



The Episcopal Diocese
of Pennsylvania

Casting Nets

DREAMING, DISCERNING,
PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.

John 21: 4-6



My Siblings in Christ,

“Cast the net on the right side of the boat...” With those words, Jesus challenged the disciples to do something new, something different, something that went against everything they knew and understood as fishermen. They had worked all night and given it their best but caught nothing. But when they trusted Jesus, everything changed.

Just imagine how they must have felt. How their exhaustion and frustration was transformed to wonder, amazement and exhilaration as the net strained against the enormous catch. And it happened, not because of their skill or experience, but because they trusted in Jesus and dared to do something different.

I am writing to call you to do something new – something that will **revitalize our churches, our communities and our diocese.** This letter is an invitation for you to embark on this spiritual journey with us.

We stand at a threshold. A new day is dawning.

During the pandemic, we discovered new and creative ways to worship, pray, connect and serve. Building on that success and momentum, we are excited to introduce the “Casting Nets” initiative.

Allow yourselves the chance to really dream what your church might be if it was not expending so much energy focused on buildings, people and money. How might you break free from how you have always done things and to dare to envision a church that is focused on the life-giving essentials of prayer, community, worship and ministry to and with our neighbors?

We learned during COVID-19 that we can find ways to thrive despite obstacles, and this has opened up tremendous opportunities. Change does not have to take decades. It can come quickly, if we have faith to embrace new possibilities and to focus on what is most essential.

I am asking you to think as if you are a startup business.

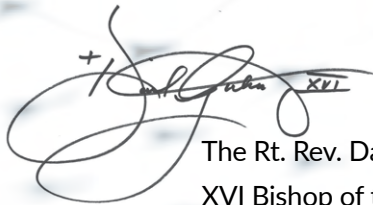
Ask yourselves about goals, creativity, listening, planning and implementation. That's what "Casting Nets" is about. You don't need more money or more people, you don't need the latest theories or programs, all you need is a ***willing heart and a desire for your church to become more the church that God envisions***, as opposed to the church the world says is possible.

There are four parts of this initiative, which can take as little as 10 weeks to accomplish. I cannot say exactly where this journey will take you, but I can promise that if you dare to "cast your nets" and trust in Jesus, that your church will be changed for the better. Above all, you will not be alone. Your diocesan staff will be here to assist and guide you in this process.

I am entering my seventh year now as your Bishop. Each day, I come to love you more, love the people, love the history, as well as our potential.

I love our revolutionary spirit. It is that spirit that stands at the heart of this project. Let us follow Jesus and those first disciples and "cast nets" on the other side so that together we may transform our churches, our communities and our diocese in his most holy name.

In Christ,



The Rt. Rev. Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez
XVI Bishop of the Episcopal
Diocese of Pennsylvania



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1

DEEP WATER

When it comes to our churches, most of us start by counting and calculating, don't we? Do we have enough?

What do we (or some outside experts) think may be possible?

Do we have what we need to do to grow the church, or even just to keep it open?

What if?

What if we started with a dream instead?

*And **what if** that dream was born, not out of necessity, but of purpose?*

***What if** when we saw the needs of our community, we didn't jump immediately to thinking about numbers, but instead simply focused on what our faith calls us to do in response?*

We often focus on the "good old days" when the church was full of people. And so we seek to bring people into the building, declaring a welcome for all.

***What if** we shifted the focus?*

***What if** we took the good things we have to offer out to them??*

*We always measure numbers in terms of attendance and budget, but **what if we tracked the difference we are making in people's lives?***

We always begin by starting a program and developing a system.

***What if** we started by taking concrete and holy action? Then, trusting God and one another, acting in faith as a beautiful idea takes shape around us?*

In the scripture above, Jesus challenges the disciples to go out to the deep water before casting their nets. This went against all conventional wisdom. Everyone knew fish were caught in the shallows, not the deep. Yet they had faith. They trusted in Jesus. They challenged their own assumptions and dared to dream of what might be possible if they dared to do things differently.

"When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

Luke 5:4

Fullfilling God's Purpose

When it comes to your dream, you already have all that you need to fulfill the purpose that God has for you.

