

All Souls Community Church of West Michigan

Strategic Plan 2006-2008

Introduction

In 2006 All Souls Community Church of West Michigan faces a turning point as it looks back on its first five years as a growing pastoral church and moves forward to the opportunity of fulfilling its mission of liberating and cultivating the spirit as a fully fledged program church.

A program church is defined both by size (150-350 members) and by the variety and quality of its programs for a range of age and interest groups. Major programs include music and religious education programming for all ages. Special interest programming may include covenant groups, community life, social justice, and other opportunities for congregational life for a wide range of people.

Both the size of the congregation and the desire of the congregants for strong programs suggest that ASCC is poised to make the transition to being a program church.

Two closely related challenges face the congregation and its leadership at this crucial and exciting time: remaining focused on All Souls' mission and developing and supporting a financial stewardship plan that will allow us to grow and flourish.

Background and Purpose of the 2006-2008 Strategic Plan

The chief purpose of any strategic plan is to assist an organization to fulfill its mission. Thus, the purpose of the present strategic plan is to define key objectives that All Souls Community Church of West Michigan should pursue over the next two years to fulfill our mission of liberating and cultivating the spirit. These key objectives stem from (1) issues that ASCC members designated as significant at the congregation-wide strategic planning meeting held at New Branches School on April 30, 2006, and (2) ASCC members' responses to the Facilities Needs Survey that was completed in April, 2006.

The primary issues identified at the strategic planning meeting and through survey responses were calling a full-time minister, obtaining our own building, establishing strong music and religious education programs that included paid RE and music staff members, improving communication, developing social justice opportunities, and increasing membership.

Some of the needs and desires of the congregation have been modified by two considerations, both of which involve the time required to achieve our objectives.

First, the objectives of this strategic plan necessarily coincide with its duration. While the majority of the congregation would like to have its own church building, obtaining this goal by the end of 2008 is not feasible given the present financial commitment of our members. As a result, the strategic plan focuses not on obtaining our own facility but on increasing the effectiveness of our financial stewardship.

Second, while our various goals to strengthen the church and fulfill our mission do not conflict with each other, we have been advised by UUA development consultants Terry Sweetser and Wayne Clark that they cannot be accomplished concurrently. Following the recommendation of the Rev. Brent Smith and at the request of the board of trustees, ASCC members Elgin Vines, Jackie Vines, and David Soet met with Terry and Wayne at General Assembly in St. Louis in June, 2006 to discuss All Souls' plans for growth. Both consultants stressed that ASCC's goals of establishing strong music and religious education programs, obtaining our own building, and calling a minister would meet with failure if they were attempted during the same period of time. Based on the tested experience of dozens of other congregations, they advised All Souls to achieve one major goal before moving on to the next one. The present strategic plan reflects this advice.

All Souls was urged to focus on its programs before attempting to call a minister and to delay a capital campaign for our own building for a *minimum* of four—preferably five—years. Thus, major annual objectives are as follows (details of these objectives are available in the strategic plan):

2006 children's religious education program
2007 music program
2008 adult religious education program
2009 called minister
2010 capital campaign

These major annual objectives are by no means discrete. In other words, the first year focuses on establishing a religious education program for our children; the second year asks that the congregation maintain its commitment to building the religious education program while shifting its focus to establishing a music program. During these years ASCC would also continue its commitment to programming that is already established, such as community life and covenant groups.

The 2009-2010 objectives, which are beyond the scope of this strategic plan, have been included here to show the recommended progression of major annual objectives.

Divisions and Format of the Strategic Plan

The strategic plan is divided into four sections (finances, programs, internal communication, and external communication) and concentrates on specific actions the members of All Souls can take to fulfill its mission of liberating and cultivating the spirit.

Program board members were invited by the strategic planning committee to contribute to their respective sections; the strategic plan includes their responses.

Because the liberation and cultivation of the spirit embraces both members and friends of ASCC as well as the greater Grand Rapids community, the strategic plan emphasizes not only those objectives that seek to enhance our own spiritual experience but also objectives that encourage All Souls to look beyond itself to the larger community, particularly by means of adult education and social justice initiatives.

The goals and objectives of the present strategic plan focus on actions the congregation and its leadership can take to live out our mission rather than on specific, measurable endpoints. Thus, rather than a stated goal of "increase membership to 250 by 2008," the strategic plan encourages activities that will drive growth, such as the development of key programs.

Each of the four sections follows the same general format: goal(s), objectives, strategies to accomplish those objectives, and the specific tactics (action steps) that can be taken to implement the strategies.


1. statement of goal(s)
2. a brief discussion of the present state of the particular issue
3. statement of objectives
4. strategies to accomplish the objectives
5. specific tactics to implement the strategies

With the exception of the second item (a discussion of the present state of the issue), the entries move from the abstract to the concrete. Thus, a goal is the broadest statement of the plan and is most closely related to the mission of the church; objectives are more specific statements that will lead to achieving the goal.

The tactics are intended as specific suggestions for implementing particular strategies, but they are by no means the last word. Members of the congregation are encouraged to supplement the stated suggestions with other tactics to achieve the objectives of this strategic plan.

Most of the suggested tactics are ongoing activities that don't require a specific timeline. In a few cases, specific times have been suggested. Assigning responsibility for implementing, assessing, or completing many of the tactics has been left to the board of trustees or the appropriate program boards.

But the fulfillment of our mission and the strength of our church cannot and should not reside solely in the hands of boards and committees. Every All Souls member can actively contribute to our success.

Activities marked with a chalice  are for everyone, not just members of committees, program boards, or the board of trustees. The generous commitment of each of our members will ensure our vitality for years to come.

Chalice created by T. A. Ingram, UUFM, Mobile, AL

From the Strategic Plan Committee

We are grateful to the congregation of All Souls Community Church for entrusting us with the creation of this strategic plan. We have strived to set out a pragmatic, workable plan that remains faithful to All Souls' mission of liberating and cultivating the spirit while reflecting the needs and desires of the congregation, and we are confident that all of our members working together can follow this plan to increase the health and joy of our church.

In peace,