

SHOW ME THE WAY

STRATEGY AS MISSIONAL MAP

Churches with a simple process for reaching and maturing people are expanding the kingdom. . . . Conversely, churches without a process or with a complicated process for making disciples are floundering. As a whole, cluttered and complex churches are not alive.

—Thom Rainer

IN 1999, THE U.S. MINT LAUNCHED AN INITIATIVE to develop the strategic thinking of its employees. The important meeting was limited to twenty-five people, who were invited to apply from any level within the organization. More than 150 employees applied. The twenty-five slots were filled not just with executives but also with production managers, accountants, and even a custodian. One of their assignments was to design a graphic that would show all of the steps going into making a coin, a complex process that only a few people understood from start to finish. Development of this simple little graphic led to dramatic results. As *Fast Company* magazine reports, “After the U.S. Mint retreat, the depiction of the coin-minting process was turned into posters that now hang in every Mint location. Just sharing that information allowed each Mint employee to see how his or her job related to the big picture—and how changes that they might make in their jobs could ripple through the rest of the process. The changes that employees themselves suggested over the next year helped the Mint increase production from twenty billion coins in 1999 to twenty-eight billion in 2000—without increasing the resources required to produce them.”¹

Strategy = Quantum Leap Clarity

The results at the U.S. Mint testify to the importance of having a clear map that shows how things get done. If you have a map, the effectiveness of your mission will go through the roof. For the mint it was a 40 percent increase of efficiency. Would you like to improve your assimilation process by that much in one year? Strategic clarity can birth a quantum leap in your ministry.

In 1999, Ken Werlein started Faithbridge United Methodist Church in Northwest Houston with a white-hot vision and clear strategy. Five years and a thousand people later, it came time to reclarify and refocus for the future. Was the secret to their future finding something new? No. The key was going back through the original Vision Pathway. The team spent seven months refining their Vision Frame together. They discussed at length how success had caused them to drift from their initial strategy. Like a busy household full of kids, they realized that more people, more staff, and lots of energetic ministry quickly led to cluttered ministry mind-set.

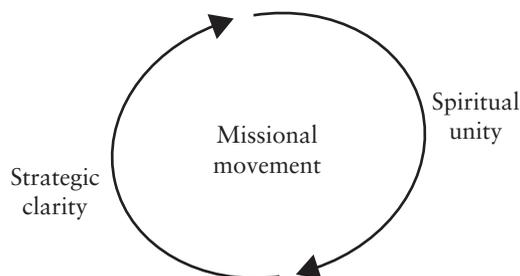
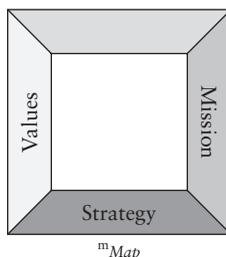
At a size when many churches begin to plateau, Faithbridge's attendance doubled over the next eighteen months. To what does Ken attribute the quantum leap in growth? He would tell you two primary things. The first factor was moving into a larger permanent building that seemed to legitimize their presence in the community. The second was regaining fundamental clarity on their strategy.

Defining Strategy as Missional Map

As we move to explore strategy as Missional Map (^mMap), keep in mind that 98 percent of churches in North America are not functioning with this piece of the Vision Frame. Many have some kind of expression for mission and values, but not for strategy. The absence of strategy, as I am defining it, is the number one cause of ineffectiveness in a *healthy* church. Note my qualification. By healthy, I mean that there is some foundation of spiritual unity in the church and trust among the leaders. Unfortunately, many churches think that being more effective is simply a matter of trying harder, being more obedient, or praying more. The battle belongs to the Lord, but the Lord also asks us to prepare the horse for battle. In other words, kingdom effectiveness and missional movement require more than spiritual unity; they require strategic clarity (see Figure 14.1).

The ^mMap is the piece of the Vision Frame that brings this crucial dimension (Figure 14.2). It is defined as *the process or picture that demonstrates how the church will accomplish its mandate on the broadest*

Figure 14.1. Missional Movement

Figure 14.2. The Vision Frame: Strategy as ^mMap

level. This map, or strategy picture, is like a container that holds all church activities in one meaningful whole. Without this orientation, individuals within the organization will forget how each major component or ministry activity fits into the mission.