This is the real miracle at the heart of the feeding of the 5,000. Although no one would have suspected it, the disciples already had all that they needed to feed the people. While it was Jesus who multiplied the loaves and fishes, he still chose to work with and make the most of the gifts the disciples already possessed. Nothing more was required. Through the grace of God, they already had all that they needed!

As you go out into the deep water and enter this sacred dreaming, know that there is already enough to accomplish what God has in mind for you.

You are already enough. You have enough time and energy. Your community is strong enough. God is calling you into something new, and God will equip you with all that you need to do what he has called you to do. For it is not our dream, but God's that we seek to make real. God's dream for you is already a reality. All you need to do is discern it and then venture forward in faith as God works in and through you to make it real.

"Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets."

John 6:11-13

Recommended:

Please make copies of these next pages for all participants >>>

What to Expect

The Dreaming Exercise involves two tours: one of your church campus and one of your community. It is followed by a time of reflection and sharing. It is recommended that you do this exercise with your vestry and any other key leaders from your church. It is also helpful if you designate one person to lead the group through the questions.

Dreaming Exercise

You have enough ... enough people and resources. You have enough time and energy. God has given you all that you need to make your dream for your church a reality.

**NOW, WHAT DO YOU DO? HOW DO YOU CHANGE THE WORLD?
WHAT IS YOUR DREAM?**

If you could change anything, it would be?

If you could help anyone, who would they be?

In your dreams, how is your church different than it is today?

In your dreams, how is your community different than it is today?

Look with Fresh Eyes

How is Jesus present and active in your church?

- Gather the clergy and vestry and go everywhere inside and out.
- Look at the light streaming through the windows.
- Touch the stone and feel how strong it is.
- Look up the aisle and consider how many have walked there.
- Allow yourselves to revel in memories of music and midnight mass.
- Let the laughter that has filled the hall fill your heart.
- Where is Jesus in this place?

NOTES | PICTURES | SKETCHES | IDEAS

Take a Field Trip

Where is Jesus in your community?

Next, the same group should make a similar tour of your community.

- Open your eyes, ears and hearts so as to take in what life is like for the people who live around your church. As you do, make particular effort to go to the places that may seem strange, different or even frightening.
- This is best done by foot but can be done by car or both.
- Don't rush. It may take multiple trips to gain a thorough sense of the totality of your community.
- If it is easier, go in small groups.
- Stop and talk to people.
- Go into businesses, parks and ball courts/fields.
- Take the time to look and listen for Jesus. Ask yourself: Where is Jesus?
- Where do you see hope and joy?
- Where do you see need and pain?
- What does our faith call us to do in response to the needs we saw?

Consider taking flyers of an upcoming event with you when you visit businesses, asking them to come and see if they will post the flyer inside their business.

FIELD TRIP PLANNER	
DATE	LOCATION (S)
SCHEDULE	CONTACT
NOTES ON FINDINGS	

2

ASSESSMENT & REFLECTION

What to Expect

- This assessment can take up to 3 weeks to complete. It should be done by the same group that participated in the Holy Dreaming of Phase 1.
- The staff of the Offices of the Diocese is available to moderate or facilitate these confidential conversations with you.

Some answers may require the input of those outside of that initial group. Our team is available to moderate and/or host this discussion and take notes for you, maintaining confidentiality of your responses. All the answers should be compiled into a single assessment. These assessment forms are also available online. *These tools are for your own internal use. You will not be asked to share your answers with anyone outside your church.*

“We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”
Romans 12:6-8

Section I: Self-Assessment (Know Who You Are)

This step builds on your previous work of holy dreaming. In order to make that dream of a transformation a reality, you must first make an honest assessment of who you are.

What about how you currently do things is getting in the way of the dream?

Remember, as with the Dreaming phase, this should not be about people, money or energy.

What successes can you build on to help make it a reality?

In order to make room for the dream, this process will help you identify what you might let go of— either by discontinuing a particular practice or by finding creative solutions that lead to transformation in how you “do” church.

Throughout this self-evaluation, please reflect on these four core questions:

- *Why should people who are seeking meaning and purpose come to your church?*
- *How might people encounter and experience God if they come to you?*
- *How will people be led to express God as a result of being with you?*
- *If your church ceased to be, what impact would it have?*
 - *On members?*
 - *On the community?*



Self- Assessment Part I: Your Gifts and Calling

In order to better understand where God is calling you to go and how to get there, you first need to consider your current practices. Your responses should help you in answering the above core questions. At the end of the assessment, you will be invited to reflect on that process.

