

STRATEGIC PLANNING CURRICULUM



Table of Contents

Session One: Storytelling and Strategic Planning	3
Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams	4
Team Exercises for Strategic Planning	9
<hr/>	
Session Two: Team-Based Strategic Planning	14
Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams	14
Team Exercises: Team-Based Strategic Planning	19
<hr/>	
Session Three: Mission, Vision, Core Values in Congregational Storytelling	25
Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams	25
Team Exercises: Mission, Vision, and Core Values	27
Congregational Exercise: Who are we?	32
Congregational Exercise: Where are we?	34
Congregational Exercise: Where are we going?	38
<hr/>	
Session Four: What Is a Ministry Action Plan (MAP)?	41
Team Exercise: What is a Ministry Action Plan?	41
Team Exercise: How will we get there?	44
Congregational Exercise: How will we get there?	47
<hr/>	
Session Five: Team Strategic Planning Meetings	49
Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams	50
Team Exercise: How Can We All Benefit From Our Meetings?	56
<hr/>	
Session Six: Living Your TMAP	61
Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams	61
Team Exercise: Quarterly TMAP Review (60 minutes)	62
Congregational Exercise: Annual TMAP Review	63
<hr/>	
Appendices	65

Session One: Storytelling and Strategic Planning



In 1997, George Dawes Green started storytelling shows called “The Moth” in his living room. He wanted to recreate in New York City the summer evenings he spent in his hometown in Georgia, telling stories on a porch with friends while moths flitted around the porch light. For Green, the moths attracted to the porch light symbolize the way human beings are attracted to stories shared. Each story is true, told live, and shared without notes. The Moth has grown to encompass eight programs, including live events that tour internationally and a podcast.

Human beings are meaning-makers, and we love a good story. But the best stories have certain elements that make them great. To tell a good story, you need intention, or we might say, a plan. That’s what we’re here to think about because we are part of a story, a story that goes back in time before the foundations of the earth and that goes forward into the future toward a new heaven and a new earth. We are immersed in that story, and it’s from that story that our churches need to rise up in ministry. That’s what the GCI mission, “Living and sharing the gospel,” is all about. Without thinking about certain elements, though, we hinder our efforts to contribute to the story of Christ at work in our world through the Holy Spirit.

Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams

PURPOSE: To explain the role of strategic planning in pastoral leadership and how it promotes intention in telling the congregation's story through ministry.

Perhaps you're asking, "What's the big idea behind strategic planning? Why do I need to burden myself with this?" Leading pastorally goes beyond preaching, praying for the sick, and visitation duties. These are noble deeds and part of our pastoral role, but to achieve greater health as a pastor that can, in turn, trickle down to greater health in our teams and in our churches, we need to broaden our understanding of holistic pastoral leadership. We must realize that it's not just us pastors telling our church's story. Our congregations need to contribute to the story, but we must empower them to speak.



Consider:

- **What is your understanding of the role of the pastor?**
- **How has GCI's definition of a healthy pastor informed your understanding? (Review the 4 Es: engage, equip, empower, and encourage.)**

Even before we can begin to wrap our heads around what strategic planning looks like and how we can implement it, we need to concern ourselves with Pastoral Leadership, Visionary Leadership, and Strategic Leadership.

To begin, let's be sure that we are informed by the ministry of the one with whom we serve, our great pastor and leader, Jesus.

Jesus and Pastoral Leadership

In John Maxwell's book series **Developing the Leader Within You**, he addresses leadership in this manner: **"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."** This is an accurate description of healthy leadership if we interpret the "way" as Jesus.



Read John 14:6-7.

- **Reflect on how this passage relates to Maxwell's statement.**
- **If we consider Maxwell's statement as well as the John 14 passage, would you then agree that keeping Jesus at the center of healthy pastoral leadership is about knowing Jesus, following Jesus, and pointing others to Jesus? Discuss what this looks like.**

If we believe that he is the way, then we must keep Jesus at the center of pastoral leadership. In doing so, we must embody his leadership style of servant leadership (Matthew 20:15-20) and collaborative leadership (Mark 3:13-19).

- **Reflect on how your pastoral leadership reflects Jesus' leadership style.**
- **How does Team Based – Pastor Led (TB-PL) reflect Jesus' leadership style?**



Visionary Leadership

Planning strategically **has to do with the steps and strategies for attaining the vision we have received from God** for our collective expression (local church) of the body of Christ. **If we do not have a clear direction of where God is leading us, then planning strategically is senseless.** A word of caution: a preferred future (vision) is always challenging but attainable. Break it down into short-term and long-term goals.

- **Reflect on the direction where you believe God is leading you.**
- **Has this direction been affirmed by others on the team?**
- **Has there been a collaborative process to discern the direction God is leading?**

Once a preferred future has been attained, a healthy leader will lead with that future in mind. Thus, visionary leadership is not just vision attainment, but it also includes vision implementation. Here are some principles that are key to holistic visionary leadership.



Reflect and discuss the following responsibilities of a visionary leader:

- **Develops and defines** a clear picture of the envisioned future.
- **Articulates and applies** future thinking in ways that engage and motivate others.
- **Leads, preaches, plans, and equips** with the future in mind.



Strategic Leadership

Pastors cannot lead strategically in a healthy manner without apprehending their calling to pastoral ministry and leadership. It has to do with our roles as under-shepherds who participate with the ministry that our great shepherd received from the Father. If we divorce ourselves from this reality, strategic leadership can easily become me-centered rather than Christ-centered. We must remember that it isn't our story that the church must tell; it's the story of Jesus Christ, the great love of God the Father, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, both pastoral and strategic leadership go hand in hand.

- **Reflect on the connection between pastoral and strategic leadership.**
- **How does healthy visionary leadership fit in with the broader understanding of Christian leadership?**
- **A healthy pastor who leads strategically will collaborate with others and involve others in developing strategies that will move the vision forward. How would you do this pastorally? How would you lead strategically and collaboratively without stepping on others' proverbial toes?**

Leading strategically has a lot to do with casting and sustaining the vision and then empowering others to contribute to the church's story. Once a preferred future has been clearly defined and envisioned, strategies have to be implemented to move toward that vision. Here are some principles that may be helpful:

- **Cast the vision with clarity, understanding, faith, and passion.**
- **Energize and inspire others. Drip the vision; don't shower it. Allow others to reflect and digest.**
- **Lead with clarity. There is a difference between vision casting and messaging. By its nature, messaging is more information-driven, but casting requires an impassioned delivery.**
- **Reinforce the vision.**
- **Celebrate increments. It has been said, "What is celebrated is often duplicated."**



Reflect and discuss the responsibilities of a strategic leader listed above.

Only after fully apprehending and embracing what pastoral leadership means and discerning what is meant by visionary and strategic leadership can we begin to fully appreciate strategic planning. It takes leadership to plan strategically with strategies that are biblically-based and Spirit-led to attain the preferred future.

The first step is to encourage our teams to care about the strategic planning process. That's the biggest storytelling rule: make me care. The second storytelling rule is to promise that the process will lead to something that's worth our time. Our goal is to inspire our congregations to see their unique contribution to the Christ story in our world and then empower them to tell it in their unique voice, full of wonder at the great love story we're part of.



Team Exercises for Strategic Planning

PURPOSE: To explain the role of strategic planning in pastoral leadership and how it promotes intention in telling the congregation's story through ministry.

You may need:

- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Flipchart markers
- Alternatively: type participants feedback/questions and display onscreen



What is strategic planning? (15-20 minutes)

Share the following definition of strategic planning with the team:

“...a deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why.”
— **Strategic Planning for Public and Non-profit Organizations**



Reflect as a team:

1. What sticks out to you in this definition?
2. What questions does this definition leave you with?
3. How might strategic planning, defined in this way, be relevant to GCI Healthy Church Vision and the ministries of the local congregation?

How to make a strategic plan?

When planning strategically, consider the following:

1. **Pause** from time to time to evaluate the strategies and their implementation.
2. Be precise in your evaluation.
3. Vision attainment can be a long process, and your strategic plan must reflect **an incremental process** toward vision accomplishment.
4. A **timeline** is not a bad idea as it can help with identifying and discerning the proper strategies at the different stages. Be sure to make the point that timelines are flexible.

GOAL BASED STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic Planning Cycle



Strategic Planning Model: Think-pair-share exercise (20-30 minutes)

Think: Give the team a couple of minutes to review the goal-based strategic planning model (5 minutes).

1. What ideas and questions do you see raised by this model?

Pair: Discuss the following questions in pairs (5-10 minutes).

1. Share/discuss the ideas and questions that came up for you in the “think” phase.
2. How might or might not this model help your team approach ministry more strategically?



