

RELATING TO CONTRACTORS

A RESOURCE FROM THE CENTER FOR CONGREGATIONS

A construction project is a huge undertaking for a congregation. Plans, architects, contractors, blueprints, and budgets are just a few of the many intricate facets involved. Developing and maintaining a good relationship with the contractor who will build your project can help smooth the road to a successful and meaningful outcome.

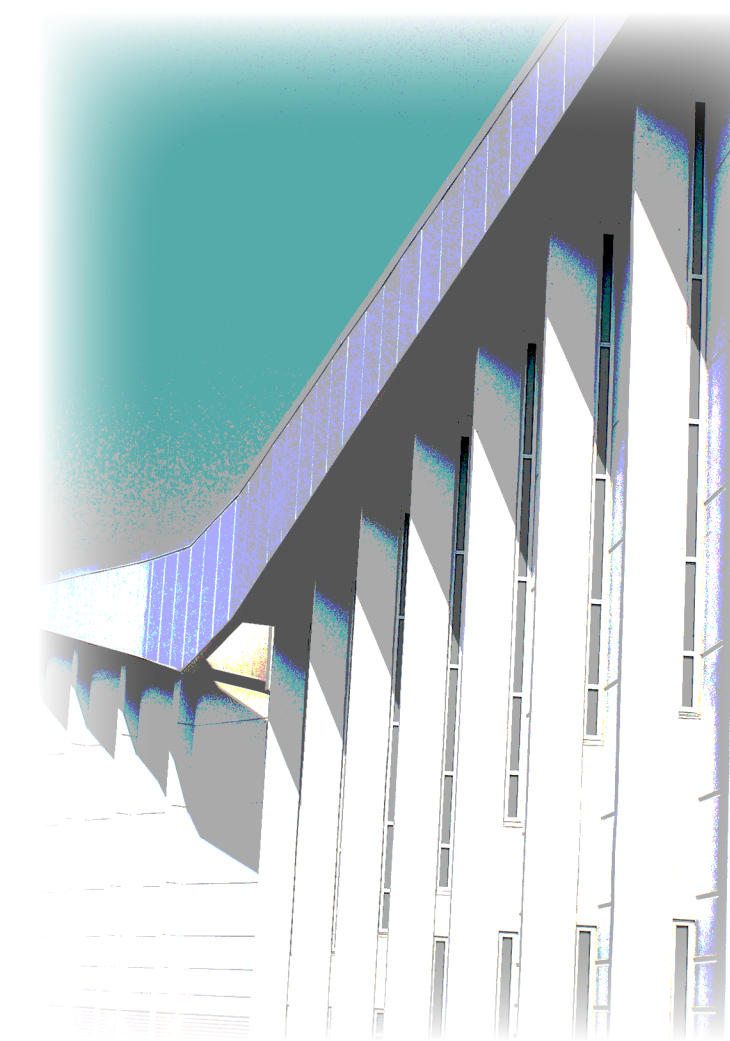
HAVE PROCESSES IN PLACE. Appoint a building committee, decide how decisions will be made and stick to the plan. When issues arise, they can be easily funneled through the already-familiar process, allowing for a timely resolution. Building projects require numerous decisions, so it is important to set up a plan early. The road won't always be smooth, but having a set process in place can help the congregation and the contractor avoid frustrating dilemmas.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT. By the time you begin looking for a contractor, you need to have in mind what you want your building project to include and how much money you can afford to spend. Be decisive. In every congregation, there are many people involved who really care about the project, many with differing opinions and ideas. Narrow it down. Present a unified plan, so your contractor will be better able to serve your needs.

FIND A CONTRACTOR WHO IS RIGHT FOR YOU. Talk to your architect and to other congregations who have completed building projects. Do some research. Check references. Find someone with experience in church construction. It is important to recognize that there are many good contractors, but not every contractor is right for every project. Find the one who is best suited to your needs. Always beware of nepotism. It is fine to consider hiring the pastor's son as your contractor, but be sure you are considering him in the same light as the other candidates.

TAKE A PROACTIVE APPROACH. Do a little homework to find out all you can about the construction process. If you know how things work in the construction business, terms used and common practices, you will be better equipped to choose and work with your contractor.

BRING YOUR CONTRACTOR ON BOARD EARLY. Finding a contractor early in the process can be the key to a successful building project. This allows the contractor, congregation



and architect to set up common expectations and become unified in your purpose. The contractor can provide advice on time frames, costs, materials and scheduling up front. In the end, this step can help control costs.

DEVELOP A GOOD RELATIONSHIP. It is important for the contractor and congregation to build a level of trust. In order to do this, the building committee and contractor need to work closely together and get to know each other. Experiences build trust. This is another good reason to bring your contractor into the project early.

CHOOSE A POINT PERSON. Appoint one person to be the spokesperson for the congregation's construction committee. Frustration can mount if the contractor receives instructions from many different sources.



COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY. Keep the lines of communication open. Set up a weekly meeting or walk-through with your contractor. Talk to your contractor often. Telephone and e-mail are great tools, but remember that face-to-face gatherings are imperative. Get to know the project manager or job superintendent on the work site monitoring progress. Let your contractor know of any obstacles or special requests. If you are renovating, be sure the contractor knows what areas of the building are being used and when, so that he or she can schedule work when it is convenient.

ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS. Never hesitate to ask for clarification. Contractors often use terms that are understood in the construction field, but may not be common to the average congregational leader. Make them speak your language, so that you understand everything. Avoiding misunderstandings can save time, money and peace of mind.

MAKE A LIST AND CHECK IT TWICE. Keep a running list of questions and issues that you want to discuss with your contractor. As the questions are answered and the tasks completed, check them off, noting the date. This step keeps you updated on the progress and can work as a reminder that something has or has not been completed. Ask the contractor to do the same, including providing a progress report with the billing.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED. Construction is not an exact science. Many parts and pieces and components have to

come together to make a building work. There will be some surprises and unexpected issues. Be prepared emotionally and financially for these. Being aware and ready makes the process run more smoothly.

CONSIDER HIRING SOME HELP. An owner's representative or owner's advocate is a person or company well versed in the construction business who acts as a liaison between the congregation and the contractor. He or she will help you understand the timing, terms, blueprints and other details.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SUCCESSFUL FINISH. Do a final walk-through with your contractor to be sure everything is in order. Be sure you are provided with the closing construction documents and instructions on maintenance. A one-year or six-month walk-through is also recommended. The building may shift in time, requiring some additional work or repairs. A good closing is the perfect end to a successful project.

Resources You Can Use

For resources on this subject, you're encouraged to check out the Congregational Resource Guide (CRG) at <http://thecrg.org/>. Suggested CRG search terms: construction, building, remodel.

Center staff are happy to talk to you about contractors, building issues or other topics. You can contact the Center office nearest you or you can email info@centerforcongregations.org.



For more resources on this topic

CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

<http://thecrg.org/>

Relating to Contractors is part of the Using Resources series, which is published by the Center for Congregations to help congregations make effective use of specific kinds of resources.

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