

Vision & Planning

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Impact

BY NANCY DAVIDGE

“How does a congregation live into its sacred role as a healer?”

That’s the question congregational leaders at St. Luke’s/ San Lucas Episcopal Church in Chelsea, Massachusetts use to guide their ministry. Recently honored by their city for all they do to “advance the cause of Chelsea and its people,” this small church, in a densely populated and economically challenged city, is realizing their mission of living the love of Christ in worship, fellowship, hospitality and service to the community.

From serving as host of the recent ecumenical service of healing in response to the shootings in Charleston, South Carolina to their long running commitment to addressing hunger in their community, the people of St. Luke’s practice a ministry of healing, modeled by both their patron saint, St. Luke, and Jesus.

Central to this ministry is the recognition of the importance of a strong lay and clergy leadership team. “It takes more than a charismatic priest with good ideas,” says St. Luke’s priest Edgar Gutierrez-Duarte. “You also need a good relationship with a strong vestry; working as a team, with constant conversation and a willingness to compromise.”

What are we called to do?

When he arrived at St. Luke’s in 2007, Gutierrez-Duarte found a small mission church that was broken, both financially and spiritually. They’d had 10 difficult years and their initial focus was on survival. He discovered that the church wasn’t particularly relevant to the wider community. Its outreach appeared limited to offering rent-free space to community groups – one of which ran a soup kitchen.

“While offering great worship was important, we knew we needed to be more; we wanted to be relevant in the community, to contribute something,” said Gutierrez-Duarte. “I asked about needs. Chelsea has a large Latino/Hispanic population. We considered offering English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and also talked about what else we might do, how we might be a positive agent for change. During our conversations, I learned that my predecessor had operated an informal food pantry, offering nonperishable food he kept in a small closet to people who were hungry.”

The vestry and congregation decided to take on hunger in their community. At first, the Saturday morning pantry served about 10 families. As the recession deepened, 10 turned to 20, which then grew to over a hundred families. The pantry moved from the closet to a small room. “The congregation was spending approximately \$4,000 a year from their limited budget. I didn’t know much about food pantries and didn’t know I could get help from the Greater Boston Food Bank,” recalls Gutierrez-Duarte.

As the food pantry was growing, the vestry took a look at the soup kitchen operated by a community group in the St. Luke’s church hall

and kitchen. Over the years there had been friction between the group and the congregation; perhaps it was time for the congregation to take this ministry on as an extension of both the food pantry and its commitment to the community.

At the same time, people who used the food pantry and soup kitchen were asking St. Luke’s how they might give back to the church. Perhaps St. Luke’s would consider starting a thrift shop, where they could donate used items for resale? The money could then be used for the food pantry.

Who can we call on for help?

As St. Luke’s was becoming a healthier worshipping community while also living into its commitment to share God’s gifts with the local community, the leadership team recognized they were running the risk of taking on too much. Gutierrez-Duarte and the vestry began to explore options. They learned about – and began working with – area organizations that offered free and lower cost food to area food pantries. They welcomed community members as volunteers in the food pantry and thrift shop. And, they decided to invite other Episcopal churches in their deanery to consider partnering with St. Luke’s by sending volunteers to help cook and

serve free community meals on Saturday morning.

The leadership team knew that some of the suburban parishes in the Mystic Valley deanery might harbor some fear about coming to Chelsea. They took care in their presentation to name this concern as they shared stories related to the impact of their programs on the families who used the food pantry, thrift shop, and soup kitchen. They also shared stories of witness to God’s presence in these ministries. The result? Four congregations signed up – each taking one Saturday a month to cook and prepare the food provided by St. Luke’s. These churches also support St. Luke’s with donations to the thrift shop.

The vestry, exercising their fiduciary oversight of this growing ministry, hired a food pantry coordinator to manage the program while the senior warden took on the role of coordinator of the kitchen partnership. They also established a fund for these outreach ministries, distinct from the funds for worship and programs.

A thriving congregation and...

While St. Luke’s outreach and worship life were thriving, the buildings were failing. Roofs leaked. The basement was damp and moldy, and the hot water icky.

On Saturdays, the building was packed with over 250 people – plus volunteers – coming to St. Luke’s for the food pantry, community meal, and thrift shop. The vestry was faced with the challenge of making their limited and aging space more functional, cost-effective, and welcoming.

In 2011, they applied to the diocese for – and received – a Stokes loan to repair the church roof and to switch from oil to gas heat for the church compound. Once this work was complete, they asked for a second Stokes loan to address additional problems including removing the leaking oil tank left in our basement, repairs to the roofs of the other church buildings, and eliminating the mold problem in the basement.

Soon after receiving this request, then bishop Tom Shaw summoned Gutierrez-Duarte to a meeting. “That was a dark day,” the vicar recalled. Given the state of the church buildings, the bishop recommended selling the aging buildings and moving to a different location in the city to better meet the needs of our congregation.

Gutierrez-Duarte made a case for not moving the church’s operations, stating, “we might as well close, because moving would be so traumatic for the congregation and our program users that we

would lose most of them, among other considerations.” Finding another location in the city with similar access to public transportation would be difficult and costly. The church’s food ministries had good support from other churches in the Mystic Valley Deanery. Then, the conversation took a surprising turn. “Tom, in his particular way, looked at me and said, ‘Edgar, what would you do if you had a million dollars?’ He asked for a proposal, and that’s where things began.”

God’s generosity

A real estate advisory firm was brought in to take a look at St. Luke’s buildings and programs. After considering several options, the firm recommended building a small two-story addition in a 500-square-foot gap between the church and its attached two-story school building. This would provide consolidated, modernized food storage for the food ministries, which would now be grouped together on the lower level, and more space upstairs for offices, classrooms, and bathrooms.

Reconfiguring the existing space would improve flow and create efficiencies. The plan would also upgrade roofing and necessary building systems, add handi-capped accessibility to all levels

of the buildings, and solve the water problem in the basement so it could be reclaimed as a dry and spacious home for the thrift shop.

“In his wisdom, Bishop Shaw in September of 2012 brought the Diocesan Council to St. Luke’s for its meeting, on a Saturday, our busiest day!” Gutierrez-Duarte recalled. “They had to make their way through all this activity, so they really got the full picture of what we were trying to do, but also what we were up against with our buildings.”

The council approved the construction project proposal that day, and in March 2013 approved the \$1.2-million budget, to be funded from proceeds from the sale of closed churches. Work began in April 2014.

“This is a church in a changing community,” said Steve Pierce, the congregational coordinator on the diocesan staff who works with churches that are closing and on other property projects.

“From a diocesan perspective, one of the purposes of the closed church proceeds is to build up ministry and mission. This project represents a major investment by the Episcopal Church in the city of Chelsea. Chelsea is not the only place where such an investment could make an impact, but

it was clearly a compelling one. Here we have this formerly Anglo church nestled in a city that is becoming more and more Hispanic and which has been through incredible economic challenges,” Pierce said.

Ministry continues during construction

It was important to the church – and the community - to keep the food and thrift shop ministries open during construction. During the seven months of construction, only the thrift shop had to temporarily close. The food pantry continued to operate--with volunteers sorting and distributing 3,000 pounds of food a week from the pews of the church’s sanctuary--as did the community meal program, though it has had to simplify its offerings to sandwiches and, during the summer, outdoor barbecues.

The renovated church is more inviting – both aesthetically and practically. There are handicap accessible entrances, opening the sanctuary and the rest of the building to people for whom stairs limit access. Everyone entering the church and its buildings enters space that is clean and beautiful.

Next steps

Today, (June 2015) Gutierrez-Duarte shares there are about 110 people in church on an average Sunday, about a fourth of them Anglo and about three-fourths Hispanic. This represents a slow pattern of growth, from 83 in 2008 to 93 in 2013 and 110 to date in 2015. During the same period pledge units have grown from 30 in 2008 to 47 in 2013 and 60 in 2015.

Gutierrez-Duarte and the vestry are working with a team of diocesan congregational development staff members and consultants to work on a strategic plan that includes building up both leadership capacity and financial stability – challenges that face many congregations, perhaps more so for a small congregation serving lower income people. “People in this congregation give a lot, given their financial resources,” said Gutierrez-Duarte. “Our partner churches are also generous.

“It is certainly our hope, and we are working with the team from the diocese, to take advantage of the curiosity that there is in the community about our project, and its attractiveness, to bring in new people and involve them. We have big plans.”

Nancy Davidge, ECF associate program director and editor of ECF Vital Practices shares St. Luke’s story as told to her by their vicar, **Edgar Gutierrez-Duarte** and supplemented with detail from **Tracy Sukraw’s** November 19, 2014 story on St. Luke’s. <http://www.diomass.org/diocesan-news/12-million-renovation-reinvigorates-episcopal-church-ministry-chelsea>

Try This

In the *Vestry Resource Guide*, (<http://www.episcopalfoundation.org/programs/ecf-publications/vestry-resource-guide>) these questions are offered to help vestries think strategically:

- What are your congregation’s top three ministry strengths?
- How does your mission and vision reflect these strengths?
- What is your congregation’s hopeful vision of the future? What impacts are you striving to achieve?
- What do you understand as the difference between your hopeful vision, your goals related to that vision, and your strategies for achieving those goals?

Resources

- "\$1.2 Million Renovation Reinvigorates Episcopal Church's Ministry in Chelsea" by Tracy J. Sukraw, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, November 19, 2014 <http://www.diomass.org/diocesan-news/12-million-renovation-reinvigorates-episcopal-churchs-ministry-chelsea>
- About Chelsea, Massachusetts http://www.chelseama.gov/Public_Documents/index
- "Call Him Edgar: Father Edgar Has Helped Bring Success, Service to St. Luke's" by Seth Daniel, Chelsea Record, March 5, 2015 <http://www.chelsearecord.com/2015/03/05/call-him-edgarfather-edgar-has-helped-bring-success-service-to-st-lukes/>
- "Five Mystic Valley Congregations Partner to Feed the Hungry in Chelsea," July 2, 2012 <http://www.diomass.org/parish-news/five-mystic-valley-congregations-partner-feed-hungry-chelsea>
- St. Luke's / San Lucas Episcopal Church, Chelsea, Mass. <http://www.lukelucas.org>

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Editor's Letter

Who are we? What is our vision?
Where are we going?

