

# risk reporter

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## Contracting for construction success

As membership and activities grow, many religious organizations are faced with the need to build a new facility, remodel existing space or expand their building.

Building projects can be a difficult and trying time in a ministry; however, there are ways to make the process a more enjoyable experience. For many congregations, this process begins with selecting the right general contractor for the project.

Oftentimes, congregations neglect this crucial step in favor of handing over the responsibility of general contractor to a member of the congregation to help save money. Unless the member volunteering has experience in the industry, it might be wise to politely decline the offer. The role of a general contractor is extremely important as the general contractor is responsible for effectively guiding the planning and construction activities in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

### A timely undertaking

Even the smallest expansion or building project requires an enormous investment of time and energy.

"Any type of building project is really a full-time job," said Mark Meland, general contractor and executive vice president of Century Construction Company in Richmond, Va.

"Somebody needs to be accountable 24 hours a day, on site and fully vested in all aspects of the construction project.

It is nearly impossible for a congregation leader or a member with numerous other responsibilities to adequately carry out the role of general contractor."

Hiring a professional ensures that at least one person from your construction team is completely devoted to the progress and success of your building project.

### Expert knowledge and experience

A religious leader or building committee should not be expected to know all aspects of the building process — this knowledge is the responsibility of a good general contractor.

"The most valuable part of hiring a certified general contractor is the level of professionalism and knowledge they bring to the project," Meland said. "A general contractor is well informed about topics such as local building codes, inspection procedures and work site safety. A general contractor ultimately is responsible for helping the construction process run smoothly."

### Beating the budget

Involving a general contractor from the initial planning phases of a building project can help an organization set a realistic budget for the required work.

"It is impossible to have a successful building project unless you can afford it," Meland said. "The earlier you involve a certified general contractor, the better. The contractor is the best person to advise you on whether the plans can be executed within the given budget parameters."

### Scheduling for success

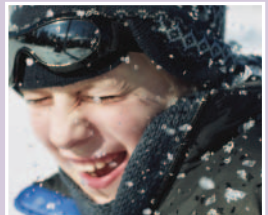
Keeping a building project on track and moving forward is crucial for finishing the project on time and within initial budget parameters.

According to Jamie Spry, certified general contractor for the Mountain View Church of Glenview in Glenwood Springs, Colo., only an



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### Seasonal Spotlight

Winter camps and retreats



### A Perspective

Risk Reporter talks with electrical contractor Tim Vroom



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Church members hospitalized with carbon monoxide poisoning

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## seasonal spotlight

### *Winter camps offer unique retreat experience*

The changing of the seasons no longer means the end of camping season for many religious organizations. Winter camps and retreats are catching on as popular recreational alternatives for youth and family groups.

A growing number of camps now offer winter retreats and conferences that celebrate religious ministry along with the winter season.

Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters in Andrews, N.C., has been offering winter retreats since it opened in 1998.

Winter camping presents unique challenges and concerns reinforcing the importance of finding an organization that makes safety a priority. Here are some things to look for when choosing a winter camp:

- Accreditation by a professional organization such as the American Camping Association (ACA)
- A camp staff that has first aid and CPR training with special attention to cold-related injuries
- Staff that is specially trained in proper equipment and procedures for winter activities such as skiing, snowboarding and ice skating
- On-site medical personnel

Outdoor activities for winter camps and retreats take advantage of the cool temperatures and snowy conditions. Popular activities include cross-country and downhill skiing, snowboarding, snow tubing, ice skating, broomball and snowshoeing.

"With our southern location, we generally don't get snow at our camp, so we can still offer outdoor activities such as high ropes challenge courses, a climbing tower and a paintball course," Davis said. "But we also take trips to a nearby mountain location so our guests can participate in traditional winter activities such as sledding and skiing."

Cool winter temperatures present unique safety concerns for the staff of winter camps and retreats.

"The safety of our campers and employees is the No. 1 concern at Snowbird," Davis said. "Our counselors are highly trained in the elements in which they work. Training starts with a two-week boot camp at the beginning of the winter season where

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"Our winter retreats seem to grow in popularity every year," said Spencer Davis, Snowbird's program director. "Summer is definitely peak camping time, but our winter retreats offer a much-needed break from school and work-related stress."

Winter camps function much like their summer counterparts; however, activities and lodging are adjusted to accommodate the cooler climate.

"We winterize our housing facilities for cold-weather retreats," Davis said. "When offering cold-weather activities, it is important to provide our campers a heated environment in which to warm up. Campers are housed in heated cabins and dorms, and we have several fireplaces within the camp buildings to provide a warm and cozy environment."



