



SWOT's Up?

By Rev. Joel Fitzgerald, Sr. Director of Church Relations

My son recently started Cub Scouts, and one of his requirements involves using maps. Paper maps. Ones that might fold. Not GPS. Using a paper map is a new experience for him, and a muscle that has atrophied for me. It requires locating ourselves on the map and making sure that it accords with where we are in the real world. We could have the best maps and the easiest route, but if we do not know our current location and situation, we will not get far.

In strategic planning, knowing where we are is just as crucial as it is in orienteering. We cannot plan out a realistic path forward if we do not have an honest understanding of where we are right now.

In the planning world, one of the tools to help an organization see its current reality is called SWOT— short for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Strengths are things internal to our organization that can help us move forward. For a church this might be a strong leadership team, a deep bench of volunteers, a healthy endowment, or a clear sense of mission and vision.

Weaknesses are the opposite of strengths. They are things internal to an organization that will hinder its progress. In the church this might be unresolved conflicts, lack of financial reserves, or deferred building maintenance.

Opportunities are things external to the church that can help it grow. There might be a new housing development opening across the street, a growing population base, or a growing need the church can fill.

Threats are external things that will hinder growth. For most churches this would include continued trends in secularization and an aging population.

An effective way for a church to find a path forward is to take an honest look at itself. Doing SWOT analysis is one effective way for leadership team or board to wrap its hands around where the church is. Only when we know where we are, can we begin to see where we might go.

Interested in learning about where your church is? The United Methodist Foundation of Michigan offers coaching, cohorts, and consultations that can assist your church in see where it is and where God might be leading it.

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