



Navigating the Postmodern Seachange of Theological Education and Local Church Ministry

Northwind Institute

Executive Summary

Prepared by Northwind Institute

Rev. Dr. Robert J. Duncan, Jr.
Rev. Dr. Michael Christensen

PREFACE

This notion of *ministry* takes much of its terminology from the nomenclature of sailing. Ships cannot sail directly into the wind. To reach the desired destination that is against the wind, a ship must sail in the general direction of the destination but at a slight angle to the wind. This critical angle creates a vacuum in front of the sail and allows the ship to move into the wind. To reach the destination, the ship sails first at one angle and then at the opposite angle to the wind. It does so by turning its bow through the wind so that the direction from which the wind blows changes from one side to the other. This is called “tacking”. For example, if a vessel is sailing on a starboard tack with the wind blowing from the right side and tacks, it will ‘come about’ to a port tack with the wind blowing from the left side. In practice, the sails are set at an angle of 45° to the wind for conventional sailing ships, and the tacking course is kept as short as possible before a new tack is set in. Even modern motor-drive ships tack but at a much closer angle to the wind (at 20-30°).

The tacking image and metaphor apply to ministry in the seachange of postmodern times. The church and the culture in which it sails are going through cataclysmic change. This has impacted the educational needs of local church pastors and leaders.

The purpose of the Trajectory Report is to identify the angles, waypoints, and direction for the new mission tack.

WHY CHRISTIAN FUTURING?

Simply put ... Strategic Planning is dead in postmodern culture.

At least Strategic Planning as a model for Church Planning is dead, outdated, and no longer desirable. Another planning process is needed.

Old School Strategic Planning starts with a firm foundation and a blueprint. It requires knowing a starting point and an ending point, identifying every variable, and assigning a value to that variable. A linear plan is then developed to build on the foundation, beginning at the starting point and inserting every variable to achieve the desired result. Once the plan is implemented, if a variable value is changed or a new variable is discovered, one must stop, adjust the plan or start over. A traditional Strategic Plan limits the number of variables that can be added, changed, or deleted.

And that's the problem ... If we truly believe that God shows up in church, and inactive in our individual lives, then we cannot identify every possibility and variable in the planning process, or assign a static value to each variable. The wind of the Spirit blows where it will, and God moves within us and among us, changing directions and revealing new way posts in the sea of possibilities. As new resources are needed, God brings new persons with new spiritual gifts for ministry. We need to leave room in our planning process for God to work beyond the old foundations and familiar patterns.

WHY IS CHRISTIAN FUTURING A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO STRATEGIC PLANNING?

The notion of *Christian Futuring* is a better fit for the planning needs of a local church and church-related institutions because it anticipates inevitable changes and needed shifts in response to new winds of the Spirit.

Identifying possible *scenarios* helps us imagine multiple futures for thoughtful selection instead of a win/lose either/or choice that is often the by-product of a linear strategic planning model. The scenarios constructed in *Christian Futuring* describe what ministry might look like in the future, given certain trends and factors. By using multiple scenarios, a *preferred scenario* can be selected for action.

The preferred scenario often energizes a ministry by opening a collective vision of what *could be* instead of *what is*. God's message to God's people always has involved a call to new directions and wisdom about what is possible *with* God. The energy that is generated in this process is a renewable resource. As the congregation moves toward its future, and its trajectory begins to fulfill the preferred scenario, vital energy is created, which renews itself and serves as the catalyst for increased momentum.

Often the preferred scenario, and the energy it creates, attracts new people to the movement toward the future. New people come with fresh insights and spiritual gifts. Other spiritual gifts within the congregation are called forth and activated. The *Christian Futuring* model provides a *Trajectory Report* which identifies a 'cone' of future ministry activity that absorbs these newly discovered spiritual gifts without the need to stop, lose momentum, and re-build a strategic plan.

One example of *Christian Futuring* and its notion of faith-based planning in a local congregation was done by the leadership at Church at Hemlock Farms in Lord's Valley, PA. Located in a planned community and founded by several denominational executives working at 475 Riverside Drive in NYC, it was designed to be a federated congregation. The concept called for persons to retain their denominational membership and worship together in a multi-denominational congregation while on vacation in Hemlock Farms in the Pennsylvania Poconos.

