

## Planning as Involvement and Cultivation Leading to Commitment

There are lots of good reasons for planning in parishes, including:

- External pressures (such as changing circumstances that require new ways of thinking or perhaps a need to develop a compelling case for fundraising);
- Operational improvements (such as focusing efforts on mission, programs, ministries or developing measurable goals).

In the typical parish experience, though, the most compelling benefits often come from developing the strength of internal resources.

The priest, parish council members, volunteers, staff and general parishioners all know the parish in a different way. Their limited individual perspectives offer both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths involve the value that comes from challenging assumptions. The obvious is often wrong, even if it started out right in different circumstances. Getting everyone out of their comfort zones to consider different points of view can lead to important changes in goals or means.

One vulnerability of a parish comes from its reliance on one or two sources of income - families deciding to support it with their time, money and influence and a festival. There is an ongoing need to sustain that support every year. One definition of strategic planning for parish is the development of consensus around mission. This distinguishes strategic planning in the parish from the process of strategic planning in business.

Parish council members often have a knowledge of business planning that can distort their understanding of its purpose and power in the life of a parish. In parishes, success comes not through the economic self-interest of employees and customers, but through the voluntary efforts of parish council members, volunteers and parishioners. Many competing charities combined with the one or two sources of income, causes, a parish's success to hinge upon the degree of involvement and engagement it inspires in its parishioners.

An inclusive planning process builds connection and enthusiasm, enhances self-awareness and mutual understanding, and develops strategic thinking and informed leadership.

Change that is involuntary always feels as though it is *imposed*, hence, may result in instant resistance. But change that is participatory builds ownership and commitment.

Hey! That's *our* parish's strategic plan you're criticizing! We all had a chance to provide input, attend general planning sessions and approve the final written plan. If you didn't participate then you have no one to blame but yourself! It was a very open and inclusive process.