YOUR GIFTS

What are your church’s spiritual gifts? *Spiritual Gifts include qualities of leadership, evangelism and teaching (Ephesians 4). If you need help in identifying them, we recommend the Spiritual Gifts APEST Personal Vocational Assessment (<http://www.theforgottenways.org/what-is-apest.aspx>)*

In addition to your church’s spiritual gifts, what talents and skills are present in your church?

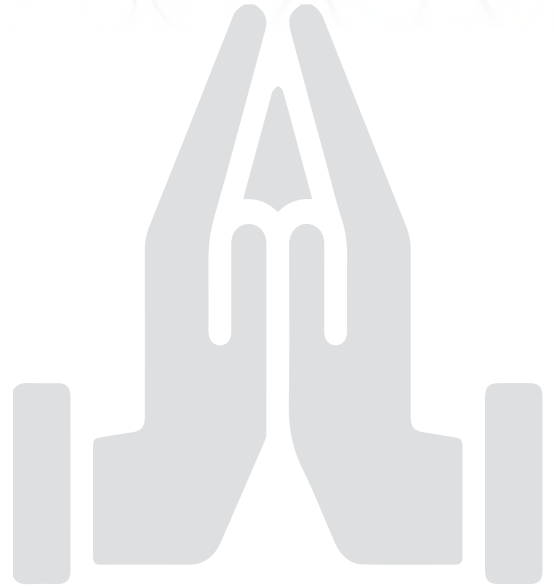
Are all your church’s gifts and talents being engaged in ministry and service? If not, which ones are underutilized?

Have any new gifts emerged since the pandemic began?

Describe your church's current worship practices.

*Do you offer Christian formation?
(i.e. Sunday school, Bible Study, etc.)*

Worship and Spiritual Health



Has the pandemic led you to consider significant changes in your worship and spiritual practices?

Are your current practices meeting your larger goals in terms of worship, formation and nurturing the spiritual life of your members and visitors?



Does your church have a clear sense of mission and ministry?

- *What is God calling you to do?*
- *Who is God calling you to serve?*

Mission/Ministry

What are your current ministries?

What impact do they have?

How do you measure that impact?

When was the last time an existing ministry was retired or a new one added?

What resources do you have that could be used in pursuit of your mission and calling?

- *Unused parts of the building or campus, such as a large kitchen or outdoor space that could be a garden or used for sports??*
- *Storage space?*
- *Space for community meetings?*
- *Connections in the community or with people with influence?*
- *Money or tangible goods?*

Has the pandemic led you to consider significant changes in your ministries?

Are your current practices meeting your larger goals in terms of mission and ministry?



Community Needs and Desires

Drawing on your knowledge of the community (from your previous tour of your neighborhood and augmented by demographic data as needed), what are the greatest needs of your neighbors?

This should include both practical needs, as well as emotional and spiritual issues like loneliness and despair.

Are those needs being met? If so, by whom?

What gifts and resources do you have that could help meet those needs?

Who could you potentially partner with to make those efforts more effective?



Self- Assessment Part 2: How Your Church Operates

GOVERNANCE

Do your vestry meetings include a spiritual component?

(Prayer, Bible study, etc.)

Is there time set aside for discerning and discussing new ideas?

Is your budget aligned with your mission and ministry?

Are you prioritizing those people and programs that make it easier for you to live out your mission and become the church God is calling you to be?

How (if at all) has the pandemic impacted your budget's ability to support mission and ministry?

How fully and effectively do you utilize your campus to support mission and ministry?

Has the pandemic led you to consider more permanent change in your vestry practices?

WHAT STANDS IN YOUR WAY?

List three (3) things that need to change so that you might better be able to live into God’s dream. *“More money, more people, and more time” are not options.* Instead, we ask that you focus your attention on areas you identified as you answered the questions.

In particular, we ask you to consider:

Are there any practices, ministries or traditions that you might find liberating to stop or simply not resume?

How might your operations and practices be restructured so that more resources could be devoted to pursuing your dream?

