

Mission and Vision – The Heart of Strategic Planning

By Bentley Foster

Our first article on planning stated, *“Planning begins by defining a clear mission – why we exist, and then articulating a vision – what we will do about it – that enables the organization to carry out its mission. Vision depends upon a clearly articulated mission and the fulfillment of mission depends upon a compelling vision. The vision is guided by the culture and context of the organization and built upon the gifts and passions of those within it. Obviously, mission and vision must be anchored in the specific call of God as well as the overall mission and vision of the Church.”*

In the following paragraphs we would like explore further the nature, purpose, and creation of Mission and Vision statements. While this article is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive, our goal is to provide a framework for you to develop statements that are meaningful and compelling.

MISSION

The Catholic Church is by its very nature missionary, called to take the good news of Jesus Christ to all people as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20. Vatican II explains that the pilgrim Church is missionary because *“it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.”* (Ad Gentes, #2).

It is this outward focus, or evangelization, that gives any organization its power and energy. Christ who is the head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22) sent us another “Helper”, God’s Holy Spirit (John 14:16) to lead the Church into all truth (John 16: 13). But Jesus goes further. He instructs the infant Church to wait and pray and assures them that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them (Acts 1:1-8). It is from the Holy Spirit that the Church derives power and direction. Without the headship of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit we become just another charitable organization and lose the unique calling and mission that God has entrusted to us.

Aware that we are not up to this monumental task on our own, The Church reminds us that, *“The Church, sent by Christ to reveal and to communicate the love of God to all men and nations, is aware that there still remains a gigantic missionary task for her to accomplish.”* (Ad Gentes, #10) Thus it is essential for every leader and visioning team to be grounded in prayer, the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. Mission and vision are not ours to create but ours to discover as they are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. Our mission is greater than we are. It is beyond our intellect, strength or resources, and only attainable when grounded in the person of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

A Mission statement defines why your organization exists and how it will contribute to God’s mission in the world. *“The mission needs to be first and foremost in every decision made. It is the goal that must be kept in front of us at all times and cannot be subordinated to any other fact or circumstance whether financial, legal or operational.”* (Pat O’Meara)

Also remember the importance of the laity’s role. *“The future of the Church, and today she has the greatest opportunities, depends upon whether laymen can be found who live out the unbroken power of the Gospel and are willing to shape the world.”* Hans Urs von Balthasar, Razing the Bastions. The identification and inclusion of laypeople is critical to the future mission and ministry of the Church. As Pope John Paul II underscored in his apostolic letter, *Ecclesia in America*, “The renewal of the Church in America will not be possible without the active presence of the laity. Therefore, they are largely responsible for the future of the Church.”

As you prepare your Mission statement, consider the following:

I. Pray. Set aside time for study and prayer. Include others in the study and writing. Maximize participation but be careful not to make the group too large. Seven to nine would be a good number.

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(podcast) The Role of the Laity in Ecclesial Forgiveness

(GSN) The Church is Called to Evangelize Permanently in Words and In Action

Where Does Mission Advancement Begin?

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II. *Read and meditate on the Word of God.*

Ground the statement in the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. While the Mission statement for each organization may differ, it is imperative that it be built upon the underlying principles of Church mission as presented in the Scriptures and taught by the Church. As you study, ask yourself questions. "What do the Scriptures say about the mission of the Church?" Helpful Scriptures include the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20 and these others: Mathew 4:19 and 11: 27-30; Psalm 126: 5-6; Mark 16:15; Luke 10:1, 2; 24: 46 – 48; John 3:16; 17:18; Acts 1:8; 16: 9-12; 1 Corinthians 9:16-25; Ephesians 2:10 and Colossians 2: 6-7.

In writing your Mission statement, consider the following three points:

- What are we as a community of faith supposed to be doing?
- Why has God called our organization into being at this time and in this place?
- Why does He want to see our organization continue to exist?

III. *Be inclusive.* The mission should be stated in a general way so that all the programs/activities of the organization can fit within it. At the same time it must inherently provide boundaries and a clear direction for your organization and its members. All plans and activities should then help your organization achieve its objective. What you see as your mission will never be accomplished in our time here on earth, but a good Mission statement should be developed with a generous heart, in the spirit of magnanimity, and in confidence in Holy Spirit that the plan will serve as a map or compass pointing you in the right direction.

IV. *Be concise.* Keep short, preferably one sentence. It should be clear to the reader why you exist as an organization. This will require planning and study on the part of the leader/leadership to really grasp your reason for existence. It goes to the core of why you are placed here on earth and what is it that you are uniquely able to accomplish.

"A mission statement defines in a paragraph or so any entity's reason for existence. It embodies its philosophies, goals, ambitions and mores. Any entity that attempts to operate without a mission statement runs the risk of wandering through the world without having the ability to verify that it is on its intended course." Missionstatements.com

VISION

Following the Mission statement comes an understanding of the Vision. *"The vision is the incarnation of our mission unique to the local organization."* (Pat O'Meara) A vision statement grows out of your Mission statement and should clearly state what is health or vibrancy for each entity.

