

School Facilities: If the Roof Leaks . . . Fix It

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It was the last day before Christmas vacation was to begin. We had made arrangements to transport the students to a local arena for a morning of skating, and we were all looking forward to the beginning of the holidays at noon. But in true December style, the weather outside was frightful; but not with snow-it was pouring rain!

The weather that fall had been rather damp to say the least. Even the local newspapers had had cartoons depicting animals heading for an ark; it had been that wet. It was unbelievable as to how much rain was falling outside. And the roof, as it always did in wet weather, was leaking.

In the main hallway there were wastepaperbaskets collecting water, ceiling tiles had been removed, and mops and buckets were stationed in various places for easy access. Students were picking their way between buckets, puddles, and everything else cluttering the hallway.

Then, it really began to rain. The heavens opened up and rain fell in torrents. Of course, this was the time at which we had chosen to have the children get ready to make a mad dash to the vehicles to make our way to the arena. It was also just the time you would like to have a fire drill; the conditions were perfect-a deluge outside for everyone to stand in!

When the fire bell sounded, my heart sank. Just what we needed! It turned out water had gotten into the alarm system and set it off. Who said that life at school was ever dull?

School facilities can cause us challenges. It is the largest investment of capital that we make, and the upkeep of these facilities will be the largest expenditures we budget for each year. The most frightening aspect of this is that if you don't do it right when you build it, you will get to pay for it again, again, and again, until either you get it right, or you get rid of the building.

Because of the limited resources we have, it is necessary for us to ensure that the facilities we construct are suitable, well built, and manageable for us to maintain. When building or remodeling a facility, these are the deciding factors that need to be investigated and become the framework upon which the project proceeds.

School facilities are addressed in the Seventh-day AdventistSeventh-day AdventistSeventh-day Adventist Church in Canada K-12 Master Plan with goal number five which is to: Build and maintain education facilities that provide an environment conducive for learning, and set aside funds to that effect. To reach this goal there are steps we need to take to ensure the success of the projects we undertake.

Planning

When the project is started, involvement of the stakeholder groups is essential in the planning process.



These are the people who will be using the facility, and will be providing the resources to build and then maintain it in the future. To have them on side from the beginning will allow for their input to ensure that the needs they perceive as the end users will be addressed.

The building committee, with representation from these groups, will work together to develop a plan for the facility that will meet the needs. The functionality of the building is important, and as this is a long-term investment, long-term use should also be addressed. Consideration of such things as future needs, possible advances in technology, and teaching techniques currently under development must be explored, and should impact the design of the facility. Throughout this process, safety issues in and around the facility, as well as adherence to local building codes, will also play a role in determining the final look of the facility.

Financing

Ensure that the project has a sound financial basis. Policies are in place within our church structure at all levels to ensure that projects are properly funded so there will not be an unbearable financial burden the church will have to carry. It is when these policies are not followed that we find financial hardships taking place. These policies are there to protect, although at times they seem to hinder the progress we would like to see. To step outside of these policies puts us at risk, and the consequences that may follow create larger problems that someone will have to deal with.

The development, and adherence to, of a financial timeline in conjunction with the building program will allow for the tracking of expenditures. The financial plan should be regularly updated to reflect the ongoing and final cost of the project. This is important as the projected costs of projects tend to increase along the way, so good financial management dictates that a system of checks and balances is in place so there isn't a major unpleasant surprise when it is completed.

Budgeting

Another aspect dealing with finances is maintenance of the facility once construction is complete. Developing a balanced operating budget, including such things as maintenance, utilities, insurance, etc., which will allow for the proper care of the facility, should be completed. The costs do not stop when the last wall is painted or the last nail is driven. This is an investment that will need to be maintained and cared for, to ensure it will serve the intended purpose for years to come.

Construction

Ensuring there is enough money to finish the project can cause us to make decisions we might later regret. There are times when the temptation may come to cut some corners to save a few of those precious dollars. Decisions of this nature may affect the quality of the construction, hence affecting the useful longevity of the building, and impacting the operating budget in succeeding years. It may save you a little immediately, but you may end up paying for it many times over in the long run. Building costs should be as economical as possible, but should not jeopardize the long-term use of the building.

By keeping these principles in mind as we launch into any major building or renovation project, we should be able to successfully provide adequate facilities in which to operate our schools. As for my roof? We are still trying to fix the problem, which was a flaw in the building design from the beginning that was not foreseen. But, I have to look on the bright side-it only leaks when it rains.

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