

Church of the Servant CRC

Strategic Planning Task Force

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Dear fellow COS members,

The Church of the Servant, our "local address" as friends and followers of Jesus Christ, has a colorful history and a wide variety of vigorous ministries today. It has been more than a decade, however, since the congregation took the effort to reflect on what it has accomplished and on what might be its "unfinished business" as a vessel of God's grace in the near future. The council of deacons and elders decided last year that COS should engage in a period of reflection, priority setting, and goal making. It named us (listed above) to a strategic planning task force, and charged us with developing a statement of the challenges currently facing this church and the ways in which COS should address those challenges.

"Strategic planning" is a fairly commonsensical idea, based on the belief that every organization can benefit from understanding its own history and character, the setting where it works, the challenges it faces, and the strengths and weaknesses it brings to its ongoing work, then laying out some goals to advance its mission over the near future. The strategic planning task force has been working along these lines, and now we want to get a mid-course review and response from the congregation.

So we are sharing this "interim report," with you. It conveys what we have learned about COS, what we think are some of the challenges facing us, and our best reckoning of the resources COS has to engage these challenges. The next major step will be to propose some goals for the church to pursue in the years to come, but before we start drafting goals, we want to hear from you.

We are asking the following groups to review this report and respond to the fairly open-ended questions at the end of it:

- COS households,
- Standing committees,
- Deacons,
- Elders,
- Pastoral and administrative staff, and
- Additional "town meetings" of all who are interested in providing more feedback

Each group should take some time to discuss the report, and collectively respond to it (via a reporter). We also welcome more open-ended responses, and responses from individuals. **Please send your responses to Rich van Houten by October 1.**

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter. COS was founded on the principle of open decision making, and we cannot conceive of drafting a plan without your advice.

Blessings,

The Strategic Planning Task Force

INTERIM REPORT

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Introduction

Church of the Servant has experienced some remarkable growth in the past decade or so. She has prospered with multiplied members and ministries that range beyond the dreams of her long-time affiliates, while new members have found a welcoming place that enriches their faith and challenges them to new commitment.

The congregation has made these advances because it has faithful members, lay leaders and ministers with exceptional talent and devotion, and God's rich blessings. However, some strains have begun to show. There has been some uncertainty about COS' future course, and to some degree, our recent budgetary difficulties have sharpened our awareness that we have some concerns to address.

Last year, the COS council of deacons and elders decided it was time to develop another strategic plan. It appointed a task force to consider our current situation and to recommend some strategic priorities for the next five to ten years.

Our last strategic plan exercise was almost a decade ago, and it appears to have had a short life. This task force could not even locate that plan in the church files. We do, however, have a full plan from 1991-92, which was more of a landmark for the congregation. So the task force took that plan as our starting point as we began our work.

We thought at first that we might be able to go forward swiftly from that plan, but the first thing we learned from it was how much the church had changed over the past 15 years. So we decided to learn more from the congregation about what it thinks is working well at COS and what could stand some improvement. We made a congregational survey of January 2007 and learned a great deal from it.

The survey, and a variety of additional communications from COS members and leaders, gives us a good start toward our goal, which is to recommend a few major priorities for the congregation, with some concrete goals within those priorities for each area of our common life and work. Priority setting is not a simple task, and we think it will prove more useful in the end if we gather responses and insights from the congregation. So here we present the congregation with our interim findings, and we use this report to consult the congregation about goals they would like to achieve under the broad needs we identify here.

There are five sections to this report:

- I. Our current environment and the changes we have experienced since 1992.
- II. Our current organization and statistical growth patterns.
- III. Growth: the marks of a healthy, growing church and options for adjustments by COS to remove hindrances to growth.
- IV. Our Strengths and weaknesses: Identification of areas we can build on and things we need to correct.
- V. Summary and Questions: Seeking your thoughts about major areas of ministry development.

I. The Church of the Servant: History and Current Situation

From the bright purple sign by the street to the multicolored building at the end of the banner-lined driveway, the Church of the Servant signals right away that it is an extraordinary, if not peculiar, congregation. That is its charm, and indeed, its self-ascribed identity: "NOT your ordinary neighborhood church." COS began in turbulent times, the late 1960s, when a small, dissident fellowship of Christian Reformed people in Grand Rapids formed the "Fellowship of Acts" to practice their Christian faith differently than they were seeing it in the Christian Reformed congregations of their day. By 1973, the Fellowship had received official status as a congregation in the Christian Reformed Church, named the Church of the Servant (COS). It numbered around 30 families. Perhaps the best way to describe the hopes and aims of COS is to quote from the last major planning document, "What We Are" (1991):

COS was formed not as a parish congregation but as a congregation committed to certain goals for the contemporary church. Its aim was that every member should contribute to the life and work of the congregation rather than rely mainly on the council or the pastor. It was the hope and intent that the laity, including women and children, would actively participate in worship and the life of the church. It was hoped that decisions would be arrived at openly and that the work of the office bearers would be rethought. It was hoped that there would be rich fellowship among the members, bridging different ages and sexes, and that Christian compassion would be exhibited to the needy. There was a deep commitment to joyful and vital worship that would include the arts, be contemporary in expression as well as reflect the church of all ages, and be open in enriching contact with Christians of other traditions.

