



PROMISE MINISTRIES

Building a Strategic Ministry Plan
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Promise Ministries: Building A Strategic Ministry Plan

Introduction

As a congregation grows from infancy, to maturity, and ultimately toward decline, it will exhibit a change in emphasis in four key areas: *vision, relationships, programs, and management*.¹ In mature congregations such as Promise Ministries,² the vision that drove the founding of the congregation recedes gradually as more emphasis is placed on sustainability in the form of relationships, programs and management. It is at this point that congregations often seek renewal in the form of a new or revised vision for its ministry.

The visioning and planning process at Promise Ministries was built around the four areas (referred to as “pillars”) of a church community, which are:

- Building Community (*Internal*)
- Worship
- Christian Education
- Mission and Outreach (*External*)

Through the process, the congregation was asked to clarify and affirm its core purpose for each pillar and how its approach to the pillar supports the larger mission, vision, and values of the church as a body. For each pillar, members of the congregation were asked to respond to three questions:

1. What are we seeking to accomplish?
2. How well are we accomplishing those things?
3. What would bring us closer to accomplishing them?

The planning process began with the distribution of a brief survey to all members of the congregation. The survey was designed to gather perceptions from the members regarding the current state of each of the four pillars. The information from the survey was used to inform the subsequent planning sessions.

Based on the results of these discussions, the congregation will develop a series of implementation plans, each built around a *strategic priority* or area of emphasis identified through the planning process. Finally, the congregation will consider whether it has the structures and resources in place to strengthen and maintain the pillars in their desired form. Questions in this regard include:

¹ This particular framework was developed by the Reverend George Bullard in 2001.

² *Mature* denotes a position at the top of the arc on the lifecycle of congregations. Other terms for this position include *plateau, prime, and adulthood*.

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- Do we have the right people doing the right things?
- Do we have processes for making decisions?
- How well do we communicate our priorities and the decisions that support them?
- How do we prepare for growth?

The first planning session included a series of activities designed to focus the attention of the congregation inwardly, to make explicit the underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions that guide the activities of the church. The results of the first session are presented in Section I, entitled, “Looking Inward”.

The report is organized around each of the four pillars presented above and includes a statement of purpose for each, along with recommendations for strengthening the pillar.

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I. Looking Inward

Mission

Promise Ministries operates under a simple and direct mission to “deliberately disciple people into fully devoted followers of Christ”. Members of Promise Ministries live into the mission by:

- Walking beside one another in a non-judgmental way.
- Helping one another grow.
- Sharing our own experiences with one another.
- Educating ourselves and one another about scripture.
- Forming authentic relationships with one another.

Actions and Words

Members of Promise Ministries were asked to put themselves in the place of a newcomer to the congregation in responding to this question: “*What would you conclude is important to Promise Ministries based on what you see and hear there?*” The responses are presented below.

- Promise Ministries recognizes the spiritual power of music, as evidenced by the vibrancy and professionalism of the music program.
- Promise Ministries strives to be culturally relevant, as evidenced by the number of youth and young adults.
- Promise Ministries wants people to be comfortable and relaxed, as evidenced by the buzz of activity in the commons area before worship.
- Promise Ministries is family-oriented, as evidenced by the presence of children who enjoy being there.
- Promise Ministries is about living out the faith, as evidenced by the challenging and provocative nature of the sermons.
- Promise Ministries values the contributions of people of all ages, as evidenced by the multi-generational mix of the congregation.

Lessons Learned

Finally, members of the congregation were asked to identify the major lessons it has learned about itself over the years. The following were identified:

- It is okay to take risks and to make mistakes.
- Change can happen without violating our core values.
- Taking risks requires that we trust each other.

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II. Building the Pillars

Identify, accept, and celebrate who we really are... not who we think we are supposed to be. (Parker Palmer, Let Your Life Speak)

Who We Really Are

Promise Ministries was founded on a very clear vision of itself as a place where traditional Lutheran values and theology could find a more contemporary expression. Specifically, Promise Ministries is rooted in the following tenets of the traditional Lutheran Church:

- The authority of scripture.
- The centrality of forgiveness and grace.
- The personal relationship with Christ.
- The experience of the sacramental.

Promise Ministries consider itself to be a *destination* church (rather than a neighborhood church) and recognizes that it is likely to appeal to *seekers*, understood as individuals who:

- Attend out of desire rather than a feeling of obligation.
- Have left other churches or denominations.
- Are seeking a deeper exploration of faith.
- Value the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- Recognize that we can't grow in faith by ourselves.

Promise Ministries is able to meet the spiritual needs of the seeker by opening up the Scriptures in a way that allows individuals to take their faith out into the world. The deep exploration of faith is enhanced by the integration of the message of Scripture into other activities of the church.

It is from this understanding of itself – the continuing relevance of its founding vision and its importance to the people it serves – that Promise Ministries undertakes the task of creating a renewed vision for its ministry.

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Pillar I: Worship

Core Purpose

Worship at Promise Ministries is, by design, an alternative to the traditional Lutheran worship service and is comprised of three essential components:

- The message of grace and forgiveness.
- Personal reflection time.
- Challenge to personal action.

