

Milton UMC: quality space, limited budget

While many people may have had building experience in constructing a new home, few have had the experience of building a new church. For most congregations that's something that happens maybe once every 50 to 75 years -- if then.

For the small congregation of the Milton United Methodist Church in Milton, Kan., it was a new experience when they decided to replace their circa 1919 building. The aging building had a flat roof that had leaked almost since it was built and a bi-level entry that was not handicapped accessible. After the church received a generous donation, the congregation looked into installing an elevator, but decided the cost, added to the Sunday school space they would lose, made it a poor proposition, according to church member Judy Casner. After months of discussing what to do, one gentleman made the bold move of suggesting that they tear the church down and build a new one. And, that was the decision that was made. Additionally, the church opted to move the location to land donated by a church member along Highway 42.

"We got an idea of how much money people would pledge to the building and came up with a bit of a plan and started talking to builders," said Judy Casner, who along with her husband, Jack, served on the building committee.

The project became a design/build project almost by accident as the church took the approach of just finding a builder who would do the job. Casner said the committee looked at "gobs" of churches over the next few months to get further ideas. Fuqua Construction was contacted because of work the company had done on the Mennonite Church in Kingman. The company got the job because of references from friends who were acquainted with Max Fuqua and the fact that he was willing to work with them to achieve what they were looking for. Of the other two builders contacted, one suggested a metal building and the other just wasn't interested.



PROJECT PROFILE

Milton United Methodist Church

Location: Milton, Kansas

Project Scope: New Church Building
Square footage: 7,840 sq. ft.

Design Build Team: Fuqua Construction & Kelly McMurphy, Landmark Architects

"We wanted a brick building, something nice," Casner said.

As it turned out, opting for the design/build model was a blessing that the church couldn't have imagined when they started the process.

"I had no idea how many decisions you had to make before you get started (on construction)," Casner said. "And, there were hours spent drawing and redrawing the plans with



Natural light in the sanctuary was important to the congregation. The windows were designed for maximum natural light at the front of the sanctuary with minimal glare.

the architect (Kelly McMurphy of Landmark Architects in Hutchinson). Max met with both the committee and the entire congregation and walked us through that process."

What made it easier was Fuqua's knowledge of construction and ability to manage the project, Casner said. He knew

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how to listen to what the committee said they wanted and then was able to make suggestions that would fit those needs. An example of that was the church foyer, which was drawn in the plans as nearly 15 feet wide, and an eight-foot wide hallway that provided access to a classroom and the mechanical room. Casner said for the congregation's size, that just seemed like wasted space. They felt the space was better used for the chancel area, so the plans were redrawn to their wishes.

Sometimes the committee's planning process could become a little contentious – whether it was picking out countertop, carpet or the floor plan — and the building committee relied on Fuqua's expertise in the decision-making process.

"Max has a way with words. He could calm things down," Casner said.

Having a design/build team rather than bidding the subcontracting out separately saved the church needed funds, Casner said. For example, Fuqua explained that having the same company for heat, air, electrical and plumbing would save time, as there would be no waiting on one subcontractor to come in before the next could do his job, and ultimately money. A subcontractor who worked in the area was recommended by Fuqua and hired.

It also allowed the budget to be more closely monitored. Casner said Fuqua was very sensitive to their budget concerns while working with them to achieve the building they wanted. And, while they did go over budget, Casner said it was because the congregation opted for several higher-priced options after the job was started – not because Fuqua had underbid something.

"Max worked feverishly to bring that project in under budget," McMurphy said. "It was about the lowest budgeted project on which we had worked. But, he was able to do some very nice things with brick detailing on the outside and windows placed to provide lots of natural light in the sanctuary without glare, which was what the congregation wanted."

Complicating the budget issue was that the congregation had intended to use a number of things from the old building in the new one – including the stained glass windows, a paneled folding door, the pews and a cross from the sanctuary. The new church was built to accommodate the odd-sized windows and doors.

Then disaster struck. The original building burned to a charred brick shell due to a gas leak the day before crews were scheduled to take out the windows, doors and pews and move them to the new construction.

"We were devastated," Casner said. "Not only did we lose things we had intended to use in the new church, we also lost things we had intended to auction to help with the new church expenses. We didn't know what we were going to do."

New windows and pews were ordered and the church received enough additional donations to complete the project, but Fuqua continued to be mindful of budget, while still respecting the committee's wishes. This was an easier proposi-

tion since Fuqua Construction, as part of the design/build team had a little more control over how the budget was managed. Casner said when they opted for a higher quality countertop and found a bid that was less than the one he had received, he told them to go ahead and order from their supplier. He also listened when the committee rejected his frugal choice for lighting fixtures in the fellowship hall.

"After I saw those fixtures, I asked him what he had picked out for the bathrooms and he just smiled and said,



The cross on the sanctuary end of the Milton United Church is a distinctive feature.

"You're not going to like it," Casner remembered. "He did tell us that lighting was very important and we got the shades we wanted. He's really concerned about quality. In the things that are really important about the construction he's way above average. On the inside attractiveness, he's above average, but he's not a real 'showy' person. He wants the money to go into the construction. He was a great help on things like picking out the carpet. We had spent days looking for carpet and when it came down to the decision, he told us we wouldn't be happy with how one of the samples would hold up and recommended a different one. It still looks great. I'm so glad Max influenced us on that. We have loved it."

And, Fuqua furnished the materials and time for the crew to construct a new cross as a gift to replace the one lost in the fire, which was much appreciated, according to Casner.

The Milton church was designed as a two-phase project so it can be expanded in the future. After eight years of using the church, the congregation is still pleased with the the building and the way that the Fuqua Construction crew partnered with them to achieve it. There was a problem last year when some of the screws started popping out of the sheet rock. They called Fuqua and his crew came back, repaired the walls and repainted at no charge. That's how important doing quality work is to the company, Casner said.

"We were just overwhelmed when we moved into the building," Casner said. "It was so wonderful, absolutely wonderful. It took lots and lots of time to do, but they worked with us all the way. It was a good decision."