

## **Quit Reporting and Start Visioning -Rev. Gary Step, Director of Leadership Development**

Did you ever notice that the majority of a typical council meeting's time consists of reporting past events? Too often, visioning is not on the agenda because we are bogged down in day-to-day ministry efforts.

In addition, decisions are often made at a glacial pace, if they are made at all! In one church I was working with it took six months of multiple meetings with the church council, trustees, and finance to change the paint color in the nursery! You may be familiar with the multiple steps that can slow effective decision making: You need the trustee's approval... now off to finance . . . and then back to the council for final approval! Ugh! I am drained just thinking about it.

This structure is often referred to as "we have always done it this way." When I asked how it was working at the church with the unpainted nursery, they stated, "It isn't." They were stuck with a structure that worked at one time but ceased being effective years ago. The current consensus-based structure in many churches has become so convoluted that no one is sure who can make decisions. This gives rise to questions like, "Who gave you the authority to do this?" Pastors find it frustrating to lead in this type of environment.

Multiple meetings. Slowed decision-making. Looking backward, rather than forward. Is this the way we want our church to function? Is this how we want to live out our faith? Might God have something more in mind for our efforts as followers of Christ?

Thankfully, there is a way forward. Although it can be a difficult journey, many churches decide to move to a Simplified Accountable Structure (SAS). This new structure combines all the administrative committees, thus flattening the structure and moving the day-to-day decision making into the hands of ministry leaders. The new simplified structure is charged with holding the pastor and leaders accountable to the mission of making disciples. It supports innovation in ministry, even encouraging it. The structure is more nimble and responsive to the ever-changing mission field. Leaders create sub-teams as they are needed for tasks like hiring, capital campaigns and outreach.

Pastors and laity agree that when the simplified structure is done correctly it is a game-changer for ministry and making disciples.

I found the book *Mission Possible: A Simple Structure for Missional Effectiveness, Expanded 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* by Kay Kotan and Blake Bradford to be an excellent resource to guide church leaders in this process. The book lays out three distinct phases: discerning, equipping, and implementing. Implementing the phases properly takes almost nine months.

It is important to remember that adopting a system takes time; change can be difficult in an entrenched culture. A church I recently worked with began shifting some of their council behavior to the simplified model immediately after they started the discernment process. When it was time to vote on the new structure it was voted in unanimously, and now they are in their first year humming along with vision squarely in the driver's seat.

I am a certified SAS coach, as are several others in the Michigan Conference. A coach will guide your congregation through the structural change. Ask your district superintendent for more information.

As Director of Leadership Development for the United Methodist Foundation of Michigan, I have the opportunity to help congregations understand their purpose and move forward with a Spirit-led vision. I believe that the Simplified Accountability Structure is just one tool for setting leaders free to dream and act boldly. Contact me if you'd like to learn more about SAS, setting values, visioning, capital campaigns, preaching and coaching.

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