

**Gateway Transitional Assessment:
Preparing Gateway Church for Our Next Pastor
December 27, 2018**

Summary

Gateway's Session recognized the need for an organized process of transition to calling a new Pastor/Head of Staff, and authorized a working group called the Transitional Team to guide that process. A stepwise process was proposed consisting of Looking Back, Looking Around, Looking Forward, and Recruiting a Pastor.

The Looking Back and Looking Around steps were addressed in a Key Leaders Workshop, with a group of long-standing servant leaders of Gateway with perspective on past and present status of the church. Two exercises were conducted in the workshop – a Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, and a Church Life Cycle (CLC) exercise. Results were analyzed by the Transitional Team in conjunction with Session.

SWOT analysis results provided context and clarity for understanding Gateway's position in the CLC, which was determined to be in a declining phase of the life cycle. That position directed choice of one of three recovery strategies – the one that was intermediate in commitment/effort and is referred to here as Revitalization.

The Revitalization process will focus on Gateway's need for developing a comprehensive long-term vision and strategy alongside its new Pastor/Head of Staff. The need for Revitalization has implications for the skills and characteristics of Gateway's next Pastor, and has been given the descriptive term, Turnaround Pastor-Leader. Specific characteristics to guide recruitment of a well-suited Pastor were delineated. It was recognized that while an extensive process of Revitalization will take place with the next Pastor, a short-term vision and strategy is needed to prepare our congregation, staff, and leadership to work with that next Pastor. That short-term process will also demonstrate Gateway's commitment to fulfilling our mission through active vision and strategy development, a feature likely to attract the most skilled and discerning Pastor candidates.

Background

Approximately 1 year ago, Gateway's Pastor/Head of Staff departed after serving for 3.5 years. Though his duration of service was within the current average time of service for a head pastor in the U.S., it was in sharp contrast to the long duration of service by a Pastor/Head of Staff to which Gateway's congregation was accustomed. Other complicating factors in the early transition process included short notice of departure by the pastor, which limited time to prepare for the transition, and Gateway's Assistant Pastor declaring candidacy for the new position. That candidacy created conditions that promoted distress for the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) and the internal candidate. The PNC was disbanded after doing their best to navigate that difficult process as conflict stemming from differences in expectations between the PNC and the internal candidate developed, with the ensuing withdrawal of candidacy and resignation from Gateway's call by the Associate (formerly Assistant) Pastor.

As a result, the need was recognized for an organized process of transition to calling a new Pastor/Head of Staff that proceeds with expedition, but not haste, and with careful thought and planning, but with efficiency, guided by prayer and servant leadership, but not vacillating emotion or insistence on individualistic desires or agendas. In response, Session elected a working group, called the Transitional Team, to guide this new transitional process while operating under the supervision and approval of Session.

This Transitional Team has embarked on a stepwise process that can be summarized as Looking Back, Looking Around, Looking Forward, and Recruiting a Pastor. The purposes of this process are to

- 1) Understand our current status as a church within the context of our history as a church (Looking Back and Looking Around)
- 2) Provide guidance toward developing a unified vision for Gateway (Looking Forward)
- 3) Prepare the congregation to support the future pastor (Looking Forward)
- 4) Guide the PNC in recruiting a pastor with the right skills and temperament for leading Gateway in developing a vision and executing the strategies to achieve that vision
- 5) Demonstrate to prospective pastor candidates that Gateway is a proactive church that understands our mission, and will actively participate to develop vision and strategy to fulfill our mission

This document summarizes the transitional process through the steps of Looking Back and Looking Around, and makes recommendations for the next steps of Looking Forward and Recruiting a Pastor. Its intended audience is Session, Gateway's Congregation, the next PNC, and prospective Candidates for Pastor.

What We Did

A group of approximately 30 key leaders from Gateway was assembled based on current service on Session and/or the following criteria – duration as a congregational partner to have an understanding of Gateway's history over several years, demonstrated consistency and perseverance as a Christ-based servant-leader for Gateway, and an unoffendable heart conducive to objective evaluation without avoidance of potentially painful topics or conclusions.

