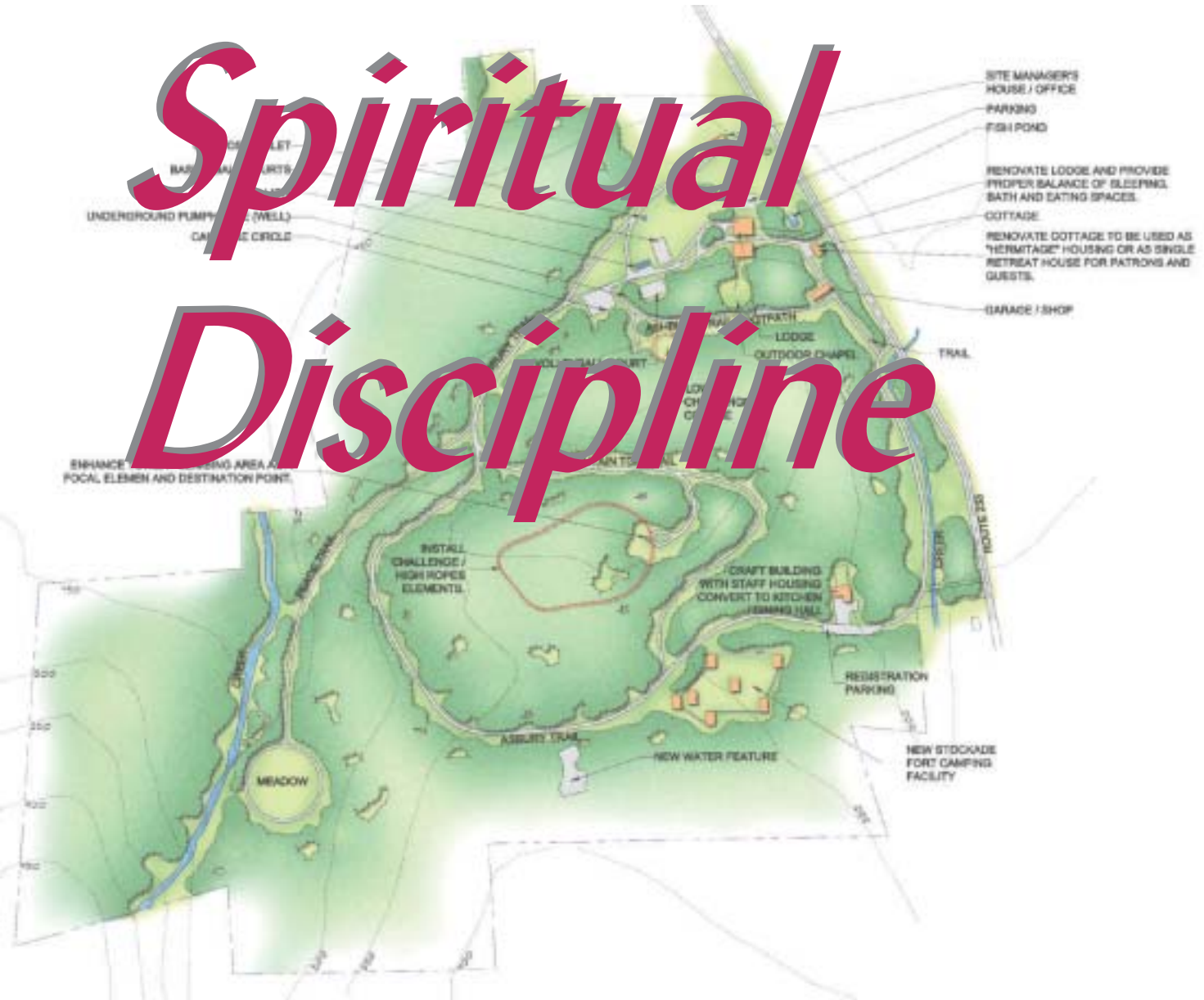


Strategic Planning as

Spiritual Discipline





Helping You Find Your Way

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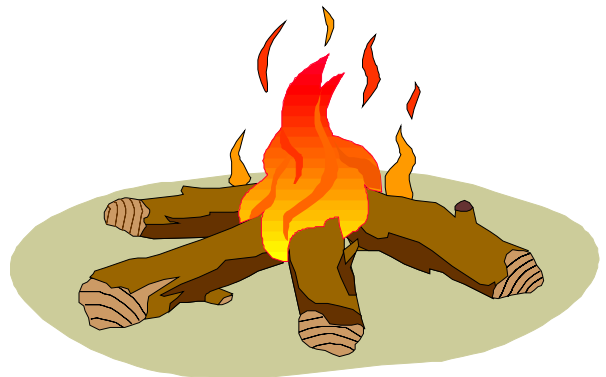
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“Strategic Planning as a faith process deepens our relationship with God, and strengthens the life of our group.

