



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What will Crossroads Consulting do for my congregation?

The flexible and custom-designed service – which offers a comprehensive, a modified, and a basic approach to ministry planning – will help you do an analysis of current ministry and ministry setting, explore options, create a vision for the future, develop strategies, and organize efficiently to carry out those strategies. As part of that process, Crossroads will help a congregation confront the impact of a changing culture and develop lay leadership that is rooted in God's Word, responsive to needs and opportunities, and discerning in its approach to decision-making.

Crossroads can also provide specialized consulting for such issues as staffing, team building, coaching, mentoring, managing conflict, structural realignment, multi-site ministry, relocation, merger, and more. However, there are advantages to addressing a specific issue during a ministry planning process (a) because it is difficult to separate an issue from the larger context of a congregation and (b) because the long-term health of a church is seldom served by addressing a single issue in isolation. We generally recommend the comprehensive approach because it best serves the needs of most congregations. Although, depending on the circumstances, the modified or basic approach may also be beneficial.

We expect each planning process to leave in place a better understanding of the audience for ministry, a strategic approach to reaching that audience with the Gospel, a consistent planning process for carrying out ministry, a greater appreciation for spiritual growth, and a spirit of optimism with which to address the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

2. How will Crossroads help my ministry?

By God's design, the key person in any congregation is the pastor. Crossroads seeks to encourage the pastor in his role as leader and make his leadership more appreciated by the congregation. We will help the pastor assess his strengths and weaknesses, offer suggestions and resources for personal growth in ministry, and teach skills and processes of leadership for both pastor and lay leaders. Where there are issues of tension or disagreement in the congregation, Crossroads can assist the pastor in sorting out these issues and putting them to rest. The lead consultant for your congregation wants to be an encourager for the pastor and – if so desired – a "coach" available to the pastor as a sounding board and advisor.

3. What results should we expect?

As St. Paul pointed out in 1 Corinthians 3, only God makes things grow. Our work in a congregation may be blessed by the Lord in any number of ways. Typically, the process encourages greater

commitment by involving members in analysis and vision formation. You can expect that decision-making will become more focused and systematic. Hopefully, there is increased energy and optimism as people are reminded of the mission and promises they have from the Lord of the Church. Often, there is an increase in Bible study and volunteer service. There may be increased financial stewardship and evangelism efforts. While only the Gospel can produce the fruits of faith, a high level of commitment to the planning process will mean more people in contact with the Gospel and sharing it. From a human perspective, the results of working with Crossroads Consulting are influenced by the congregation's expectations and level of commitment to the planning process.

4. What is my (lead pastor's) role in the consulting process? How much time and effort should I expect to commit?

Typically the (lead) pastor will be, initially at least, the liaison with Crossroads and the lead consultant who is assigned to your congregation. We want to avoid any impression of going around the pastor. The pastor gives credence to the planning process by promoting it, giving it priority, and cooperating in the process. Unless the pastor is committed to making this process work, the benefit to the congregation will be considerably diminished. If the pastor is not involved in the process, there may be an impression of disunity in the church's leadership. The pastor's input to the vision for the congregation's future is vital, and he has the primary role in assuring that the vision is implemented.

Crossroads often asks the pastor and president of the congregation to put in place a "Guiding Coalition" to direct the planning process locally. This group will be responsible for coordinating the activities within each phase of the process. In the analysis phase (Phase 2), the pastor will be asked to complete a couple of diagnostic instruments in advance of the consulting team's on-site visit. He may be asked for some help in locating data and coordinating the schedule. He should have input on the selection of members for pulse groups and interviews.

During the on-site analysis, the consulting team meets with the pastor(s) and coordinator of the on-site schedule. There will be an interview of an hour or more with the pastor and he is invited to participate in a session with elected leaders. Prior to the oral report to the congregation, the consultants meet with the pastor and sometimes the principal (if there is a LES) for an hour or more to run key portions of that report past them prior to giving the report to the congregation. In subsequent phases of the planning process, the lead consultant will be in contact with the pastor as the leader of the congregation. As will be the case in every significant effort of the congregation, the pastor will want to delegate work appropriately while providing the direction and support necessary.

5. How will Crossroads deal with members' comments about their pastor(s) and other called workers, both positive and negative?

