

## Developing Five-Year Plans: A “How-To” Guide

### Why Make Five-Year Plans?

*“People don’t plan to fail – but they fail to plan.” – Anonymous*

The *Rediscover and Recommit* Workshop encourages Via de Cristo communities to develop five goals which they want to accomplish in five years. Setting goals is a terrific way to build purposeful organizations, communicate ideals, and encourage commitment. However, without concrete plans on *how* to accomplish them, those goals often remain only aspirational, little better than dreams. To move from *aspirations* to *inspirations*, goals have to be translated into meaningful and achievable plans. A five-year plan helps organizations think through what they want to achieve, how they will achieve it, and who will be responsible. They help change dreams into realities.

This document is intended to provide some ideas and steps to assist secretariats who want to build a five-year plan, but perhaps need some guidance or processes to get the ball rolling. There is no magic here and some groups may choose other methods to reach the same end. But these ideas are well-accepted and generally have proven successful.

### Let’s Start at the Very Beginning

Building a five-year plan is a lot like a navigation problem. Oddly enough, the first thing you have to figure out isn’t where you are going – it’s *where you are!* Most people focus on where they want to go, but you can’t build a path if you don’t know the starting point.

Begin with an inventory of your community – and start with your strengths. It’s often easy to start by listing all the problems, challenges, and shortfalls of a community. After all, we want to improve things. But starting with the negative can often generate pessimism and lead to a sense that nothing can be done. Instead, celebrate God’s blessings to your community. These are the resources the Holy Spirit is providing and your community can build on them. Studies show that successful organizations focus on what they do best and then work at excelling in those areas. Building on successes encourages people, builds energy, and increases commitment. Small victories lead to even greater effort, which leads to more successes, which leads to...well, you get the picture.

After assessing your strengths, consider your weaknesses. Better still, look at them as gaps or challenges. Nothing is insurmountable – after all, Jesus and you *are* an overwhelming majority. But realistically address areas where your community needs to improve. Perhaps some of your strengths can be used to tackle these challenges.

Quantitative data may prove helpful in assessing trends. How many pilgrims made weekends each of the past five years? How many people have been attending Ultreyas? And consider qualitative (non-numerical) information. How well are sponsors supporting the new Cursillistas? How do the pastors in your area regard Via de Cristo? Assessing the current status of your community and comparing trends over the past few years can help you develop a better understanding of where you are and can stimulate good dialogue within your secretariat leadership and with the members of your community.

## The Vision

Once you have an idea where you are, it is time to develop a vision. Where do you want to be in five years? As with all things in the Via de Cristo ministry, this step needs to be bathed in prayer. Where does God want you to be in five years? We have the right to be enthusiastic and optimistic about the future of our communities as long as we seek and pray for God's vision. After all, we "can do all things through Christ who gives [us] strength." (Phil 4:13) You need not be timid; if God sends you, He will equip you.

Start with a vision statement. It should be bold and attractive, encouraging your membership to be dedicated, committed, and optimistic. It should communicate what you want your community to look like – to *be* like – in five years.

From the vision statement, develop a set of goals that would make that vision a reality. Try to make those goals specific and measurable. Vague goals tend to lead to unfocused efforts. Worse yet, you never can tell when you achieve them. For example, if part of your vision statement is to have "a vibrant 4th Day Community," then one goal might be to have at least 50% of all pilgrims in a renewal group within three months of their weekend. That's specific and measurable. By comparison, a goal of having "more reunion groups," would not be very helpful, since you haven't defined what "more" would look like.

One caution on building goals. Be bold, but don't try to do everything at once. Focus on a handful of areas where your strengths can help you succeed or a few key gaps that are really holding your community back. *Rediscover and Recommit* suggests five goals might be a good starting point. Trying to do too many things simultaneously can lead to diffused efforts and progress might be too slow, leading to discouragement. So ask God to guide you on what His goals are for your community.

## Building a Plan

Once you know where you are and where you want to be, you can begin building the five-year plan. This is nothing more – or less – than a set of specific and measurable steps that support achieving one or more of your goals. Goals, which are often called "ends" in planning guidelines, can be interrelated. For example, a goal of strengthening the fourth-day community might result in greater weekend team commitment or pastoral engagement.

Besides ends, your plan must consider *ways* and *means*. Means are resources that you have *or reasonably can expect to get*. Use your self-assessment to evaluate what means the Lord has placed at your disposal. Means can be people, talents, money, or any other asset that can be used to work toward your goals. This is where some focus on the positive can be very helpful. Perhaps your community is blessed with several great organizers, or you have a significant number of members in a particular geographic area. Putting together a list of resources is akin to a builder evaluating her materials before beginning a new project. If her goal is to build a retaining wall and she figures out she has only a few landscape timbers but plenty of rocks, she probably will create a plan that involves a rock wall.

Ways are *how* you use those means (resources) to achieve the ends (goals). There may be more than one way to get to the goal and it often can be useful to have a team work together to develop proposals on ways to reach the goal. But each *way* proposed should include what *means* will be required. Will the planned ways meet the ends? What is the most efficient or effective way to use the means available?

Ways need to be specific and measurable. They need to help members of the community know exactly what is being done, by whom, and when. For example, a goal might be to increase Ultreya participation by 50% within two years. One way to achieve that might be to hold Ultreyas in at least four new locations within the next year. Another way might be to have at least two Ultreyas involve a service project as part of the activity. And so on. And ways should specify who will be responsible. (As we all know – unless someone is assigned responsibility, a task tends to end up being no one's responsibility.)

Recognize that often multiple proposed ways might use the same means – for example time or money. Will there be enough for all the efforts? Do some activities need to be delayed while others proceed? Balancing ends, ways, and means is the art of building five-year plans. As leadership considers the ways, means, and ends, be realistic. Perhaps some resources are being overtaxed. If that is the case, consider adjusting some of the ways to use different means or adjust timelines to reduce strain. But the discussion around achieving that balance can help a Secretariat work through priorities and develop achievable plans.

Don't try to do too much at once; this can lead to failure and discouragement. And it is often wise to plan for some "small victories" early on. Seeing that progress can be achieved inspires others and can increase commitment. Be willing to accept limited successes and build upon them.

## **Reviewing the Plan**

"In preparing for battle, I have always found plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."  
– D.D. Eisenhower

Five-Year Plans are not static documents, developed and then put on the shelf or followed mechanically for five years. They tend to be iterative. You plan, you work the plan, then you look at the results and adjust the plan. After a year or two, don't be discouraged if the plan needs to be revised. This is normal. Perhaps in some areas, you are ahead of schedule or seeing more rapid progress than expected. If so, consider whether you should expand the goals in that area. Conversely, you may find some parts of the plan that are struggling. Leadership needs to evaluate whether to adjust the goals, change the ways being used, or perhaps abandon that particular goal completely.

Five-Year Plans are not a panacea; they don't solve your problems magically. But the planning process, especially if covered in prayer throughout, can help a Secretariat determine *what* needs to be done, *how* it will be done, with *what resources*, by *whom*, and by *when*. The process can help you build a coherent vision, set priorities, build paths to achieve your goals, and assess where and whether you are making progress. By the grace of God, five year plans can help your Via de Cristo Community serve God even more effectively in your area!