

The Salvation Army Leadership Letter

Issue 11:



Te Ope Whakāora

Finding Your New Church Dream (2)

Dear Bob

You asked me to write a Letter or two on *Finding A New Church Dream*.

In the first Letter we considered some critical background issues we should be clear about when starting strategic planning—and we ended with the ‘mission washed’ church service that’s the cornerstone of a new church dream.

In this second Letter we work through the planning process that produces that new church dream.

Stage 1 – Creating your winning graphic

To be of any use to you, your strategic plan should be brief, simple, and captured in a stunning graphic that people remember from the moment they first see it. Once created, you use this graphic frequently (along with the strategic plan outline, road rules, and core values we’ll come to shortly)—when you’re preaching, in your notices and newsletters, at leaders meetings, and so on because vision dies in 30 days.

But first, we start with where the church is at now, and where we believe that under God it should be several years from now—say 31 December 2010.

Using models ‘A’ and ‘B’ (see attachments—and slightly adapted from the originals) to get us started, we’ll assume we were running at 25 or 110 on Sunday mornings when we did a strategic planning weekend last June—believing that under God we’ll grow to 90 or 220 by the end of 2010. Of course we’re not just into the numbers game, so we note that some of the newer people attending in 2010 will be transfers from other churches (which always happens when churches grow), some will be returnees who’ve returned to Jesus and His church, and the biggest group will be the many people who’ve come to Jesus and been disciplined through the things we consider in a moment.

So using a large sheet of paper on a whiteboard or easel, we write ‘**Our Church Dream**’ at the top of the page, and underneath it, our expected morning attendance by the end of 2010. Then we decide on the four to six most significant things that will get us to our 2010 destination—and in many churches interested in renewal they’ll be roughly these (all this later written up on two sides of an A4 sheet for distribution).

1. The Sunday morning church service—or meeting

We put the church service first because, in all but a very small number of niche market churches, we win or lose on Sunday morning—the time when most Kiwis still prefer to attend church. If we can’t win here, and we’re not a niche market church, we’ll never win anywhere. So the Sunday morning meeting or service takes the first spot at the bottom left of the page—with an arrowed track that points us to our 2010 goal. Adding projected end-of-year attendances then completes the left hand side of the page with its focus on the large ‘corporate’ worship gathering on Sunday morning.

2. Small Groups, Pastoral Care and Discipleship

The second area that's crucial to win in is the small group, discipling, and pastoral care ministries—because they focus on growing the individuals in the church. Like the Acts 2.42-47 church, we need to do well at our large gatherings and our care for individual believers—small groups being the best way to do this.

3. Family ministries

Family life has changed enormously over the past few decades but certain things remain the same—wherever there are children there will always be at least one parent or caregiver, and some children may be older ('youth') and some younger ('children'). In all but the most exceptional congregations, therefore, reaching families becomes a top priority in the church's outreach ministries. So family ministries, with their focus on parents, children and youth (although some churches, like church 'B', prefer to have a separate focus on youth), are often the primary focus of the church's outreach—with pre-school ministries being at the cutting edge of family ministry initiatives. Family ministries, with their own track, take the third position across the page.

4. Key Community ministries

Key community ministries bring us into contact with people we may not otherwise meet, people we probably have no pastoral relationship with before the first meeting. Relationships tend to develop very rapidly in family ministries, through weekly quality time with children, parents, or youth (as also in some specialised community ministries). But in many community ministries, contact is often casual and infrequent at first, but deepens over time as we start seeing the same people again and again. Community ministries also vary greatly from church to church, but Family Stores and various Community Services ministries are particularly prevalent in some churches, so we'll feature these. Key community ministries therefore become the fourth track across our page—picking up on the other things we do in the community in addition to family ministries.

5. Other possible ministries

Some churches put a fifth or even sixth 'ministry' track across the page—and these may include youth (if not already part of track 3 or perhaps a track 4), or business, or something else. But we'll keep the graphic simple, with the four ministry tracks of church 'A', or the five of Church 'B' (the Sunday services, as we've noted, being a primary ministry).

6. Natural Church Development

An amazing number of churches don't have any regular health checks—just as many people don't have health checks until it is sometimes too late. Churches concerned about their health use different checks, but Natural Church Development (NCD) is probably the one most widely used across the denominations. The two churches featured both chose to use NCD so we'll make that our annual health check.

But however many tracks we use, our annual health check is placed at the far right of the graphic because it is a track in itself and focuses on all the other tracks spread across the page—helping us discover the strengths and weaknesses of each track. Writing 'Annual Health Checks' by the NCD track, as both churches did, also gives 'text' balance to the page.