This group participated in a Key Leaders Workshop on 11/10/18 with the goal to complete the steps of "Looking Back" and "Looking Around" in a single day. The group by design was equipped to have an understanding of Gateway's long-term history in a way that could provide perspective and understanding of Gateway's current state.

Two complementary exercises were conducted in the Workshop – a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) and a Church Life Cycle (CLC) evaluation.

SWOT Analysis: Gary Grossman presented information for education and orientation as to the mechanics and goals of the SWOT analysis. Small groups then discussed and listed each of the components of the acronym SWOT (understanding that Strengths and Weaknesses refer to factors internal to Gateway, while Opportunities and Threats focus on factors external to Gateway). The entire group was then reassembled to allow reporting and recording of descriptors pertaining to each

category. The comments in each category were listed, and participants were then allowed to individually vote on what each found were the most significant descriptors in each category by placement of a limited number of color coded dots. The results were tabulated by the Transitional Team. Similar descriptors were combined where logical and meaningful to develop a list of the 4-5 most significant descriptors within each SWOT category.

Church Life Cycle (CLC): Pastor Don Harris presented an orientation as to organizational life cycles, particularly with emphasis on the life cycle for churches. Briefly, this life cycle can be illustrated as a bell shaped curve that begins with birth, passes through phases of growth, plateau/maturity, and decline, and ends in death (Figure 1, Appendix). The rise of the curve represents increased vitality. Within the church, vitality is correlated with attendance and giving. Data were presented on Gateway's attendance and giving over several years, and the group's knowledge of Gateway's history complemented those data with an understanding of Gateway's life associated with attendance and giving, along with impressions of overall church vitality. Prevalent forces behind different phases of the CLC relating to differing proportions of Vision, Relationships, Programs, and Maintenance were presented to give the participants better understanding. Subcategories of the major life cycle phases particular to churches were defined with characteristics of those subcategories listed. With this information, each small group discussed and delineated the characteristics most descriptive of Gateway's current state. Individuals then placed dots on a graphical representation of the CLC to vote for their assessment of where Gateway currently resides in that life cycle. Results were tabulated by the Transitional Team to develop a consensus of Gateway's current position in the CLC.

Application: Three potential recovery strategies corresponding to position on the CLC were evaluated by the Transitional Team. Each recovery strategy corresponds to a position on the CLC, and varies in intensity. For example, an organization in the plateau/maturity phase of the life cycle would undertake a less intensive recovery strategy labeled "Refocus" whereas an organization near death would require a more drastic recovery strategy called "Rebirth". An organization in the declining phase, but not near death, would follow a recovery strategy termed "Restructure". A less corporate term applicable to a church used here is "Revitalization". There are different characteristics of a pastor suited to lead each of the 3 categories of recovery strategy. The Transitional Team evaluated those characteristics to develop a description of a pastor-leader equipped to lead Gateway through the corresponding recovery strategy.

What We Learned

SWOT Analysis: Table 1 (Appendix) shows the summarized results of the SWOT analysis. Strengths endorsed were a spiritually strong core within the congregation, Gateway's facilities, fiscal responsibility and responsiveness to financial needs, experience and inherent talent in leaders, and a caring disposition of the congregation. Weaknesses noted were recent poor leadership performance (despite their experience outside Gateway and inherent talents noted under strengths), lack of church vision, lack of discipleship, poor involvement of youth and young adults in ministry and leadership development, and poor hiring practices. Opportunities endorsed were our culture's need for spiritual infilling, collaborative ministry opportunities with outside organizations (ecclesiastical and secular), change (e.g., in staff) revealing new ideas, creative ways of outreach, and enhanced use of our facilities by the community outside Gateway. Threats identified as most important were societal lack of spiritual leadership and susceptibility to sin, an individualistic culture focused on self, pastors occupied by

management at the expense of spiritual leadership, and physical/criminal/liability threats to the congregation and property.

