



Can a Building be a Kingdom Opportunity?

Charlie Cotherman | June 13, 2023

Should OCV Consider Purchasing a Building?

For almost seven years, Oil City Vineyard Church (OCV) has thrived in rented spaces ranging from family living rooms to the former offices of oil tycoons and gymnasiums. During this time God has added to our numbers, provided for our needs, and allowed us to extend significant levels of generosity to the community.

Given this history, one might wonder why a church like OCV would ever consider purchasing a building of its own. It is a fair question. We believe that if purchased or built with wisdom and the favor of God *a permanent building will become a physical hub that will allow us to further step into the calling God has for us in Oil City and the surrounding region.*

From OCV's earliest days we have believed that our call is to love God and neighbor in a holistic way that embodies the goodness of the Kingdom of God. We believe that Jesus taught us to pray for God's kingdom to come and for his will to be done on earth as in heaven because He wants to pour out the goodness of His kingdom on our families, our workplaces, and our entire community. His church is one of the conduits through which God has chosen to bring this kingdom reality into existence. This is a reality we want to be part of at OCV!

Does a church need a physical building to participate in this kingdom mission? Absolutely not. However, in some cases a church may reach a point in its development when a physical building could significantly increase its ability to **spiritually nurture and care for the church family, expand ministry to those outside the church, and be a source of revitalization and hope in its larger community.**

Here are a few ways the purchase or construction of a building could help OCV better carry out this tri-fold calling.

I. A Building Can Help OCV Care for its Church Family

A building could be purpose-built or renovated to suit the specific needs of our church family. To this point in our history, OCV has had to adapt to the contours of available spaces. We've moved treadmills to create nurseries and had children upstairs when their parents are in a downstairs gym.

Children's Ministry:

The process of adaptation is especially evident in our children's ministry set up. **OCV has never had a space specifically designed for children's ministry.** This is remarkable because we sense (both internally and through external evidence) that *God has called and gifted OCV to prioritize children's ministry.*

We believe a building can help us step further into this calling by opening doors for:

- 1). Expanded **Sunday morning ministry** to children
- 2). **Mid-week ministry to children** via youth group and mid-week clubs (e.g., Awana)
- 3). **Weekday tutoring** for school-aged children
- 4). On sight **summer VBS**

We believe that offering a **safe, clean, and fun** children's space will allow us to further step into this call. Aimee and I have personally experienced how the built environment at a church functions as an immediate indicator to young parents of a church's capacity and concern for children's ministry. Church spaces speak clearly about church priorities. *We believe that a purpose-built children's space in the right location will communicate our commitment to helping children flourish.*

As far as OCV's volunteers are concerned, permanent children's spaces will help our volunteers by providing permanent storage of children's ministry supplies with little or no weekly set up for teachers and the set up team. It will also allow us to paint walls, provide toys, and generally make kids' spaces more welcoming and fun.

OCV Volunteers

As noted above, OCV currently relies on numerous volunteers to help with set up each week. A permanent space will allow us to streamline volunteer hours and channel more volunteers into front-of-the-house roles (to borrow restaurant terminology). Volunteer hours are like gold in the life of a church. We want to steward the goodwill of our volunteers in the best possible way.

Special Events—Funerals and Celebrations

A building will help us better care for members of the OCV family in times of joy and sorrow. For several years I have been concerned that OCV cannot care for families during seasons of loss because we were not able to extend hospitality through funeral dinners. Most of us have experienced the blessing of having a church provide a lunch following a funeral so that members of the family and friends can share memories about their loved one and encourage each other in times of loss.

People need spaces for celebrations, too. Churches have often provided spaces for the mile-markers of life like weddings, baby showers, and anniversary celebrations. As we mature as a church family it would be nice to be able to provide opportunities for these gatherings.

Special Events—Conferences, Prayer Meetings, Worship Gatherings

As OCV steps into leadership in our region and within the larger Vineyard movement, we will encounter more opportunities to host speakers and small conferences. A space of our own would allow far more flexibility to plan and carry out these events. In the process it will allow us to provide more opportunities for spiritual formation and relationship building. It will also allow us to move into a more significant leadership role in our community and movement.

Additionally, having our own building would make it far easier to hold regular worship and prayer meetings. We have not had many of these in our history, in part because simply securing space and transporting our equipment to that space has been a regular barrier. (It is one thing to train someone to run a sound board. It is another thing to train a person to transport and set up an entire sound system!)

II. A Building Can Help OCV Expand Ministry to Those Outside the Church

While many people have experienced the financial and infrastructural burdens that can accompany a church building, the ministries and partnerships of some churches demonstrate the ways in which a well conceived church building in a good location can significantly increase a church's ministry to the community. Churches like the Crossing Free Methodist Church in Oil City have used their space to be a blessing to the community for years by hosting a food pantry, Americorps workers, and a Weed and Seed program on the South Side.

