

Living Out Good Intentions: Practical Love in Life, Ministry, and Mission
A Next Steps Action Plan for Sherman Street CRC and Step of Faith Church
(May 2015 – May 2018)

Shared Congregational Vision:

We are a spiritually and economically diverse, multicultural community of faith that “enters the [Baxter Neighborhood] parish and the other communities of our lives telling and showing the good news of Jesus Christ, leading friends and strangers alike to faith and hope in him, and working to extend God’s peace in the city where God has placed us.”

Sherman Street Church’s Statement of Mission:

To be a living testimony of God’s grace and justice in the city.

Step of Faith Church’s Statement of Mission:

To build healthy people, healthy families, and healthy communities

A Summary of the Discovery/Planning Process:

In the late spring of 2013, the council approved an action planning initiative rooted in a discovery process that included extensive listening to congregational members and community stakeholders. Over the summer months a Mission Discovery Team (MDT) was formed and a leader identified. Members included Ben Brower, Kris Buth, Sarah Emerson, Roland Hoksbergen, Kelly Mullen, Anita Oomkes, Sharla Verstraete, Taylor Voss, and Gary Warners. Roland was designated as team leader, and Wayne Squires from Partners in Neighborhood Transformation was asked to provide coaching/consulting assistance. Along the way, Taylor had to leave the team, Amanda Van Engen joined the team, and Tom Sims participated in several key meetings. The first meeting was held on July 25, 2013 with a view toward completing the whole process by January of 2015.

The congregational listening (or “look inward”) involved a ministry capacity survey filled out by 167 members of Sherman Street CRC and Step of Faith, personal interviews with 89 members, mapping of congregational assets by council and ministry leaders (at a leadership retreat), and a spiritual gifts assessment of 87 participants. This part of the process also included training 23 additional individuals who conducted the interviews and assisted in interpreting the feedback. Key insights from the work of congregational discovery were shared at a combined potluck on May 18, 2014.

The community listening (or “look outward”) included five neighborhood walks by MDT members and several other SS/SOF members (75 total participants), 35 interviews with community stakeholders, and careful analysis of demographic data from the Community Research Institute.

24 people were trained to conduct interviews and helped interpret the feedback. Those who went on the walks and also talked with neighbors in the Baxter area provided helpful insights and identified opportunities for follow-up interactions. A summary of community discovery findings was shared with elders during a prayer time on 11-25-14 and in ongoing conversations with staff/ministry leaders, council members, and SJC leaders.

The MDT created a number of future ministry scenarios in November/December of 2014 and developed a draft action plan in January/February of 2015, the result of hundreds of hours of prayerful, creative work by team members. This draft is being shared with the church council in mid-March, after which it will be shared with the congregation. Adjustments may be made through all stages as both Sherman Street and Step of Faith churches come to own and implement the plan.

An Overview of the Action Plan:

The comprehensive feedback and discernment process (overseen by the MDT) confirmed a shared vision and a growing understanding of mission among congregational members and between the Sherman Street and Step of Faith congregations. It also provided patterns of mutual hopes and expectations which became the basis for this detailed action plan. These collective, God-given dreams are reflected in the objectives and goals listed below. The strategies provide specific recommendations for meeting the objectives and goals (i.e. a roadmap of implementation for staff, council, and ministry leaders). However, they are neither exhaustive nor required; instead, they serve as prompts to think and act creatively in faithfulness to God's call.

Four major objectives and eighteen supporting goals are outlined as follows:

OBJECTIVE 1: prioritize “love of neighbor” as a primary expression of faithfulness to God by:

- encouraging greater involvement in good neighboring by SS/SOF members where they actually live and work
- collectively increasing relational presence and strengthening neighbor-to-neighbor connections in the Baxter area and nearby southeast side communities
- establishing and/or sustaining working partnerships with identified local organizations for the purpose(s) of spiritual and social transformation
- actively supporting local businesses, establishments, and “common good” initiatives
- cultivating and deepening our passion for justice and sustained advocacy around the acknowledged challenges of local residents and institutions
- consistently assessing the effectiveness and relational capacity of all outreach ministries through the strategic lens of “with others”

OBJECTIVE 2: reinforce, enhance, and sustain the partnership between the Step of Faith and Sherman Street congregations by:

- completing a clarifying process that brings renewed, deeper understanding of the SS/SOF partnership
- entering into a designated season of celebration and storytelling
- creating a practical roadmap for mutual growth in worship, fellowship, and community engagement

