

Thinking of New Church Space?

Or, How to Build a New Building or
Modify an Existing One



Rev. Wayne Walder

Published by the Canadian Unitarian Council

April 1996

Revised July 2005

The Canadian Unitarian Council is a national organization made up of 43 Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist congregations across Canada.

One of its primary purposes is to help congregations grow and develop. Toward that end, Ellen Campbell, the then executive director of the Council, asked Wayne Walder to consider putting together a booklet outlining how to help congregations build or rebuild their spaces.

This handbook is the result of that process.

Rev. Wayne Walder is a fully fellowshiped minister of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. He is presently minister of the Neighbourhood Congregation in the East End of Toronto. He holds a B.A. (SUNY) and M.A. (U of T) along with several professional certificates. He also serves on the boards of the international Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association and The Committee for Continuing Education. (CENTER)



Before ministry, Wayne was Managing Director of an award-winning Toronto Construction company. He ran that business for more than 25 years. Wayne lives in the Beaches area of Toronto with his wife Joan and his three rapidly growing children, Lee, Keith and Simon. He has recently taken up the Native American flute as a hobby.

Permission to reproduce this material is granted. Please respect the time that went into this work and offer a credit to the Canadian Unitarian Council and to Wayne Walder.

Contents

Introduction	4
Needs Assessment:	5
Feasibility Study	7
Congregational Involvement.....	10
Planning Process	12
Hire the Architect:.....	14
Hiring the Contractor	16
The New Operating Budget:.....	18
Growing stories	18
Good Luck.....	22

Introduction

Thinking about building? Rest assured that you are not the first to do so. Many congregations and societies have built or rebuilt their buildings. It has been done very successfully before.

There are good reasons for rebuilding your church building. You probably have several reasons already or you would not be reading this publication. However, no matter what they are, by changing your building you are going to be rethinking the way your community does “church.” You will ask important questions like: How big will the Religious education areas be? How large should we make the worship area? Will the new space be wheelchair accessible? These questions will consume your time and energy. Your community will probably get into all sorts of discussions about how you might undertake this project. The reasons below are some of the most common reasons for building or rebuilding churches.

You are probably reading this because:

1) Your congregation has outgrown your building.

You are finding that the seats are 80% full during a Sunday service and growth cannot occur because there is not enough space for new people. Children in the R.E. are crowded and you have considered a ‘take a number’ system for washroom use.

2) The building has worked in the past but no longer works for your congregation.

Your building is not wheelchair accessible nor does it have room for religious education. (We heard of one congregation that limited enrolment, because of space constraints) The building is too severe to inspire an aesthetic feeling of transcendence (in other words, you don’t like the way it looks). It leaks badly when it rains and the cost of a new roof would be 50% of the cost of a second story. The scent of the new meat packing plant that went in across the street is discouraging new membership...

3) You want the building to look like a church, not like a strip mall.

In the 1950's and even in the 1960's there were architects and builders who felt that making a church look like a dentist’s office or variety store was just the right thing to do. Churches were subject to the same architectural styles and whims of a period where many buildings ended up looking like strip malls.

These days, some have the notion that a church should look like a church (however you see that). Perhaps you want the church to look beautiful so that people would be interested in coming to a beautiful place. Perhaps you wish your church to look heavy and strong so that it will look like it can support a community. Perhaps you want your church to have that wispy light and airy feel that can allude to transcendence. Regardless, you will need to consider how you want the building to look.

4) You want the building to reflect your social mission statement.

These days social mission is not spoken about much. Just having the church pay its bills is sometimes considered enough of a social mission. Yet there are communities who want the church's building to say something about the activities going on inside. There are churches that have decided to locate in run-down or ignored neighbourhoods to show their confidence in making a change in that area of town. Some have cooperatively funded their building plans with like-minded organizations so that space and work can be shared. There are churches that build in the middle of communities with young families, others that build near communities of older folks. Each church might build close to existing communities so that they can serve and benefit from them.

5) You want to grow and you think that you would grow if you were in a "good area."

Useful demographic information is available for most of Canada. This information can help determine where a good location might be within your city or town. It is based on the population of possible Unitarian Universalists in residential areas tracked by the census. Historically we have drawn a certain type of person or family and this demographic information informs us where these people live. It is only reasonable to assume that growth would be easier if your church or fellowship was near the people who wanted to come.

Whatever your reasons for building or rebuilding, you should know that this has been done before. With a little information and a lot of help from competent professionals, you should be able to get your building project off the ground. (As long as all the committees in the church agree!) The following is a simple course in rebuilding your church. It is a preliminary course, or sketch. It is designed to give you an overview or a picture of the landscape of what building or rebuilding a church will be like.

