning is to first correctly understand your needs, abilities, and limitations. There are five basic steps to a church building program and if you get them out of order, things get a lot harder.

Step 1 – Planning: Plan well in order to build well! Understand what you need, what you want, what you can afford, and what your land will support. This prepares you for the next steps.

Step 2 – Fundraising: Few churches are adequately prepared financially to build and/or to retire debt. Until you objectively define

the space and financial need, you are not prepared to ask your congregation to financially support a building program.

Step 3 – Design: Until you can define need, financial ability, and what your land will support, designing a building is a waste of time and effort. Generally speaking, design is not the first step, as many would seem to believe.

Step 4 – Finance: To get a construction loan you will first need building plans from which you can obtain an estimate of cost to build. To do that, you need plans that are relatively complete. Few lenders will want to loan money to a church body that is not financially behind the program and many require a capital campaign to be in place for the church to qualify for a loan.

Step 5 – Construction: When *all* the other pieces are in place, then you can finalize your construction plans and begin construction.

The Key to a Better Building Program

The key to a successful building program is found in proper planning. Performing a needs and feasibility study is one of the first steps towards creating a more satisfactory outcome. Quoting from the 2006 FIRST study done by the Rainer Group:

“We did find a strong correlation in overall satisfaction with the building project if a feasibility study was conducted. The disappointment, however, is that only one-third of the churches conducted a feasibility study.”

When a consultant says there is a strong correlation, the implication is generally one of cause and effect. In this quote, the operative phrase is “*if a feasibility study was conducted.*” This squarely identifies a causal relationship between proper preparation and maximized satisfaction. They were satisfied because they conducted a feasibility study.

According to the study, 33 percent of the churches conducted feasibility studies. This correlates closely to the 35 percent that

considered the building process as “excellent” and the 40 percent that indicated the building program created no conflict in the church. I don’t believe it is a coincidence that those who planned better were happier with the outcome and had less conflict when building, do you?

Proper planning brings unity to the church and provides the foundation for the design and construction process. In proper planning is found the key to maximizing the church’s satisfaction while minimizing risk.

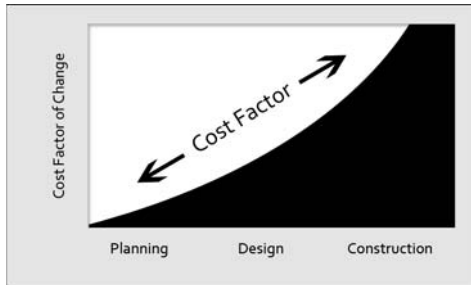
Poor planning will often be found at the heart of cost overruns and financial duress. Failure to properly research and objectively understand the needs of the church and its financial ability can cause the church to build facilities that are too small, too large, or otherwise inadequate. Failure to take adequate preparation in hiring the architect or builder can yoke the church to a poor performer or an improper relational fit. Failure to ask the right questions during the planning process will cost the church time, effort, and money - or worse.

The cost to implement changes in the project increases dramatically as the project timeline progresses. The further the church has proceeded down the path of design and construction, the more expensive revisions become. In fact, one of the major causes of cost overruns in church construction is change orders once construction has begun. It is far easier and cheaper to plan the project correctly in the earliest phase than to implement changes further into the design or construction process.

The following two diagrams clearly demonstrate that the time when the church will have the most impact on the project plan at the lowest cost is early in the planning and design process. *Unfortunately, this is the time when the majority of churches often neglect to get professional assistance!* This can result in changes and corrections getting pushed into the more

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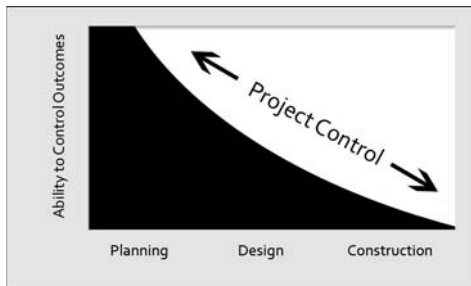
expensive phases of the project, thereby raising the total cost of the project.



The further along the church is in the building program the higher the cost of implementing change.



Meanwhile, the cost-effectiveness of the church's ability to affect changes in the outcome of the building program quickly decreases.



Failure to Plan = Planning to Fail: The fruits of poor planning are:

- § Lack of unity and/or confidence
- § Damage to pastors and other leaders
- § Increased cost
- § Increased effort
- § Increased risk

- § Increased stress
- § Increased conflict
- § Financial problems
- § Facilities that do not meet the needs of the ministry
- § Reduced satisfaction with the completed project

Before you start, you need to know how you will finish. In Luke 14, Jesus gives us the example of counting the cost of building so we do not fail and be thought a fool (and be a bad witness). *"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"* (Luke 14:28-30)

We are going to revisit this biblical example later in Chapter 6 of this book as we discuss financing, but right now it is important to remember that counting the cost for a building program involves organizing and planning.

John Gill, the famous Bible expositor, had this to say about this particular passage of scripture, "Now what person acting deliberately in such a case as this, and proceeding with intention and design, *sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it*; as every wise man would, who has any thoughts of building a tower, or any other edifice."

