



Congregational Life

Planning Time

By Joyce Madsen

August 2008 Issue Contents

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It's that time of year again — the time when staff and committees are meeting to decide what they want to do before Advent and what will come after.

One of the most useful things that we do as a team at the Congregational Life Centre is set some time aside, usually once a quarter, just for dreaming and planning. It is an opportunity to reflect on what we have been doing, how it has been going, and to think about what we have discovered over the last couple of months. What emerges is a number of goals for the days ahead.

It is always amazing to me when we look back at our plan (even when I've forgotten what it was we laid out) and see how many of the goals we have achieved. The act of discussing what we want to do and identifying goals creates a mindset that we carry with us as we go about our daily and weekly activities.

We believe congregations need to have a process to identify specific goals every year. The process is simple — it just requires the commitment of the leadership of the congregation.

To begin, the Board or Vestry or Council needs to take the time to identify what it is they want to accomplish during the coming year. We would suggest you need to include some new challenges, not just maintain the programs and ministries that you have had in the past. Think about how your community has changed, the new technologies that are available, and the changes in those who attend your congregation. You do need to introduce new ministries and programs if you want to connect with these new people.

Many of our small rural towns have become bedroom communities for larger centres. Young families are moving in as a result. How are you connecting with these

people? Do you use e-mail? Is the cell phone part of your communication strategy? How can you use technology as a way for people to connect with your congregation? If congregations are to continue to be effective, they have to evolve ways to meet the needs of those who currently live in their community.

A planning event can be an extended evening meeting, perhaps beginning with dinner, or a longer weekend event. Whatever format you decide on, be clear that you are not going to do any regular business during the session. This is a special time just for planning. Many congregations find that getting away to a different location helps. Ideally, you will find someone who is not currently involved with the leadership to facilitate the process.

A typical agenda includes celebrating what you have accomplished and dreaming what it is you want to do for the coming year. The outcome should be no more than three new goals. Goals need to be SMART, and by that we mean Simple, Measurable, Attainable, Required, and Time-specific. Otherwise you will find you can't achieve them.

We say no more than three goals because you can only add so much to an already busy schedule. If you set one significant goal and achieve it, that would be a great success! Success breeds success, so whatever you do, set yourselves up to win.

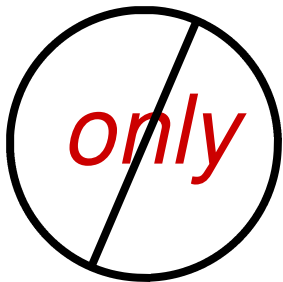
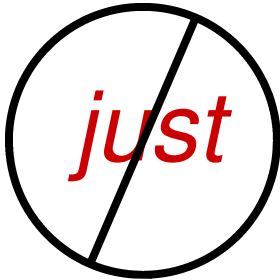
Don't assign new tasks to people who are already too busy. Do find new people who are passionate about a particular goal, and support them as they lead the congregation in that area. If you don't have new people, seriously consider letting some things that you have done in

(Continued on page 2)



Editorial

Two Words that Have To Go



Two words we believe you need to eliminate from the church vocabulary are **just** and **only**! How many times have you heard people say “*only* four of us see the need for change” or “just eleven showed up for the congregational meeting.” Eleven people managed to launch the Christian church. Four people wrote gospels that have kept Christianity alive and on fire all these years. “Only” and “just” need to disappear entirely from our church vocabulary.

In a congregation where 80 people come out to worship on Sunday, four new people constitute five percent growth. Five percent per year for five years would be 25%. That would be outstanding. It would certainly be better than the decline we are currently experiencing.

Those of us who have been part of the church for three decades or more remember the time when pews were full, the choir loft was bulging, and the number of children was overwhelming. We continue to carry that picture of success with us. It is a picture we need to redefine. Let's get back to Jesus' picture of success: “Where two or three are gathered together ...” miracles can happen.

How do we create a culture that operates out of this new picture? We begin by painting a new vision of what we can be today. It is a picture that is rooted in our history, but re-framed to meet the needs of an ever changing environment. It is looking for areas of abundance rather than rehearsing what is missing, it is building on our strengths not bemoaning our weaknesses. It is a matter of letting go of the things we don't have the resources to do well and putting our energy behind what we do best.

Let's get rid of the words only and just, and replace them with language that celebrates what we are doing well.

Do you have words that you think we need to eliminate from our vocabulary? Send us a note and share them with us.

Thanks from your *Centre Staff*.

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the past go. That frees up resources to do something new.

Use this planning time to look at the vision and mission of your congregation. That way the goals will fit in with the congregation's way of being.

You want goals that move people to achieve them. Goals should invite endorsement by congregation and clergy.

Once you have your goals, the actions required to achieve them will readily follow. Take small steps — remember a journey happens one step at a time. There is nothing more exciting than seeing you are actually moving toward something that you envisioned.

A very important task of the Board/Council/Vestry is to regularly review the goals for the year and monitor progress. This, in effect, should be a major focus of meetings throughout the year. That way you can make the necessary adjustments based on what is happening. Do you need to speed things up, slow them down, or consider a new approach?

One of the major challenges we find is that people want to slip back into the “way things have always been done”, rather than following through on something new. The leadership needs to persevere over the challenges of naysayers who are blocking the way.

If you are clear about where you are going, you have every possibility of getting there. That is a source of excitement that will infuse a whole congregation with new life and vitality.