Remember to ask questions about this process from competent professionals and from your congregation. Ask questions of, the Canadian Unitarian Council, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Professional Association of Architects in your town, the Homebuilders Association in your area and of course other churches which have just gone through the process. They can help fill in the details.

Needs Assessment:

"This Building just doesn't work any more."

It happens quietly at first. Inadequacies in the church go unnoticed for a long time. Sometimes there is a lone voice in the wind calling to the church board or the trustees, to consider the need for new space. That voice talks about, a leaky roof, or huge heating bills, or a lack of space for the new Religious Education director and the 30 children they are responsible for.

Hopefully, the need for a new or redesigned space comes from the inadequate space itself. For example, the closet that has been filled with more than 20 years of accumulated "important," items,

“bursts,” during a service. Maybe water drips on the trustees’ table during their monthly meeting. More seriously, potential new members stand at the back not wanting to identify or embarrass themselves by finding a seat in the middle of the first row. Maybe they will not return because they felt that there was no seat for them. Perhaps the community has changed and more members need parking for cars than previously did.

Regardless of the reason, it has become common knowledge among your members that something has to be done with the facility. **‘Needs Assessment’, is a simple name for a process that your congregation can use to identify what additional or reconfigured space is needed.** This assessment asks you to look at your building with open eyes. It wants you to see your building as a tool that the congregation can use for all of the reasons it wishes to. It will ask you to forget history for a short while and concentrate only on the building.

Often a ‘needs assessment’ is developed by a general meeting of the church community. By identifying groups that have clear building needs within the church, this meeting can identify what those groups need within a building. Sometimes you might want to get a non church member, or professional to run this meeting. If an Architect is involved at this point, they might run the meeting.

The point of the meeting is to produce a list that reflects what the church needs now and what the church will need for many years in the future. (Remember, most churches do this only every 40 years.)

Let’s say that the board or the conveners or the janitor has called a ‘needs assessment’ meeting because things are not working in the building. And let’s further say that each of the church’s user groups assemble in smaller groups to discuss their needs.

Then it might go like this: In a Religious Education group, The R.E. people acknowledge that there are now 41 children of three different ages in the Sunday classes. Because they work in three groups and are of three different ages a good R.E. program should have three different spaces. After a few glasses of wine the R.E. committee feels that not only do they need those three rooms, but they also need a separate washroom for the kids, so that the kids can mix paint and occasionally throw-up from eating the paint, in a nearby washroom.

The R.E. committee feels that they will need a library for children’s books and an office for the future R.E. director, and a plenary space for group R.E. worship. After another bottle of wine, the group feels that they need a playground and three more classrooms for the future growth that the future R.E. director will encourage. (Time to stop drinking wine folks)

A finance committee might need a room where records could be kept. They might need a computer and one nicely lit room where they could meet once a month, (but they were probably not drinking wine).

The worship committee or those responsible for Sunday service, might feel that the congregation will need a room that seats 200. For that space the building would need two bathrooms, with three stalls each and two sinks. When the worship committee is dreaming, they might vision a place to hang coats, a sound system, adequate lighting, and finally a ceiling 20 feet high with a burning

chalice in the middle.

Each group in the church can probably understand what they want to do with the church from their own perspective. At this stage, some of the needs might be outrageous, the chalice on the ceiling, for example. Other needs might be exclusive. At this stage that doesn't matter. You need a **real list** of what the church **wants and needs**. The designer or the architect or the building committee will have the unfortunate job of dashing some dreams.

A 'needs assessment' is just that; assessing what the groups in the church need to make their work not just easier, but better.

Feasibility Study:

"Will it work?"

Naturally, after you decide what you all want and get really excited, some wise individual is going to ask the question, **can we do it?**

This question has two distinct parts. One is, "do we have the resources, money, energy and time to do it?"

The other question is, "where can we do it?" "Will our existing building be able to house all our needs?" "Is there a building out there that can work for us right away? Will we have to build or renovate the old or a new structure?"

I am glad that these wise ones are among us.

Let's go through the process. First, **can we do it?** Second, **where can we do it?**

Can We?

We need to deal with money and energy when we try to answer the "can we," question. This may be a very easy question or a much more difficult one. It is easy if there is a large endowment or a large monetary bequest, or a budget surplus in the last three years, (yeah, right). It is easy if you have people lined up to help with the building project. Usually though, it is a more difficult question. It starts by finding out what resources you have within the community. When it is more difficult you will need to implement a strategy. Part of this strategy is to find out what you have in the way of property and money.

This means that you need to pool your assets and see what they total. Once you see what you have, you can more easily see what you will need and where you want to go.