OBJECTIVE 3: strengthen the internal sense of community in a way that promotes holistic discipleship, cross-generational participation, and leadership development for kingdom influence by:

- identifying key milestones and habits on the spiritual journey for all disciples of Jesus (to assist those serving as spiritual mentors and guides)
- utilizing small groups and ministry teams as primary contexts for ongoing spiritual growth and effective mission
- forming an apprenticeship strategy for all council and ministry leadership roles
- establishing life mentoring connections between willing, wise adults and willing, open teenage youth
- implementing a gifts-based approach to ministry/mission participation ... from “cradle to grave”

OBJECTIVE 4: improve structural support for effective ministry/mission by:

- refocusing and enhancing prayer strategies around key initiatives
- identifying needed building improvements to better utilize embedded hospitality passion(s), teaching gifts, and educational/training skills
- developing better, more creative, more interactive communication processes
- cultivating faithful stewardship and sacrificial giving among SS/SOF members

The action plan presents an opportunity to continue God’s story among his people at Sherman Street Church and Step of Faith Church (wherever they live and work) and in the Baxter neighborhood. The plan is not something dreamed up by the mission discovery team, but a set of objectives, goals, and strategies that arises out of the discernment, hopes, and dreams of all the people who have provided input for the discovery process. Nor is it a strategic rulebook laying out inflexible principles, but a series of practical invitations to experience and to bear witness to God’s goodness, grace, and justice. As such, the Mission Discovery Team hopes the plan will be received with great joy and anticipation. To facilitate ongoing attention to the plan’s implementation, the MDT recommends the appointment of an implementation team of 5-7 members to discern how and when the identified strategies will be applied and to ensure appropriate follow-up responses.

Living Out Good Intentions: Practical Love in Life, Ministry, and Mission

A Next Steps Action Plan for Sherman Street CRC and Step of Faith Church (May 2015 – May 2018)

Objective 1: prioritize “love of neighbor” as a primary expression of faithfulness to God

- Goal #1:** encourage greater involvement in good neighboring by SS/SOF members where they actually live and work
- Goal #2:** collectively increase relational presence and strengthening neighbor-to-neighbor connections in the Baxter area and nearby southeast side communities
- Goal #3:** establish and/or sustaining working partnerships with identified local organizations for the purpose(s) of spiritual and social transformation
- Goal #4:** actively support local businesses, establishments, and “common good” initiatives
- Goal #5:** cultivate and deepen our passion for justice and sustained advocacy around the acknowledged challenges of local residents and institutions
- Goal #6:** consistently assess the effectiveness and relational capacity of all outreach ministries through the strategic lens of “with others”

Goal 1: encourage greater involvement in good neighboring by SS/SOF members where they actually live and work

Strategy 1: design an annual congregational event (e.g. a *friendship or good neighbor* month) that includes a message series, small group learning, training support, hospitality and serving opportunities, and creative storytelling in worship settings

- identify key leaders and form an event team
- design and plan the event (i.e. provide administrative/organizational support)
- implement event initiatives/activities (perhaps in May?)
- evaluate the event’s success and pursue follow-up opportunities for developing good neighbor practices

Strategy 2: support the development of small groups in which members share a geographical affinity and a desire for neighborhood engagement

- provide periodic teaching/training on the neighborhood as a primary context for spirituality and mission (e.g. a 3-4 week series on Sunday mornings or evenings)
- develop and update a visual map identifying the places where SS/SOF members live
- encourage the formation of place-based small groups focused on neighborhood/community transformation
- identify leadership support/oversight for these groups

Strategy 3: make “love of neighbor” a key theme of elder visitations

- incorporate a modeling expectation for pastoral elders around neighbor relationships
- provide mentoring, training, and resources for pastoral elders in this area
- develop a home visit template of appreciative questions that includes a focus on good neighboring practices
- schedule time in elder meetings for neighbor/neighborhood engagement stories ... and prayerful response(s)

Strategy 4: affirm and promote the practice(s) of being a good neighbor in the workplace and other vocational settings

- identify and tell transformational stories of kingdom influence from our work and vocational lives
- encourage participation in workplace groups, neighborhood associations, community/civic organizations, education boards, and home-based service

Goal 2: collectively increase relational presence and strengthen neighbor-to-neighbor connections in the Baxter area and nearby southeast side communities

Strategy 1: form a neighborhood walking team to consistently stroll through the parish area, talk with neighbors, observe activities, and pray together