CLC: Consensus from the CLC evaluation was that Gateway's vitality has been in decline for about a decade, beginning with the later phase of Pastor Hazlett's call, continuing through change in denomination, and exacerbated by recent events related to pastoral turnover. There was close correlation between Gateway's giving and attendance and the characteristics of the declining phase of the CLC. The specific Life Cycle location in the decline was between subcategories called Apathy (serving bureaucracy, rigid/resistant to change, and looking to the past) and Questioning (problem and survival oriented, paralysis, low morale, doubt about Gateway's future, planning based on allocation of resources rather than vision, and individual thinking). In this state, a congregation tends to maintain habitual patterns with maintenance (i.e. a holding pattern) being the dominant organizational principle. Pastoral ministry in under these conditions tends to become more of a chaplaincy than an apostolic mission.

The Transitional Team recognized a Revitalization recovery strategy as applying to Gateway's point on the CLC. This is a strategy in which change is discontinuous with respect to the history of the church. Revitalization does not deny or ignore the congregation's history, but discovers, designs, and develops a fresh vision and strategy for this generation through prayer and discussion. In order for a congregation to emerge out of decline and into growth, then the same people (the core and the committed) must do different things with different groups of people. New leaders must be developed, and long-standing leaders of older ministries must be willing to relinquish any sense of "turf" or proprietary ownership. Information must be shared between leaders of different ministries. New relational opportunities must be developed with newcomers and Gateway's neighborhood outside the congregation.

To carry out this challenging process of Revitalization requires perseverance of pastors and leaders, unity of vision, willingness to accept change, and mechanisms for hearing and addressing dissent. Leadership development for elders, deacons, and ministry leaders is important, with expansion of the leadership base for developing new ministries on campus and in the community. The spiritual leadership abilities of elders must be developed and prioritized. Many of these principles were emphasized in the SWOT analysis giving further credence to the need for Revitalization as the appropriate recovery strategy for Gateway.

What this means for Gateway's congregation

The Church Life Cycle reflects a path common among organizations that is destined to occur without periodic self-evaluation to cast vision and develop strategies to reach that vision. It has been estimated that only about 1 in 5 churches engage in active strategic planning. Gateway has not engaged in a formal visioning and strategic process, and as such has been in a declining phase. Just over 5 years ago, Gateway underwent a formal process to develop a Mission Statement. For a church, the mission should be based on Christ's Great Commission. Gateway developed a Mission Statement that is adequate and enduring. However, the process of developing a Mission Statement did not progress to casting a 5-10 year vision or developing a strategy to reach that vision. Vision and strategy will take months to discern and years to execute, and will be a valuable journey for Gateway's congregation and leadership alongside our next pastor. While that vision will be a more comprehensive one that asks the question, "what could we be in 5-10 years as a church?", a short term vision and strategy is also needed for

Gateway to prepare ourselves to recruit, and then support with enthusiasm and unity, our next pastor who will lead that more comprehensive process. *In other words, Gateway should embark on short-term vision/strategy development to prepare our congregation to receive, support, and collaborate with Gateway's next Pastor/Head of Staff to lead Gateway through Revitalization.*

What this means for Gateway's next Pastor/Head of Staff

In order for Gateway to succeed in the Revitalization process of long-term vision and strategy development, a pastor with the right characteristics needs to be recruited. The term Turnaround Pastor-Leader has been used to describe such a pastor.

Considering Gateway's core principles of scriptural foundation and concurrence with ECO's reformed theology (as described in ECO's Essential Tenets) and polity, it is assumed that any pastor candidate to be considered must be grounded in those same principles in both personal and professional life. The pastor must be founded in spiritual disciplines of prayer, reading the Word, and reflection. Personal spiritual formation with ensuing purity and integrity must be of primary importance, resulting in a life and ministry that is fed by the overflow from relationship with the Lord. Proficient preaching and teaching of the Word is essential, but not sufficient to fulfill the skillset for Gateway's Turnaround Pastor-Leader.