Don't forget that the church is itself an asset. Could you trade your church or the valuable space it sits upon for another that would work better for you? Leave no holds barred when you are looking at your church or building as an asset.

Once you assess your assets, (that's a mouthful), and reconsider the suitability of your building, you will have an idea of your resources. If you find you do not have nearly enough money or energy to

move toward your dreams, **then it is time to develop your strategies for increasing your potential.** Finding more money is usually more difficult than finding energy, (as if you didn't already know that). So you will need to handle that first.

One strategy for getting more money is to just go to that long-time member whom everyone knows has lots of money and ask them. I'm sure that if you ask them nicely they'll give you as much as you want. (Ha, Ha,)

Seriously, we all know that the congregation will be your primary source of funding for any building plans. They will be the ones to pay for the new building and they will be the ones to enjoy it. You must consider how much you can ask from the congregation as a whole. **There is an easy rule of thumb to find out what you will likely get from a capital campaign. Multiply the last three years annual giving toward an operating budget by 2 or 3, and expect to get this amount.** You might get it over 1-3 years for a long term project like a renovation or a new building and that is probably O.K.

For example, let's take a hypothetical example of a church that had an operating budget averaging \$75,000 over the last three years. You could realistically assume that you would get between \$150,000 and \$210,000 for the capital campaign drive.

If that is not enough, there is always a mortgage. This is a reasonable way for congregations to get some money when they are planning a building project. How many of us could have afforded to buy our first house without a mortgage or a loan from our families? **A good rule of thumb is to almost never obtain a mortgage that is greater than \$1,000 per member.** That means if you have 100 members, your absolute, maximum, not to be exceeded mortgage, would be \$100,000. Considering a lower mortgage would be far more prudent.

Now take your assets, the endowment fund, and the building fund, any land you own, and any buildings you wish to sell, include the money Aunt Harriet hid in the cookie jar, and put them all together. Then add a realistic mortgage to the capital campaign drive funds and wallah! You have a preliminary budget for your special building project.

Remember I said that you had to have money and energy. You will need to find between 5 and 10 high quality people who will help get this thing off the ground. Don't treat these folks lightly. They will be the ones to inform the congregation what is happening and they will be the ones handling the day to day actions of the professionals you hire. These folks will be making a lot of important decisions. (Feed them well)

The energy these people generate can inspire ideas that translate into money. Your building committee should not only be from the very prudent of those among you. They should also include the entrepreneurs from among you.

Let me give you a hypothetical example of the total picture. Say that there is \$50,000 in an old endowment fund that you lost the records for several years ago, (but are sure that you can find). Let's say that the church owns a piece of property that they will never use (current value, \$40,000). Who knows why they ever thought they would need the extra land. Let's say that you have 100 members, (real members who actually gave a pledge last year), and they will give \$150,000 (twice the annual operating budget "\$75,000" of the last three years). Finally, Aunt Harriet gave you the \$152.00 she found in the cookie jar. If you took out a conservative mortgage, you could add up to \$75,000.00 to that number. That would add up to \$315,152 in cash.

Assets

Endowment Fund	\$ 50,000
Sale of property	\$ 40,000
"Cookie," money	\$ 152
Capital Campaign	\$150,000 (The low total)
Maximum Mortgage (\$100,000)	\$ 75,000
Total capital funds	\$315,152

There! Not bad for writing it down on the back of an envelope. You have approximately \$315,000 to spend on a capital project, (not including the value of the property you now own).

Call the C.U.C. for any help that they might have on line. Call your Regional Services Director and see what they think about your figures. Help is available. Make sure you take advantage of it. Reinventing the wheel is only for those who have lots of extra time.

Where do we do it?

You must decide if you will renovate or redevelop your present building or if you will sell that building and move elsewhere.

I know that considering moving from that old building is almost sacrilegious, (unless you are a humanist, and then it's outrageous). I know that many long-time members of the church or fellowship used their time and money to build the church. Their blood is likely in the mortar or in the soup. How could you move?

Simple, you just do. There are many ways to bring the legacy of the old building with you. Remember that the people who built the building you are now using, built it to address their needs. **They would be the first to encourage you to do what they did.** Nevertheless, that discussion is for another time.

Right now I want you to ask the question: do we have to move, or can we redevelop the present building?

If you want to develop your property (Renovate), give good reasons why you can. Ask if anyone in the church or on the committee can honestly see the potential for development at the present site. Do you have room to grow? Do you have a structurally sound building in a good demographic area? Will repairs to the old building be tremendously expensive?