- identify willing leaders/participants (including neighbors)
- set up a basic framework and conduct initial training
- initiate walking team activities
- create feedback loops to staff/council members
- develop an inventory of neighbor/neighborhood stories, gifts, and resources

Strategy 2: develop block-level connectors who consistently interact with individual neighbors

- review and learn from previous efforts
- develop expectations for participants
- recruit participants based on interest and gifts
- provide needed training and leadership support
- link these efforts to the work of the neighborhood walking team (see strategy 1) and the community hospitality team (see strategy 3)

Strategy 3: place greater emphasis on neighborhood/community hospitality

- form a SS/SOF community hospitality team that includes interested neighbors
- reach consensus on simple, helpful, encouraging events for relationship building (e.g. Saturday morning breakfasts, picnics at Joe Taylor Park, parking lot cookouts, topical community conversations/forums, various “joining” activities and “get to know you” events)
- involve other organizational stakeholders as appropriate
- assess activities/events from a “having fun and building trust” perspective ... and make necessary adjustments
- invite greater utilization of church space by local groups and organizations (note: this may call for a revision of building use policies and associated fees)

Strategy 4: strengthen the McCarty House model of engagement

- integrate ongoing relationship building in the Baxter neighborhood into expectations and responsibilities for house residents
- affirm the role of experienced mentors who ensure appropriate levels of skill development in good neighboring and relational ministry
- identify and introduce a neighborhood connecting training/curriculum for all house residents
- create feedback loops to key SS/SOF ministry leaders and teams for the purpose of mutual learning and informed engagement
- encourage house residents to exercise leadership in SS/SOF ministry settings

Strategy 5: hire a “community connector” in partnership with other neighborhood organizations to bring needed energy and oversight to the strategies listed under this goal (#2) and the following goal (#3)

- develop a proposal and job description in conversation and cooperation with other interested organizational partners
- create a simple charter for a neighborhood collaboration focused on connecting activities (i.e. identify supervisory, fiduciary, and administrative support responsibilities for organizational members)
- access needed funding for both a minimum 20 hours per week role and basic program support for neighborhood activities/initiatives (over an initial period of two years)
- complete a hiring process that identifies a person who is a good fit with the qualities, skills, and activities/responsibilities outlined in the job description

Goal 3: establish and/or sustain working partnerships with identified local organizations for the purpose(s) of spiritual and social transformation

Strategy 1: convene a neighborhood collaboration task force to build on the initial work of the MDT

- affirm and build capacity around current partnerships
- review feedback from stakeholder interviews with MDT representatives
- follow up with interested organizational representatives as appropriate
- continue and broaden the stakeholder interview strategy to cultivate relationships/friendships and clarify potential collaborative opportunities
- develop other simple, interactive feedback strategies with potential partners
- work with the “community connector” (in Goal 2 above) to strengthen support of local organizations/ministries and coordinate volunteer opportunities

Strategy 2: host or sponsor quarterly community forums and/or bi-monthly roundtables with interested stakeholders for the purposes of networking, relationship building, storytelling, and brainstorming around collaborative opportunities

- link this strategy to the work of the collaboration task force (for communication and planning support)
- find another organization or two to help sponsor and facilitate these community conversations
- identify key leaders to facilitate these conversations and follow up with emerging opportunities
- create collaborative experiments when appropriate

Goal 4: actively support local businesses, establishments, and “common good” initiatives

Strategy 1: design an annual congregational initiative (e.g. “Invest in Your Neighborhood” month) that includes a message series on serving the common good, the encouragement to patronize at least one local business, communal prayer for local establishments, and experiential storytelling in worship and group settings

[Note the similar activities associated with this kind of initiative in goal 1, strategy 1 above.]

Strategy 2: encourage support of local businesses/establishments through effective, consistent communication (and event consideration)

- develop and maintain a list of local businesses to patronize
- create a bulletin board for promoting/advertising purposes
- highlight local businesses during congregational prayer(s)
- use local businesses willing to support church/community events (e.g. catering or supplies or equipment or specific services)

Goal 5: cultivate and deepen our passion for justice and sustained advocacy around the acknowledged challenges of local residents and institutions

Strategy 1: involve the Social Justice Committee in prioritizing local justice pursuits and advocacy opportunities and taking next steps

- build on MDT feedback from local stakeholders (which identifies shared interest in improving educational access/achievement, improving access to fresh foods and nutritional food preparation, improving access to living wage jobs, improving access to safe/affordable housing, and expanding mentoring and leadership development strategies with young people)
- work with the collaboration task force [see goal 3, strategy 1 above]
- continue to get helpful feedback from interested stakeholders/potential partners
- evaluate current involvement of SS/SOF members in justice initiatives and identify areas of shared commitment
- build capacity around current activities ... as appropriate (e.g. events/initiatives connected to returning citizens and restorative justice)
- develop a roadmap identifying ways SS/SOF members can participate. The map should be revised annually in light of new pursuits and opportunities.

