

CHURCH FACILITIES AND MINISTRY SUCCESS

Church Facilities Satisfaction & Ministry Success Study

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Tag at the request of Cornerstone Knowledge Network (CKN), embarked on a study seeking correlations of congregational buildings and facilities satisfaction with congregational ministry effectiveness. Whereas it is understood that there are multiple factors that relate to a church's health and transformation for mission, this study seeks to identify the impact that buildings and facilities have on the other factors for ministry satisfaction and effectiveness. This study was based on an analysis of the Transforming Church Index Data (a congregational assessment tool) as well as on interviews with churches that scored at the top and bottom of building and facilities satisfaction on the TC Index. Churches at both the top and bottom of the satisfaction scale were from a variety of traditions and reflect differing sizes. It included churches that had not added on or remodeled as well as churches that had done so recently. Thus, the interview group represents a fairly random sample of churches.

The TC Index measures congregational satisfaction in the following 5 Key Indicators and 18 Scales:

Key Indicator #1: Consumerism/Community

Scale #1: Caring Relationships

Scale #2: Personal Connection to Church's Purpose

Scale #3: Social Connections

Key Indicator #2: Incongruence/Code

Scale #4: Personal Growth

Scale #5: Unique Focus

Scale #6: Excitement about the Church

Key Indicator#3: Autocracy/Shared Leadership

Scale #7: Financial Leadership

Scale #8: Trust in Leadership

Scale #9: Raising Issues

Scale #10: Effective Management

Key Indicator#4: Cloister/Missional

Scale #11: Meets Needs

Scale #12: Local Impact

Key Indicator #5: Inertia/Reinvention

Scale #13: Innovation and Creativity

Scale #14: Communication about Change

Scale #15: Embracing Change

Additional Scales

Scale #16: Worship

Scale #17: Christian Education

Scale #18: Buildings and Facilities

Buildings and Facilities Study Insights

Comparing the Buildings and Facilities scale with the other 17 scales of the TC Index, we found high levels of correlation with all 17 scales. In other words, building and facility effectiveness is definitely related to most aspects of ministry and organizational effectiveness. While there was a correlation with all scales, five significantly strong correlations emerged:

Meets Needs

Members who are more positive about their buildings and facilities are more likely to feel that the church meets their needs. This scale (under the Key Indicator: Cloister/Missional) measures internal congregational mission programming to the various ages within the church: children, youth, seniors as well as families and singles.

Local Impact

Members who are more positive about their facilities and buildings are more likely to feel positive about their church's local impact. This scale (also under Key Indicator: Cloister/Missional) measures missional impact within the local community around the church. This includes meeting the felt needs of people in the community, having strong community involvement and outreach ministries that make a difference in the community.

Christian Education

Members who are more positive about their facilities and buildings are more likely to feel positive about the Christian education programming. This scale measures satisfaction in Christian education ministries across all ages, including education for knowledge, service and life transformation.

Effective Management

Members who are more positive about their facilities and buildings are more likely to feel their church has effective management. This scale (under Key Indicator: Autocracy/Shared Leadership) measures satisfaction in the area of church leadership. This includes leadership communication, establishing the church's direction, purpose and goals, mentoring and meeting established goals.

Embracing Change

Members who are more positive about their facilities and buildings are more likely to feel positive about how their church embraces change. This scale (under Key Indicator: Inertia/Reinvention) measures satisfaction related to how well changes are embraced by the congregation. This includes how deeply connected people are to the church's vision of the future.

Additional Correlations

Membership Growth (Positive Correlation)

Congregations that scored high in building and facilities satisfaction increased their membership, over a five year period, at twice the rate of congregations that scored low. High satisfaction in buildings and facilities increases the desire for belonging. More people formalize their connections to the church through membership.

Top Scoring Congregations: 34% increase in membership

Lowest Scoring Congregations: 17% increase in membership

Worship Attendance Growth (Flat Correlation)

Congregations that scored high in building and facilities satisfaction increased their membership, over a five year period, at the same rate as congregations that scored low. High satisfaction in buildings and facilities does not increase worship attendance at a greater rate. Thus, while membership does grow along with buildings and facilities satisfaction, worship attendance does not correlate.

Top Scoring Congregations: 34% growth in worship attendance

Lowest Scoring Congregations: 35% growth in worship attendance

Ministry Involvement (Negative Correlation)

Congregations that scored high in building and facilities satisfaction had less growth in involvement in ministry, over a five year period, than churches that scored low. With high building satisfaction comes a message of success that the present leaders and servants are doing well. As a result of this, the feeling that people are needed and valued for ministry decreases.

Top Scoring Congregations: 39% increase in ministry involvement

Lowest Scoring Congregations: 49% increase in ministry involvement

Based on interviews, the following insights were gained as to building and facilities design and usage and the impact they have on mission and ministry.

Designed on Mission and Purpose

Churches that scored high on building and facilities satisfaction and who had recently built, added on, or repurposed their facilities had a strategic process to ensure that they did so on mission and on purpose. These churches either had an internal process or brought an outside consultant in to clarify mission and strategy so that their building design would advance their mission and ministries effectively.

- Mission Clarification helped build the right facility.
- Building on missional purpose brought focus to the design process.
- Strategic Focus helped set priorities for building and repurposing space.