The pastor must be directive (but not autocratic and domineering) and collaborative with the ability to delegate. The collaborative nature is particularly important given the SWOT analysis emphasis on the need for elders to develop and carry out their leadership potential. The pastor must have self-confidence (so as not to be easily discouraged), balanced with grace, humility, and self-awareness in order to be a calming, yet inspirational presence in challenging times. The pastor must be a visionary who can conceptualize, but also must be able to actualize in order to guide and execute strategy to achieve the vision. In order to inspire the congregation to work alongside one another toward a common vision, the pastor must be persuasive and encouraging with good communication skills, as applied to interpersonal situations, preaching to the congregation, communicating updates to the congregation, and providing direction for staff. The pastor must be willing and able to work alongside Session to help covenant partners overcome instances of doubt, anxiety, or conflict inherent to change from the Revitalization process. As the Revitalization process is one that involves trying new ideas, the pastor must embrace innovation, willingly re-evaluate, learn from that re-evaluation, and engender a sense of progress from what is learned even in a failed attempt at a new ministry. Finally, as the Revitalization process is one that occurs over several years, Gateway's next pastor must be willing to commit to a tenure (barring exceptional circumstances) that is well beyond that currently typical of pastors (3-5 years), and more in the 5-10 year range. Table 2 (Appendix) summarizes these characteristics.

Conclusion

Gateway's leadership has embarked on a time of self-evaluation to gain direction and momentum in the transitional process toward calling a new Pastor/Head of Staff. The formal processes of evaluating Gateway's past (Looking Back) to gain better understanding of Gateway's present status (Looking Around) has resulted in a recognition that Gateway has been in a state of declining vitality for several

years and that a Revitalization process consisting of casting new vision and a strategy to attain that vision is needed. This Revitalization process is one that will require commitment and perseverance by Gateway's congregation and leadership. It has implications for the characteristics of a Turnaround Pastor-Leader to lead alongside the people of Gateway to achieve the vision of what we could become as a church through that Revitalization process. The result of the self-evaluation process has been an articulation of the characteristics of a pastor that will guide a PNC in recruiting the right leader for Gateway's Revitalization. It has also resulted in recognition of the need for a short-term vision during this time of transition to prepare Gateway's congregation to receive, support, and collaborate with Gateway's next Pastor/Head of Staff.

Reference

Malphurs, A. Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013.

Appendix

Figure 1: Organizational Life Cycle. The vertical axis can be considered as vitality, and the horizontal axis as time.

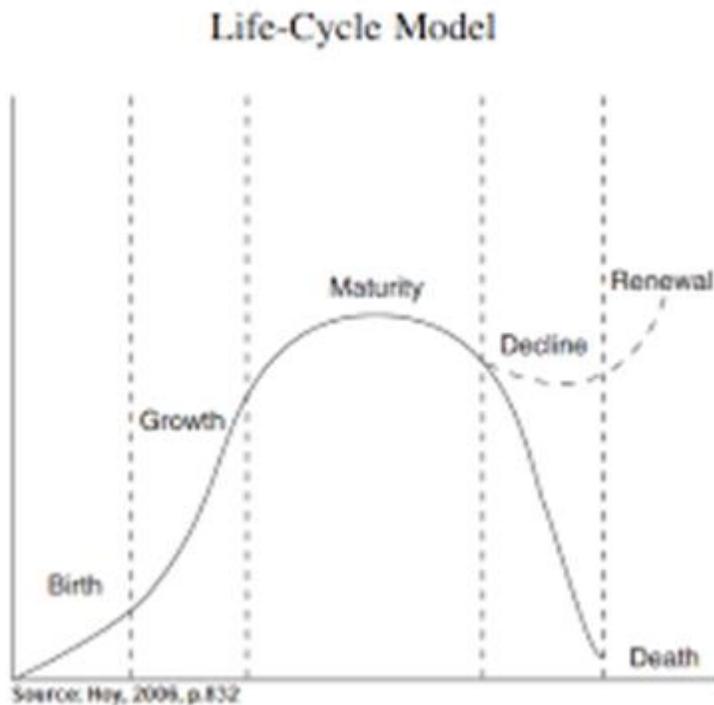


Table 1: Summary of SWOT analysis listed in order of endorsement by each category. Numbers in parentheses show total scores from voting of participants.

