
Myth vs. Reality

The Surprising Truth About Church Capital Campaigns

Capital Campaign Impact: Church Conflict

There are many myths associated with church capital campaigns. Here at CGS, we decided it was time to investigate the myths and find reality. To do so, we commissioned an independent agency (Arbor Research) to conduct a rigorous research project. Their study encompassed 52 pastors representing 17 different denominations.

The findings from the study were surprising and many myths got busted. Here is another one of the more significant discoveries:

Myth: *A capital campaign for a major building project will increase the likelihood for conflict within the congregation.*

Reality: *87% indicated that the capital campaign did not create increased conflict; only 13% of congregations experienced higher levels of conflict due to a capital campaign.*

How Does This Myth Get Started?

Church capital campaigns have an unfortunate reputation for creating conflict within a congregation. Most pastors have heard a story of a church campaign that "didn't go well", or, worse yet one that "split the church". Such stories can often be enough to give church leaders serious pause when considering a major campaign of their own.

But, the reality is quite different. Results showed that the majority of churches (87%) did not experience increased conflict. As is the case in many areas of life, negative experiences tend to get blown out of proportion in relation to the frequency of actual occurrences. Psychologists call this the "availability heuristic", the notion that if something can be easily recalled (i.e. a negative event), it must be important and/or prevalent.

How to Respond to this Myth?

Generally, there are two extreme responses to potential conflict regarding capital campaigns, neither of which are healthy or recommended. On one hand, some leaders perceive that a building project could be a rallying point in bringing their congregation together in the midst of other ongoing conflict. This is comparable to the young couple experiencing marital difficulties

who believes having a new baby will bring them together. Unfortunately the results in both situations are generally not resolved conflict but rather complexity added to existing conflicts.

The other extreme is the leader who takes no action because he/she is paralyzed by the fear of creating conflict when none actually exists. Ministry opportunity is forfeited for the sake of conflict avoidance.

Avoid the Myth and Become Part of the Reality!

Reality lives in the center of these two extremes. A building project will not necessarily create new conflict, but it will often become the "lightning rod" for conflict that already exists within the church. Prior to launching any capital campaign for a major project, existing levels of conflict should be carefully assessed. This should include an intentional due diligence process that may involve the use of an outside professional to accurately determine congregational readiness for success.