

Writing the Future Story of Ministry for Your Congregation

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A Spiritual Strategic Journey Playbook Resource
FaithSoaring Churches Learning Community

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Table of Contents

Preface	2
Introduction	3
Spiritual Strategic Journey 1.0 Process	4
Why Tell the Future Story of Ministry for Your Congregation?	5
Future Storytelling at First Church	7
How to Tell the Future Story of Ministry for Your Congregation	8
The Future Storytelling Process	11
Step One: Identify Three Choices	12
Congregational Ministry Framework Choices for the 21 st Century	15
Step Two: Craft Three Scenarios for Your Future	16
Step Three: Affirm One Scenario as the Future Story of Ministry Theme	18
Step Four: Craft Your Future Story of Ministry	19
Step Five: Share Your Future Story of Ministry and Continually Build Ownership	20
Afterword	22
Strategic Services Offered by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association	23
About the Columbia Metro Baptist Association	24
About George Bullard	24

Preface

What will characterize your congregation ten years from now if you with faithfulness, effectiveness, and innovation life into God's empowering vision for your congregation?

For more than five decades I have assisted congregations and denominations with strategic planning. For the first two decades it was traditional, left-brained strategic planning with a purpose, objectives, goals, and action plans. It worked well for many situations. The key was developing deep ownership of the process and the plan. Involvement of many people within a congregation or denominational organization was always a process goal. Securing the support of the governance groups was a key to the success or failure of the process.

During the past three decades I shifted my approach, using a right-brained storytelling process called Spiritual Strategic Journey. Rather than focusing on a structured planning process, the attempt is to lift a narrative process that involves storytelling. It is about telling the Future Story of Ministry for a congregation [or denomination]. This approach works very well to help congregations think and act outside a boxed approach used in the past. Some clients move from a boxed approach to a centered approach to a networked approach.

A narrative Future Storytelling approach turns many things around and requires a different perspective. Leaders must look at their congregation from a different place in the process of transition and change that could lead to transformation. For example, they must see the Triune God pulling the congregation forward rather than standing behind and pushing the congregation forward. They need to focus first on transitioning the congregation to a place of readiness for change, rather than changing things and then hoping the congregation can make the transition.

Leaders must focus on empowering people who have the most positive spiritual passion for the future of the congregation toward which God is pulling it. Some of these people may also be people of position or power or influence in the congregation; but not always. People of Position tend to have a low ceiling and still want to be in control after changes are made. People of Passion have no ceiling, are action-oriented, and do not care as much if they are in control when the changes are made.

Congregations must be willing to focus on Visionary Leadership and Relationship Experiences more than on Programmatic Emphases and Accountable Management. Traditional long-range and strategic planning tends to focus on Programs and Management that take congregations to a healthy place, but does not necessarily empower *FaithSoaring*. Vision and Relationships are the DNA of a Future Story of Ministry. Congregations must be fueled by Vision and flavored by Relationships.

Several other resources are helpful for you to read to get a full understanding of where the Future Storytelling process fits into the overall Spiritual Strategic Journey of a congregation. Among these are: *Are We Ready Yet? Seven Radical Questions Your Congregation Must Answer*, *Living into the Full Kingdom Potential of Your Congregation*, and *Choices for Congregations*.

Introduction

Future Storytelling is a narrative approach to envisioning the future of your congregation as part of a Spiritual Strategic Journey (SSJ). It is the primary activity of the Strategic Season for Changing in an SSJ 1.0 process. The other two seasons are the Spiritual Season for Transitioning that precedes the Strategic Season and the Journey Season for Transforming that follows the Strategic Season.

A Future Story of Ministry process empowers your congregation—using a Visionary Leadership Community—to come to consensus concerning the major themes surrounding Relationship Experiences and Programmatic Emphases that might characterize it ten years from now. It is not a detailed mechanistic planning model that restricts the spiritual thinking and intuition of the congregation. It does not shut out the new things God might inspire in your congregation that do not exactly fit the Future Story of Ministry. It is a divining rod. It is a standard against which to test new ideas, programs, and movements.

Future storytelling is more characteristic of a movement or ongoing discernment approach to the future ministry of a congregation. A movement and discernment approach are more conducive to a postmodern era focused on chaos, community, character, and commitment. They are genuine and authentic in the midst of a Christ-centered faith-based journey. Traditional strategic planning as it has been practiced pushes congregations forward to a more desirable future. A future storytelling approach pulls congregations forward to the future God is unfolding before them.

The Future Story of Ministry for congregations is dynamic and changes as new understandings of God's leadership emerge in congregations, are articulated by your leadership, and owned by those connected with your congregation. The Future Story of Ministry for congregations helps move them in the direction of being captivated by Vision by allowing for back casting that emerges out of the future storytelling to assist with discerning the spiritual strategic direction of congregations. If the process involves deep lay leadership ownership, and if the Future Story of Ministry evolves as new spiritual and strategic understandings emerge, then congregations never have to vote on their future by voting on the Future Story of Ministry.

For congregations more comfortable with a traditional planning model, have no fear. There is still the need for an operational plan that has some of the elements that are familiar to you. However, the Future Story of Ministry is the guide and focus and empowerment of that operational plan. Vision and Relationships must lead. Programs and Management must follow. The Future Story of Ministry seeks to describe a future that cannot yet be seen, but may be imagined with spiritual eyes.

Spiritual Strategic Journey 1.0 Process



Why Tell the Future Story of Ministry for Your Congregation?

Some years ago, I was leading a retreat of Christian leaders at a conference center amid a beautiful range of mountains. One afternoon a group of us decided to climb the mountain behind the conference center. There was a rough trail we could follow that represented the climb of others who had gone before us.

