

A Planning Process Based on the Spiritual Character of the Congregation

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The New Testament offers provocative descriptions of the church.

- The church is a community of the redeemed. God has gathered the church together for God's purposes.
- The church begins with God, not with pious people, or clever planners, or charismatic leaders.
- Christ is the head of the church. The congregation that God has called together is under the leadership of Christ and empowered by the Spirit.
- The church is a community where the Holy Spirit is active. The Holy Spirit empowers, gifts, sustains, and sets apart the church to accomplish God's purposes.
- Authority is in God and Word, not in the actions or teaching of a human person.
- The Bible gives very little information about structures. It does give clear pictures of what we are to be as a people and how we are to relate to God.

In light of the above descriptions, representative questions and reflective exercises can be created. For example:

- What spiritual values are important for this congregation?
- What founding values of this congregation give it its character and drive? To what extent are these values still giving life to the congregation?
- What would you identify as hindrances to growth toward maturity?
- If you asked a cross section of members of this congregation how they feel about the congregation what descriptions do you think would predominate?
- What do you believe are areas of growth that leaders must give attention to as they serve this congregation?

Planning with Spiritual Development in View

Intend that the *priority* in congregational life is character and spiritual health—not program and organization. There is not much point in having the latter if the former isn't present. A planning process that focuses on spiritual development could include the following:

1. Identify significant qualities of character (or principles that guide our behavior as the people of God) that God demands of his people.
2. Identify all those avenues (including leadership) that will alert and teach the people of God about the fundamental character of a church.
3. Think about the issue of spiritual development as a congregational issue. What can be done in your planning processes to stimulate the spiritual development of the congregation? In other words, what will you do to prepare the way for the Holy Spirit to act among God's people?
 - What indications suggest that God is at work? In what ways is the Holy Spirit breaking into our midst?
 - What behaviors or attitudes may invite greater expressions of the Holy Spirit in our midst?
 - What activities, behaviors, or attitudes are part of our life together that may be a hindrance to the movement of the Holy Spirit?
 - How can these hindrances be removed or at least, their effects diminished, in order to allow the Holy Spirit more freedom to work?
 - Who has God brought to our congregation who are especially gifted to help us in this work?
4. Ministry is an obligation of a people growing to maturity in Christ. What can be done to mobilize and equip the priesthood of all believers? How will you plan for the evaluation and redesign of existing program and organizational structures in light of the priorities of spiritual development and ministry?
5. Give time for prayer, reflection and dialogue on the above before moving to the next stages. This is, after all, a process of participation with the Spirit of God.
 - Where would God have us invest our resources at this time?
 - What are we willing to believe that God will do in these areas?
 - How is the Lord directing us to pray for each area of growth and ministry?
 - What specific steps is God calling us to take that will develop the life and ministry of the congregation?