

# CHURCH STRATEGIC PLANS

WHY YOU NEED ONE & HOW TO BUILD ONE





## WHEN YOUR CHURCH LOSES DIRECTION

For those of us with a poor sense of direction, getting lost can be an art form. In the days before GPS came with every smartphone, I got lost all the time. In fact, I've lost my way in more states than I care to admit. Honestly, I'm not much better with a GPS.

And do you typically leave on a trip without a destination in mind? Not likely. Whenever I have tried "just driving" I end up going in circles.

Whether it is your GPS or your guiding "northstar," getting lost is no laughing matter. It'll cost you in a number of ways. You'll spend more money (extra gas, extra food, another night of lodging) and time (finding your route, arriving late). Conflict is inevitable (lost passengers get cranky) and you get defensive because you have no clear idea where you are. You may not even reach your destination.

The same is often true of churches. With no guiding directions or clear destination you can get lost. The costs are huge when we don't know where we're going. Here are a few examples.

- **It drains resources.** You'll invest in one area one year, then change your mind the next. Your ministries may all be using the same resources and people. Instead of a consistent vision, the church changes direction with the whims of the culture, and what you are doing suffers by being starved for lack of support..
- **Staff Conflict increases.** With no way to prioritize efforts, your staff ends up in conflict. The conflict causes staff members and church leaders to lose morale, which pervades the culture of the church.
- **Engagement declines.** Your people drift away because they do not have a sense of purpose or organizational mission. They are uninspired. Ministries can end up in conflict for support and resources when there is no priority.
- **Gifts will be squandered.** You'll likely see a reduction in financial giving. Talented people are sitting on the sidelines because they're not sure what they're doing.
- **You'll fail to accomplish anything lasting.** If you don't know where you're going, you're guaranteed to get there. (Yeah, read that again.) Jesus has called us to make disciples. You won't do that without some kind of plan.

That's when you get that feeling of anxiety. It's the same feeling as when you get lost on a road trip. You know your church is just existing and may even be declining. Your congregation is not growing and thriving. Your church was established to transform lives, bring people to Christ and change the world. You know it is not fulfilling its potential.

So when you're lost, it's not just a loss for your church and the people who call it home. It's a loss for your entire community.



## WHY DO YOU NEED TO DO A STRATEGIC PLAN?

In his book *Advancing Strategic Planning: A 21st Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, Aubrey Malphurs emphasizes the importance of strategic planning to “design a strategy that accomplishes the mission and vision” of the church. More simply, entrepreneur Nelson Searcy describes strategy as: “a logical plan that gets you from where you are to where God wants you to be.” And Patrick Lencioni says a strategy needs to be “memorable, understandable, actionable and wise.”

You want your church to be the ministry that is your fullest potential, the place where God wants you to be, right?

Of course, you do.

You didn’t take on your leadership role to fumble around and struggle to reach people. You want to foster a community that creates opportunities to encounter Christ, and you want to have time for personalized ministry.

If you are choosing to simply maintain what has always been done at your church, then you don’t need a strategy. You can keep on doing what you’re doing. You can turn your back on inevitable decline.

But if you want to fulfill the Great Commission today, you need alignment and clarity of purpose. In other words, you need a plan.





## WHAT DOES A GOOD STRATEGIC PLAN LOOK LIKE?

A good strategic plan provides you and your leaders clarity of purpose, desired leadership behaviors, alignment on where you are going, and priorities on how to get there. You create a strategic plan when you put your strategy down on paper and empower your leaders to make decisions based upon that plan. *It's a guiding document as the church moves into the future.*

Strategic plans have similar components, but no two church strategic plans are alike. Your church has a unique call, and you'll need a unique plan to fulfill God's purpose for you.

There are a few common elements in great church strategic plans.

### PURPOSE STATEMENT

Your purpose is your WHY. Why does your church exist? All churches are called to fulfill the Great Commission by making disciples. *But your church's unique purpose* is the specific way God has called your church to do this.

(Often strategic plans use "mission" and "vision" as the components of the plan. These terms get used interchangeably and can be difficult to distinguish from one another. We are using "purpose" in place of "mission" to avoid mixing the terms.)

Clarity of purpose helps everyone: staff, ordained, volunteers, and members to understand the significance of the organization. It provides alignment for why the church exists and your part in building the Kingdom of God.

It's a statement that combines your unique attributes with your value-informed behaviors to live and attain your ideal Christ ordained "world."

*Your purpose ensures your congregation understands what your church does.*

### VALUES

Values are your HOW. They are the terms that inform the behavior of the people of the organization, expressing the interactions that are desired and good and distinguishing from what is undesirable. Your values represent the important principles behind how you do your ministry. Every church has them whether they are written down or not. Strategic planning is a time to review the behavior of your leaders and members, which demonstrate your lived church values, and determine if they are truly the ones you wish to live by for the future. The strategic plan should proclaim your aspired values along with statements about how you will apply the values in your ministry.

*Your values ensure your congregation understands the core principles that guide your church.*

## VISION STATEMENT

Your Vision describes WHERE. It's what your church and your community will look like in the next 3-5 years.

In his research for Gallup, Al Winesman identified a hierarchy of congregational engagement, noting that members are most engaged in their church when they share in the direction the church is going.

Your vision statement should inspire both leaders and members to align in support of the mission potential of the church. It should be biblical, grounded in scripture, and be an expression of your prayerfully discovered future, achieved through your aspirational (which become your Core) values and clear purpose.