For July, Vestry Papers invites congregations to consider these questions, reflecting on the gifts God has granted to us while also listening – and watching – for what God is calling us to do in our communities. Our offerings include:

- How does a congregation live into its sacred role as a healer? This question remains central to the leaders at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Chelsea, Mass. In "Small Church, Big Impact," Nancy Davidge shares the story of a small congregation who, despite economic challenges, remain committed to following in the footsteps of their patron saint St. Luke by living into his sacred role as a healer.
- "What are we to do with that knowledge?" Ongoing visioning and planning is a key vestry responsibility. In "Why Articulate Your Mission & Vision," an excerpt from the new Vestry Resource Guide, Nancy Davidge and Susan Elliott share a process to help congregational leaders and faith communities discover what God is calling them to do.
- "Why Strategic Planning" by Linda Buskirk invites congregational leaders to consider discerning God's call as a community through prayerful reflection and conversation on the gifts God has uniquely provided your congregation and the needs that exist in the world around you. Also available in Spanish.
- En "El amor incondicional de Dios," Alex Montes-Vela nos habla de cómo podemos compartir las Buenas Nuevas del amor incondicional de Dios con todo el mundo – dejando que toquen y experimenten las cosas "brillosas" que a menudo cuidamos demasiado y nos ayuda a entender que sólo dejando que la generosidad de Dios nos quebrante podemos compartir ese amor a los demás. Also available in English./ In "God Helps Us to See," Alex Montes-Vela reminds us that it is through our brokenness that we can truly see what God is calling us to do – and be – in the world. Also available in English.
- Who Sets the Vision for the Congregation? Nancy Davidge shares responses from congregational leaders – lay and ordained – from across our church.
- In "Growing Our Church," Estela Lopez shares the story of the rebirth of a struggling church in Texas. A shared vision and inviting all members to become leaders are central to the success of this ministry. Also available in Spanish.
- "From Vision to Action" introduces vestries to the concept of strategic thinking; an effective way to help congregations incorporate their vision into action. In this excerpt from the new Vestry Resource Guide, Nancy Davidge and Susan Elliott offer strategies for shifting a strategic planning process to the more nimble and dynamic strategic thinking model.

- En “Liderazgo multilingüe y feligresías multiculturales/ Multilingual Leadership and Multicultural Congregations” por Sandra Montes, Silvestre Romero comparte sus pensamientos y experiencia de trabajo con feligresías multiculturales, así como sobre la identidad episcopal y los retos que se enfrentan. Además, comparte una fórmula para ayudar a las congregaciones a desempeñarse exitosamente en feligresías bilingües. Also available in English.

It’s my hope that these Vestry Papers stories and ideas might spark a conversation at a vestry or other leadership meeting and perhaps provide a catalyst for looking at your own situation in a different way.

Each Vestry Papers article includes a practical application that you might try at an upcoming vestry meeting. You’ll also find a list of the resources related to the topic. If you have a resource you’d like to share, please email me with the link or

add it to the site using the Your Turn feature.

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Faithfully,

Nancy

Nancy Davidge

PS: To make it easier to find the resources offered through *ECF Vital Practices*, please consider adding a link to ECF Vital Practices to your website. Here’s how: Using your websites ‘add a link’ tool, insert our full URL – <http://www.ecfvp.org/>.

PPS: Do you live in an area with limited Internet access? If you have a smart phone, consider browsing ECF Vital Practices from your mobile device; the site has been optimized for smart phones

which makes it easier to search for content.

Why Articulate Your Mission & Vision?

BY NANCY DAVIDGE AND SUSAN ELLIOTT

Vestries today need to see beyond the quick, technical fix and tackle the more complex issues that ultimately can strengthen the congregation. That slower, more difficult work of transformational leadership requires a shared understanding of what God is calling the faith community to do. And the path to that shared purpose begins with these questions: Why? Why are we here, in this particular place? Why do we do what we do? Like inquisitive two-year-olds, we ask these broad questions that will eventually to the real questions: Where is Jesus in all this? What is he calling us to do?

Exploring these questions together is life giving. It is a way to discover a clear understanding of your church's work and hope for the future. Shared understanding of spiritual purpose has the power to guide leadership and energize the congregation. It is transforming. In our work with congregations we see abundant evidence that the prayerful consideration of mission and vision can empower Episcopal communities of faith to embrace the challenges and possibilities of this time.

We see this in places like St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, where congregation-wide conversations led by the vestry and rector have developed a vision for their Christian life, "The Way of Jesus." Its eight themes—story, prayer, simplicity, discernment, reconciliation, hospitality, generosity, and gratitude—provide touchstones for St. Matthew's life and ministry and represent its way of being Christ in the world. <http://www.stmatthewsmn.org>

We see it in western Massachusetts, too, where the catastrophic expense of repairing a collapsed church wall and another congregation's call to pursue vital ministries led to the creation of a new congregation, Grace Church, formed from the members of St. James', Great Barrington, and St. George's, Lee. Both congregations sold buildings that were sapping their energy and resources and created a new, combined faith community that meets and worships in a public social hall. Energized and renewed, Grace's members run two food pantries and a community garden—bringing Christ's love and care to

the need they see around them. <http://graceberkshires.org>

Discerning Mission & Vision

The Episcopal Church Foundation defines mission as what God is calling your congregation to do. We understand vision as a hopeful picture of the impact of your mission on the church and world in the future. Well aware of the tendency to spend too much time crafting beautifully worded mission and vision statements—and not enough time on implementation—we encourage vestries to remember that these statements are meant to serve, support, and inspire the congregation. They should not be static but should be subject to ongoing discernment and conversation (and perhaps never more than 85 percent perfected). It is vitally important that they reflect the faith community's shared understanding of its call and the imagined impact of its life and work in the future.

The Vestry's Role

Ongoing attention to mission and vision is critical as vestries navigate the complex challenges and

opportunities before them, and these should be a part of every vestry meeting. That big-picture work gives each member a chance to step back and see the whole of the community's life in the light of God's call. Some vestries are already doing this, but others leave that deep, foundational work of discernment for retreats, if they address it at all. If this is true for your vestry, begin slowly. Introduce a short period of prayer and Bible study at the beginning of your meetings. It may take a while, but you'll begin to see connections between your church's life today and the ancient stories of God's people.

If you've already done some work on mission and vision, dust it off, and spend some time discussing it at each meeting. You may find that it no longer fits or that it should be realigned to meet the needs and changes within and beyond your church. If you haven't worked to develop a clear mission and vision or if you stopped at a mission statement and never considered a vision for your future, now is the time to start.

The important thing is to consider what you're doing, why you're doing it, and where it is leading you, being mindful to listen carefully for the Spirit's guidance along the way. Spending time in

this way at the start of meetings connects the budget, staff, building, and programmatic items to God's call to your faith community. It grounds your efforts as you confront issues and set goals, and it helps you think strategically.

If you are just beginning this work, there are various ways to go about it. You may want to form a small task force made up of lay, clergy, and staff leaders to design and lead the process. To keep the vestry engaged, it's a good idea to include the rector and a warden or vestry member on that team. Alternatively, you may decide to work with a consultant or facilitator. You may also decide that a simpler approach led by vestry members and the rector is best for your faith community.

Engaging the Congregation

Discernment of mission and vision doesn't end with the vestry. It offers an opportunity for conversation in the congregation about its day-to-day life and future. This is an important conversation to have annually (or every two or three years) to help renew and refresh your shared identity, purpose, and direction.

Whatever your process, you'll want to give people a chance to talk about what the church is doing now and what they

sense God is calling them to do. You'll need to cultivate an open and accepting environment that encourages deep listening and values everyone's input. Conversation should consider your congregation's own life and mission and also the needs and opportunities in the surrounding neighborhood, city, or town.

The idea is to find out where there is meaning and purpose in your life together and to imagine how it will affect the future. Your mission—what God has called you to do—can be stated simply. It is a description of what your church does in your specific location within the larger community. Here are a few examples:

"As a community of faith we gather for meaningful worship; form faithful disciples; serve those in need; use our time, talents and treasure in service to God's kingdom; welcome everyone."

"Sharing Jesus with neighbors"

"While St. Matthew's may seem like several other churches in the Twin Cities area, we are particularly characterized by:

- *A desire to go deeper spiritually*
- *A global perspective*
- *Artistic expression*
- *Hospitality*
- *Community leadership"*

It is important when discussing mission to identify your ministry strengths. They are a bridge to the future and to discerning vision. You might ask:

- What are we doing well?
- What do we do that is distinctive or unique?
- How do we welcome and engage the community outside our church?
- How are we an asset in our local area?

With your ministry strengths defined, the next task is to imagine the ways your presence and mission can impact the future. Consider together:

- What do we hope for our faith community?
- What do we hope for our neighboring community?
- What are the needs, hopes, and fears in the wider community?
- How will faithful attention to our mission build our church community in the future and share Christ's love in the world?

It's okay to dream big. The Christian life is all about extravagant hope.

Less important is wordsmithing a beautifully crafted vision statement. Instead, consider reality-based answers to questions about

your congregation's strengths and future.

In some ways, discerning your church's mission and vision is playing catch-up with the Spirit, which is always out ahead of us. If you listen well and faithfully, you'll find important insights into God's presence in your life and ministry—often from unexpected places and people. As you and your congregation explore your church's call and its hopeful future, you will discover strengths and passions, challenges, and dreams. From these come the shared understanding of your faith community's values, purpose, and call, which will enable your church to embrace each challenge and opportunity with courage and hope.

*This article is an excerpt from the 2015 edition of the Vestry Resource Guide, an ECF publication by **Nancy Davidge**, ECF associate program director and editor, ECF Vital Practices and church communications writer and consultant **Susan Elliott**. The Vestry Resource Guide helps vestry members and clergy work together to become an effective, even transformational leadership team. With information and recommendations for congregations of all shapes and sizes, this is an essential tool to help vestries focus on what God is calling them*

to do in the world. Available in English <http://www.forward-movement.org/Products/1951/the-vestry-resource-guide.aspx> or Spanish, <http://www.forward-movement.org/Products/1773/guacuteta-de-recursos.aspx> and in both print and eBook formats.

Try This

What are your ministry strengths?

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Once you have begun to define your strengths and vision, consider one or two strategic goals that would bring your congregation into alignment with your vision.

Resources

- "A Foundation of Strengths" by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices, January 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/a-foundation-of-strengths/>
- Appreciative Inquiry: The Four Step Process and Participant Agenda, ECF Vital Practices' Your Turn Resource <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/appreciative-inquiry-at-st-marys-manhattanville/>
- "Becoming Grace" by Deborah Johansen Harris and Frances A. Hills, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers, July 2013 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vision-planning/becoming-grace/>
- Clergy Leadership Institute website <http://www.clergyleadership.com>
- "Do You Really Need A Mission Statement?" by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices' March 2, 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/do-you-really-need-a-mission-statement-2/>
- "Ongoing Discernment: The Way of Jesus" by Blair Pogue, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers, January 2014 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vestries-listen-to-gods-call/ongoing-discernment-the-way-of-jesus/> and The Way of Jesus resource <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/the-way-of-jesus/>
- Strategic Thinking for Congregations, an ECF webinar <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/strategic-thinking-for-congregations/>
- "The Power of a Shared Nightmare" by Miguel Escobar, ECF Vital Practices, January 29, 2013 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/the-power-of-a-shared-nightmare/>

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Why Strategic Planning?