Some more food for thought and team discussion...

- **If our GCI collective vision is “Healthy Church,” then how do we lead strategically?**
- **Is our apprehension of the vision clear and concise so that we can plan and lead strategically? If not, take a step back and solicit help.**
- A Ministry Action Plan (MAP) is the reflection of the strategies that will help you move in the direction toward the preferred future. Review your plan and ask the following questions:
 - **Is it strategic enough?**
 - **Is there alignment within the plan toward the preferred future?**
 - **Does it reflect incremental movement?**
 - **Refer to session 4 for more resources on Ministry Action Plans.**

- Strategic planning helps you connect the ministry dots that will move you in the right direction. Consider the following:
 - **Do you have the right personnel to implement the plan?**
 - **Have you developed your team in such a way that they possess the skills to effectively live out the plan?**
 - **Are there any missing pieces? How can you compensate for what's missing?**
 - **Is your plan team-based?**
 - **Have you bathed the strategic plan in prayer?**
- With a changing landscape of volunteers and the need to gauge progress, it is important to calibrate your strategies on a yearly basis and perhaps quarterly.
 - **Gather your team for long- and short-term planning meetings.**
 - **Work the yearly calendar in a strategic manner.**
 - **Know ahead of time who, when, and what is being done.**
Ask yourself: How is this project moving the vision forward?
That's how you calibrate your plan.
 - **Refer to session 5 for more resources on team strategic planning meetings.**

Participation in Jesus' ministry by the Spirit takes various shapes and forms. It is not a solo act but relational in nature. Our leadership styles need to reflect who God is as revealed in Jesus Christ. Effective pastoral leadership will be highly relational, visionary, and strategic. Empowering our congregations to contribute to the church's story through their unique gifting and equipping by the Holy Spirit makes the story multi-dimensional, and ultimately, worth telling.



Appendix C: “Intro to Strategic Planning” — Cara Garrity explains the connection between strategic planning and discernment. <https://equipper.gci.org/2024/05/intro-tostrategic-planning>

Appendix D: “Discernment and Strategy” — Heber Ticas writes about strategy as it accompanies discernment in effective ministry efforts. <https://equipper.gci.org/2024/04/discernment-and-strategy>

Appendix E: “GCI Church Hacks: Discernment and the Examen” — This article explains the prayerful practice of examen and its part in discernment. <https://resources.gci.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-CH1-Discernment.pdf>

Appendix F: “GCI Church Hacks: Leadership Discernment” — This article talks about the importance of discernment in ministry and leadership. https://resources.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/03/2024-CH6-DiscernmentPractices.pdf?fbclid=I-wY2xjawGqNb5leHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHQQfmaMdRChVPdHw9strB8IYGBMI8qv-9v2UBIX-DOEWsXugdMXowy7u-7g_aem_17A6Q_3-DXYeaJeixskMxw

• • • • •

Session Two: Team-Based Strategic Planning



Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams

PURPOSE: To prepare the heart of the leader to guide their congregation in strategic planning, thus enabling the congregation to share their story and their experience of God's love with the community.

Healthy churches start with healthy leaders. It is, therefore, important for ministry leaders to regularly reflect on whether or not they are impeding the work of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this section is to help ensure we are leading our strategic planning from a place of health, facilitating “power with” those we serve rather than “power over.” To empower a congregation to share its story with the community, a leader should have the following qualities:

- Belief in God's ability to do great things.
- Belief that God is at work in the world around us, and we can participate in Christ's life and work.
- Trust to follow where the Holy Spirit leads, even if it involves change.
- Deep love for ALL God's children — those in and outside the church.
- Belief in one's calling to lead and one's God-given gifts.
- Trust in the vision for the congregation God has provided.
- Capacity to lead improvement efforts.

The following self-assessment is aimed at helping the leader identify areas of strength and growth. Areas of growth should be brought to the Lord in prayer. In some ways, the leader may need to compensate for areas of growth by sharing leadership with someone else with strengths in that particular area.

Please rate yourself as best you can, using the following scale:
Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Belief in God's ability to do great things:

1. I believe in God's power to do great things.
Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
2. I can draw strength from times when God has miraculously intervened in my life.
Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
3. I believe God can use our congregation to be a tangible blessing to each other and our neighbors.
Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Belief that God is at work in the world around us, and we can participate in Christ's life and work:

4. I can see God working in my life, my family's lives, and my neighbors' lives.
Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
5. I believe all Christians are called to participate in the life and work of Jesus Christ.
Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
6. I have hope that God can bless my neighborhood in a tangible way.
Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Trust to follow where the Holy Spirit leads, even if it involves change:

7. I trust in the Holy Spirit to lead me.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

8. I trust in the leadership of the Holy Spirit, even if it requires me to change.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

9. I am comfortable with change, and I adapt quickly to the Holy Spirit's leading.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Deep love for ALL God's children — those in and outside the church:

10. I love the people in my congregation.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

11. I love the people in my neighborhood and want them to know their connection to Christ.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

12. I believe all people are valuable to God and made in God's image.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Belief in one's calling to lead and one's God-given gifts:

13. I believe that God has called me and equipped me for this role.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

14. I believe I have been given spiritual gifts enabling me to be an effective leader.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

15. Since I discerned that God called me to this role, I believe I am the right person for the job.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Trust in the vision for the congregation God has provided:

16. I believe God has given me glimpses of what our congregation could be.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

17. I have begun to articulate the vision God has been showing me.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

18. I believe we can accomplish the vision for the congregation God has given.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Capacity to lead improvement efforts:

19. At this point in my life, I have the mental and emotional strength to lead my congregation through strategic planning.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

20. I have healthy spiritual rhythms to keep me centered in Christ.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

21. I take steps to promote my physical and emotional health.

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Reflection

22. What are my areas of strength? Are there ways I can build on those strengths?

23. What are my areas of growth? What are one or two things I can do to improve in each area?

Team Exercises: Team-Based Strategic Planning

PURPOSE: To understand the importance of team-based, strategic planning and the way it empowers congregations to tell their unique story of God's love in their lives.

You may need:

- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Flipchart markers
- Alternatively: type participants feedback/questions and display onscreen

For the pastor or leader to introduce the session:

You've probably heard of the children's television host Mr. Fred Rogers. It's been told that he carried a quote in his wallet that said this: "Frankly, there isn't anyone you couldn't learn to love once you've heard their story." Storytelling is part of being human, and if we think about our efforts at ministry as a means of telling the story of how Jesus Christ has shown us great kindness, then it makes sense to think through how our congregation can tell that story in a way that makes sense to our community or neighborhood. Any good story has a theme running through it, and our theme is wonder: wonder at Jesus' sacrificial love; wonder at the Spirit's constant companionship, guidance, and comfort. Telling a good story takes some thought, however, and strategic planning can give us the tools we need to tell our congregation's unique story.

This curriculum is part of a process to lead a leadership team through a strategic planning process. The first part consisted of a self-assessment for the pastor. Now, we want to get the congregation's leaders engaged in the process because a pastor can't tell a church's story alone. A story needs a cast of characters who contribute to what happens next. But before a team can engage in strategic planning, the leaders need to understand the process and the importance of team-based ministry. We thank you for participating in this discussion. Let's pray and ask for discernment as we begin.

Getting Started (5 minutes)

Group Discussion: Have you ever been a part of a successful team (e.g., dance group, sports team, ministry, a campaign, etc.)? What are the qualities of a strong team?

Seeing Teams and Planning in Scripture (20 minutes)

Read aloud: Throughout scripture, we find teams. From Moses appointing judges over Israel (Exodus 18) to Jesus selecting the twelve disciples, we see God's chosen leaders sharing their responsibilities with an equipped team. In the book of Acts, we can see the emerging church as it becomes more structured and decentralized. We can also see how these teams of people behaved and how they met challenges. Let's take a look at the evolution of ministry teams in the book of Acts and the way they shared the story of God's love within the church as well as with their community.

Please take a moment to silently read the following summary of some of the team-related activity of the early church. If appropriate, please take the time to read any passages that generate questions.

Acts 1:1-14

Following the instructions of Jesus, the disciples gathered as a group to pray as they waited the arrival of the Holy Spirit. From the beginning of the church, it was a team that interacted with God together.

Acts 1:15-26

The disciples organized themselves, and they systematically chose a replacement for Judas to prepare themselves for the Holy Spirit's arrival. Doing so reinforced the importance of a leadership team to the early church.

Acts 6:1-7

When they realized Hellenistic widows were not being adequately served, the emerging church built new organizational structures to meet the demands of ministry. Believers were involved in this change, especially those most affected. The emerging church appointed those who would later be called deacons, thereby instituting a team-based model in which one team reported to another.