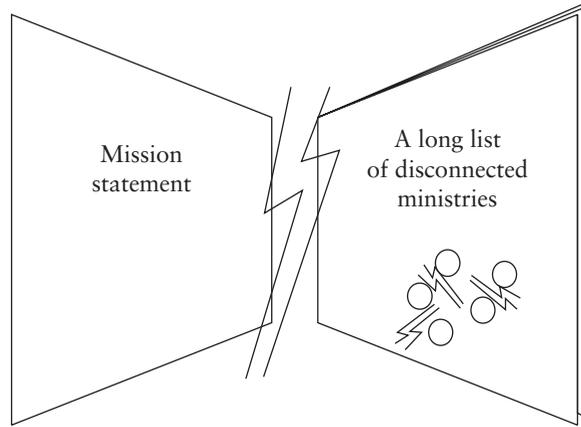
The ^mMap can be described as:

- The church's organization logic for achieving the mission
- The pattern of how ministry fits together for fulfilling the mission
- The rhythm of church life as the body of Christ on mission

The word *map* implies that the strategy serves as both a locator and a guide. Think of the "you are here" map at the mall. It orients you in the middle of a three-level, one-hundred-store complex. Then it helps you find your way. The ^mMap does the same; it orients you in the complexity of a church environment and guides your next step. Keep in mind that about 50 percent of the people in our churches have never taken a step beyond the worship service itself.

Figure 14.3. Typical Church Brochure

No strategy = Meaningless ministries = Confusion about next steps



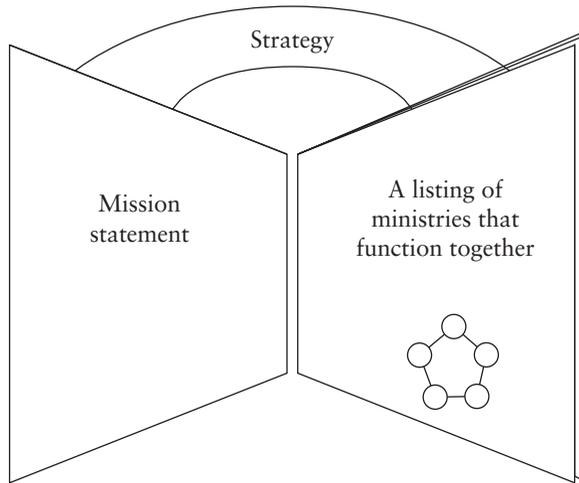
To clarify why churches need a strategy, imagine this scenario. You walk into a church you have never attended and pick up a guest brochure at a welcome center. On the inside flap you see a nice mission statement. Then on the next page (and the rest of the brochure) you see umpteen ministries, listed from A to double Z. As you stare at the brochure, a paralytic effect ensues. “What in the world do I do next?” you momentarily wonder. Then you choose to do nothing at all (Figure 14.3).

This guest scenario reveals a threefold problem for most churches that have no strategy or ^mMap. First, they have too many ministry or program options. Second, the ministry options have no relationship with one another. Finally, the ministries themselves have no connection to the mission—in fact, never the two shall meet. Another way to say it is that ministries have no *vertical* alignment with the mission and no *horizontal* alignment with each other. This creates complexity and confusion for people, which is hard for most pastors and ministry staff to appreciate. Individuals stay lost with regard to where they are and what to do next. For the average attender, ministries exist in a disconnected soup of meaningless activity.

With the ^mMap, your church has a much needed strategy bridge between the mission and all of the activities. The strategy becomes a powerful connector not only to the mission but for the individual ministries as well. In this connection, the ministries find their meaning and programs find their purpose. The relationship between ministries yields clarity for everyone, from staff to core leadership to members and to guests.

Figure 14.4. Church Brochure with ^mMap

Strategy = Meaningful ministries = Clarity about next steps



In the church culture, people are attuned and structure is aligned. Members know not only “why we exist” but “how we get there together.” To go back to our guest scenario, the ^mMap brochure would show the newcomer a simple and obvious pathway of involvement (Figure 14.4).

The Good Samaritan and the “Bad” Martha

When I suggest that churches might have too many ministries, some grow concerned. When sharing the perspective of less is more, I picture one disagreeable saint who practically belched out, “Isn’t it possible that doing less is actually just . . . doing less?” Yes, I suppose it is, but that misses the point.

