



WILLOW CREEK MAIN AUDITORIUM

## 2. Funding Changes To Church Property

The church as a whole has an amazing legacy of buildings, many of which have been inherited from previous generations that funded their construction. This was a society that was on average poorer than today but had been encouraged to commit financially to the construction of church buildings. So how does the church fund building works today? The market cost of construction is a long way from the typical income from a jumble sale or cake stall, although these will be important involvement activities.

I suggest that there are five basic methods of funding church building work:

### **Cash in the Bank**

Some churches may have funds available from bequests or the results of other good stewardship the past. Putting this into active mission use falls into the category of, "not burying your talents"... but getting a good missional return.

### **Loans**

These may be bank loans secured against the churches property or the property of individual members. Willow Creek in Chicago originally met in a movie theatre until a group of members decided to mortgage their homes to raise funds to buy their current site. This has now grown to 20,000 worshippers each weekend over six campuses with an international association that helps local churches to thrive. Some diocesan schemes provide loans based upon levels of church members investment in the diocesan bank. In 1862 it took 15 years to pay off the loan for the substantial refurbishment St Aldates church, Oxford. In 2002 it took seven years to pay off the loan for a similar 21stC refurbishment.

### **Sacrificial Giving, Bequests and Pledges**

Encouragement by the pastoral leaders for their members to give sacrificially to fund the cost of construction is the basis for part of most church projects. This has been found to deepen the spiritual experience of many people who have spoken of all their needs being met after they have acted generously. At St Aldates in Oxford some postponed extending their houses to be able to give and others gave some of the proceeds of house sales. Some tithed their income for the first time while others pledged to pay regularly from income. This requires the bold leadership of the pastor to encourage such commitment. Having a masterplan can enable committed members to see ahead and contribute to the future church they approach the end of their lives.

### **Realising Value from Property**

In many cases the church is property rich and cash poor. This can be leveraged to realise value by selling or leasing property that is no longer serving mission or by leasing it to create a regular income. Property ownership should not be an end in itself for a mission-based church. Property that it is not serving any mission purpose is like the servant who buried his master's money (Matt 25:14-18). If property value is to be realised, wise stewardship is needed to get the best value from it and this may mean obtaining planning permits to increase its value. More about this in Blog 4.

### **Sharing Ownership**

This is relatively new concept in which members of a church might make up the shortfall in cost on the basis that they are co-owners. This might involve individual superannuation funds of members.

Most church building projects are achieved by a combination of two or three of the above.