Before we began our journey, we looked around at the beauty and majesty of the mountains. We noted that we could not see very far, or with great clarity, because we were only at the beginning of our journey. From the bottom of the mountain, we could only look up and see our immediate context. Then we climbed for a while.

Upon arriving at a resting place, we looked around again at the range of mountains and realized our view had dramatically changed. We commented about the different perspective that now presented itself, the enhanced beauty, and the ability to see farther and with more clarity than we had been able to see when we started the climb.

Then we continued our climb. We had similar revelations about our climb and the range of mountains at the next resting place. Finally, we reached the summit of our mountain. What a view! We could now see farther and with greater clarity than we could have imagined at the beginning of our climb. We wondered out loud if this was the same mountains we had viewed at the beginning of our journey. They looked so different.

We realized several things from our new vantage point. First, a whole new world was out there that we could not see at the beginning of our journey. Second, despite the fact the mountains looked like a totally different set of mountains than they did when we began the climb, they were the same mountains; and they had not moved. We moved. We changed perspective.

Third, the mountain we climbed was not the highest mountain. Many more mountains beckoned us to climb them and discover even greater perspectives that were farther up and farther in. Fourth, we can now look out, and not just up, and can begin to have an initial understanding of our mountain-climbing potential. At the same time, our full potential is still elusive to us.

Fifth, as we climb other mountains in this range of mountains, we will surely see farther and with even greater clarity. What adventures and challenges they offer we cannot know until we journey toward them. It would appear our journey will never end, but the learnings, insights, revelations, and discoveries will continue to excite, inspire, and bring us fulfillment beyond what we had ever dreamed.

What are the implications of this mountain climbing image for the journey of congregations toward their full Kingdom potential? First, at the beginning of our Spiritual Strategic Journey we cannot know the distance or length of our congregational journey. Nor can we see with clarity the vision God has for us. None of us knows our full Kingdom potential. We must live into it, but it will always be farther up and farther in.

Second, as we journey in the direction of our current understanding of our full Kingdom potential, we will continually discover, discern, and develop new insights into our potential. We will continually be able to see farther and with more clarity. We will develop capacities which, at the beginning of the journey, we did not even know we would need.

Third, our understanding of our full Kingdom potential is not static. It is continually changing as we journey in the direction toward which God is pulling us. As we mature in our journey, we have a deeper understanding of our potential and our capacity for Kingdom service.

The Spiritual Strategic Journey of a congregation is not pushed forward by a strategic or long-range plan. It is pulled forward by a continually clearer view of the full Kingdom potential toward which God is calling our congregation.

We cannot know in detail God's future for our congregation. We cannot state that future in words that will remain accurate for long. Yet, we can imagine, project, and articulate the future based upon our current understanding of the full Kingdom potential of our congregation. We articulate the future by creating the Future Story of Ministry for the congregation that is a narrative of the transitions, changes, and transformation God's vision will lead the congregation to make. We begin the story from the perspective of the congregation reaching its full Kingdom potential, and then work backward to create the detailed story.

Articulating our congregation's Future Story of Ministry in this way will allow us to have a goal or destination in front of us toward which we are traveling. It will allow the Merlin the Magician factor from the story of Camelot to create in us a sense of pull toward a destination we may have a hint about in the midst of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

You should tell the Future Story of Ministry for your congregation because it is much more likely to become a reality if you articulate it and focus your actions on seeking to achieve it. The key factor is continual openness to the new things God is seeking to say to your congregation as you journey toward the fulfillment of your story. The new things will often change the details of the story and at various hinge points can even transition and change our entire understanding of our full potential for Kingdom ministry.

Future Storytelling at First Church

One of the first times I was inspired to use a Future Storytelling process in a congregation happened when visiting a congregation for a different reason. The presenting issue from a large, county seat First Church was they needed help in staff development, team-building, and evaluation. Upon arriving at the church, I was presented with a packet of material I had requested. What I was particularly interested in seeing from this very large congregation was their ministry plan, the position descriptions for the ministers, an annual program and ministries plan, and the performance appraisal instruments used to evaluate its staff ministry.

When I pulled everything out of the packet, I realized something was missing. I turned to the receptionist and asked her if a copy of the congregation's ministry plan had been mistakenly omitted from the packet. Her response was that the congregation did not have one. This response was not unusual, but it was disappointing.

I do not expect every congregation to have a written ministry plan, but I hope they have something that represents a clear sense of mission, vision, or key strategies they are seeking to fulfill. I hope an increasing number of congregations find themselves on an intentional Spiritual Strategic Journey that will take them toward a destination to which they feel God is leading them, whether they have this in writing or not.

It is a lot easier to develop staff, deepen their sense of functioning as a team, and evaluate them in an affirming and developmental manner when the congregation knows who it is, what it believes, where it is heading, how it is going to get there, and what constitutes faithful, effective, and innovative progress along their Spiritual Strategic Journey. When these elements are not present, congregations are generally over-managed and under-led. The congregation's leaders may act more like they are managing an institution than navigating a Christ-centered, faith-based journey.

I was doing fine with what I was learning about the congregation until I discovered the congregation had a Facilities Leadership Team ready to recommend to the congregation an architect who would help them develop renovation and new construction plans that would cost them more than ten million dollars over the next three to five years.

This congregation does not know who it is, what it believes, where it is heading, how it is going to get there, and what constitutes faithful progress; but they are going to invest more than ten million dollars in new and renovated facilities? It did not know what its programs, ministries, and activities were likely to be ten years from now, but it knew what its facilities were likely to look like in the year 2065. Any new or renovated facilities would still be in use five decades later.

Through a series of events that can only be described as God's divine intervention, I found myself over the next months helping this congregation through a quick and concise process of Future Storytelling to visualize the destination of the congregation if it embraced its God-given Spiritual Strategic Journey.

