

# MOVING STRATEGICALLY

## Reedy River Congress of Christian Education

### Objectives

- Focus the attention of the Association on the role of planning as a way to mitigate risk, particularly those that are legal in nature
- Aid the Association in identifying issue areas that increase its exposure to risk that do not rise to level of legal entanglements but can present an existential threat
- **Facilitate a process whereby the Association begins to:**
  - Identify its core values
  - Articulate its mission more clearly
  - Articulating goals and objectives that supports its vision

### Essential Steps to Church Strategic Planning

Every church makes plans. After all, they have services, ministries, classes, and programs to organize. But just because you have a lot of activities in place doesn't mean you're accomplishing any real objectives or pursuing your highest ideals. There's an enormous difference between planning and church strategic planning.

### HOW DOES A STRATEGY DIFFER FROM A PLAN?

A good plan is essential to pulling off any elaborate endeavor. It's the steps that need to be pulled off in order to accomplish a goal. If you have an outreach event coming up, you're going to need a plan to ensure that all of the pieces come together to make it a success.

But there's an almost infinite number of opportunities available. And without a strategy, you can never really know if you're making the right plans.

A strategy is a way to get a much larger picture. It answers questions like:

- Who has God called us to be in our community?
- How do we prioritize our opportunities?
- What plans need to be implemented in order to fulfill our aspirations?

Without a strategy, it's possible to remain busy all the time and even accomplish some measurements of success. But you can never really be sure if you're moving toward a specific objective. It's about understanding and seeing the difference between long-term and short-term goals.

A plan asks "What are the important steps?"  
A strategy asks, "What are the important plans?"

## **WHY IS IT HARD FOR CHURCHES TO PLAN STRATEGICALLY?**

Creating a comprehensive game plan requires that churches become incredibly proactive. It involves a pretty significant investment of time and effort, but without anything immediately concrete to show for it. Because strategy is about long-term goal setting, you don't see the fruit of it until you start working it out over time.

As is the case in most organizations, it's hard for churches to justify pouring a lot of effort into something without an immediate payoff. There are so many spinning plates and pressing items to take care of that strategic planning can almost feel like an imposition.

But that's the age-old problem with urgent things. They're seldom the most important things you could be doing, and the more energy you spend running from fire to fire, the more urgencies you seem to create. Eventually, a church finds itself on a treadmill of programs and crises that can only move them closer to their ultimate goals by accident.

Think about it this way: You can create a blueprint that enables you to build the community you long for, or you can just start hammering boards into place and hope you end up with the structure you want. Obviously, anyone would choose the former over the latter.

But it's a challenge to create and work from a blueprint while you're building—and that's the greatest challenge churches experience when trying to create strategy. They don't have the luxury to tear down everything they've built or stop construction entirely in order to rebuild their foundation. So they hack solutions together from whatever's laying around. Over time, all those short-term solutions start creating long-term problems.

The steps for strategic planning aren't too tricky, but they do take time. It's a perfect opportunity to get your leadership team together for a weekend retreat so you can knock it out in three or four sessions. Let's look at a template to help your church succeed:

### **1. CREATE A MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES STATEMENT**

There was a big push in the 90s to create mission and vision statements, and churches of all sizes poured effort into creating these strategic documents—sometimes more than once. But after sharing them with the congregation, posting them on the website, and working them into the bulletin, they never seemed very helpful. Because of this, a lot of pastors groan when you bring them up—but they're essential.

For more action-oriented people, these statements can sound like abstract nonsense. Why sit around and try to build consensus about your dreams and wishes when there are real, practical issues and problems to attend to? But the truth is that when you use these documents correctly, they're incredibly sensible and functional.

The purpose of these three statements breaks down this way:

- Mission: Why are you doing what you're doing?
- Vision: Where are you going?
- Values: How are you going to go about it?