Consider an interesting juxtaposition of stories in the gospel of Luke. In chapter 10, the familiar passage of the good Samaritan constitutes the quintessential snapshot of service—being a neighbor to the needy within one’s sphere of influence. Right after this important teaching event, Jesus enters the home of Mary and Martha with his disciples. The two sisters respond to Jesus’ presence differently. Mary sits and listens at Jesus’ feet. But Martha is “distracted by all of the preparations that had to be made” (Luke 10:40). To make matters worse, Martha blurts out a complaint about Mary’s passivity. But Jesus mildly rebukes her: “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the better. . . .”

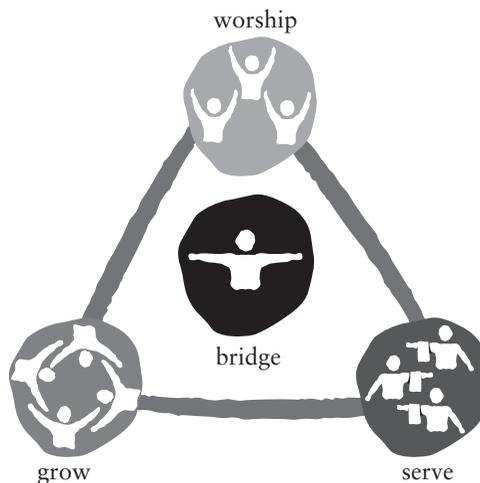
So on the heels of the famous parable we see Jesus giving a corrective on pursuing service for service's sake. He ultimately defines *us*, not our “service to him.” Is it possible that Luke brilliantly places these two stories side-by-side as if to say, “You had better spend your life ready and willing to serve” on the one hand and “you had better be careful not to be distracted in too much service” on the other? There are a lot of Martha churches out there, and defining your *mMap* will help you reduce the distractions of many things, even those “good things” that are enemy to the best.

Illustrating the Missional Map

Let's take a peek at Faithbridge's *mMap* to gain the benefit of an illustration before moving on. At Faithbridge the *mMap* has four components: three weekly time commitments held together by the lifestyle of “being a bridge of faith to people every day.” The three time commitments are represented by three venues offered each week: (1) worship services, (2) grow groups, and (3) serve teams. These are the three standing invitations for church involvement and the church's simple process for making disciples. At Faithbridge, the people call this the strategy of “worship + 2.” The *mMap* is represented by the icon in Figure 14.5.

This picture represents how the church accomplishes its mission on the broadest level—its operational logic and pattern for ministry. No program exists without some relationship to this strategy, and no guest or member encounters a random menu of programs without first seeing this *mMap*.

Figure 14.5. Faithbridge UMC *mMap* Icon



Simple Design Equals Vibrant Growth

Let's consider more fully the advantages of this critical piece in your Vision Frame. The *mMap* brings profound benefits to both the personal side and the organization side of your church's ministry. Think of it like two sides of the same coin. Each side has a corresponding benefit, "for me" and "for us." Using Faithbridge as an example, let's explore the benefits.

FEWER CHOICES FOR ME, SIMPLER STRUCTURE FOR US. Because the how of the mission is organized around a few highly developed ministries, the first benefit for people is that there are fewer choices. People no longer want endless options. A marketing test conducted recently gave people the option to purchase jellies from two sample platters in a grocery store. One sample platter had twenty-four samples and the other had six. The result? The tray with only six samples sold ten times more!² One time I was developing the *mMap* for a church that had an executive chef in the Vision Pathway process. He was enthused about the process and understood the less-is-more philosophy. He told me, "In the restaurant business we have learned that the fewer specials you have, the more specials you sell." That is exactly what a strategy or *mMap* enables your Church Unique to do: serve up a few great ministry specials.

At Faithbridge, they serve three specials, and three specials only! The average church, however, offers five to twelve separate ministry opportunity invitations each week. One could easily burnout on a weekly diet of Sunday morning worship, Sunday afternoon life enrichment seminars, Tuesday night Bible study, Wednesday night rehearsal after the Wednesday night service, and Friday morning men's prayer breakfast.

The opportunity of fewer choices for the individual allows a correspondingly simpler organizational structure in the church. The work of organizing, staffing, and budgeting ministry becomes easier with fewer balls to juggle and less clutter in the closet.