How to Tell the Future Story of Ministry for Your Congregation

While some may see it as an oversimplification, the key answer to this question is, “Just tell it!” Don’t just sit there! Tell the story God is stirring up within you. My guess is the raw material for the Future Story of Ministry is already present within your congregation as God is working to bring forth His vision for your congregation.

My basic approach to this process is not fancy or complicated. It involves a straightforward approach. It begins by imagining what God might be calling your congregation to be like ten years from now. If your congregation travels along its Spiritual Strategic Journey toward its emerging understanding of its full Kingdom potential, what will be the story of the life and ministry of your congregation ten years from now?

Another simple, straightforward way to approach this is to consider what might be going on in your congregation that would interest people outside your congregation ten years from now. What if the religious news editor for your local newspaper heard about the life and ministry of your congregation, and the servant leadership characteristics of your congregation, and asked ten years from now to visit your congregation for the purpose of writing a feature story? What would that story say about the life and ministry of your congregation? What would it say about the things that had happened over the past ten years to achieve your excellent practice of ministry?

Go ahead. Write this story now imagining ten years from now.

At First Church, the methodology of this process emerged quite easily. In this congregation, the process followed was quick and concise because the time available to develop the Future Story of Ministry was brief. The overall principle used was that I let God tell the story through the congregational leaders. I simply became a facilitator and scribe.

I began on a Wednesday afternoon with the pastor. He told me his story concerning the past, present, and future of the congregation. Thursday morning I met with the ministerial staff, including the pastor, and engaged them in a brainstorming session in response to a single question. The question was “What will characterize the Visionary Leadership, Relationship Experiences, Programmatic Emphases, and Accountable Management of this congregation ten years from now if it is reaching its full God-given Kingdom potential?”

This question required some elaboration. The ministers came to understand what a Future Story talks about:

- God’s vision for the congregation
- the relationship of the congregation to God, one another, and its community context
- creating these relationships through an intentional discipling process
- the visible programs, ministries, and activities of the congregation
- the management systems that operate in a manner that makes managers accountable to the direction set by the visionary leadership of the congregation

From Thursday afternoon through Friday morning I met with several focus groups of lay leaders and asked them the same question. Friday afternoon, I studied my notes and composed three scenarios of the future of this congregation that could become their Future Story of Ministry.

Friday night we had a dinner meeting with 100 lay leaders from the congregation. During the meeting, I talked with the participants about Visionary Leadership, Relationships Experiences, Programmatic Emphases, and Accountable Management. I showed how each of these fit into the life cycle and stages of congregational development. Then in small groups, the participants brainstormed ideas about how these factors were currently being played out in the life of the congregation and sought to identify the congregation's current stage on the life cycle.

Later that evening I revised the three scenarios based on the new input from the dinner meeting participants. This prepared me for an all-day Saturday workshop with the ministerial staff and around two dozen lay leaders of the congregation. During this meeting, I presented, and then the participants debated, the three scenarios. After all viewpoints had been fully discussed, we then began to describe the characteristics of the Future Story of Ministry for the congregation.

Develop Consensus and Craft the Story

Having reached a consensus on its characteristics, we drafted a Future Story of Ministry for the congregation. Later sessions with the pastor, ministerial staff, and key lay leaders refined the story and led them to be embraced by the Future Story of Ministry. We then presented the story back to the 100 people were present at the previous Friday night dinner meeting. Finally, we presented it to the entire congregation for dialogue.

Once developed, refined, and celebrated, the Future Story of Ministry became a navigational tool for the congregational Spiritual Strategic Journey. The Facilities Leadership Team made a major change in the architectural direction in which they were heading. They even changed architects to get one who understood the ministry philosophy put forth in the Future Story of Ministry.

The most significant changes they made related to their future approach to worship services. Their original thought had been to construct a 2,000-seat worship center. However, their Future Story of Ministry indicated a strong feeling among a broad-based group of congregational leaders that God was leading them to be a congregation with multiple worshipping communities. They would probably not need one large worship center, but three places of different sizes and styles where worship could take place.

Remember the original presenting issue for this consultant was how they do staff development, teambuilding, and evaluation. The Future Story of Ministry even brought great insight and clarity to the staff leadership arena. It allowed each of these issues to be addressed in a positive and empowering manner.

Reasons for Using a Future Storytelling Approach

I decided to use a Future Storytelling approach in this congregation for numerous reasons.

First, it would allow the congregation to quickly come to consensus concerning the major themes surrounding relationships experiences and programmatic emphases that might characterize it ten years from now.

Second, it was not a detailed, mechanistic planning model that would restrict the spiritual thinking and intuition of the congregation. It would not shut out the new things God might do in their midst that did not exactly fit their plan.

Third, storytelling is more characteristic of a movement approach to the Spiritual Strategic Journey of a congregation.

Fourth, a movement approach is more conducive to a postmodern era that will focus on chaos, community, character, and commitment to that which is genuine and authentic about a Christ-centered, faith-based journey.

Fifth, traditional strategic planning as it has been practiced seems to push congregations forward to a more desirable future. A storytelling approach seeks to pull congregations forward to the future God is unfolding.

Sixth, the future story of congregations is dynamic and changes as new understandings of God's leadership emerge in congregations and are articulated by leadership.

Seventh, if the process followed involves lay leadership ownership that is regularly reinforced and if the future story evolves as new spiritual and strategic understandings emerge, then congregations never has to vote on their future by voting on their future story. The future story simply begins to play out. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as visionary leadership navigates the Spiritual Strategic Journey.

