



Flexible Space

Historically, churches have had single-purpose rooms. The library of the church stored religious books for members to study. The choir room was designed for choir practice and to store robes and music. And, Sunday school classrooms were only used on Sundays by a specific class for Christian education. However, as the cost of construction, maintenance and operations of a facility has increased, many churches have started to design flexible spaces that can be used for many purposes.

Space Used

Over the past three years, Disciples Church Extension Fund's research on energy usage has shown that most church facilities are used less than 20 percent of the available time they could be open for ministry, programs and community use. For example, a church facility with 14 rooms could be open from 7 a.m. – 9 p.m. each day, seven days a week. The calculation: 14 rooms x 14 hours x 7 days = 1,372 available hours each week. At 20 percent usage, most churches use their total space about 250 hours a week. By using rooms within a church facility for a single purpose and very short periods of time each week, churches pay a premium to maintain and operate their facility. By designing rooms that can be flexible, rooms can be used for multiple purposes, which increases the efficiency of the facility and lowers the

cost to operate the building – money that could be used for ministry.

Size Matters

According to the Department of Energy, the average utility cost to operate a commercial facility each year is \$1.19 per square foot.¹ The average utility cost to operate a 30,000 sq. ft. commercial building is \$35,800. By having a smaller facility with flexible space, a church can save thousands of dollars each year on utilities and operating costs. Additionally, smaller buildings decrease liability risk (fire, theft, etc), are cheaper to insure and maintain, and are easier for visitors to navigate.

¹ Based on 1995–2001 research project by the Department of Energy reported by the U.S. Energy Information Administration http://www.eia.gov/emeu/consumption-briefs/cbecs/pbaweb/office/office_howuseenergy.htm

Potential Drawbacks

While flexible spaces have many advantages, churches should also be aware of the potential drawbacks related to sharing space with multiple users and purposes. Common problems associated with flexible space include:

- Lack of storage space for all users or programs
- Need to clean and organize the space regularly, due to increased traffic
- Time and usage conflicts due to limited space
- Need to do strategic planning of furniture, technology and lighting fixtures

Ministry and Financial Planning

As a congregation considers its facility needs, it should always begin by evaluating the priorities and needs of its ministry. A congregation can then make the necessary financial plans to build, maintain and operate its facility. By creating flexible space, churches can save money that they could otherwise use for ministry. However, any decision should ultimately be decided based on the church's ministry priorities and context.

For more information about flexible space, please contact Disciples Church Extension Fund 800-274-1883 info@disciplescef.org www.disciplescef.org