

PART THREE: A HOLISTIC STRATEGY TO MATURE MOBILIZE, AND
MULTIPLY DISCIPLES

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CHAPTER 7

A WHOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

FLC's goal is to make, mature, multiply, and mobilize disciples who serve in missional ministry. To realize this goal, FLC must develop an effective action plan that avoids the pitfalls experienced by other churches in the Cedar Rapids area. FLC has chosen four primary transition themes for this action plan based on the theological and biblical foundations described in the previous chapter. The action plan must also be flexible and adaptable, but consistent with biblical teachings.

Barna emphasizes the need for a deliberate plan based on a sound philosophy of ministry:

Discipleship does not happen simply because a church exists. It occurs when there is an intentional and strategic thrust to facilitate spiritual maturity. Specifically, the church must have a philosophy of ministry that emphasizes the significance of discipleship, and promotes a process for facilitating such maturity...churches that are most effective in discipleship have learned what is required among their people: a philosophy of ministry that places daily spiritual growth at the core of the ministry. Programs alone won't get the job done. Knowing what you're striving to produce, having a philosophy that supports that outcome, implementing a plan to accomplish the goal, and evaluating the sufficiency of the outcomes is important. Just as each believer's life is examined to see if it produces fruit, so must each church evaluate its ministry to determine the quantity and quality of the fruit it is producing.¹

This chapter describes the use of a year-long discipleship plan developed at FLC called *The Circle of Life Discipleship Journey*. An evaluation tool was developed to

¹ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Ventura, CA: Issachar Resources, 2000), 29.

assess the criteria, benchmarks, and mileposts for the program. The chapter describes structures designed to maximize the congregation's overall life and ministry.

The Circle of Life Discipleship Journey Stages

The Exploration and Creation Stage

Following three years of multiple initiatives and experiments, FLC hired a Director of Discipleship, Small Groups and Alpha. Based on the dynamic growth that resulted, and from lessons learned, a staff visioning team (SVT) was formed. The SVT studied successful discipleship efforts conducted in contexts similar to FLC's. Elements of the programs combined into *The Circle of Life Discipleship Journey*.

The Advancement Stage

The plans were tailored to the FLC context, grounded in FLC's core values, and a presentation was made at the FLC annual leadership retreat. All Council members, church staff, ministry and small group leaders were encouraged to give constructive feedback, and to participate in the next stages of refinement and execution of the program plan. Details of the plan are presented later in this chapter.

The Refinement Stage

The Staff Vision Team identified potential leaders for eight teams, which included several from those who indicated interest at the retreat. Each team was guided by the SVT and identified local area resources such as retreat centers and FLC Library resources, and wrote the eight dimensions of discipleship included in *The Circle of Life*

Discipleship Journey. A *Leaders' Resource Binder* was assembled to be used by small group leaders as they developed a year-long small group program schedule.

The Execution Stage

The SVT created a training opportunity for small group leaders as they developed the small group schedule. The SVT explained the concept of *The Circle of Life Discipleship Journey* and equipped each small group leader to develop a small group plan. For those unable to attend, resource binders (see Appendix 4) were created with detailed descriptions of how to devise a year plan for a small group.

A four-week sermon series communicated the biblical and theological foundations of the vision and overall strategy. This sermon series included the titles: “Transformation—The Change is on the Inside,” “The Circle Brings New Life,” “Will You Come and Follow Me... Yes... No... Maybe... but I Won't go to Nineveh!,” and “Come to the Feast.”

The Support and Evaluation Stage

Ongoing mentoring and support equip group leaders and facilitate small group success. Quarterly leadership support events stimulate vision casting, skill development, evaluation methodology, effectiveness, and nurture healthy group leader relationships. The SVT will use a FLC developed evaluation tool crafted for FLC's context. The evaluation tool is described at the end of this chapter.

