

**DEVELOPING A PARISH VISION  
LEADING TO  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A  
PARISH STRATEGIC PLAN**

**A FACILITATORS GUIDE PRODUCED BY  
THE DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF  
GENERAL SYNOD**

**MAY 2008**

This document is being provided for use by a facilitator assisting a parish (congregation) in developing a series of vision statements from which a Parish Strategic Plan can be developed to achieve the stated vision. A facilitator should use this document as a guide only and feel free to amend, as they consider appropriate.

### ***WHY?***

Perhaps the first question that parishioners need to address is – Why is there is a need for us to have some vision statements and a strategic plan?

Many people will be familiar with the phrase – “If you don’t know where you are going then any road will get you there”.

As parishioners, it may be useful to think about the person who enters the church building for the first time and asks the questions:

“What is it that you do here? Why does this parish exist?”

What they are really trying to find out is – “Is this the kind of community that I want to be a part of”?

It would be much easier to respond to such questions if the person was able to have a copy of the Parish Strategic Plan to then determine if they want to be a member of this church community.

### ***WHERE TO BEGIN?***

So, you have been approached to act as a facilitator by the parish to assist them in developing a Strategic Plan – where do you begin?

Perhaps the first step in the process is to ensure that the parish leaders (Parish Council) accept the concept of developing a Strategic Plan and are willing to support such a plan in ensuring that it will be implemented once it has been established. Therefore, it may be practical to meet with the Parish Council members to explain what process you intend to follow and obtaining their support for this process.

## ***THE PROCESS:***

Experience has indicated that an initial Vision Planning Day is the best way to start. A Saturday session from say 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. is probably desirable but if this is not practical then perhaps the process can still be used over several evening sessions.

Let us assume that we are looking at a full day session as indicated above. Each and every parishioner should be invited to the session but, of course, all will not participate but at least you have given them the opportunity of doing so. Do not worry if the number of attendees is fewer than you hoped for – work with what God has provided for you.

A good working arrangement is to have people sitting at small tables with no more than 5 people to a table. You will need a plentiful supply of flip chart material, markers and masking tape!

### ***Step Number 1:***

Basing the process in scripture:

Have a participant read appropriate scriptural passages; the following are suggested texts:

I Chronicles 28: 19-20

Revelations 3: 1-6

It would be helpful if you had copies of these texts for everybody to study in their table groups and ask the question:

“What messages are you receiving from these passages”?

There is no need to share these thoughts beyond the table groups.

You can then affirm that God has a plan for each of us. It is through His Church that this plan will be accomplished. The challenge before us, as a Christian community, is to understand what part God wants us to play in working out his plan for us in this place at this time.

The answer to that difficult question can only come through us. He has given us the skill sets to answer the question.

Remind people of this piece of advice:

“Pray as though it all depends on God  
Work as though it all depends on us”

***Step Number 2:***

It is in this step that you begin to develop a series of Vision Statements for the parish.

The basic questions in this step are:

What would you like your parish to be known as?  
How would you like people to describe us as a parish family?

Exercise:

Let us assume that the Editor of the Diocesan newspaper has come to write a story about the parish ***5 years from now***.

Give participants the following headline as a starter for this story;

St..... is a parish that.....

At the table groups have them suggest no more than **three** different statements to complete the headline for this proposed story and record them on flip chart paper.

Tell people not to start to worry about the practicality of the statements that they produce – they should not start thinking at this stage about all the reasons as to why a preferred outcome could never be achieved – think only about vision at this stage in the process rather than the “how to”.

After an appropriate time have each table group share what they have written and why they chose their particular endings.



If not, then the process we are undertaking will hopefully address ways for us as a parish family to perhaps reverse the trends that we have been experiencing.

***Step Number 4:***

Now we begin to look beyond the walls of our church building. As Christians we should not be living in isolation. As a church community we are also part of a much wider community – if a parish is not involved in activities in this wider community the chances are that it will eventually perish and it is certainly not responding to the Great Commission.

What we are looking for in this step is the characteristics of the wider community beyond our church walls – for example it is probably not helpful to have a vision statement that indicates a desire for a major increase in young families in our church family if we are part of what is generally regarded as a retirement community!

So, in a group setting you are asking people to indicate what they see as the characteristics and trends relating to the community in which the parish is situated. Some basic questions to start the dialogue are:

- What are the trends that indicate what is happening in our community?
- What plans for the community are we aware of, i.e. a major subdivision development?
- What are the general economic conditions in our community?
- Have we studied the information on our community that is available through the Statistics Canada web site (It might be helpful if you, as the facilitator had this information available for sharing).
- ??

Record the responses from participants on a flip chart and then paste on a wall for all to see and refer to.