Acts 11:27-30

Believers began meeting together to discern what was happening in the world around them. When prophets predicted a famine, they discerned how they could be a blessing to their neighbors and organized a relief effort.

Acts 15:1-35

This is the most detailed description in Scripture of a corporate discernment process. A diverse group of believers with varied perspectives met to better understand the problem. In this case, the problem was a disagreement over whether Gentiles had to convert to Judaism to follow Christ. In their discussion, they prioritized the present activity of God — what they heard God saying and doing in their midst. When the way forward started to emerge, they sought confirmation in Scripture for their new perspective. They agreed on how change should be implemented, and they carried out their plan.

Acts 16:11-15

According to Jewish law, ten men were required to start a new synagogue. In this instance, Paul started a new congregation in Philippi with a group of women. New ministry models emerged as a result of the early church's team-based discernment and planning.



Group Discussion:

- Why do you think the early church featured so many teams? What are some of the strengths and challenges of team-based ministry?
- In what ways was the emerging church strategic?

Activity: Headlines (5 minutes)

Group Discussion: In general, what evidence do we have that God is a planner?

Let's pretend that God is not a planner. What are some headlines that would appear in tomorrow's newspaper if God were not a planner? Come up with as many funny headlines as you can in 1 minute.

Overview of a Strategic Planning Framework (45 minutes)



Read aloud:

Max De Pree (1924-2017) was an extraordinary individual. He was a devout Christian who was a long-serving member of the Board of Trustees of Fuller Theological Seminary. He was also CEO of Herman Miller, Inc., a Fortune 500 company and innovator in the world of office furniture. If you have seen office furniture in the past 40 years, you have likely seen something based on a Herman Miller design. De Pree seamlessly and authentically blended his Christian faith with his beliefs about leadership, which he outlined in two best-selling books: *Leadership is an Art* and *Leadership Jazz*.

While not an overtly Christian book, *Leadership is an Art* outlined the qualities of an effective leader, which De Pree derived from Christ, biblical teaching, and his own experiences as a Christian in the workplace. De Pree states, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader.”

Pair Share: In groups of two or three, discuss the quote by Max De Pree. What resonates with you? Can you see these principles lived out by Christ? Can you think of any other examples of this kind of artful leadership? After 5-10 minutes of discussion, take 5-10 minutes as a group to share your insights.



Read aloud:

Using the wisdom of Max De Pree as a guide, we can start to flesh out the responsibilities of a healthy, effective (artful) leader. The following graphic builds upon De Pree’s quote and illustrates the responsibilities of a healthy leader.

As the graphic shows, defining reality can be broken down into the following questions: Who are we? Where are we? Where are we going? How do we get there? As we tell our church’s story, we want to engage our congregation in figuring out what comes next. Because human beings are naturally problem-solvers, people want to engage in ministry, but we need to provide the proper elements and order.

To this end, leaders can implement GCI's 4 Es: engage, equip, empower, and encourage. Appreciation involves consistently and liberally expressing our gratitude for the work, the workers, the journey on which God has brought the group, and the God who makes all things possible. The ultimate goal of the strategic planning process is to define reality clearly so the congregation can discern from God the way forward. The process will conclude with the creation of a Team Ministry Action Plan (TMAP), which will state **how the congregation will move towards their purpose in Christ (Healthy Church) over the next year. The remainder of the curriculum will support you in leading your congregation through a process to answer the four defining reality questions.**

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A HEALTHY LEADER

"The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader."

— Max De Pree in
Leadership is an Art

1

DEFINE REALITY

**Who are we?
Where are we?
Where are we going?
How do we get there?**

2

SERVE

**Engage
Equip
Empower
Encourage**

3

APPRECIATE

**Cultivate appreciation for:
The work and the workers
The journey
The God who made it
all possible**



-

Have a time of prayer, asking God to reveal your congregation's unique voice and story through the strategic planning process.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Session Three: Mission, Vision, Core Values in Congregational Storytelling



Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams

PURPOSE: To reflect on your personal values and leadership style to prepare for a values discernment process. Knowing your personal values and your congregation's values are foundational steps to communicating its special story in the most authentic and effective way.



Discerning Your Personal Core Values

Take time to reflect on the core values that resonate most with you. A list of values is provided to guide your reflection: [click here](#).

- Which values from the list immediately stand out to you? Why do these values resonate with you?
- How do these values influence your decisions and actions, both in your personal life and in your professional role?
- Are there any values that you consider nonnegotiable or foundational to who you are? What experiences or beliefs have shaped these convictions?
- How do these values align with or challenge your current leadership style?
- How might they influence your interactions with your team?



Core Values for Each Voice

- Review the following table that outlines the core values associated with each of the 5 Voices.
- Reflect on how these core values resonate with your personal values and how they influence your approach to leadership.

WHAT THE 5 VOICES CARE ABOUT...

NURTURER: Relationships, Values, and People

CREATIVE: Future Orientation, Organizational Integrity, and Social Conscience

GUARDIAN: Tradition, Money, and Resources

CONNECTOR: Relational Networks, External Communication, and Internal Collaboration

PIONEER: Future Vision, Tough Decisions, and How To Win



Build on Insights from the 5 Voices

- Reflect on the insights you've gained from Giant's 5 Voices. This reflection will help you deepen your self-awareness and understand how your personal values influence your leadership style.



Consider the Following Questions

- What did you learn about yourself when you view your primary voices as reflecting your personal values? How does this help you better understand your core values?
- Based on any new insights, what would you want the rest of your team to know? How might your primary voice influence your interactions with others on your team, especially in discussions about values?



- 

Prepare for Team Facilitation

- If you do not have team core values in place, begin considering how you will facilitate a discussion with your team on discerning core values.
- If your team does have core values established, are there any core values that may need to be revisited, refined, or emphasized more strongly to better support your team's vision and objectives for the upcoming year?



Team Exercises: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

PURPOSE: To define your congregation's mission, vision, and core values as a means of understanding its story and ministry.

You may need:

- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Alternatively: type participants feedback/questions and display onscreen



As we begin our exploration of our congregation’s mission, vision, and core values so that we can effectively participate in the greater Gospel story, we can reflect on the metaphor Paul used in Ephesians and in 1 Corinthians 12. He talks about the church as a body and the way each part is essential:

**“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.”
(Ephesians 4: 15-16, NRSVUE)**

If we want to share with the world our truest story about love, it requires all parts of the body of Christ. Our story needs to reflect those “ligaments” that are unseen but somehow knit us together. It’s easy to overlook those who might be behind the scenes, grounding our group and supporting those who are in leadership roles. By taking time to think about our congregation’s mission, vision, and values, we can share a fuller picture of our congregation and its experience of God’s love. Let’s begin this session with prayer, and then we’ll review what mission, vision, and core values mean for us.

Defining Mission, Vision, and Core Values (10 minutes)

Review with your team the following resources:

Appendix Q: “GCI Buzz — Healthy Church: Vision, Mission, & Core Values” — This handout explains the difference between a mission statement and a vision statement and defines other key terms found in strategic planning. <https://resources.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/07/2024-3-GCI-Buzz.pdf>

Appendix R: “GCI Church Hacks: Vision, Mission, Core Values” — This article provides easy-to-follow steps to creating a mission and vision for your congregation based on its core values. <https://resources.gci.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2024-CH7-Mission-Vision-Core-Values.pdf>

- What questions does the team have about mission, vision, and core values?

Team Core Values (30-45 minutes)

Purpose: To begin a collaborative process of discerning and agree on 5–7 core values that will guide your team’s expression and storytelling.

You may need:

- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Flipchart markers
- Alternatively: type participants feedback/questions and display onscreen

1. Using the Five Voices as a Conversation Starter:

- Facilitate a discussion that builds on the insights gained from Giant’s 5 Voices.
- Use the following questions to prompt conversation:
 - What did each team member learn about themselves when viewing their primary voices as reflecting their personal values? How does this understanding help in identifying individual core values?
 - How does understanding the connection between another person’s voice and their values help you to better understand them? How can this shape the team’s core values to accommodate what each person values?

2. Reviewing Core Values for Each Voice:

- Present the table of core values associated with each of the 5 Voices and the list of [values resource](#) to your team:

WHAT THE 5 VOICES CARE ABOUT...

