

# Minimize Brick, Maximize Mission:

## *Budgeting for Missional Mobility*

By Michael Slaughter

**G**rowing churches inevitably face space constraints. With growth comes the dilemma to build or not to build, where to build, and what to build. This is when we must honestly wrestle with the issue of theology of space. Buildings define our ministry and values. They also create a certain permanence that tends to become restrictive with demographic and culture shifts.

Much of the United Methodist Church's ministry has been limited by the fact that over 70% of our church facilities are located in small towns and rural areas where only 16% of the U.S. population lives. The permanence of our nineteenth and twentieth century capital assets has us out of position for twenty-first century mission. Our brittle wineskins cannot hold new wine! We have assigned sacred value to our physical facilities, and we can't let go. Buildings are not sacred—people are sacred! We need to let go of buildings and invest in the world that God loves and for which Jesus died.

How many declining churches are using the vast majority of their shrinking resources to maintain a building that represents the ambitious building initiative of another era? This is why God preferred the mobility of the Tent of Meeting to the immobility of the Temple of Solomon. God gave Moses detailed instructions for the design and setup of the Tabernacle that would be representative of God's presence with the people in their wilderness journey. The journey metaphor is prevalent throughout both Testaments. Jesus' call to "follow me" is an invitation to journey. He calls us to "go into all the world and make disciples." The church of Jesus mobilizes to the places of need. The Tabernacle is a metaphor and a model for the church that is mobile, going where Jesus is going, being who Jesus is being, and doing what Jesus is doing in the world.

The cloud that covered the tabernacle signified the presence of God's spirit for the purpose of directing the community's

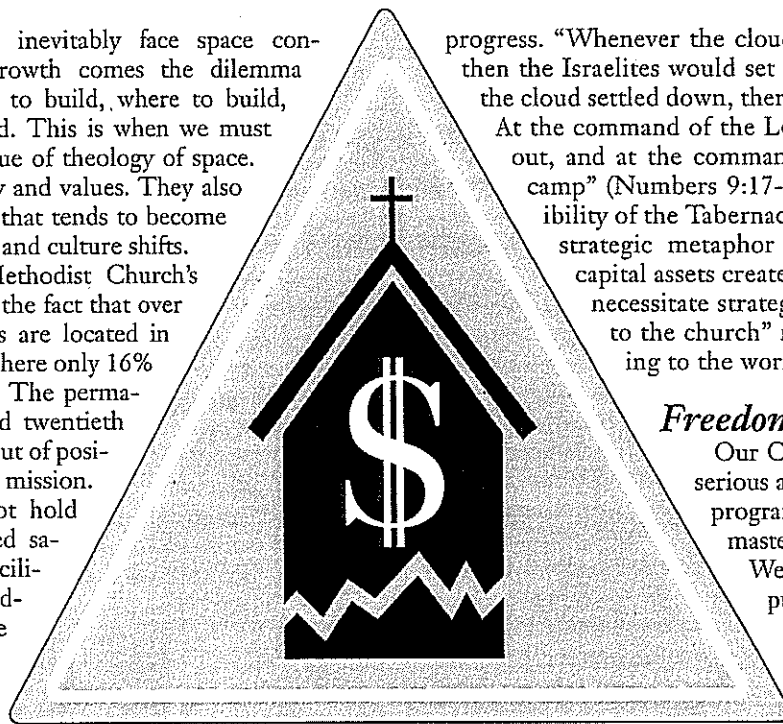
progress. "Whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, then the Israelites would set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the Israelites would camp. At the command of the LORD the Israelites would set out, and at the command of the LORD they would camp" (Numbers 9:17-18). The mobility and flexibility of the Tabernacle-Tent of Meeting is God's strategic metaphor for the church. Inflexible capital assets create systems and structures that necessitate strategies for "bringing the world to the church" rather than the "church going to the world."

### *Freedom to Follow*

Our Church Board has made three serious attempts to initiate a building program that would complete the master plan developed in 1993. We have traveled to church campuses around the country and enlisted the services of consultants and architects. We have prayed and fasted, done feasibility studies, and spent days in planning

retreats. Each time, the Spirit has put in our spirits a yield sign saying, "That is not where I am going, but follow me to..."

In 2004 the "follow me to" became Darfur. I had a vision of a child standing and pleading, "Come over to Darfur and help us." The establishment of The Sudan Project ([thesudanproject.org](http://thesudanproject.org)) became the latest alternative to a building campaign. Ginghamburg Church and our partners have invested almost 5 million dollars in The Sudan Project through Christmas 2009. The project is committed to the development of sustainable agriculture, safe water, and children's protection and development programs. If we had followed our own strategic plan and gone ahead with the capital campaign as planned, we would not have had the mobility to respond so rapidly to what the United Nations has deemed the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Listening to the voice of the Spirit allowed us to move with God in speed and to have significant impact in scope. We have traded our own master plan





## Action Step

Analyze your church budget, looking especially at the amount that goes to help those in need as compared to the amount spent on upkeep of facilities. If a stranger who knew nothing else of your congregation were to look at your budget, what conclusions would he or she draw about your priorities and values?

to take hold of the Master's high calling, to serve these poor out of our wealth, and to live more simply, that these children may simply live.