Make sure that it will not cost \$150,000 just to repair the roof because the old Bell tower is rotten. Make sure that even if you can add onto the existing structure inexpensively, that you will still have enough money to do other repairs and improvements.

Make sure that you're building is in a good area for future growth. It would be poor planning to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on a renovation if few people come to the new building.

Finally, make sure that the neighbourhood is appropriate for a church. Don't bother spending big bucks on renovation or an addition if there is going to be a meat packing plant across the street.

If after careful examination the existing building will not work in any way, you will have to sell it. Although this might be sad at first, there is a bright side. You can take the assets you might have used for a renovation, \$315,152 and you can add that to the money you will get for your building. (Let's say that it is worth \$200,000). You will now have \$515,152: the assets plus the value of your present building. You can use all of this money to buy a new building.

Relocating will take a lot of energy too. Now you need 10-20 committed people who will sit for one meeting a week for a year or two. (Feed them well). They will examine the real estate in the area to see if an existing building is feasible. They will look for land in good areas to see if building a new church is possible. They will need to assess the demographic information that is available from the C.U.C., and they will tell everyone all about their findings. An architect should be on board for this process and/or a real estate agent. **Remember: no matter which path you take, you will need the money and the energy of your congregation. Don't waste either one! Be bold and be careful.**

Congregational Involvement:

"Let's get this change off the ground."

If you do not keep your congregation involved in this process, you will fail. If you do not keep your congregation involved in this process, you will fail. (Emphasis intended)

A flying metaphor is appropriate here. If you do not keep everyone up to speed and confident that the building committee is doing a good job, (whatever you call that committee), the process will crash.

This means that the congregation must be involved in all areas of the process. This will make it easier for the congregation to decide important items.

The congregation needs to agree that they need change for growth; they need to be asked if they can see potential in the building you presently use, or if they see potential in another. **They must be**

asked what they want in a building, (Feasibility Study), and they must be asked to work for new goals. (Be sure to inform them because the church will need their energy.)

Finally they will be asked to pay for it. That means you must let them know how wonderful the new building will be. That means you need to let them know you are listening to what they want, and are trying to make it happen.

Plan on at least 5 of these potential congregational meetings.

- 1) Growth, for us?
- 2) Feasibility Study meeting
- 3) 'Needs Assessment' meeting
- 4) First sketch of the building plan and feedback
- 5) Last sketch of the plan and congratulations
- 6) Capital campaign implementation
- 7) Vote to go ahead, ("cheer leading" rally),
- 8) Progress on construction, volunteer work etc.
- 9) Preparations for opening up the new building, (big party)

During these meetings, remember a consensus is what you are striving for. **You want people to ask questions, (make sure you have answers); you want people to feel good.** You would like them to see the process that you are going through so that instead of constant questions you might even get helpful suggestions.

Some new people who can help you on the committee may show up. You'd be surprised about how, "an accountant," might just pop up and volunteer to do the cash flow and mortgage footwork. I would suggest that the final paper work for any transaction be done by a professional, (who gets paid by the congregation). That doesn't mean that you cannot use professional people in your congregation to put the material in a rough form so that, "hired guns," (lawyers, accountants, agents, etc.) can finalize at less cost. It just means that you will have greater confidence that your, "hired guns", will do a good job and be understood, because of these helpful members.

Use the, "hired guns", so that they, and not your congregants, can take any heat about any problem that may come up. Remember this is work, but it doesn't have to be hell. (You don't want to burn out an unpaid committee member who is also a lawyer by blaming him or her for a small mistake in the paper work.)

Remember don't rush this process. Take it a step at a time. Use professionals so that your members do not burn out

Success for the church is moving into a "new," building with all the members happily signing cheques on the front steps.

Planning Process:

“Let’s put this Sucker on the Time Line”

You might think that this can all be done in a couple of weeks.

Not.

This is an elaborate undertaking that will require consistent work for well into a couple of years. (Remember when I said that you would need not only money but energy?)

You will need energy and money. Yet a little smarts about when you will need the energy and the money might help. It doesn’t all need to happen next week. In fact, if you set the work up nicely along a time line, it might look even manageable.

Glance at this time line. It would work for a church that was moving out of its building and back in, after the work is complete. It would be a substantial renovation on an existing site. A new building would take approximately the same amount of time.