Our consultants are sensitive to issues of the eighth commandment and the spiritual health and unity of a congregation. Members are never asked to provide negative information about their called workers. If there is slander, it should be rebuked. If a member should speak personally to his/her pastor or another called worker about a concern – as Scripture urges, the consultant will encourage the member to do so. Where there is constructive criticism offered, the consultant will bring a synthesis of such comments to the called worker personally and privately, as part of the purpose of

helping that person grow in his role of shepherd and leader. The strengths of the pastor, as observed and as mentioned by members, are included in the report to the congregation typically. This provides a reason to thank God and a basis for future ministry.

No called worker can escape criticism. Consultants, therefore, take random criticism with a grain of salt. If several members point to a specific weakness or problem in a called worker's ministry, the consultants may discuss with him whether surfacing the issue in order to put it to rest and rally support for growth and improvement is advisable.

Congregations tend to lose confidence in the planning process, and in their called workers, when it appears that a significant issue – something already being discussed among members – is being “swept under a rug.” The Christian Church is built on the love and forgiveness that Jesus gave us. Normally, when problems and personality issues in a congregation are openly addressed in the light of Christian love and forgiveness, they are resolved in a godly manner. Again, consultants work with the pastor and other called workers to assure that they are involved in any attempt to resolve problems. Where there are significant problems, the consultants may encourage a called worker to contact his circuit pastor or district president for advice and assistance. We take seriously the twin injunctions of 1 Timothy 5:19-20.

6. What are some of the major issues that Crossroads will help us analyze and address?

One answer to this question is that each congregation creates the focus of attention with the data and survey summaries provided in advance of the on-site analysis and through interviews with called workers, leaders, and other members. No two congregations are alike. The consulting team will explore the issues that your congregation and situation highlight. Typically, there are two or three key issues that are critical to a congregation's future, and primary attention must be directed to these issues. The pastor usually knows what these key issues are, though sometimes the consulting team can help him see the congregation from a quite different perspective.

Among the common areas for analysis are attitudes, location, facilities, interaction with community, staffing, financial support, worship, evangelism, children's and family ministries, adult spiritual growth, member ministry, Christian fellowship life, member care, leadership, organizational structure and planning, and communication.

7. How long will the ministry planning process take?

That depends primarily on the planning process selected by the leaders (i.e. comprehensive, modified, or basic) and on how the process is designed. The analysis and vision setting phases combined generally take from four to seven months, and the implementation phase (during which the lead consultant checks in regularly and provides ongoing assistance) follows. While congregations often want to “do this in a hurry,” it takes time to shape thinking, develop consensus, and establish direction.

There will, of course, be necessary decisions and plans that are a part of the congregation's ongoing ministry during the course of the planning process. The congregation will want to make long-range and strategic decisions on the basis of the analysis and vision phases of the planning process.

8. Who are the consultants?

The director of Crossroads is a full-time consultant. Prior to launching Crossroads, he had twenty-four years of parish ministry experience and nine years of consulting experience (with WELS Parish Assistance, which he also directed). Crossroads also uses part-time lead and associate consultants (normally pastors, principals, and professors) who have had training and experience. Consulting teams for the comprehensive Phase 2 analysis visit add from one to three associate consultants who may have consulting training and are chosen for their demonstrated wisdom and track record in ministry.

9. What are the costs for services?

Pricing for the comprehensive, modified, and basic service is based on the number of people in worship on an average Sunday at your church (during the past year) and on the design of the desired consulting process. The cost of a specialized service is determined by the scope of the project. Current costs, as they pertain to your congregation specifically, will be provided when the director talks with you and your congregation's leaders during an initial visit.

10. Is this consulting service simply the application of business principles and best practices from research with American churches?

Crossroads works with the conviction that the Church is the Body of Christ. He is the Head, and he directs the Church's work with his Word and by the Holy Spirit. Every dimension of a congregation's work is, ultimately, spiritual in nature. Only the Gospel can accomplish the purpose of the church. In the pursuit of that purpose, a church will employ methods. The methods do not make the Gospel more or less powerful. They may, however, have an impact on gathering an audience for the Gospel and on that audience's ability to understand the Gospel. Every church makes use of principles and practices. The first concern is that these principles and practices be compatible with Scripture, neither undermining nor overshadowing truth. The second concern is that these principles and practices be compatible with the audience the congregation is attempting to reach with the Gospel.

