

# THE STRATEGIC CHURCH

*Moving into a viable future requires a candid assessment of your present reality and an honest appraisal of the environment that affects your church. As the songs say, change is going to come. How will your church respond?*

## KNOW WHAT YOU DO WELL

### ENGAGE IN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

- ✓ Evaluate a high point experience
- ✓ Examine relevant trends
- ✓ Identify your church's strengths
- ✓ Define what sets your church apart
- ✓ Cultivate leadership in everyone
- ✓ Imagine the future

## ASSESS YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

### CONDUCT A SWOT ANALYSIS

Build on the work of your Appreciative Inquiry to identify your congregation's —

- ✓ **STRENGTHS**  
What you do well, your assets, how you're unique
- ✓ **WEAKNESSES**  
The gaps, functions, conflicts — the places that need work
- ✓ **OPPORTUNITIES**  
Trends and needs of which you can take advantage
- ✓ **THREATS**  
Competition, attitudes, assumptions, community issues

As you conduct your SWOT analysis, include discussion of the factors considered in a PEST (or PESTLE) analysis: political, economic, social, technological, (legal, environmental).

### TRACK TRENDS IN YOUR CHURCH

Make a clear, honest assessment of the reality in which you currently live. Consider your church's metrics and trends over the last three, five and 10 years in these areas —

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

Who is involved in your church: age, work status, education, ethnicity, income, political affiliation, marital status, gender, other relevant identifiers?

#### ATTENDANCE

How has worship attendance changed (or not) over time?  
How have the people attending changed (demographics), average age of attendees, etc?

#### MEMBERSHIP

What are the numbers and demographics of people leaving/joining, the increase/decrease in regular attendees who don't join, average age, etc?



## GIVING

Is giving trending up or down? Do you have a growing or decreasing reliance on a few donors, or on earned income like rentals? What is the average size of annual gifts, special offerings, the average gift per member?

## OTHER METRICS

What trends do you see in budget size or changes in how money is spent? What about staff size, volunteers and leadership, involvement in non-worship activities of the church?

## COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Who lives and works in your radius of attraction (demographics)? How has your neighborhood/community changed? How does your church fit into its present location?

## COMPLETE A GAP ANALYSIS

- ✓ Identify the gaps between your strengths and your current practice — Are you building on your strengths? Are you trying to be all things to all people?
- ✓ Identify the gaps between your present reality and your vision — Which gaps would be pretty easy to fill with a re-allocation of energy or resources? Which seem unfillable?
- ✓ What are you doing that isn't helping to close the gap between where you are and where you want to be? In other words, what practices or attitudes need to change?
- ✓ Besides money, what do you need to move in the direction of your vision?
- ✓ Can you meet your needs with your current membership, resources, location, etc? If you could do whatever was best for your church without upsetting anyone, what would you change or do?

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# DECIDE

## HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

## DEVELOP A VISION FOR YOUR FUTURE

- ✓ Consider the data you've gathered
- ✓ Determine what's most important about your ministry
- ✓ Seek input from external stakeholders
- ✓ Establish your desired outcome
- ✓ Create a plan
- ✓ Determine the next action your church can take to move toward your vision
- ✓ Communicate to the audience you want to reach
- ✓ Align your actions with your vision



# OUR CHURCH AT OUR BEST

## AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

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### QUESTION # 1

#### Evaluate A High Point Experience

Think back on your personal experience in your church. What stands out as a high point for you: a time or event —

- when you felt most energized by what was happening
- when you felt most engaged/involved with your church
- when you couldn't wait to go to church
- when you felt most proud of your church

#### *Questions to ask in pair interviews —*

- What happened? When and where? How did you feel at the time? What kind of feelings does recalling this story bring up now? Did you/the church have to confront challenges? If so, what did you do to overcome challenges?
- What made this story stand out as a high point for you (and others)?
- What did you/church learn from that high point? How did you/church grow as a result?

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### QUESTION # 2

#### Examine Relevant Trends

For many in the church, appearing to conform to social trends and external forces strikes a sour note. But across the ages, the church has changed, reformed and been transformed as a result of the events, trends and the very environment in which its people live and seek to know and serve God. After all, Jesus lived as a man shaped by and responsive to his environment; we, too, are shaped by and called to respond to our environment in our day and time.

#### *Questions to ask in pair interviews —*

- What are the most important events, trends and opportunities in society and in our community that affect our church's future?
- What are the desires and expectations of the people our church wants to reach?
- What do these events, trends, opportunities, desires and expectations suggest for our church's future? our ministry in our community? our potential to reach others?

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### QUESTION # 3

#### Identify Our Church's Strengths

Let's explore what really makes our church come alive — what gives people joy.

#### *Questions to ask in pair interviews —*

- What were the attributes that most attracted you to our church? What excited you about our church's work, its people, its mission in the community?
- Identify three ways our church has benefitted our community — things that make you proud to be a member
- Share one story of our church benefitting the community — of our church living its mission or sense of purpose.
- What distinctive core strengths and qualities do you think form the blocks on which our church can build in order to grow — in strength, numbers, and service? The strengths/qualities need not be spiritual — they could include particular programs, structures, technologies, people skills, etc.

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QUESTION # 4

**Define What Sets Our Church Apart**

To build for the future, you need to know what you do best. And that may be something you aren't presently doing. In business they call this your Unique Selling Proposition.

A church in New England with mainly older members kept focusing on the need to get young families to come to church — until they realized their community was made up of seniors and retirees. When they admitted what they did best was older folks, they changed their strategy — and their future!

**Questions to ask in pair interviews —**

- What one thing about our church differentiates us? What can we do better than any other church in our community?
- Describe a time when our church focused on what it did best — and succeeded as a result.
- Building on the best of who our church has been and looking to the future of what we can be, what does our church need to consider in order to spark growth (however we define growth) in a significant way? What could we do — small or large — that is new, different, changed or improved?

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QUESTION # 5

**Cultivate Leadership in Everyone**

You've probably seen or experienced a number of examples of leadership over the years — individuals or groups you admire; people with whom you've worked, volunteered or played. Leadership is about growth and change and about bringing out the best in people — empowering and challenging people to go beyond what they believe possible.

Think of one example of the kind of leadership you value.

- What happened? What do you most value in this story of leadership? Based on this example, what do you believe are the key qualities of outstanding leadership?
- In your experience, what is the sign of a leader who is very aware of her/himself and of those around her/him? How does that self-awareness show up in the way s/he leads others and provides leadership?
- What would you need to be more of a leader in your current role in our church? What would that allow you to do? How would that feel? How would our church benefit?

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QUESTION # 6

**Imagine the Future**

Imagine that it's General Synod 2027, and your church is being recognized for your living out your mission with excellence — kind of an Nobel Prize for Church. You're part of a small group of people who have been invited to make a presentation to the national body — church leaders and members from all over the country — explaining the choices you've made and the practices you've committed to that have brought you to this point.

**Questions to ask in pair interviews —**

- What are the key points of your presentation?
- Now imagine that you, personally, are being recognized for your contributions to our church's success. Identify the highlights of your involvement — projects, contributions, leadership — that have made a difference.
- This Nobel Prize for Church comes three wishes, though none are financial. You get a wish for yourself, our church, and our church as God's agent in our community. Make your wishes.