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A Process and a Journey

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Accountable For the Protection
and Care of Our Children

(podcast) Introducing the Concept
of Christian Stewardship to the
Latino Community



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Strategic Planning: A Process and a Journey

By Paul Votaw

This article is the first in a series on planning that leads to ministry formation. The purpose is to provide short bites of information that will set a framework for enhancing the life and ministry of your organization through strategic planning.

Effective strategic planning must be done in a way that:

- brings unity to the organization without stifling creativity
- provides clear direction with goals and benchmarks
- creates energy and promotes ownership from its members
- provides opportunities for service (living out one's faith)
- provides avenues for individual and corporate faith formation
- has an ultimate end to bring glory to God and God alone

Imperative to this type of planning is a clearly defined mission: "Why we exist". The ultimate goal of an organization is defined in its mission. You could say that an organization's mission is its coherence. Mission is the glue that holds an organization together. Every decision that is made, be it related to finance, ministry, facility, outreach, or staff, is subordinate to mission and must be made in light of – and move an organization toward – the realization of its mission.

The other key component to strategic planning is vision. Vision brings the mission to life in concrete ways and provides the strategies that enable an organization to carry out its mission. (*"Vision is the incarnation of mission"* – Pat O'Meara). Vision provides direction but, just as importantly, it generates energy, passion, momentum, and something for people to grab hold of and take ownership of. (*"Without prophesy (vision) the people become demoralized."* (Proverbs 29:18a)

Vision points toward specific accomplishments within a framework of

time providing tools and vehicles for moving the organization forward. While the mission is an organization's coherence, the vision is an organization's contingency. That is to say, two organizations may have the same mission but have very different visions because the vision is guided by the culture and context of the organization and built upon the gifts and passions of those within the organization. Obviously, mission and vision must be anchored in the specific call by God for an organization as well as the overall mission and vision of the universal and local Church.

Without a clear mission and a vision that looks beyond the present, an organization may grow and be exciting for a time, but it will eventually run out of energy and its target will change depending upon short term interests and changes in leadership. One could say that such an organization is subject to whims rather than to the call of God. In such a scenario it is not unusual to see fifteen different programs going fifteen different directions with no common unifying purpose.

Unfortunately, the mission and visioning process is neglected by most organizations. As a result we end up doing programs rather than carrying out mission. That's not to say that good is not accomplished or that God is not glorified. But imagine the enthusiasm, the energy, the spiritual formation that would grow in an organization that is built upon – and subjects itself to – the specific mission and vision to which it has been called by God.

Programs take us around the block. Mission and vision lead us from city to city, country to country, milestone to milestone. We look back and see the journey rather than a list of events. So the questions becomes: "Where do we start?"

As a leader, do not take the first step until you have settled the issue of resolve. The planning process is not easy and it does not end. It is a journey, but not a journey for the faint-hearted. Rather, it is a journey for disciples who seek to discover what God

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wants to accomplish through them. It is for people who are grounded in prayer and the Eucharist, driven by the Spirit and buoyed by their gratitude to God as well as love for God. If you decide to take this journey, it will transform you and ultimately your organization, leading you to be more completely what God calls you to be – the heart, hands, and feet of the Body of Christ. “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.” (I Corinthians 12:27)

In the coming months Dan Conway, Frank Ferguson, Bentley Foster, Pat O'Meara, Michael Shumway, and I will provide simple but effective tools to help you begin and move forward in this journey. We will also suggest activities in which to engage between articles. The purpose of these activities is to help you move from the theoretical to the practical. Get a planning journal to record your thoughts and activities.

Between now and our next article in April:

Pray Daily:

- That you will be open to God’s will for you and your organization
- That God will prepare the hearts and minds of people to join the journey
- That God will show you the people He wants to help you lead this effort

Read Daily:

- The Bible to discover all you can about God’s mission for the Church:
 - Matthew 25:31-46 and 28:16-20
 - I Corinthians 12
 - Romans 12
 - The Book of Acts
 - James 1:19-27

Observe:

- What are your passions and unique gifts?
- What are the passions and unique gifts of the people in your organization?
- Do the activities/ministries of our organization move in a certain directions?
- How do these passions/gifts fit into God’s overall mission for the Church?
- What are the needs of your community, the world?

Share:

- Tell a few select people (confidants) what you are doing and ask them to pray for you. Let them know that you will check in with them in a month and talk with them about what you have discovered/concluded.
- Talk with people outside your organization? whom you trust and whose wisdom you value. Ask them for feedback and advice.

Dream:

- If you could see 5 – 10 years from now, what would your organization look like?
- What people do we need to make it happen?
- What gifts and skill sets do we need?
- What resources and funding do we need?
- What facilities will we need?
- What kind of team do you need to assemble to lead the way?

Following is an outline of the topics we will cover. I hope you will join us and read our monthly newsletter. Your participation and feedback are valued and appreciated.

Topics

- Mission and Vision: The Heart of Strategic Planning
 - a. Mission: Why We Exist
 - b. Vision: The Response to Mission
- What is a Strategic Plan?
- Assembling a Team
- Laying the Foundation (Organizing the Planning Process)
- Leadership Dialogue and Polemics (the role of Consensus-Building in Strategic Planning)
- Charting the Course (Creating the Strategic Plan)
 - a. Access Current Operation
 - b. Analyze Data from Listening and Consensus-Building Activities
 - c. Determine Operational Needs
 - d. Establish the Benchmarks
- The Journey Begins (Implementing the Strategic Plan)