Big Church Time Line, (After many years of preparation)

1) Decisions from grass roots that the congregation wants to grow. Articulated so that the congregation can hear it.	1-2 months
2) Decisions about decoration, or renovation, or relocation. Preliminary ‘needs assessment’ completed.	1-2 months
3) Let’s see how much money we can get together, Preliminary, capital assessment. Meeting to kick the thing off.	1-2 months
4) Let’s hire an architect to help us with the concept	2 -3 months especially if you interview three or four
5) Let’s show the concept to the congregation and get feedback	1-2 months
6) Let’s do a final and complete ‘needs assessment’	2 months with all committees of the church meeting
7) Let’s look at the architect’s concept and his ballpark (right out of the park) estimate of what it will cost.	2 months
8) Let’s get feedback (read that compromise), to make the architect’s concept work with both our budget and our needs.	1 month
9) Big Capital Campaign, with clear goals and target amount	3-4 months with many members interviewed
10) Minor Modifications to the architect’s concept, then Full working drawings that talk about all aspects of the building.	3 months
11) Let’s start getting a place rented so that we can be somewhere when	1-2 months

the work is going on. (If you are building new, "0")	
12) We get a design team involved for furniture and decorations that will be needed when we move in. (And we veto any colour that looks like pink, sorry, my personal bias)	Ongoing
13) Let's make sure that everything is in order and that the congregation is really excited about its new home.	1-2 months
14) Let's hire a Builder, and sign a contract	1 month
15) We move out, we ritualize leaving our trusted building and watch how things progress (If building "0") If building, we just watch!	1 month
16) Construction.....We have occasional days when we show the congregation around the hole in the ground or the bombed out shell of what we once called our church.	9-12 months
17) We continue with watching progress, asking people for money and signing cheques.	Ongoing
18) We get a party ready for moving back in, get media involved etc.	1-2 months
19) We do a big congregational parade and reopen our building, and we do dedications when we are there.	1 month, including prep.
20) We get some poor and kind soul to continue working the books after all the celebrations are finished, (Remember, the pledges are still coming in and will continue for 2-3 more years.	After construction, approx. 2 years.

If you are still reading this, after you looked at the chart, you are really a good church member. You should be the chair of the Building committee. Seriously, if you do the math, we get a quick time of 2.7 years, a long time of 3.7 years.

Of course some of this work is concurrent, yet I have been optimistic on some of it as well. I listed this chart so that you could see how long things take. I wanted you to see how much energy you will need for the entire process.

Small Church Time Line: (Still after many years of preparation)

1) Decisions from grass roots that the congregation wants to grow. Articulated so that the congregation can hear it.	1-2 months
2) Decisions about decoration, or renovation, or relocation. Preliminary needs assessment completed.	1 month
3) Let's see how much money we can get together, Preliminary, capital assessment. Meeting to kick the thing off.	1 month
4) Let's hire an architect to help us with the concept or a builder with design experience.	2 months especially if you interview two firms.
5) Let's show the concept to the congregation and get feedback	1 month
6) Let's do a final and complete 'needs assessment', you might already have this.	1 month with all committees of the church meeting

7) Let's look at the architect's or builder's sketch and their ballpark price.	1 month
8) Let's compromise in a general meeting	1 month
9) Big capital campaign, with clear goals and target amount	2-3 months with many members interviewed
10) Minor Modifications to the final plans, then Full working drawings that talk about all aspects of the building.	2 months or less, if changes are minor.
11) Let's start getting a place rented so that we can be somewhere when the work is going on. (If building new add "0")	1 month
12) We get a design team involved for furniture and decorations that will be needed when we move in. (And we veto any colour that looks like pink)	Ongoing
13) Let's make sure that everything is in order and that the congregation is really excited about its new potential home.	1 month
12) Lets hire a Builder, and sign a contract	Already done
13) We move out, we ritualize leaving and watch how things progress. If building, we just watch! Add,"0".	.5 month
14) Construction.....We have occasional days when we show the congregation around the bombed out shell of what we once had. If you are building new, stick with 9-12 months.	6-9 months
15) We continue with watching progress, asking people for money and signing cheques.	Ongoing
16) We get a party ready for moving back in or opening up, get media involved etc.	1 month
17) We do a big congregational party inviting anyone who has ever had a connection to our church or fellowship.	1 month, including prep.
18) We get some poor and kind soul to continue working the books after all the celebrations are finished, (Remember, the pledges are still coming in and will continue for 2-3 more years.	After construction, approx. 2 years.

This totals less than two years for a quick track and only a little more than two years for a slow one. **It is more likely that fewer people will be doing the work in a smaller congregation. So make sure that these folks get as much help and support as they will accept.** Plan for all the work and then work your plans, and remember, keep everyone informed.

Hire the Architect:

(Let's give this loaded cannon to someone who can take the heat)

It's time. It's time when you notice several dedicated church members bringing their sledgehammers to the church on the weekend. Others are constantly bringing their table napkin sketches to show, "the board," their design ideas.