The church is not a business, though it must operate with business principles in America. Like Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Crossroads believes that the mission Jesus gave his church deserves the best tools available for communicating the Gospel, organizing the work, and equipping workers. As the culture of our country changes, there will be new tools and opportunities available to the church for its mission.

Because pastors are rightly concerned that no form or method condition the Gospel, the following excerpt from the doctoral dissertation of one of our consultants is offered as further explanation.

The Absolute Efficacy of the Means of Grace and The Relative Effectiveness of Methods of Communicating Grace

In Isaiah 55: 10-11 the Lord says: *“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”* God’s Word is “efficacious,” that is, it produces an effect in the mind and heart – and then the life – of those who hear it. It accomplishes God’s purpose, whether his saving purpose of convincing and converting or his judicial purpose of rendering without excuse those who deny his grace.

People are brought to faith and nurtured in the faith alone by the Gospel in Word and sacrament. (Cf. John 6:44, Romans 10:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Titus 3:5, John 3:5, et al.) This biblical truth is affirmed in the Augsburg Confession, Article V: *“To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. . . . Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel.”* Similarly, the Formula of Concord, The Epitome, Article II, argues: *“. . . the will of man has been changed and renewed solely by God’s power and activity. . . . Prior to man’s conversion there are only two efficient causes, namely, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God as the Holy Spirit’s instrument whereby he effects conversion. Man should hear this Word, though he cannot give it credence and accept it by his own powers but solely by the grace and operation of God the Holy Spirit.”*

An important corollary of this truth is that there is nothing any human being can do to make the Word of God more or less efficacious. The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II, paragraph 48 uses that term “efficacious” to make the point. St. Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 by rejecting “personality cults” within the church and in chapter two, verses 1-5, by emphasizing that not human wisdom but the Spirit’s power characterized his message. In Philippians 1:15-18 he argues that neither the character nor the motives of the preacher condition the power of the message. (See also the Augsburg Confession, Article VIII, point two.) Not the brilliance and charismatic personality of a preacher, nor the conviction and logic of a Christian witness can add a thing to the power of the Gospel. No psychology or sociology can augment the Gospel to improve the percentages of conversion. No evangelism methodology or discipleship strategy can enhance the ability of God’s Word to create faith and strengthen faith. It is equally true that the humblest servant of Christ, unsophisticated in his world-view and out of touch with his culture, does nothing to subtract from the efficacy of the Gospel when he presents it in its truth and purity. In fact, the power of the Gospel is undiminished by the unfaithful life of its messenger.

Just as Lutheran theology leaves unresolved the tension between the absolute efficacy of the Word of God and the free will of human beings to reject that Word of God, so also must our theology honestly present another paradox. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, St. Paul says: *“Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.”* Much of this epistle is a defense of Paul’s ministry, sometimes in comparison with the less faithful or less productive ministry of others. In 1 Corinthians

3:10-15 the apostle uses the analogy of construction to make the point that while the foundation of every true ministry is Jesus Christ, the quality of a man's ministry may vary. *He* may be more or less effective. In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) Jesus recognizes that differing abilities and efforts bring different results. The way in which we communicate the Gospel DOES have an impact on conversion and discipleship.

Theologian Edward A. Koehler makes the distinction this way: *"The Gospel is always efficacious. . . The Gospel is not always effective."* By "efficacious" is meant the inherent, complete and sole power to accomplish its purpose. The Gospel is, as St. Paul describes it in Romans 1:16, *"the POWER of God for salvation."* In Romans 3:3-4 the apostle adds that a person's unbelief does not negate the promise of God to save in the Gospel. *Nothing* beyond the Gospel is necessary to bring a person to faith, nothing in the person brought to faith and nothing in the person who proclaims the Gospel. "Efficacious" is an absolute term. "Effective," on the other hand, is a relative term. "Effective" may describe how well a Christian witness gains an audience for his evangelism, how well a preacher organizes and delivers his message, how well a church follows up on an initial presentation of the Gospel to reinforce the message. The term "efficacious" is reserved for the Gospel, while the term "effective" is applied to the individuals or institutions that proclaim the Gospel.

