



## C13: Planning Creating an Action Plan

### BUSINESS: WHAT A CHURCH HAS, NOT WHAT A CHURCH IS

**business** (biz'nis), *n.*

1. one's work; occupation; profession
2. the buying or and selling of commodities and services; commerce; trade
3. rightful concern or responsibility

The word "business" is used at times in scripture to refer to God's work. However, if you do a study of all the times that happens, the point is stressed that the church is *not*, strictly speaking, a business. Consider:

- ❖ In a business, while you are friendly with your coworkers, you are cautious about forming friendships. How do you fire a friend if they are not cutting it? However, in the Church, everyone is to be friends. Jesus tells his disciples, *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* (John 15:15).
- ❖ In a business, efficiency is placed at a premium. You assess a job "well done" when it is actually *done well*: on time, on budget, meeting the goals. In the Church, love is placed at a premium. Someone might meet every one of their goals on time and on budget, and yet God is disgusted with their labor if it is done out of some sense of guilt or obligation. *"The only thing that counts [as good in God's eyes] is faith expressing itself through love."* (Galatians 5:6).
- ❖ In a business, those in leadership positions get others to act by exercising authority. In the Church, leaders move people to act by serving them in every possible way, by viewing themselves as slaves, "owned" by the people. Jesus said, *"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."* (Luke 22:25-27)

No. The Church is *not* a business. You even see that in the word scripture uses for "church" – *ecclesia*. It is the Greek words for "call" and "out" put together. Therefore, even the word "church" tells us what it is – those who are called out of darkness and into light, called out of death and into life. The Church is a family, children of one Father, with the one whose birth we prepare for as our greatest Brother. We view our church as a family in the fullest sense, for we share blood every time we drink of the cup. To think of your church as a business belittles it. To run your church identically as you would a business will destroy it. It will not destroy it in the sense that your church will disappear. It will destroy it in the sense that your church will lose the sight of the bullet

points above. While your church may then be efficient, accomplish goals, and maybe even grow, God will be entirely disinterested in your efforts, precisely because you view his Church as a business when he intended for it to be so much more... so much *greater* than that!

All that said...

The church *has* important business, does it not? Just as your family has important business – to encourage, teach, and admonish one another with the Word, to support one another in love, to build a nurturing home, etc. – so also the Church has important business.

Just look at that third definition for “business” above: *rightful concern*. We just said the Church is those who have been called out of darkness into the light of God’s grace. If that *means* something to you, you will be “rightfully concerned” about those who remain in darkness. We said the Church is those who have crossed over from spiritual death (unbelief) to spiritual life (faith). If the one who made eternal life possible means anything to you, then when he speaks of his rightful concerns – the lost, the proclamation of the Gospel, etc. - they become your concerns too, i.e. your business.

In this module of C13, we will discuss how to write up an action plan, one that ends with a planning calendar. We do this *not* because our church is a business. We do it because as the family of God, we have important business. We want to share the Gospel with as many people as possible. We want to do all we can to pull people into the Church. That is important business.

When something is important, you do not approach it haphazardly. Take your salvation. St. Paul writes:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.*

-Ephesians 1:3-5

The heavenly Father did not make up your salvation as he went along. He planned early, “before the creation of the world.” He had a specific goal, to make you “holy and blameless.” He planned how to achieve that goal. It had steps. Through the sacrifice of his only Son, your sin would be atoned for. Through the work of the Spirit in the Means of Grace, you would be adopted. Your salvation was God’s *business*, his “rightful concern.” Therefore, he did not approach is haphazardly.

Likewise, as you work your way through this and the other modules of C13, which place so much emphasis on planning, do not ever let yourself think, “*We’re turning the church into a business.*” God forbid such a thing! Moreover, planning does *not* do that – does *not* turn a church into a business. Planning simply allows us to undertake the “rightful concerns” that all Christians have in a manner that imitates, to a tiny degree, the zeal God demonstrated in coming after us, saving us, and making us his own.