The Circle of Life Discipleship Journey Plan

FLC's fundamental intention is to lead people to Jesus Christ. Through experience, the FLC leadership identified effective small group techniques for faith formation in the FLC environment. Small groups and worship are major newcomer entry points. FLC exposes each person to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the basics of Christianity, and loving Christian community through the Alpha Course (Alpha). Alpha is a ten-week, small group discipleship tool designed to make, mature, and mobilize disciples into missional ministry. [See Appendix 4]. It was originally developed by the Reverend Nicky Gumbel of England.²

The Alpha Course

The Alpha Course promotes and nurtures relationships over meals and group discussions in a safe, hospitable, celebrative atmosphere where people feel comfortable and at ease. The small groups include ten to fourteen people and facilitate intimacy and disclosure based on individual need. Alpha uses the natural energy of a small, intimate group that leads to life transformation and growth of relationships.

Alpha draws skeptics, seekers, nominal, growing, and mature Christians who explore the basics of Christianity. Although attendees come from many different backgrounds and hold different viewpoints, most come with the same objective: to determine if Jesus Christ is relevant in their lives. FLC encourages recent guests, new members, current small groups, and all current members to participate in Alpha Course.

²Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life: A Practical Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 2004), 9.

For established members, Alpha offers an opportunity to explore the Christian faith through participation or serve as group leaders, group helpers, hospitality, prayer team members, greeters, runners, technical helpers, and weekend retreat team members. Descriptions of these service opportunities are included in Appendix 5.

Alpha is a ten-week course offered three times a year. The evening format includes hospitality and dinner from 5:45 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. and guests are welcomed, receive a nametag, and sit at an assigned table with others who form a small group throughout the course. The meal is based on a theme such as luau, St. Patrick's Day, or football teams, and guests are served by hospitality team members. The initial table conversation is casual and not focused on spiritual matters at this point. At 6:30 P.M., the guests are welcomed by the Alpha director who enlivens the atmosphere through jokes, stories, and worship songs.

The Alpha Course explores questions such as: "Who is Jesus?" "Why Did Jesus Die?" "How Can I be Sure of My Faith?" "Does God Still Heal Today?" Most discussions include DVD presentations developed by Gumbel, and thought starters given by the Alpha director. Following the forty-five minute presentation, people take a brief break and move to separate rooms for small group discussion. While the weekly session is the primary growth vehicle, FLC recognized participants also desire to be still and hear the voice of God (Psa 46:10a). Alpha incorporates a day or weekend retreat midway through the course focused on community building and personal meditation and reflection through the Holy Spirit. This structured retreat is directed by FLC's Alpha director, prayer team, and hospitality team.

Alpha is a faith catalyst that leads participants into personal relationships with Jesus Christ, confirms the faith of nominal Christians gone astray, and matures the faith of those who seek depth and service opportunities. The Alpha course goal is for individuals to place Jesus Christ at the center of their lives. Alpha connects people together through weekly conversations and retreats. It cultivates a richer journey of faith through Bible study, prayer, and discussions on questions of faith and doubt. Alpha offers many opportunities to contribute through service, and the experience communicates the gospel personally.

Small Groups as the Primary Faith Incubator

The Alpha course plants the seeds of faith and gives participants tools to grow spiritually in healthy ways. Weeds, however, will overcome the best garden or well planted seed, if not regularly tended. With this in mind, FLC developed a coordinated small group plan. *The Circle of Life Discipleship Journey* requires disciples of Jesus Christ have an accountability group or small group that meets regularly. The expectation that all FLC members participate in a small group is stated in FLC's emerging Church Covenant, which will be fully implemented by fall 2006. To encourage group participation, FLC will communicate opportunities through written and verbal invitations to join an established group or a new small group. Current apprentices and emerging leaders will be trained in the basics of small group facilitation prior to the invitations. It is believed this effort will launch and multiply groups and participants, contribute to growth, and move the congregation toward a church *of* small groups.

FLC has experimented with this approach. During the Lent 2004 season, FLC utilized the Forty Days of Purpose during the season of Lent. Prior to this program, FLC had approximately 300 participants in forty small groups. During the Lenten season, that number grew to 900 participants in 100 small groups. A second trial of this approach was conducted in 2005, and utilized the *Living Beyond Myself* sermon and study series.³ The total participation was 400 people in thirty-five groups. Each new program taught FLC how best to make, mature, and multiply disciples.