SAMPLE

The Future Storytelling Process

Typically, a five-step process is used for congregational Future Storytelling. Crafting the Future Story of Ministry occurs in the second of three seasons in the Spiritual Strategic Journey process. The first season is the Spiritual Season of Transitioning. The second is the Strategic Season of Changing. The third is the Journey Season of Transforming. Each season is approximately 120 days.

For initial clarity here are the five steps, and then we will go back through them in some detail. The details of the five steps may be customized for each congregation. Presented here is the typical pattern that may be followed.

Step One—Identify Three Choices: Identify three choices or scenarios your congregation would like to explore as they seek to determine the future toward which God is pulling them. One possible beginning point is to reflect on 17 choices for congregations and the results of the insights and discernments from the 100 Days of Discernment using Dialogue and Prayer Triplets during from the Spiritual Season.

Step Two—Craft Three Scenarios: Brainstorm characteristics each choice or scenario might exhibit ten years from now. Continue reflecting on the 17 choices for congregations and the results of the 100 Days of Discernment. Craft three scenarios based on your choices and brainstormed characteristics. These are to be presented in a written and multi-sensory form to the leadership of your congregation and/or your entire congregation.

Step Three—Affirm One Scenario as the Future Story of Ministry Theme: Choose one scenario to pursue more deeply, and on which to base your future storytelling process. An obvious choice should emerge from the response to the presentation of the three scenarios.

Step Four—Craft Your Future Story of Ministry: Craft your Future Story of Ministry. Have in mind a story image and a setting for that future story ten years into the future, and the various ways and media you will use to tell that story.

Step Five—Share Your Future Story of Ministry and Continually Build Ownership: Share your Future Story of Ministry and build ownership among the leadership of your congregation. Develop print, dramatic, audio, video, and online methods of presentation. Revise your Future Story of Ministry and your presentation based on the feedback from a preliminary presentation of the Future Story of Ministry to leadership. Present your Future Story of Ministry to the congregation and continually build ownership among the congregation.

Step One: Identify Three Choices

The process of writing the Future Story of Ministry for a congregation should be initiated by the People of Pastoral Leadership and become a primary focus of the work of the Enduring Visionary Leadership Community [EVLC] which represents 21 percent of average number of active attending adults in a congregation present on a typical Sunday for worship. The EVLC is composed of People of Pastoral Leadership, People of Passion, and People of Position.

Throughout the process various periods of dialogue with the EVLC should take place. A key part of the first steps is the development of three choices or scenarios for the future of the congregation.

Why three? Making only one choice is shallow, myopic, can lead to a closed or group think mentality, and fails to show openness to the new thing God might be doing in the congregation. Two is always a bad number of choices to consider as it creates a dichotomous situation in which people position themselves around one or the other of the choices and create an either/or situation that contributes to competition in the life of the congregation. This mirroring of the traditional political election situation is never a healthy model to bring into a congregation.

Three choices allow a congregation to include in the choices the major directional thoughts of the future of the congregation held by the majority of the active participants. It also allows the congregation to include in its choices one or two ideas that may have been considered in the recent past, but were discounted because there was a powerful directional choice already held by the leadership of the congregation.

Three allows for true dialogue rather than debate. It lowers the amount of “them and us” talk in the congregation. It may create a situation where God’s sense of focus for the congregation can break through and be heard throughout the congregation. God’s full Kingdom potential for a congregation may be at a point beyond the congregation’s current vision, farther up and farther in enough that it is not easily seen or felt without the congregation doing something that opens themselves up to the new thing God is doing in their midst.

At least three different approaches or types of choices or scenarios exist. One focuses around the rate or pace of transition and change. A second focuses on organizational and ministry choices or scenarios for the congregation as a whole. The third focuses on customized choices or scenarios developed by the congregation out of the vision for and circumstances under which they are doing ministry.

Rates or Paces of Transition and Change

The three rates or paces of transition and change, as one approach to choices or scenarios, are incremental, significant, and radical. This approach is generally used by a congregation who feels it is substantially certain about its future direction, but desires to project what that future might be like based on different rates or paces of transition and change. How fast can we change and bring the clear majority of the congregation along with us? How fast is too fast? How slow is too slow that people will become disillusioned about positive change and transformation? To find out identify three choices or scenarios with differing rates or paces of transition and change.

Incremental transition and change means doing the same or similar things in the same or similar ways, focused on the same or similar target groups of people using the same or similar

leadership. Using transition and change in worship styles as an example, incremental transition and change in worship involves making small changes in the style or structure of an element of worship on a regular basis. The changes are small, incremental ones so that few if any attendees feel stressed because of the changes. This makes the transition of worship styles easy to attain.

While regular worship attendees may not feel the changes, a person who has been away from the church, such as a college student, and returns to the church following a year away, immediately recognizes that worship has changed significantly. A person who has been attending the church throughout the year may recognize that changes have taken place, but generally has found them pleasing, as he or she has been given time to adjust to the changes.

Significant transition and change involves doing different things in different ways, focused on different target groups of people using different leadership. Sticking with the worship image, this involves starting a new worship service in a congregation with a different structure and style that focuses on new target groups of people and primarily uses different worship leaders than those who lead the other worship services of the congregation. The congregation now has a choice of two or more worship services of differing structure and style that they can attend.

Radical transition and change takes place when the congregation figuratively turns the page and starts with a clean or new page in designing the programs, ministries, and activities of the congregation. The way this works with the worship image is that a new worship service of a different structure and style replaces existing worship service(s). The new service primarily focuses on the next target groups of people the congregation feels it can reach. Members and attendees must move forward to the new worship service or not attend worship.

Choices for Congregations

A second approach focuses on a list of organizational and ministry choices or scenarios for the congregation as a whole, from which they can choose three. Here are 16 organizational choices in four categories.