NURTURER: Relationships, Values, and People

CREATIVE: Future Orientation, Organizational Integrity, and Social Conscience

GUARDIAN: Tradition, Money, and Resources

CONNECTOR: Relational Networks, External Communication, and Internal Collaboration

PIONEER: Future Vision, Tough Decisions, and How To Win

- Facilitate a discussion to help team members draw out core values that align with their primary voice. Use the following questions to guide the conversation:
 - **For Nurturers:** How do relationships, values, and people factor into your personal and professional decision-making? Which values reflect your commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment within the team?
 - **For Creatives:** How do future orientation, organizational integrity, and social conscience influence your vision for the team? Which values do you think are essential for ensuring that your team is forward-thinking and ethically grounded?
 - **For Guardians:** How do tradition, money, and resources play a role in your approach to team management? Which values are key to maintaining stability, efficiency, and resourcefulness in your team?
 - **For Connectors:** How important are relational networks, communication, and collaboration in your work? Which values best represent your commitment to fostering connections and teamwork within the team?
 - **For Pioneers:** How do future vision, tough decisions, and a drive to succeed shape your leadership style? Which values do you think are necessary for guiding the team toward ambitious goals and achieving excellence?
- Encourage each team member to share how these core values resonate with their primary voice and how they see these values being lived out within the team.

3. Discerning an Agreed-Upon List of 5–7 Core Values:

a) Initial Brainstorming (Round-Robin Approach)

- Start by having each team member independently reflect on the core values they believe are most important for the team to embody. These values should reflect the team's mission, vision, and the culture they want to foster.
- Gather the team and begin a round-robin process where each member shares one core value they think should be part of the team's core values. Continue this process until all values have been shared. Record all suggestions on a Post-it or shared document.

- Encourage discussion after each round, allowing team members to explain why they chose their suggested values and how those values align with the team's expression of the congregation's story.

b) Grouping and Refining Core Values

- Once all the potential core values are listed, begin grouping similar values together. For example, if multiple members mention values like trust, honesty, and transparency, these could be grouped under a broader core value like integrity.
- Develop a consensus on the overarching core values that best capture the essence of the grouped values.

c) Narrowing Down to 5–7 Core Values:

- Now that the values are grouped, work together to narrow the list down to 5–7 core values. Consider which values are most critical for the team's success and alignment with its mission and vision.
- Use a voting or consensus-building process if necessary to finalize the core values.

d) Identifying Sub-Values for Each Core Value:

- For each of the agreed-upon core values, engage the team in identifying two or three sub-values that further define how the core value will be understood and lived out by the team.
- For example, if integrity is chosen as a core value, sub-values might include transparency, accountability, and honesty.
- Use a round-robin process again, allowing each team member to suggest sub-values for each core value. Discuss and refine these suggestions until the team agrees on the final sub-values.

Congregational Exercise: Who are we?

PURPOSE: To discern the identity of the congregation and its unique story and experience of God's love.

You may need:

- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Flipchart markers
- Alternatively: type participants feedback/questions and display onscreen

This section is part of a larger strategic planning process. Before beginning this part, the leaders of the congregation should be informed about strategic planning and be invested in the process the congregation is undertaking. The following is a detailed agenda for the pastor or other ministry leader to guide the congregation through a mini-workshop aimed at articulating their identity in Christ. This is just a guide, and pastors and leadership teams are invited to follow the leading of the Spirit. This is the first of four mini-workshops. At each of these experiences, it is suggested that someone in the congregation is designated to take photos. Documentation of the process is always appreciated later.



Suggested Set Up

Tables, chairs with pens, and Post-it notes, enough for each participant, on the tables.

Optional Introduction (5 minutes)

Read aloud to the congregation:

The Bible is a collection of stories about one ancient people's interactions with the Divine. You'll notice that these stories had different expressions depending on the people's lived experience: praise and thanksgiving, lament and grief, along with historical information strategically shared to make a specific point. Most importantly, the triune God's great love is expressed through the story of Jesus and his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Though the Bible and its stories might seem out of touch for modern society, we can experience their timelessness when we ask ourselves what they reveal about God's love. As Christians, we see our church as a descendant of the church in Acts 2, and we're choosing to continue the story of God's love, telling it in our congregation's distinctive voice.

We're exploring how we can best tell our congregation's story to our community. No two congregations will have the same story or tell it in the same way. Let's pray for discernment from God as we begin.

Post-it Activity (40 minutes)

Read aloud:

We are going to start first with trying to hear from God how he gifted our congregation. We would like for you to consider: In what ways has God made our congregation special? Compared to other congregations, what is unique about us? What do we do well? Please write your answers to these questions on the Post-its — one answer per Post-it. Please hand your Post-its to me, and I will group them by theme. We are going to take 15 minutes to gather responses to this question. Any questions?

Once everyone understands the activity, allow 15 minutes to provide answers. Walk around the room to collect Post-its. As you do, begin to arrange them on a wall, grouping Post-its with a similar theme. For example, responses like “we are loving” and “we are friendly” can be grouped together. If possible, aim to consolidate the grouped answers such that you are left with ten or fewer piles.

If possible, invite the congregation to gather around the Post-it responses. Mention each theme group and read the individual Post-its in each group. You may need to say a bit about your rationale for the grouping. Open the floor for comments, connections, and possible further consolidations. Once the group is satisfied with the Post-it groups, write down the themes on a piece of flipchart paper.



Time of Prayer (15 minutes)

Read aloud:

Now that we have articulated some of our congregation's characteristics, let us do our best to accurately hear from God. We are now going to have a time of silent, individual prayer. Specifically, we are going to be listening to God. Please take three minutes to be quiet before the Lord and ask if the themes we came up with fit our congregation and the way our story should be expressed to our neighborhood or community.

After the three minutes of silent prayer, ask the congregation: **After your time with God, do you feel confirmation that these are the right characteristics of our congregation? Would you make any additions or changes?** Discuss any responses and appropriately adjust the characteristics.

Thank the congregation for their participation and close in prayer.

Congregational Exercise: Where are we?

PURPOSE: To identify the congregation's available resources and the way those resources can convey God's love for our community and neighborhood through our expression of the gospel story.

You may need:

- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Flipchart markers
- Alternatively: type participants feedback/questions and display onscreen

This section is part of a larger strategic planning process. Before beginning this part, the leaders of the congregation should be informed about strategic planning and be invested in the process the congregation is undertaking. The following is a detailed agenda for the pastor or other ministry leader to guide the congregation through a mini-workshop aimed at discerning the work God has given the congregation to do. This is just a guide, and pastors and leadership teams are invited to follow the leading of the Spirit. This is the second of four mini-workshops. At each of these experiences, it is suggested that someone in the congregation is designated to take photos. Documentation of the process is always appreciated later.

You will need:

- Pens
- Paper
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Flipchart markers
- Flipchart or slide with the congregation's characteristics
- Copies of the "Our Congregation's Resources" handout for all participants
- Flipchart or slide with a summary of the results of the neighborhood map, especially the community's key assets and challenges
- Optional: a brief summary of the congregation's financial situation (i.e., account balances, savings, and average monthly giving vs. expenses)
- Alternatively: type participants feedback/questions and display onscreen



Suggested Set Up

Tables, chairs, pens, and “Our Congregation’s Resources” handouts, enough for each participant, on the tables

Optional Introduction (5 minutes)

Read aloud:

Thanks for being here today. When we were together the last time, we talked about our congregation’s special gifting and the way those characteristics might influence how we share the story of God’s love in our lives. Today, we’re going to consider how our congregation’s gifting and faith experiences might connect with our community and neighborhood. We’ll be thinking through how our storytelling about God’s love might be a blessing to our neighbors. Let’s begin our time with a prayer of thanksgiving.



Resources Activity (20 minutes)

Explain that the group will now take stock of its available resources. If you have a financial summary available, share it with the group and briefly highlight important information. Ask the members to break up into groups of two or three and complete the “Our Congregation’s Resources” worksheet. A template for the worksheet can be found at the end of this section. Give them ten minutes to brainstorm answers to the questions. Next, invite groups to share their answers. Record the responses on flipchart paper.



Matching Activity (30 minutes)

Share the summary of the neighborhood map, especially the community’s assets and needs. After briefly explaining the neighborhood map and answering any questions, explain to the group that you are now going to match the congregation’s identity and resources to community needs and assets.

Read aloud: We will start looking at the needs of the community. Next, we will look to see which of our characteristics lines up with or matches the needs or assets of the community. Finally, we will look at our resources to see the ways in which the congregation can be a blessing.

For example, let's imagine that one of the aspects of a neighborhood is a lot of college students. If a congregation has the characteristic of being multi-generational, there may be a connection or match there.

College students may welcome relationships with their peers and with “adopted” grandparents. As far as resources, the congregation has several retired seniors who could volunteer their time. Therefore, a congregation in this situation may seek to reach out to a nearby college to start a mentoring program.