## IN THE HEADLINES

### *Carbon monoxide hospitalizes members*

October 2004 – Several members of Bethlehem Assembly Church in Detroit, Mich., went to the emergency room after attending a Sunday service. All reported feelings of dizziness, nausea and shortness of breath. Three people were admitted to the hospital and treated for carbon monoxide poisoning. The origin of the carbon monoxide in the church is unknown, but experts advise building owners to inspect their heating system before its first use in the fall or winter.

Source: WDIV [www.ClickonDetroit.com](http://www.ClickonDetroit.com)

### *Virginia congregation builds apartments*

October 2004 – The First Baptist Church in Arlington received county approval to build a new sanctuary with apartments on top of its current location in Arlington's trendy Clarendon neighborhood. The 10-story development will include a 450-seat church and eight floors of apartments above it. The 116 apartments will be a mix of efficiencies, one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, 60 percent of which will be for families with annual incomes below \$52,000. The plan also will include the county's largest day care center and will maintain the church's landmark 107-foot steeple. Construction is scheduled to begin next summer and slated for completion in early 2007.

Source: Associated Press

### *Former Wal-Mart remodeled as a church*

November 2004 – The First New Baptist Church in New Castle, Ind., is moving into a former Wal-Mart building. The membership outgrew its previous location and in 2002, voted to purchase an empty 100,000-square foot Wal-Mart building and remodel it into a place of worship. The reconstruction is under way with more than half the project complete including a large, A-frame canopy and steeple that have been added to the building. The congregation hopes to have the building finished in time for Easter services next year.

Source: [www.thestarpress.com](http://www.thestarpress.com)

# A PERSPECTIVE

Installing new lighting in your worship center can greatly enhance both appearance and efficiency. However, performing lighting and electrical updates is complex and dangerous work that often requires the knowledge and expertise of a certified electrician. Risk Reporter spoke with Tim Vroom, certified electrical contractor and owner of All Phases Electrical & Construction Services in Crete, Ill., regarding safe procedures for lighting maintenance and updates.

**Risk Reporter:** What safety measures should congregations take when performing basic electrical maintenance?

**Tim Vroom:** Before beginning any type of electrical work, turn off the power to the area you plan to work on and be sure the location, the worker and the equipment are dry.

General lighting maintenance often requires the use of a ladder. To avoid injury, always use a Fiberglass ladder, position the ladder at a safe angle to prevent slipping and never stand on or above the top step.

Finally, know your limits and the types of maintenance you can safely perform, and seek professional assistance when necessary.

**RR:** What types of lighting maintenance can a congregation perform itself?

**TV:** Congregations should perform a monthly electrical and lighting audit to identify any potential safety hazards. Potential hazards may include exposed electrical components, light switches or junction boxes with missing cover plates, overloaded circuits, burned-out light bulbs or light fixtures that are not equipped with the proper wattage and type of bulb. These basic electrical and lighting problems can easily be addressed by your custodian or volunteers.

**RR:** What types of lighting maintenance or updates require professional assistance?

**TV:** An organization should never attempt to perform any wiring alterations, repairs or lighting fixture updates on their own — these are not only dangerous procedures, but if done incorrectly, they have the potential to cause future problems.

Blown fuses, short circuits or circuits that trip repeatedly also are cause to consult a professional — these can be signs of a more serious electrical problem.

Finally, contact a professional for any electrical work at heights greater than 18 feet — professionals have the training and equipment necessary to handle work at extreme heights.

**RR:** What are some lighting or electrical risks associated with older buildings?

**TV:** Oftentimes, older wiring systems are not designed to meet the electrical demands of today's worship centers. Elaborate sound and lighting systems can overload older wiring causing a fire hazard. Organizations considering installing new

sound or lighting systems should consult a certified electrical contractor prior to installation to have their wiring inspected.

**RR:** Are there any specific areas of concern with respect to outdoor lighting?

**TV:** Outdoor lighting problems are often the result of exposure to the elements such as snow and rain. Maintenance begins with a visual inspection of the housing of light fixtures. They should be undamaged and in good condition to prevent water or moisture from leaking in. Also, inspect the lenses of the lights; they should be intact with no sign of moisture or condensation buildup inside. Look carefully at the mounting points for the lights — these tend to deteriorate with age and should be secure and in good condition.

Outdoor lighting fixtures should be UL certified with durable construction and finishes. Wiring for outdoor landscape lighting should be properly sealed to protect against water and condensation.

All extension cords, timers and other components should be rated for outdoor use.

**RR:** What types of outdoor lighting do you recommend for increased safety and security?

**TV:** Adequate perimeter lighting is extremely important. We recommend lighting all sides of the building to eliminate any dark corners. Infrared motion detectors are a good option producing light when any motion is detected in the monitoring area. In addition, stair, railing and pathway lighting is helpful in preventing slips and falls.