It seeks to answer the question, ‘What is God calling us to do?’ Plans, goals, objectives, and strategies are developed as a way of responding to God’s call.



*It is God
who is at work in you,
enabling you both to will
and to work
for his good pleasure.*

Philippians 2:13

What is Strategic Planning?



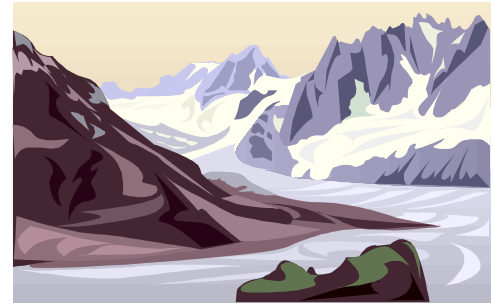
Strategic planning is a process which guides a group in thoroughly examining its current and past operation, evaluating its effectiveness in light of its mission, setting significant goals for the future, and developing specific plans to achieve those goals.

As a process of spiritual discipline, strategic planning is always in response to God. It is a process of discernment; of listening for God's call and formulating a response to that call.

A strategic plan allows an organization to accomplish more than it otherwise would, to optimize the use of its current resources, to make operational decisions which lead to strategic ends, and to increase future resources.

It encourages individuals to grow in faith, and the organization to become a more faithful steward of those gifts with which it is entrusted.

Setting out in faith



- ◆ **Define the outcome of the process in terms of the mission of the ministry:**

The reason for entering the planning process, and therefore, the essential goal is always articulated in terms of the ministry of the organization. The reason for planning is not to answer questions of what to do with buildings, or how to meet budgets. The reason for planning, and the only question that should be asked is, “What is God calling us to do?”

- ◆ **The process must be framed intentionally with the marks of faith and spirituality:**

The nature and shape of the process must reflect who we are as a people of faith. The ways we identify ourselves and build our faith should be built into the process, such as prayer, song, testimony. Activities and actions that move us away from who we are as a people of faith should be intentionally eliminated from the work.

- ◆ **Create a “culture of call;” which moves us beyond our own preferences, inclinations, and prejudices:**

Be aware of activities or statements which reflect predetermined limitations based upon past conclusions or assumptions. The very nature of spiritual discipline requires an openness to that which is beyond us.

- ◆ **Blend an objective examination of our ministry with a process of inspiration:**

The information which should be taken into consideration include hard data, such as a site and facility assessments, usage data, and financial statistics. But the process must also include those things which help us to see beyond the data and inspire us to dream. Both help to shape our vision.

- ◆ **Invite commitment and renewal as well as plan for implementation:**

The plan for a new future is not just a strategy of budgets and buildings; it is a response to God’s call and the resources necessary to fulfill that call.



The Process

There are generally four distinct stages in a planning process, which may be described differently by different consultants and faith communities. However, these four basic aspects should be included in your process. Each of them lends itself to an expression of our life in the spirit.

- ⇒ **Research and Analysis - *Tradition***
- ⇒ **Review Data and Focus Direction - *Scripture***
- ⇒ **Preliminary Strategic Plan - *Reason***
- ⇒ **Final Report - *Experience***

- I. In the *research and analysis* stage all relevant information is gathered and sorted. Critical information includes: exploration of organizational mission, detailed analysis of past program participants and groups, appraisal of current site and facilities, review of current operational strength (including programs, personnel, and finances), and any other pertinent organizational issues. Information may include general demographic research as well.

The tradition dimension of our spiritual experience is the recalling of the ways in which God has blessed us and our ministry in the past. It is the “mission beyond the statement,” the times when we have been faithful and God has worked through us. It is not always what we might expect. It may not be at the places of greatest sophistication. It is often carried in story. It provides the starting point for planning as seeking to be faithful to God’s call in the future.

- II. *Review and focus* involves drawing preliminary conclusions regarding the general direction of the plan based upon the information gathered. This phase describes the “broad stroke” vision of the future, and provides the framework upon which the final plans are formed. This stage might present such conclusions as “Camp

**³Let the LORD your
God show us where we should
go and what we should do.”
Jeremiah 42:3 (NRSV)**

Grace should expand its summer camping operations to increase the number of older campers.”

“To hear with my heart, to see with my soul, to be guided by a hand I cannot hold, to trust in a way that I cannot see, that’s what faith must be.”

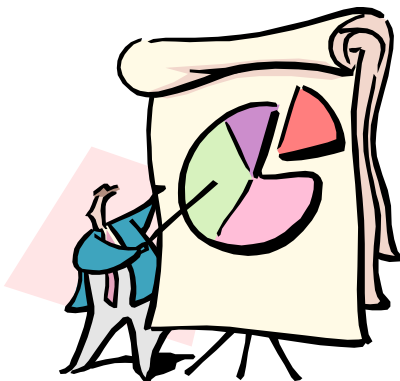
The stories of our own experience and memory must be tied to the larger story of God’s people in the world. By ourselves, we are apt to wander down the path of our own preferences. So we tie our stories to Scripture, the larger story of what

God has done and is doing in the world. Exploration and study and reflection upon the scriptures to which we are drawn helps to shape where we go in the future.