BY LINDA BUSKIRK

I receive some pretty interesting responses when I tell people that I facilitate strategic planning for congregations. By far the most frequent response is a blank stare followed by a polite, “Oh, that must be interesting.” Sometimes an enthusiastic affirmation about the value of strategic planning is offered. Less frequently, fortunately, are those who stare as if they suddenly imagine horns growing out of my head as they question applying corporate gobbledygook to a community of faith.

A simple definition of strategic planning is setting priorities to enable a desired outcome to be achieved. It’s about setting a goal and making decisions and taking actions to achieve it. The goal is our vision, and the actions are our strategies.

Vision provides direction. This is valuable for congregations because members are each traveling their own diverse faith journeys. Out of our individuality, God calls us into community to seek God and to bring others to God’s Kingdom. The church community to which we are called is special because God has uniquely assembled its members

and many other gifts to use to seek and evangelize.

In congregations, members can run off in scattered directions, or remain complacent in our pews just having our own needs satisfied. Vision calls us to follow a particular path, together. Without vision, “the people are unrestrained.” (I love that translation of Proverbs 29:18 in the New American Standard Bible). Unrestrained might sound fun, but the point is to be obedient in following God’s direction so that God’s will is accomplished.

Discerning God’s call as a community means engaging as many members as possible in intentional, prayerful reflection on the gifts God has uniquely provided your congregation and the needs that exist in the world around you.

Such an intentional journey can be led and organized internally. Sometimes church leaders prefer an outside facilitator skilled in listening and guiding. The Episcopal Church Foundation has begun a new initiative, Strategic Solutions, to walk alongside congregations as they discern both vision and strategies for realizing this vision. ECF

customizes the process to fit the unique culture and conditions of each congregation, diocese, school, camp, or organization.

Whether you use an outside facilitator or coordinate your congregation’s journey internally, the important thing is to be intentional about understanding your congregation’s ministry potential. Lay and clergy leadership should be committed to participate in the process. Later, they must also commit to use the vision as a tool for strategic decision-making.

Congregational strategic planning heightens a sense of shared identity and purpose. May your vision be focused and your strategies be blessed!

Linda Buskirk is a capital campaign and strategic solutions consultant for the Episcopal Church Foundation. She brings to ECF diverse experience as a consultant to social-profit agencies, specializing in board governance and strategic development. Linda has a masters degree in public affairs from Indiana University. She lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where she and husband Ron are members of

Trinity Episcopal Church. She is a graduate of the Congregational Development Institute of the Diocese of Northern Indiana. Linda serves her parish and diocese in many capacities, including roles in stewardship and communications ministries.

Try This

Identifying the ministry strengths of your congregation is an important part of the strategic thinking process and one that should involve broad participation. Schedule some small group discussions and invite members of the congregation to share a church related experience that is special to them. Questions that invite stories include:

- Tell me about a time when you experienced a sense of community at St. John's.
- Tell me about a time when St. Anne's was at its best in representing Christ. What made that possible?
- An apostle means someone who is sent forth. What about your experience at Trinity Church has prepared you to be an apostle in the world today?

Questions can be asked and answered in a variety of settings, including a facilitated discussion where people are invited to share their answers at their own tables,

and then report their stories to the entire gathering. Or you can post questions on flip chart paper and invite people to write their answers over a period of a few weeks. It is important to record answers so the vestry can then review them and identify trends in the answers that reveal your congregation's ministry strengths.

Resources

- Holy Shift: Strategic Thinking for Congregations, an ECF webinar <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/holy-shift-strategic-thinking-for-congregations/>
- Strategic Thinking: How our biases impact our parish's decisions by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices, May 21, 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/strategic-thinking-how-our-biases-impact-our-parishs-decisions/>
- The Difference Between Mission and Vision by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices, January 13, 2012 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/the-difference-between-mission-and-vision/>
- Vestry Resource Guide <http://www.episcopalfoundation.org/programs/ecf-publications/vestry-resource-guide>
- Vision for Impact, Not Just

Change, by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers, July 2014 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/leading-change/vision-for-impact-not-just-change/>

- Vision and Planning, an ECF webinar <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/vision-and-planning/>

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¿Por qué planificar estratégicamente?

POR LINDA BUSKIRK

Recibo algunas reacciones muy interesantes cuando le digo a la gente que facilito la planificación estratégica de las feligresías. La reacción más frecuente es un rostro carente de expresión seguido con un cortés, "Oh, eso debe ser interesante". A veces me ofrecen una afirmación del valor de la planificación estratégica. Menos frecuentemente, por suerte, están los que me miran como si de repente me hubieran salido cuernos en la cabeza y cuestionan la aplicación de jerga corporativa a una comunidad de fe.

Una definición simple de la planificación estratégica es: sentar prioridades para permitir que se cumpla un objetivo. Es sobre fijar un objetivo y tomar decisiones y acción para alcanzarlo. El objetivo es nuestra visión y la acción es nuestra estrategia.

La visión proporciona dirección. Esto es valioso para las feligresías porque cada uno de los miembros está viajando por su propia y diversa jornada de fe. Desde nuestra individualidad, Dios nos llama a formar una comunidad para buscarlo a Él y para traer a otros a Su Reino. La comunidad eclesíástica a la que estamos llamados es espe-

cial porque Dios reunió de manera única a sus miembros y a muchos otros dones para ser empleados en la búsqueda y la evangelización.

En las feligresías, los miembros pueden diseminarse en direcciones diversas o permanecer complacientes en los bancos de las iglesias sin otro anhelo que satisfacer sus propias necesidades. La visión nos llama a seguir una senda específica, juntos. Sin visión, "el pueblo se desenfrena", Proverbios 29:18. Estar desenfrenado puede sonar divertido, pero el objetivo es ser obediente en seguir las directivas de Dios para que se haga Su voluntad.

Discernir el llamado de Dios como comunidad significa reunir el mayor número posible de miembros en una reflexión intencional y en oración sobre los dones únicos que Dios proporcionó a la feligresía y sobre las necesidades existentes en el mundo que nos rodea.

Una jornada intencional de esta índole se puede liderar y organizar internamente. A veces los líderes de la iglesia prefieren contar con un facilitador externo experto en escuchar y guiar. La Fundación de

la Iglesia Episcopal lo proporciona mediante su programa Strategic Solutions. La ECF adapta el proceso a la cultura y las condiciones únicas de cada feligresía, diócesis, escuela, campamento, etc.

Ya sea si usa un facilitador externo o coordina la jornada de su feligresía internamente, lo más importante de todo es ser intencional sobre la comprensión del potencial de ministerio de la feligresía. Los liderazgos laico y clerical deben estar comprometidos a participar en el proceso. Posteriormente también deben comprometerse a usar la visión como una herramienta para la toma de decisiones estratégica.

La planificación a nivel de feligresía expande el sentido de identidad y propósito compartidos. ¡Que su visión esté centrada y su estrategia esté bendecida!

Linda Buskirk es asesora de la campaña de capital y de Soluciones Estratégicas de la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal. Aporta a la ECF una diversa experiencia como asesora de entidades sin ánimo de lucro, especialmente en los ámbitos de gobernanza de la junta y de

desarrollo estratégico. Linda posee una maestría en asuntos públicos de la Universidad de Indiana. Vive en Fort Wayne, Indiana, donde ella y su esposo Ron son miembros de Trinity Episcopal Church. Es graduada del Congregational Development Institute de la Diócesis de Northern Indiana. Linda sirve a su parroquia y diócesis en muchas capacidades, incluyendo en los ministerios de mayor- domía y comunicaciones.

Pruebe lo siguiente

La identificación de los puntos fuertes del ministerio de su feligresía, que debe contar con una amplia participación, es una parte importante del proceso de pensamiento estratégico. Organice varias discusiones de grupos pequeños e invite a los miembros de la feligresía a que compartan una experiencia relacionada con la iglesia que haya sido especial para ellos. Algunas de las preguntas que invitan narraciones son:

- Cuéntenme sobre alguna vez en que experimentaron un sentido de comunidad en St. John's.
- Cuéntenme sobre alguna vez en que St. Anne's representó muy bien Cristo. ¿Qué hizo que eso fuera posible?
- Apóstol significa alguien que se envía al mundo. ¿Qué me pueden decir sobre la manera en que su experiencia en

Trinity Church los preparó para ser apóstoles en el mundo actual?

Estas preguntas se pueden presentar en una variedad de entornos, incluyendo una conversación facilitada en la que se invita a la gente a que comparta sus respuestas en sus propias mesas y que después informe sus narraciones a toda la reunión. O puede poner preguntas en un papelógrafo e invitar a la gente a que escriba sus respuestas a lo largo de un período de varias semanas. Es importante dejar constancia de las respuestas, para que la junta parroquial las pueda repasar e identificar tendencias en las respuestas que revelen los puntos fuertes del ministerio de su feligresía.

Recursos

- Holy Shift: Strategic Thinking for Congregations, un webinar de la ECF <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/holy-shift-strategic-thinking-for-congregations/>
- Strategic Thinking: How our biases impact our parish's decisions por Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices, 21 de mayo de 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/strategic-thinking-how-our-biases-impact-our-parishes-decisions/>
- The Difference Between Mission

and Vision por Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices, 13 de enero de 2012 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/the-difference-between-mission-and-vision/>

- Guía de recursos para la junta parroquial <http://www.forwardmovement.org/Products/1773/guacuttea-de-recursos.aspx>
- Vision for Impact, Not Just Change, por Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers, julio de 2014 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/leading-change/vision-for-impact-not-just-change/>
- Vision and Planning, un webinar de la ECF <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/vision-and-planning/>

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El amor incondicional de Dios

POR ALEX MONTES-VELA

Cuando fui ordenado sacerdote episcopal, la comunidad en la que estaba sirviendo, St. Paul's Episcopal Church en Waco, Texas, me regaló un hermoso juego de comunión portátil. El pequeño cáliz, la patena, el hostiario y vinajera de vidrio venían en una brillante caja de caoba. Puse la caja en un lugar visible en mi oficina, donde pudiera admirarla y quitarle el polvo a menudo, para que siempre estuviera como el día en que la recibí. Cuando iba a visitar a los que estaban enfermos o en un hogar de ancianos, llevaba la caja con orgullo, teniendo cuidado de no rayarla. Cuando regresaba a mi oficina, la volvía a poner en su lugar especial, le quitaba el polvo, la lustraba y después me sentaba a admirarla.