God bless your planning!

## AN ACTION PLAN: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT DOES

### *Meat on the skeleton*

Many churches will plan. A plan is simply a method of proceeding towards some goals. For example, a church decides to set the goal of inviting the community to join them on Christmas Eve. The leaders sit down and talk about it. They decide to do some canvassing and put out some temporary signage. Great! They have a two-step plan toward accomplishing their goal. However, if that is the extent of their planning, either a) it will not happen, or b) it will be done so chaotically (last minute, unorganized, etc.) that the goal will not be achieved.

An action plan takes that skeleton of a plan and puts meat on it. It breaks down broad steps of a general plan into *actionable* tasks. For example, if that church wants to go canvassing, they will need to:

1. Determine where they are going to canvass.
2. Determine how they are going to canvass. Knock on doors? Door hangers?
3. Recruit people for that canvass.
4. Develop the materials for that canvass.
5. Set a budget for this all.

The church needs to arrange those tasks in a logical sequence. They obviously cannot develop materials for a canvass until they know what type of canvass they are going to undertake. They need to assign those tasks to different people. They need to set due dates.

Therefore, a plan lays out steps to achieve a goal. However, an action plan breaks those steps down into actions and determines:

- What *specific* tasks need to occur?
- Who will perform each task?
- When will this task occur, and for how long?
- What resources (i.e., money, staff) are needed for this task to occur?
- What communications needs to happen for this task to occur?

An action plan is *always* written. (It is too detailed not to be!) In addition, it often includes visual components, such as a calendar or Gantt chart. This allows people to easily see how one task flows into another.

Finally, while an action plan can be used to plan overall ministry, where it comes in especially handy is planning events. That is what we are encouraging your church to do with C13 – formulate an action plan for Christmas Eve.

## ***The benefits of producing a good action plan***

You look at the above and you might think, “This seems like an awful lot of work.” It really is not. Once your congregation gets in the habit of producing action plans for events (or for your overall ministry), you will be amazed at how quickly an action plan can be produced. Moreover, you will *want* to put in the time, because of the benefits.

- *An action plan reduces stress.* What can make something like Christmas Eve stressful is last minute rushing. Some detail was overlooked, and now it must be dealt with quickly at a very busy time. An action plan forces you to think about the details well in advance of an event. Thus, it reduces unwanted last-second “surprises.”
- *An action plan saves work in the end.* An action plan provides you with a written record of what you did and when you did it. As we will see later, it provides you with a written record of what worked well and what did not. Then, *next* Christmas Eve, you pull out your action plan for this year, and you have a ready-made list of what needs to be done.
- *An action plan helps you determine what is and what is not possible for your church to do.* For example, say your church sets the broad goal that you will invite 15,000 people from your community to join you on Christmas Eve. That is a wonderful goal! Is it possible? You do not know for sure until you produce an action plan, which will establish exactly how much time and money will be necessary for that. It can be disheartening for a church to set a goal that is unattainable. Action plans help you avoid that.
- *An action plan encourages service of the saints.* The New Man inside every Christian *yearns* to serve God. He does that in his vocation, i.e. the day-to-day opportunities that God places before him in his family, his job, etc. However, Christians are more than willing to serve their church too. The problem is that churches often provide very vague information. The pastor might mention how he would like more volunteers for the evangelism committee. The people know there is a need, but they do not know: How many hours or days a month will this involve? If there are meetings, when will they be held? What training will be offered? What specific goals are there, if any? Unless those questions are answered, the member cannot commit, precisely because he has a broader vocation (family and work responsibilities). An action plan forces you to break tasks down in a detailed way. Thus, you can let the saints know *exactly* what is being asked of them.
- *An action plan encourages evangelical accountability.* With an action plan, one knows of some specific Gospel-oriented goal. It is a goal that person feels strongly about. The action plan tells him what his specific role is. More than that, it shows him how *others are depending on him* to fulfill that role. If he does not accomplish his task on time, others are affected, because they cannot do their task until he completes his. Therefore, an action plan puts everyone on the same page. It lets people see their relationship to one another in the work of the Church. That creates evangelical accountability.