Divide everyone into groups of two or three to discuss possible matches. After about 15 minutes, reconvene the group. Ask the small groups to report some of their ideas for matches. Record the ideas on flipchart paper, allowing some time for questions and discussion.



Prayer and Priorities (10 minutes)

Inform the group that no congregation can do it all. We are now going to discern from God what the priorities should be. Ask the group to spend three minutes in silent prayer asking God to reveal his priorities for the congregation. Again, the group's orientation should be listening to the Spirit.

After the time of prayer, ask each member to take a pen or marker and put a star (*) next to the ministry connection or match that they believe should be given priority. Repeat the process until the congregation identifies one ministry priority.

Thank the congregation for their participation, and close in prayer.

SUGGESTION: If you do not already have them, this would be a great time to put together a **mission** and core **values statement**. Please refer to Appendix Q.

Appendix Q: “GCI Buzz — Healthy Church: Vision, Mission, & Core Values” — This handout explains the difference between a mission statement and a vision statement and defines other key terms found in strategic planning.

<https://resources.gci.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2024-3-GCI-Buzz.pdf>

OUR CONGREGATION’S RESOURCES

TIME	TALENT	TREASURE
To what extent can the members of our congregation be available to volunteer their time?	Do members of our congregation have any unique or in demand talents, abilities, or hobbies?	What finances and other resources can the congregation bring to bless our neighbors?

Congregational Exercise: Where are we going?

PURPOSE: To cast a vision for the way our church's story about God's love can meet the needs of our community.

This unit is part of a larger strategic planning process. Before beginning this unit, the leaders of the congregation should be informed about planning and be invested in the process the congregation is undertaking. The following is a detailed agenda for the pastor or other ministry leader to guide the congregation through a mini-workshop aimed at casting a vision for the future. This is just a guide, and pastors and leadership teams are invited to follow the leading of the Spirit. This is the third of four mini-workshops. At each of these experiences, it is suggested that someone in the congregation is designated to take photos. Documentation of the process is always appreciated later.

You will need:

- Pens
- Paper
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Flipchart markers
- Countdown clock (e.g., a cell phone timer)
- Optional: a slide or handout with the congregation's ministry priorities



Suggested Set Up

Tables and chairs, and two blank flipchart pages placed on opposite sides of the room.

Optional Introduction (5 minutes)

Read Aloud:

Thanks for being here today. Hopefully, you're seeing more clearly our congregation's gifting and the way our story might connect with the needs in our community. The story of the Acts 2 church continues, and I hope you're excited to envision where our story might lead and what that might mean for our neighborhood. Let's pray and ask God to help us imagine how our story about the great love we've experienced might be a blessing to our community.



Creativity Catalyst (15 minutes)

Explain to the group that we are going to get creative, so we need to get our creative juices flowing. So we will play a silly game to exercise our imagination. Place a blank piece of flipchart on each side of the space. Divide the group in half (quarters for a larger group) and have each team line up in a straight line in front of the blank pieces of flipchart. Give a marker to the first person in each line. Tell the teams that their task is to come up with as many uses for a spoon as they can. The uses can have nothing to do with eating. Also, the teams cannot give each other answers. The first person in the line writes an answer, hands the marker to the next person, and then goes to the end of the line. The team continues in that way for 1 minute (2 minutes for larger groups).

Say “go” to start the race and count down the time. At the end of the time, read and count the responses. Take the time to have some fun with it. Applaud for both the winners and not winners.



Vision Brainstorm (35 minutes)

Prior to this activity, take three pieces of flipchart paper. Write one of the following questions at the top of each of the pieces of paper:

- What would our congregation be like?
- How would our neighborhood experience blessing?
- How would the story of the Acts 2 church be continued through our efforts?

Divide the participants into three groups. Each group should designate a scribe — a person to write down what people say using a different colored marker.

Explain that you would like the members to think about the congregation's identity (mission and core values if you have them) and ministry priorities (the results or output from the last session). Imagine we are five years into the future. What would our church look like then? What would we be doing? What would our congregation be like? How would our neighborhood be helped?

Thank the congregation for their participation. Explain that the Leadership Team has the information it needs to develop the TMAP, which will be presented at the next meeting for their feedback. Close in a prayer of gratitude to God.

Appendix Q: “GCI Buzz — Healthy Church: Vision, Mission, & Core Values” — This handout explains the difference between a mission statement and a vision statement and defines other key terms found in strategic planning.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Session Four: What Is a Ministry Action Plan (MAP)?



Team Exercise: What is a Ministry Action Plan?

PURPOSE: To develop your congregation's ministry action plan as a means of expressing its unique experience of God's love.

You will need:

- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Flip chart and markers
- Alternatively: type participants feedback/questions and display onscreen

Read aloud: When it comes to storytelling, we look for meaning and want the story to make sense. And developing a MAP is one aspect that will ensure our congregation's story is told in a way that is distinctively ours. So today, we're filling in the blanks using what we know about our congregation's strengths to express who we are and what we've experienced in our relationship with God.

A MAP is simply a tool to enable us to discern through discussion and prayer how we might participate in the gospel story. We can look at the example of the Jerusalem Council, told in Acts 15, where the early church leaders had to figure out if Gentile converts to Christianity needed to follow Jewish laws and customs, such as circumcision. Their final decision, after much discussion and prayer, was to include the Gentile Christians without requiring them to abide by the practices of Judaism. This critical moment in the gospel story established the inclusivity of the early church, and it is one we can learn from as we create a MAP to help us convey God's love from our congregation's unique perspective. Let's begin our time together by asking God to help us in this process.

If this team is using a MAP together for the first time (i.e., including a new team member), start with exercise A.

A)K-W-L (Know — Want to Know — Learned) Chart (15 minutes)

1. Ask team members to fill out the K and W of the K-W-L chart.
(Use Post-it notes or write directly onto flip chart paper.)
 - b. What they **know** about MAPs
 - c. What they **want** to know about MAPs
2. Review what the team came up with, discussing any questions about Ks or answers to Ws.
3. Review Appendix J and N below either in pairs or together as a team.
After reviewing the documents, work as a team to fill out a “a MAP is” and “a MAP is not” chart.

Appendix J: “Team Ministry Action Plan (TMAP)” — This blank form provides guidelines and a template for creating a TMAP. https://equipper.gci.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/TMAP-TEMPLATE-2024_FINAL.pdf

Appendix K: “Team Ministry Action Plan (TMAP) — Sample” — The sample shows how a TMAP might be completed using the template. https://equipper.gci.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/TMAP-TEMPLATE-2024_SAMPLE.pdf

Team Exercise: How will we get there?

PURPOSE: To create a Team Ministry Action Plan (TMAP) with specific ideas and tasks to share our congregation's ministry story.

You may need:

- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Flipchart markers
- Alternatively: type participants feedback/questions and display onscreen

This section is part of a larger strategic planning process. Before beginning this part, the leaders of the congregation should be informed about strategic planning. The following is a guide to aid the Leadership Team in constructing their Team Ministry Action Plan (TMAP). This is just a guide, and pastors and leadership teams are invited to follow the leading of the Spirit.

The first part of this session provides guidance on how to take the information gathered from the strategic planning process and structure it into a TMAP. Some will want to have the entire Leadership Team work together to write the TMAP. Others will have one or two people write up a draft of the TMAP and then present it to the Leadership Team for further revision. Still others will want to divide up the TMAP into sections and then bring the pieces together to be reviewed by the Leadership Team. As long as the Leadership Team gets the opportunity to shape the TMAP, there is no one right way to proceed. Therefore, this document will provide some general principles about how to pull all the pieces together.

Read aloud: In the story of the resurrection, Christ's body isn't found in the tomb where it was placed. In quoting observations made by psychotherapist Carl Jung, author John Philip Newell writes, "The story is not about resuscitation. It is about resurrection. It is not about reviving the old form. It is about something new, something we could never have imagined" (The Rebirthing of God). In this respect, we also are interested in telling a new story about our congregation, something we might never have imagined, and we appreciate your engagement in the TMAP process to help us. We'll begin by organizing our priorities and vision before we set goals and objectives. Let's begin our time together with prayer.

Organize the Priorities and Vision

The first step in putting together the TMAP is to organize the information you received in the strategic planning process. Go through the ministry priorities generated in session 3. Categorize the information as follows:

- **Love Avenue:** Which items are concerned with engaging our neighbors?
- **Faith Avenue:** Which items concern discipleship? Looking at the Love Avenue items, what are the Faith Avenue implications? How will we need to grow spiritually to do the Love Avenue items?
- **Hope Avenue:** Are there any natural connections to the Christian liturgical calendar? How can we highlight or celebrate our ministry priorities during the Sunday gathering?
- **Pastor Avenue:** What systems, structures, and or supports do we need to address in our ministry priorities?

