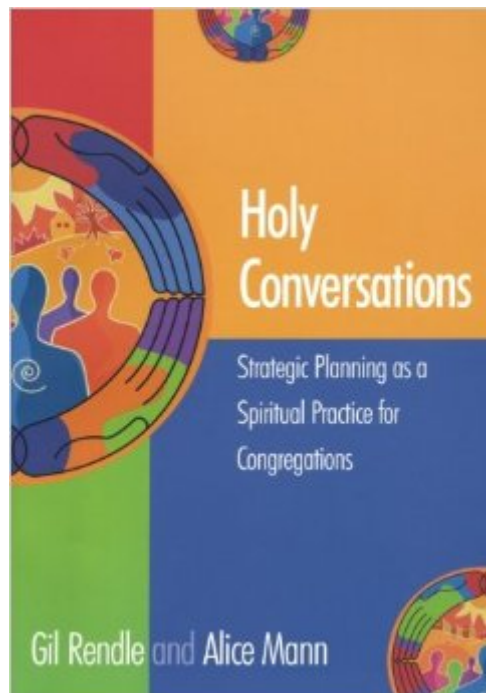


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# Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning As A Spiritual Practice For Congregations



## Synopsis

Planning can be challenging in the contemporary congregation, where people share a common faith and values but may have very different preferences and needs. Much of the literature on congregational planning presents it as a technical process: the leader serves as the chief problem solver, and the goal is finding "the solution to the problem." Rendle and Mann equip congregational leaders with a broad and creative range of ideas, pathways, processes, and tools for planning. By choosing the resources that best suit their needs and context, congregations will shape their own strengthening, transforming, holy conversation. They will find a path that is faithful to their identity and their relationship with God. Resource materials are available to purchasers of the book. E-mail [resources@rowman.com](mailto:resources@rowman.com) for more information.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a great resource and guide for congregations going through the planning process. As a lay member helping our Pastor, it helped me frame questions, lead discussions and develop a spiritual based planning process for our church.

This book is a wonderful resource and encouragement for any churches looking to plan, especially those who want to plan with God. It asks those fundamental questions that we do not seem to remember to ask ourselves: who are we? who are we called to serve? It has more practical resources than you could or should ever use and the authors tell you that - not every exercise will be right for your church. Still, it is nice to have options and it is nice to have a book that actually talks

about discernment instead of trying to co-opt the business model for churches.

If you ever wondered how to do church planning in a spiritual manner, I have a book for you. *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice* by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann doesn't try to separate business approaches and spiritual discernment: it finds a unique way to combine them. The main plea of the book is for church leaders to create on-going spiritual conversations about what is important to them, and what future they believe God is calling their church to. Many styles of spiritual discernment are explained: Ignatian, Methodist, African and Quaker. But the book also covers what (besides number of bodies) makes different sized churches different from each other. It offers two creative ways to explore a church's history. Rendle and Mann talk about what really happens when a pastor asks a congregation to complete survey. Twenty-three appendices cover everything from "Types of Planning" to "A Short Guide to Lectio Divina." This would be a wonderful book if you just wanted to explore deepening the Christian spirituality of groups. It would be a fine book if you just wanted to follow a sound strategic planning process. And it is gold for those who seek a spiritually grounded planning process.

The book helps a congregation look forward and look backwards. As one looks forward, one has to decide which of the three types of planning described are needed. It also looks backwards to ask what type of things (positive or negative) stamped their imprint on a congregation's DNA. One of the resources in the back describes why many mainline churches resist talking about numerical growth or being part of small groups. The book contends that asking three questions (honestly asking them and asking others to help answer them) can be transforming for a congregation. Who are we? Why are we here? Who is my neighbor? The authors suggest that scriptural stories can be claimed to describe a particular church's situation. This story claimed can be liberating and transformative.

Probably the single best book in existence on strategic planning for churches. Based on deep understanding of how churches actually come to change and factors to consider in deciding how fast and at what depth your congregation can move how far in meaningful planning. Deeply spiritual (subtitle: "Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations"), the *Holy Conversations* approach takes seriously the leading of the Spirit and the need to discern that leading. It is not a plan which simply overlays a corporate planning model on the church nor is it a "one size fits all" template, but a book of principles to keep in mind as you construct a "plan for planning" for your congregation -- of which a core element is the structuring (but not too tightly) of conversations in the

course of which they absorb and integrate Bible stories, their own congregational stories, and data concerning both their congregation and the surrounding context) as well as the variety of preferences and alternative futures that surface in conversations. Not every congregation will need -- or be able -- to do a total, comprehensive strategic planning, but the key leaders in the planning process need to be aware of what a comprehensive program looks like so that they can choose which segments they need to help bring about the outcome in their congregation with its particular needs and leadership resources.

My church governing board used this for a year, reading a certain amount each month and then discussing it at the next meeting. It describes three types of planning: Problem planning, which is used to address problems; developmental planning, which can also be called long-range planning and addresses the church's future; and frame-bending planning, which also is used to address problems but in a more radical way to "shake things up." There are lots of diagrams to help the reader visualize the planning process, an exploration of mission and vision statements, and instructions on how to read the congregation's culture -- its way of looking at things. Our church was changing over to "policy governance," where the board turns over the day-to-day church decisions to a council of committees, and this book was a great help. I would especially recommend it for churches that are going through changes, conflict and growing pains.

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