Strengths

1. A strong core of congregational participants who are biblically grounded, perseverant, and prayerful. (42)
2. Facilities and property holdings that are sufficient for church functions/ministries and create opportunities for other ministry and community partners. (e.g., ACTS, AA) (25)
3. Stewardship of finances and responsiveness of congregation to financial needs, resulting in financial solvency and debt free status with ownership of property and no remaining financial obligation to PCUSA. (18)
4. Church leadership that is fundamentally strong as exemplified by an attitude of servant leadership and broad experiences as leaders in the community outside Gateway. (12)

5. A congregation that loves and cares for one another. (7)

Weaknesses

1 (tie). Poor recent history of leadership function despite the inherent strength (listed in #4 under Strengths), exemplified by passivity (too much deferment of Session to the Pastor, failure to take action on issues), poor communication (Session to congregation, staff with ministry teams, ministry teams with each other), failure to confront and correct gossip and indirect discussions in dialogue with covenant partners, and failure to address conflict directly. (31)

1 (tie). Lack of church vision (e.g. youth programs, ministry teams, adults/seniors, family, education, discipleship, community engagement, all within a coherent and coordinated plan), which has resulted in lack of participation by covenant partners in ministries, poor development and sustainment of commitment, loss of covenant partners (often with failure to recognize and re-engage in a timely manner), poor vitality of small groups, and excessive dependence on paid staff. (31)

3. Lack of discipleship which has been impacted in part by lack of Sunday school/education classes for youth and adults (younger and older). (18)

4. Failure to reach out and involve youth and younger adults in ministry with progression to leadership training, resulting in an aging population and poor succession planning for leadership. (14)

5. Hiring practices have been poor with respect to candidate vetting and/or providing an accurate picture of Gateway to candidates, resulting in poor fit of the individual, and/or their family, and poor retention. (6)

Opportunities

1. Our culture is in need of spiritual infilling (be ready to give testimonies, awareness of individual's needs and situations, research and understand). (16)

2. Local ministry outreach (teaming with other ministries or secular outreach – Chenowith). (15)

3. Change (change of staff opens new thinking and approaches). (14)

4. Creative outreach (field trips, outside speakers, events, web-based bible studies). (13)

5. Allowing more community use of our facilities. (13)

Threats

1 (tie). Societal lack of spiritual leadership in homes, opening the opportunity for Satan's influence and proliferation of sin (e.g., our prevalent drug culture). (20)

1 (tie). An individualistic culture that is focused on self - one which lacks commitment to others, and thereby presents a challenge for a group of believers espousing care for one another to connect with and break down barriers, in part related to misperceptions of who we are. (20)

3. Pastors getting caught up in day-to-day management (staff, facility, programs) to the point of emphasizing executive functions at the expense of spiritual leadership. (12)

4. Security to protect against outside threats with respect to physical/criminal activity against the congregation, children, and property, and with respect to liability. (6)

Table 2: List of characteristics for a Turnaround Pastor-Leader

Concurs with reformed theology and polity of ECO

Spiritually disciplined in prayer, reading of the Word, and reflection

Values personal spiritual formation with resulting purity and integrity

Proficient preaching and teaching of the Word

Directive (not autocratic or domineering)

Collaborative

Self-confident, but with grace, humility, and self-awareness

Calming in times of challenge

Inspirational

Visionary AND Actualizer

Persuasive

Encouraging

Good communicator

Willingness to prioritize and lead a Gateway's revitalization

Open to new ideas and able to objectively review outcomes

Able to learn from "failed" ventures

Committed to tenure of at least 5-10 years