Strategy 2: consistently and sensitively provide training opportunities for increased awareness and competency across racial, cultural, and economic boundaries

- schedule an annual trip to the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University
- host and/or sponsor inclusion training events to heighten awareness and skill for participating in a diverse cultural context
- form short term “healing racism” groups with willing neighborhood churches and organizations
- incorporate cultural competency training into expectations for all staff and council leaders (e.g. participation in the Eracism Experience)

Goal 6: consistently assess the effectiveness and relational capacity of all outreach ministries through the strategic lens of “with others”

Strategy 1: work with current outreach ministry teams to identify and take full advantage of follow-up relational/friendship/leadership opportunities (e.g. the food pantry, Kids Club, Kids Hope, and Men’s Luncheon)

- clarify staff/council oversight of each community ministry (including setting and meeting annual goals)
- provide a template of participation level & relational development questions to each community ministry leader to be answered (via reports/updates) on a quarterly basis
- establish twice-a-year celebration/storytelling/brainstorming events for all leaders and workers in outreach ministries
- budget for resources that increase capacity for relational mission (e.g. conferences, curriculum, or sponsored workshops)
- revise budget request forms (for ministry leaders) to reflect “with others” expectations/priorities
- sponsor an annual training in ABCD (Asset Based Community Development) for all participants in community-oriented ministries

Strategy 2: increase leadership oversight and focus on parish relationships and neighborhood partnerships

- restructure current staff and council responsibilities to place greater emphasis on relational, sustainable community ministry
- increase the number of staff hours devoted to direct, yet collaborative neighborhood/community engagement

Objective 2: reinforce, enhance, and sustain the partnership between the Step of Faith and Sherman Street congregations

Goal #1: complete a clarifying process that brings renewed, deeper understanding of the SOF/SS partnership

Goal #2: enter into a designated season of celebration and storytelling

Goal #3: create a practical roadmap for mutual growth in worship, fellowship, and community engagement

Goal 1: complete a clarifying process that brings renewed, deeper understanding of the SS/SOF partnership

Strategy 1: hire a skilled facilitator to help complete a re-covenanting process

- commission a representative three-member task force to identify and recommend a facilitator to SOF/SS leaders
- create an agreement between the task force and facilitator that outlines process details, outcomes, and associated costs

Strategy 2: schedule an appropriate event with leaders from both congregations (e.g. a weekend retreat) to reach consensus on the substance and key details of a renewed partnership

- design and plan the event with the facilitator
- secure financial support (via the administrative council and SOF leadership team)
- initiate follow-up activities, additional meetings, and communication updates...as needed

[Note: The task force from strategy 1 will take on oversight responsibility for all planning, facilitating, and follow-up activities associated with this event.]

Strategy 3: compose a written agreement outlining the shared values, expectations, commitments, activities, and responsibilities associated with this ongoing partnership

- form a three-member writing team to work with the facilitator-coach
- construct a rough draft document and complete an editing/revising process based on feedback from SOF/SS leadership teams
- gain final blessing/affirmation from both teams

Strategy 4: creatively and consistently communicate the priorities and hoped-for outcomes reflected in the agreement

- host a celebratory event for both congregations to communicate key aspects of the agreement...with an emphasis on shared expectations
- develop a quarterly story, using all available/appropriate communication vehicles, to remind members of mutual priorities and ongoing progress
- create a short, summarized version of the agreement that can be used as a strategic reminder and assessment tool in leadership meetings

Goal 2: enter into a designated season of celebration and storytelling

Strategy 1: select a six-month period for raising awareness of the SS/SOF journey among church members and community supporters alike

- include activities mentioned above (under goal 1, strategy 4 of objective 2)
- establish a monthly focus on personal transformation, emerging insights, and/or shared learning connected to the SOF-SS partnership; this can be done via sharing/storytelling in worship gatherings which is then summarized in newsletter articles and/or website pages
- invite the participation of local media outlets (i.e. send out news releases, contact radio and TV stations, set up opportunities for interviews with interested journalists or “personalities”)
- utilize Sunday afternoon potlucks for mutual sharing/storytelling
- host monthly community roundtables with interested partners and stakeholders

