

5 when?

The unfolding of the story God is calling us to be part of in the future

Contents

1. Planning tool: Walking backwards towards the future
2. Planning tool: A 'faith' plan that works
3. Planning tool: Action plan for mission
4. Guide to effecting change: Preparing for change, managing transition.

1. Planning Tool Walking backwards toward the future

Often our ability to move towards a new or different future in mission is hindered by the discouragement of the obstacles we identify between where we are at present and where we need to go. To counter this difficulty, without minimising the challenge of the barriers to change, the following exercise suggests we approach the process from vision to present circumstances, rather than the other way around.

1. Imagine – Describe or draw the vision and activities of future mission to which you discern God is calling the congregation.
2. Walk backwards – With your eyes still fixed on that vision, begin the process of walking backwards towards where the congregation is now noting the steps needed to take you where you need to go.
3. Timeline – Having mapped out the tasks that need to be accomplished to turn your vision into reality, mark them out over a period of time stretching from conception to completion.
4. Potential obstacles – As you 'walk backwards' towards outlining the process of development, consider who you might 'bump into' in terms of gaining permission or winning approval. Consider at each stage:-
 - Who might you need to get permission from?
 - Who might you need to build ownership among?
 - Where might you need to find or create space for your new development, either physical or within the existing congregational programme?
 - Who might you work in partnership with either inside or outside the congregation?
5. Map and compass – As you 'orienteer' towards the future ensure that your plan has both the detail of a map along with the greater flexibility of a 'compass approach'. The map acts as your well thought out strategic plan, but the compass approach will prove useful. It will allow you to alter tactics, while still moving in the intended direction when unexpected changes occur which cause you to adjust your course.

Planning Tool A "faith" plan that works

James chapter 2 verses 14-26 addresses the need for 'a faith that works'. Acting in faith in mission is about both trusting in God and taking action. The following tool uses the letters of the word 'FAITH' to enable congregations to think clearly about a working plan of action.

We need to ensure that our plan of action is:-

A "faith" plan that works

Focused – To clarify vision, seek to articulate the answers to the following questions in single sentences.

- What are we planning to do? • Why have we chosen to do it? • Who are we trying to reach in mission? • How are we planning to do it?

Achievable – Vision needs to be realisable or it is a mere dream. Consider what resources you will need to achieve your vision for mission.

- What resources do you already have? • What resources will you need to add?
- How can you free up resources from other areas of congregational life to resource mission?
- What will you need to do to ensure your vision for mission can be sustained in the longer term?

Imaginable – If we cannot imagine what we are

trying to realise we will not be able to do it. Seek to capture a picture of what you hope to see God do through your initiatives in mission.

- What do you imagine taking place? • Where do you imagine it happening? • Who do you see there? • What results do you envisage?

Timetabled – If things are to happen we need to be intentional about acting in faith. Consider the following issues which will arise as we stage a process from conception to completion and beyond.

- How will you communicate the vision for what you hope to do, gain permission and achieve the necessary ownership?
- What preparations need to be made in advance of starting the work?
- When will you start the work?
- When will you begin to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the goals you set?

Holistic – In His creation and redemption of humanity God makes and remakes us, as both physical and spiritual beings. Effective mission always holds both realities in balance so that the Church acts in a holistic way. In an attempt to retain this delicate balance, reflect on the following questions.

- In what way will our vision for mission communicate that we genuinely care about those we are seeking to impact?
- How do we envisage the message of the gospel being communicated to those with whom our vision for mission will bring us into contact?
- What values behind what we do and the way we do it will ensure that we hold both emphases in balance?
- Consider how each of the following indicators will prove most helpful in enabling you to assess the effectiveness of the impact of mission – numbers involved, betterment of individuals' lives, positive impact in the community, opportunities to share the gospel.

Planning Tool Action plan for mission

To achieve clarity of vision and ensure your Congregational Mission Plan translates into action, draw up a table like the one shown below for each intended action.

Guide to effecting change Transition and Mission

We all find change threatening, challenging and stretching. But change happens whether we welcome or want it or not. The ongoing mission of the Church demands that we wrestle with change around us, otherwise we will end up as a proud irrelevance. Managing change is about helping congregations navigate the internal transitions involved in moving from an established position to adopting a new one.

It may be helpful to understand change in terms of three stages – endings, twilight zone, new beginnings. In preparation for launching a new vision for mission it may be useful to give serious consideration to the communication of these stages and how the congregation will be helped to negotiate them as smoothly as possible.

Endings

Despite what we were told in the fairy stories read to us as children, all endings are not happy ones! Their impact on people is considerable. We see this in terms of bereavements, redundancies

and broken relationships. The essential issue is that people need to let go of the present before they can embrace a new future. A number of important considerations for managing congregational change follow.

1. What endings might a new approach to mission necessitate?
2. Is it possible to avoid needlessly destructive endings by locating the new alongside, rather than in place of, the existing?
3. How might we mark endings well so as to help people avoid feelings of guilt and failure?
4. How might we locate new approaches to mission as respecting the ethos, even if not following the practice, of existing methods of mission?

Twilight zone

This stage of managing change has been likened to the wilderness that lies between the Exodus and the Promised Land. It marks a time of uncertainty. Expect high levels of bewilderment, insecurity, anxiety and tension. The necessity of this stage is that it allows space for grieving the receding past and creates anticipation building to momentum for a different future. This period of transition requires a lot of reassurance and support from leadership. There is a delicate balance to tread at this point. Consider the following issues.

1. How will you create space for people to express their grief for the past that is gone?
2. How will you create space for people to express their fears of a very different future?
3. How will you create space for anticipation of a new future to grow?
4. How will you present change as a challenging opportunity for the congregation to grow in faith?

New beginnings

New beginnings need careful introduction and timing. They need to feel manageable rather than overwhelming. They need to provide opportunities for the congregation to be involved in planning, participating in and reflecting on carefully managed experiments. As you think about how you are going to communicate a new vision for mission to the congregation, consider the following guide.

1. Explain the purpose of change – treat endings with respect, reference the twilight process of mission planning, set out why the congregation needs to change to continue to be effective in mission.
2. Explain the plan for change – communicate what is going to happen, when and how. Outline the training and support that will be offered. Encourage conversation about both hopes and fears, but in an attitude of unity and faith.
3. Explain the participation of the congregation in change – foster a feeling of togetherness and ownership of the plan, whether directly or indirectly involved. Build this into the programme by regular updates and requests for prayer and support as the new plan unfolds. Celebrate successes and share in the setbacks.
4. Explain the need for a new culture of change to emerge – encourage the congregation to try to be as open to change as they can for now, whether that is by merely accepting or enthusiastically appreciating new approaches. Continue to build on increasing confidence in ability to change that comes from a greater openness to thinking and doing things differently.