

Christian churches facing persecution all over the world

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=5209>

Despite the systemic rejection of churches in many cities in the United States, I find it encouraging to know that churches still want to build and make a place for themselves within their communities. I still receive frequent calls from churches expressing interest in building new facilities or in expanding facilities to meet the need for ministry or growth.

It is comparatively easy for churches to build in smaller towns rather than in larger cities, mainly because regulations in larger cities are more numerous and more difficult to comply with. Smaller towns still value the benefits that churches bring to their communities, and thus see them as an asset rather than a tax liability.

Of course, this is not a blanket rule, and churches have been facing an increasing number of challenges in their efforts to build needed facilities.

In California, a church closed its doors and moved after their efforts to build a shelter for homeless women was met with stiff opposition from the community. The pastor sold the church property to a developer who planned to build a mid-rise condominium project.

Another church, strapped for cash, made a deal with a developer that was going to build a mixed-use building that would include new church facilities and affordable housing, but a local resident has sued to stop the project, claiming that their county was subsidizing the church and that residents of the housing would be forced to see the message of the church every day.

Many churches are suffering from the economy as financial support has dwindled away. The Crystal Cathedral in Orange County, California, has decided to sell its famed facilities as a means to exit out of Chapter 11 bankruptcy. An investment group has agreed to the purchase and to a plan to allow the church to buy the facilities back in four years.

A megachurch in Maryland abruptly stopped construction on its new facilities after lenders, nervous about the increasing number of loan delinquencies and foreclosures, stopped making new loans to the church.

In California and Hawaii, church projects have been halted after the discovery of ancient human remains were found at their construction sites.

In the state of New York, a church has abandoned its plans to construct a new church adjacent to an affordable housing development it had already constructed, after the local planning board demanded that they go through the site planning review process again. The church had reduced the size of its project for financial reasons, which prompted the planning board's demand.

In spite of the obstacles, churches are still building and those with the financial means are finding that building during a bad economy has its benefits. Project costs are more manageable, construction provides badly needed jobs, and new facilities often allow churches to provide more ministry to the community than before. Because of these benefits, many churches are still willing to go through the gauntlet of regulations, regardless of the expense or difficulties involved.

And despite the problems that churches see in the United States, it could be much worse. In Indonesia, a group of Muslims mobbed a church that was under construction, demanding that construction be halted. Under Sharia law, it is against the law to build or even repair a church.

In Iraq last October, 52 Christians were massacred by al Qaeda guerillas in response to burnings of the Quran in the United States. Since then, up to 95,000 Christians have fled the country. Around 500,000 had already left due to persecution that has included beheadings, rapes and extortion. It is expected that in just a few years, virtually all of the Christians will have left Iraq.

This is particularly disappointing, since it was a Christian nation that was primarily responsible for freeing the Iraqi people. Obviously, there will be no church construction in Iraq and what few churches that might have been there will likely be converted to mosques, much as has been the fate of many of the churches in Europe.

A quick tour of the Voice of the Martyrs website reveals how widespread persecution is around the world, primarily in Muslim or communist countries. Even Mexico is listed as a country that is considered to be hostile to Christians.

So while churches in America are definitely suffering more from discrimination than before, we should not lose sight of the fact that we still have religious freedom here and have a system whereby we can address grievances. But we should also be ever observant and diligent to prevent the kind of persecution we see in other parts of the world from coming to our shores. It is on the way.

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