Among COS' distinctive features from the beginning, then, were, first, liturgical and eclectic worship services. These featured musical variety, with historical connections and contemporary expressions; the visual arts; broad participation; and the gifts and leadership of women.

Another key emphasis has been church education, something that is common to mainline and evangelical Protestants, but less robust in Christian Reformed circles, due probably to their emphasis on Christian day schools. For the past 20 years, COS has maintained an educational ministries staff position to assure a strong program.

COS was founded in the agonizing years of the civil rights struggle and the Vietnam War, and one defining feature of the congregation from the start was to engage concerns for justice and peace, what parishioner Nick Wolterstorff called that "mode of human flourishing the Bible calls *shalom*." Early on the church formed task forces devoted to ministries on behalf of peace, hunger, evangelism, and refugees. In more recent years, this commitment to justice and reconciliation also led to an ongoing anti-racism initiative.

COS has experienced a very strong international, "world Christian" outlook for many years. In addition to support for the CRC's more traditional forms of mission sending from North America to the global south and east, COS has developed a variety of contacts, friendships and partnerships with Christian leaders and congregations elsewhere in the world.

Matters of pastoral care, COS members believed, should be an all-member concern, and early on, household fellowships were organized to encourage members to support and care for each other.

Pastoral oversight for the congregation has been a shared duty since the early days, and in the 1980s, as the congregation grew, a staff position was added to organize pastoral work.

From the early days, as the long quoted passage above implies, COS has considered itself to be a "gathered church," bringing together those of like hearts, minds, and expectations for congregational life. It was not to be "a parish congregation," in the sense of drawing mainly from one neighborhood, or to a settled place. For the first twenty years it had no church building of its own. For a time COS held services in another church building on the northeast side of Grand Rapids, and for a time it met in a Christian school building on the southeast side of the city. The decision in 1988 to build a new building was a difficult one, therefore, but in the end the congregation decided that its ability to serve a growing number of families and to organize, sustain or even simply to host a wide variety of ministries would be strengthened if it had a building. Thus the current facility was finished in 1994 and the church built a major addition for education, fellowship and service a dozen years later.

COS resides on the far southeastern edge of Grand Rapids. With a building, it now resides in a neighborhood and has neighbors. Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary share the neighborhood, and the historic ties to the college are, if anything, stronger than before. COS now has about 75 member families with Calvin College connections and there are at least 100 college students who worship here regularly.

Ties to Calvin Theological Seminary were not strong in COS' history before 1994, for in some respects, the seminary was seen to represent modes of CRC life that COS was formed to counteract. Since 1994, however, which was about the time that the CRC and Calvin Seminary began to open congregational leadership to women, COS has developed more collegial ties with the seminary. Pastor Jack Roeda regularly teaches courses in preaching there, members of the seminary board and faculty are now at COS, and a number of parishioners--male and female--have studied there. Proximity has helped build ties as well, since COS is within easy walking distance to the seminary apartments, which are used overwhelmingly by international student families. International students have brought fresh cultural diversity, vibrant witness and worldwide connections to COS.

Also nearby are several large apartment complexes, some of which include subsidized housing for low-income families. Over the past dozen years, COS has hosted a variety of programs that serve this neighborhood, most notably ESL classes for its many immigrant families. COS has developed some programs of its own with this community in mind, such as Bible studies held in the apartment complex, after-school tutoring, last year's summer basketball camp, and what is becoming an annual neighborhood barbecue. These connections fit well with the church's prior commitments to refugee settlement and support, and indeed with its older immigrant heritage.

COS sees itself as a metropolitan church with a far-flung membership, and to some extent the addresses of the congregation bear that out. Some families do in fact reside outside the county, as far away as Holland to the west, Fremont to the northwest, and Ionia in the east. Yet according to the 374 addresses of active participants, 275 live in Grand Rapids proper (222 on the southeast side of the city), and more than 50 live in the close-in suburbs of Grandville, Jenison, Kentwood, Rockford, Walker and Wyoming. The southeastern quadrant of Kent County, then, in which the church sits at just about the middle, is home to the great majority of COS members.