In the past at FLC, small groups were based primarily on a discipleship or study approach, and groups chose what they would study. A new step initiated in 2005 includes the design of a small group plan. Each of the small groups will formulate a plan that describes how they will function together throughout the year selecting from a plethora of opportunities for study, Sabbath, and service.

Study

Each person is encouraged to participate in multiple study options throughout the year and cultivate spiritual maturity through small group. These studies may be incorporated into church-wide programs such as the *Living Beyond Myself* sermon and study series. Most study programs are intended for groups of three or more people, and this effort has surfaced many leaders passionate about a particular study focus who will lead study sessions during the year (see Appendix 4, Study section).

³ Bill Hybels, *Living Beyond Myself: Discover Joy Through Serving Others* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Community Church, 2004), 6.

Contemplative Living

To foster a consistent, deeper relationship with God, the spiritual disciplines of prayer, journaling, sacred reading, and story telling are offered within the program. Congregational members with a particular gift or passion in a contemplative living aspect can visit small groups, facilitate the group's first session and equip the group to facilitate on its own from there (see Appendix 4, Contemplative Living).

Growth

Christian faith-based courses are often led by teachers at FLC, and are offered throughout the year on Sunday mornings and occasional evenings through the adult education program. The courses often focus on a facet of faith and life that people desire to master, and they are designed to equip individuals, couples, families, and/or small groups. Examples of course titles include: *The Contagious Christian*, *Good Sense Finances*, *Modern Science and the Christian Faith*, *Christian Parenting*, and *Discover the Love of Your Life Again*. As new leaders emerge and different courses are developed, a growing variety of growth courses will become available.

Discipleship

The discipleship component of the Circle of Life is traditional Bible study. It enables small group members to cultivate a biblical worldview and focus on their faith. Small groups are encouraged to consider studying the weekly sermons, published Bible study curricula, and the use of a concordance or Serendipity Bible to create their own Bible study. FLC offers an extensive library of Christ-centered, biblically-based

resources for study and use. [See Appendix 4, Study Section or www.firstlutherancr.org under Circle of Life]

Sabbath

There are times for study, hard work, and rest and renewal included in the Sabbath concept. FLC has created resources, contacts, and ideas for small groups to rest, recreate, and retreat together. The “Develop Your Small Group Plan” in Figure 10 describes a typical year that includes four study or service periods interspersed with Sabbath times. Each small group determines the timeframe for Sabbath pauses in between study periods or service. Periods of four weeks from the group with no connecting activity is discouraged (see Appendix 4, Sabbath Section).