Ideally, OCV would want to build or own a building that could provide similar opportunities for community outreach both within and outside OCV's own ministry programming. We believe several features about the location of the building we are currently considering offers these types of opportunities.

Ministry to the Church's Immediate Neighbors—Pin Oak Village

Over the past seven years, OCV has prioritized ministry to children and prayed for greater impact among the many children who are living at or near the poverty level in our community. In many cases, these children have endured trauma within their families and have very little consistent church experience.

Location matters when it comes to reaching these children with the gospel. Unless a church owns a bus, a church must be walkable. During the seasons of our church's life when we met in walkable places, children periodically stopped by on Sunday mornings without their parents.

We believe that one of the missional elements of the building we are currently considering is its location within a walkable distance from one of our area's largest subsidized housing developments. *It is not difficult to imagine the kingdom impact a church in this location could have on these children and their families through regular Sunday morning kids' church, an on-site summer VBS program, and various other programs such as after school tutoring and perhaps a mid-week Awana service.*

Ministry to Multiple School Districts and Communities—Oil City, Cranberry, Keystone

The other reality of life within the community that God has woven together over the years is our ties to three primary school districts and the communities that surround them. Our connection to these districts are represented by the graduates we celebrated this year: 5 from Oil City, 3 from Cranberry, and 2 from Keystone.

The proposed building is located in one of the best possible locations in terms of caring for these three communities. It is very close to the boundary between the two primary school districts OCV serves and is five to ten minutes closer to the folks coming from Clarion County. This location will help us maintain a strong presence in both Oil City and Cranberry, while reducing the distance for those traveling the farthest.

III. A Building Can Be a Source of Revitalization and Hope for the Larger Community

When we launched OCV's initial website in the spring of 2017, we included a short overview of our mission on the home page. Over the past seven years this mission has remained the same and is still prominently displayed on our home page. It reads:

What does God see when He looks at you? What about when he looks at the town or village where you live?

At Oil City Vineyard Church (OCV) we believe that God loves His entire creation—including us, humans made in His image. From the moment sin entered the world God has been on a mission of redemption seeking to set right a creation marred by brokenness and death and win back our hearts. Amazingly, this redeeming God also calls us to know Him deeply and join Him in His mission in the world. The implications of this call impact every aspect of our lives and every corner of creation.

All of life matters to God, so all of life matters to us.

We believe that a building can communicate something important about what a group of people believe.

Does a group believe a community or geographical area is worth investing in long-term? Does a group believe that architecture and safe, clean, fun, and well planned kids' spaces communicate something about their heart to see young lives in their town nurtured into flourishing? Does the renovation of a long-neglected building on a prominent stretch of the county's busiest road convey hope to the thousands who drive by every day? Does a growing intergenerational church with a kingdom-vision remind people in a society that sometimes seems to have lost its way that God is still changing lives and empowering folks to choose truth above the lies of our culture?

Absolutely.

We think that choosing to invest in this space is strategic on multiple levels. It is prominent. It is long-neglected but full of potential. It is missional in its proximity to Pin Oak Village. It is a hub between the two communities we primarily serve.

Furthermore, ***it is a place from which we can grow both as a church and as a meaningful partner in our community.*** For years, this space has been a resource for the community by hosting bingo games and various fundraising events. We believe that creating hospitable spaces for the community is a privilege churches should embrace. We plan to design an open concept space with flexibility to host a wide variety of community events. We have always partnered with the community through organizations like the YWCA, PennWest Venango, Hope 21, the Venango Area Chamber of Commerce, and many others. We believe that a building may allow us to further develop community relationships by providing a large group meeting space with a flexible floor plan and a vision for the holistic flourishing of our entire community.

Concluding Thoughts

It is true that a church is a group of Spirit-filled people, not a building. However, from the start, physical spaces have helped the church nurture faith and help Christians care for each other. Early churches met in homes—usually larger homes with courtyard spaces and rooms to host regular gatherings and shared meals. Accessible, comfortable, and safe space matters. (Think about Eutychus in Acts 20:7-12. He may have benefitted from a safer meeting space!)

OCV has never emphasized buildings, but we have emphasized things like worship, teaching, hospitality, and providing a safe and fun environment where children can learn. As the church has grown, the amount of effort needed to care for and simply make room for each of these activities has increased.

We think God may be opening the door to a new opportunity for community engagement and stability that communicates our long-term vision for our community and gives us the ability to shift our attention from weekly set up to cultivating space for prayer, worship, teaching, and community engagement.

If we step into this opportunity, it will require new levels of time, talent, and treasure from us all. It will also allow us to communicate our long-term commitment to being part of what God is doing in our area. We believe this is a statement our area needs to see. Would you consider partnering with us in this journey? I, for one, hope you will.

In hope and in Christ,

Charlie Cotherman
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