Strategy 2: initiate and plan at least two follow-up “blowout” events for joyful interaction, personal storytelling, mutual support/blessing, and prayerful envisioning

- identify SOF-SS members and community supporters/stakeholders willing to help plan for and participate in these events
- create one event that is exclusive to SOF-SS members and another event that communicates the partnership story to a broader audience
- provide incremental organizational and financial support ... as needed
- take advantage of opportunities for ongoing conversations among SOF-SS members and with community supporters

Goal 3: create a practical roadmap for mutual growth in worship, fellowship, and community engagement

Strategy 1: form a representative partnership planning team that builds on previous and current strategies, identifies new opportunities, and recommends specific activities or initiatives

- designate a team leader
- identify and confirm team members (e.g. the SOF leadership team plus 2-3 SS members)
- establish team priorities and expectations
- suggest specific ways to strengthen individual relationships and worship/serve together (e.g. a fifth-Sunday strategy for combined worship)
- help implement these recommendations
- develop simple feedback tools/processes that help capture the shared hopes, dreams, and expectations of both congregations (e.g. an annual, one-page survey)

Strategy 2: grow together in preparing individual members to effectively and confidently share their stories of faith

- facilitate a relational evangelism training of staff, council, and ministry leaders (perhaps in an off-site retreat setting); SOF leaders will take the lead in this effort
- provide extended “sharing our faith” training for members of both congregations (perhaps in a series of Sunday morning or Sunday evening trainings); again, SOF will initiate and participate as appropriate
- form a coaching group or team to encourage experiential learning, offer needed support, and identify helpful resources
- link evangelism opportunities and stories with fitting prayer activities

Strategy 3: prioritize meeting a local justice challenge that directly affects members of our congregations (e.g. housing, education) on the journey toward a stronger working partnership

- fully integrate this strategy with the two strategies listed under objective 1, goal 5
- home in on a challenge that produces significant energy/interest/participation from SOF and SS members alike
- identify practical ways to work together (and with other community stakeholders) in addressing the designated challenge
- work in cooperation with the Social Justice Team on this challenge

Objective 3: strengthen the internal sense of community in a way that promotes holistic discipleship, cross-generational participation, and leadership development for kingdom influence

Goal #1: identify key milestones and habits on the spiritual journey for all disciples of Jesus (to assist those serving as spiritual mentors and guides)

Goal #2: utilize small groups and ministry teams as primary contexts for ongoing spiritual growth and effective mission

Goal #3: form an apprenticeship strategy for all council and ministry leadership roles

Goal #4: establish life mentoring connections between willing, wise adults and willing, open teenage youth

Goal #5: implement a gifts-based approach to ministry/mission participation ... from “cradle to grave”

Goal 1: identify key milestones and habits on the spiritual journey for all disciples of Jesus (to assist those serving as spiritual mentors and guides)

Strategy 1: commission a 3-5 member task force to design a “map” for the discipleship journey at SS/SOF (e.g. core spiritual practices, spiritual gifts assessment, and mentoring relationships); this map will include practical entry points and opportunities for taking next steps

- identify and recruit key members for the task force
- develop a useful discipleship map/framework/diagram available to all
- make use of faith formation materials already developed by the CRC denominational (see <http://www.crcna.org/ministries/initiatives/faith-formation>)
- elicit needed feedback, make revisions, and gain council blessing and congregational affirmation
- provide training and resources for those involved in some aspect of spiritual mentoring

Strategy 2: adapt current ministry approaches/systems to this map for following Jesus (e.g. membership expectations, educational strategies, and small group priorities)

- engage pastors, staff members, the administrative council, council members, and ministry leaders in identifying organizational implications and recommending changes
- make needed changes...as appropriate (e.g. rewrite curriculum, adjust the membership process, and/or clarify ministry area responsibilities)

Goal 2: utilize small groups and ministry teams as primary contexts for ongoing spiritual growth and effective mission

Strategy 1: ensure leadership oversight and focus on small group life/ministry

- increase the number of staff hours devoted to enhancing team ministries and small group life; this may mean hiring a small groups coordinator for 15-20 hours per week
- integrate elder responsibilities with small group involvement/engagement
- adjust/restructure current staff roles in light of this strategic priority
- form a creative oversight team to support the work of the small groups coordinator

Strategy 2: develop a wide spectrum of small groups that allows for multiple entry points (i.e. everything from temporary “fellowship groups” to home-based groups focused on spiritual formation and mission)