For many years this church plant model worked well. But over time, things changed. As more families chose Hemlock Farms as their primary residence, regular worship, and membership in a federated congregation failed to meet everyone's spiritual needs and preferences. Several of the original sponsoring denominations withdrew their continued support. The congregation was headed for a split along the lines of the 'home' denomination of two of the leading families in the church. An either/or, win/lose, stay/go decision was looming. By employing *Christian Futuring*, several scenarios were constructed, *a preferred one was selected*, and the congregation avoided a split. Together, they were able to imagine a future where God was actively present beyond what they could immediately see for themselves.

IS CHRISTIAN FUTURING A GOOD FIT FOR CHURCH AND ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS?

Christian Futuring has been part of the Doctor of Ministry curriculum at Drew Theological School since 1997. Futuring is a component of the Future Studies degree offered by the University of Houston, College of Technology. The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association recognized *Christian Futuring* as an approved planning model during the 2005 Comprehensive Visit to Bacone College. Following that visit, Rev. Dr. Robert J. Duncan, Jr., President, and Dr. Robert K. Brown, Chief Academic Officer, presented a professional paper and workshop on *Christian Futuring* at the Higher Learning Commission's Annual Meeting in Chicago.

In 2009 Bacone undertook a process to determine its potential and direction. A Consulting Group was hired to conduct a comprehensive review of Bacone's current status, and what Bacone could become in the future. This group developed a linear plan that was overly ambitious. After receiving that report the Board of Trustees faced the prospect of inadequate resources to implement the plan presented by the consultants. By returning to the pathway of the previous *Christian Futuring Trajectory Report*, the BOT was able to preserve key elements of the consultants' plan and avoid the either/or & win/lose choices that seemed unavoidable.

Another example of Christian Futuring at work at an academic and church-related institution is *Communities of Shalom*—an economic community development network initiated by The United Methodist Church in partnership at Drew Theological School where it was based. Both partner institutions—Drew University and The United Methodist Church--had long relied on traditional strategic planning. But in the global economic downturn of 2008, a new and more creative strategy was called for. By retaining the professional services of a *Christian Futuring* coach and consultant, the national leadership of *Communities of Shalom* was able to shift, tack, and extend its resources by constructing three possible futures, and then selecting their preferred scenario which offered the best chance of sustainability in troubled waters. Their preferred scenario involved a major shift in strategic thinking from relying on denominational structures for decision-making in favor of community-based solutions organically grown from the ground up. It was no easy task to convert from top-down organizational management to bottom-up community development processes for better buy-in and sustainability, but the choice was made, and *Communities of Shalom* at Drew enjoyed some fruitful years of ministry before it was time to change again in response to new emerging futures.

CHRISTIAN FUTURING - THE PROCESS

The *Christian Futuring* process described in this Executive Summary uses a Consultant/Client process to identify possible futures and constructs the preferred scenario. In this guided process, the Consultant provides specific services, and the Client completes assigned tasks.

The Consultant provides:

- Training and coaching in the Data Collection phase
- Creative writing in the Scenario Spinning phase
- Guided discussion during the Scenario Selection phase
- Technical writing in the Trajectory Report phase

The Client provides:

- Provides research in the Data Collection phase
- Responds to questions from the Consultant in the Scenario Spinning phase
- Participates in focus groups during the Scenario Selection phase
- Responds to questions from the Consultant in the Trajectory Report phase

Northwind Institute has engaged two consultants: Robert J. Duncan, Jr. D.Min and Michael J. Christensen, Ph.D. (both consultants worked on futuring projects at Drew Theological School and Communities of Shalom).

Several

Data Collection –

- Church Judicatories and Higher Education Institutions
- Demographics
- Trends
- Drivers of Change
- Theological Priorities

Scenario Spinning – Dr. Christensen developed three possible scenarios of the future based on the data from the Council workgroups

Scenario Selection – The three scenarios and selected preferred one to develop as the plan for Northwind Institute's Future.