In many ways, therefore, COS is a very different congregation than it was in the 1970s and early 1980s. Instead of a small fellowship of 30 families, it is now a large congregation with more than 400 households and more than 1,000 members. Where once COS was determined to do its ministry

primarily by lay initiative, today there are six paid part-time employees, eight full-time members of the church staff, and four more (three full-time) in the Residents in Parish Ministry program. COS began as a home for dissidents and reformers within the CRC; today most of its members have either little or no personal memory of the old conflicts, or no prior connection to the CRC. Principally through its ties to Calvin College people and programs, COS has gained wide notoriety beyond the CRC. It recently was chosen by the Lilly Endowment to be a national "teaching church" and a site for the Residents in Parish Ministry program. Occupying ground and a building has changed the church too. Plant debt and current costs have become huge financial obligations. At the same time, being physically situated has made COS, which is engaged in so many far-flung causes, more aware of local needs and better equipped to minister to people close by.

In other ways, however, COS still keeps faith with the original vision. Household fellowships persist in congregational life, although there are signs that they need renewal. Liturgical worship, drawing on the visual and performing arts and featuring a broad selection of traditional, contemporary and "world Christian" music, is still a COS distinctive. Women fully participate in the offices of the church, including the pastorate, and the church offices continue to be rethought and reshaped in order to keep them responsive to the congregation's needs. Lay initiative still thrives as members of the congregation continue to organize and engage in widely varied missions.

A recent survey and other recent expressions of concern have revealed, however, that the identity and mission of COS need some careful thought and conversation:

- ◆ Are COS members fully cognizant of the changing shape and character of the church?
- ◆ What are we to make of the recent leveling off of membership growth and giving patterns?
- ◆ Can this complex and busy congregation be more effectively organized and governed? Have the decision-making processes of the church become overly concentrated in too few committees and persons?
- ◆ How can the church sustain and improve its program of education?
- ◆ Are the changes noted above more reflective of drift or of purposeful decisions?
- ◆ How can the church develop stronger lines of communication, both among its internal offices, committees and ministry units, and between leaders and the congregation at large?
- ◆ What kind of congregation should COS aspire and attempt to be?
- ◆ Can this congregation take this occasion to develop as fully defined a vision of COS' distinctive identity and mission as its founders had?

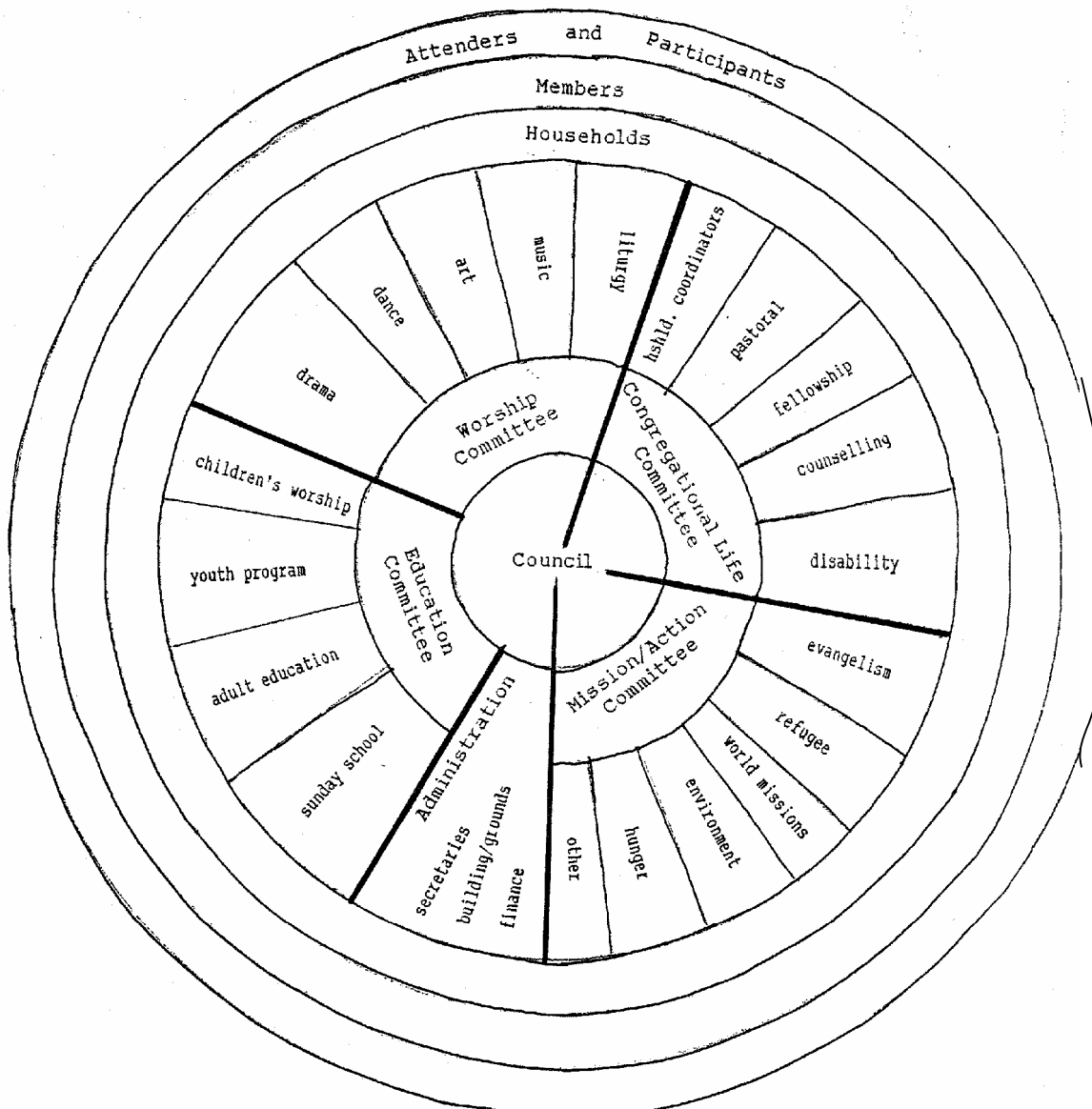
These and other questions are now before the Strategic Planning Task Force, and they will be put before the congregation more broadly. In that way, the decisions that these questions appear to demand will be "arrived at openly," according to the COS founders' hopes.