***Step Number 5:***

This is the opportunity for participants to “brag”!

You are asking the questions:

What are the strengths of our parish? What are the things that we do well here?

Have the groups work in their table groups for this exercise and have them record their responses on flip chart paper.

As they report back to the full group you could start a new chart of their responses only adding new items as each table group reports.

Once you have a “group” report this can be posted again for all to see and refer to.

***Step Number 6:***

Now for some hoped for “truths”.

You are asking the question:

What are the weaknesses of our parish? What are the things that we do not do so well?

Again, have the groups work in their table groups for this exercise and have them record their responses on flip chart paper.

As they report back to the full group you could start a new chart of their responses only adding new items as each table group reports.

Once you have a “group” report this can be posted again for all to see and refer to.

***Step Number 7:***

By this stage it would be helpful if you have been able to produce a combined list of the Vision Statements that were worked on earlier in Step Number 2.

Depending upon the number of participants that you are working with you will either need to have everybody working with all the Vision Statements or perhaps have each table group working with a different statement.

In this exercise you are asking people to draft **three** possible objectives that may be possible in order to achieve the stated vision. At this stage members should not be concerned about the how to or whether the objective is possible or not but rather simply so state a preferred objective.

***Conclusion of this session:***

If you have been able to accomplish all the above within the time you had allocated for this days session you will have done well and it will be time to draw the day to closure.

However, before closing you will need to indicate what the next step in the process will be and how they wish to proceed from this point on. This can be done with another day or half-day with hopefully as many of the same participants as possible.

***What will happen at the next session?***

If during the first session you were able to have all the participants provide three possible objectives for each Vision Statement you will need to arrive at some kind of consensus as to which ones are seen by the members to have the greatest priority.

You can achieve this in a variety of ways of your own choosing. You will have a listing of several objectives under each of the Vision Statements. Whatever system you choose for reducing these to a manageable number you are trying to find the three preferred objectives for each Vision Statement.

Once you have these top three selections you will involve the group in trying to develop action plans to meet these objectives. You can either have the table groups working with one set of objectives each or depending upon the numbers all can develop action plans for each set of objectives.

As the members begin to develop these action plans they need to be reminded that each action plan that they develop needs to be:

- Specific – it should be very clear about how this action plan is to be carried out.

- Achievable – the plan should be challenging but at the same time there has to be a realistic understanding that this plan is achievable – here the group will need to take into consideration all the points that were raised in the first session relating to the strengths and weaknesses of the parish as well as the characteristics of the surrounding community. At the same time there will be a need to identify any potential “barriers” that could prevent an action plan from being completed and if such a barrier exists how this might be overcome.
- Measurable – in this part the action plan needs to indicate who will be responsible for carrying out the plan – what is the time line for achieving this – who will monitor the progress of the proposed actions and what will be considered as the measurable as to whether the plan is working or not.

Once this task has been carried out you will need to have the full group involved to ensure that all have the opportunity to discuss these proposed plans and refine them as necessary.

At this stage in the process you will have reached the stage where the parish members have indicated their preferred future – the Vision Statements and the Action Plans indicating how they plan to reach that preferred future.

Now is the time to identify a small group who will begin to draft the Strategic Plan for the parish and then this session can be closed.

### ***Next Steps.***

The small group as identified above will prepare the first draft of the Parish Strategic Plan. This plan should include all the various steps that were taken in the previous sessions including such material as considered appropriate. It may be useful to consider taking the trends that were identified and indicating what the picture might look like in 5 years if no steps were taken to change the trends.

Here would be the articulation of the Vision Statements and the Action Plans. Once the draft document is ready it should be presented and shared with the Parish Council members seeking further input. This may take one or more meetings to achieve but you will eventually reach the stage where it is possible to release to the entire parish family the final Parish Strategic Plan.

One of the most important aspects from here is to ensure that the Parish Council establish some form of process to constantly be checking all that they do against the Strategic Plan. In simplistic terms this should not be a Plan that sits on a shelf somewhere in the Rector's office until some years in the future when somebody raises the question – Should this parish not have a Strategic Plan? This should be a working document that should be reviewed on a regular basis and the entire process should be commenced again at the end of 5 years.

***Communications:***

As indicated earlier it is considered desirable to allow all parishioners, who wish to do so, to attend the Vision Planning Day. However, recognizing that this will not happen does not mean that people will not be interested in what is happening. It will be important to ensure that those parishioners who are not directly involved in the planning process feel that there is a small group deciding future plans that will affect everybody.

Therefore, it will be necessary to develop appropriate communication procedures that ensure that all parishioners are aware of what is happening throughout the entire process so that once the Parish Strategic Plan is complete all parishioners will feel a sense of ownership of the Plan.