However, before you can count the cost, you need to know what you need to build. Building a church today is much more complicated than it used to be. Your church certainly cannot "wing it" with a project budget of six, seven, or possibly eight figures! Sketching a floor plan on a napkin and looking for land seems so easy, and it can be; however, that's a *very* long way from being prepared to execute a building program in an effective manner.

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As you will discover when you build, the foundation must be laid before everything else is built upon it. Just so, there is foundational preparation at the beginning of the process of planning to build.

There is an order of precedence in building that determines what should be done, and in what order, so that the building program is executed in an orderly, objective, and cost-effective fashion, having being built on a firm foundation.

Proverbs 24:27 has this to say about doing first things first: “*Prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house.*” Your church should consider the application of this proverb to the building program and be reminded there are preparatory steps that must be taken in order to build on a firm foundation. While some of these steps overlap, the general process is one of:

1. Research & Planning
2. Conceptual Design
3. Fundraising
4. Final Design
5. Financing
6. Construction

The above list is not meant to be all-inclusive, nor is it necessarily chronological or distinctly sequential. Some churches will have to look for land and some will have to sell their current locations, while others have to consider their Christian schools, denominational restrictions, or other outside factors. There are certainly times when more than one of these steps will happen somewhat concurrently. Each church has different needs and starts from a different point. *There is no one-size fits all solution*, that’s why experience plays such a huge role in building.

If this “order of service” is followed, the church should expect to:

- § Avoid costly mistakes.
- § Build unity in the leadership and body of the church.
- § Increase financial support.
- § Minimize stress, uncertainty, and confusion.
- § Enjoy the fruit of a good process: a happy and more unified congregation, and a building that best meets the needs of the ministry and its budget.

It’s one thing to know the basic steps - it’s another to do them well. Your church knows it needs to design a building, but it doesn’t really know how to do so. The church knows it needs to hire an architect, but it doesn’t necessarily know how to hire the right architect. The church knows it needs to build, but not how to build effectively.

Important concept: The *gap* between knowing and not knowing what to do is much smaller than the *gulf* that lies between knowing what to do and knowing how to do it.

An analogy I often use is that of two airplane pilots. One pilot can quote technical manuals forward and backwards and has spent time in a simulator. The other is an instructor with thousands of hours of actual flying experience. *Who would you want flying your plane?* The same concept regarding experience should apply to your church and who pilots its building program.

In the opening pages of this book I quote Solomon from Ecclesiastes 10:10, “*If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success.*” The application of wisdom “sharpen the ax” to make the process easier. Today, we would probably say “work smarter, not harder.” Abe Lincoln understood this

principle very well and is quoted as saying, “*Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four hours sharpening the axe.*”

The Preparing to Build Process

The fundamental pre-construction process can be summarized in the following points:

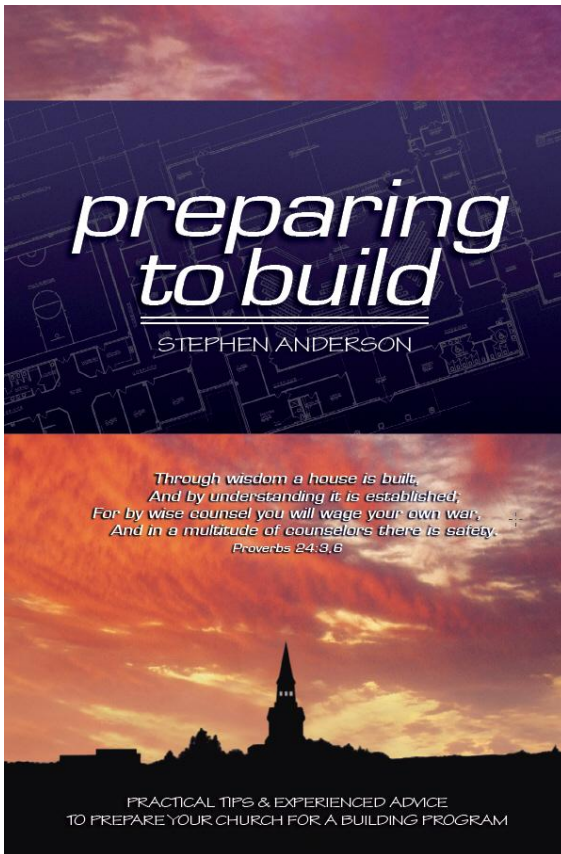
- § Understanding how the vision for the church dictates a need to build.
- § Understanding what the church can afford to build and how the church will pay for it.
- § Understanding what the church needs to build and why the proposed solution is the right thing to build to meet the needs of the ministry.
- § Developing a building design driven by the church’s needs, but within the framework of what the church can demonstrably afford.
- § Starting a capital campaign.
- § Securing a financing commitment.

Then, and only then, are you really prepared to build, having followed a process that provides the firm foundation on which to do so.

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I just wanted to comment on your book, it is phenomenal! Your book has everything from A to Z in terms of preparing the church to build. Thank you for your insight, this information is priceless! D. Owens