II. Organization and Size

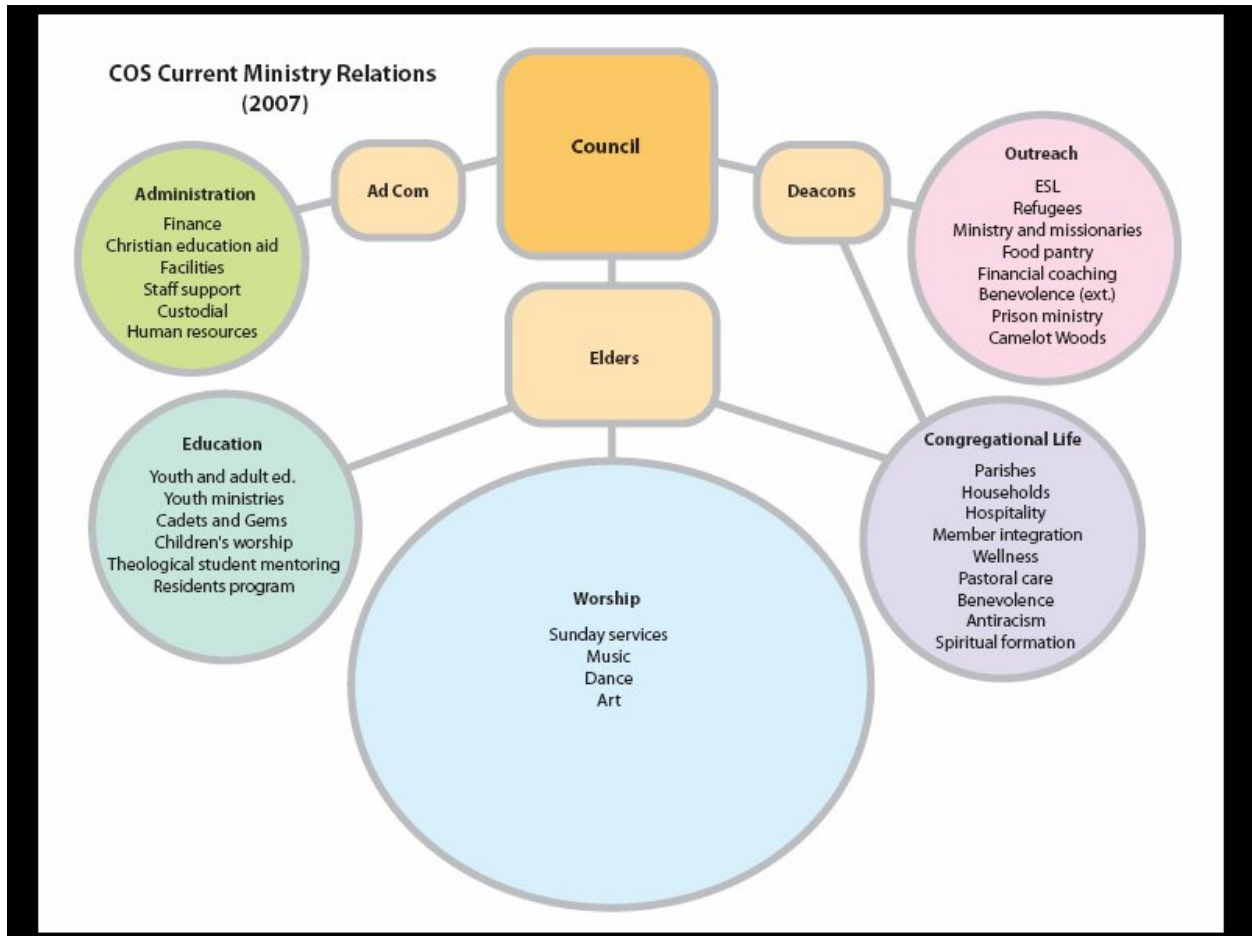
The 1992 strategic plan for COS brought about a few changes in organization. The church consolidated its many committees into four main bodies: Administration, Congregational Life, Education and Outreach. At the same time, COS stressed that households and other small ministry groups were to remain the front line of participation and ministry in COS. We divided the church council into three units: 1) an administrative committee of elders, deacons and staff, 2) the shepherding elders and 3) the deacons.