Please list the things that need to change below:

**CHANGE
1**

**CHANGE
2**

**CHANGE
3**

***PLEASE NOTE:**

We recognize that the issues of money and people are real and pressing. The Offices of the Diocese and Diocesan Governance continue to formulate new models to assist you in finding practical solutions in the areas of finance, administration and property management.



3

CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR ACTION PLAN

“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”

Proverbs 16:3

How can you change the world in Jesus’ name? Your idea does not need to be a new one. It could be to be part of something already happening.

At the end of Phase I, you articulated a dream. In Phase II, you took a long look at your church and your community to better discern how that dream might take shape. Now it is time to take all that hard work and formulate it into a clear plan so that you can make that dream a reality.

Modeled on a secular business plan, this template will allow you to lay out your new idea so it can be “launched.”

You can work on it as a group or task a subcommittee to create a draft to present to the full group for comment and finalization. The step-by-step process should take between one and two hours to complete.



Drawing on your work from Phase I and Phase II, you will answer the following:

• **ISSUE**

What problem/issue are you called to address?

• **GOAL**

What solution can you offer?

• **EXPERTISE**

How are you equipped to do this?

• **COMPETITION**

*Is anyone else doing this in your area?
How are you different?*

• **MARKETING**

How will you reach your target audience (those with whom you wish to engage/or assist) with news of this idea?

• **TASKS**

How will you implement that solution?

• **RESOURCES**

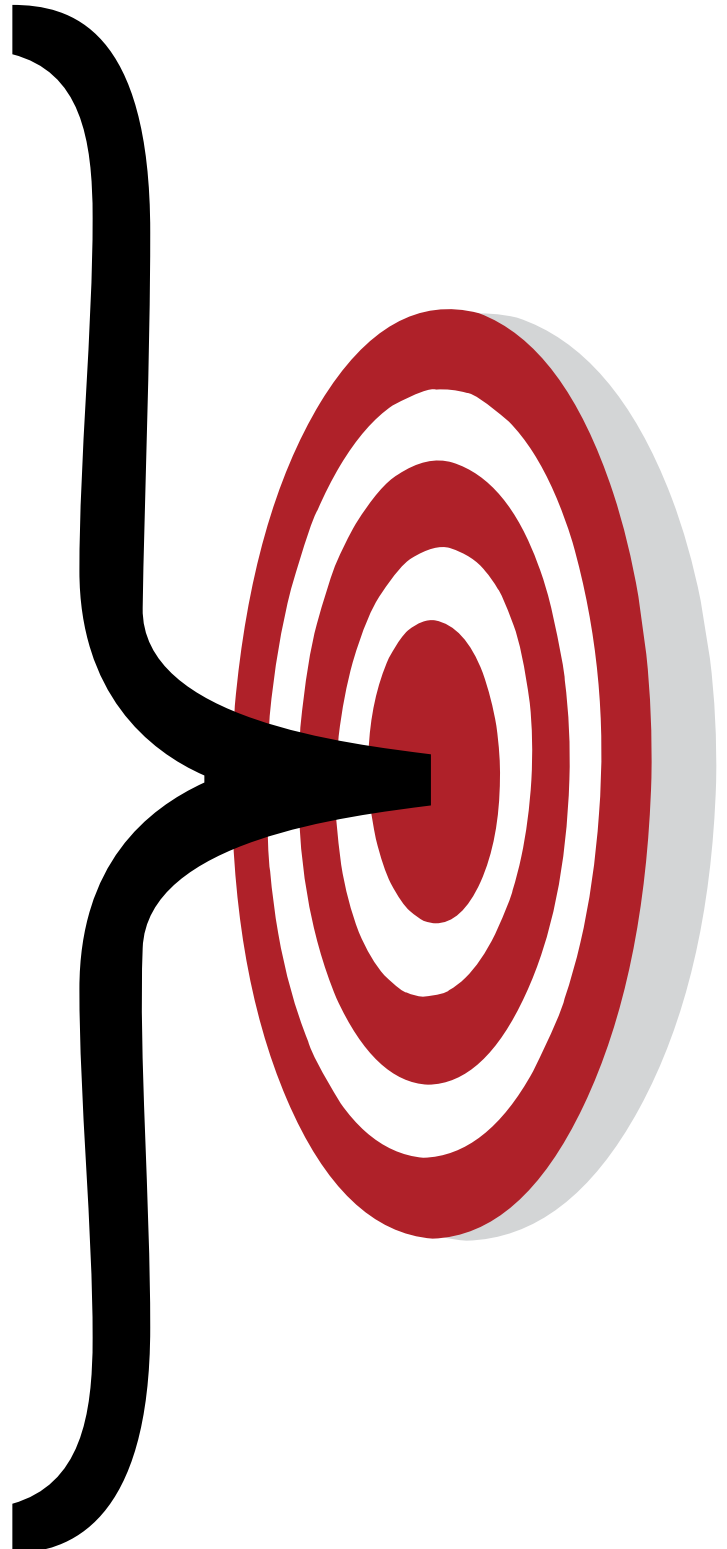
*Do you have what you need in terms of money, people, leadership and materials?
Are there partners who can help?*