## **Give it a try!**

I hope that all this has convinced you it is worth it to try producing an action plan for Christmas Eve. Let us talk about how to do it, systematically.

## THE TEN STEPS OF A CHRISTMAS EVE ACTION PLAN

These are the steps you would follow to produce any action plan. However, C13 is meant to model planning by focusing on Christmas Eve. Therefore, with our steps, we will be focusing on that night.

### ***Step 1 – Establish the broad mission for Christmas Eve.***

What is it you hope to do that night? This should be an easy step, for you are simply establishing some *broad* goals.

Obviously, as the Church, you want to gather around the means of grace. Just as Christ came to earth on that night, you know he comes to you in word and sacrament.

Hopefully, you would add a broad goal that includes sharing the Christ-child with your community.

You might have a broad goal of allowing as many of the saints as possible to use their spiritual gifts to honor Jesus. Therefore, the children of the school would be given recitations. The choir would sing, etc.

You might have a broad goal of using Christmas Eve as a time to pull delinquents back into the fold. Delinquents are often wracked with guilt over their delinquency. However, the angel proclaims good news of great joy for those wrestling with such guilt – a Savior has been born.

Who should determine these broad goals? Your congregation in their mission statement probably has already determined them. (If your church does not have a mission statement, contact WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling at your convenience. They can be helpful in keeping your church focused.) Therefore, for Christmas Eve, your church council could simply look at your mission statement, and based on that statement, set some broad goals for Christmas Eve.

### ***Step 2 – Set some appropriately specific goals for Christmas Eve in the different areas of ministry.***

For example, if your church council decides it wants to encourage the saints to use their gifts on Christmas Eve, then whoever plans worship – a worship committee, worship planner, etc. – now gets specific. It decides to set the specific goal of having the choir sing three times on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and recruiting a musician or two to play the offertory.

Alternatively, if your church decides to set the broad goal of inviting your community to join you on Christmas Eve, then whoever plans evangelism gets specific. It is decided to set the specific goal of sending postcard invitations to 5,000 homes.

What does the word *appropriately* mean in that phrase: “appropriately specific goals”? It is meant to remind you that when setting goals for your ministry, it is wise in an action plan to focus on goals that mere men can actually attain! For example, you can set the goal of canvassing 2000 homes, inviting people to Christmas Eve. Canvassing homes is the work of the church, not of the Holy Spirit. However, if you set the specific goal of adding 10 new souls to your congregation after Christmas Eve, you have now assigned a goal to the work of the Holy Spirit. Only the Spirit, working through the means of grace, can lead someone to faith, including the mature faith required to commit to membership in a church. The Holy Spirit does not need you to set goals for him! You are

wise, however, to set goals for yourself. Just make sure they are *appropriate* – ones you can actually attain.

So what are the “areas of ministry” in your church? C13 will address all of these:

- Worship – The group that plans what happens in the service.
- Outreach and evangelism – The group that plans how you promote events, welcome people when at worship, follow up on visitors, etc.
- School/preschool – Christmas programs are a staple of childhood ministry.
- Discipleship/Elders – This group would look at encouraging members towards faithful use of the means of grace. They also might be the group responsible for recruiting members to serve.
- Property/Trustees – This group is responsible for making sure the property is maintained and welcoming.
- Others?

Each of these groups needs to set some appropriately specific goals for Christmas Eve.

### ***Step 3 - Create a detailed task list for each of those goals.***

The group that plans outreach and evangelism decides it wants to send out 5,000 postcards and deliver another 1000 cards, along with information about the church, in a walking-canvass (door hangers). That group lists those goals, and then under them begins to write down what needs to be done to accomplish them. Someone needs to design the postcards. Someone needs to proof them. Someone needs to order them. Someone needs to order door hanger bags. Someone needs assemble them.

