



## Choosing a Site

**T**he old adage in real estate is “Location. Location. Location.” However, when choosing a site for your church, location is only one of the many factors that can affect the future ministry of a congregation. Before a congregation begins to search for a specific site, it should evaluate as many of those factors as possible. In most cases, the preparation to purchase a site requires completing the following steps:

### Step 1

#### Demographic Research

Learning about the community and its needs

### Step 2

#### Ministry Planning

Created based on the strengths of the church and the needs of the community

### Step 3

#### Financial Planning

For the purchase of the property and operations of the congregation.

These first three steps will help a congregation determine the basic factors needed to find a location and/or facility that are suitable for its ministry.

After completing the initial planning, leaders need to select a site that

matches the congregation’s goals and considers the following:

#### 1. Location involves choreographing several factors that relate to the physical address of the property:

- *Central location* – Selecting a site that is centrally located to the area where the congregation plans to offer its ministry.
- *Accessibility* – The ability to easily access the site can be critical to how people find and use the property. Landmarks that can affect the accessibility of a site include waterways, interstates, rail lines, neighborhoods, and roads with limited curb cuts or restrictive turns. It is best to find sites that have two access points and close proximity to public transportation.

- *Planning & Zoning* – Some municipalities limit the areas where churches can be built, and zoning can affect property restrictions for parking, drainage, utilities, right of way, environmental impact, lighting, signage and building design.
- *Surrounding community* – A church can be impacted by the surrounding community, with its traffic due to major events, neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, and/or shopping areas.

#### 2. Cost is another major consideration when selecting a site.

Beyond the initial cost of purchasing a property, congregations should also factor in the costs of any construction or repair, operations, insurance, furniture, signage, lighting and various unknowns and cost overruns related to purchasing property. In many cases, it is less expensive and more efficient to purchase an existing facility than to incur the costs of new construction.

#### 3. Size and use of the property can affect the future growth and financial health of a congregation.

Purchasing a site or facility that is too large for a congregation can impose a financial burden that limits growth. On the other hand, purchasing a site that is too small can cap growth. In most cases, churches should plan for phased growth based on their ministry plan, and create spaces that are multifunctional.



#### **4. Visibility of the site includes the location of the facility on the property, landscaping, signage, parking, and the surrounding properties.**

The best sites will provide a high level of visibility for the facility and signs near high traffic areas.

#### **5. Utilities are often overlooked when choosing a site.**

Be sure to know what access the site has to gas, electricity, phone, sewer, water and internet. Utilities can also restrict property use due to right of way and easement.

#### **6. Safety and prior use should always be considered when choosing a site.**

Sites should be thoroughly inspected and buyers should conduct the following: Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment (ESA), ALTA Survey and an MAI Commercial Appraisal. Congregations should consider acquiring additional reports based on the advice of their real estate agents and the requirements of any lender or title company.

Church leaders should consider all of these factors when evaluating a site, making sure not to acquire a site simply because it was donated or offered at a discount. Like most commercial property, the selection of a site should be based on the specific needs of the church, both short and long term.

**Additional Notes:** Please note that churches are usually considered commercial real estate, and due to their unique nature, it is important to work with a professional who has experience in site selection. Often local real estate agents will not have experience in site selection for religious needs, and therefore it is recommended that your con-

gregation work with consultants from your larger denomination or another professional with related experience.

#### **Additional Tips:**

- Contact other church leaders who have selected a site in the past 10 years
- Consider using outside advisors, such as Disciples Church Extension Fund, rather than local real estate agents, who may not have commercial or church real estate experience
- Work with a lender who can assist you with third-party reports and inspections
- Evaluate sites independent of one another and offer only one final selection to the congregation
- Do extensive interviews with people about the needs of the community
- Meet with civic leaders early and before selecting a site
- Conduct a capital campaign to help with funding
- Evaluate in what direction a facility should face to maximize visibility and natural lighting
- Consider using LEED Green Building standards for construction or renovation
- Work with an architect to create conceptual design models and to determine the size and space needs of anticipated programming and ministry
- Conduct special events and a worship service to consecrate the new site for ministry

**For more information about choosing a site, please contact Disciples Church Extension Fund 800-274-1883 [info@disciplescef.org](mailto:info@disciplescef.org) [www.disciplescef.org](http://www.disciplescef.org)**