

2017 School of Congregational Development

Large Church

SM09

A Systems Approach to Leading the Large Church

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Description: Leading the large membership church can be a daunting task. However, using a systems approach to planning your work can bring unity among leadership, clarity in your goals, and an effective strategy for ministry. This process, developed by Dr. Kennon Callahan, is an effective tool for these changing times.

Content:

Recruit a Committee of 100: select 20 persons to serve as a steering committee and have the group nominate 80 lay persons who are known to have wisdom, sound judgment, vision, common sense, and a reliance upon prayer. It also helps for these folks to have a hopeful attitude about the future. The 100 should be well-representative of the congregation paying attention to gender equity and a diversity of persons in age, stage of life, and tenure in the church. Place the committee into groups of 20 with two steering committee members in each group. The steering committee members invite persons in their group to the annual meeting (usually the end of January). The purpose of the meeting is to develop a three-year plan of ministry.

Decide Where You Want to Be in 3 Years: there are three steps in this process. The first is to gain an understanding of your current standing: membership, constituents, and persons served in mission. The second is to decide where you want to be in three years. The third step is to collectively decide the best way to move from where you are to where you want to be.

The Planning Process: one of the best ways to move forward is to evaluate the church's ministry based on 8 characteristics in ministry. These are adapted from Kennon Callahan's "Twelve Keys to an Effective Church."

Mission Outreach

Shepherding Visitation

Dynamic Worship

Small Groups

Church Programs

Leadership Team

Adequate Facilities

Financial Resources

The interesting part is that the characteristics on the left side are relational and the ones on the right side are functional. Improving your ministry on the relational side raises the level of satisfaction while improving your ministry on the functional side lowers the level of dissatisfaction. People tend to participate in your church for relational reasons.

Develop Your Three-Year Plan: select the characteristics you deem to be strengths to build upon; select the characteristics you deem to be future strengths to develop; and construct a timeline for your work. In setting a timeline, allow three years for a new ministry to grow (year 1 is the development year, year 2 is the year in which the leadership emerges, and year 3 is the year of momentum).

Remember Three Principles: the first principle is the “20-80” rule – 20% of what a group does delivers 80% of the results (therefore, learn to invest your resources in 20%’ers). The second principle is “work smarter, not harder.” The third principle is “plan less to achieve more.”

Once the plan is set, each year the Committee meets to evaluate the past year, edit the plan for the coming two years, and add a new third year. This keeps the plan dynamic and relevant to the life of the church, giving a clear direction for the future with measurable goals that keeps your church moving forward.

Putting a Systems Approach into Practice:

Example: Worship and planning messages that offer help and hope

Step 1: Select scripture, themes, and sermon titles for the major services of the year (New Year, Easter, Mother’s Day, Fall Kick-off, Thanksgiving, and Christmas – I refer to these as “red-letter” Sundays and mark them in red on my planning. They are the first ones I plan.

Step 2: Select the significant church services of the year (Palm/Passion, Confirmation, Pentecost, Youth, Children, Music, Senior Adult, Young Professional, Stewardship Sunday, etc.) I mark these in green on my calendar and plan them second.

Step 3: Select the sermon series I want to preach for the year (January beginning of the year series, Lent, July “Summer in the City,” August Methodism, Fall, Thanksgiving “We Are Thankful...”, and Advent. These are marked in black on my calendar, and it’s amazing that there are only about 10 Sundays left over.

Step 4: Select in a preliminary way the music for these services and begin to think through the “warm moments” we want to create in each service and the “action” we want participants to take each week.