Stay the Course—Selected Transitions and Changes

- Few or No Transitions and Changes
- Continual Transition and Change Innovations

Modify the Course—Continuous Transitions and Changes:

- Multiple Generations Congregation (4+ Birth Generations)
- Multiple Worshiping Communities Congregation (3+ Worshiping Communities)
- Neighborhood or Community Focused Congregation (<3-mile radius)
- Multiple Communities Congregation (1-mile radius to 10-mile distance)

Change the Course—Significant Transitions and Changes

- Metropolitan Regional Congregation (500+ attendance)
- Multiple Site Congregation (225+ attendance)
- Multicultural Congregation (Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic)
- Congregational Multiplication Movement (135+ attendance)
- Special Focus Congregation (Specific Target Group)
- Relocation to a More Promising Location (Repositioning)

Plot a New Course—Radical Transitions and Changes

- Multiple Congregations Within a Congregation (Location Partners)
- Acquisition by Another Congregation (Become Part of Another Congregation)
- Merge with Other Congregations (3 or More Merge)
- Resurrection Congregation (ReStart/RePlant)
- Legacy Congregation (Endow New Ministry)

Customized Approaches

A third approach is for congregations to come up with customized choices or scenarios. These may draw from the other two approaches, but will be unique to this congregation. These are choices or scenarios developed by a local congregation out of their own Spiritual Strategic Journey. Congregations often use this choices or scenarios approach when they have unclear thoughts about the future choices they face and want to investigate various choices more deeply. At times these customized choices arise from combining some of the ideas in the 17 choices or scenarios and then including some differentiation of the rate or pace within these.

The raw material for these customized choices often arise from feedback and insights received at the conclusion of the Spiritual Season for Transitioning when at the end of 100 Days of Discernment Dialogue and Prayer Triplets offer insights or discernments about the future ministry of the congregation. Examples include a congregation where the themes of the three choices were Inviting, Discipleship, and Missional. Another congregation identified their three choices as Mobilized, Missional, and NeXt.

Getting Organized

Three Scenario Writing Teams should be formed—one for each of the choices—composed of five to eleven people depending on the size of the congregation. Their assignment is to craft three brief scenarios, prepare a multi-sensory way to present them, and the present them to the Enduring Visionary Leadership Community—the 21 percent of the average number of adults in weekly worship attendance—and others from the congregation who may way to attend. The details of this assignment are covered in Steps Two and Three.

The teams working on each scenario should be made up of people representing all three of the following types. First are people who are very passionate that this is the scenario on which they must write if they are to be faithful to their view of the future of the congregation. Second are people who are opposed to this scenario, but are willing to open themselves up to looking at the promise or hope inherent in this scenario. They function as friendly contrarians. Third are people who are undecided, but are willing to give of themselves to this process with great enthusiasm.

The three Scenario Writing Teams should be given around six weeks to develop their scenario and the method they will use to present it to the Enduring Visionary Leadership Community and others.

Congregational Ministry Framework Choices for the 21st Century

CHOICE CATGEGORY	CHOICE STRATEGY
STAY THE COURSE <i>Selected Transitions and Changes</i>	Continual Transition and Change Innovations
	Few or No Transitions and Changes
MODIFY THE COURSE <i>Continuous Transitions and Changes</i> <i>[Success]</i>	Multiple Generations Congregation (4+ Birth Generations)
	Multiple Worshiping Communities Congregation (3+)
	Neighborhood/Community Focus Congregation (<3 miles)
	Multiple Communities Congregation (1 Mile to <10 Miles)
CHANGE THE COURSE <i>Discontinuous Transitions and Changes</i> <i>[Significance]</i>	Metropolitan Regional Congregation (500+ att)
	Multiple Site Congregation (300+ att)
	Congregational Multiplication Movement (135+ att)
	Multicultural Congregation (Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic)
	Special Focus Congregation (Specific Target Group)
	Relocate to a More Promising Location (Repositioning)
PLOT A NEW COURSE <i>Radical Transitions and Changes</i> <i>[Surrender]</i>	Multiple Congregations Within a Congregation (Nesting)
	Acquisition by Another Congregation (Become Part Of)
	Merge with Other Congregations (3 or More Merge)
	Resurrection Congregation (ReStart/RePlant)
	Legacy Congregation (Endow New Ministry)

Step Two: Craft Three Scenarios

The three Scenario Writing Teams should each brainstorm characteristics of their choice or scenario as they may express themselves ten years from now if the congregation faithfully, effectively, and with innovation moves forward toward its full Kingdom potential. Their beginning point should be the compiled insights and discernments received at the conclusion of the Spiritual Season for Transitioning when at the end of 100 Days of Discernment Dialogue and Prayer Triplets offered insights or discernments about the future ministry of the congregation.

They may also research other approaches or ideas relevant to their choice or scenario. They are not bound by the compiled material from the 100 Days of Discernment, but they are to be faithful to that material as representing the insights or discernments of a large group of people from their congregation. At the same time, the choice or scenario they are asked to work on may call for additional brainstorming and creativity to offer an enticing choice for the future of their congregation.

Each Scenario Writing Team may need to consult people outside of their team to expand their thinking and the ideas brought to the scenario process. One of the beauties of working on three choices or scenarios rather than just one is the ability to discern, discover, and develop a quality and quantity of innovative ideas that would not be possible if only one way forward was considered at that step.

The one way forward approach can result in group think that stifles concepts and ideas that the Triune God may be seeking to inspire through this process. The concept of the myopia of group think was popularized many years ago by management guru Jerry Harvey in his business parable known as *The Abilene Paradox*. Jerry often suggested many of his management principles to the congregation he attended.

