

**BUILDINGS**

# How to Best Use Our Buildings

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Canadian Ministries

As congregations listen to how God is calling them into greater relationship with their communities, the question of how to make best use of church buildings comes up more frequently. For many congregations, buildings are their greatest assets, but, for others, the responsibilities for maintaining a building has become a barrier to ministry.

*“Don’t be afraid to dream big and allow your church room to grow.”*

—The Rev. Jim Smith

## Central Presbyterian Church, Vancouver

With a vision for service, Central Presbyterian Church in Vancouver made a bold decision to redevelop their land in partnership with Galilee Presbyterian Church, to create a large complex that includes living space for seniors and low-income housing as well as gathering space for the congregations and community groups.

Building projects require years of praying and planning before the first stone is laid. The Rev. Smith has these words of wisdom for any church looking to redevelop their church building:

- Connect with the community: Churches are at their best when their ministry is directed outwards toward the community. It’s important to consult with the community at every point in the redevelopment process and to take input seriously. Ministry is more likely to be a blessing in the community when it is connected to the people and the needs in the area it serves.
- Communicate: It is impossible to over-communicate your plans within the congregation and to presbytery. People are more likely to embrace the vision and less likely to perpetuate misinformation when there is a lot of clear information.
- Be clear about your vision and expectations: Building projects invariably require partners, whether it be developers or another congregation; the clearer you are upfront about long-term hopes and expectations, the

healthier and more sustainable your partnership will be into the future.

- Consult and hire the best lawyer and architect you can: Building projects are complex and require expertise that most congregations do not possess. Professional advice helps protect the interests of congregations and avoids unnecessary complications.

This inspiring project is entering the final stages and the two congregations, both of which are planning to move into their space in June 2018, are beginning to see the satisfying results of dreaming big. As construction workers recently gathered for a BBQ in the newly completed Community Interface Room, the packed tables, buzz of voices and sight of hungry people being fed was a reassuring vision for many of the good things yet to come.

*“How can we find ways to make our church building a blessing?”*

—The Rev. Janet Taylor

## Westmount Presbyterian Church, Edmonton

Even after opening the doors to their new worship and gathering space, which now shares a building with a much needed social housing complex in Edmonton, members of Westmount Presbyterian Church continue to ask how their building can be a blessing to their neighbours. After

years of praying, planning, partnering and pursuing a collaborative redevelopment project that will be opening soon to provide homes for people living on low incomes and refugee families, the congregation is leaning deeper into one of their core values: “We are here for the people of our community and the world.”

The Rev. Janet Taylor explains that, as the congregation returns from a wilderness period in its life—meaning that it was without a stable church home—they will focus their attention on rooting their identity in Christ and recommitting to journeying with each other and their community. After all, it was their courageous response to Christ’s call to reach out to their neighbours that brought about this ambitious project and will allow them to continue growing into the future. The Rev. Taylor encourages any congregation re-evaluating the use of their buildings to ask themselves and their neighbours how their building could contribute to developing a healthy, vibrant, connected and welcoming community. In other words, we need to ask ourselves how our buildings can contribute to building the Kingdom of God.

To learn more about the Westmount project, see page 22.

Considering a church building project? Have a building project on the go? Canadian Ministries wants to hear from you. Email [canadianministries@presbyterian.ca](mailto:canadianministries@presbyterian.ca) or call 1-800-619-7301. For resources to help your congregation consider a building project, go to [presbyterian.ca/church-building-resources](http://presbyterian.ca/church-building-resources)



Construction at Central Presbyterian Church in Vancouver.



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