And one other thing. The base of each track is linked to all the others, like the links in a chain, reminding us that in both healthy growing churches, and unhealthy declining churches, everything is inter-related—as NCD correctly reminds us.

Getting our church dream graphic in place is step one in getting a winning strategic plan—because, as in most things, a picture is worth a thousand words. And many of us are ‘picture’ people.

Stage 2 — Getting the main details in place

With our graphic now complete we can turn to the main details of our strategic plan – going for simplicity rather than complexity. In fact, complexity is unwise; complex church plans just don’t work!

So just as we picked out the four or five main things that will grow the church, we now jot down the three or four main things that will lead to high performance in each track. Following through the tracks listed above, our strategic plan for the next 12-18 months might look like this—the details being a blend of the two above churches’ plans, with special focus on the smaller church’s details because they focus on the few high-impacting steps they would take in each area (however, we’ve made ‘Youth’ our track 5, but it could well be a track 4 as in church ‘B’, or included in track 3).

1. The Sunday morning church service—or meeting

- change the service start time to 10.30am (it had previously been 11.00am which is far too late for connecting with seekers over morning tea afterwards)
- put the service focus on ministering to Christians and seekers alike (exactly as in 1 Cor 14.23-24; see NIV Study Bible text note)
- have guest services for Teeny Boppers (Teeny Boppers reaches 120 people in 53 families in a church of 20+)
- start Children’s Church (till now, this 20+ church had kept the children in church through the whole service)

2. Small Groups, Pastoral Care and Discipleship

A. Small Groups

- talk with the neighbouring minister about small groups—his church does small groups well
- start a small group now (they had none previously)
- do *40 Days of Purpose* as soon as possible (to give them small group momentum)
- from the start, develop an apprentice leadership system and people’s basic pastoral care from the small groups

B. Pastoral Care

- develop a total pastoral care strategy that includes people not in the future small groups
- teach the church to expect basic pastoral care from the emerging small groups
- develop a strategy to reach the Teeny Bopper Dads (but see also ‘Family Ministries’ below)

C. Discipleship: Decide on the first steps towards a discipleship programme—especially the **how** and the **who**.

3. Family ministries—especially Teeny Boppers

- be more intentional about evangelism

- contact the named people to develop a big selection of Christian Action Songs for Teeny Boppers
- start occasional Teeny Bopper guest services and feature their children, with morning tea afterwards
- prioritise reaching a few Teeny Bopper families first—especially those closest to the Kingdom
- develop specific pastoral care of the Teeny Bopper families, and perhaps organise a team to do this
- encourage the wider church family to be part of a ‘buddy’ system to strengthen relationships further

4. Key Community ministries

- have occasional Family Store services for volunteers and shoppers
- invite people we’re contacting through Community Services Ministries to a special morning service

5. Other possible ministries—eg. Youth

- be more intentional in our evangelism with young people
- run youth services twice a year (as a first step)

6. Natural Church Development

- talk to the recommended NCD facilitator immediately, do the first survey, and act on the findings
- do a survey in August or September every year
- pay special attention to the NCD emphases in Holistic Small Groups (with small groups yet to start)

Conclusions

Looking back over the above details several things stand out:

1. Church ‘A’ has put huge emphasis on the present two big things in the life of the church: the Sunday morning services and the wonderfully successful Teeny Boppers activity during the week—the Teeny Bopper details being taken over directly from the 20+ church’s mini plan. They saw the ministry as ‘gold’, and it is!
2. The plan is brief, simple, focused on both the big wins and the long-term journey, and achievable—just as all church strategic plans should be sharply focused, highly visual, and very simple if they’re to be of any use to us.
3. Further, with small but clear type, the main details of the strategic plan fit easily on the lower two thirds of side one of their dream sheet (below the graphic) and the top of side two—as does the plan for the 110-attendance church. Plans for much larger churches would be a little longer, but each major section of the church, like Family Ministries, would do its own strategic plan and graphic first, feeding their five or six main things into the larger church plan.
4. Finally, this is the version of the plan (including the graphic at the top of side one), together with the ‘Road Rules’ and Core Values I discuss in a moment, that you give out to your people in general—and to people transferring in who may be interested in who you are, what

you stand for, and where you're heading. They're not interested in the details we discuss in the next stage.

Stage 3 — Completing your Strategic Plan

With the main steps of our strategic plan in place we're now ready to put the finishing touches to the plan.

If we're a very small church, with less than 50 on Sunday morning (like church 'A'), we may only need to add the names of those actioning the steps through to the end of 2006—and the dates by which they action the steps. And since a pastor/minister and one or two lay leaders usually lead these small churches, no further details may be needed because their two or three names cover all the steps.