You may be feeling frustrated that you have had to postpone building or other personal projects due to current economic realities. Have you considered that this might be a yield sign from the Holy Spirit? Get ready to trade your master plan for the Master's. We are a pilgrim people who are called to go where Jesus is going, be who Jesus is being, and do what Jesus is doing in the world.

Some "follow me to"s appear quite suddenly, and require financial flexibility to respond promptly. Ginghamburg Church would not have been ready to respond to the suddenly homeless and hurting in the New Orleans area if we had been committed to higher capital expenditures. Similarly, when the economic markets collapsed in late 2008, we would not have been able to increase outreach by 55% to meet the urgent needs of the newly unemployed in the Dayton community.

The United Methodist Church lost approximately 80,000 members in 2005, but giving in the denomination went up 40% that year. What accounts for this? The southeast Asian tsunami of 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The outpouring of sacrificial giving was amazing! People want to give their time and money to things that truly matter. Like a mountain stream rushing over boulders toward the valley, money flows toward God's mission and trickles like drops coerced from a rusty pipe for brick and mortar. The commitment to "minimize brick and maximize mission" has fortified our people's sacrificial resolve in these challenging economic times. If we are going to remain flexible in our ability to respond as the hands and feet of Jesus to urgent local and global needs, then our budgets must reflect

the mission priority. If our commitments to internal capital projects exceed external mission priorities, then we cease to be vessels for God's new wine.

## Budget Missionally

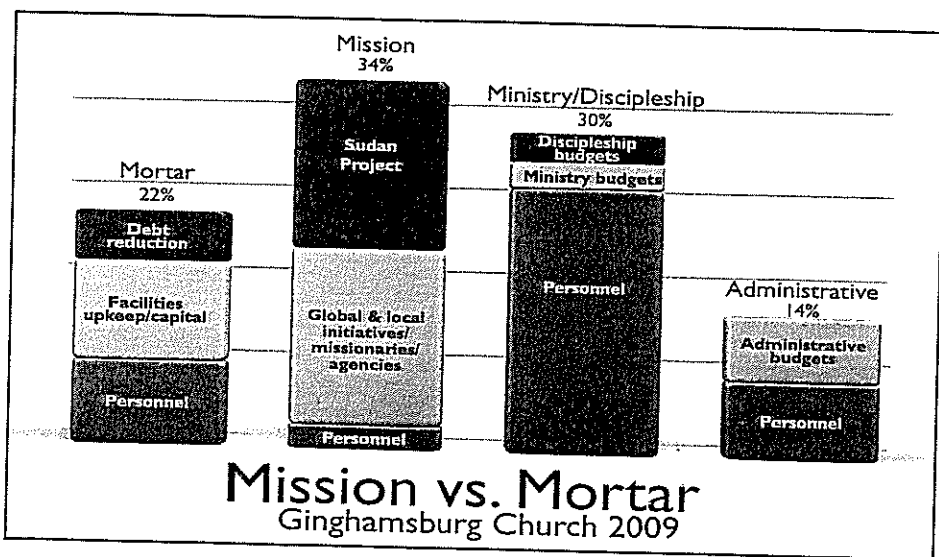
A clear vision and prayerful strategic planning must precede the budgeting process. Where is God calling you to go? What is God calling you to do? A strategic budget will be built around the three areas of Mortar, Ministry, and Mission.

**Mortar:** This section of your budget represents capital expenditures. The line items in this section include all monies allocated for facilities personnel and upkeep, including the mortgage.

**Ministry:** This section of your budget represents discipleship expenditures focused within the walls of your church (to disciple missionaries who will minister outside the walls of your church). Ministry expenditures include all age-level programming and curriculum, and worship, as well as staff expenditures connected to these areas.

**Mission:** This section of your budget represents all ministries benefiting those outside the walls of your local church and includes apportionments, missionary support, staff salaries that are dedicated to external mission, outside initiatives like food pantries, emergency relief work, community partnerships, and global initiatives. All of the monies for these line items included in the annual budget come from the offering plate. Other mission monies are generated through grants, fees, and partnerships with other outside sources, including the creativity of committed saints who sell items on eBay to raise cash for urgent missions.

The leader of the missional church is committed to making sure that ministry and mission are not sacrificed on the altar of mortar. Do a budget self-screening with your leadership team or church board to examine the mission health of your local church. Do capital expenditures outweigh missional spending? If so, seek the Holy Spirit's guidance and follow God to a place your church's funds are desperately needed to relieve the suffering of poverty and disease. Cast the Jesus vision and begin to strategize together on ways that you can minimize brick to maximize Christ's mission. □



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