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The Plans Nobody Cares to See

Have you ever seen anyone “wowed” by the foundation plans of a new church building? I haven’t. However boring those plans may appear, there are engineers among us who thrill to the challenges of analyzing structural reactions, loads, soil bearing capacity, and materials. Everyone is familiar with the fool who built his house upon the sand, but perhaps his house would still be standing had he built it on a proper foundation. One look at the Coronado Bay Bridge will tell you that you can build on just about anything with a well-designed foundation.

The foundation design process initially requires the owner to hire a geotechnical engineer to test the soil (and any fill materials) in the area of the new building pad. The architect will then prepare a conceptual foundation design based upon this soil report and assumed structural loads. In the case of a pre-engineered steel building, the building supplier will provide a design for their structure and then calculate all the column loads and reactions. All plans and data are then delivered to the architect’s structural engineer for analysis. The structural engineer will also consider local codes and environmental conditions, and determine if the architect should modify the foundation design.

If the least appreciated aspect of any church design is the foundation plan, it remains one of the most important. Ignore the foundation plans if you wish, but don’t ignore the need to have professional engineering and testing on your church project.

Jeff Thomas is Vice President of Omega Church Consultants, Inc., Church Designers and Builders, located in Indianapolis. You may contact him at jeff@omegachurchdesign.com or (317) 359-6248 or visit the Omega website at <http://www.omegachurchdesign.com>.
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