Años después me desempeñaba como sacerdote interino en la Iglesia Episcopal San Francisco de Asís en Austin, Texas, que se encontraba a unas treinta millas al sur de Manor (pronunciado "máinor"), la ciudad donde había sido enviado a plantar una iglesia. En San Francisco de Asís oficié muchas bodas, bautizos y quinceañeras. Un viernes por la tarde, una mujer vino a la oficina de la iglesia

y frenéticamente me preguntó si podía officiar la quinceañera de su hija el sábado (¡el día siguiente!) en su casa situada en un pueblo al sur de Austin (¡aún más lejos que Manor!). Ella quería que su hija recibiera una bendición especial en su día especial. Ya tenía una boda y otra quinceañera programadas para ese sábado, pero a pesar de mis argumentos la señora insistió. Así que asentí irritablemente, pero sin que me faltara mi sonrisa sacerdotal.

Ese sábado por la mañana decidí que la manera más fácil de llevar la Comunión a la quinceañera era empleando mi juego de comunión portátil. Así que lo cogí de ese lugar especial en la oficina de mi casa donde se veía tan brillante como el día en que lo recibí.

Mientras caminaba de mi carro a la oficina de la Iglesia Episcopal San Francisco de Asís, con mi Libro de Oración Común bajo el brazo y mis vestiduras sacerdotales bajo el otro, sentí que mi juego de comunión portátil se me deslizaba de la mano. Todo parecía pasar como en cámara lenta y vi la caja de caoba estrellarse contra la superficie del esta-

cionamiento, las bisagras caer y salir volando el cáliz, la patena y la vinajera de vidrio. ¡No lo podía creer! Sorprendentemente, la vinajera de vidrio no se rompió y el cáliz y la patena no se rayaron mucho. Sin embargo, yo estaba abatido. Después de la boda y de la quinceañera en San Francisco de Asís ese sábado por la tarde, caminaba malhumorado hacia mi carro para ir a la casa de la señora para la otra quinceañera. Era un tórrido día de verano tejano y estaba sudando. "¡Más vale que aprecien todo lo que tuve que hacer para esta quinceañera!" mascullé.

Al manejar por un laberíntico parque de casas rodantes en un lugar aislado, pude ver a la distancia unos globos de colores. Al acercarme vi sillas y una mesa preparadas para que sirvieran de altar. Algo me pasó en ese momento: se me partió el corazón. Pensé que iba llevando las mercancías, las cosas brillantes, las cosas santas, pero era esa familia la que me dio la bienvenida con las Buenas Nuevas de ese Dios que "amó tanto al mundo, que dio a su Hijo unigénito, para que todo aquel que cree en él no muera,

sino que tenga vida eterna” (S. Juan 3:16). Me di cuenta de que mi enojo por la rotura del juego de comunión portátil no tenía sentido. Me di cuenta de que tenía que romperse para que pudiera compartirlo, con sus contenidos brillosos, libremente. Me di cuenta de que hacía falta que se me partiera el corazón para poder compartir libremente las Buenas Nuevas y las cosas brillosas que tenemos como iglesia.

¿Por qué cuento esta anécdota? Cuento esta anécdota porque es parte fundamental de la obra que estamos haciendo y de la cultura y la atmósfera que creamos en la Iglesia Episcopal St. Mary Magdalene en Manor, Texas (SMM). Entendemos que hemos sido llamados a compartir esas cosas “brillosas” con todos, a compartir con todos lo que hemos recibido de la generosidad incondicional de Dios.

La mayoría de los que se reunieron en mi casa cuando empezamos SMM, a principios de 2010, no habían asistido regularmente – o nunca -- a un servicio religioso. Muchos de ellos habían tenido vidas difíciles. Nos reunimos en la sala de mi casa y la mesa de centro se convirtió en altar. A los niños les atraían los objetos brillosos en el “altar” y a menudo se acercaban a ellos para tocarlos y abrirlos. Los padres se asustaban,

pero yo les decía que estaba bien. Me daba la oportunidad de enseñarles lo que eran esos objetos brillosos y de decirles que estaban libremente a su disposición, y que Dios es un Dios accesible y generoso.

En agosto de 2010 este grupo de latinos/hispanos (con la excepción de mi esposa, Thi, que nació en Vietnam), en su mayoría de primera generación en Estados Unidos e incluso algunos indocumentados, estábamos preparando un espacio en la cafetería de la Escuela Secundaria de Manor para compartir las Buenas Nuevas que habíamos recibido de Dios con la comunidad local. Durante siete meses nos habíamos reunido en mi casa afinando nuestros oídos al sonido de un servicio religioso en el que la liturgia, la música y el sermón eran en inglés y en español. Muchos de los participantes no habían tenido nunca una experiencia de esa índole y se sentían incómodos. Sin embargo, la generosidad de Dios nos había quebrantado y sabíamos que teníamos que hacer ajustes a lo que estábamos acostumbrados, para hacer que las Buenas Nuevas y las cosas brillosas llegaran a más gente que sólo nosotros.

Fue este mismo quebrantamiento que un par de años después inspiró a lo que se estaba convirtiendo en una comunidad

diversa de SMM a que diariamente pusiera equipamiento, carpas, mesas y sillas en un parque local durante una semana para celebrar nuestra Escuela Bíblica de Vacaciones. Soportaron el agobiante calor tejano de fines de julio porque querían compartir lo que habían recibido: las Buenas Nuevas de la generosidad de Dios. Les recuerdo que estas eran personas que no habían asistido a la iglesia anteriormente. Incluso hoy en día, casi el 88% de los que pasaron a formar parte de la comunidad de SMM no habían asistido a una iglesia anteriormente o habían dejado de asistir a ella hacía años.

Fue interesante que cuando nos mudamos a nuestro nuevo campus y nuevos edificios a mediados de diciembre del 2014, después de habernos reunido en la cafetería de la Escuela Secundaria Manor por cuatro años y medio, los que en el pasado habían sido parte de una iglesia se pusieron sus sombreros de “piadosos”, algo que no se habían puesto cuando nos reuníamos en la escuela. Parecía que el ambiente y la cultura que habíamos establecido en la escuela no coincidían con nuestro “nuevo” medio. Pedían cambios tales como nuevos requisitos de vestimenta y cambios en el horario de nuestros servicios religiosos, para que pudiéramos ser más correctos, más

complacientes. Esto me dio la oportunidad de recordar a toda la feligresía que SMM había sido plantada por personas que no asistían a servicios religiosos y que anteriormente no habían sido parte de una comunidad de fe, y que en el pasado no sólo se habían sentido juzgados e inoportunos en la iglesia, sino que además que les habían hecho sentir que no eran lo suficientemente buenos como para tener acceso a las cosas “brilloses”. Además, les dije que era importante recordar que lo que nos acerca a Dios es nuestro quebrantamiento colectivo, no lo que tenemos puesto cuando nos reunimos o hacer lo que es “debido”.

Ahora tenemos más cosas “brilloses” (un hermoso edificio de iglesia, oficinas y aulas sobre una colina en un solar de 23 acres) que recibimos de un Dios generoso y tenemos la oportunidad de compartir todo ello con todos y de anunciar, tal como María Magdalena anunció a los discípulos de Jesús, “¡He visto al Señor!” (S. Juan 20:18).

Alex Montes-Vela es el pastor fundador de una comunidad multiétnica y bilingüe, St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church en Manor, Texas (un suburbio al nor-este de Austin), que comenzó en su casa. Después de reunirse en la

cafetería de la Escuela Secundaria Manor por cuatro años y medio, St. Mary Magdalene se mudó recientemente a su propio campus con feligreses que en su mayoría no habían sido parte de una comunidad de fe en el pasado. Alex está casado con Thi y tienen tres hijos: Thanh (director de banda en una escuela secundaria), Alissa (una maestra de matemáticas de escuela secundaria) y Laurita (estudiante de tercer año en la Universidad de Texas).

Recursos

- Bells for Charleston (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wz03GzhzfQ4>
- *God Gave the Growth Church Planting in The Episcopal Church*, Susan Brown Snook, Morehouse Publishing, junio de 2015 <https://www.churchpublishing.org/products/index.cfm?fuseaction=productDetail&productID=10104>
- Groundbreaking (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QJ8GS4Nxjg>
- La traila (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9pmju02VFw>

- Lessons for all Churches from Church Planting, un webinar de la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/lessons-for-all-churches-from-church-planting/>
- Looking Back and Forward (video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6phjax7yxY>
- St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church, Manor, Texas <http://iamsmm.com>
- St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church, Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/iamsmm>
- St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church, Instagram <https://instagram.com/iamsmm/>
- St. Mary Magdalene on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/ManorSMM>

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God Helps Us to See

BY ALEX MONTES-VELA

When I was ordained an Episcopal priest, the community I was serving, St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Waco, Texas, gave me a beautiful portable communion set. The small silver chalice, paten, host box, and glass cruet were all contained in a shiny mahogany case. I placed it in a visible spot in my office, where I could admire it. When I made pastoral visits to those who were homebound or at a nursing home, I proudly carried it, being careful not to get any scratches or dents on it. When I returned to my office, I would place it in that special spot, dust and shine it, and then sit back to admire it.

Years later, I was serving as the interim priest at Iglesia Episcopal San Francisco de Asís in Austin, Texas, about 30 miles south from Manor (pronounced "maynor") where I had been sent to plant a church. At San Francisco de Asís I officiated at many weddings, baptisms, and quinceañeras. Late one Friday afternoon, a woman stopped by the church's office, and frantically asked me if I could officiate her daughter's quinceañera on Saturday (the next day!) at her home in a town south of Austin (even further from Manor!).

She wanted her daughter to have a special blessing on her special day. I had a wedding and another quinceañera scheduled for Saturday, but in between my excuses, she insisted. So I irritably agreed, with a priestly smile of course.

That Saturday morning I decided that the easiest way to have Holy Communion at the quinceañera was to use my portable communion set. I grabbed it from the special spot in my home office where it sat as shiny and new looking as on the day I received it.

Walking from my car to the church office at San Francisco de Asís, my Libro de Oración Común under one arm, my vestments under the other, I felt my communion set slip from my hand. Everything seemed to go in slow motion: I saw the shiny mahogany case hit the hard parking lot surface, the hinges fall off, and chalice, paten, and cruet fly out. I couldn't believe it! Amazingly, the glass cruet didn't break, and the chalice and paten didn't get too many scratches. Nevertheless, I was crushed. After the wedding and quinceañera at the church later that afternoon, I walked angrily

to my car to drive to the woman's house for the other quinceañera. It was a hot Texas summer day and I was sweating. "They better appreciate that I'm going through all this trouble to do this quinceañera!" I murmured under my breath.

As I maneuvered the maze like streets in an isolated trailer park, I saw colorful balloons in the distance. As I got closer I could see chairs, and a table set up to be the altar. Something happened to me at that moment; my heart was broken. I thought I was bringing the goods, the shiny things, the holy things, but it was this family who welcomed me with the Good News of that God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). I realized that my anger for the broken communion set didn't make any sense. I realized it had to be broken in order that I may share it, and the shiny things in it, freely. I realized that I had to be broken in order to share the Good News, and the shiny things that we as a church have, freely.