Next, take the vision dreams captured in session 3. As best you can, organize the statements by their connection to Faith, Hope, and Love Avenues. At the end of this process, you will have your ministry priorities and vision organized by Avenue.

Set Goals

Goals are targets that help move a congregation closer towards its vision. Taking a look at the organized ministry priorities and vision, what will it take to move from where you are to the vision to which God is calling you? Brainstorm this question for each Avenue. From your brainstorming, narrow your list down to one to four goals (see Appendix J for information about SMART goals).



Set Objectives

Objectives are short-term targets that aid a congregation in meeting its goals. You should be able to achieve an objective within a year. Looking at each goal that you set in the previous step, what are one to five things you need to do to make progress towards that goal?



Assign Leads and Set a Timeline

Each objective should have a name attached to it and date by which it will be completed. The lead or point person does not have to do it all, and they do not have to do it alone. Rather, the point person takes the responsibility for moving that piece of work forward. Ideally, the leads will volunteer for the work they take on rather than being assigned. The lead should also have a say as to the timeline of the objective.

Once the TMAP is drafted, it should be shared with the congregation.

SUGGESTION: Using the information you gathered, craft a statement of purpose and vision. This is a brief statement that says who you are and where you are going. It is intended to be like an offering, repeated every week during the Sunday gathering. These statements not only unite a group but immediately inform new people about how God has made the congregation. Here is an example: “We are a multiethnic and multi-generational group of ordinary miracles following Christ together. We are being formed by God into something new and beautiful. By God’s grace we want to grow to be like Jesus, individually and collectively, and be a tangible blessing to our neighbors.”

• • • • •

Congregational Exercise: How will we get there?

PURPOSE: To gain the congregation's insight into the proposed TMAP to ensure its authenticity in conveying the unique ministry story of God's love.

You may need:

- Handouts of the TMAP
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Flipchart markers
- Optional: display a version of the TMAP onscreen



Suggested Set Up: Theater-style seating

Optional Introduction (5 minutes)

Read aloud:

Our church is part of the story of God's love for the earth and all the creatures living in it, including us. Since human beings are natural storytellers, we are uniquely qualified to tell the story of God's love as we've experienced it in our lives. Just like any good story, though, we must think about how we can best express the love we've received. The answer to that question is going to be different for every congregation, and the way we tell our story to our community and neighborhood needs to reflect our special gifting and experiences. Just as a storyteller or writer thinks through the means to best express those truths they hold dear, we need to think about our story and how we can share it most effectively because it is ours, and it is worth telling.

Your leadership team has finished the first draft of our congregation's Team Ministry Action Plan (TMAP). We're excited to hear your feedback about it, so let's begin our time together with prayer.

Open in prayer asking God to continue to lead the congregation forward.



Presentation (15 minutes)

Walk through the features of the TMAP, pausing to allow people to ask questions.



Gathering Feedback (30 minutes)

Ask the congregation, “What do you like about the TMAP?” Record their answers on the flipchart.

Ask them, “What do you think should be added, subtracted, or changed?” Record their answers on the flipchart.

Have a brief discussion about how the TMAP is going to help guide the congregation over the next year. Share ways in which members can get involved with executing aspects of the TMAP.

Thank the congregation for their participation in the strategic planning process. Explain that the Leadership Team will put the finishing touches on the TMAP and share a completed version with them.

Close in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Following the meeting with the congregation, the Leadership Team should have one more meeting to finalize the TMAP. The Team should take the feedback from the congregation and decide how, or if, to integrate the members’ suggestions. Once this process is complete, a version of the completed TMAP should be shared with the congregation.

• • • • •

Session Five: Team Strategic Planning Meetings



Intentional Checkpoints: Aligning Ministry with Mission and Vision

Part of our church story includes celebrations. Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations — these are exciting milestones where we pause to celebrate progress and achievements. Another year of life, a full year of commitment, and the mastery of new skills are all worthy of celebration. These moments allow us to acknowledge what has been accomplished and to look forward to what comes next. In ministry, however, it's easy to stay focused on what still needs to be done. Yet, just as we mark life milestones, healthy churches benefit from regular rhythms of celebration, assessment, and intentional planning.

Developing a rhythm of strategic planning meetings allows churches to pause and recalibrate. Why is this important? Strategic meetings provide opportunities to zoom out, evaluate past progress, and ensure alignment with the church's mission and vision. These regular checkpoints help keep the church's story on course, preventing drift from its purpose and strengthening its focus on long-term goals, disciple-making, and fulfilling its God-given calling.

Prescheduled strategic meetings foster proactive planning and intentionality, which lead to more effective decision-making. Regular meetings also allow church leaders to communicate progress, address challenges, and hold each other accountable, creating a unified direction for the entire team. Built-in moments to review and celebrate successes also bolster team morale, encouraging ongoing commitment and shared ownership of the church's mission and its narrative.

As we consider the importance of strategic meetings, it's essential to remember that these gatherings are not just about logistics and goals; they are deeply spiritual moments for discerning God's direction for the church. Strategic planning should be infused with practices that seek the Holy Spirit's wisdom, aligning our vision with God's purposes. By embedding spiritual practices in our meeting rhythms, we invite God into every step, asking for guidance that shapes our ministry beyond our own understanding.

In ministry, working together reflects the relational nature of Father, Son, and Spirit — three in perfect unity, collaboration, and purpose. When we embrace this communal approach, we mirror the Trinity's harmonious relationship and ensure the work doesn't rest on one person alone. Trying to carry the weight of ministry alone becomes a heavy burden, but sharing the load allows each person to participate in the priesthood of all believers offering their gifts and strengths, freeing us to serve more fully.

Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams



A Story about Shared Leadership

In Exodus 18, Moses faced an overwhelming task: he was the sole judge and leader, attending to the needs of thousands. Seeing this, Jethro, his father-in-law, offered him wise counsel — to delegate responsibilities to capable leaders who could share the load. This advice wasn't just about efficiency; it was about stewardship, wisdom, and the call to shared leadership. Strategic delegation allowed Moses to fulfill his role effectively without being overburdened.



Imaginative Prayer Prompt: Entering Moses' Experience

Scripture Focus:

Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone... But select capable men from all the people... and have them serve as judges for the people at all times."

— Exodus 18:13-26

Take a few deep breaths and imagine yourself in Moses' place, standing before the people, trying to meet every need. As you begin, ask God to reveal insights from this experience of shared leadership and to help you reflect on your own journey.

As you read over the verses:

Picture the scene: Who are the faces you see before you, those seeking support and guidance? Notice their needs and hopes. Consider any areas in your ministry where you feel stretched or overextended, perhaps as Moses did. Allow these areas to come to mind.

Absorb the wisdom: What part of the passage brings you comfort? Ask God to speak to any areas where you are bearing the weight alone, acknowledging where it feels overwhelming.

Rest in God's provision: As you hold these reflections, what might it look like to release some of these burdens to others? Ask God, who provides, to give you discernment in choosing capable helpers.

Reflect:

- What did God reveal to me about the areas where I may be carrying too much alone, and how does this awareness shape my approach to delegation?
- In what ways did I feel encouraged or challenged to trust others with aspects of ministry, and how might I begin putting this into practice?



Reflective Process: Developing Your Meeting Rhythm

As leaders, we often feel the weight of managing ministry and trying to meet every need. Good storytellers don't tell their listeners everything; they allow them to figure out some of the missing pieces. Rather than giving our ministry teams the answer of "4," we give them "2+2" and allow them to problem-solve. With intentional, structured meetings and thoughtful delegation, we can create a rhythm that strengthens our teams, allowing us to focus on leading while empowering others to serve.

Drawing from the principles in Exodus 18, consider structuring your leadership approach with intentional rhythms that allow you to stay "eyes on" but "hands off." Join us in the reflective process below to develop a rhythm that empowers your team to take ownership while allowing you to maintain engaged oversight.



Reflect on Meeting Needs

Instructions: Begin by reviewing the following questions to reflect on the role of different meeting types in your overall leadership approach.

- **Larger Scale Meetings:** How do annual or mid-year planning meetings help me and my team align around the church's mission and vision?
- **Periodic Meetings to Move Toward Goals:** How might seasonal and weekly meetings provide the focused attention necessary for specific events or ministry areas?

Take a moment to write down any observations or adjustments you think your team may need based on their current capacity and ministry focus.