Our organization chart in 1992 was a circle: it had members and households all around the outside, the four committees in large pie wedges, and a small wedge for administration.

COS Ministry Organization, 1992



Today, however, we think our organization looks like this:

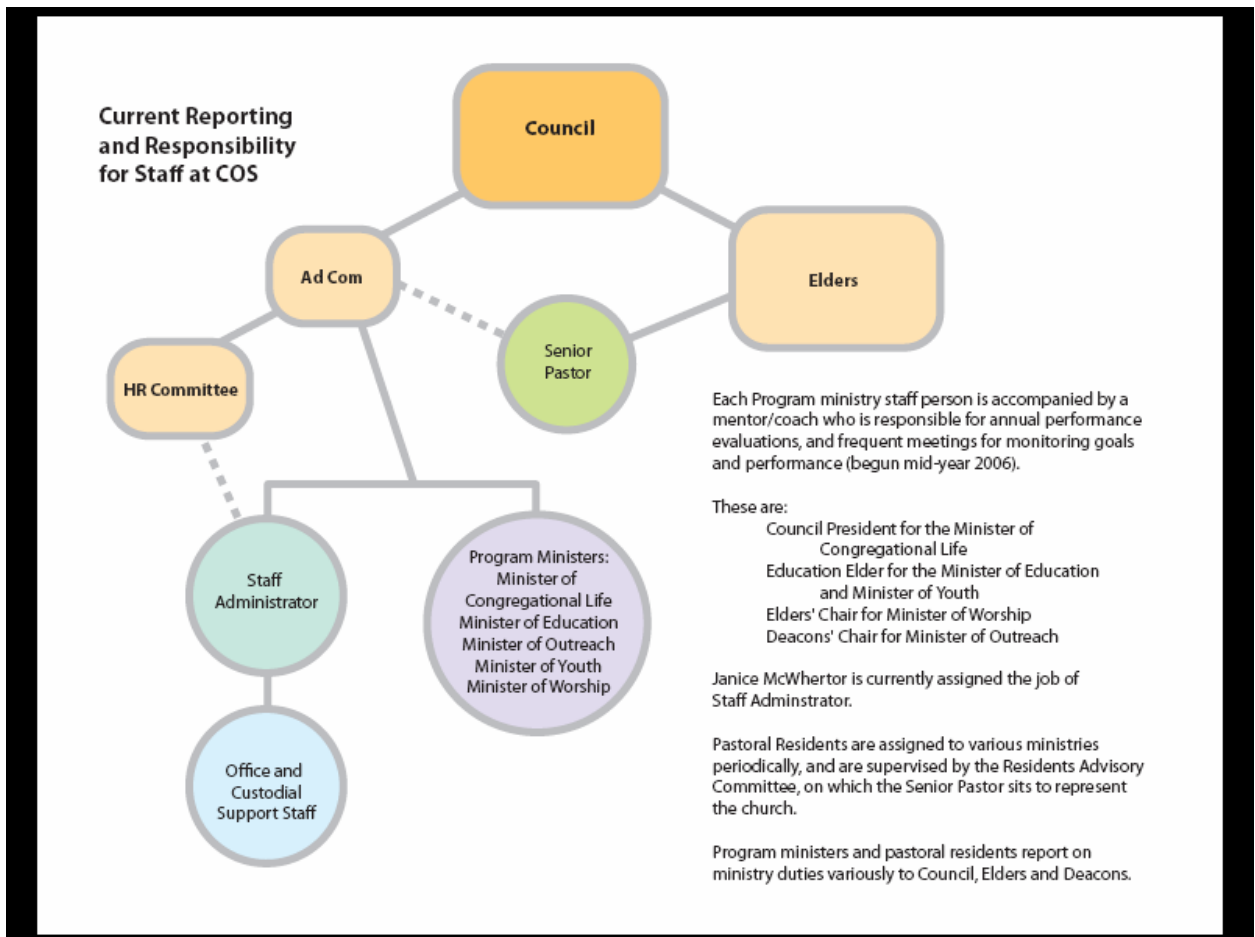


This chart reveals several changes since 1992:

- Our recent congregational survey showed that worship was the most important reason why people are members at COS, by a 2-1 margin. The Worship circle, then, is bigger than the others. It is the entry point for us.
- Administration has become a larger task, so it has assumed its own role.
- Households play an important role in the nurture of our members. Many find these small groups crucial for making close friendships in the church. However, we created the parish system a few years ago, and this is now the primary vehicle for the delivery of pastoral care by the elders.
- The three sectors of the council (ad comm, shepherding elders, deacons) are still visible, and each plays its own role in ministries of the church with oversight of critical functions.
- As in 1992, staff positions are not included on the chart. Clearly staff members have assumed a larger role, but their functions are essentially the same – to facilitate the ministries of the congregation.

