



Priorities

From Nayiri Karjian, General Minister, Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast, UCC | Sept 29, 2022

There is some kind of restlessness in our churches nowadays. Many feel as if COVID is gone and done with, and now we need to figure out what's next and move on with it. COVID is still with us and moving on with it has not been as baffling for the church as it is now.

Some are asking – should we engage in long term strategic planning? Should we develop an action plan for the future? Should we revise our mission and vision statements? These are excellent questions and here are my thoughts concerning them.

After discovering that there is some confusion about “vision and mission” and their definitions, I decided to rename them as “purpose and calling.” Aspirational and foundational, Purpose, like Vision, is the “why” of the church. The purpose of a church is to be the Church to preach the good news, to heal the broken, to mend the world, and more. This unreachable, aspirational, impossible to achieve purpose abides and does not change.

Practical and doable, Calling, like Mission, is about how we live our purpose in this day. The Calling is practical and relevant to the day. It changes as the circumstances, conditions and the environmental context changes. So, every few years, congregations should reconsider their calling to ensure its relevance for the day.

Strategic and action plans were very popular some years back when many congregations embarked on the journey to discover their long-term goals and the path to get there. But times have changed. In this rapidly changing, uncertain, “post covid” world, when

we are, I hope, more realistic about an unknown and uncharted future, is it possible to make practical, plausible, long-range plans?

I suggest that it is time to take a simpler path. Instead of a long-range plan, consider your purpose and have a few priorities for each year. Every year, confirm the purpose of the church and pick a few priorities as your calling, then begin working on them according to their importance and impact. Instead of a complicated and involved plan, have a priority or two that can be accomplished. As you succeed, you will be energized to do more. Make sure to choose a priority, or two, that is about outreach and community engagement. To have more energy for ministry, look outside of your doors, don't be self-absorbed, and don't worry about Sunday morning worship numbers. Worry about your neighbor who is hungry, your friend who is unable to pay rent, the child who is bullied in school, the one who is in harm's way.

These are complicated times that I believe are calling us to simpler ways of living. If we don't try to simplify life, reduce it to the essentials, we would be overwhelmed and swallowed by its complexities. A simple life, as V. Morgan writes, “is about figuring out how efficiently we can put first things first... When you're clear about your purpose and your priorities, you can painlessly discard whatever does not support these,” and do what you are called to be and do.

When you live in the present, attentive to what the Spirit is doing, and committed to your purpose and calling, you do not have to worry about the future. When you do the present right, the future will take care of itself.