CLEARER PATHWAY FOR ME, REAL SYNERGY FOR US. Fewer options is not about doing less in and of itself; it's about helping people develop relationally and with spiritual maturity in the body of Christ. But it doesn't happen automatically. Fewer options become meaningful when they exist in relationship to one another and show a clear pathway. In Faithbridge's example, you see a triangular pathway with multiple entry points. Worship is at the top of the triangle, representing the primary entry point.

The corresponding benefits to the staff are numerous, but all are rooted in the opportunity for real synergy. Ministry is no longer measured by “butts in seats in my ministry area” but by how people progress through the *Map*. Because the pathway is clear, leadership teams share a common goal: they know what it means to score a touchdown together. For example, the Faithbridge small-groups pastor can celebrate when someone stops double dipping by attending two small groups and gets involved in a serve team instead. Another benefit to the leadership team is the ability to readily decide what fits and what doesn’t. With a clear pathway, it is more obvious when programs or initiatives create a counterflow or distraction to the defined process. Likewise, the staff can continually experiment to create initiatives and events that enhance assimilation through the pathway. On this note, I salute the mantra initiated by Andy Stanley: “Think steps, not programs!”³

BETTER QUALITY FOR ME, FOCUSED ENERGY FOR US. The *Map* allows the church to channel more resources in the form of time, money, creativity, prayer, and planning into the best ministry initiatives. The result is a better experience for all aspects of “life together.” It is important not to read consumerism into the idea of quality. It is a quality of spiritual substance as much as it is clean restrooms and tight harmony. Is your teaching better with three sermons to prepare each week, or one? Do the worship team members experience meaningful community before they lead or not? Are you constantly worn out as a spiritual leader, or are you attending to your people with energy and passion? By *quality* I mean the quality of life Jesus referenced when he talked about “life to the full” (John 10:10).

With your *Map*, the collective potential of your leadership is as effective as sunlight shining through a magnifying glass. What was mild and “effect-less” becomes concentrated and potent—even burning hot. At Faithbridge, leaders log many hours, not talking about philosophy of ministry issues and evaluating all kinds of new programs but in working toward improving their worship +2 strategy. They focus on doing more of what they do best.

MORE LIFE FOR ME, LESS ACTIVITY FOR US. For the individual, the *Map* means more life—that is, more life change, and more life outside of church to be the church. In the end, the greatest argument for the *Map* is that it frees people from overprogrammed environments to embody the life of Jesus in the world. When I left church staff to start consulting years ago, I stopped going to a Wednesday night service. Permanently. I am now a better dad and neighbor because I quit that habit.

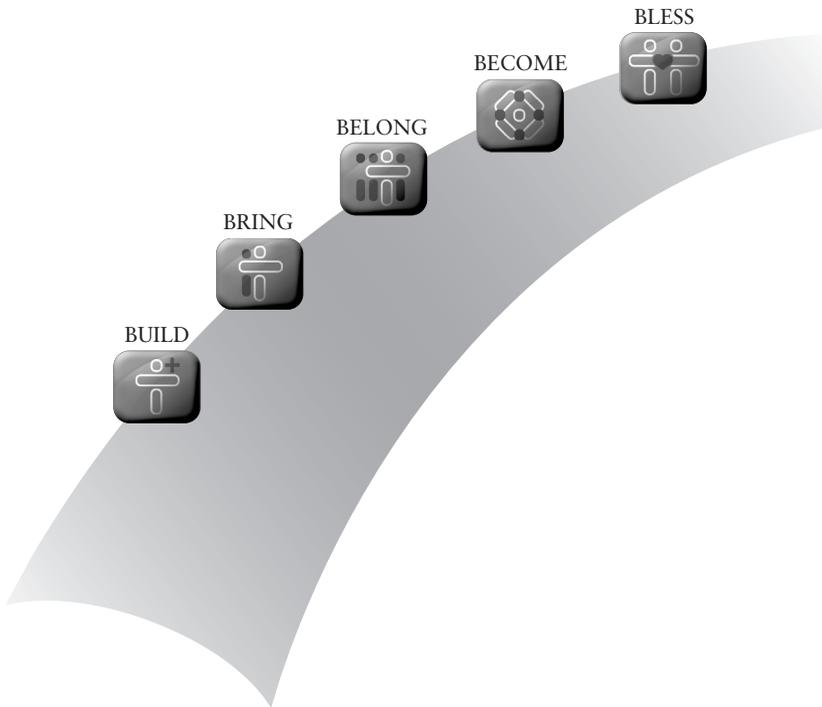
The corresponding benefit for the staff and other church leaders is nothing short of sanity. Not all activity is progress; the blood, sweat, and tears of many pastors are the fuel of a church machine with little life-change output. Developing the ^mMap for your church is critical not just to leading but to living a life worth giving away to those who follow us.

