



Evaluation and Planning Manual: A Disciplined Method for Evaluating your Congregation and Planning a Future

R. Channing Johnson, Nancy Ann McLaughlin

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How successful is your congregation as **a multi-generational congregation, united in love of the Lord, joyful worship, and service to a broken world?** Good planning needs a clear understanding of the problems and opportunities so have a church team use the Manual's challenging yet realistic evaluations to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses and begin planning for the future to which God is inviting you and your new members!

The First Evaluation is taken from a study by the Hartford Institute for Religious Research on factors that predict growth or decline in churches. We selected the best predictors of growth for the Manual. These elements involve the congregation's mission and purpose, its vitality and spirituality, its willingness to meet new challenges, the nature of the main worship service as being joyful rather than stilted, and whether the members are involved in outreach. Your evaluation team's members each rate the present performance of the church and develop a joint value as a baseline to measure future results. Throughout your time together team members also use a personal notebook to record insights for improvement actions that will be invaluable in later planning sections.

The Second Evaluation utilizes 10 factors which characterize the culture of the younger generations from Dr. Johnson's book "Where have all the Young People Gone" (2012). Your team discovers how social interaction between older church members and the younger generations might create some discomfort and works to proactively identify possible solutions.

The Third Evaluation is similar to the second in that it addresses the young people's cultural values, but here they are taken from a college chaplain's advice regarding how to get more young people involved. Your team now moves beyond the objective scientific elements using the nuances found here to provide another great opportunity to understand the younger generations.

In this third evaluation we introduce discussion of specific moral issues such as mixing pharisaic teaching and behavior with basic Christian anchoring (focusing on the letter of the law, rather than on the spirit of the law). The insight in this section is that congregations who love the law rather than love the Lord will find Generations X and Y hard to attract.

The Fourth and Fifth Evaluations are linked together in the Manual because they cover similar issues with living Jesus' New Commandment of love. Your team looks at coffee hours, social and business meetings, and greeting new people at Sunday services.

The New Commandment is the most serious of the generational issues. It appears widely but is taken for granted and often simply set aside; the bible, however, talks about actually becoming a new person in Christ. Jesus said, "Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). This emphasis is vital to the Manual. Our conviction is that effectively reaching out to others through evangelism, the Great Commandment of Jesus, loses much of its punch unless love is integral to the efforts.

Planning: When your congregation's team has finished the evaluations, they have covered elements found in a spiritually powerful church; they understand young people on many different levels; and they have some idea where your own church stands with respect to love (sheep, goat or hybrid). Their notebooks are filled with insights for possible improvement actions and the love that must go with them. The Manual at this stage provides guidance to your team for drafting both a proposed vision statement and sample action plans. Your team's results, in preparation for building the love in your hearts for those that God already has in mind for your church to minister with, are, finally, entrusted to the leaders of your church for implementation.

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