Each of the Scenario Writing Teams should craft a brief future scenario based on the choice for the future of the congregation they are assigned. They should do this with excitement, passion, and the belief that their choice could form the very best scenario for the future of the congregation. At the same time, they should realize that one of the three scenarios is likely to be chosen as the theme for the Future Story of Ministry, and it may not be theirs.

What they will contribute to whatever scenario is chosen as the theme of the Future Story of Ministry is some of the best and most innovative ideas that will enhance the congregation's future. Their best ideas that fit the future of the congregation are likely to be included in the Future Story of Ministry. Therefore, each Scenario Writing Team has a significant contribution to make to the process.

A small but important point is that each Scenario Writing Team should keep in confidence the content of their scenario. Many reasons could be stated for this, but here is a focus on two. First, it is desirable that each scenario be as unique as it can be, and not be an emulation of what one team hears another team is including in their scenario. The uniqueness of each helps show the many positive possibilities for the future of the congregation. It increases the innovative ideas offered through this process.

Second, this is a spiritual discernment process as well as a strategic process in a congregational cultural setting. It is important to see what the Triune God is inspiring across the leadership of the congregation. When common ideas and innovations show up in the scenarios it helps affirm the consensus within the congregation about God's leadership.

The brief scenarios should take on two forms. One is written, and the other is multi-sensory. The written scenario should be around 1000 words in length.

The multi-sensory form relates to how the scenario will be presented in the next step. This also enhances the story nature of each scenario. Some scenarios are presented as a drama or play. Some with music. Some as a PowerPoint presentation. Some as a video. Some as a newsletter or newspaper report. Creativity is important.

The goal of presenting a scenario in a multi-sensory form is to draw the audience into the scenario for them to experience the inspiration and excitement the Scenario Writing Team wants to convey. To a certain degree the medium is the message. People want to have an image or a sound they connect with the scenario, and not just a written text presented without creativity.

SAMPLE

Step Three: Affirm One Scenario as the Future Story of Ministry Theme

All three scenarios should be presented to at least the Enduring Visionary Leadership Community. The two-hour gathering where these are presented should also include an open invitation for anyone from the congregation to attend. The minimum goal is to have at the gathering at least 21 percent of the average number of adults present on a typical Sunday for worship.

In a predetermined order each Scenario Writing Team presents their scenario in its multi-sensory form. They should be given a maximum of 15 minutes to do so. Then their scenario is handed out in its written form to allow people to read it. A maximum of 15 minutes is allowed for participants to read each scenario and to ask questions of clarification to be sure they understand the scenario as presented in both multi-sensory and written form. This is not the time to talk about agreement or challenges for each scenario. That will come later.

After each Scenario Writing Team has presented their scenario in multi-sensory and written form, and the participants have read each scenario and had opportunities to ask clarifying questions, then general dialogue begins. Participants are invited to speak in favor of the scenario they believe most represents where God is in the process of leading the congregation. They can advocate for the scenario that best represents this and they can highlight ideas in the other two scenarios they believe ought to be part of the future of their congregation.

When the dialogue is completed then each participant completes a response form they are given that asks four questions. First, which one of the three scenarios most seems like the one God is leading this congregation to embrace for its future? Second, why did you choose this scenario or why do you believe this is the right scenario? Third, what are some ideas in this scenario you would like to be sure are included in the Future Story of Ministry? Fourth, what are some ideas in the other two scenarios you would like to see included in the Future Story of Ministry?

All participants are asked to complete their forms and hand them in before leaving this gathering. First impressions are the best impressions when both a multi-sensory and a written presentation have been made. Delayed impressions are often influenced by persuasive people who may want their image of the future of the congregation rather than God's image.

Leadership of the Future Storytelling process will begin immediately analyzing the responses to determine the theme for the Future Story of Ministry. They will then pull together a Future Story of Ministry Writing Team to craft the Future Story of Ministry. This team will be made up primarily of people from the three Scenario Writing Teams who would like to help write the Future Story of Ministry. Typically, one more than half of the five to eleven people come from the scenario chosen as the theme, and the others from the other two teams. If people with specific insights or skills are needed beyond the seven to eleven, two to three others can be added.

Step Four: Craft Your Future Story of Ministry

The Writing Team should craft a full draft of the Future Story of Ministry for the congregation. This draft is often 1500 to 2500 words in length, written in a narrative form, and speaking as if written ten years from now based on the future journey of the congregation and the future characteristics of the congregation. This Writing Team should be given six weeks to accomplish their task.

They should begin with the chosen theme from the three scenarios, or a revised theme that is a synergy of two of the scenarios if there was not one strongly affirmed theme. They should have in mind from the beginning a story image and a setting for the Future Story of Ministry. They should think from the beginning about the multi-sensory way they will present the story and the form the written story will take.

In crafting the Future Story of Ministry, the Writing Team pays close attention not only to the chosen theme, but also to the concepts and ideas in the scenario of the chosen theme as well as those in the other two scenarios that fit the chosen theme. The Writing Team should seek to benefit from all concepts and ideas of value and relevance to the chosen theme to enrich the Future Story of Ministry.

Some Writing Teams may secure the services of an actual feature news reporter, a storyteller, or even a playwright. Asking for expert assistance in crafting the best possible Future Story of Ministry is a great way to add value to the story. When considering the multi-sensory presentation of the story a media and/or technology person is often asked for assistance.

In crafting the Future Story of Ministry, the Writing Team should begin ten years in the future by describing what the congregation will be like a decade from now if it with faithfulness, effectiveness, and innovation lives into the call of God for their congregation. What will characterize the congregation qualitatively and quantitatively? What Kingdom progress will the congregation have made? What is being celebrated ten years from now about the congregation living into God's call upon it?