^mMap, Take Two (and Three, and Four)

Here are a few more examples to inspire your own journey toward a unique ^mMap.

CALVARY BAPTIST, CLEARWATER, FLORIDA. Calvary’s mission is “building relationships that bring people to dynamic life in Christ.” In the Vision Pathway process, the team developed the ^mMap to show five components that describe the journey in accomplishing the mission. It is represented by the tagline “For life’s journey.” Each step has its own icon, and the overall ^mMap is referred to as “signs for life’s journey” (see Figure 14.6).

Figure 14.6. Calvary Baptist ^mMap Icon



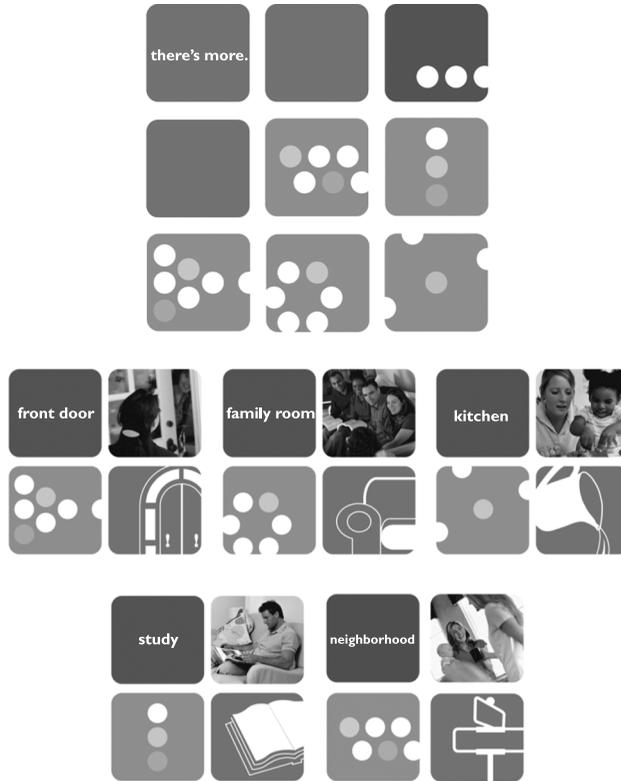
Here is the meaning of each step:

- *Build* means to build relationships. The icon represents always being willing to add someone to your life while being intentional for Christ.
- *Bring* represents bringing yourself and others to worship on weekends.
- *Belong* represents the life-groups component of the strategy (Calvary does on- and off-campus small groups).
- *Become* is the sequence of equipping seminars offered seasonally at the church; here we use the baseball diamond to represent a curriculum pathway.
- Finally, *bless* is the lifestyle of service both inside and outside the church.

Again, as with Faithbridge, everything at Calvary is connected to this clear ^m*Map*. Even the internal language is rooted in the strategy vocabulary. A grand opening was promoted as the “Big Bring.” When the church launched off-campus small groups, they called it “Belong 2.0.” One special initiative to serve the community was coined “Blessfest.” By aligning their communication, the church helps keep everyone focused on the vision.

DISCOVERY CHURCH, ORLANDO, FLORIDA. When Discovery Church developed its ^m*Map*, the inspiration came from the metaphor of a home (developed before North Point’s became popular) where new rooms represented new “discoveries” about Jesus. Their ^m*Mandate* is “to lead people to discover their home in Christ.” As a media-savvy and innovative church, Discovery needed colorful and multiple graphic images to create a multifaceted communication approach that would help people understand their strategy (see Figure 14.7). The strategy unfolds as follows:

- The front door represents their weekend services.
- The family room is their small-group community.
- The kitchen represents ministry and volunteer teams.
- The study reminds people to encounter Jesus personally each day through prayer and bible study.
- The neighborhood icon reminds people to live intentionally for Christ where they live.