The same is often true of churches of 50-100+ (like church 'B'). Depending on the situation, the pastor may still be the key person in the church, so his/her name will go against many, if not most, of the action steps (as happened with church 'B'). So again, names and dates against each planned step or strategy may be all that's needed in these churches—rather than the 8-10 page plans that churches of this size sometimes use, quite often with little effect.

However, when we've completed stages one and two of our planning exercise, and our church is over a hundred in attendance, we may best achieve stage three by following the normal planning disciplines of key issues, statements of intent, objectives, actions needed, names of people involved, resources needed, time frames, and indicators that we've achieved the objectives. But this longer version of the plan is for leaders—the rest of the church don't need to know the details and probably aren't interested. They want to know what our dream is (and many don't have a dream!), where we're heading, and where we'll put our strokes in the next 12-18 months. That is, they want to know the big picture things. And leaders need to keep the big picture things in mind too—lest they get bogged down with the details (which often happens); so leaders need the shorter plan as much as the people do! The longer plan is just their operating guide.

Stage 4 — Establishing your road rules

With the strategic plan complete, we're now ready to jot down the absolutes, non-negotiables, or 'road rules' we'll need to keep—to get to our 2010 destination. There are five.

1. Regular Vision Casting. Since vision dies in 30 days, and many people aren't at church every Sunday, we need to vision cast regularly—in our worship leading, notices, and especially our preaching. Without a crystal clear vision, well presented and constantly nurtured, we'll never get to the 'promised land' of our dream.

2. Continual Leadership Development. To grow through the various attendance barriers, we should be very intentional in developing the leaders we need to reach our dream—small groups, with an apprentice leader development strategy, being the easiest area to do this in.

3. Increasing Prayer Momentum. Leading a growing church is one of the most challenging tasks on earth, and the bigger the challenge, the more we need to pray—so we know God's mind and will for the many decisions we make, remembering, 'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.'

4. A United Leadership Team. Leadership is a challenge at the best of times, and having a united team is the minimum requirement for growing a church. Sadly, many churches never achieve this, so they never reach their mission potential. To grow a church through the years, leaders need to be very intentional in working together as a united team.

5. Spend Our Money Evangelistically — which includes making our first contact with people through our ministries, bringing them to Jesus, growing them as disciples, and empowering them to reach others. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is about making disciples, and we should prioritise spending our money to this end.

Stage 5 — Establishing your core values

If our road rules remind us of the things we must do to reach our dream, our core values highlight the few things we must also focus on as we travel to our promised land.

Where churches already have core values, we don't usually add to them. But where they don't have values, and want to capture the spirit of their dream in new values, I end a planning day by helping leaders create their own values—and the simplest way is to take the tracks from our graphic and turn them into values.

Church 'A' did this—creating a value for each ministry track.

For example, their first value focused on their Sunday morning meeting, or service, and read like this: 'We believe that the Sunday morning meeting is the high point of our church week. Therefore we prepare our hearts to **worship** God together, **hear** from God's Word, **meet** with other attenders, and **encourage** one another.'

They did the same with their other values; so value three, for example, read like this: 'We believe that children and family ministries are central to our church focus for extending the Kingdom of God. Therefore we will prioritise our efforts and resources to this end.' And so on, thus completing our strategic planning exercise.

So now, with our plan complete, we can take our road rules and core values and put them below our plan outline, at the bottom of side two of the sheet we'll use widely in the life of the church—turning the various sections also into PowerPoint slides to use in our preaching and vision casting etc.

Finding Your New Church Dream!

Bob, this is a long Letter, but I wanted to complete my reply to you this year – rather than run it on into next year.

So read both Letters at a sitting, make sure you've thought through the background issues discussed in Letter 10, then use this Letter to help you create your new strategic plan. And when you've completed your plan, remember the five road rules you must keep to reach the promised land of your dream.

God bless you as you go forward to your new future. And may all your dreams for your church come true!

Goodbye.

Gordon Miller

Territorial Church Growth & Development Consultant

Email: gordon_miller@nzf.salvationarmy.org

To discuss at leaders meetings (before doing your planning)

1. What parts of this Letter challenge you most as you come to do your strategic planning?
2. Which 4-6 tracks will you prioritise to give you maximum mission traction on your journey through to the end of 2010?
3. What are some of the big steps you'll need to take in the next 12-18 months if you're to start your journey well?
4. When you've completed your plan, what major things will you then do to keep the broad features of your dream (captured in your plan) before your people (be very bold, creative and specific)?

Note: The next Leadership Letter appears on this website on 1 March 2006; and Gordon Miller can be contacted at the email address above.