Maybe the congregation is ready to start a capital campaign drive. You will likely need a sketch of a “new,” building to round out the “dream,” for your congregation.

It’s time.

Remember to check two things about the architect.

First, is that they have to be a competent professional. No leaky roofs in their background, no history of buildings that did not get built because they were twice or three times the original budget. No lawsuits.

Second, is that they can work with people and **really listen** to what they hear.

If they cannot do these two things, **do not hire them**. There is only one thing worse than spending a couple of thousand dollars on concept plans and then getting something that looks like a horse designed by a committee.

What is worse is having the congregation get excited by the capital fund drive and then seeing either a horse designed by committee, or a new construction budget that is twice or three times what they have to spend.

This will pour cold water on your plans faster than you can say \$50,000.

Interview three of them. During the interview, ask for ideas. **Tell them about your theology and see what happens to them**. If they start mumbling, keep looking for another one. **Look for some passion in them about your project**. Make sure that they are interested. **Make sure that they will attend board meetings and congregational meetings so that the folks in your church or Fellowship will get to ask questions and provide input**. Look at jobs that they have completed and see if there is a style. See if you like their style. Make sure that you can work with them and understand them. Consider if they will be enjoyable to work with.

Negotiate a fee schedule with them that is complete. This means that they will be paid from the start of the drawings to the, “moving in,” parade. Within this fee structure consider a clause that allows you to get out of the agreement after the concept drawings. You would do this because you did not like either the drawings or the cost of construction. This clause is a reasonable condition in the industry.

Use the architect a lot! That is what they are paid for. Call them often.

And treat them really well, buy them coffee often. Feed them at meetings. They will make very little money on your project, (especially if they go to all the church meetings). They do it for prestige. They also almost always misjudge the time they will spend with your congregation. So at least tell them how great they are.

Finally, if it all works, give them credit. They deserve it.

Hiring the Contractor:

“Now we have found someone who can really take the heat.”

If you hear the choir modifying their dressing room during the sermon, it's likely time to get the professionals in. It is definitely time when you have good concept drawings from the architect.

Before you hire a contractor, ask the architect for names. Look at three contractors. Make sure that the contractor is experienced in handling the size of the project that you are planning. Make sure that the contractor is insured, and is paying workers' compensation. **Start the process by looking for a contractor when you have a project that is ready to lift off the ground.** Get the architect and the contractor talking about the project. (This may even save you some money.)

Look at work the contractor has done, talk to the building committee that the contractor has done work for in another church or Fellowship. Ask them three questions. Did the contractor play hardball with them after they signed the contract? Were there frequent extras that were hard to negotiate? Did the project get built behind schedule? **If you get a yes to any of these three, find out why.** If you do not like the answers they give you, look for another contractor. **There are two ways to work with a contractor. One is the fixed price bid.** You all know this process. You probably used it to fix a roof in the last few years or something. You get three contractors that you feel good about. Then you have them price **the exact same set of drawings or work.** A complete set that the architect has given them. A set that includes all the decisions that the congregation has made on every aspect of the buildings construction, including some simple decorations. (That is why you need the architect!)

You then take the lowest bid. It is a very simple strategy.

There is one catch though. **If the plans are not excellent and complete, the priced is not fixed at all.** For everything that is not specified on the plans you must expect the contractor to request an extra to that “fixed” price. If doorknobs are not in the plans, **they are not in the bid.** If it does not ask for the contractor to install light fixtures, expect them to be in boxes when you move. **This is the way fixed price contracts work.** The contractor does not know what you want. The contractor only prices what they see on the plans. Since the pricing is competitive, they are not including anything that is not specified, **period.**

A fixed price contract is usually best when a new building is being built. A fixed price contract is usually best when the project is simple and the plans are complete.

The second way to work with a contractor is with a Project Management approach. This means that the contractor gives you a realistic budget before the plans are complete, and justifies those costs to you. The contractor will tell you how much the electrician will charge him and how much the roofer and the plumber will charge him. The contractor will charge exactly what he is being invoiced for. To make money on the project the contractor will charge you a fee based on the true construction costs of building. For example, if the contractor feels that the project will cost \$100,000.00 he will say, “I will manage this project for \$15,000.” (Or 15% of true construction costs.) **This means that the project will cost you \$115,000.** You will pay all the costs, materials,

subtrades and labour to build the structure and you will pay the, “fee,” of \$15,000.00 that the contractor has requested from the beginning of the project. (The fee doesn’t change)

This approach works best when the project cannot be clearly specified. It will work only if the building committee and the architect and the contractor are working well together. **It will only work well if there is a team approach to the project.**

The good news in this approach is that you will see all costs related to the project. (In fixed price, you will see none of the costs, and only pay instalments toward the final bill or bid). You will see that when there are changes, or extras to the original project, you will pay those costs and the 15%, no more. (In fixed price contracts, extras are often inflated to help the contractor cover unforeseen costs)

The bad news is that the price is not fixed. If the contractor makes a mistake and his \$100,000 budget turns into \$125,000, you can do nothing about it. You will have to pay the \$125,000. This is why the architect and the building committee must all be on board with the contractor early in the building process. This approach needs strong team work to be successful.