Flexible Space/Multiple Uses

Overwhelmingly churches that scored high on building and facilities satisfaction say that the most important design element for positively impacting mission and ministry is that the space is flexible. Design elements that allow for different uses of space with minimal changeover was cited as the top factor in how a church building can help move the mission of the congregation forward. This includes having moveable walls, adequate storage for tables, chairs and other furniture as well as flexible technology including lighting, sound and video.

- Flexible space on platform for worship with moveable furniture (podiums, altar, etc.)
- Automatic window coverings to have both natural light when desired and to cut out the light when needed.
- Moveable walls to make rooms/space different sizes for various uses including classrooms, large meetings and dinners.
- Gathering space that can be used for meetings and seminars as well as for receptions.
- Ample storage for tables and chairs. Storage is close and accessible to the flexible areas.
- Audio and visual technology throughout the building provides flexibility and more options for use of rooms for various presentations, classes and seminars.
- Lighting in worship space to provide wide variety of uses.



Open Space and Open Feeling

Another design element that churches felt positively impacted mission and ministry was having the design of the building be physically and ascetically open.

This includes having large foyers and gathering spaces with lots of natural light. Large and open hallways and having easy flow of traffic inside the buildings were also mentioned as having an impact on the overall open feeling of the church.

- Large gathering space with natural light.
- Not cluttered with too much furniture or bulletin boards.
- Wide hallways provide a feeling of openness and flow.
- Traffic flow is easy with signage that is clear.
- Lots of windows throughout the building.
- High ceilings, especially in the gathering space.



Inviting and Comfortable Feeling

Having an inviting physical atmosphere, including a feeling of comfort was mentioned as having a positive impact on mission and ministry. Most often mentioned was having a number of areas that had couches, chairs and tables for informal as well as formal gatherings. This “3rd Place” space invites people to stay at church longer and build relationships on a deeper level than churches that do not have this design element.

- Open space provides an inviting feeling.
- Welcome Center/Information Center provides an inviting feeling.
- Gathering area has 3rd Place area(s) for people to gather in small groups.
- 3rd Place areas through the building so people may linger before and after meetings and events.
- Warm colors make the space feel more comfortable.



Use of Building by the Community

The churches who scored high on building and facilities satisfaction overwhelming invited the community to use their buildings and facilities on a regular basis. These churches sought to open their building for community organizations and community events. This included typical organizations like Scouting and AA but also include organizations such as the local symphony, community dance and drama organizations as well as partnerships with public schools.

- Buildings are always busy with church use and community use.
- Community use is a missional use of the building.
- Builds relationships with local community organizations and community leaders.
- Allows partnerships with community organizations.
- The church benefits and the community benefits.

Study Conclusions and Implications

Church buildings and facilities are tools for mission and ministry. This study sought to discover the correlations of the buildings and facilities with ministry satisfaction and success. Using the 17 scales in the TC Index we were able to see that there are some clear connections. Interestingly, the top three correlations (Meets Needs, Christian Education and Local Impact) have to do with the impact that buildings and facilities have on ministry programming. Meeting Needs refers to the internal missional programs that serve the members and attendees. Christian Education is also connected to meeting the needs of those who are already involved in the church's mission and ministries. Local Impact refers to the outreach that a congregation has in the community. Local Impact is about ministry programs that make a difference, not to the members, but to the community surrounding the church. We learn that buildings and facilities can have a very positive effect both on the internal programs that meet the needs of the members as well as an impact on the local missional programming that reaches out into the community. Somewhat related to this is the strong correlation to Effective Management. Effective Management is about setting goals and meeting them. It is about the strategic leadership of the church. Finally, the last strong correlation is in the area of change. As the satisfaction in buildings and facilities grows so too does the ability of a congregation to embrace change.

The study also shows that there is a strong correlation between buildings and facilities satisfaction and membership growth. Comparing increases in membership rates we learn that as the satisfaction in facilities grows so too does membership. This reflects the reality that a good building will increase people's sense of belonging and ownership. They want to call it "home." They want to formally be a part of the church as the buildings and facilities satisfaction increases. This membership growth is consistent with research that shows churches meeting in schools for more than ten years tend to die rather quickly. On the other hand, attendance does not correlate with building and facilities satisfaction and in fact ministry involvement actually has a negative correlation. Thus, buildings and facilities can give people a sense of success which leads to people feeling that they are not needed or valued. This is shown in the TC Index correlations. The second lowest correlation in regards to building and facilities satisfaction is with Personal Connection to the Church's Purpose (see appendix). As building satisfaction grows there is less connection to the big picture missional objectives and thus less participation in the ministries. Thus, it is important for churches with high building satisfaction to intentionally and strategically connect people to the mission and ministries of the church.

Finally, in regards to church design and usage this study reveals a few facts. First, churches who design their buildings and facilities on mission and on purpose are much more satisfied not only with their buildings but with the above correlations to mission. Having clarity of mission and purpose and connecting that to building design is important. Second, the actual designs that consistently were valued were designs that had open and flexible space and space that was inviting and comfortable that allowed people to linger. Lastly, the research found that churches that had high building and facilities satisfaction consistently used their building for community events and for community organizations. The sense that the building was not just for the church but for the whole community increased the satisfaction that members had regarding their building and the resultant correlations listed above. This was true in newer buildings as well as in older buildings that had not been remodeled for some time. This shows the clear connection to buildings and facilities and mission to the local community.