There are a lot of online tools for creating these documents, but here are some helpful steps:

### **CREATING A MISSION STATEMENT**

A mission statement will lay out your church's distinct purpose. One problem that churches tend to experience when drafting this document is that they make this so broad that it's ultimately unhelpful. Every Christian church should have the same goal (to grow the Kingdom), but a mission statement should communicate how your church does this in a way that only you could.

Here are some brief steps for creating a church mission statement:

- Pull together the key people needed to make this a success.
- If you have an existing mission statement, ask if it still communicates your goals and distinct characteristics. If not, why?
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- *Ask yourself the following questions:*
  - What do we do and for whom? (Remember, you want to be as specific as possible: Is there a particular cross-section of your community that you are poised to serve?)
  - What do we want to convey about our church?
  - How do we differ from other churches in our community?
- Condense the essence of these questions down into a short, concise explanation of why you exist.

### **CREATING A VISION STATEMENT**

Your mission describes the ultimate reason for your church's existence. A vision statement helps define where you're going. It answers the question: "If we were to remain faithful to our mission, what would our church look like in five years? What about ten years?"

You can determine this by asking yourself questions like:

- What legacy do we want to leave for the future leaders of this church?
- If we were to stick to our mission, what would our community come to believe about us?
- What impression do we want our community to have about our church?
- What is one reason we would like people in our community to say that they're grateful for our existence—even if they don't follow Jesus?
- What does missional success look like for us?
- How do we know that our vision syncs up with God's vision?

Questions like these will help you craft an aspirational document that gives you something to work toward.

## **CREATING A VALUES STATEMENT**

Once you've identified your mission and vision, you can look at your values. These determine your culture: How will you live out your mission and fulfill your vision?

It's going to answer these kinds of questions:

- What kind of words guide the way we deal with each other? How about the way we deal with those outside of the church?
- What beliefs define the way we do ministry?
- What are our church's guiding values?

Once you're finished, you should be able to create a simple, bulleted list of values that guide your church's behavior, not only as a corporate entity but individually as well. Here's an example of some core values:

- Every person is valuable to God and His Kingdom.
- Prayer permeates everything we do.
- Doing church as a team is God's design for effective ministry.
- The body of Christ is inclusive and we value every generation.

These statements aren't an end in themselves, they are a means to an end. You're not finished with them once you write them. They become the lens through which you look at every opportunity and decision in the organization.

## **2 PERFORM A SWOT ANALYSIS**

Performing a SWOT analysis is a lot easier than it sounds. It simply looks at your church in four specific areas:

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

You can accomplish this by gathering your team together, pulling out a large whiteboard, and working through each area. As a group project, a SWOT analysis usually makes for an interesting, informative, and fun discussion.

## **STRENGTHS**

Start by listing some of your church's strengths. Have your team answer the following questions:

- What do we do well?
- What originally drew each of us to this church?
- What needs are we meeting in our church and community?
- What are we doing that it would be ridiculous to stop doing?

## **WEAKNESSES**

Once you have a list of your strengths, have someone copy them down into a document so that you have them later. Then move on to your weaknesses. Encourage people to answer these questions as honestly as possible:

- What needs in the community are we not meeting?
- What needs in our congregation are we not meeting?
- On what ideals are we dropping the ball?
- What are some areas of inconsistency between our message and our behavior?
- What three things could we eliminate today that would create the most positive change?
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## **OPPORTUNITIES**

After you've written all of the weaknesses onto your document, it's time to look at the fruit that's just waiting to be picked. Turn your attention toward these questions:

- Instead of needing to build our own momentum, where is God moving in our church or community where we could simply join Him?
- What's already happening in our community to which we could contribute?
- What needs in our church or community align with our strengths?
- What new technologies or tools could help us fulfill our mission better?
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## **THREATS**

Lastly, it's time to look at obstacles and challenges you may need to overcome. Start this discussion by asking:

- Are there community attitudes, prejudices, or behaviors that negatively affect our impact?
- What internal behaviors hinder our effectiveness?
- What future problems could prevent us from fulfilling our vision?
- Do we have any financial issues that are impacting us negatively?

