

# Are We Selecting The Right Firm?



*By*

*Steven McIntosh*

*Corporate Vice President*

One of the big questions that a building committee faces is, "Are we selecting the right firm?" Many times building committees are driven by the fees associated with a firm and not by what that firm really has to offer in the way of services. Although fees are important, it should not be your driving force in making a good quality decision. There are several areas that should be investigated before entering into a contract with a firm:

1. **Experience:** I believe this is one of the key factors in making the right decision. Does the firm have expertise in the area of church facilities? Many good contractors have years of experience in building, but not in the area of churches. There are so many variables that go into the design of a church that may not be in a typical commercial project. For instance, does the sanctuary have good acoustics? This is extremely important for most churches. A firm that understands ministry needs will make this a high priority when it comes to the sound factor of your new facility.
2. **Solid references:** No one is going to get it right every time. It is important to understand when you're checking references that even in the best of circumstances things can and do go awry. Here's a simple guideline when checking references: Ask for at least 3 or 4 references, and ask the "big" questions, such as did the project come in on time, was it within budget, were there any major issues, how hard was it to contact someone when you had an issue or question, and has the company been compliant in doing what they contracted to do. Many times a client might have a leaky roof or small items that need to be attended too. However, be cautious when it comes to larger items that have been neglected or not addressed.
3. **Ability to offer in-depth planning:** The firm that is hired should be able to listen to the needs of the ministry and project and capture the vision throughout the process. Too often churches select firms after the first interview based upon a conceptual drawing and fail to realize budget considerations, ministry space, and any future plans of that ministry. Planning will accomplish these tasks and will assist in making sure the building will be within budget guidelines and ministry needs. Make sure to ask specific questions about the company's planning process and the way they approach the church's vision and ministry needs.

4. **Partnership:** The firm selected should approach the project as a joint venture with your ministry. They should be able to assist you in reaching the vision and not over-step their efforts in the design of the project. In a partnership, there must be a mutual trust and understanding of what both parties are expecting at the very beginning of the project. Look for a firm that is going to treat your ministry as their own and look at this as a true partnership rather than merely a contractual relationship

Following these steps should help your ministry find the right firm to assist you in the building process.