Regardless which method you favour, make sure you talk to the architect about it. Check out the contractor’s track record with whatever approach you use.

I have one caution. Often hiring the contractor brings out all the latent testosterone in the males and some females in the congregation. I guess it’s because contractors have reputations only slightly better than car mechanics and lawyers. People in your congregation may try to deal strongly with them. They may be overly suspicious of them. Remember they are building your church. **You want them to do a good job.** Do the homework that will allow you to hire a good one, **and then cooperatively manage the project with**

Finally remember, (as a church), if you ever have to go to court with a construction firm, even if you win, **you will lose.** If you ever have an unsolvable problem with the contractor, the project will be delayed forever, the costs will increase when someone comes in to pick up the pieces, and your members will start looking for a church that does not have a lawsuit hanging over its collective head. **So don’t allow testosterone poisoning to occur during your building project. Ever!**

I am asking you to be reasonable with the contractor. I am hoping that by picking a good contractor, they will be reasonable with you.

Feed the contractor too! I figure that for every \$1.25 cup of coffee you bring a contractor, you get \$100.00 in extra work done or good ideas that just happen to come out during the conversation. (They love it when people treat them with respect.)

The New Operating Budget:

“Or how come the new electrical bill is \$2,500.00!”

It seems obvious. When you add 50% more space to your old building or build a new one that is twice the size of the old, all operating costs are likely to go up. Heat, electrical, water, cleaning, and maintenance are all costs that will increase.

So before they even build the building, discuss what the new operating costs might be. Ask the architect to consider them as well. Perhaps you will choose a low maintenance floor on the entire first floor of the building. Perhaps you will consider stone or brick for the outside so that you will never need to paint the building again. These might make the building more expensive to build, yet it will pay for itself many times over through the next 10 annual operating budgets.

A congregation may choose to use electric heat because they did not want to replace their old and still working, furnace. To install new electric radiators might only cost \$4,000 during the building process. To install a new furnace for the whole building the cost might be \$20,000.

Yet it might cost **\$2,000 per month** in the winter to heat with the combined electrical and the old furnace. A good architect will tell you that operating costs for heating the entire building would be only **\$500 per month** if you replaced the old furnace with a new gas unit.

If there is a five month heating season, the difference is **\$7,500 per year** in reduced operating costs. That means that you would get the money you paid for the expensive furnace back in only three years.

I am asking you to make sure that the building committee and the architect, (if there is one), are considering the new building in light of future operating costs

This will help the church meet its operating budget in the future and it will get the building committee pats on the back for years to come.

Growing stories

I thought that you might not believe that there were successful new building stories throughout Canada. There are many. I chose from ten that I know about. One is a small church that is getting bigger in Kelowna, British Columbia. Another story is about a large church trying to double its size in Toronto.

All the stories are different. Yet all the growth stories use several of the ideas that I have written about in the text of this booklet. I got the ideas from them. Read the stories, they are all wonderful.

Toronto, Ontario

First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto did it all. They went from neighbourhood groups talking about what the church needed to a 1.4 million-dollar renovation of their existing space in about 5 years. They had an endowment fund of approx. \$430,000.

The process was very simple. They went one step at a time. The first thing that they did was to survey their members and have a congregational workshop. They asked their church members what kind of church they wanted. They had neighbourhood meetings where members could talk freely about what they wanted in their church. In the meetings they centered the discussion on three questions. "Would you like to? 1) Repair and redecorate the church, 2) Redevelop the church which might mean moving or adding apartments to the church grounds, 3) Renovate the existing church.

There was a strong sentiment to renovate the building. This was reflected by a church meeting. Ed Lynn a consultant architect and minister came from the UUA. To help give them a sense of what they wanted in their building.

They hired professional fundraisers that interviewed some of the members and then coached the leadership about how to interview others. They told the leadership that they could expect to get \$450,000 from the members in a capital campaign drive. The congregation thought that they could support a budget of \$1,000,000. They realized that they would need a small mortgage to augment the capital campaign and the endowment monies.