• **TIMELINE**

How long will it take you do achieve this and what key milestones need to be met?

• **OUTCOME**

How will you know if you have been successful with this idea?



Articulating The Dream Work Sheet



ISSUE

Drawing on the work you did in Phase II, what is the need you feel called to address?

EXAMPLE: Unemployment in community: During the pandemic, many local restaurants closed, leaving a large number of workers in our area unemployed.

GOAL

What will you do to meet that need?

EXAMPLE: Provide displaced workers with a home base in the church where they can hone skills.

***Note: For more on defining Goals, see the Appendix.**

EXPERTISE

- **Why are you qualified to do this?**
- **Do you have the call to carry out this ministry?**
- **Do you have the necessary location, time, money, people, etc.?
(See Resources below)**
- **Do you have the necessary commitment to see it through to completion?**

COMPETITION

- **How is this different/better than what is already out there?**
- **Are you the first church in your area to provide this service?**
- **Are you better able to meet the need because of your proximity or because you already have an established relationship?**

MARKETING

- **How will you get the word out both to those you seek to serve and to those who might want to support your ministry? This could include social media, flyers, word of mouth, email, advertising, etc.**
- **What do you want them to do when they find out about it? (This is called the call to action.) Do you want them to volunteer, donate, attend, etc.?**

**Note: if you need demographic data on your community, please contact the Offices of the Diocese.*

TASKS

What specific action will you take to make your goal a reality?

EXAMPLE: Renovate church kitchen to be used as a commissary for a catering business.

EXAMPLE: Partner with X to create a food service training program.

Include specifics such as:

- **Where will the activity take place?**
- **When will it happen (day/time) and at what frequency?**
- **Who will do the work to make this ministry successful? Staff, volunteers, partners from other organizations, etc.?**

**Note: For more on defining Tasks, see the Appendix.*

RESOURCES

- **What is needed in terms of space, money, supplies and equipment?**

- **Where will those resources come from?**

Church members?

The community?

Partner organizations?

Grants?

If you know what you need but don't know how to acquire it, please contact the Offices of the Diocese.

TIMELINE

What is the timeline for this ministry to launch?

Starting from the present:

- **Lay out a calendar that takes you to full implementation.**
- **Include as many specific steps and accompanying dates as possible. This will help in establishing your benchmarks for measurement and evaluation.**

OUTCOME

What impact do you hope to have? How will you measure success?

This is the desired Outcome of your Goal.

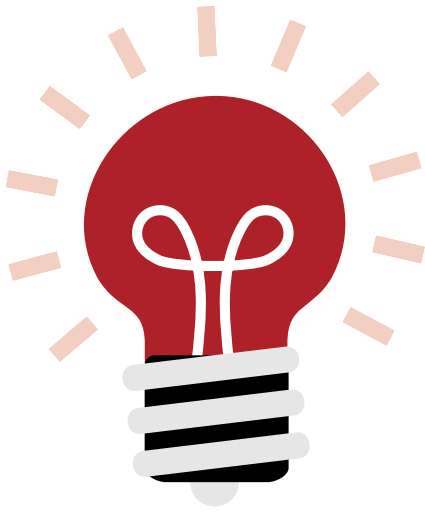
Be sure to include numbers and other concrete measurements!