PLAN FIRST!

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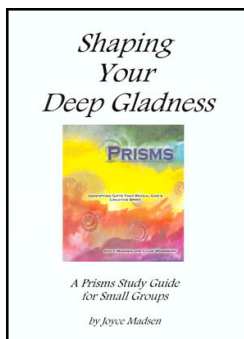
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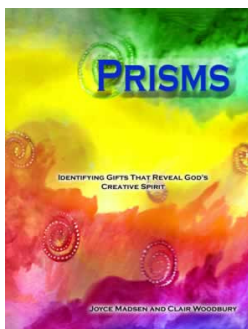
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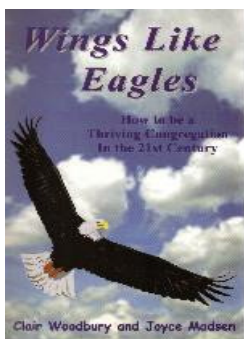


Looking for resources for a congregation study group?

SHAPING YOUR DEEP GLADNESS is the ideal guide for a group who wish to explore their gifts. It is designed to be a workbook for each participant, and has proven very helpful for those going through a transition in their life — whether job related, retirement, or changing vocations. It contains an outline for eight group sessions. \$14.95



PRISMS was written as to guide for those who want to explore their gifts and use them in a meaningful, rewarding way. The book can be very helpful for individuals, but works very well in a group study situation. It contains a spiritual gifts inventory specially developed for use by members of mainline congregations. \$14.95



WINGS LIKE EAGLES has been updated and revised and is in its third printing. It contains the recipe for developing a thriving congregation — having a vision, developing leadership, connecting with the community, fostering spiritual growth, and a clear sense of its identity. John Ambrose, editor of *Other Voices*, described the book as “a gold mine of insights, illustrations, very practical ideas, guidelines, and challenges.” \$19.95

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For a discount of 20% on eight copies or more, contact the Congregational Life Centre at 780-438-6016.



You are invited
to the
Congregational Life Centre Annual General Meeting

Thursday September 18

7:30—9:00 p.m.

at the

Revelations Book & Gift Cooperative

Whitemud Crossing Store

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Our work and our focus is identified by listening to the needs of those in our community.
Please come and share with us your current questions and concerns.

Guest Column

Dandelions

James Strachan

Every spring, I go to war. That requires ammunition, weapons, and energy. It is a war that many urban dwellers fight, and many farmers agonize over. I'm speaking, of course, about dandelions, the curse of the Urban Lawn and Garden! The curse of many a Farm Field as well. Just when you think you've won a decisive battle, having cut off the heads of all the Golden Soldiers, you rise in the morning to find them back again in full force! They drink Killex for breakfast, they shrug off Roundup unless it is applied very carefully, and many plants duck low beneath the blades of the lawnmower and survive even that! Of course, vinegar will kill them...and everything else it touches for two feet around! By August, I am in despair... no hope of victory!

Military strategists remind us that we should always: "Know your enemy!" So I set out to know the dandelion. Its name comes from the French (no, *not* Quebec). It means "*dente de lion*" – "lion's teeth" because of the saw-toothed shape of its leaves. Because of its diuretic qualities, the medieval English called it "pissabed," for reasons that require no explanation!

However (and isn't there always a 'however?'), the Dandelion also has many uses. The leaves can be eaten raw as a salad, or cooked in a soup. Currently, bunched dandelion leaves are sold at a higher price than lettuce! Jam can be made from the flowers, as well as a very powerful wine. I have had personal (adolescent) experience with this. It took days for me to recover. The root has medicinal properties. A 'decoction' of the root produces a powerful diuretic (see above), which can be obtained only with a medical prescription!

Gentle reader, it appears that we...I in particular...are digging up and poisoning a FORTUNE! As a good Scot it is difficult

*The dandelion
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appropriate
symbol for the
Christian
Church ...*



for me to contemplate that possibility. Perhaps I should start a dandelion farm! I'm sure that some of the retired farmers in the Liar's Club would help me...with free advice, at least. Imagine it: a crop that needs no tending, that reseeds itself all summer, that produces ten, perhaps fifteen crops per season! It can withstand all kinds of weather, including hail, drought and early snow. No cultivation is required, but harvesting is best done by hand. And...once you are making money from it, a field of golden dandelion flowers is a beautiful sight to behold!

In my research and contemplation, I remembered one more memorable aspect of the dandelion: it is virtually impossible to uproot. It is tenaciously alive, no matter how hard an enemy works at digging it out. I got to thinking that the dandelion might be an appropriate symbol for the Christian movement, for the Church. Bright in color, with many nourishing and medicinal uses, virtually impossible to kill, with a root that goes deep into even the toughest soil, the dandelion shares its glory with all who pass, and spreads its seeds far and wide on the wind.

Perhaps in front of every church in the land, up front, near the walk or path, there should be a dandelion patch planted. Each month of summer, we could watch that patch spread. Each winter, we could rest assured that come spring, the dandelions would be back in force. Soon, our whole Churchyard would be covered with gold. It would require no cutting, no watering, and it would urge us on to share the Word, and spread the seeds of faith. Some Churches would be full; others would be empty as the people went out to live their dandelion-faith in other yards and other fields. Wow, what a concept! And no more war every spring.[Hmmm... I wonder what our neighbors would think?]

