



# Ask for permission, not forgiveness!

By Rodney C. James

Picture a group of men and women at the ready. Hard hats, leather gloves, steel toe boots, hammers, nails, and all the tools needed to tear down, renovate or expand your church building. A beautiful scene, isn't it?

Not so fast. Let's rewind the tape.

Where are permissions needed from the City — the permits that allow building projects to go forward with authority from governing officials?

## This isn't a new concept

Permissions for building date back to the days of the Bible.

Nehemiah recognized the need for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He was broken, and God placed a desire and clear vision within his heart of how to go about this construction project. If you read the story, you notice the very first thing Nehemiah did, after praying, was to ask permission from the King. Nehemiah knew he needed not only the permission, but the blessing of those in authority over him to complete such a project. This paid off later as opposition arose because he had the letter and backing of the King.

Often churches feel they can remodel or renovate facilities without going through the proper steps of securing the permission or permits required by building codes and governing authorities. They gather a group of people within the church to remove walls, construct new classroom space, or add doors and walls to redirect the flow of people. Although it can be deemed as good stewardship, to save money, it can end up being very costly during the project or later on.

*If the governing building officials or Fire Marshall were to discover the work in progress, it's likely the work would be stopped.* Depending on the scope of work and the stage of construction, this stoppage could be devastating. The officials would likely require the church to go back through all the steps to secure the proper permission and permits before continuing the work. If the work completed didn't comply with

building codes, much of it might have to be torn out and recreated to meet the code standards. Additionally, this could create some tension between the well-meaning church leaders and local officials.

*Even if the current project eludes local officials, all isn't said and done.* A moment of money-saving could turn into money misery when the time comes for the larger expansion or renovation. Remember those permits that were dodged? If the previous work completed wasn't constructed according to proper building, life safety, or Americans with Disabilities Act Codes, then securing a permit for future work

might prove challenging or costly, if not impossible.

Also, once officials discover previously completed work that did not have proper permitting or was not performed according to building standards or codes, this can create added costs and even fines for noncompliance.

## Your best bet: get the permits

Simple projects like new paint, new wall textures, or new floor coverings likely do not require going through the permitting process. When the changes require alterations to the structure of the building, egress paths, occupancy loads, life safety systems, plumbing, electrical systems, ADA access, or other vital building components, it's always

best to engage a partner to help you navigate the process of seeking permission and permitting.

The best option for any building renovation, repurposing or new construction is always to follow the Biblical example of Nehemiah and ask permission before designing, planning or performing any work. The church should be the first to set an example and abide by the local or state building codes, local laws, and governing authority rules and processes.

Don't let your church be spoken about in your community or read about in the local news because you're now having to ask for forgiveness because you failed to properly ask for permission. **CE**

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