APPENDIX 1

Spiritual Preparation Retreat Outline

Friday Evening

6:00 Dinner

7:00 Study of Seven Letters to the Churches (Rev. 2–3)

Break into groups of two or three and assign the seven churches to the groups. Depending on the number of people on your leadership team, each small group will be assigned two or three of the churches. For each of the churches, they will answer these questions:

- What are the strengths of this church?
- What are the weaknesses of this church?
- What is the Lord's opinion of this church?

Give each group a tear sheet and markers to record their responses.

Bring the groups back together and ask each group to share the strengths and weakness for their assigned churches. As they share, they will post their tear sheets on the walls of the room.

After each group has shared the strengths and weakness, go back around the group and have them share the Lord's opinion of each church.

8:00 Break

8:15 As a transition to the next set of exercises say: "What if Jesus were to write a letter to our church? What would He commend? What would He rebuke? Although we cannot have a letter with the authority of Scripture, we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us discern how the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, views our local congregation. He can help us apply the scriptural truths to our lives and to our church."

Step 1: Our Ministry's Strengths

Keep the entire group together for this exercise. Provide tear sheets to record the responses to the following questions.

Ask the group to list the church's strengths. To generate responses you might want to ask this in several different ways: What do we always do well? What works for us every time? How has God uniquely gifted us as a church body?

Do not rush the group. Allow plenty of time for the group to mention as many strengths as possible. As you move from one tear sheet to another, post the tear sheets around the wall. This is a time of celebration and positive reflection on how God has blessed your church and is using your church.

When you feel all the responses have been given, let the group choose the top five strengths for your church. They will do this by voting. Each person in the group may vote for those they feel are the top five. Record the number of votes for each strength listed beside that strength, then circle the five with the highest number of votes.

When the top five strengths have been determined, it is time to pause to thank God for those strengths. You

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may wish to have five different group members volunteer to voice a prayer of thanksgiving for each of the strengths. You may simply wish to have a time of silent prayer followed by someone voicing a prayer for the entire group.

Step 2: Our Weaknesses
Keep the entire group together for this exercise. Provide tear sheets to write the responses to the following questions.

Ask the group to list the church's weaknesses. To generate responses, ask this in several ways: What are our shortcomings, faults, and failures? What are we not doing well? What should our church be doing that is not being done?

Do not rush the group. Allow plenty of time for the group to mention as many weaknesses as possible. As you move from one tear sheet to another, post the tear sheets around the wall.

This may be a difficult time for your group. Many, if not most, of the responses will not be directed toward specific ministries. For example, "Our church does not do a good job in reaching our community." However, some responses may be ministry specific, such as, "Our Sunday School is poorly organized."

Some people on the group may be responsible for areas of ministry that are thought to be weaknesses for your church. It may be difficult for the group to be open and honest. Encourage openness and frankness, reminding the group to speak the truth in love. Now is not the time to hold back. Part of the purpose of the process of strategic planning is to expose weak areas and determine future actions related to these weaknesses.

You will also need to lead the group to understand the need for confidentiality at this point. People not attending this retreat could be hurt if specific comments about their ministry got back to them.

When you feel all the responses have been given, lead the group to choose the top five weaknesses for your church. They will do this by voting. Each person in the group may vote for his or her top five. Write the number of votes for each weaknesses beside that weakness. Circle the five with the highest number of votes.

When the top five weaknesses have been determined, pause to thank God for what He has done despite these weaknesses. Lead the group to pray for wisdom to strengthen the church's weaknesses. Declare your absolute dependence on the Lord as a church and as a planning team.

Saturday

8:00 Continental Breakfast

8:30 Begin this session by reminding the group of the discussions of the evening before. Without going back through every detail, hit the highlights to set the stage for morning.

Begin with prayer for wisdom.

Step 3: Memories
Our memories are a part of what makes us who we are. They impact the decisions we make today and the plans we have for the future. The same is true of churches. Each church has a unique past that influences the present and the future. This exercise will allow the planning team to begin to get a picture of their past in a way that can help make sense of the present and possibly the future. Surfacing memories as a group can facilitate identifying patterns and discussing issues in the open. With the Holy Spirit's guidance, this exercise may be the most powerful part of the entire planning process.

Make a tear sheet for each decade the church has been in existence. If you church is more than 50 years old, you will only want to go back as far as someone in the group has memories or knowledge of the church. Begin with the decade that is the most distant from the present. (i.e., 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s). Record the responses on the tear sheets as the group responds.

Ask the group to share good memories of the church. Good memories may include such things as:

- New building
- Relocation

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- Date debt was paid off
- Significant revival
- Year of most baptisms

When all good memories have been listed by decade, have a time of thanksgiving through prayer for these blessings you have shared as a corporate body.

10:00 Break

10:15 Make another tear sheet for each decade and repeat the above exercise with painful church memories. Painful memories may include such things as:

- Major church conflict
- Firing of a staff member that created major conflict
- Destruction of a building by fire
- Moral failure of a staff member

Encourage the group members to use real names. The entire group will need to be reminded not to place blame. Absolute confidentiality must be assured.

After all painful memories have been shared, have a time of prayer. Confess times when you have not responded with patience and kindness as a body. Ask the Lord to remove any bitterness or bad feelings that remain.

After the time of prayer, destroy the list of painful memories. Do this as a group to symbolize that you as a leadership group are not going to allow these painful memories to drag you down any longer.

11:15 Break

11:30 **Step 4: Timeline**

Post a piece of butcher paper, 10–12 feet long on the wall. Draw a timeline beginning on the left side of the butcher paper. End the timeline two-thirds the length of the paper. You will use the last third of the butcher paper later in the planning process. Put the date the church began on the far left of the timeline. Put the current year on the right end of the line.

On the timeline write significant dates in the life of the church. Many of the events you will write on the timeline will come from the good memories tear sheets. Add any other dates to the timeline such as the tenure of pastors, first full-time staff positions, etc. As the facilitator, you can come prepared with specific dates, and you can add much of this information to the timeline during the breaks. Invite the group to add any other positive significant events in the life of the church to the timeline.

Then invite the group members to come, one at a time, to the timeline and write on the paper at the appropriate date the one most significant event in their life as it relates to your church. Such events may include their baptism, the baptism of their child, their wedding, the date they joined the church, a specific church service that had life-changing implications on their life, or any number of others.

As the individuals come to the butcher paper to add these personal events, ask them to share in two minutes or less why that event was significant.

Close with a time of prayer, allowing members to voice thanksgiving for what the church has meant in their own life.

Save the butcher paper with the timeline. You will use it again in the planning process.

12:30 Dismiss

Adapted from Neil T. Anderson and Charles Mylander, *Setting Your Church Free* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1994), 171-210.

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