Map Out Your Meeting Rhythm

Using the [Examples of Meeting Rhythms](#) resource, consider the following questions as you develop a tailored rhythm of meetings for your team:

- How do you set the tone and direction for the year?
- Which months or seasons are best for larger planning sessions, and when should we focus on more tactical or seasonal meetings?
- Who should be present at each meeting to ensure all necessary perspectives and expertise are represented?
- What format (e.g., retreat, half-day workshop, brief sync) would be most effective for each type of meeting, and how can we maximize participation and engagement?
- How will we track progress toward our Ministry Action Plans (MAPs) and goals?
- What support, resources, or guidance does each team member need to move their tasks forward?



Personalize Based on Your Congregation's Needs

Reflect on any unique aspects of your church that might influence the frequency or duration of meetings. Complete the following statements to further tailor the rhythm to your congregation:

- **For my congregation's size and ministry needs, I may need to...** (e.g., reduce the frequency of smaller team syncs or add an additional check-in during busy seasons).
- **One way to ensure I stay “hands-off” while supporting my team's independence is by...** (e.g., focusing my attention on goal alignment rather than specific execution).

Next Steps

- **Step one:** Introducing strategic meeting rhythms might be new for your team. Gather your team to participate in the [“How Can We All Benefit From Our Meetings?”](#) activity, designed to help them recognize the value of these strategic gatherings.

- **Step two:** After the “How Can We All Benefit From Our Meetings?” activity bring your team together for a follow-up meeting to develop your Team Ministry Action Plans, [TMAP](#), with the goals identified during your debrief, and to finalize your rhythm of meetings with the group.



Session Summary

In ministry, it's easy to focus on what remains to be done, but establishing rhythms of intentional planning helps churches honor the journey, seek the Spirit's guidance, and move forward with purpose and authenticity, being true to our congregation's special story and its expression.

As you continue with your Team Ministry Action Plans (TMAPs) and establish a meeting rhythm, let these checkpoints become opportunities to celebrate, evaluate, and stay grounded in your church's God-given mission to contribute to God's story of love for the world.

References

Malphurs, A. (2013). *Advanced strategic planning: A 21st-century model for church and ministry leaders* (3rd ed.). Baker Books.



Examples of Meeting Rhythms

Larger Scale Planning Meetings:

- **Beginning-of-Year Reflection and Planning (January/February)**
 - **Purpose:** Reflects on the past year, sets annual goals by finalizing your Team Ministry Action Plans (TMAPs).
 - **Format:** Full-day retreat, including spiritual reflection and collaborative planning.
- **Mid-Year (July/August) or Quarterly (April/July/October) Planning Meeting**
 - **Purpose:** Reviews TMAP for mid-year progress and adjusts goals.
 - **Format:** Half-day meeting, focused on tracking goals and team collaboration.

- **Purpose:** Allows individual ministry teams (e.g., Hope Avenue, Love Avenue, Faith Avenue) to review goals and address challenges.
- **Format:** 1–2 hours per month.

- **Purpose:** Plans key events aligned with the church calendar, like Easter, summer Love Avenue Events, and the launch of connect groups.
- **Format:** 1–2 hours; seasonal focus for upcoming activities.

- **Purpose:** Provides clarity on tasks and events for the week. For example, a huddle before your worship gathering of all who will participate in the worship gathering that day.
- **Format:** 15–30 minutes; quick updates and collaborative prayer.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Team Exercise: How Can We All Benefit From Our Meetings?

Purpose: To introduce the benefits of strategic planning, explore how it can support the congregation's mission and storytelling, and take initial steps toward developing a planning process that aligns with the church's unique vision and its expression.

You will need:

- Copies of the Benefits and Challenges of Strategic Planning chart
- Sticky notes, markers, and a whiteboard (or virtual board for online sessions)
- Note-taking materials for each participant

Read aloud: Collaboration is part of the triune God's flow of love toward one another and us, and it's a practice that we can embrace in forming and then executing our congregation's story. In the relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit, this collaboration has been compared to a dance. So, too, must we allow for give and take, making modifications to our TMAP as we and our congregation are led by the Holy Spirit. Because this is a living process, change and fluidity are to be expected. God has never promised to be static, but instead, present always with us in our ever-changing circumstances. Let's invite the triune God to guide our meeting today as we think about how our meetings can align us in an intentional way with our congregation's resources and the story we want to tell.

Begin with a brief prayer, inviting guidance as you consider ways to focus your congregation's mission.



Opening Reflection on Mission

- **Prompt:** "What are some of the unique ways God has worked through our church to bless and serve our community?"
- Give each participant a few minutes to reflect individually and then invite them to share their insights with the group.



Learning About Strategic Planning

- Provide a short explanation of strategic planning:
 - **Definition:** Strategic planning is a process that helps teams work together to align activities and resources with their mission.
 - **Purpose:** It enables us to focus on where we believe God is leading, so we can serve with purpose and direction.
- Introduce the **Benefits and Challenges of Strategic Planning** chart as an outline of why strategic planning can help churches serve with focus and unity.



Discovering Benefits for Our Congregation

- Distribute or display the **Benefits and Challenges** chart.
- **Step 1:** Ask each participant to circle 2–3 benefits they feel could strengthen the church's ministry and mission.
- **Step 2:** Go around the group, allowing each person to share one benefit they selected and why they believe it would be helpful for the congregation.



Starting a Conversation: Current Strengths and Needs

- Divide into pairs or small groups and use the following questions to guide the conversation. Ask each group to appoint a notetaker to capture key points:

1. **What strengths does our church already have that could support planning?**
2. **Where do we feel there's a need for more focus or teamwork in our mission?**
3. **How could planning together help us follow God's leading in our neighborhood?**

- After about 10 minutes, come together as a full group and invite notetakers to share highlights, encouraging a focus on opportunities and aspirations for the church's future.



Simple Next Steps for Our Team (15 minutes)

Reflect as a group on these questions to identify initial steps:

1. What's one step we could take to better focus our church's mission?
 2. **How can we support each other in moving forward together?**
 3. **What practical steps can we take this month to start working as a team in planning for our congregation?**
- **Action Step:** Write down 2–3 simple next steps on a whiteboard or shared document, such as planning a follow-up meeting, setting one initial goal, or identifying one area to focus on.



Closing Debrief and Prayer (15 minutes)

- Conclude with a brief reflection on the mission of the church and how strategic planning can help focus and support that mission:
 - **What was one insight from today's activity that helped us see our mission in a new or clearer way?**
 - **How can meeting rhythms bring focus and consistency to our planning and teamwork?**
 - **What are some immediate goals we can set as a team to align our activities more closely with our mission?**

Close in prayer, asking for wisdom and unity as the church steps into a new season of focused ministry.

Benefits and Challenges of Strategic Planning Chart

Aspect	Benefits	Challenges
Collaborative Insight	- Team-based planning draws on diverse perspectives, enriching strategies aligned with the congregation's unique vision and mission.	- Different viewpoints on church health practices and vision can cause disagreements or slow decision-making.
Team Buy-In	- Team involvement fosters a sense of ownership, increasing commitment to the church's mission and goals.	- Consensus may take time, balancing personal and team alignment with the pastor's vision.
Clear Communication	- Open discussions ensure clarity around the congregation's vision, roles, and expectations, supporting effective collaboration.	- Miscommunication may arise if vision and roles aren't fully understood, risking strategic misalignment.
Accountability	- Shared planning encourages accountability as members feel responsible for the success of the vision.	- Shared planning encourages accountability as members feel responsible for the success of the vision.
Resource Utilization	- Effective use of each member's skills and resources allows for efficient and focused execution of the strategic plan.	- Misallocation can occur if roles are unclear or if resource needs aren't fully understood within the team.
Adaptability	- Diverse perspectives help the team adapt to changes and evolve strategies based on community needs and new ministry opportunities.	- Difficulty in pivoting may arise if team members are attached to established roles or projects.

Motivation and Morale	- Shared goals and team-based efforts boost morale, encouraging ongoing engagement and alignment with the church's mission.	- Unresolved conflicts or slow progress can diminish team morale, impacting commitment to the vision.
Collaborative Insight	- Team-based planning draws on diverse perspectives, enriching strategies aligned with the congregation's unique vision and mission.	- Different viewpoints on church health practices and vision can cause disagreements or slow decision-making.

Appendix B: "Strategic Planning Best Practices" — Michelle Hartman offers ideas for planning a strategic retreat for your congregation.

<https://equipper.gci.org/2024/06/strategic-planning-best-practices>

Appendix O: "Sample Itinerary of a Strategic Planning Retreat" — This sample itinerary shows how you might structure a strategic planning retreat.

<https://equipper.gci.org/2024/08/sample-itinerary-of-a-strategic-planning-retreat>

Session Six: Living Your TMAP



Reflection for Pastors Leading Teams

PURPOSE: To determine how to incorporate the intentional activities outlined by the TMAP into church life at the communal and individual levels to share the love shown to the congregation by God.