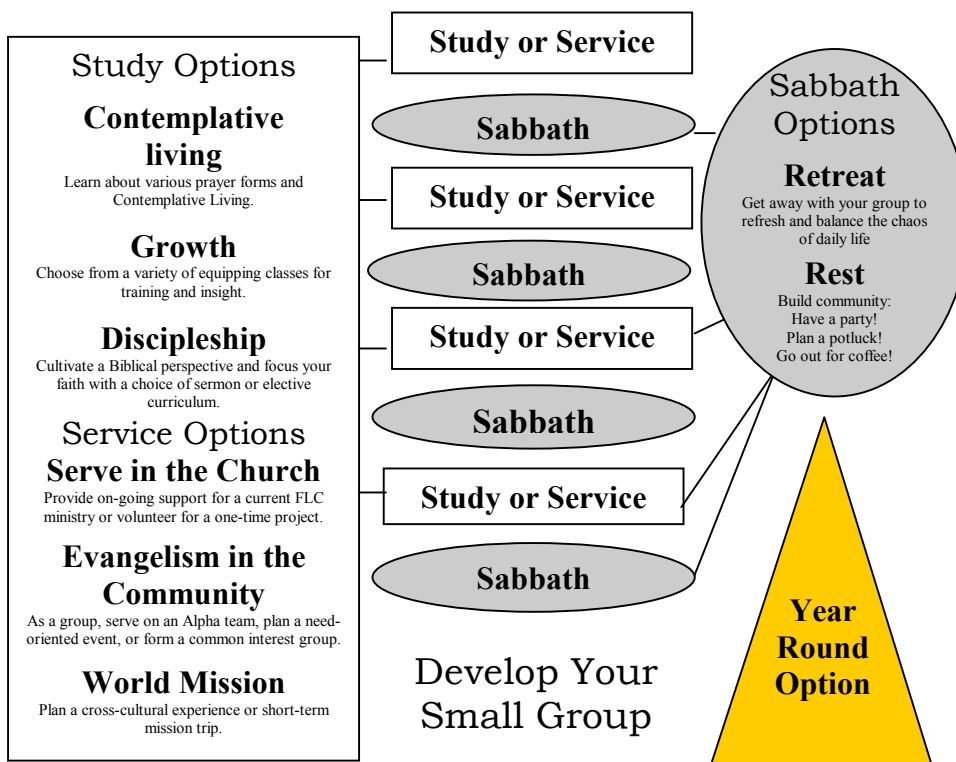


Figure 10

Rest

Rest involves time off from study to rejuvenate, and it may be as short as a week or extend throughout the summer. During this rest time group members visit each other and have contact with members of the small group. For example, the rest may include a party to celebrate completion of a curriculum. Having a rest time allows the small group members to connect with each other and build community within the group without a study as the primary focus. Although many ideas are possible, a few may include: a party, a potluck/picnic/barbecue, dinner gathering, dessert time, a sporting event or movie night, game night, Super Bowl party, and other recreational activities.

Retreat

Longer times of interaction and play provide a catalyst for depth and trust, and deepen interpersonal relationships. Small group retreats provide opportunities to cast vision, laugh, have fun, and create memories. FLC offers a church family retreat weekend at a local camp every summer. Multiple retreat center and camping locations have been identified and are included in a resource binder for small group use. Suggested formats and schedule are also available. The Alpha Retreat program has served as an initial retreat experience for many.

Service

Study and Sabbath promote life transformation in a variety of ways. Christ-likeness develops when Christians offer hands, feet, and selves in compassionate service for others. This service takes a variety of forms.

Serve in the Church

In order to function at the highest capacity, every member must minister in some way through the church. God gave each person spiritual gifts to edify the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27-31). The FLC members can contribute their gifts, abilities, and resources for the kingdom of God through the First Serve program. The Director of Equipping Ministry and the Equipping Ministry Team serve as vital links for individual and into small group based opportunities. The resource binder (Appendix 4, Service Section) names a variety of ways to serve within FLC.

Serve in the Community

Numerous FLC congregants serve in a variety of capacities in the community. FLC has emphasized this expectation because as disciples of Jesus Christ, FLC individuals and small groups can impact the community around them. Because of this intentional premise, FLC has expanded its options and participation in the community. A good example of this service is described in the next chapter regarding a citywide collaborative of churches called, *Serve the City*.

Serve in the World

Throughout its history, FLC has provided significant amounts of financial and material resources for mission work across the globe. For example, the sea container ministry sent medical supplies, computers, and many of worthwhile items to Liberia, a country in dire need. FLC has lacked in sending short-term missionaries and apostolic disciples who serve and learn in a different cultural context. Through a relationship with

FLC's companion synod of the Same (pronounced sahme) Diocese in Tanzania, FLC will send a lay ministry team for two weeks in June, 2006.

Evaluation of the Circle of Life Discipleship Journey

A strategy typically is long-termed and involves a multi-year plan. As the first transforming transition indicated in chapter three, tension exists between the incremental change of the modern era and the more chaotic change experienced in the postmodern era. Due to inevitable change and new insights, *The Circle of Life Discipleship Journey* will be revised through constant evaluation. Some revisions may be simple and incremental, but other changes may be complex and transform the strategy. Regular assessment is required, and evaluation can determine if established objectives are met and implementation steps are followed faithfully.

The Evaluation Form created for the Circle of Life (Appendix 6) includes key questions based on the eight quality characteristics identified in the Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development. The use of the highly valid and reliable NCD survey on a twelve to eighteen month basis coupled with the Evaluation Form will sharpen FLC's next steps for action.

