

What Makes a Terrific Congregational Self-Study?

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What makes a terrific congregational Self-Study? **You do!** You can make the transition time between installed Pastors a terrific experience for the congregation you serve. Transition is a very significant time for your congregation. There is a tremendous need for focused, humble leadership. Your leadership can help chart a new course for congregation that will lead to grow, maturity, and even greater service in Jesus' name.

Self-Study or Mission Study is a process of Congregational Envisioning. The goal is to compose a document (50 to 100 pages) that defines the congregation and describes a sense of direction for the next 5 to 10 years.

- A Self-Study does not have to be a detail strategic plan.
- A Self-Study is not just problem solving.
- A Self-Study does not necessarily fill in gaps.

A Self-Study is an opportunity for the congregation in faith while intentionally listening to God for guidance and direction.

An outstanding Self-Study process is outlined in a *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, Alban Institute, 2003. All quotes below are from *Holy Conversations*.

7 Ways To Make Your “Self-Study” Terrific

1. Emphasize the Conversation

The goal is “to help people have a purposeful and meaningful conversation about who they are what they believe is important to do.” P. xii

“It is not the plan that will change people and give direction to the congregation. It is the conversation of the people with one another and with God – that is part of the planning process – that changes people. P. xviii

2. Get Comfortable with Conflict

“Arguing over important things is the way congregations come to agreement, not only about their own future, but also about they in fact shape and re-shape their faith tradition to be passed on to successive generations.” P. xxii

3. It’s All About Maturity

“To submit to the disciplines of faith means to open ourselves to change and maturity in order to move into a fuller life – to follow a path drawing us closer to what God thinks we are capable of.” P. 4

4. The Key is Connecting to Context

“To be a people of faith is both to search within ourselves for growth and also reach others in service and invitation. P. 5

5. Prepare the Congregation for Envisioning

“Help others to want to be different, want to move beyond where they currently are.” P. 49

6. Get the Right People on the Envisioning Bus

The Self-Study Task Force needs to have high credibility, high trustworthiness, not agenda driven, and able to set forth a mandate. The ideal number is 7.

7. Manage the Process and Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

Benefits of a Terrific Self-Study

1. People will experience the presence of God.
2. It will generate energy and momentum
3. People will know the joy of TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More) and a deeper participation in Christian community.
4. The search process will be shorter.
5. There will be a better match between congregation and new installed Pastor.
6. The new Pastor will be able to hit the ground running,
7. You be able to see a visible, tangible outcome that will look good on your PIF.
8. The Kingdom of God will have advanced.

Congregational Envisioning: A transition process that leads to calling and installing your next Pastor

Congregational Life Ministry Team
Presbytery of Detroit
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Welcome to the exciting process of strategic envisioning. You have a very important task during the transition period between your previous Pastor and your new Installed Pastor. Your important task is envisioning – envisioning who God is calling your church to become and what God is calling your church to do.

We know you may not feel excited to complete this task at the moment. The idea of entering into an extensive envisioning process may seem unnecessary, even daunting. Please know that experience has proved again and again that the more faithfully and diligently a congregation approaches the envisioning process, the better the result. We no longer call this process planning or self-study. Instead, we call it envisioning. This is what makes it exciting. This is a time for you to listen to God with intention and purpose and as you do discern a new beginning for your congregation.

Please note that it is important that the congregation do the envisioning. Not just a committee. Not even the Session. This is a time for the congregation to experience an important time of growth and maturity.

To submit to the discipline of faith means to open ourselves to change and maturity in order to move into a fuller life—to follow a path drawing us closer to what God thinks we are capable of. Is this the time when we need to reach inside to address our fears and mature our spirits? Is this the moment when we need to reach out and serve others? To what are we now called?¹

The entire transition process is divided into two – the study phase and the search phase. The study phase, which is congregational envisioning, concludes with the election of a Pastor Nominating Committee. The search phase concludes with the election of a new Pastor. The entire transition will take 18 to 36 months.

Here's what we know from experience – the more complete the study phase, the faster the search phase. Finding the right Pastor depends on doing an exceptional job of congregational envisioning.

Congregational Envisioning

A complete Congregational Envisioning reports has 6 parts and answers the following questions:

1. Where are we now?
2. Who is God calling us to become?

Study Phase -- Where are we now?