Once you've walked through these four areas, it's time to distill this information into an actual strategy. You can work through your analysis this way:

- Identify strengths that can be leveraged to take advantage of opportunities.

- Discuss ways that strengths can overcome potential threats.
- Consider what weaknesses are hindering your ability to capitalize on opportunities.
- Make plans to do the following:
  - Expand areas where you're strong.
  - Minimize weaknesses.
  - Take advantage of opportunities.
  - Overcome threats.

### 3 PERFORM A GAP ANALYSIS

It's a lot easier to imagine where you'd like to be in the future than it is to know how to draw a map to get there. A gap analysis will help you determine what steps need to be taken to get from your current state to a desired future state.

If you've already done your vision statement, a lot of the preliminary work is finished. You've identified where you're going in the future. Now it's time to break that broad idealized plan into more actionable pieces.

This means looking at:

- How you would like your church organized.
- The direction of your church.
- Your church's ministries, programs, and outreaches.
- Your church finances and resources.

By looking at your vision (and your values), you should be able to identify three clear five-year goals for all of these areas. This is identifying the "Where do we want to go?" section of the analysis. So look at your church's ministries and discern three objectives to accomplish in the next five years. The next thing is to look at where you are. What are the boundaries that exist between your current state and this future goal? What would need to happen for this goal to be realized? Remember, you want to be as specific and honest as possible.

Once you've identified where you are and where you want to go, it's time to make a plan to bridge that gap between the two. For each goal, you need to break down the steps required to get there. As you begin to discover where your biggest gaps are, this will help you come up with creative ways to take things to the next level.

For instance, you might want to have a really good worship team in the future, but right now you don't have many musicians. A gap analysis helps you plan to make your dream a reality by identifying the potential steps required to get you there.

This could include identifying and training musicians in the church, borrowing musicians from another church, or even hiring musicians from outside the church. But until you clearly identify the

gaps that exist between where you are currently and your objectives, you can't build a bridge to reach your goals.

#### **4 PLAN FOR REGULAR FOLLOW-UPS**

Many churches have done some or all of these things, but they're nowhere closer to making their mission and vision a reality. That's usually because they don't come back to this material after creating it. But these aren't set-it-and-forget-it tasks. You need to regularly come back to them.

Imagine that you've discovered information that says that there's buried treasure somewhere within 100 miles of your church. So you've sat down with your leadership team to look at all the information available and talked through the most likely places it could be buried. Through these discussions, you have been able to sketch out a rough map to where you think the treasure is hidden.

The fact that you had this discussion and drew a map isn't going to get you any closer to finding that treasure. You have to chase it down, and that means coming back to the map over and over again to reassess things, make sure you're on the right course, and cross out any paths that have proven to be fruitless.

Strategic planning is very similar. All of this effort is only the precursor to the actual work. Once you put these things in place, you have to start working the plan. And that means periodically coming back to these tools and ensuring that your day-to-day decisions are in line with the conclusions that come from these meetings.

It's also important to fine tune the plan as you go. Every decision that comes out of your strategic planning isn't going to be gold, and you need to be able to discern that as you go. This means coming back periodically to reassess how your plan is progressing. The only way that you can do this is by readdressing this information again and again.

I would suggest meeting at least once a quarter to look at your progress, reevaluate your goals, and do some more planning. The more regularly your leadership meets, the more these tools become part of your congregation's lifeblood.

#### **EVERYONE PLANS, BUT NOT STRATEGICALLY**

There's no way around it: Your church is going to be making plans. Make sure that they're plans that do more than keep you busy. By being intentional and strategic, you can begin making plans that move the church closer to its aspirations—and experience a level of success that isn't accidental.

While having the conversation around strategic planning, be sure to keep your church's vision, mission, and purpose in mind. It's the only way to grow a lasting legacy for your church, and strategize for healthy growth moving forward.