The following questions are important for the evaluation of the first use of FLC's Circle of Life Discipleship Journey: Did the congregation understand what the FLC leadership was trying to do? What aspects were unclear and what would increase clarity? Did every small group leader receive communication of various kinds (e-mail, newsletter, training, face-to-face, phone, website, postcard) that informed and equipped them in their

roles? Was the congregation energized by the vision? Were they prepared for their next roles? What are the measurable results of FLC's efforts to mature, multiply, and equip disciples for apostolic discipleship? The list of questions may increase. The purpose of the questions is to evaluate program effectiveness and anticipate the needs of the congregation. This evaluation process may help direct change in a chaotic world and alleviate potential conflicts and obstacles that result from a poorly executed process.

Designing Effective Leadership Structures and a Yearly Visioning Process

To move a church from a maintenance mode to a continuous mission mindset, new directives and initiatives must be created through an informed visioning process. The implementation of a new congregational model of ministry requires a thorough understanding of change dynamics and leadership. In a corporate sized church congregation, the pastors, staff, and congregational council must unite and lead together as change agents. Leadership structures must be redefined and function properly to promote positive outcomes. Clarification of staff position descriptions, council leadership roles, staff and council cooperation, a yearly visioning process, and regular leadership training are essential elements for success.

Staff Roles and Goals

The corporate sized FLC congregation has an extensive staff that work together to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The purpose and role of each position is defined and clarified so that all staff members understand the roles. It is vital to maximize each person's gifts and knowledge and fulfill the purpose of each role. The yearly visioning

process informs the staff of the church's program directives for year. Each staff person crafts goals that are aligned with the directives for the year on position focus sheets (Appendix 7). The staff's responsibilities are defined and measured weekly to determine the number of hours focused on the responsibilities for each position.

A second element that enhances the staff's action planning is the use of three S.M.A.R.T. goals (Appendix 8) used in their annual performance reviews. S.M.A.R.T. stands for specific, measurable, achievable, related to minimum factor, and timeline. Each goal is attached to a specific event or ministry program with achievable numbers. It is important that each goal addresses the current factor(s) FLC aims to strengthen this year. The following questions help frame the goals and identify measurable outcomes for passionate spirituality:

1. Will it help to increase love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control in the Christian walk? How measured?
2. Will it increase prayer lives and deepen faith? How measured?
3. Will the scriptures be utilized to increase spirituality? How measured?
4. Will new understandings of actions, attitudes or experiences increase spiritual growth?
How measured?
5. Will it provide a place for people to use their spiritual gifts? How measured?
6. Will it challenge and motivate people in their spiritual walk and foster commitment?
How measured?
7. Will it encourage the sharing of thoughts or feelings and not just outer circumstances?
How measured?

Second, the program and goals must reinforce need-oriented evangelism. The following questions help staff as they develop the goal.

1. Will the goal intentionally cultivate relationships with pre-Christian people so they become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ? How measured?
2. Will it make evangelism culturally relevant? How measured?
3. Does it mobilize people for the harvest? How measured?
4. Does it develop outreach-oriented ministries? How measured?
5. Will it help assimilate newcomers into the church's life? How measured?
6. Does the goal(s) establish new Christians in loving obedience? How measured?
7. Does it train current church members in innovative outreach methods? How measured?
8. Does it target an audience? How measured?

Finally, a detailed timeline helps staff members organize the creation, advancement, refinement, and execution of each goal. This provides a framework for the goal and the action steps leading to the goal.

In order for the church to realize its vision and strategic plan, each staff person creates a five-year vision narrative (2005-2010) based on the five Cs and FLC's core values. Each staff team leader's vision is informed by the ministry team's discussions at a yearly workshop and is included in a five-year strategic goals sheet (See appendix 9 FLC Executive Pastor Goals). At an annual staff retreat, all staff members share their visions and five-year strategic goal sheets with the entire staff. This sharing strengthens communication, increases awareness and accountability, creates unity, alignment, and increases staff support.