Why am I telling you this story? I'm

telling you this story because it is foundational to the work that we are doing, and the culture and atmosphere that we have established at St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church in Manor, Texas (SMM). We understand that we are called to share those “shiny” things with all, to share what we have received from God’s generosity with all, no strings attached.

The majority of the people who met in my house in early 2010 when we began SMM had not attended a church service on a regular basis or at all. Most had rough backgrounds. We met in my living room, and the coffee table became the altar. The children would be attracted to the shiny things on the “altar” and often would reach to touch them, to open them. The parents would freak out, but I assured them that it was okay. It gave me the opportunity to teach what these shiny things were and that they were freely available to them, and that God is an approachable and generous God.

In August 2010 this group of Latinos/Hispanics (and my wife, Thi, who was born in Vietnam), the majority being first generation Latinos/Hispanics, and some who were undocumented, found ourselves setting up equipment in the cafeteria of the Manor High School, preparing the space

to share the Good News we had received from God with the surrounding community. For seven months we gathered in my house, training our ears to the sound of a service where the liturgy, music, and sermon was done in both English and Spanish. For many in the group this was the first experience of this kind and it was uncomfortable. However, God’s generosity had broken us and we knew that adjustments had to be made to what we were accustomed in order that the Good News, and the Church’s shiny things, be made available to more people than just us.

It was this same brokenness that a couple years later pushed what was becoming a diverse community of SMM to set up and take down equipment, tents, tables and chairs in a local park every day for a week for our Vacation Bible School. They endured the brutal Texas late afternoon July heat because they wanted to share what they had received, the Good News of God’s generosity. Let me remind you that these were people who did not attend church before. Even today, approximately 88% of those who have become part of the SMM community, did not attend church before, or had stopped attending for several years.

It was interesting that when we

moved to our new church in December 2014, after meeting at the Manor High School cafeteria for four and a half years, people who had in the past been part of churches put on their “churchy” hats, which they had not worn while we met at the school. For them, it seemed that the atmosphere and culture that we had established at the school did not match our new surroundings. These members asked for changes such as a new dress code, a change in service times, what they believed to be proper for a consecrated church building.

These requests provided an opportunity to remind the entire congregation that SMM had been planted by people who did not attend church services and were not part of a faith community before, and who in the past had felt judged and not welcomed at church, that they were not good enough to have access to the “shiny” things. And, that it was important to remember that it is our shared brokenness – rather than what we wear, when we meet, or someone’s expectation of what is “proper” – that brings us closer to God.

Now that we have more “shiny” things (a beautiful church building, and offices and classrooms, which sit on a hill in a 23-acre property) which we have received

from a God who is generous, we have an opportunity to share it all with all and announce, just like Mary Magdalene announced to Jesus' disciples, "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18).

Alex Montes-Vela is the founding pastor of a multiethnic and bilingual community, St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church in Manor, Texas (a suburb north-east of Austin), which began in his home. After meeting at the Manor High School cafeteria for four and a half years, St. Mary Magdalene, a majority of whose congregants were new to any faith community, recently moved to its own campus. Alex is married to Thi, and they have three adult children: Thanh (a high school band director), Alissa (a middle school math teacher) and Laurita (a junior at the University of Texas).

Resources

- Bells for Charleston (video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wz03GzhzfQ4>
- *God Gave the Growth Church Planting in The Episcopal Church*, Susan Brown Snook, Morehouse Publishing, junio de 2015 <https://www.churchpublishing.org/products/index.cfm?fuseaction=productDetail&productID=10104>
- Groundbreaking (video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QJ8GS4Nxjg>
- La traila (video)
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- Lessons for all Churches from Church Planting, un webinar de la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/lessons-for-all-churches-from-church-planting/>
- Looking Back and Forward (video):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6phjax7yxY>
- St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church, Manor, Texas <http://iamsmm.com>
- St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church, Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/iamsmm>
- St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church, Instagram <https://instagram.com/iamsmm/>
- St. Mary Magdalene on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/ManorSMM>

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Who Sets the Vision?

BY NANCY DAVIDGE

The catechism in The Book of Common Prayer says that the mission of the Church is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” What does this look like at the local level – and who in the congregation or faith community sets this vision?

This question has been on my mind for months. It’s a central focus of our work at the Episcopal Church Foundation and a major theme in the recently revised Vestry Resource Guide. (<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/programs/ecf-publications/vestry-resource-guide>) In a recent conversation, a colleague shared this blog post (<https://www.faithandleadership.com/john-ed-mathison-vision-leader-and-whole>) in which Methodist pastor John Ed Mathison responds to a question, posed by a new pastor: “Does vision for leadership in the local church come through the pastor or through the congregation? Or is there some other third, fourth, or even fifth option?” (<https://www.faithandleadership.com/tom-arthur-does-vision-come-leader-or-people>)

In both posts, the authors frame their response within the context

of the United Methodist church polity. While Episcopal and Methodist churches have common roots, there are differences in polity and practice. Our Episcopal polity is that lay people, clergy, and bishops make all major decisions at every level: denominational, diocesan, and parish.

This got us thinking: How might leaders of Episcopal congregations answer this question:

Does vision for leadership in the local church come through the pastor or through the congregation? Or is there some other third, fourth, or even fifth option?

Several lay and clergy leaders were invited to consider this question. Here are the responses I received:

Jan Henderson, (<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vestry-leadership/leading-through-transition/>) senior warden at St. John’s Episcopal Church (<http://stjohnsjackson.diowy.org/index.html>) in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, writes:

“All of the above and none of the above. From ECF’s January 27th webinar “The Leader’s Heart:”

(<http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/the-leaders-heart/>) the 1st of 10 ways to approach leadership ... is to Surround Leadership Efforts in Prayer, which also includes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as fundamental in any vision for leadership. That lofty answer said, there are very distinct roles for the pastor and for the congregation. The pastor is a paid professional whose duty it is to continue learning in order to bring fresh ideas, along with experience, to his or her ministry, while it is the lay leadership of a congregation who understands its core values and have the real sense of place. Both are essential to successful leadership, and both must be open to prayerfully listen, discuss, and move forward together, with God’s help.”

Miguelina Howell, (<https://vimeo.com/132151486>) vicar at Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford, Connecticut, is a member of the Council of Advice of The Episcopal Church Office for Latino/Hispanic Ministries and served on The Task Force for Reimagining the Episcopal Church, 2012-2015.

“It seems to me that in a healthy setting, vision for leadership in the

local church comes in a variety of ways, according to the movement of the Spirit and the capabilities of the Body of Christ in that particular setting. At times, it comes from the clergy and, at times, from lay leadership. It also may come as a combination of both and as a result of collaborative ministry practices, dialogue, and clear understanding of God's mission and the role of all baptized in the building of God's kingdom. Additionally, it is important for clergy to have an understanding of God's call and to provide leadership to their communities in listening and discerning what God is up to in their context."

Steve Muncie (<http://www.gracebrooklyn.org/about-us/contact-us/clergy-staff-profiles/>) is rector at Grace Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, New York. In his response, he raised additional questions.

"His [Mathison's] goal seems to be to maximize the ownership of the vision. But what if the Church is not called to speak with one voice but to speak with many voices? I wonder if the Church is not enriched and empowered by a multivocal rather than a univocal approach to mission and ministry?"

"Mathison wants to raise up 'the vision' but he is vague about the

contours of vision itself. What is the difference between 'ministry goals' and 'godly vision?' Is vision simply another word for long-term congregational goals or is it biblically and theologically grounded in what the living God is calling the Church to be and to do? As I read the article I kept asking myself, 'Whose vision?' For me, the challenge is not only to embrace a proposed vision of a group of parish leaders (the Joel Committee/Board of Stewards) but to continually seek God's vision for God's people. I believe we are able to easily lose sight of God's vision as we become enthralled by our own.

"Our vision may be ministry development, increased membership, and enhanced programs, but God's vision may be justice for the poor, racial reconciliation, nonviolence, and peacemaking, establishing God's reign of Love in every place. God's vision will shatter our own certitudes and our own comfort. God's vision will always extend the margins of grace to make room for those we find it difficult to love. This godly vision will be less programmatic than prophetic - and it very well may cost us deeply held assumptions and cherished comforts."

Demi Prentiss ([\[www.churchpublishing.org/products/index.cfm?fuseaction=productDetail&productID=10144\]\(http://www.churchpublishing.org/products/index.cfm?fuseaction=productDetail&productID=10144\)\) is a ministry development specialist and co-author \(with J. Fletcher Lowe\) of *Radical Sending Go to Love and Serve*, Morehouse Publishing, October 2015 <https://www.churchpublishing.org/products/index.cfm?fuseaction=productDetail&productID=10144>](http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vestries-listen-to-gods-call/roadmap-for-</p>
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"The role of the pastor—whether at the local or judicatory or denominational level—is 'vision crier.' The vision for the church is God's, discerned by the leadership of the church—clergy and lay, paid and unpaid—in community. When the discernment process has been well grounded, the congregation can recognize and affirm God's voice calling them into the future. With the power of the pulpit, the pastor can proclaim and remind and hold accountable. But if the vision is the pastor's alone, 'brought down from the mountain,' there is great danger that the congregation will not buy in, or will receive the unspoken message that their role is to cheer while the pastor brings the vision to life. That's a recipe for pastoral burnout and congregational disempowerment—not to mention squandering the opportunity to enliven the whole people of God in partnering with the Holy Spirit."

Why does this matter?

Steve Muncie articulates what many believe: “In the end, the primary task of clergy and laity is to stay attentive to God’s vision and to see that our local mission is advancing the reign of God.

“God is inviting – challenging – us to see the world with all of its brokenness through the eyes of divine love and mercy. We are called to a broader vision for the loveless, a deeper look at the plight of the powerless. The danger for the Church is to remain blind to God’s great vision while we busy ourselves with our own limited sight, reducing God’s Mission in the world to our maintenance of the local church.

“The local church and its ministries are vitally important to building up the people of God. We need to make plans and establish priorities for strengthening congregational ministry. We need structure and accountability. We need to maximize participation in sharing the vision.

“However, God’s great vision is still waiting to be seen by those who have eyes to see.”