Once the Writing Team is clear about the ten-year horizon, it should then think about the sequence of things that were accomplished during that ten-year journey in three phases of three years each. What outputs, impacts, capacities, and sustainability needed to be fulfilled during each three-year period for the congregation to arrive at its God-given future ten years from now?

The qualities, facts, actions of the ten years should be woven into a story that is told ten years from now about the congregation. This is why the story idea and the multi-sensory presentation needs to be thought about from the very beginning.

Step Five: Share Your Future Story of Ministry and Continually Build Ownership

Develop and implement a plan for sharing the Future Story of Ministry and building ownership among the leadership of your congregation. Complete drafts of the print version, the multi-sensory version, and strategize about web and social media methods for eventually sharing the Future Story of Ministry.

Sharing the Future Story of Ministry should involve some open means for dialogue and feedback from the congregation. Their response is important. Their insights into what God may be doing in the congregation will probably prove to be very meaningful. Such a process may also discover places of stress for the participants in the congregation where the story is outside their comfort zone.

Be sure to support the live presentation of the story with a plan for using the congregation's web site and social media to spread the good news of the Future Story of Ministry.

Initially share the written draft and multi-sensory presentation of your Future Story of Ministry with at least the seven percent People of Passion and in smaller membership congregations the full 21 percent represented by the Enduring Visionary Leadership Community composed of the People of Pastoral Leadership, the People of Passion, and the People of Position.

Solicit their feedback on various aspects of the Future Story of Ministry. In general, you can ask them about what they would affirm about the story, what they would challenge about the story, and what suggestions they would have for improving or strengthening either the story or its presentation.

Specifically, you can ask questions such as these: To what extent is this a captivating Future Story of Ministry that makes you excited about what God is in the process of doing in and through our congregation? To what extent is this Future Story of Ministry faithful to our assignment and the material we were given from the congregation? How would you improve the written draft? How would you improve the multi-sensory presentation?

Revise your Future Story of Ministry and its presentation based on feedback and new insights from your leadership. After you have written and presented your story, you will know better how to write in a manner that captivates the imagination of your congregation, speaks prophetically to the work of your congregation, and sees farther into the future than you had at first been able to see.

At this juncture you are trying to polish the story to the point that it communicates passion and spiritual vitality. You are not seeking to polish the story too finely because the story will always be dynamic and in the process of becoming as you see more clearly the leadership of God while you travel in the direction of God's current leading.

During the next season of the SSJ process, known as the Journey Season for Transforming, a pattern for regularly updating the Future Story of Ministry is introduced. It is this regular updating that keeps the story sharp and relevant. Too much refining of the story at the beginning may make it more difficult to change and for the story to best represent agility in the journey of the congregation.

Implement a plan for sharing your story and building ownership with your active congregation.

Determine how you can share the new version of the story with at least the 63 percent People of Participation within the congregation. This will be the story with which you will move forward. It is important that a broad base of ownership for the story exists throughout the congregation.

Ownership is the key concept, rather than formal approval being the key concept. It is enormously important that neither the congregation nor its board vote on approving the Future Story of Ministry. That's right; formal approval should not be sought. Why?

When congregations vote on their long-range or strategic plans, thus giving them formal status, they tend to canonize these plans. Then two things happen. First, they seek to follow the plans like they are the law of the Medes and the Persians. One or more people or teams in the congregation emerge who perceive their role to be one of making sure that the congregation follows the plans to the exact letter. Often when the exact letter of a plan is followed, the spirit of the plan is lost.

Within months or a year, the congregation or the Enduring Visionary Leadership Community often recognize that the plans are irrelevant to what is going on in the congregation. If your congregation is making progress along its Spiritual Strategic Journey, then a static plan can become irrelevant very quickly.

The Future Story of Ministry for your congregation is intended to represent the current understanding of the spiritual strategic direction of your congregation as it is being pulled forward by God, who knows your perfect future. As the story of the mountain climbing at the beginning of this manuscript illustrates, as you journey toward the summit, you regularly come to new understandings about your journey and your ability to see the future toward which you are traveling.

Your Future Story of Ministry must remain a dynamic, ever-changing narrative that seeks to remain relevant to the current congregational understanding of the Future Story of Ministry toward which God is pulling your congregation.

Afterword

The Columbia Metro Baptist Association offers various strategic processes for congregations of which Spiritual Strategic Journey (SSJ) 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 are the most comprehensive and covers the longest period of engagement. Other processes that are folded into SSJ process are the following. Each process, in the order listed, is part of the next process mentioned.

Fresh Eyes Assessment: A Sunday or weekend observation of the quality and excellence of the worship, discipleship, and fellowship activities of a congregation. It involves on-site observation during a typical Sunday or weekend. This is completed in one weekend. It does, in addition, require three weeks of preparation.

Congregational Assessment and Learning Experience (CALE): A four-day weekend experience to launch a congregation on an SSJ process of their own or as the launch weekend for the SSJ process guided by TCP. Included is the Fresh Eyes Assessment. The CALE is completed in one weekend and the report is prepared and sent to the congregation within three weeks. It does, in addition, require 45-60 days of preparation.

CALE Plus: This is a CALE experience followed by an on-site report to the congregation and a leadership retreat to help a congregation plan their next steps. This is completed in 45 to 60 days. It does, in addition, require 45-60 days of preparation.

CALE Plus Future Story: This is a CALE, the report to the church, a leadership retreat, and coaching for writing a Future Story of Ministry. This is typically completed within 120 days. It does, in addition, require 45-60 of preparation.