The Role of Coaching Staff

A staff person's supervisor serves as coach or mentor. Primary supervisors include the senior pastor, associate pastors, and the business administrator. The supervisor's role is "to come alongside to help someone succeed by helping people find out what God wants them to do and help them do it."⁴ Robert Logan's coaching process of "relate, reflect, refocus, resource, and review" coaching tools are used.⁵

The supervisor engages the staff member through a series of questions and helps the staff person create specific goals, advance and refine each goal's implementation strategy, provide encouragement in the execution of the plans, and celebrates the staff person's and ministry team's results. Bi-monthly meetings of the staff person and supervisor/coach increase support, clarity of vision, synergy, and fruitfulness. Instruments reveal how staff members perceive life: an *Innovate with C.A.R.E. Profile*⁶ summary, a DiSC Profile,⁷ and a Myers-Briggs⁸ assessment are completed and help the

⁴ Robert Logan, "Raising and Multiplying Leaders in Your Ministry," OD725 Raising and Multiplying Leaders in Your Ministry. Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA, October 27-November 7, 2003).

⁵ Robert E. Logan and Sherlyn Carlton, *Coaching 101 Handbook* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2003), 119-120.

⁶ Allen Fahden and Srinivasan Namakkal, *Innovate with C.A.R.E. Profile*[®] (Minneapolis, MN: Inscape, 1995).

⁷ DiSC[®] Classic Personal Profile System[®] 2800, (Minneapolis, MN: Inscape, 2001).

⁸ David Keirse and Marilyn Bates, *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types* (Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, 1984).

coach and staff person understand each other. Logan's Coachnet⁹ coaching log is used by the supervisor and staff person in preparation for staff meetings.

The Role of the Executive Pastor

The role of executive pastor is defined carefully and strengthens the communication and authority of staff relations and performance. A definition currently being explored is: As a servant leader, the executive pastor is responsible for the development of the staff and oversight of the ministries in order to implement the mission, vision and values of FLC.

This includes a yearly visioning and strategic plan implementation process. Appendix 10 provides the proposed executive pastor job position description. In the past, the business administrator operated the annual performance review process. The role of executive pastor, senior pastor, and business administrator must be coordinated and communication among pastors, program and support staff, and the church council, must be clear to maximize communication and fulfill staff roles, goals, strategic planning and implementation.

Each year FLC conducts a visioning process, and the senior pastor is essential for its success. This process has been fairly effective in the past. As FLC moves forward and gains additional knowledge through training conferences, much more can be done to improve the process, timeline, and strengthen communication. The FLC Planning Timeline (Appendix 11) describes the process which will be explained in detail.

⁹ Robert E. Logan, "Coachnet Coaching Log," *Coachnet* <http://www.coachnet.org> (accessed Dec 30, 2005).

The Role of the Ministry Development Team

The role of each leadership team requires definition. The Ministry Development Team includes the senior pastor, executive pastor, business administrator, church council vice president elect, and one council member at large. Their responsibility is to secure staff and guide them toward the fulfillment of the congregation's mission. They are expected to develop vision for the future, analyze the FLC ministry, and oversee the interviewing and hiring of staff. Specific expectations include: meet monthly to discuss ministry strengths and growth areas, create vision for staff and council, communicate actions to staff and council members, act as a sounding board for ministry teams, quarterly evaluation progress of directors toward annual goals, monitor and assist directors in meeting goals, prioritize (with council approval) an action plan for congregation, create job descriptions, and oversee performance reviews.

The Role of the Staff Visioning Team

The SVT includes the senior pastor, executive pastor (process facilitator), and the program staff including: the director of spiritual formation, the director of equipping ministry, and the director of discipleship and small group ministries. The SVT is made of the shepherding or program staff and are crucial facilitators for implementing the visioning process. The process includes the creation stage which generates concepts and ideas, the advancement stage which develops and promotes the ideas and gives structure for implementation, the refining stage which challenges the concepts through analysis, problems identification, idea modification and new idea development, and detailed action

plans. The execution stage ensures the implementation process proceeds in an orderly manner based on a well developed implementation plan. It is important that someone who values quality outcomes and is detail-oriented partners with the facilitator/executive pastor to carry out the plan. This person may be part of the staff or the Ministry Development Team.