Nancy Davidge is ECF associate program director, editor of ECF *Vital Practices*, and editor of the recently revised *Vestry Resource*

Guide. (<http://www.episcopalfoundation.org/programs/ecf-publications/vestry-resource-guide>)

Try This

What processes do the leaders of your congregation use to discern God’s great vision? In his response, Steve Muncie shares the visioning practice used at Grace Episcopal Church:

“I invited the entire congregation to a “Share the Vision” process. A questionnaire was developed, which included many open-ended questions (“I was most proud of our congregation when we...” “I was disappointed in our congregation when we...” “ In the next five years I think our congregation should concentrate on...” “I would like to commend the following ministries and/or people for...” and so on). Questionnaires were distributed to the entire mailing list and made available for several months at church. Many small neighborhood groups were organized to discuss our “Share the Vision” exercise. Results were tabulated and shared with the entire congregation, including all comments (unless a particular comment was deemed offensive to an individual), and the parish vestry used the “Share the Vision” results to develop a five and ten-year plan, including an intentional

review and revision process.”

How might you adapt this practice to your congregation?

Resources

- “A Vision for Your Vestry Retreat” by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices Vital Post, February 2, 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/a-vision-for-your-vestry-retreat/>
- “Does vision come from the leader or the people?” By Tom Arthur, Faith&Leadership, April 12, 2010 <https://www.faithandleadership.com/tom-arthur-does-vision-come-leader-or-people>
- Faith & Leadership the online magazine of Duke Divinity School (<https://www.faithandleadership.com>)
- “Vision from the leader and the whole” by John Ed Mathison, Faith&Leadership, April 19, 2010 <https://www.faithandleadership.com/john-ed-mathison-vision-leader-and-whole>

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Growing Our Church

BY ESTELA LÓPEZ

"I have come that they may have life and life more abundantly"

John 10:10

My husband, the Rev. Pedro N. Lopez, my two sons, and I currently serve in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, at St. Peters-San Pedro in Pasadena, which has a large Mexican population. Today our church is a bilingual-bicultural congregation with two services in Spanish and one in English. When we arrived four years ago we found a church about to close; both membership and the building had been declining for several years.

During those first months, a regular Sunday service would have about 70 people. People spoke negatively about the past, there was some resentment, and the congregation and building were in a rut. Thanks to my husband's vision and experience in planting churches, we were able to teach people to look to the future, putting the past behind us and focusing only on our strengths, not on our weaknesses. We invited people to take ownership of their church and to take a leap of faith by donating their time, talent, and treasure, to redevelop the church, starting with the basic ministries

and creating new programs. The people who stayed were faithful to the Lord; people of great faith, who prayed and believed.

Thanks to the efforts and dedication of this congregation, San Pedro has grown to an average Sunday attendance of 280, with vibrant and growing ministries. Recently we remodeled the sanctuary and expanded its capacity to seat 400 people. We also bought and installed a new building for a thrift shop.

How did this happen? What has helped has been our commitment to the vision and mission of St. Peter's-San Pedro.

1. Prayer as a means of healing and deliverance. We continually pray for the Holy Spirit and his healing touch. During the Eucharist, after the sermon, we pray for healing laying our hands on people (James 5:14-15). In the Gospels, we see repeatedly how Jesus would heal people and how these people, out of love and gratitude, would join the mission of salvation and redemption that is offered through Jesus Christ (Luke 17:11-19). In my personal

experience as a priest's wife and a layperson, it was not until I experienced the healing touch of Jesus that I could give my life completely to God and to the ministry. That is why we pray without ceasing for healing and deliverance. Once the person experiences the power of God's love in their life, they want to share this great gift with others. We believe that prayer is the door to grace for the church and its people. We believe that no one can serve with excellence and true commitment without experiencing a personal encounter with the Lord and giving their life to Him.

2. Serving God in the church by sharing leadership. Any institution or organization needs a system. We have created a system of shared leadership for all ministries. We invite people to help in at least one ministry once a month. Why do we do this? First of all, to give the opportunity to serve to more families and second, so that the weight and responsibility does not fall on only one person. We use this system in our service to the community as well as the ministries in the congregation such as ushers, readers, and Eucharistic ministers.

3. Serving God in the community. The mission of the Church is to serve people who are poor, sick, or helpless, as Jesus did (Matthew 25:35). We will soon be opening, by the grace of God, a thrift store to serve people with low incomes. We also operate a food pantry, which recently expanded from being only open once a month to every Saturday, serving a total of 320 families each month. During the week, Monday through Friday, we have a group who does Zumba. They have two classes in the morning and two in the afternoon and about 100 people gather every day. We also have a group of people who are elderly who practice yoga twice a week. Next to our church, we have a building that functions as a community center offering all sorts of classes including technology, nutrition, English, and painting. At St. Peter-San Pedro, we believe the church building must be used to evangelize and serve our community. We believe that the Lord liberates our whole being: mind, body, and spirit and wants us to grow in all the dimensions of our life. The Lord transforms our lives giving us abundant life. I recommend for you to open the doors of your Church and receive a group or organization. This is the best way to become known in the community.

4. Christian education for

all ages. This is our strongest evangelism ministry that brings new families every six months. Every Sunday, there are three Communion classes, three Confirmation classes, and Sunday school classes for all ages. This program lasts 18 months with a rotation, following the school calendar. We have about 90 children registered for these programs and about 60 adults in our parenting class. We firmly believe that it is necessary to keep a family committed to the Church for at least one year, so we can share the Good News of Jesus with them, and offer them the opportunity to truly deepen their faith. During this year and a half, these families are invited to attend retreats, to serve in a ministry, and we are there for them in their times of need and difficulty.

5. Companionship, fellowship, celebration of our faith, and our culture: Jesus was devoted not only to heal and preach but also took time to share with his friends. Jesus and His disciples attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11). We do not gather only for trainings and meetings. We also come together for parties, festivals, and cultural events. We have a folkloric dance group, an annual church festival, quinceañeras, and dinners. But most importantly, we make time to rest. Throughout the year we

work very hard, but in the summer time we take a break and we encourage our leaders to do the same.

Throughout these four years, we have taught the leaders and all the families to take responsibility for their church, contributing generously to the maintenance and the development of the church and its mission. Our church is now looking towards the future, aware that others planted before us, and we need to plant our seed for future generations. With the hard work of our congregation, and the help of our Diocese, we are working on a capital campaign called "Seeds of Faith - Planting seeds of love for future generations." Our plans include building a childcare center and a parish hall with capacity for 400 people. Our desire is to expand our services to the community and one day become economically sustainable. God is big and powerful and His love has no limits!

Estela López, program director St. Peter-San Pedro in Pasadena, Texas, worked as a cosmetologist and a real estate agent for many years. She's now fully dedicated to the church and its mission. Originally from Guadalajara Mexico, Estela is happily married to The Rev. Pedro N. López; they have two children Nathan and Peter. Together, they minister in

their church as a family. Her two biggest passions are Jesus and dancing. Estela has a children's dance group in her church where she teaches Mexican folk music.

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Resources

- A conversation with Estela López: a YouTube interview (in Spanish). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJBvCyoXXwQ&feature=youtu.be>
- "Leadership from the Pews" by Maria Eugenia Giraldo, ECF Vital Practices, Vestry Papers, May 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/facing-leadership-challenges/leadership-from-the-pews/>
- St. Peter's Episcopal Church – Iglesia Episcopal San Pedro <http://stpeterspasadena.org>
- St. Peter-San Pedro Episcopal Church, Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/pages/St-Peters-Episcopal-Church-Pasadena-Tx/126411054127389>
- "Will You Give Me a Hand?" by Jeremiah Sierra, ECF Vital Practices, Vital Post, January 23, 2012 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/will-you-give-me-a-hand/>

Hacer crecer nuestra Iglesia

BY ESTELA LÓPEZ

"Yo he venido para que tengan vida y vida en abundancia"

San Juan 10:10

Mi esposo, el Rvdo. Pedro N. López, mis dos hijos y yo servimos actualmente en la Diócesis de Texas, en la Iglesia de San Pedro, en Pasadena, con una población mayormente de origen mexicano. Nuestra Iglesia es una feligresía bilingüe y bicultural con dos servicios religiosos en español y uno en inglés. Cuando llegamos hace 4 años, San Pedro estaba a punto de cerrarse. Hacía varios años que el número de miembros se estaba reduciendo y que el edificio estaba en malas condiciones.

Los domingos teníamos aproximadamente 70 feligreses en la iglesia. La gente hablaba negativamente sobre el pasado, había resentimiento y la feligresía y el edificio estaban anquilosados. Gracias a la visión y experiencia de mi esposo en plantar iglesias, pudimos enseñar a la gente a mirar hacia el futuro, a dejar el pasado atrás y concentrarse en nuestros puntos fuertes, en lugar de en nuestros puntos débiles. Invitamos a la gente a que se sienta dueña de la iglesia y a que realice un acto de fe donando su tiempo, talento y tesoro para

revitalizar la iglesia, partiendo desde los ministerios básicos y creando nuevos programas. Los que permanecieron eran fieles al Señor, personas de una fe muy grande, que oraron y creyeron.

Gracias al esfuerzo y dedicación de esta feligresía, en la actualidad San Pedro cuenta con una asistencia promedio de 280 personas y con ministerios llenos de vitalidad y en aumento. Recientemente remodelamos el santuario y expandimos su capacidad a 400 personas. También compramos e instalamos un nuevo edificio para un baratillo.

¿Cuál ha sido la visión y misión en San Pedro? ¿Qué nos ayudó a alcanzar nuestra visión y misión relativas a St. Peter's-San Pedro?

1. La oración como instrumento de sanación y liberación. Nosotros continuamente le pedimos al Espíritu Santo su toque de sanación para que todos seamos sanos y libres. Durante la Santa Eucaristía, después del sermón, oramos por sanación con imposición de manos (San Santiago 5:14-15). En los Evangelios, en repetidas ocasiones, podemos ver como Jesús sanaba a las personas

y ellas, al ser sanadas, en muestra de su amor y agradecimiento se unían a la misión de salvación y redención que ofrecía Cristo Jesús (San Lucas 17:11-19). En mi experiencia personal como esposa laica de un sacerdote, no fue hasta que experimenté el toque sanador de Jesús que pude entregar mi vida completamente a Dios y al ministerio. Por eso en San Pedro oramos sin cesar por sanación y liberación. Una vez que la persona experimenta el poder del amor de Dios en su vida quiere compartir con otros ese gran don. Creemos que nadie puede servir de manera sobresaliente y con verdadera entrega al Señor si no ha experimentado un encuentro personal con el Señor y ha entregado su vida a Él.

2. El Servicio a Dios en la iglesia compartiendo el liderazgo. Toda institución u organización necesita un sistema. Nosotros hemos creado un sistema de liderazgo compartido para todos los ministerios. Invitamos a la gente a que ayude por lo menos una vez por mes en un ministerio. ¿Por qué lo hacemos? Primero, para darle la oportunidad a más familias, y segundo, para que el peso y la responsabilidad no caiga en una sola persona.

Aplicamos este sistema en los servicios religiosos que brindamos a la comunidad, como también en los ministerios de la feligresía, tales como como ujieres, lectores y ministros del altar.