A good rule of thumb is to go over that list three times, each time trying to break the tasks into even smaller chunks. For example, take the task “design a postcard.” You need to know what the theme of the worship service is. (For Christmas Eve, it is *Born to Save Us*.) You need to find a graphic that fits that theme. (The C13 program is providing that for this Christmas as part of the planning model.) By going over the list of tasks three times, you should have them broken up into the smallest possible chunks.

When you have those tasks broken down into their smallest components, assign completion times. For example: “Design back of Christmas postcard – 2 days.” This will be important in the next step.

Finally, you need to arrange the tasks in chronological order. Many of the tasks will be able to be done simultaneously. However, many of them will be dependent upon other tasks being completed first. So arrange them in order, based on dependency.

### ***Step 4 - Put those tasks on a timeline.***

Here, you work backwards. Let us use the production of the worship folder as an example. The worship committee decides the ledger-sized Christmas Eve worship folder read to go by December

21<sup>st</sup>. They believe the “assembly” of the worship folders will take one day. Thus, that task is done on December 20<sup>th</sup> or earlier. The task *before* assembly is printing. The worship committee estimates that will take three days, since they are going to a printer and so they set December 15 as the day the worship folder file is delivered to the printer. That digital file needs to be produced. It is estimated it will take two days. Therefore, that is scheduled for December 12 and 13. (Note the buffer days in between tasks, in case something goes wrong.) The worship committee continues to do this until the *first* task that needs to be completed is assigned its date.

While you might initially do this just by writing in due dates next to the tasks, eventually it will be helpful to produce this timeline in some sort of visual format. There are two ways to do this.

The first is to put the tasks on a calendar. In doing that, you want to list when a task begins and ends, not simply the due date. You could produce a calendar using one of the many free tools online. (Google Calendars is a powerful resource, and not too difficult to learn.) Alternatively, you could purchase a desk-blotter calendar and use that to schedule your talks.

The other option is to put your tasks into a Gantt chart. Gantt charts are bar graphs that illustrate the start and end date of tasks in a project. They also demonstrate when beginning one task is dependent on the completion of another. The benefit of Gantt charts over calendars is that instead of tasks being scattered over the various months on the calendar, they are listed in their order on the far left side of the chart. The bar graphs then provide the timeframe. Thus, it lets you see the systematic process more easily.

A Gantt chart also allows you to stack areas of ministry on top of one another to see where there might be a scheduling conflict. For example, say your evangelism committee sets October 20<sup>th</sup> as the day to produce your outreach postcard. However, your worship committee has set November 1<sup>st</sup> as the day to settle on a theme for Christmas Eve. (Again, this is not an issue if you are using the C13 program, as the theme and due dates for postcards have been set already for you. This is simply a hypothetical example.) Your worship and outreach leaders now coordinate, so the outreach committee can produce the card on time.

C13 has provided you with a simple example of a Gantt chart. It lists some basic tasks for worship and outreach. We also have provided a simple Microsoft Excel file you can use to produce your own Gantt chart, if you so desire.

### ***Step 5 - Assign responsibility and resources.***

Therefore, you have your tasks broken down and arranged in order. Who is going to accomplish each of those tasks? What resources are you going to give to them (monetary or otherwise)?

When assigning responsibility for a task, you should list *an individual*, not a committee. It might fall to a group of people to accomplish some task. For example, labeling 15,000 postcards would take one person a long time! However, you need to list the *one* individual who is responsible for making certain that task is completed.

In order for them to do their job, you need to provide them with a list of resources – financial or otherwise. For example, the group in charge of decorating the church decides they want to have a 20-foot tall live tree. That will be spectacular. However, whoever is charged with finding that tree needs to know how much he or she is allowed to spend and, if the company does not deliver, who in church has a trailer long enough to haul that monster!



