

# BUILDING CONFIDENCE



**Russ Zellmer**  
President & Co-owner  
Langer Construction



**Josh Schultz**  
Vice President & Co-owner  
Langer Construction

**Langer Construction has continued to build its religious portfolio over the past 80 years. Today, 100% of Langer's clients are faith-based organizations — churches, private education, and nonprofits.**

Founded in 1946, Langer Construction has been family-led and relationally driven since the beginning. Today is no exception; co-owners Russ Zellmer, President, and Josh Schultz, Vice President, comprise its third cycle of leadership. Zellmer started as an intern at Langer in 1996. Schultz, meanwhile, is the fifth member of his family to work for the business and has been with the firm since 2016.

“Over eight decades, turnover is minimal and tenure is long,” Schultz says. And while such stability is undoubtedly important, maybe more crucial is the company’s consistently customer-focused approach to every project. It has been a defining characteristic since inception, from Langer’s industrial beginnings to the current faith-based projects that are Langer’s primary focus moving into the future.

According to Zellmer and Schultz, every church client has a few things in common, regardless of denomination or size. First, many are heading up a building project for the first time. Second, accordingly, they place a premium on financial sensibility while meeting the needs of their community.

“Decades ago, we found a niche with people who own and occupy their buildings. These customers are looking for long-term solutions starting

with their design-build team,” Zellmer explains. “We are now working almost exclusively with Christian organizations. We have found that we can bring significant value to customers through our complete project leadership from initial idea to project completion.”

As Zellmer points out, in contrast to collaborating with corporate figureheads, a church-designated leadership team represents a larger community comprised of people who are heavily invested, personally, in the project. “This place is their home,” Zellmer shares. “It’s where they worship and grow. We have an entire community relying on the success of the project.”

## AT-A-GLANCE: Langer Construction

- 1946 — Founded by Louis Langer
- 1951 — Began general contracting
- 1955 — First religious project
- 1971 — First design-build project
- 1990 — Tom Langer succeeds his father as president
- 1996 — Russ Zellmer joins Langer as an intern
- 2016 — Josh Schultz comes onboard as Director of Business Development
- 2020 — Russ and Josh complete buyout and begin third cycle of leadership
- 2026 — Celebrates 80 years in business



St. Gabriel Rendering (Courtesy of Miller Dunwiddie)

### ST. GABRIEL THE ARCHANGEL CATHOLIC CHURCH (Hopkins, Minn.)

Leaders at St. Gabriel the Archangel are in the middle of a transformational renovation of their 1950s-era building.

Langer Construction’s involvement with St. Gabriel started small, with a remodel of the parish’s lower-level social hall. A minor remodel was comprised of primarily new finishes and accessible ramp; the Langer team handled it from start to finish.

Following the success of the social hall, Langer was enlisted for a much larger project: remodeling St. Gabriel’s nave, sanctuary and narthex. Functioning as the design-build partner, Langer assembled the entire project team — design, construction and consultants. Langer provided accurate and detailed conceptual estimates for multiple project options, allowing St. Gabriel to select the best possible project that aligned with their available budget.

The remodel project is currently underway, with a particular focus on preserving St. Gabriel’s incredible stained glass — which was in a state of disrepair — and the addition of new tile flooring and tile columns, artist-painted ceiling, new pews and reredos, remodeled confessionals, and restrooms.

“The worship space is going to be breathtaking once it’s done,” says Langer Vice President Josh Schultz. “We’ve assembled the complete team for this turn-key project. As design-builder, we have brought together the architect, stained glass preservation firm, and custom furniture-maker,” he adds. “Once complete, I believe this may be the finest remodeled Catholic church in Minnesota.”



### ST. ODILIA CATHOLIC CHURCH & SCHOOL (Shoreview, Minn.)

Langer Construction began working with the St. Odilia Catholic Community at a challenging time for the parish. They had previously devised a master plan with an initial scope of work costing millions more than they could afford to spend on the first phase. “The parish was stuck and turned to Langer Construction for help,” says Langer President Russ Zellmer.

Teaming with the architect, Langer developed a cost model that could be used to make informed decisions to balance the scope of the project with the available budget. Within one year, the stalled initial project within the larger master plan was back on track with a reduced scope and more efficient construction techniques. “You don’t have one multi-million-dollar job — you have a dozen smaller jobs that equate to that larger figure,” says Zellmer.

Essentially, he and the Langer team helped St. Odilia break its overall project into “manageable bites” for the scope of work. Pricing for each element was presented in such a way that allowed the owner to prioritize and develop a project that was attainable and meaningful.