EXAMPLE: Reduced food insecurity as measured by specific metrics such as reduced demand at foodbanks, reduced applications for WIC, etc.

EXAMPLE: X people rehired in culinary positions as a result of training.

**Note: For more on defining Outcomes, see the Appendix.*

FINAL THOUGHTS



First, don't wait until you think your plan is perfectly polished. The needs of your community are real and it is important to act to meet them.

Second, few new ministries go exactly as planned. Therefore, it is important to remain flexible in your thinking. Nothing in your plan is set in stone. Many aspects may shift over time. People and roles will change, marketing will change, finances will change, and sometimes even the presenting need can change. As these changes occur, you must be willing to adapt your plan accordingly. Remember that what really matters is the difference you make in the lives of the people you serve.

If you are not meeting your desired Outcomes, be prepared to adjust. Do you change the nature of the program altogether?

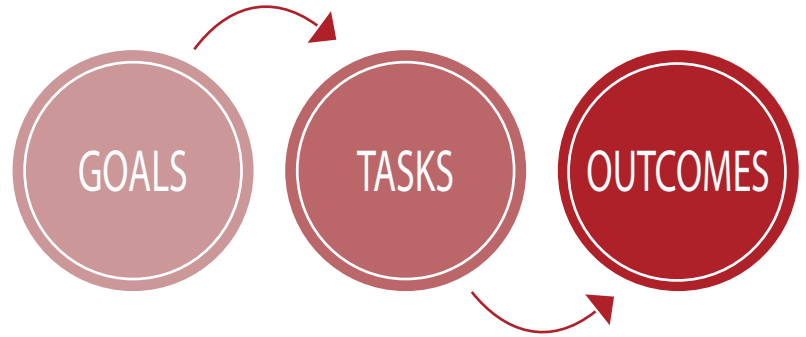
FOR EXAMPLE:

- *Change the day and/or time of the food distribution*
- *Start working with a new community partner*
- *Shift the age of the children you serve*

Finally, you might even discover a new need along the way. How might you adjust in order to meet it? For example, your church sought to offer afterschool programming for local elementary students. While some children participated, you noticed that parents tended to linger to talk with one another when they came to pick up their kids. This revealed a new need: Parents were looking for mutual support and fellowship. You might meet this need by changing the time of the program to dinner time and offering separate programming for kids and parents. This way, you continue to meet the needs of the kids yet also meet the needs of the parents.

APPENDIX: GOALS, TASKS & OUTCOMES

“...the journey to achievement starts with a goal and finishes with a desired outcome.”



GOALS: Goals are observable and have a measurable result. These are generally “umbrella” or macro issues. For example, your goal might be to end food insecurity in your community.

TASKS: Tasks are the action steps you need to take in order to achieve the goal. They are what you do to make the goal a reality. For example, tasks might be to create a food ministry, partner with another church in doing the work, etc.

OUTCOMES: Outcomes are measurable and what you hope to achieve when a goal is accomplished. For example, the outcome of the tasks above might be that you feed 500 people living below the poverty line each week.

IT IS EASY TO CONFUSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES. However, simply working to increase church attendance (for example) does little to identify the larger goal of actually bringing people into relationship with Jesus.

“If you’re unsure of what your real goal is, take a look at the outcomes you desire.” As you can see, this process invites us into thinking beyond our traditional models and structures and pushes us to clarify exactly what it is we are trying to accomplish. Real and lasting change becomes possible only when we focus ourselves on the larger goals that God calls us into.

EXAMPLE FOR GOAL/TASKS/OUTCOME

St. Swithin’s has identified that many local restaurants closed during the pandemic leaving both owners and staff without income. St. Swithin’s has a long tradition of hospitality and love of food. They also have a large industrial kitchen that is seldom used. Thus, their plan might look like one of these:

GOAL: Increase opportunities for displaced hospitality workers to find employment.

TASKS:
Any one of these tasks could accomplish the goal above.

- Allow the kitchen to be used as a commissary for start-up catering businesses.
- Create a program for re-training displaced workers by establishing a partnership with local community college.
- Create networking opportunities through by hosting a monthly social event open to both the community and the congregation. Food can be provided by the workers and prepared in the church kitchen.

DESIRED OUTCOME: X% of workers find new employment in hospitality or are retrained for another industry.