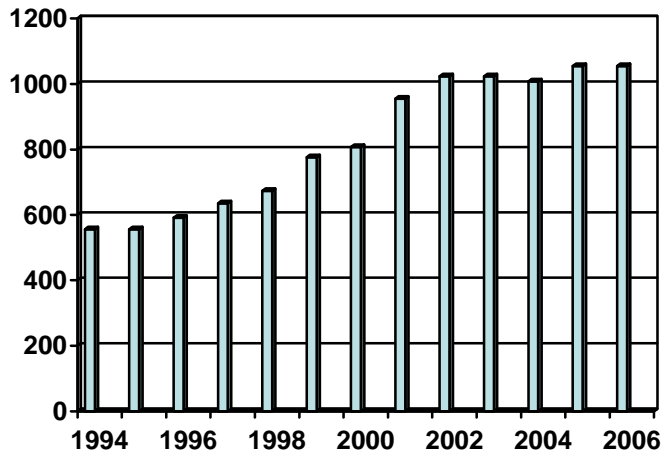
Our staff has grown over the last decade. Some of that growth can be attributed to our congregational growth, but some of it is also due to broader trends. Across COS' local denominational grouping, Grand Rapids Classis East, the total number of church members has hardly changed since 1990, but the number of ministerial program staff has grown from 14 to 70. COS today has a senior pastor, five program ministers, three residents and a resident director (Lilly program), two nurses (volunteers), two treasurers, three custodial staff and four secretarial staff. While many of these are still part time, it is a huge increase.

The growth of staff means that we have had to work on our staff's organization, care and oversight. We added a committee for human resources in 2005. We still have work to do on managing our staff, but today our way of handling it looks something like this:



Since the first circulation of the above chart, the elders, Ad Comm and Council as a whole have offered serious suggestions for refinement of this structure. At the July 2007 Council, the Council will consider modifications to increase the clarity of lines for reporting and accountability. So, this chart will soon be out of date, but it shows how we were in the Spring of 2007.

This major growth in staff at COS has been driven to a great extent by membership growth. COS has doubled in size since 1992. However, that growth has not been in a straight line. Here is our pattern of membership growth since we moved into our new building.



For the first eight years after COS moved into the new building, our congregation experienced a steady growth of about 8-10 percent, and we doubled our size in just seven years. Since 2002, our size has remained more or less constant, slightly more than 1,000 members. In the following table, we see more details about membership.

Membership of COS, 1994-2006

	Total Families	Total Members	Total Professing Members	Total Baptized Members	Baptized Members per Family	Percent Baptized Members
1994	134	556	335	221	1.6	39.7%
1995	143	591	340	251	1.8	42.5%
1996	151	635	364	271	1.8	42.7%
1997	170	673	390	283	1.7	42.1%
1998	181	721	421	300	1.7	41.6%
1999	188	776	444	332	1.8	42.8%
2000	196	807	468	339	1.7	42.0%
2001	243	955	668	287	1.2	30.0%
2002	248	1,023	717	306	1.2	29.9%
2003	254	1,023	717	306	1.2	29.9%
2004	246	1,008	649	359	1.5	35.6%
2005	224	1,055	702	353	1.6	33.5%
2006	238	1,055	682	373	1.6	35.4%

There are some striking things on this chart, especially the jump of 200 adult members in 2001. Perhaps we undercounted in 2000. The other trend worth noting is the continuing healthy contingent of baptized members. According to a study by C. Kirk Hadaway of Faith Communities Today, it is a good sign that we still have a high percentage of families with children. When the ratio of adults to children is about 2:1, as ours is, a church should have a sustainable, even growing membership.¹

Meeting space matters too. Before our move to the new building in 1994, there was similar pattern of growth and stabilization to the one we see now. After COS moved to larger quarters at the Seymour Christian School gymnasium in 1983, we had five years of steady growth from about 375 members to 575. Then there was a plateau to 1994. After we built our present building, we experienced growth again. Room for visitors in our worship seems to have a direct effect on our growth. Clearly people are attracted to our worship services, but we are not seeing net growth in membership. We live in a mobile time and place, and people do come and go. So while we continue to attract new members, we are no longer attracting more than we lose to ordinary moving about. So in the next chapter we want to look directly at the issues pertaining to growth.