**RR:** Can you offer any energy saving tips?

**TV:** Install an automatic timer or photo-eye control on outdoor lighting to automatically turn lights on and off at the appropriate times. Limit the use of extension cords — they are not energy efficient, and they pose fire and tripping hazards. When appropriate, replace incandescent light bulbs with more efficient fluorescent bulbs.

For more information on finding a certified electrician, visit the National Electrical Contractors Association Web site at [www.necanet.org](http://www.necanet.org).



experienced professional has the knowledge and awareness necessary to coordinate the various activities and personnel of a building project.

"In any building project, there is a certain order of events to follow, and without knowledge of that order, serious time can be wasted," Spry said. "It comes down to time management and knowing when and which projects you can overlap."

"A general contractor should provide a detailed construction schedule at the onset of the project that coordinates the efforts of the subcontractors, various inspections and even equipment and furniture delivery," Meland said. "The schedule should be reviewed on a monthly basis to discuss progress and any potential problems."

### Reputable working relationships

The role of the general contractor is to act as a single source of responsibility for a building project and all facets of the construction. However, the general contractor is not an expert in all areas making the hiring of experienced subcontractors essential to the quality and success of a building project.

There may be pressure within a congregation to use members to complete work even if they are not best suited for the job. However, experienced general contractors have an extensive network of professional contacts and manage to keep themselves removed from the politics of the religious organization in order to hire the best professional for the job.

Spry not only was the general contractor for the Mountain View Church building project,

he also was an active member of the congregation and recalls the pressure to subcontract work to other members.


"There was definitely a feeling of obligation to work with members from our church, especially those who offered their services at a discounted price," he said. "However, as the general contractor, it was my responsibility to hire the best person for the job.

"If you do choose to work with members of the congregation, it is important to hold them to the same standards as any other professional," Spry said. "Take steps to avoid possible complications up front by providing them with a contract and job description that details job expectations."

### The importance of insurance

It is essential that all parties of a building project, including your general contractor, carry adequate insurance.

"General contractors should carry general liability insurance," Meland said. "The religious organization should ask for a certificate of insurance from the contractor prior to beginning any construction work. The general contractor also is responsible for requiring all subcontractors to carry adequate insurance."

Beyond the contractor's insurance, a worship center also should carry a builders' risk policy that covers specific projects under construction, renovation or repair. An insurance review is recommended before beginning a construction project. 

### Choosing your contractor

The success of your building project depends largely on selecting a contractor that possesses a combination of key attributes. Consider the following areas when interviewing general contractor candidates:

**Experience** — Does the contractor have previous experience working on worship center projects or projects of similar size and design?

**Track Record** — Check the contractor's past performance record for experience and quality by speaking with a list of references that include building owners, banks, subcontractors and suppliers.

**Cost Control** — Has the contractor stayed within budget parameters in past projects and completed projects on time?

**Chemistry** — Building or remodeling is a long and stressful process; therefore, good chemistry among the contractor and congregation members is important.

For more information on selecting a qualified general contractor, visit [www.centuryconstruction.com](http://www.centuryconstruction.com) or The Associated General Contractors of America Web site, [www.agc.org](http://www.agc.org).

we cover topics ranging from wilderness first aid to specific concerns associated with cold temperatures and extreme activities such as skiing."


Prolonged exposure to the winter elements increases the risk for cold-related injuries such as frostbite and hypothermia.

Proper dress is the most effective way to prevent cold-related injuries such as dressing in layers so you can remove items if you get warm and avoid perspiration.

"We counsel our campers on proper attire for winter retreats before they attend camp and then again during camp, especially as weather conditions vary day to day," Davis said. "We also have bonfires that burn during winter outdoor activities to offer an additional warming area."

The safety and enjoyment of many winter activities depends largely on proper equipment and use. Winter camp staff should be trained in the correct use and fit of the equipment.

Cold winter temperatures also affect the proper functioning of camp equipment.

"We perform a daily check of all camp equipment during the winter season to ensure it is functioning properly," Davis said. "Some equipment, such as our paintball course, is especially susceptible to cold weather and requires special care." 

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on organizations offering winter camps or retreats, visit the Christian Camping International Web site at [www.cci.gospelcom.net](http://www.cci.gospelcom.net), or visit these winter camp Web sites:

- Spring Canyon, Buena Vista, Colo., [www.springcanyon.org](http://www.springcanyon.org)
- Big Sandy Camp, McGregor, Minn., [www.bigsandycamp.com](http://www.bigsandycamp.com)
- Tall Timber Ranch, Leavenworth, Wash., [www.talltimber.org](http://www.talltimber.org)



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