NOTE: When it comes to assigning financial resources, realize that in C13 we are working backwards from what is ideal. Most churches set their budget and then areas of ministry plan accordingly. The goal is to have your church plan their ministry, and then set their budget off that plan. As you plan for your next year of ministry (be it calendar year 2014 or your next fiscal year), consider producing action plans for every major event. When you get to this step – *Step 5 – Assign responsibility and resources* – you will be listing the financial resources that you need to do what you want. A financial committee can then pull all those plans together as a starting point for their budget. They might have to cut some things. That is fine. You still have a budget flowing out of a plan for ministry, rather than preceding it.

### ***Step 6 - Communicate, coordinate, and adjust.***

Now you have your list of tasks and resources, and you have assigned responsibility to someone. You need to communicate to that person *exactly* what their job is, and what it *is not*. Say, for example, you ask someone to produce a church brochure for you to deliver in a door hanger canvass. Does that mean they produce the content? Alternatively, are they given the content to arrange it in an aesthetically pleasing way?

The leaders of the church need to help coordinate this action plan. A good way to do this is have everyone in an “area” of ministry show up for an initial meeting with whatever they use to schedule their life (calendar, cell phone, laptop, etc.). In that meeting, have them put the start and end dates for their task into whatever it is they use to schedule. Using that visual representation (calendar or Gantt chart), will help them to see why their task needs to be done by the due date – because others cannot start their task until that other task is done.

Leaders will also have to adjust the plan at times. There are *always* problems, even for the most well thought out plan. If a deadline is missed you can adjust the schedule, but do not give up on those appropriate specific goals.

In short, step 6 is to work the plan. In regards to C13, from now until Christmas Eve, your leaders need to be aware of what is to be done day by day. They need to encourage, offer counsel, and support those who are striving to complete their tasks.

### ***Step 7 - Assess and rejoice!***

Sometime, not too long after Christmas, your leaders will come together and assess how well the action plan was implemented. They will assess what went well and what did not. For example, maybe you tried to use a *Christmas for Kids* one-day VBS as a form of outreach. You only had 5 children sign up, all members. Do you try the *Christmas for Kids* program again the next year? If you do, you have to adjust the goal or adjust the program. If the goal is to share the Gospel with member children for a few hours one weekend – a worthy goal! – then the program is fine. If the goal is to reach into your community to create opportunities to invite people to Christmas Eve, then the program needs to be adjusted. Maybe you should try promoting it in different ways next year. If after a few years you find the program does not accomplish the goal, then that goal is changed or the program is scrapped, and those resources redirected into something else.

So assess everything you did over these months. What do you want to do again next year? What will you do differently? Take notes. File those all somehow.



However, do not just assess. Rejoice! Rejoice over any blessings God has given to you personally or to your church through your Christmas efforts. If nothing else, there is the blessing of honor and purpose God gave to you by allowing you to participate in Kingdom work.

## ***LIKE RIDING A BICYCLE***

There are many of you who are saying, *“Action plans are something I use every day in my business. I am very familiar with the process. I learned nothing new.”* The role you play then is in *affirming* to the others in your church who *have not* used this process that it has great benefit. You can help walk them through it. Most importantly, you can ensure that as you engage in this business practice, you do not turn your church into a business.

Nevertheless, we are aware that there are many out there who are looking at this, not with affirmation, but apprehension. You are saying, *“This seems really complicated! It will be really hard to do all this.”*

Let us be honest. It *will* take effort. However, producing action plans are much like riding a bicycle. At first, it is scary and difficult, but eventually, it just sort of “clicks.” It makes sense. Riding a bicycle becomes easy. When you do it, you do not think about the process. You just *do* it. In fact, if you tried to *forget* how to ride a bicycle, you could not.

So it is with producing action plans. At first, it seems daunting and scary. That is why the C13 program provides so many nuts-and-bolts options – to make it a little less difficult this time around. However, eventually, it just “clicks” for a congregation. Producing action plans for ministry is something they do naturally. They could not imagine doing ministry without them.

You are not a business.

You are the Church.

My God bless you richly as you plan how to carry out your “rightful concern” of sharing the Gospel zealously!