The format and content of worship at Promise Ministries is built around three guiding principles and beliefs:

1. The message in worship must be culturally and personally relevant.
2. The worship experience must help individuals move faith from the mind to the heart.
3. Teaching is more effective than preaching.

Based on the discussions at the planning session, it appears that worship at Promise Ministries is aligned with its core principles and values. Suggestions for improvement include:

- Better communication about worship, including signage and written explanations of communication of how we do things (e.g., communion, offering).
- The placement of greeters and ushers inside the worship center.
- More opportunities for children to be involved in worship.
- Create greater integration of themes across the worship service.

Strategic Priorities

To strengthen the worship pillar, Promise Ministries will address the following:

Strategic Priority: Leadership

Objective: Ensure continuity of leadership in worship planning.

Strategic Priority: Music

Objective: Utilize music in the most effective manner to enrich the worship experience.

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Pillar II: Christian Education

Core Purpose

The purpose of Christian Education at Promise Ministries is to foster discipleship through reflection on the message of Scripture and how we act it out in our lives as individuals and as a congregation. Several challenges were identified that inhibit the aspirations for a more comprehensive, inclusive program. Those challenges include:

- The need of individuals to balance convenience with commitment.
- Lack of understanding of what it means to “study the Bible”.

Promise Ministries believe that the small group model is a solid foundation for a stronger Christian Education program. The following recommendations for improvement were offered:

- Provide more opportunities for adult Bible study.
- Integrate topics across all age groups.

In addition to these content-focused suggestions, Promise Ministries believes that there needs to be a sense of shared responsibility for the delivery of Christian Education activities and programs. In addition, a process needs to be put in place to identify relevant topics.

Strategic Priorities

To strengthen the Christian Education pillar, Promise Ministries will address the following:

Strategic Priority: Small Group Ministry

Objective: Develop a small group structure that provides opportunity for members to engage in deep theological reflection on the messages of worship.

Pillar III: Service and Outreach

Core Purpose

Promise Ministries believes that service and outreach is a natural response to the call to share Christ’s love. This takes two forms. *Outreach* is the sharing of our faith with others who do not have a personal relationship with Christ. Through *service*, we share ourselves – our time, our gifts, and our presence – as an invitation to be in relationship with others through selfless giving.

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Service is tied to our commitment to discipleship in the “up/in/out” model. The goal at Promise Ministries is to build a service heart in all its members such that each is compelled to serve people in need of material and spiritual support. The appropriateness of a congregation-sponsored activity or project will be judged by the following criteria:

- It brings us in communion with the people we serve.
- It provides an opportunity to plant seeds that may grow into full discipleship.
- We are compelled out of genuine love with no expectation of payback or benefit.
- It does not require a long-term commitment.
- There are no theological strings attached to our involvement.

Promise Ministries operates under a decentralized model of service and outreach, meaning that any member of group within the congregation is able to bring forward ideas for service and outreach activities.

Strategic Priorities

To strengthen the Service and Outreach pillar, Promise Ministries will address the following:

Strategic Priority: Individual Discipleship

Objective: Continued growth in the number of individuals involved in service and outreach activities.

Pillar IV: Congregational Life

The pillar of congregational life is comprised of two related considerations. First, there are commitments that the congregation makes to its members for how it will foster full inclusion into the life of the church. Second, there are expectations of each other for how each individual member will work toward discipleship while contributing to the life of the church. Each list is presented below.

As a member of Promise Ministries, we promise that we will:

- Help you find a way to serve internally and externally.
- Present the Truth of the Gospel.
- Be there with and for you in times of need and in times of joy.
- Provide opportunities to participate in the sacraments.
- Provide information about what is happening at Promise Ministries.

As a member of Promise Ministries, we expect that you will:

- Believe in the authority of Scripture.
- Seek to use your time and talents in service.
- Support the church financially.
- Be fully engaged in the church ministry.

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Promise Ministries recognizes that they are very good at greeting and welcoming people who choose to join us in worship. However, they also recognize that sometimes they fall short in helping each other discern the personal call to discipleship, whether through internal or external activities.

Strategic Priorities

To strengthen the Congregational Life pillar, Promise Ministries will address the following:

Strategic Priority: Leadership Development

Objective: Empower individuals within the congregation to assume leadership roles in the implementation of the four pillars.

Strategic Priority: Alignment of Activities

Objective: Ensure that activities of the church are mutually reinforcing and that resources are expended on the activities that matter most.

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Strategic Framework Summary

Pillar	Strategic Priority	Objectives	Action Steps
Worship	Leadership	Ensure continuity	Form task force
	Music	Enhance worship	Form task force
Christian Education	Small Group Ministry	Foster theological reflection	Form task force
Service and Outreach	Individual Discipleship	Continue growth in participation	Message of challenge
Congregational Life	Leadership Development	Empower individuals to contribute to church activities and ministries	TBD
	Alignment of Activities	Consistency of message and experience	TBD