Part 1: History and Facts

Answering this question requires that you take a good, honest look at the status of the congregation in this point in time. Collect some internal data².

- A brief history of the congregation
- History of pastors

1 Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations*, 2003 Alban Institute, p 4.

2 Ibid, pp 75-76.

- 10 – 20 year membership statistics and trends
- 10 – 20 year worship attendance statistics and trends and ratio of membership average to attendance at worship
- Sunday school membership and attendance trends
- Youth group membership and trends
- Membership addition and deletion patterns
- Age and gender profiles of members and participants
- Participation level in church activity
- Nonattendance by spouses
- Tenure studies (how long have people belonged to the congregation)
- Geographical location of members in relation to church location – where do the members live?
- Facility assessment and overview
- Financial assessment – trends in giving 10 – 20 years
- Financial assessment – budget trends 10 – 20 years

Part 2: The Community

Collect external data about your community.

- What is your community like, including the areas where members live, metro and state?
- Demographic trends 10 – 20 year: population, race, age, marital status, family size, income
- Economic overview
- What is the racial breakdown in your community?
- What is the dominate lifestyle?
- What is the percentage of church attendance in your area?
- What area does your church serve?
- Religious trends, locally, metro, nationally
- How many churches are in the area you serve? Growing or shrinking in number?
- What are the denominational trends in the area over the last 10 – 20 years?
- What is the pattern of non-denominational churches in the area? What are they doing to serve their congregations and community?
- What are local church, both denominational and non-denominational, “best practices” locally, metro, nationally?

Part 3: The Congregation

This is the fun part – the perceptions of your congregation. To answer these questions, you will have to develop some way for all members of your congregation to participate. Some congregations have written surveys and distributed them to all members. Other congregations have congregational meeting in which these questions were discussed in small groups

- What do people see as the strengths of the congregation?
- What do people see as the weaknesses?
- What do people see as the opportunities of the congregation to grow in faith, number, and impact?
- What do people see as the threats to not realizing these opportunities?
- What are people’s hopes for their church?
- What are their dreams for their church?

Where are you now? Once you collect your internal data, external data and congregational input, your Session or envisioning team will need to discuss what the data is telling you.

- What are you learning about the current condition of your congregation?
- What are the five most important conclusions you draw from your data?
- Turn these conclusions into a brief statement about where you are as a congregation.

Discernment Phase -- Who is God calling us to become?

Answering the following questions will not be easy. This is the discernment aspect of the process. Discernment requires prayer, listening, dialogue and eventually a coming together of a variety of opinions. The goal is to develop a sense of direction for your congregation.

Part 4: Vision - Who are you called to reach?

That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" Acts 16:9

- Include a study of the scriptures of what the church of Jesus Christ is called to be and do.
- Identify existing ministries of your congregation.
- Are you fulfilling your God-given potential to be who God calls you to be and to do what God calls you to do?
- Are you serving all of your members or are there groups within your congregation who are underserved?
- Identify the unreached people groups within the area your church serves.
- What are their needs?
- What are the needs within the community?
- How will the changes in the community and congregation affect the priorities of your current life and work as a congregation?
- Write a brief statement of vision.

Part 5: Mission - Define how you will reach those identified in your vision.

"But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?" Luke 14:28

- Identify the needed expertise to reach each identified group.
- Identify and recruit members of the identified group that could assist you in the mission plan.
- Identify the core values of this mission.
- Develop a mission model that can reach the identified group.
- Define the desired outcome of this ministry.
- What size of membership is needed to enable/support these ministries?
- Is the facility adequate to meet the needs of these ministries? If not, what can you do about it?
- What resources do you need for these ministries?
- Write a brief mission plan

Part 6: Leadership – Describe the kind of leader you need to direct this mission.

One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2

- What are the personal qualities needed to reach effectively the target groups?
- What are the personal skills needed to accomplish the mission?
- List the skills and experience required.
- Define expectations, responsibilities, and allocation of time.

Now that you have completed all six part of Congregational Envisioning write a paragraph describing your church in five years.

- Who will be present?
- What will they be doing?
- What kind of Pastor will be in place?
- What will your congregation be know for in your community?

For additional help with Congregational Envisioning, please consult *Holy Conversations* by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, published by Alban Institute