That leaders are called to cast vision is apparent throughout the Scriptures. At the same time it is clear that vision is to be tested by the faithful (*sensus fidelium*). Therefore good leaders should consult with others in their parish when making decisions. This, however, does not excuse the pastor or lay leader from taking initiative when it comes to casting a vision. If this is not a gift of a given leader then that leader is compelled by his calling to surround himself with those who have such a gift.

Visioning can be an unpleasant and painful exercise because the process asks people to stretch beyond their comfort zone. This may cause some to believe that their traditions are being threatened and will ultimately disappear. Therefore, it is imperative that those guiding the process help individuals celebrate time honored traditions and respect those forerunners who established and nurtured those traditions.

Leadership should cast traditions as stepping stones encouraging people to open themselves to God creating something new, in and through them and their organization. Just as the present was shaped by people in our past who dared to step out in faith, so too may the future be shaped by people, in our present, who dare to do the same. Central to it all is beginning with Christ.

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Hans Urs von Balthasar explains that *“to honor the tradition does not excuse one from the obligation of beginning everything from the beginning each time, not with Augustine or Thomas or Newman, but with Christ...where the Spirit moves vitally in the Body a continuous, unwearingly process of becoming new is under way.”* Razing the Bastions.

The Scriptures say, *“Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder things of the past. Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it?”* (Isaiah 43:19).

As you cast a Vision, seek to lead people to Jesus and let Jesus lead you to the future.

Your Vision statement:

- Says, “This is what your organization is going to do about the mission to which you have been called”
- Shares with people how your organization will look in the future
- Differentiates how you can be different from the present
- Motivates people to make the effort to realize that future

The vision shows that the desirable future is reasonable to achieve even though it may be challenging. It also convinces people that the envisioned future is not optional but is necessary for the vitality of the organization’s mission.

The Vision statement should be carefully distinguished from the Mission statement.

Mission	Vision
Mission is the calling we have today	Vision is prophetic
Mission statements are broad	Vision statements are narrow
Mission is philosophical	Vision is strategic
Mission is used to inform	Vision is to guide and inspire
Mission is the head	Vision is the heart
Mission states purpose	Vision provides direction
Mission is usually shared throughout the organization	Vision is usually more specific to a particular ministry, project or parish
Mission is doing	Vision is seeing

Vision arises from the few and is shared with the many. Throughout the Scriptures when God desired to utilize His people, he spoke to a leader who then shared with the people. Vision comes from the heart and mind of a leader – a leader whose heart and mind desires God, but such vision must be tested against the *sensus fidelium*. Vision is used to inspire the people to capture what it is that God is calling that organization to accomplish.

As you began after our last article, continue gathering your thoughts in your Planning Journal as well as in your prayer and study of the Scriptures daily.

Suggested Scripture Readings:

Ephesians 5:15-18; Proverbs 16:3; Psalm 20:4; Proverbs 14:8; Luke 14:28-33; Proverbs 13:15; Proverbs 21:5; Proverbs 3:5-7; Psalm 37: 4; Proverbs 16:9; Proverbs 19:21; Ephesians 2:10

As you finalize your Mission statement, begin to envision how your organization will carry out this mission. What will your organization look like? What will it do? Who will it help? Evaluate your leadership, facilities, potential, community, traditions, history and all resources. Ask yourself the question, “If resources of time, space and finances were not an issue, what is it that I would like to see happen here in the next 3, 5, 10 years.” Remove all obstacles from the “dreaming” process. What excites you or would stir the passions of the people? Dare to dream big, yet be aware that it is done according to God’s power using us as His instruments. Challenge people with big dreams. Make it challenging. People yearn to be a part of something challenging and big. They are not interested in doing things that just “anybody can do.” They desire to be a part of something significant. They want to know that the investment of their resources is going to accomplish something that will make a difference – make a difference in their lives, their communities, and their organization. People aspire to greatness. Give them that chance.

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Observe

- What is your organization good at doing?
- What are the unique gifts and abilities of those within your organization?
- Do the activities and programs that we support come from our Mission and Vision or from our History and Tradition?
- What are the needs of your community – the world that your organization is equipped to address?

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 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.
- Begin identifying leaders of organizations and key individuals in the organization that others also identify as leaders – do not just ask the same people, but rather those individuals that exhibit the qualities of leadership that will enable you to develop the mission and vision for your organization; individuals that have the respect of others;

people that are engaged in what you are trying to accomplish; those that have the ability to look at an issue from all sides; those that you know spend time in prayer and study; those that you know that when they speak, others listen. They listen because they trust their values and judgment.

Continue keeping a record of your activities in your Planning Journal.

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

Future Articles:

- I. What is a Strategic Plan
- II. Assembling a Team
- III. Laying the Foundation — Organizing the planning process
- IV. Consensus Building
- V. Charting the Course — Creating the strategic plan
- VI. The Journey Begins — Implementing the strategic plan

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