This addition and remodeling project to an existing two-story church and school consisted of a 2,500-square-foot, single-story addition to the church and a 10,000-square-foot, two-story school addition. Approximately 13,000 square feet of the church and school were remodeled.

“We’re still working with them today on their next push as they look to dream and re-imagine” Zellmer says.

#### “This market still respects trust”

Another defining characteristic among church clients, according to Schultz, is the importance of trust. “And for the project to be a success, it must happen early in the process,” he adds.

Langer Construction is at the table from the very beginning — and maintains until the end.

“Every construction company can build a building. They all know how to assemble steel and pour concrete” Zellmer explains. “Where we differ from them is, we provide complete project leadership. We are a partner that you can rely on through the entire process, from pre-construction through project turnover.”

Complete project leadership is critical: “Working on ministry projects is unique. At Langer, we analyze the desires and needs of the church and make recommendations,” Zellmer says. A budget is set early in the process knowing that there are far more needs than the budget will allow for. It is the job of Langer to provide support in the design and budgeting process to give church leadership the proper tools to set the priorities.

“Once a project scope aligns with the budget, we work with the design team to provide value engineering. Researching the best construction types for the situation; completing cost analysis on different building shapes and sizes; evaluating roof designs, various interior finishes and schedules based on time of year — all are VE examples,” Zellmer says. “A church just can’t be over budget — no matter how little or insignificant it may seem — because every dollar is from sacrificial giving.”

Neither Zellmer nor Schultz claim that it’s the simplest approach. The alternative, however, is potentially far more costly and time-consuming for the owner.

Preconstruction involvement is so crucial, in fact, that both men say it now occupies much of the time they spend with clients. This includes introducing other team members — project management staff and site superintendents — who will take the project through construction, while Zellmer and Schultz maintain a visible, accessible leadership presence.

“It’s important that [Zellmer] or I are at most of the meetings,” Schultz explains. “We’ll be overseeing the project every single day from the ➤



Wooddale Church (Eden Prairie, Minn.)



Excelsior United Methodist Church (Excelsior, Minn.)



Gloria Dei Lutheran Church (St. Paul, Minn.)



St. Croix Lutheran Academy (West St. Paul, Minn.)

office. There's consistency in seeing the same faces. So, why do we win jobs? Because clients believe us when we talk about the passion that we have for churches, for faith, and for them. They believe in the role that we'll play throughout."

#### Attitude is everything

This imbedded approach to project leadership extends to jobs of all sizes, whether it's switching out door hardware, remodeling a single classroom or staff bathroom, all the way up to multi-million-dollar jobs.

"For one thing, this builds our funnel," Schultz acknowledges.

"We build trust on a smaller scale, which leads to relationships, and opportunities grow from there."

In fact, he encourages any church leader — client or not — to treat Langer Construction as a resource.

"If we can offer guidance early, with no strings attached, we know it's the first step in building a relationship and earning trust," he says.

"It might just be an email or a phone call. *What consultants do you recommend? Where do we go from here?* But I'm not expecting anything in return. I just know that if that owner needs something down the road, they'll come back to us."

#### "We're seeing a faith 'boom' right now"

Eighty years is a long time to be in business, but for Zellmer and Schultz, it's just the beginning. To drive sustained growth at Langer

Construction, they say they intend to double down on faith-based projects and — equally important — on the hands-on, early involvement model that has proven effective among this unique clientele.

"We're definitely seeing a faith 'boom' right now — the company is doing very well, having record years," Schultz says. "But we're also growing at a metered pace. As we grow, we'll do it carefully. We refuse to introduce a level of middle management that separates [Zellmer] and me from what's happening with our projects on a day-to-day basis."

Additionally, a challenging but essential part of "growing strategically" is finding and hiring team members who are familiar with the faith-based building ethos. "It's a very unique market to be in, and it takes a certain person to fit the mold," Zellmer explains. "We can't hire a PM who just finished building a data center, where cost was no issue, and then ask that person to handle a \$100,000 narthex remodel and be sure they'll treat both clients the same."

"They need to understand that the value of a job isn't reflected in its budget," he adds. "This hypothetical narthex remodel might be the result of the biggest fundraising push the church has ever done."

Zellmer and Schultz anticipate that demand in the faith-based construction market will only increase. "There seems to be this heightened desire for a sense of community and bringing it to the forefront again," Schultz says. "Pairing our company's rich history with our vast religious experience and desire to guide during the pre-construction process positions Langer well for the *next* 80 years." **CB**