¹ Hadaway, *Facts on Growth* (Hartford, CT: Faith Communities Today, 2006), 2-4

III. To Grow

The strategic planning committee has discussed at length the concept of growth, and whether at COS we desire to be a “growing church”. We eventually agreed on the following points:

- “Growth” does not simply mean growth in the number of congregants worshipping at COS; the essential feature of it is growing in "the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2Peter 3:18). God wants us to grow deep as well as wide.
- Being a faithful Christian includes sharing God's good news with others who have not yet embraced it, and welcoming them into God's gathered family.
- Over the years, COS has had a ministry of welcoming those who have not felt at home in more traditional CRC churches. Here where we reside, with 100 CRC congregations concentrated in one county, COS has, might we say, a "rich field of opportunity" for ministering to potentially alienated CRC members.
- A church that does not strive to invite and welcome new members will shrink, since there will always be some who are exiting the congregation (be it by death, leaving this locality, or deciding to make a change in commitments). Sometimes geographical or demographic changes hinder growth, but often there are hindrances over which we have some control. These we need to address.

In light of these factors, it was the sense of the strategic planning committee that growth—broadly and richly defined—is a meaningful objective for COS.

Hadaway's 2006 study, cited above, identified the following features that can be found in most churches that are vigorous and vibrant--holding their own or even expanding in numbers. Some of these items seem obvious, but others are a bit surprising:

1. Located in growing neighborhood
2. Racial diversity
3. Can attract younger families with children
4. Healthy ratio of men and women
5. Clarity of mission and purpose
6. Sense that church is vital and alive
7. Willing and eager to embrace change
8. Little or no conflict
9. More worship services
10. Joyful and "noisy" worship
11. Drums and percussion
12. Children and youth participate
13. Worship has changed recently
14. Plan to recruit members
15. Having an attractive web site
16. Special events or programs for non-members
17. Following up on visitors
18. Healthy financial condition
19. Being close to other denominational congregations
20. Having healthy relationships with neighboring churches
21. Linked to a Christian school

The strategic planning committee observes that most of these features describe COS, and in the few cases where we are experiencing challenges in these areas, we are deliberately striving to improve. Therefore it appears that COS is doing many of the things that situate a church to grow.

Growth in membership seems both desirable and feasible for Church of the Servant over the coming years. Even so, the congregation has been stretched very thin in order to finance its latest expansion to the current building, and is still paying down the debt of the 1994 expansion. It does not seem possible to just now to induce another spurt of numerical growth by building a bigger worship space. So what are our options? Here are some that the task force discussed:

1. **A “church within a church.”** Leverage our recently expanded facilities by growing a new congregation within our current building with a distinctive mission and style. Perhaps a new congregational unit would strive to be deeply multicultural.
2. **A third worship service.** A less radical implementation of the “church within a church” concept could simply be a third worship service, either quite similar to existing services or a different style. A range of options as to when a third service might occur: on Sunday morning (e.g. with services running at 8:30, 10, and 11:15), or on Sunday mid-day or Saturday evening.
3. **A satellite church.** A concerted effort to see the COS model replicated in another congregation or two in our county.

No doubt others in the congregation can think about additional options.

In the end, the task force reminded itself, not all growth is healthy growth. We are eager to see our children increase in size, but as adults we hope to see our bodies stop increasing in size! How can we at COS achieve growth that will increase our spiritual fitness rather than erode it? In some ways, COS seems to have outgrown the congregational organs and systems that served it well at a different stage of life. So the committee turned intently to an examination of the internal health of the congregation, its strengths and weakness.

IV. Strengths and Weakness

A common tool to help planners understand an organization's situation and the resources it has at hand is called "SWOT analysis." SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In this kind of reflective exercise, planners think about internal features first: what are your organization's strengths and weaknesses? Many times, thoughtful planners discover, strength in one facet of your work has a "flip side," which is in fact a weakness as well. Opportunities and Threats, by contrast, refer to factors external to your organization. Planners want to have a clear sense of what their situation is serving up to them now, and what they might encounter in the future. So the task force undertook a SWOT analysis late last fall, and came up with the following results. The survey that we administered to the congregation had some comparable results, which we also include here:

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>	<u>Survey Results</u>
We have a good, functional Building	We have a costly mortgage	Survey made some mention of building being a strength.
We have superb preaching	We are dependent on Jack	Survey had similar comments
Our liturgy is unique and attractive	High liturgical language can be an obstacle	Survey had similar comments
We have an abundance of literary and artistic talent	Our intellectual natures sometime conflict with our outreach goals	Not much mention of this issue in surveys.
We are self-starters, people with a lot of initiative	We can be an intimidating bunch, and we are resistant to following leadership	Not much mention of this issue in surveys.
Our music is appealing and varied		Some members feel the music is too classical and not contemporary enough.
We have a multi-faceted ministry, so that each can follow his/her own interests		
Our staff is highly qualified, with no ongoing conflicts		Survey indicates concern about staffing issues: oversight, accountability, etc.
We are a strong, supportive community		Survey indicates that not all people feel this way. Some see COS as a closed community.
We have a constancy, and do not follow the latest fad	We don't like to change, especially worship.	
We have a good educational program	Adult ed has low participation.	Survey results are mixed: some people see it as a strength, but there is also concern about the educational program (youth and adult)
Our hospitality has improved recently	We need more work yet	Many members feel that COS is not hospitable.
We are a Gateway congregation in and out of the CRC—the last stop for some, the first entry for others		This was not mentioned in the survey results.