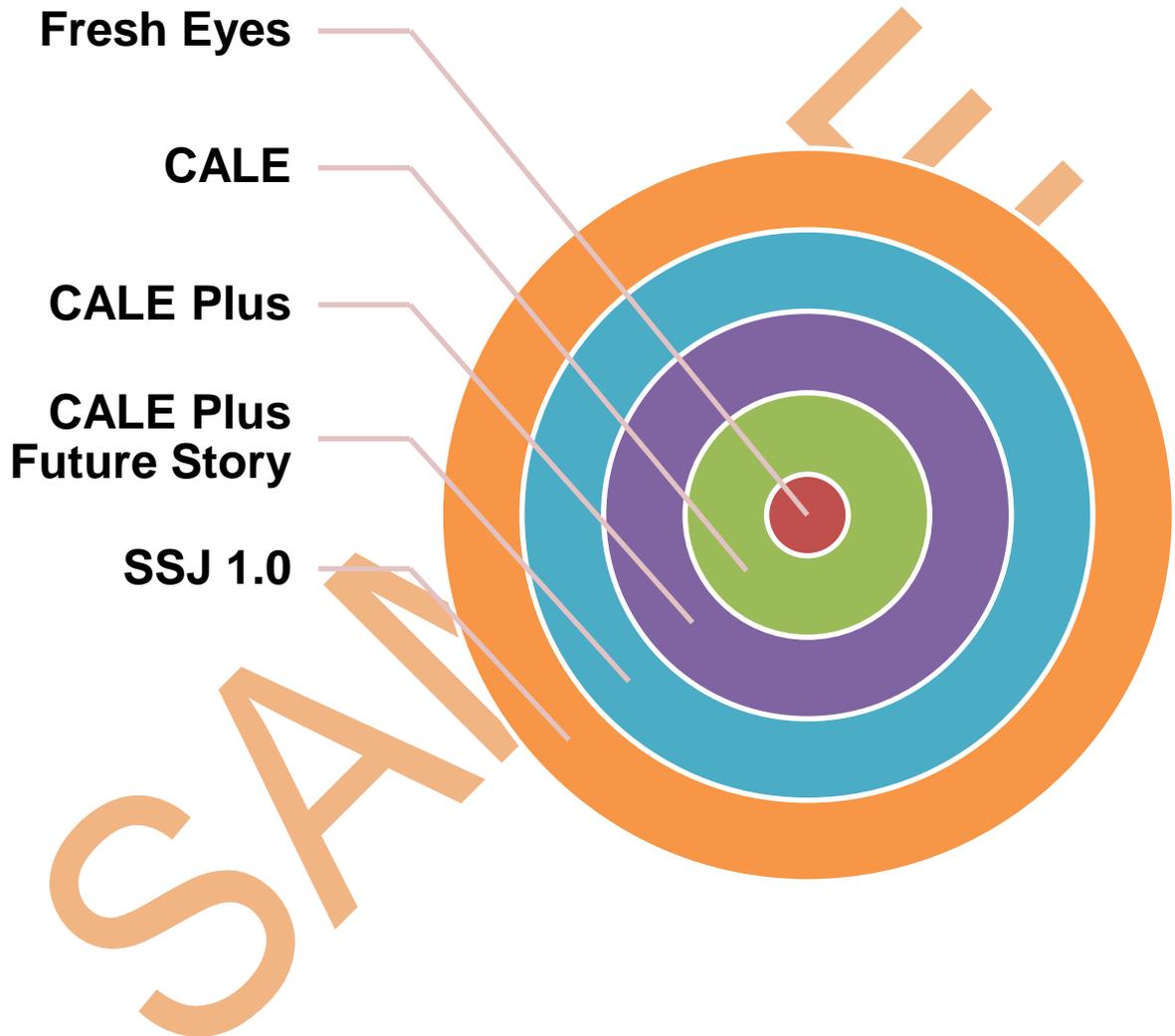
SSJ 1.0: This is the full process involving a Preseason for Exploring and Readiness, and three 120-day seasons known as the Spiritual Season for Transitioning, the Strategic Season for Changing, and the Journey Season for Transforming. From preparation through completion is 12 to 15 months.

Congregational Champions Retreats: CMBA also offers three-day experiences where pastors, staff persons, lay leaders, denominational staff, teachers/professors, consultants/coaches can learn the full Spiritual Strategic Journey process and gain the opportunity to shadow George Bullard as he works with congregations on various aspects of the Spiritual Strategic Journey process.

Please contact us at CMBA@ColumbiaMetro.org or George Bullard at 803,622.0923 with your questions and requests.

CMBA Congregations: All the services listed above are available to you without a fee. There are usually in-house hospitality costs to the church, but no fee.

Strategic Services Offered by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association



About the Columbia Metro Baptist Association (CMBA)

CMBA is a Baptist association of approximately 100 congregational expressions located in the Midlands of South Carolina. *Our One Priority is Starting and Strengthening Congregational Expressions to Serve as Vital and Vibrant Missional Communities.*

CMBA has seven strategies:

- Empowering Congregations
- Multiplying Congregations
- Transforming Congregations
- Developing Leadership
- Impacting Communities
- Collegiate Ministry
- Missional Partnerships

Check us out at our website at www.ColumbiaMetro.org, at Facebook at [ColumbiaMetroBaptistAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/ColumbiaMetroBaptistAssociation), or on Twitter at [@CMBA_SC](https://twitter.com/CMBA_SC).

About George Bullard

George Bullard is the Director of the Columbia Metro Baptist Association. He has been in church and denominational ministry for 50 years, and has engaged in consulting, coaching, and teaching with 1000s of congregations, pastors, staff persons, lay leaders, and denominational staff in around 50 denominations throughout North America.

He still serves as a Strategic Leadership Coach to Christian leaders, congregations, and denominational organizations. Contact him at GeorgeBullard@ColumbiaMetro.org or 803.622.0923.