

A Concise Guide to Pastoral Planning

William L. Pickett, Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria,
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A Concise Guide to Pastoral Planning is from the “Concise Guide Series” produced by Ave Maria Press and authored by Dr. William Pickett. Other books in this series by the well known Roman Catholic publisher include: *A Concise Guide to Your Rights in the Catholic Church...to Canon Law and...Catholic Social Teaching...to Supervising a Ministry Student*.

Purpose of the book is found in the Preface as the author points out that planning takes place at different levels in the Catholic Church in the United States – parish, diocesan and regional, Pickett states, “My first issue was to determine a basic approach that would include all three levels” (12). He owns that there is some overlapping, but provides the most comprehensive view of the subject and does it in a way that makes clear that the same basic process is used in all three.

The book has eight chapters, Chapters 1-4: (1) Introduction in Pastoral Planning, (2) Pastoral Planning Basics, (3) Basic Elements of a Pastoral Plan and (4) The Pastoral Planning Cycle, develop a generic approach. Chapters 5-7: (5) Implementation at the Parish Level, (6) Implementation at the Diocesan Level, (7) Implementation at the Regional Level, apply the same model for each of three levels. Chapter 8, Communication, is treated as a separate topic. Each chapter begins with a purpose and ends with a brief conclusion and several study questions which help the reader to focus on a personal response.

How is pastoral planning defined by Dr. Pickett? He gives two layers of definitions, one is more theological and the other more organizational. “Pastoral planning is the process of praying and thinking together about actions of the body of

Christ in a particular time and place” (16). “Pastoral planning is the process, a coherent set of activities with internal consistency and identifiable goals and outcomes” (16).

The author points out that while most people think of the future in regard to planning he contends that planning must begin with an agreement on “where we are right now” (17). Two kinds of planning are presented, directive and probabilistic. I don’t think that I have seen these distinctions before. The directive is more familiar – “we are here, we want to be there and this is what we need to get there” (19) which the probabilistic assumes that no single person or set of persons or controls what happens to themselves or others” (50).

In Chapter 4 the planning cycle is given, the Mission Statement, the Vision Statement, Assessing where we are, Developing goals, Articulating Objectives and Action Plans, Implementing and Assessing. This is the same pattern used for the Parish, Diocesan and Regional levels.

The author says that a mission statement states that an organization exists to do something toward a goal (62) while “a vision statement describes where the organization sees itself in the future” (65). He is consistent throughout on the use of these definitions. These are compatible with most definitions in the literature available on the subject.

The author of the book, Dr. William L. Pickett served as the Director of Pastoral Planning for the Diocese of Rochester, New York, from 1997 to 2006. He has thirty years of experience in higher education and administration and served as the president of St. John Fisher College in Rochester. Pickett holds a Ph.D. in higher education from the University of Denver. At the time of writing of this book (2007) he was pursuing an M.A. in theological studies from St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry. This is his first book. The author has more than forty years of experience and planning in not-for-profit organizations. The series editor is Fr. Kevin E. McKenna, pastor of St. Cecilia Parish in Rochester. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Church law and ministry.

Several aspects of this book are commendable to me. The first is that there is a rather extensive glossary of terms on pages 248-254. This is of great help to a non-

Catholic in understanding some of the terms unique to the Church, words like “Diocese,” “Presbyterial Council,” “Temporalities” (The material goods cared for, and administered by the Church at all levels” 253). He also includes items related to the topic – goals, objectives, mission, vision, etc. An interesting one for me is “Double-Loop Learning,” “the learning required when the ordinary rules and procedures do not seem to work...we need to go back to the underlying values and goals to understand these in the new circumstances and thus create new rules and procedures” (250).

Throughout there are numerous forms and charts used to guide someone in the planning process. With almost all of them there is a notation saying, “chart available at avemariapress.com. Some examples are Pastoral Planning Cycle, Mission Evaluation Sheet, Mission Development Worksheet, Vision Statement Worksheet. These are very helpful and could be used in many organizational and ministry settings. These are excellent materials and add to the value and use of the book.

In Appendix A: Resources (243) much helpful information is included. He references books and websites. The sections on Demographics and Church Statistics is valuable for both Catholics and non-Catholics. In fact, these will be very helpful for D.Min. Directors in training students in research. The section for Diocesan Planning Websites would be extremely helpful to Catholic researchers.

I was impressed with the theological concepts undergirding the practical aspects particularly in Chapter 1, “Introduction to Pastoral Planning”. Here is a good example, “Our incarnational, sacramentality helps us live in this ambiguity (thinking and praying vs. measuring actions) without falling prey to the temptation of focusing on one or the other. Actions without prayers and prayers without action fall short of the fullness of life that the Lord promised us. We must live with a foot in both worlds, steeped in the knowledge that the Spirit is always with us” (20).

Another example is found on page 22, “Pastoral planning is designed to help our faith communities have the same radical connection to the here and now and to live the spirituality of our tradition, scriptures and ongoing relationship with God just as Jesus did. Our pastoral planning must be done in a way that results in actions of the Body that are powerful and potent in announcing the reign of God to the world as it is” (22).

I have given several positive statements about the book. I do see some weaknesses. First of all as the title says, it is the Concise Guide to Pastoral Planning. Therein may lie the major weakness – it is both concise and it is a guide. However, the book does achieve its purpose to do both which was the intent of the author. In some ways, it is “outlinish” in its nature.

The book is primarily directed to a Roman Catholic audience. While this may narrow its appeal, it in no way takes away the valuable information available to any person involved with the planning process.

There is some redundancy in the book with the same material presented in the parish, diocesan, regional approach. Obviously, the need in his church determined that. That approach could be helpful to denominational executives in other faith traditions.

This is a trade book with 254 pages. I don’t see it as a primary text for a D.Min. course, but would make a nice supplemental text in M.Div. or D.Min. courses. The many charts depicting results of various church surveys would be helpful to D.Min. students working on methodology and report of results.

Who needs or could use this work? Pastors, Vocational staff members, administrators in higher education, D.Min. Directors, D.Min. students, Church and Organizational Boards. There is great coverage on the subject and a nice writing style for a guidebook.

In Appendix A (246) a prayer for pastoral planning is included. It is often attributed to Archbishop Romero (assassinated in El Salvador in 1980). It provides conclusion to this review:

It helps now and then to step back and take the long view.

The Reign of God is not only beyond our efforts. It is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying

the Reign of God always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the church's mission.

We cannot do everything, but there is a sense of liberation in realizing that because this enables us to do something and to do it well.

It may be incomplete but it is a beginning, a step along the way,

And an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

This is an excellent prayer and helps understand that something like planning is really kingdom work. Hopefully, its use will extend beyond the page of this volume.