3. El servicio a Dios en la comunidad. La misión de la Iglesia es servir al pobre, al enfermo, al desvalido, tal como lo hizo Jesús (San Mateo 25:35). Abriremos pronto, por la gracia de Dios, un baratillo para servir a gente de bajos recursos. Tenemos también el almacén de comida, que en el pasado ofrecía despensas una vez al mes y que ahora abrimos todos los sábados, sirviendo a 320 familias por mes. Durante la semana, de lunes a viernes, tenemos un grupo que hace Zumba con dos clases por la mañana y dos por la tarde. Asisten a diario unas 100 personas. También tenemos un grupo de gente de tercera edad que hace yoga dos veces por semana. En nuestro centro de ayuda a la comunidad también tenemos clases de computación, nutrición, inglés y pintura. Creemos que el edificio de la iglesia está para la evangelización y el servicio a la comunidad en general. Creemos que el Señor libera todo nuestro ser: mente, cuerpo y espíritu, y que desea que crezcamos en todas las dimensiones de nuestra vida. El Señor transforma nuestra vida para tener una vida abundante. Yo les reco-

miendo abrir las puertas de sus iglesias y recibir a un grupo u organización. Es la mejor manera de darse a conocer en la comunidad.

4. Formación cristiana para todas las edades. Este, nuestro principal ministerio de evangelización, y trae nuevas familias cada seis meses. Tenemos tres clases de Comunión solemne, tres de Confirmación y Escuela Dominical para todas las edades. Las clases tienen una duración en rotación de 18 meses, siguiendo el calendario escolar. Tenemos alrededor de 90 niños inscritos en estos programas y una clase de aproximadamente 60 adultos para pares de esos niños. Creemos firmemente que para poder evangelizar a una familia hay que mantenerla dedicada a la iglesia por lo menos, así como para que puedan profundizar realmente su fe. En ese año y medio se invita a esas familias a asistir a retiros espirituales y a servir en algún ministerio y se las acompaña en sus necesidades o dificultades.

5. Compañerismo, convivencia, celebración de nuestra fe y nuestra cultura: Jesús en su ministerio no sólo se dedicaba a sanar y predicar, sino que también dedicaba tiempo a estar con sus amigos y a celebrar, como lo hizo en las bodas de Caná de Galilea (San Juan 2:1-11). En San Pedro no todo es reuniones y

capacitaciones, sino que también celebramos con fiestas, festivales y eventos culturales. Tenemos un baile folclórico, un festival anual, quinceañeras y cenas. Pero lo más importante de todo es el descanso.

Durante todo el año trabajamos arduamente, pero en el verano tomamos vacaciones y animamos a los líderes que hagan lo mismo. Durante estos cuatro años hemos enseñado a los líderes y a todas las familias a asumir responsabilidad por su iglesia contribuyendo generosamente al mantenimiento y al desarrollo de la iglesia y de su misión. En la actualidad nuestra iglesia está mirando hacia el futuro, consciente de que otros plantaron antes que nosotros y que debemos plantar nuestra semilla para las generaciones venideras. Con la ardua labor de nuestra feligresía y la ayuda de nuestra diócesis, estamos trabajando en una campaña de capital llamada "Semillas de fe - sembrar semillas de amor para las generaciones venideras" - "Seeds of Faith - Planting seeds of love for future generations". Nuestros planes incluyen construir una guardería infantil y un salón parroquial con capacidad para 400 personas. Deseamos expandir nuestros servicios a la comunidad y algún día ser económicamente sustentables. ¡Dios es grande y poderoso y su amor no tiene límites!

Estela López, directora de los programas de St. Peter-San Pedro en Pasadena, Texas, trabajó como una cosmetóloga y agente de bienes raíces por muchos años. Pero ahora está dedicada totalmente a la iglesia y a su misión. Originaria de Guadalajara, México, Estela está felizmente casada con el Reverendo Pedro N. López; tienen dos hijos, Nathan y Peter. Ministran en su iglesia como familia. Sus dos grandes pasiones son Jesús Cristo y el baile. Estela tiene un grupo de baile infantil en su iglesia en el que enseña música folklórica mexicana.

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Tx/126411054127389

- “Will You Give Me a Hand?” by Jeremiah Sierra, ECF Vital Practices, Vital Post, January 23, 2012 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/will-you-give-me-a-hand/>

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Resources

- Entrevista con Estela López <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJBvCyoXXwQ&feature=youtu.be>
- Liderazgo desde las bancas por Maria Eugenia Giraldo, ECF Vital Practices Vestry Papers, mayo de 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/facing-leadership-challenges/liderazgo-desde-las-bancas/>
- St. Peter’s Episcopal Church – Iglesia Episcopal San Pedro <http://stpeterspasadena.org>
- St. Peter-San Pedro Episcopal Church, página de Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/pages/St-Peters-Episcopal->

From Vision to Action

BY NANCY DAVIDGE AND SUSAN ELLIOTT

See the July 2015 article, *Why Articulate Your Mission and Vision*, for part one of this two part series <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vision-and-planning/why-articulate-your-mission-vision/>

Once your church understands what God is calling it to do, identifies its ministry strengths, and shares a hopeful vision for the future, it is time to translate discernment into action. In the past, vestries often began a lengthy strategic planning effort that would produce a long list of goals, neatly slotted into a timeline covering the next three, five, or even ten years. At ECF, we see that many strategic plans generate too many goals leaving little room to adapt to unpredictable and changing circumstances. Congregations may find these three-to-five year plans are soon outdated and shelved.

A more nimble model is needed to address the challenges of today's fast-paced world. Churches and other organizations are turning to strategic thinking—an ongoing, dynamic process that understands the need to embrace change in order to move forward. Strategic

thinking focuses on developing effective strategies for a few goals rather than for many. It recognizes that there are challenges and opportunities that cannot be fully anticipated at the present time.

Strategic thinking is not about bringing a project or plan to successful completion. It's much more like being responsive to the Spirit's leading—letting your vision guide you toward seeing possibilities, trying things, keeping what works, and letting go of the rest.

How Strategic Thinking Works

Strategic thinking is a way to address the big-picture challenges progressively. The process begins with three steps:

- Identifying a few goals that are aligned with the congregation's long-term vision
- Identifying potential strategies for reaching those goals
- Evaluating your potential long- and short-term strategies in light of mission, financial capacity, strengths, and other criteria

A wide net is cast to collect as many strategies as possible. Asking questions—including identifying the things you value most as a congregation—might help you select the best ideas for achieving your goals. As a strategy is implemented, it is evaluated. If it's not working, it is dropped. For example, to live into its vision, Christ Church, Pensacola, Florida, (<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/leading-change/vision-for-impact-not-just-change/>) identified some priorities for strategic action. These goals included developing more robust marketing, determining the best use of some recent property acquisitions, and providing vital programs to reach youth and families.

With the economy still reeling from the 2008 downturn, Christ Church did not immediately jump into new expenditures to achieve their goals. Instead, the goals became a guiding force for the vestry, which reviewed them annually and worked to strengthen Christ Church's ability to achieve them.

The process of identifying goals, developing, testing, and

evaluating strategies is continuous—enabling organizations to tackle complex challenges and move forward, one step at a time.

Strategic Thinking Begins with the Vestry

Strategic thinking is an effective model for confronting the tough choices our churches face today; it works for faith communities of all sizes. You have identified ministry strengths and discerned a hopeful vision of your church’s impact on the future. Your congregation has participated in the discernment process and has a shared understanding of your church’s mission, strengths, and vision. Your communications—from the pulpit to Facebook—reinforce that shared purpose.

Now you are ready to use the big-picture time in your vestry meetings to apply strategic thinking to an issue that goes beyond the day-to-day business of your faith community. Select a challenge facing your church, and consider it in the context of your vision for the future. Identify a few major goals for the next twelve to eighteen months that will begin to address the challenge.

Let’s say the urban neighborhood around your congregation is changing. The demographics

are shifting with younger adults moving into the area and aging empty nesters moving away. Your church is becoming increasingly marginalized, almost invisible. Let’s also imagine that an aspect of your church’s hopeful vision is that it will become a congregation that reflects the diversity of the neighborhood. With that scenario, over the next twelve to eighteen months, your goals might be:

- To participate in the community as a congregation
- To make your worship and life more welcoming and accessible to younger adults

The Congregation’s Role

In a strategic thinking model, the leadership doesn’t have to generate all the ideas. So the next step is to frame your goals as questions and take them to the congregation: How can we participate as a congregation in the wider community and become more visible? What can we do to help our new neighbors feel welcome in our life and worship?

Invite everyone—core leaders, newcomers, youth, active and inactive members—to participate in brainstorming strategies on these two questions. Part of this brainstorming should

include time in the wider community talking with people who are unfamiliar with the congregation and asking questions about their needs and desires for a community of faith. In that great harvest of ideas you’ll find creative and innovative possibilities. You’ll also gain the interest and support of the congregation—a vital element in moving toward the goals you select.

Developing a Strategic Filter

Brainstorming produces a lot of potential strategies. The question becomes, “How does the vestry evaluate the ideas collected during brainstorming?” To do that, you need a set of values—strategic criteria—to bring best ideas to the surface. Some suggested strategic criteria are mission and vision, uniqueness, financial sustainability, identity, and internal capacity. To apply them, look at each idea and ask:

- Does this support our mission and vision?
- Is it unique or does it duplicate others’ work?
- Is it financially sustainable through potential gifts or fees?
- Is it consistent with our identity?

- Do we have the internal capacity to begin and sustain this initiative?

In discussing the potential strategies together, your vestry will find that some ideas meet all criteria and others fall short in one or two key areas. With this analysis in hand, the vestry will decide on one or two ideas to implement. Regular evaluation is critical. If a strategy is not working, learn from the experience and try something else.

Maybe your congregation is not ready for a coffee shop ministry. Try a different way to show that you welcome and care about the new community. Offer a worship service on a Sunday evening or begin a Bible study geared to younger adults. Host some service projects and invite neighbors to participate. Establish a community garden that can meet the needs of an urban setting and provide an example of environmental stewardship.

Go where your vision and the energy of your people take you. The point is to keep working toward that hopeful future, one strategic step at a time.