Churches often pair their vision statement with their logo to provide a consistent experience for those they are engaging. Some are as long as 12-15 words, but many of the best are between 6-8 words.

An effective vision statement shares your strategy in a concise and memorable way. Your goal is that every regular attender can recite the vision statement from memory. It's something you work into the aesthetics of your worship space, the communication from the pulpit, and your digital and print media.

*Your vision ensures your congregation understands where your church is going.*

## PRIORITIES AND GOALS

Your priorities are the 2-4 MOST IMPORTANT areas your church must focus on to progress toward your vision over the next 3-5 years.. The priorities provide the framework for strategies defined as SMART Goals (typically 18-24 months each) to implement your priorities. They also provide alignment for staff and leaders to determine what NOT to do at this moment in time. Likely these are the elements of a strategic plan you're most familiar with already. These are also the most malleable. Goals will be added as initial ones are completed. They may change depending on the situation your church finds itself in. Priorities should not change without careful consideration and communication.

Your goals should be strategic, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound, so at the end of the duration it's clear whether or not you reached those goals.

*Your priorities ensure everyone knows what to do and what not to do. Your goals ensure your church can celebrate wins and stay engaged with the vision over the long haul.*



## BUILDING YOUR STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM

Building a strategic plan is a team effort. You want people on your team from every part of your church's ministry—especially as you work through the information-gathering process. A strategic plan needs to be more than simply a product of a brainstorming session among the leadership.

### Here are a few of the groups that need to be represented on your team:

- Your Pastor or Senior leader
- Members of your Council or leadership team
- Leaders of age-group ministries
- Key volunteer leaders
- Longtime members of your church
- New members of your church

### Also consider the skills you will need present for your team to be effective:

- Financial analysis
- Communications
- Design
- Writing and documentation
- Goal-setting
- Strategic

Think about the socio-economic and ethnic diversity of the community you want to reach as you build your team, too. You want the diversity of your team to match the diversity of your community, if possible.

But don't stop with just looking internally for team members. An outside partner is critical.

Why?

You need an outside set of eyes. People who aren't intimately involved in your church will see things you can't see.

Plus, you'll want experienced team members. You want to involve leaders who have been through this process before in many different contexts. Any time you develop a strategic plan, you'll run into roadblocks and questions along the way. An effective guide can help you navigate them without a detour.

Ever seen the popular Farmers Insurance where they tell you about some crazy case they've seen? Like a bear running amuck in a man cave, a deer dancing on a classic car, or a squirrel setting up a home in an engine compartment.

Then a voice comes over the screen saying: "We know a thing or two because we've seen a thing or two."

When your church works on a strategic plan, you need someone on your team who knows a thing or two because they've seen a thing or two.

That's us at ACS Technologies. Our new strategic planning consulting service connects you with consultants with decades of experience working with churches of all sizes, denominations, and strategies.

We'll walk beside your leaders and church members as you go through a process of discovery that'll lead to a strategic plan for moving forward.

## HOW ACS TECHNOLOGIES CAN HELP

ACS Technologies wants your church to thrive and reach the unique vision God has given your church. Through decades of experience, we've seen the impact that a focused, kingdom-minded church can have on their neighbors, their community, and the world.

To help you discover the future God has for your church, our experienced consultants walk you through a four- to six-month process that typically has four parts.

- 1. Preparation** – We'll help you get ready for this process by working with you to find the right people to be a part of your strategic planning team in your specific ministry context. Then we'll help your newly established team understand the process so everyone begins on the same page.
- 2. Review current reality** – We'll walk together to help you understand the unique gifting and untapped potential of your church body, so you can see how you can best minister in the future. We will gather information about your members and your church through interviews and our own assessment resources. And using our industry-leading MissionInsite software database, we can help you learn more about the community you want to reach including—the ages, ethnic backgrounds, educational level, and socio-economic status of your neighbors. We can also go beyond that by showing you their motivations, spiritual questions, and needs.
- 3. Prayerfully consider your church's desired future.** We believe God has big plans for your church. Once you have the right team in place and a clear and unbiased look at your community and church family, we'll dream together of what God can do through your church.
- 4. Identify key priority goals.** Then we'll establish a few mileposts along the way, goals to help you know you're headed toward the future you've envisioned.

At this end of this process, you'll leave with:

- An understanding of your specific ministry context and an awareness of how to use research tools to stay on top of important community trends.
- A vision statement that will inspire your congregation—and the broader community—to embrace the future God is planning for your congregation.
- A mission statement that'll guide your church's future direction and decision-making.
- An initial set of priorities to keep your church moving toward God's vision.





## READY FOR THE FUTURE?

It's easy to look at the chaos of the world and wonder about your church's ability to impact it. The problems around you—no matter where your context is—are great. Spiritual emptiness, rampant materialism, social dysfunction. The list goes on and on.

But the Bible tells us you have everything you need to do what God calls you to do. The Apostle Peter wrote this to the first-century church: ***"We have everything we need to live a life that pleases God. It was all given to us by God's own power, when we learned that he had invited us to share in his wonderful goodness."***

A strategic plan can help your church unleash the unique gifts God has given your church for impacting the world. We'd love an opportunity to walk beside you as you discover that call and the gifts he has given you to fulfill it.





# Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

## The know-how you need from experts you trust.

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

## Tools and support to strengthen churches.

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

## Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

## A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.


We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

## We believe in YOU!

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

## Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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