Team Ministry Action Plans are not just busy work, to-do lists, required paperwork for compliance, or “one and done, set it and forget it” type of tools. TMAPs, once put together, are meant to be lived out as part of the church’s authentic expression of their experience of God’s love in their lives. They are, after all, “maps” that provide direction for the pathways the team members and the collective team are going to take to get from point A to point B in terms of local church ministry. However, like any story that is unfolding, TMAPs must be modified as needed to reflect accurately the congregation, its mission, and its resources.

1. What thoughts and attitudes do you have about TMAPs — positive, negative, or neutral?
2. What hopes or hesitations do you have about using a TMAP with your team?
3. What do you need to lead your team well using TMAP as one of your tools?
How will you address that need?

As we consider our congregation's story and how it can be best expressed to our community, let's think about how we can use our TMAP to help:

1. At what point(s) does your team reference your TMAP?
2. At what point(s) is your team most likely to veer away from the clearest expression of the congregation's story?
3. How does the team respond if they find that they are off track?
4. What might distract the team's attention away from the TMAP and the congregation's story?
5. What is one thing you can do in the coming quarter to make your TMAP more practical for your team?

• • • • •

Team Exercise: Quarterly TMAP Review (60 minutes)

PURPOSE: To ensure that the TMAP is still an accurate assessment of the community's needs as well as the congregation and its resources.

Prior to scheduling an annual meeting with the congregation, the leadership team should meet to perform quarterly TMAP reviews. Please see Appendix P for more guidance.

Appendix P: "GCI Church Hacks: Quarterly TMAP Review" — This article will help you structure an end-of-the-quarter TMAP review to ensure alignment with your congregation's resources and mission. <https://resources.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/01/2024-CH3-MAPreview.pdf>

Congregational Exercise: Annual TMAP Review

PURPOSE: To refresh the TMAP based on the congregation's purpose and ensure it reflects their unique story.

While the strategic planning process does not have to be done every year, the Team Ministry Action Plan (TMAP) needs to be updated annually. This section presumes that the congregation already has a TMAP that was developed in collaboration with the congregation, and that the pastor and Leadership Team have some experience leading meetings like this. Therefore, it will simply provide an agenda for the meeting without talking points. This is just a guide, and pastors and leadership teams are invited to follow the leading of the Spirit.

Prior to the Congregational Meeting:

- The Leadership Team should meet to assess how the congregation did in accomplishing the TMAP objectives.
- A document or slide deck that summarizes the TMAP progress should be prepared.

You will need:

- Handouts of the congregation's mission, vision, and/or core values
- Handouts of the current TMAP
- Sticky flipchart paper (optional: easel)
- Post-its
- Pens
- Flipchart markers
- TMAP progress handout if not making slides
- Optional: display a version of the TMAP progress onscreen



Suggested Set Up

Theater-style seating with everyone getting a copy of the two handouts, pens, and Post-its.



Agenda

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)
 2. Alphas and Deltas (20 minutes)
 - Hand out copies of the TMAP and mission, vision, and/or core values statements.
 - Ask the congregation, “Looking back at the last year, what are your alphas — things we did well or should do more of?” Record the answers on flipchart.
 - Ask the congregation, “Looking back at the last year, what are your deltas — things we did not do as well or should change?” Record the answers on the flipchart.
 3. Deeper Analysis of the TMAP (15 minutes)
 - Share the progress towards the TMAP
 - Open the floor for questions and discussion
 4. New Ideas (20 minutes)
 - Ask the congregation, “What are some things we should do next year to move closer to our vision?”
 - Ask them to record their ideas on Post-it notes, one idea per note.
 - Organize the notes by theme.
 - Share the themes and notes with the congregation.
 - Record themes on the flipchart
 5. What Should be Next Year’s Priorities? (25 minutes)
 - Ask the congregation, “What should be our priorities next year?”
 - Record on the flipchart paper.
 - Have each member come up and mark the item they feel should be a priority next year.
 6. Closing and Prayer (5 minutes)
-

Following the meeting with the congregation, the Leadership Team should take the feedback from the congregation and decide how, or if, the members’ suggestions can be integrated into the new TMAP. Once this process is complete, a version of the completed TMAP should be shared with the congregation.

Appendices

Appendix A: “GCI Church Hacks: Mapping Your Neighborhood” — This article helps ministry leaders understand their focus neighborhood.

https://resources.gci.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2022-CH4-Mapping-Your-Neighborhood.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0DsVAIG6AAcDvTMhV6ZcbHpgSk7AdOsr4uOInm_H2FmzyMIND54r7mzel

Appendix B: “Strategic Planning Best Practices” — Michelle Hartman offers ideas for planning a strategic retreat for your congregation.

<https://equipper.gci.org/2024/06/strategic-planning-best-practices>

Appendix C: “Intro to Strategic Planning” — Cara Garrity explains the connection between strategic planning and discernment. <https://equipper.gci.org/2024/05/intro-tostrategic-planning>

Appendix D: “Discernment and Strategy” — Heber Ticas writes about strategy as it accompanies discernment in effective ministry efforts.

<https://equipper.gci.org/2024/04/discernment-and-strategy>

Appendix E: “GCI Church Hacks: Discernment and the Examen” — This article explains the prayerful practice of examen and its part in discernment.

<https://resources.gci.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-CH1-Discernment.pdf>

Appendix F: “GCI Church Hacks: Leadership Discernment” — This article talks about the importance of discernment in ministry and leadership.

https://resources.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/03/2024-CH6-DiscernmentPractices.pdf?fbclid=IwY2xjawGqNb5leHRuA2FIbQIxMAABHQQfmaMdRChVPdHw9strB8IYGBMI8qv9v2UB1X-DOEWsXugdMXowy7u-7g_aem_17A6Q_3-DXYeaJeixskMxw

Appendix G: “Nehemiah: A Model of Leadership” — Dishon Mills discusses the ministry role model found in the book of Nehemiah. <https://equipper.gci.org/2024/05/nehemiaha-model-of-leadership>

Appendix H: “Nehemiah’s Lessons on Leadership and Management” — Dishon Mills provides a list of leadership lessons for ministry leaders. <https://equipper.gci.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Lessons-from-Nehemiah.pdf>

Appendix I: “Nehemiah: A Visionary, Missional, and Strategic Leader” — Heber Ticas explains how a visionary leader articulates and applies future thinking so that others are engaged and inspired. <https://equipper.gci.org/2024/05/nehemiah-a-visionary-missionaland-strategic-leader>

Appendix J: “Team Ministry Action Plan (TMAP)” — This blank form provides guidelines and a template for creating a TMAP. https://equipper.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/10/TMAP-TEMPLATE-2024_FINAL.pdf

Appendix K: “Team Ministry Action Plan (TMAP) — Sample” — The sample shows how a TMAP might be completed using the template. https://equipper.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/10/TMAP-TEMPLATE-2024_SAMPLE.pdf

Appendix L: “Individual Ministry Action Plan (IMAP)” — This blank form provides guidelines and a template for creating an IMAP. https://equipper.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/10/IMAP-TEMPLATE-2024_FINAL.pdf

Appendix M: “Individual Ministry Action Plan (IMAP) — Sample” — The sample shows how an IMAP might be completed using the template. https://equipper.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/10/IMAP-TEMPLATE-2024_SAMPLE.pdf

Appendix N: “Ministry Action Plans” — Cara Garrity explains what a MAP is and isn’t as well as how MAPs can be used to ensure alignment with a congregation’s core values. <https://equipper.gci.org/2023/09/ministry-action-plans>

Appendix O: “Sample Itinerary of a Strategic Planning Retreat” — This sample itinerary shows how you might structure a strategic planning retreat. <https://equipper.gci.org/2024/08/sample-itinerary-of-a-strategic-planning-retreat>

Appendix P: “GCI Church Hacks: Quarterly TMAP Review” — This article will help you structure an end-of-the-quarter TMAP review to ensure alignment with your congregation’s resources and mission. <https://resources.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/01/2024-CH3-MAPreview.pdf>

Appendix Q: “GCI Buzz — Healthy Church: Vision, Mission, & Core Values” — This handout explains the difference between a mission statement and a vision statement and defines other key terms found in strategic planning.

<https://resources.gci.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/07/2024-3-GCI-Buzz.pdf>

Appendix R: “GCI Church Hacks: Vision, Mission, Core Values” — This article provides easy-to-follow steps to creating a mission and vision for your congregation based on its core values. <https://resources.gci.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2024-CH7-Mission-Vision-Core-Values.pdf>