This article is an excerpt from the 2015 edition of the Vestry Resource Guide, an ECF publi-

*cation by **Nancy Davidge**, ECF associate program director and editor, ECF Vital Practices and church communications writer and consultant **Susan Elliott**. *The Vestry Resource Guide helps vestry members and clergy work together to become an effective, even transformational leadership team. With information and recommendations for congregations of all shapes and sizes, this is an essential tool to help vestries focus on what God is calling them to do in the world. Available in English <http://www.forwardmovement.org/Products/1951/the-vestry-resource-guide.aspx> or Spanish, <http://www.forwardmovement.org/Products/1773/guiacutea-de-recursos.aspx> and in both print and eBook formats.**

Try This

In part one of this article, vestry members were invited to consider their ministry strengths. (<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vision-and-planning/why-articulate-your-mission-vision/>). As you move from vision to strategic thinking, you'll likely generate a number of ideas of how to translate your vision into action. A strategic filter is a helpful tool for evaluating each idea and allowing the best to surface. For each idea raised, consider evaluating it using these five questions:

- Does this support our mission and vision?
- Is it unique or does it duplicate others' work?
- Is it financially sustainable through potential gifts or fees?
- Is it consistent with our identity?
- Do we have the internal capacity to begin and sustain this initiative?

Resources

- "A Snapshot of Our Urban Neighborhood" by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices Vestry Papers, January 2012 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/real-basics-for-vestries/a-snapshot-of-our-urban-neighborhood/>
- "How to 'Just Try a Few Things: Lean Experimentation'" by Sarai Rice, Congregational Consulting Group http://www.congregationalconsulting.org/just-try-a-few-things-part-ii-lean-experimentation/?utm_source=Subscribers&utm_campaign=d5782da665- Perspectives_60_Rice&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_e863323d31-d5782da665-162420505

- “Strategic Thinking for Congregations” an ECF webinar <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/strategic-thinking-for-congregations/>
- “Strategic Thinking: How our biases impact our parish’s decisions” by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices Vital Post, May 21, 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/strategic-thinking-how-our-biases-impact-our-parishs-decisions/>
- “The Gifts of Holy Imagination” by Miguel Escobar, ECF Vital Practices Vestry Papers, January 2015 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/vestry-leadership/the-gifts-of-holy-imagination/>
- “The Power of a Shared Nightmare” by Miguel Escobar, ECF Vital Practices Vital Post, January 29, 2013 <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/the-power-of-a-shared-nightmare/>

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Liderazgo multilingüe y feligresías multiculturales

POR SANDRA T. MONTES

Silvestre Romero es el sacerdote a cargo en St. Peter's/San Pedro en Salem, Massachusetts. Está casado, tiene dos hijos y es guatemalteco. En sus 18 años de ministerio como sacerdote episcopal ha trabajado con diferentes grupos étnicos y multilingües. En la actualidad está finalizando su plazo como miembro del Consejo Ejecutivo de la Iglesia Episcopal.

En el video en <https://youtu.be/14WQbvFdgWE>, Silvestre Romero comparte sus pensamientos y experiencia de trabajo con feligresías multiculturales, así como sobre la identidad episcopal y los retos que se enfrentan. Además, comparte una fórmula para ayudar a las congregaciones a desempeñarse exitosamente en feligresías bilingües.

1. El hecho de que alguien tenga una verdadera pasión por desarrollar ese tipo de ministerio no basta: tiene que contar con el **apoyo y el profundo deseo de la comunidad en general de alcanzar ese objetivo**. En otras palabras, si el objetivo del sacerdote y la comunidad no coinciden, lo más probable es que

los esfuerzos sean en vano.

2. La **participación de la diócesis**, no sólo con recursos financieros, sino también humanos, es fundamental.

3. Otro elemento importante es **identificar los líderes comunitarios y brindarles las herramientas necesarias** para que entiendan cómo trabajar dentro de la estructura de la Iglesia Episcopal.

4. Es necesario **emplear los recursos existentes en la comunidad para alcanzar los objetivos**. Por ejemplo, la comunidad anglohablante puede ayudar a los que no hablan inglés a aprender el idioma. Eso puede iniciar un proceso de intercambio entre ambas comunidades.

Un verdadero proceso de intercambio no se limita a “yo sé algo que tú no sabes”, sino que además debe incluir “tú también tienes algo que ofrecerme”. Estos principios pueden ayudar a iniciar el proceso de conectar comunidades que de lo contrario probablemente no se hubieran conectado ni relacionado entre sí. La Iglesia es un lugar muy apropiado para crear ese sentido

global de lo que es ser una comunidad diversa.

En la página 766 del *Libro de Oración Común* encontramos el número XXIV de los Artículos de Religión, que dice: “El decir oraciones públicas en la Iglesia o administrar los sacramentos en un idioma que el pueblo no entiende es una cosa claramente repugnante a la Palabra de Dios y a la costumbre de la Iglesia primitiva”.

Esto es parte indivisible de la Iglesia Episcopal, su ADN. La Iglesia tiene que ser un lugar en el que la gente se siente incluida y en el que puede participar y expresarse plenamente. Estamos dispuestos no sólo a darle a la gente lo que tenemos, sino también a escuchar lo que la gente nos tenga que decir, creando un lugar acogedor para aquellos que busquen una profunda relación con Dios en la que todos tengan algo que ofrecer y recibir.

En lo referente al liderazgo, cada lugar tiene ciertas dinámicas y realidades que necesita afrontar. Sin embargo, en el ministerio latino hay ciertas cualidades comunes: sus miembros están dispuestos a

ofrecerse y desafiarse, incluyendo aprender inglés para ser puentes entre la cultura latina y la de EE UU. Es importante que los no latinos tengamos una actitud abierta hacia las culturas latinas. Es importante tener (mayormente) un lenguaje común, pero también es necesario que conozcamos las culturas y que tengamos una conexión con la Iglesia Universal. Parte de nuestra identidad como líderes es incluir, motivar, dar la bienvenida a todos los que se cruzan en nuestro camino.

En cuando a los retos, tienen dos aspectos: el problema que tenemos nosotros mismos, no entender claramente lo que nosotros entendemos como nuestra propia comunidad, así como las fuerzas externas (la Iglesia tiene que esforzarse mucho más en reconocer la importancia de cada uno de sus miembros). Pero no podemos sentarnos a esperar a que nos den, tenemos que participar y reconocer que tenemos un lugar en la mesa de decisiones y que necesitamos contar con un sentido de seguridad propia para involucrarnos y buscar espacios.

Sandra T. Montes nació en Perú, se crió en Guatemala y se instaló en Tejas lo antes que le fue posible. Sus pasiones son Dios, familia (especialmente su hijo), música,

educación y escribir, y ha estado esperando y orando por este puesto por años. Sandra ha estado elaborando recursos bilingües originales para su iglesia, escuela y otros por años. Sandra ha estado trabajando como voluntaria y en la Iglesia Episcopal desde que le dieron la bienvenida a ella en 1986. Se desempeña como música, traductora, oradora, asesora y redactora. Es docente a tiempo completo y está estudiando para obtener su doctorado.

Recursos

- “A Resource on Cultural Sensitivity in the Ordination Process” por Jerry Drino, Revisado en 2009 http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/A_Resource_on_Cultural_Sensitivity_in_the_Ordination_Process.pdf
- “Principles for Intercultural Ministry Development,” preparado por Office of Intercultural Ministry Development Episcopal Church en Provincia VIII
- St. Peter’s - San Pedro Episcopal Church <http://www.stpeterssalem.org/>

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Multilingual Leadership and Multicultural Congregations

BY SANDRA T. MONTES

Silvestre Romero is the lead priest at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Salem, Massachusetts. He's married, has two children, and is from Guatemala. In his 18-years as an Episcopal priest he has worked with many different ethnic and multilingual groups. He's currently ending his term as a member of the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church.

In this youtube video, <https://youtu.be/14WQbvFdgWE>, Silvestre Romero shares thoughts on working with multicultural congregations. He also talks about Episcopal identity and some of the challenges he's faced personally, as well as methods he's developed to create successful bilingual congregations.

In the video, he shares some of his reflections on and experience of multicultural ministry:

1. The fact that someone has a burning passion to develop a multicultural ministry is not enough: One has **to gain the support of the community at large to reach that goal**. In other words, if the purposes of the priest and the community

do not match, the most probable outcome will be failure.

2. The **participation of the diocese** is essential, not just for financial support, but for human resources as well. Multicultural ministry involves taking risks and challenging the congregation to grow in new ways; communicating regularly with the diocese and having their support is critical.

3. Another important element is to **identify leaders within the community and to support them with necessary tools** so that they can understand how to work within the structure of the Episcopal Church.

4. It is necessary to **use existing community resources to reach goals**. For example, members of the English speaking community may want help those who do not speak English to learn their language. That process can start a meaningful cultural exchange between communities, helping them to become one.

A true process of exchange is not limited to "I know something that you don't know," but instead "you also have something to offer to

me." These principles can help connect communities that would not have otherwise been in contact. The Church is a meaningful place to create a global sense of diversity within a familiar community.

On page 766 of the *Book of Common Prayer*, in the Articles of Religion, we find number XXIV which says: "It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the Primitive Church, to have public Prayer in Church, or to minister the Sacraments in a tongue not understood by the people." This is an indisputable part of who we are as The Episcopal Church; this focus on 'the people's language' is part of our DNA.

The church must be a place where people feel included, and where they can participate and express themselves fully. We must be willing to not only to give people what we have, but also to listen to what they express to us. That exchange creates a welcoming space to all of those who are seeking a deep relationship with God, in which everyone has something to offer and something to receive.

In terms of leadership, each

congregation has particular dynamics and realities. Nevertheless, in Latino ministry there are certain common traits: its members are willing to offer and to challenge themselves, this includes learning English to bridge cultural divides between traditional Latino and American cultures. It's important for non-Latinos to have an open attitude toward Hispanic cultures as well. Speaking a common language is critical, but it's also important to know each other's cultures and to have a connection with the Universal Church. As leaders, part of our identity is to be inclusive, motivating and welcoming to everyone who crosses our paths.

Latino leaders have a dual challenge: On one side, we do not always understand with sufficient clarity the strengths of our own communities, on the other side, the Church also has real work to do in the areas of understanding the contributions of each and every one of its members. If we as Latinos want to expand our engagement with the Episcopal Church, we cannot always wait for others to reach out to us; we have to more actively participate and recognize that we too have seats at the decision-making table.

Sandra T. Montes is ECF's Spanish Language Resource Consultant. Born in Peru, Sandra grew up in Guatemala and settled in Texas as

soon as she could. Her passions are God, family (especially her son), music, education, and writing. She has been developing original bilingual resources for her church, school, and in other areas, for years. Sandra has been volunteering and working in the Episcopal Church since she was welcomed into it in 1986. She serves as a musician, translator, speaker, consultant, and writer. She is a full-time teacher and is a doctoral student.

Resources

- "A Resource on Cultural Sensitivity in the Ordination Process" by Jerry Drino, Revised 2009 http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/A_Resource_on_Cultural_Sensitivity_in_the_Ordination_Process.pdf
- "Principles for Intercultural Ministry Development," prepared by the Office of Intercultural Ministry Development Episcopal Church in Province VIII (add pdf to ECF site)
- St. Peter's - San Pedro Episcopal Church <http://www.stpeterssalem.org/>

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