- include this expectation in the job description of a small groups coordinator
- emphasize the “open chair” approach in developing leaders and forming new groups
- create an invitational storytelling environment in the larger SS-SOF church family (linking life-change with small group participation) ... utilizing as many communication vehicles as possible
- consider an annual congregational initiative similar to those mentioned above for “friendship” or “investing in your neighborhood” (i.e. a small group Sunday...or small group month)
- encourage small groups to include a component of service into their normal activities

Strategy 3: integrate small group dynamics into all team-based ministries

- include this expectation in the job description of a small groups coordinator
- equip all ministry team leaders to initiate or facilitate core habits of small group life (e.g. praying, sharing, supporting, serving, celebrating)
- adjust ministry expectations/responsibilities as appropriate (not to mention budgeting support for increased relational activity)

Goal 3: form an apprenticeship strategy for all council and ministry leadership roles

Strategy 1: commission a 3-5 member task force to construct and implement a proposal that addresses organizational challenges related to leadership changes/transitions

- create overlapping elder and deacon relationships (of either 3 or 6 months) so that short term mentoring connections can be established between outgoing and incoming leaders
- design an effective exit interview process for outgoing council members in order to capture helpful feedback and gained insights
- identify willing mentors/coaches out of the exit interview process (including a potential team leader)
- form a long term coaching team...whose members are available to support, encourage, and challenge current or potential council members
- construct a simple team covenant for all participants (i.e. a description of basic expectations and responsibilities) to encourage loving accountability around all mentoring/coaching relationships

Strategy 2: encourage and/or equip all ministry leaders to develop apprentice leaders in their given ministry area(s)

- incorporate this strategy into job descriptions for pastors/staff members (i.e. include equipping/training of ministry leaders for developing other leaders)
- incorporate this strategy into role descriptions for all ministry leaders (i.e. there will be a clear expectation of identifying and preparing/developing apprentice leaders)
- work with current leaders (via staff coaching or mentoring relationships or training resources) to fully embrace and implement this strategy
- set expected terms of service for ministry leadership positions
- create clear expectations for ministry leadership transitions (i.e. identify tasks and activities associated with “handing off” leadership responsibility)

Goal 4: establish life mentoring connections between willing, wise adults and willing, open teenage youth

Strategy 1: increase leadership oversight and focus on the spiritual formation of young people (i.e. middle and high school students)

- increase the number of staff hours devoted to youth development/formation; this may mean hiring a part-time or full-time youth director/pastor
- adjust/revise current staff and council responsibilities in light of this strategic priority (e.g. catechism instruction and profession of faith)
- strengthen group/team dynamics with current leaders and volunteers

Strategy 2: develop a cross-generational life mentoring model that fits the SS/SOF environment(s)

- facilitate discovery, brainstorming, and planning work with current leaders/volunteers around this recommended strategy
- complete a best practices research process with key leaders, volunteers, interested parents, and interested students (i.e. visit churches and organizations who have effectively implemented some form of cross-generational mentoring and then capture insights/takeaways that can be applied to SS/SOF)
- identify helpful resources and training processes for potential mentors and mentees alike
- initiate a pilot project (over a designated period of 6, 9, or 12 months) that connects available mentors with willing mentees, provides ongoing coaching support for all mentors, and allows for consistent sharing/storytelling (note that this could be either 1-1 or group mentoring)
- make adjustments and provide structure (as appropriate) for sustaining this life mentoring/coaching model and integrating it more fully into youth ministry and congregational life

[Note: The successful implementation of strategy 2 is dependent on the successful implementation of strategy 1. Increased staff oversight and presence, along with more clearly defined involvement from youth ministry team members, is essential to establishing an effective mentoring model.]

Goal 5: implement a gifts-based approach to ministry/mission participation ... from “cradle to grave”

Strategy 1: establish leadership support for gifts-based ministry and mission

- identify a staff “champion” for overseeing a comprehensive implementation process
- adjust/revise staff role descriptions as appropriate
- incorporate “completion of spiritual gifts assessment” into council role expectations
- include gifts-related questions in home visitation templates (for elders)
- create reflective/brainstorming space in council meetings and retreats for looking at ministry and mission through the lenses of recognized individual, congregational, and community gifts

Strategy 2: form a 5-7 member advisory team to help with the achievement of this goal via the following activities:

- identify age appropriate assessment tools/processes (e.g. head-hands-heart framework for children, “network” for youth, and an online “spiritual gifts test” for adults)
- work with key ministry leaders to ensure periodic assessment work and the incorporation of appropriate mentoring/coaching strategies
- include spiritual gifts assessment and coaching in the welcome/training of new members
- offer periodic biblical teaching/training and assessment opportunities in small group, classroom, and corporate worship settings
- link growing gifts-based understanding/imagination with community engagement and youth mentoring goals/strategies mentioned above
- develop a plan for linking gift assessment to the deployment of gifted people into ministries in need of their identified gifts

Objective 4: improve structural support for effective ministry/mission

Goal #1: refocus and enhance prayer strategies around key initiatives

Goal #2: identify needed building improvements to better utilize embedded hospitality passion(s), teaching gifts, and educational/training skills

Goal #3: develop better, more creative, more interactive communication processes

Goal #4: cultivate faithful stewardship and sacrificial giving among SS/SOF members

Goal 1: refocus and enhance prayer strategies around key initiatives

Strategy 1: ensure leadership oversight and focus on prayer ministry

- identify a person, or a small team of people, gifted in prayer and administration to serve as prayer coordinator(s) for 8-10 hours a week; if it is one person, this could be a paid or nonpaid staff position
- form or re-form a 5-8 member prayer action team to support the work of the prayer coordinator
- adjust/restructure current staff and other leadership roles in light of this strategic priority

Strategy 2: integrate the practice of prayer into all aspects of congregational ministry and mission

- include this expectation in the job description of the prayer coordinator and the purpose/mandate of the prayer action team
- assess all current prayer strategies and practices for their helpfulness, effectiveness, and levels of energy/participation
- make recommendations for further development of current approaches and the implementation of new practices; initiatives to consider include: corporate prayers linked to community organizations and local businesses, a monthly prayer calendar (with a prayer focus for each day), and the formation of small groups around the habit/practice of prayer
- equip all council members and ministry team/small group leaders in “prayer first” thinking and practice
- provide periodic experiential training and practical resources for all desiring to grow in the individual and communal aspects of prayer

Goal 2: identify needed building improvements to better utilize embedded hospitality passion(s), teaching gifts, and educational/training skills

Strategy 1: build on the recent prioritizing work of staff, council, and ministry leaders

- review and/or revise stated building priorities in light of the action plan
- develop a leadership agreement (i.e. a working document of stated intentions and expectations) with regard to building improvements; this will include a future scenario and an overall timeline for completing core projects
- ensure broader communication to members and community partners as appropriate

Strategy 2: develop an “annual project” approach to making needed improvements

- enlist the building committee in prioritizing and implementing capital improvements
- elicit help from outside individuals and/or organizations as appropriate
- design annual funding campaigns around the specific projects identified in the agreement; this amounts to a “scaled” approach to building upgrades and invites “above and beyond” giving from congregational members
- involve as many church, denominational, and community stakeholders as possible (e.g. members, Classis leaders/teams, business owners, known philanthropists, local foundations ... see strategy 3 below)

Strategy 3: design all projects with the help of trusted community partners

- link all building projects to the ongoing community listening and feedback strategies listed under the “love of neighbor” objective (i.e. take note of hopes and dreams involving needed physical resources/spaces)
- take into account the presence and availability of local assets via other community organizations; this may also involve consideration of coming alongside other entities to support their building/physical space improvement efforts ... for the benefit of the whole community (e.g. the greenhouse and kitchen facilities at the Baxter Community Center)
- invite feedback from local residential, associational, and institutional stakeholders before finalizing or launching any significant project
- pursue creative, collaborative opportunities around areas of mutual interest and concern

Goal 3: develop better, more creative, more interactive communication processes

Strategy 1: increase overall technological support and capacity

- identify a technologically skilled person to serve as technology coordinator for 8-10 hours a week; this can be a paid or nonpaid staff position
- form a 5-7 member “adaptive technologies” advisory team to support the work of the coordinator; priorities include website development and maintenance, social media involvement/development (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), data base development, software and hardware recommendations for staff leaders, and ongoing evaluation of corporate communication strategies and audio/visual capacities
- adjust current staff/leadership roles ... as appropriate