- III. The third stage is the crafting of a *preliminary strategic plan*. Specific details are included for program, marketing, operations, and site development plans. At this stage, plans should be assessed for both viability and feasibility. Information related to program, marketing and operations should be presented in a form which supports the development of “benchmarks,” by which to gauge progress. Site information should include a site map, and may include concept drawings for specific buildings. Detailed specifications for buildings are probably not necessary at this point.

In coming to decisions about what we shall do and where we will go, a process of reasoning together that “builds up,” is critical. This is not a stage of debate, where ideas are pitted against one another. It is a process of together building a response to the call which has been perceived. This stage may also require a act of “relinquishment” where persons are invited to let go of personal desires and wishes.

- IV. The final stage is the development of a *Final Report*, which reflects thorough testing, evaluation, and revisions of the preliminary plans. Materials developed in this stage should include materials to support both internal and external interpretation of the plan.



The final phase of spiritual discipline is the act of prayerfully seeking spiritual conviction and commitment to the future that has been determined. It is more than a set of plans and strategies; it is an offering of ourselves to gather together the resources to fulfill the call as it has been perceived.

Each stage of the process should include some form of reporting and information sharing. For most groups, this is best done in a retreat setting; for others, input may be gathered and information shared via a secure web site, or through other means. At each stage, the results should be presented by the consultants and refined by the planning team. The final plan should be one that no one individual could have crafted by himself or herself, including the consultant.

The final materials should do more than describe buildings and budgets, but offer the vision, the way in which the group is responding to God's call, in a way that invites others to become a part of that response.

Throughout the process, each stage should be an act of faith, where individuals and the group as a whole is built up in faith.

In a more "classic" description of the spiritual life, the phase of planning could be described as:

- ◆ **work**, reviewing our labors and efforts;
- ◆ **study**, learning from the scriptures how we should live and what we should do;
- ◆ **community**, sharing our faith, and coming together to decisions about how to respond to God's call;
- ◆ **prayer**, devoting our lives to living out God's call.

¹² Sow for yourselves righteousness;
reap steadfast love;
break up your fallow ground;
for it is time to seek the LORD,
that he may come and rain
righteousness upon you.
Hosea 10:12 (NRSV)

The Role of Consultant Support

◆ Do I have to?

It is unlikely that you will be able to complete a master plan without professional and technical support. There may be cases where this is possible, but they are the exception. The work of leading effective group planning process, providing sufficient analysis of data and information, and producing designs for land use and facilities, is generally more than can be folded into staff or volunteer time. Staff and volunteer time is generally better invested in participating in the process.

Especially if you are dealing with situations of decline or extensive redevelopment of services, using a consultant to lead the process can result in stronger plans.

◆ How do I choose a consultant?

Check with fellow camp professionals on their experience, use listings in *The Journal* and *Camping* magazines, and on CCI / ACA websites. You may want to obtain basic information from companies first and then send RFP's to a smaller group. Or you may want to receive proposals from a larger number of organizations and interview fewer prospects.

◆ What should I look for?



A consultant should demonstrate a willingness to understand your camp and ministry needs. The consultant will become a partner in ministry. Be wary of “boilerplate” answers which do not seem to be sufficiently grounded in your camp’s history and mission.

A consultant should offer expertise and experience in both process and content.

How to Move Ahead

- Decide who must be involved in the decision to engage in a master planning process. Who must give formal assent and who should give informal assent?
- Make a commitment to a planning process which is also a faith process; begin to interpret that intent to those who will be involved and those who will receive results.
- Talk with a small group of persons to test the reasons to enter a master planning process at this time, and the challenges. Are there obstacles to clear before proceeding? What is the “case” to be made? Are there specific issues which should be addressed through master planning?
- Plan your timeline and process for making the decision, and review funding options. Decide on candidates for the planning team. Are there responsibilities that must be shifted during the time of the planning process?
- Research list of possible of consultants.
- Develop and send Request for Proposal.
- Interview consultant candidates, check references, and make selection. Finalize agreement for Services.
- Assemble all the information you can about the site, its programs, the issues facing it, and any data. If participation data is not in a usable format, check with staff and volunteers to enter or convert it.
- The final product should be inspiring and practical; it will be the basis of eliciting significant support.
- Aim high -- the results of your master planning process should be no less than a response to the call of God for your ministry.



¹¹For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I will let you find me, says the LORD.

Jeremiah 29:11-14a