Other Strengths mentioned on survey:

1. Worship (sermons, liturgy, music, worship in general)
2. Congregational life (strong community, households, diversity)
3. Outreach
4. Education and Leadership are toward bottom of list

Other Weaknesses mentioned on survey:

- Leadership (staff supervision and accountability; too much dependence on staff; too large a staff; council leadership and communication, concern about finances – inadequate giving and financial planning; concern about hierarchy and poor communication with congregation)
- Congregational life (interconnectedness of members / staff; hard for new members to become part of the group; poor pastoral care; lack of socio-economic and racial diversity; alienation due to double services; households are not always functioning well)
- Education (concern about youth programs; limited adult education)
- Worship (liturgy too stale and verbose; neglect of Reformed doctrine; sermons are too intellectual and doctrinal; politicization during worship; music is out-of-date)
- Outreach (too many programs and not enough volunteers)

The task force spent some time on Opportunities and Threats, but the congregational survey did not. In order to receive the full benefit of a SWOT analysis, our committee will need to focus a bit more on the environments in which COS operates: local, regional, national, and international; plus these environments' cultural, economic, political, and religious dynamics. If we are to see more clearly what threatens COS and what opportunities it might seize, this work needs to be done.

Survey takers did make suggestions, however, about what COS might do in order to build on its strengths and remedy its weaknesses:

Changes suggested by survey:

- I. **Education** (more variety of adult education classes, including Reformed doctrine, theology, how to live out our faith, etc.; improved youth ministry)
- II. **Leadership** (redefine church's mission; reinvigorate Reformed heritage; attention to financial issues and budget, including clarification of giving guidelines; supervision and accountability of staff; council members need to be more welcoming and engaging with congregation; council needs to be involved in outreach; narrow the focus on diffuse ministries)
- III. **Worship** (rethink Sunday evening service – including having Jack preach at it; change music -- more contemporary/praise, more familiar, and more by COS members; simplify wordiness of liturgies and do not print a different one each week)
- IV. **Congregational life** (revive prayer ministries, including prayer chain; improve communication between staff, council, and congregation; strengthen household system; more parish activities; more focus on congregation itself – outreach can be overwhelming)
- V. **Outreach** (limit new ministries – decide what to focus on; involve households in outreach; more volunteers needed)

V. Summary and Questions

With these thoughts and perspectives in mind, the task force believes that this is a good time to take its findings out to the congregation for advice and recommendations. Here, as we see it, are the half-dozen main questions or issues facing COS just now.

1. **How can the church improve in communication?** How can congregational leaders--staff, council, committees and ministries--better inform and collaborate with each other? How can the congregation at large be better informed about the decisions to be made and the activities that are going forward, and be more engaged in ministry as participants? Do our decision-making processes need to be improved in so that more members of the church will feel a part of them? How can you, in whatever way you participate, communicate better?
2. **How can COS gain more effective governance and organization?** When you look at the organizational and staffing charts in this report, do the relationships make sense to you? What might be done differently? How well is each position and group being held accountable? Is there a way for your group or for you to relate more effectively to the governing structure of COS?
3. **How can COS continue to be a growing and healthy congregation?** What do growth and health mean, in the context of a congregation, according to biblical norms? What practical and structural issues does COS confront in order to stay vigorous and vibrant? What ideas do you have about how to address these issues in the years to come? What can your group do to help COS remain healthy and remove hindrances to growth?
4. **SWOT: what strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats does COS face?** After reviewing the task force's work on these questions thus far and the responses to the congregational survey, what else needs to be considered? Any corrections or additions to make? What do you in your role or in your group see as your strengths?
5. **Education/formation:** COS has strengths and weaknesses in these central areas of ministry. What do you see them to be? How can we address the weaknesses, continue to improve on the strengths, and use strengths to seize opportunities? What specifically would you or your group like to see in future nurturing of our membership?
6. **Envisage COS' Future:** Given what you know about trends and conditions in and around COS, what do you expect that the church will be like in the future? If you were writing section I of this report 15 years later, what would have changed, what would have been in continuity with COS' heritage? What should COS be like in the future? Are there some emerging trends that we should run with, and determine to make more definitive of COS in the future? What's your vision?

We are asking every household, every ministry unit, every committee, the church council, and the ministry staff to read this report and engage in a strong discussion of these last six questions. Each group should have a reporter who will write up a summary of the group's thinking. As stated in our cover letter, **please send your responses to Rich van Houten by October 1, 2007.** COS was founded on the principle of vitally engaging the whole congregation in decision making, so here is a golden opportunity to participate.