If a preacher's lack of preparation results in a garbled sermon, the effectiveness of his message has been damaged even though the efficacy of the Means of Grace has not. If a church member's life so contradicts the love and truth of God that others reject his efforts at witnessing, the effectiveness of his evangelism is severely curtailed even though the efficacy of the Gospel is not. If a congregation's insensitivity to the culture of its neighborhood keeps the unchurched from participating in its programs of ministry, that congregation's mission may be rendered ineffective even if its theology is orthodox. When language changes, when the way people listen or come together is altered, when the assumptions and concerns of a generation are different from those of previous generations, the effectiveness of a church's ministry methods is affected even though its message of Law and Gospel remains unchanged.

The efficacy of the Means of Grace dare not become an excuse for ineffectual ministry. Faithfulness to the Word of God cannot make faithfulness with the Word of God unimportant. Lutheran theology does not turn the Gospel into a talisman or those who proclaim the Gospel into shamans. The God who created us as rational and emotional beings, communicates to us in rational and emotive language; and he has chosen to make his saving purpose for our world dependent on his people's proclamation of his message. While Christians cannot condition the efficacy of the Means of Grace in the heart of a hearer, they can and do condition how people hear the Means of Grace, by both the frequency and the way with which they present the Gospel. While churches cannot make the Gospel more or less believable, they can and do make it more or less hearable. While evangelism methods do not make the Word of God more or less powerful, they can make the Word of God more or less understandable. They can turn people off before they've really heard the truth, or they can build bridges which provide multiple opportunities to present the truth. While church programs that address human needs such as food, medical care, education, child care or emotional support do not of themselves accomplish the Savior's mission for his church, they create relationships and forums in which the Gospel is shared with people who would not otherwise give that church the opportunity for witness. And churches that have no method of connecting with the lost, let alone little intention to do

so, have severely restricted their effectiveness in Christ's mission without at all diminishing the efficacy of the Means of Grace.

When German Lutheran churches in the first quarter of the twentieth century were confronted with the twin challenges of greatly diminished German immigration and opprobrium attached to German culture by World War I, they adapted their methods of ministry without changing their message. They continued German-language worship and devotional visits because English was a barrier to many members' understanding. The Gospel was not less efficacious in English; but ministry was less effective in English. They began English-language worship and instruction because, however efficacious the Gospel was in German, that language and its culture were a barrier both to neighbors' interest and their ability to understand. And the children of German immigrants had become acculturated, less able and willing to learn the truth in the language and culture of their parents. Two generations later Lutheran churches confronted a similar issue within English language and culture. The King James Version was replaced by contemporary translations because God's truth didn't communicate clearly any longer in "the king's English." A new hymnal and a revised catechism inevitably followed.

It may be more difficult to recognize significant cultural shifts when they are less ethnic or linguistic in nature. But there are marked differences in the way the so-called "Builder" generation (often coupled with the "Silent" generation to include people born before 1946) sees ministry from the way "Boomers" (born between 1946 and 1964) or "Busters" (born between 1964 and 1982) or "Millennials/Mosaics" (born after 1982) respond. In a post-literate world, people are more likely to perceive things through images and experiences than through logical propositions. Their attention spans are different, as is their way of processing information. Their values are different. In a postmodern culture, people's assumptions about truth and life are different. They think synthetically rather than in black-and-white contrasts. Their goals are different. In a post-Christian society, many are unfamiliar with basic Bible stories and theological truths. They no longer see "going to church" as important to their life. They may be turned off by "institutional" expressions of the church. God's Word is no less efficacious in this rapidly changing culture. But the church's methods of communicating that Word and the church's ways of reaching people may become less effective.

There are twin dangers that ministerial practice must confront. One danger is to condition God's message with the sociology of a new culture, while the other danger is to imprison God's message in the traditions of an old culture. While cultural insensitivity can diminish the effectiveness of ministry by losing the audience, cultural impositions on the message can diminish the effectiveness of ministry by obscuring the Gospel. The Gospel in either case remains efficacious. In extremes, a culturally conditioned message may eliminate any efficacious Gospel with heresy; and a culturally insensitive message may become totally irrelevant to the people for whom Christ sent us. It is important to maintain the tension between two truths: the absolute efficacy of the Means of Grace and the relative effectiveness of methods of communicating God's grace.