Trajectory Report – A plan has been developed to move from the present toward a preferred scenario of the future that includes:

- Waypoints have been identified to review and evaluate each task in the timeline
- Touchstones have been identified to inform required action(s) and adjustments to evaluated tasks

What is our Aim and Ultimate Destination?

Christian Futuring begins with a snapshot of where the ministry is at a specific point of time. After spinning three *Possible Futures*, the selected future is described as the *Preferred Scenario*. By identifying *current trends* and *drivers of change* in the general culture & church ethos and following *Waypoints* and *Touchstones* in the Christian Futuring process, the preferred future can be reached.

Conclusion

On the one hand, it seems that mission only requires simple compassion to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. in the spirit of Jesus. But sometimes “helping the poor” does more harm than good and sometimes charity can be toxic. Better to learn how best to serve the present age, in organized and disciplined ways, with cultural competency and best practices in hand.

Preferred Scenario:

A 'Northwind' provides new directions in theological education.

This scenario describes a new online seminary supporting postmodern ministry for the neXt church by providing online theological education for a bi-vocational, second career, and lay ministry. In this scenario, there is a focus on the mission of Jesus to build-up the Body of Christ called the church by training a new generation of leaders in a new way in response to a crisis in theological education. The scenario is based on the following:

Status of Church Judicatories and Higher Education Institutions

- Local Churches in Mainline Denominations are struggling
- ATS Theological Institutions are struggling

Demographics

- The majority of new Pastors will be second-career and bi-vocational
- The lack of a local Seminary and the cost of ATS Theological Education are barriers to educating small-church pastors and ministry staff.

Trends

- Denomination training programs are replacing Degree programs to prepare pastors for local church ministry
- Pastors and Churches are seeking educational programs designed to provide practical application to ministry,

Drivers of Change

- Online education is being
- Faith-Based Institutions operating under state-issued religious exemptions are providing an alternative to traditional ATS Theological Education.

Theological Priorities

- Evangelical
- Wesleyan Roots
- Postmodern

Just as a sailing ship must sail in the general direction of the destination, but at a slight angle to the wind, this critical angle creates a vacuum in front of the sail and allows the ship to move into the wind. To reach the destination, the ship sails first at one angle and then at the opposite angle to the wind. It does so by turning its bow through the wind so that the direction from which the wind blows changes from one side to the other. This is called “tacking”.

The tacking image and metaphor apply to ministry in the seachange of postmodern times. The church and the culture in which it sails are going through cataclysmic change. This has impacted the educational needs of local church pastors and leaders.

This 'Northwind' will give birth to a new notion of theological education through an educational institution: Northwind Institute which is sailing into the future of online theological education using non-traditional approaches which include establishing a virtual institution, offering online instruction, operating under state-issued religious exemptions to offer degrees, charging affordable tuition to reduce student debt, and a distributed leadership team & faculty.

Trajectory Report

The purpose of the Trajectory Report is to identify the angles, waypoints, and direction for the new mission tack.

This trajectory has been developed to move from the present toward a preferred scenario of the future that includes:

- Waypoints have been identified to review and evaluate each task in the timeline

- Touchstones have been identified to inform required action(s) and adjustments to evaluated tasks

Trajectory Report Timeline:

Year 1: 2019

- Complete Articulation Agreements
 - Northwind Institute
 - National Association of Christian Counselors
 - Sarasota Academy of Christian Counseling

Year 2: 2020

- Develop Ministry Experience Portfolios to translate ministry experience into academic credit.
- Develop a Process to transfer MECP Credits to Northwind Seminary

Year 3: 2021

- Develop a Pathway to Ministry for BA Degree Completion
- Develop an Expressway to Ministry Program for Graduate Degree Completion
- Begin an Course Evaluation Process
- Expand Certificate Programs
- Expand Articulation Agreements

Year 4: 2022

- Develop a marketing plan to offer the Ministry Experience Credit Portfolio service to Faith-Based Institutions