Strategy 2: form an active group of storytellers/creative writers

- identify a skilled, gifted communicator to serve as leader
- establish consistent patterns of meeting/interacting and include basic group dynamics (i.e. praying, sharing, encouraging, and supporting)
- focus on capturing and “telling” personal, congregational, and neighborhood/community stories of struggle, growth, and transformation
- utilize all available forms of communication to tell these stories (e.g. a page or blog link on the website, monthly newsletters, verbal presentations in worship or educational settings, or posted videos on Facebook)
- develop new forms of storytelling (e.g. an annual anthology of essays or short stories, a quarterly community meal/storytelling forum, seasonal dramas/plays, or short films and videos)
- provide training(s) and resources for effective verbal and written storytelling

Strategy 3: design worship gatherings for increased sharing/storytelling

- work with current worship planners/leaders to establish a weekly time minimum for imaginative narration/communication (mostly of a personal nature)
- develop an approach/system by which transformational stories are identified and people are effectively prepared to share
- establish a wide creative spectrum for sharing/storytelling (i.e. from individual “testifying” to professionally produced videos...and everything in-between)
- draw upon the work of the storytelling/creative writing group

Goal 4: cultivate faithful stewardship and sacrificial giving among SS/SOF members

Strategy 1: empower the administrative council (and other skilled, interested leaders) to creatively resource key elements of the action plan

- involve the implementation team in developing specific recommendations for resourcing embedded staffing, program, and partnership requests
- create new budget lines and/or funding streams as appropriate (e.g. linking endowments to “matching funds” strategies around particular initiatives)
- develop effective communication methods for inviting increased financial support from church members and community stakeholders

Strategy 2: provide regular training, assessment, and coaching around time/talents/gifts/passions

- integrate this strategy with the gifts-based approaches listed above (see objective 3, goal 5, strategies 1 & 2)
- identify a life stewardship “champion” and form or re-form an advisory team
- reach consensus on training approaches and survey tools
- develop needed data base capacity and administrative support
- implement and assess identified methodologies on an annual basis

Living Out Good Intentions: Practical Love in Life, Ministry, and Mission **A Next Steps Action Plan for Sherman Street CRC and Step of Faith Church**

Key Questions

1. Where did the title of the action plan originate?

The language reflects an overwhelming appreciation of church members for God's faithfulness through the wise, discerning, courageous decisions of previous generations. It affirms an ongoing, shared commitment to be God's people who gather and serve in a particular place. This commitment now includes a distinctive partnership between the Sherman Street and Step of Faith congregations. As such, the title mirrors a consensus that the next steps on the journey together must give practical evidence of love for God, love for each other, and love for community neighbors.

2. What are the priorities of the action plan?

The very structure of the plan indicates the top priorities. In other words, the four objectives reflect what is considered most important, the eighteen goals are next in terms of main concerns, and so on. As far as priorities at the strategy level, the mission discovery team believes the strategies connected to neighborhood engagement, youth formation, leadership development, and congregational partnership(s) are among the most important. For these and other strategies, however, the implementation team will help identify which steps to take on in what order. The team will also help refine target dates, timelines, etc.

3. Do I have to agree with or support everything in this document?

No. At least this is the short and rather obvious answer. It is expected that all members will support the four major objectives, that most members will agree with the eighteen goals, and that many will participate in individual strategies. There is no expectation that every member will "get behind" everything. That said, it is worth noting that the components of this plan reflect comprehensive feedback from congregational members and community stakeholders. It should also be noted that anything involving staffing, budgeting, or major organizational changes will go through normal church administrative channels for discussion and approval.

4. Is there concern that this plan might feel overwhelming and cause frustration?

A little. The mission discovery team admits that some recommendations are bold and will perhaps stretch SS/SOF capacities in key areas. Yet, many strategies reflect things already started or underway. All strategies indicate a level of meaningful expectation or passion

from several members. Even so, nothing in this plan will be implemented apart from willing leadership and appropriate participation.

5. What are the specific recommendations for additional staffing?

The following new roles have been identified for serious consideration over the next few years: a) Director of Youth & Spiritual Formation (20 or 40 hours per week), b) Small Groups Coordinator (15-20 hours per week), c) Community Connector (20 hours per week), d) Prayer Coordinator (8-10 hours per week), and e) Technology Coordinator (8-10 hours per week). It should be noted that financial support for the community connector role is intended to be shared with other neighborhood/community partners. In addition, the coordinator positions for prayer and technology might be filled by nonpaid staff members (i.e. gifted volunteers who function as staff members).

6. How will progress be monitored and communicated?

The administrative council will appoint a 5-7 member task force (i.e. the implementation team) to oversee the whole implementation process. This task force will work with staff, council, and ministry leaders to affirm priorities, identify key personnel and resources, ensure needed follow-up, keep communication channels open, and provide congregational updates.