They interviewed eight architects. Murray Ross was chosen and they immediately asked that he develop a concept drawing. Once he developed the drawings they were put up for the congregation to see. There were many comments. Mr. Ross changed the facade plans slightly and the congregation was happy with the floor plan. When they approved the plan in a congregational meeting, the plan became a model and then it became the "Dream."

The "Dream" was used in almost every correspondence. They took the model everywhere. They put it up all over the church.

A feasibility study was done to get an initial idea about costs. One million dollars was the first preliminary budget.

The architect helped the congregation with the 'needs assessment' and every chair of every committee participated. After the "'needs assessment', the budget began to creep upwards." With a construction budget at \$1,000,000 there was no room it seemed, for all the other costs that accompanied a major renovation. The congregation had to pay: the architect fees, GST, new furniture, air conditioning, City fees, moving fees, and acoustical retrofit costs and the cost of construction. This meant that the initial budget was too low. They went back to the congregation and asked for permission to take the budget to \$1,400,000. The congregation agreed.

By this time, the Capital Campaign was running concurrently. The capital campaign looked like it was going to exceed \$600,000. This was much more than the \$450,000 the budget people had

expected. This made the congregation positive about the new budget increase.

Toronto First chose to, “project manage,” the construction with a company called Chapelstone. They had significant experience in church construction and had worked with the architect before. Contracts were signed, insurance policies were checked and the congregation was able to move to a nearby church for services. They moved with a parade (including bagpipes)

At several stages during the construction the congregation was invited to survey progress of the building site. Members of the construction crew and building committee members carefully showed the congregation around the new building. Progress was monitored and talked about.

One year after they moved out of the building, Toronto First Moved back into their “new” building. They had done their project on time and on budget. The congregation lost less than five people because of the renovation and the move. Their final capital campaign exceeded \$700,000. Additional funds were raised, by auctioning off chairs, they had acquired free of charge.

Toronto is still paying off their Mortgage and is currently having a Fund drive to reduce it. They feel that their, “process,” went very well. They also like their building, although the roof leaks.

Kelowna, British Columbia

The Unitarian Fellowship of Kelowna is approximately 30 years old. Five years ago they started to look for a new home. They were hoping that a larger building would help them grow. During these five years there was a lot of discussion in the Fellowship about who they were and how they wanted to grow. Three years ago they upped their ministry to ½ times. Eighteen months ago they found a building that they felt would work for their Fellowship.

This process took time, energy from their part time minister and a lot of energy from members of their congregation. Their board was positive about the new building. They said, "Let's do it". They had a congregational vote on the new building and had a positive 40-3 vote for going ahead.

It was an expensive building for a small Fellowship. It was priced at \$325,000. Although this was a great deal of money for the congregation, they were hopeful that a co-buyer might split the cost and the use of their new building. No deal ever materialized with a co-buyer. That idea fell through.

They likely could not have bought this building, even with the enthusiasm they had, without two large endowments that came in the form of bequests for \$120,000.00. (It sounded like it came in the best of time!) Members helped to buy the building with 5 year loans.

Finally, they purchased the "new", 40 year old building in September of 1994. It can seat 105 people, and has rooms for meetings and R.E. downstairs.

Kelowna never received any help from the Unitarian Universalist Association. In fact, they were discouraged from buying a building. They did it alone with a little moral help from the district

Today the Fellowship is bursting. According to their newsletter, they are renting the building out to whoever they can. They are renting it for the money and for the exposure. They have had a festival; Tai-chi classes and a conference within their building that have drawn people from the community. Recently they started getting as many as 60 to a Sunday service. When their children are in the worship space with their parents, they are now approaching their capacity.

This active congregation, after only two years, is now feeling the pinch again of a building that is not as large as they want.

Good Luck”:

Be Enthusiastic

I hope that you have some Good Luck in this process to recreate your church building. I never take Luck casually. Luck might favour you with an accountant who takes care of all, and I mean all, the financial work that will be needed for 2-3 years. Maybe luck comes when a builder offers some of his time as a charitable donation. Maybe the architect gives you, not just a pleasant structure, but something that takes the congregations’ collective breath away because it is so beautiful. (Maybe it is still affordable too, that would really be luck!)

Take care of yourselves. This is a lot of work with a wonderful joy and satisfaction occurring when it is finished. Your job is to try to feel that joy and satisfaction during the process and get a job done. Try not to forget both of these ideas. This will help decrease burnout by your committed members.

Celebrate all the high points during this process, especially the move into the “new” building.

If you can, remember that the goal is not only the new building, but also the new community that will live in it. May **Grace** and **Luck** and **Enthusiasm** be with you.

“Remember, nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays*, 1841