The Role of the Congregation Council

The final approving and feedback group is the governing Congregation Council, which reviews and makes congregational decisions. The primary oversight responsibilities include: guide the congregation in mission statement articulation; long-range planning; goal and priority setting; evaluation of its activities in light of the church's mission and goals; involvement of members in worship, learning, witness, service, and support; oversight of congregational administration; hiring and supervision of salaried lay workers; and oversight of FLC's financial and property matters.

Annual Action Step Development

The strategic planning process includes multiple elements and the FLC Planning Timeline (Appendix 11) describes the procedure. This is based on the assumption that a church can seek God's direction as it develops its congregational vision. The FLC staff and council invest significant time in prayer and discernment in planning meetings. This involves prayerful review of FLC's progress, evaluation of current realities, future action step development, and envisioning FLC's future. Prayer triads occur during the discussion times.

In November of each year, the ministry development team and staff visioning team participate together in a vision retreat. To prepare for this retreat, thirty active FLC members complete the NCD survey (or another assessment tool) that evaluates the current perceived health of the congregation. The results are used as the group focuses on the upcoming year and its challenges and opportunities. The retreat includes evaluation of the current strategic plan and its goals with the FLC mission statement. Following this evaluation, particular major themes, or big ideas, and strategic moves and directives emerge for further exploration in preparation for the annual January FLC leadership retreat. During November and December, the staff visioning team explores other programs and their advantages and prepares a detailed presentation to the broader church leadership at the January retreat. The shaping of the vision determines which major themes are most consistent with FLC's mission statement. These themes are narrowed and focused on attainable goals. The implementation specifics are delegated to those on the frontlines of a particular ministry.

During January and February the congregational leadership communicates the vision to the congregation. It is critical to explain how the new vision reflects and is consistent with FLC's mission and values. The communication of the vision and plans to those who act on them helps move desirable ideas toward actualization. The senior pastor presents the broader vision to the congregation in late January or early February. The finance team and ministry development team work together and determine budget and salary increase/decrease projections for the year. The staff develops the upcoming church calendar including: small group series weeks, tentative study courses, service

opportunities, Sabbath opportunities, holidays, major events or special services, competing sports schedule, and school breaks.

March activities focus on the ministry team as it actualizes vision and program goals. Staff supervisors meet regularly with program staff as they present the mission statement, vision, and action plan to their ministry teams. The proposed budget is modified, forms are filled out, calendar dates proposed, and each ministry area completes the position focus sheets and S.M.A.R.T. goal sheets.

Program staff members and their supervisors complete the final budget, calendar, and SMART goals for each area of ministry in April. The need for additional staff is finalized, and supervisors begin their performance reviews of their direct reports. A ministry plans notebook and draft of the Circle of Life Discipleship Journey booklet are crafted for Council review. This vital step refines and communicates overall details before the summer break.

During May, the church celebrates adoption of the action plan to be implemented that fall, and a special worship service reflects upon the completed ministry year. A complete program communicates overall themes, action plans, and resources for small group review. The annual meeting in May includes a special meal and volunteer appreciation component. In May, the staff and council finalize the priority hiring list, budget, and staff raises are confirmed. A staff day and council appreciation dessert affirm the importance and productivity of the planning process.

The June and July period is a time for rest and vacations for the staff, council, and congregation. Small groups will continue to meet, however, for retreats, picnics, or

recreation rather than meeting regularly for study. Interviews for new staff positions take place, and action plans are refined by the staff visioning team and ministry development team. This period of rest and renewal prepare everyone for the upcoming ministry year.

Action plans are implemented in August, September, and October, and the FLC staff and council pray and sign covenant for the year. This is a critical step, and produces great psychological momentum for the congregation. A September sermon series communicates the action plan to all congregants and visitors. The ministry development team and staff vision team evaluate and monitor the implementation process and make any necessary adjustments.