Figure 14.7. Discovery Church ^mMap Icon

The first component is the use of dots to show connection to the logo (the mark of the upper right hand corner of the master icon). The three dots in the logo show an ellipsis; there is always something more to be discovered in Christ. The use of these dots for strategy components creates a playful, media-driven graphic that conceptualizes aspects of each component. The second component is a house graphic as an illustration to show visual connection to the specific part of the home. The third aspect of the interactive icon is the photographic style, which can also be used to show connection to the home.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, HOUSTON. When First Presbyterian developed its ^mMap, missional emphasis was carried through the idea of a lifestyle of inviting (represented by the “i”), that is, inviting people to know Christ and experience the life he offers (Figure 14.8). This key

Figure 14.8. First Presbyterian Houston ^mMap Icon

step in the cycle of the ^mMap is the beginning and ending of everything the church does, indicating by a swoosh that begins and ends at the *i*. (The two parts of the swoosh come from their mission, which includes “engaging minds and guiding hearts.”) The *w* represents worship, and the *g* represents “grow” in Sunday school, where components of teaching and fellowship come together in a traditional on-campus format. The *s* represents areas of service. Again, everything at First Presbyterian is connected to these four ^mMap components.

Every Church Needs a Strategy

Please note that having an ^mMap does not represent a certain way of being the church. Rather, it is simply being clear about how your Church Unique works. To illustrate, consider the differences in the four examples of this chapter (Table 14.1).

Strategy Development in Recent History

The history of churches that have a strategy is pretty short. Here are the five most notable checkpoints in development of the ^mMap or strategy as I have defined it.

Table 14.1. Four Unique ^mMap Structures

Church	Heritage	^m Map Structure	Graphic Presentation
Faithbridge	Methodist	Mosaic	Organic, relational, literal icons
Calvary	Baptist	Linear	Clean, progressive, stylized icons
Discovery	Nondenom- inational	Interactive	Bold, innovative, conceptual icons
First Presbyterian	Presbyterian	Cyclical	Traditional, elegant, typographic icons

Rick Warren's Baseball Diamond

Popularized through the release of the 1995 book *The Purpose Driven Church*, many churches have “stepped up to the plate” and use the diamond. The diamond is ingeniously clear and offers a simple progression. With the missional orientation, however, two problems emerge: (1) the metaphor suggests running by yourself, which punts the value of community, and (2) when you cross home plate the implication is that you have scored—you’re done. So much for discipleship as a process! The most unfortunate reality with the baseball diamond, however, is that nine of ten churches misuse it as a strategy by watering it down to be a curriculum pathway only. This is not how the diamond was intended to be used.

Bill Hybel's Seven-Step Strategy

The Willow Creek Community Church strategy was made popular through the increasing attendance at Willow’s conferences, starting in the 1990s and continuing today. The first three steps of the strategy were “build a relationship with the unchurched,” “share a verbal witness,” and “invite to a seeker service.” At their August 2007 Leadership Summit, they announced results of a significant study in a book titled *Reveal*, which exposed the need to revisit their strategy. The pivotal discovery is articulated as, “Involvement in church activities does not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth.”⁴ I appreciate the way Willow Creek has been transparent in sharing what they are learning. As they rethink their strategy, they admit freely that their vision for a new strategy is still developing. One observation that guides their current thinking is the desire to

“move people from dependence on the church to a growing interdependent partnership with the church.”⁵

Andy Stanley’s Three Environments of the Home

North Point’s strategy is popularized by its Catalyst and Drive conferences, which have gained momentum in the previous decade. The home metaphor is wonderfully relational and intuitive, following a three-step progression from foyer to living room to kitchen, to represent the kinds of ministry that people must encounter to be in a growing relationship with Christ.

Auxano’s Consulting and Creative Team

In 2001, members of our team coined the term “strategy icon” and pioneered a process for development of the ^mMap for hundreds of churches across the country. Driven to help churches discover their own DNA, we embedded the ^mMap in our unique brand development process.

Thom Ranier’s Simple Church

Published in 2006, this is the first book dedicated to the idea of having a clear, simple process for disciple making. Thom used his research base to confirm that “there is a highly significant relationship between a simple church design, and the growth and vitality of the local church.”⁶ I am delighted that Thom heralds a message so many need to hear.

Summing It Up: Wal-Mart, or Starbucks?

Both Wal-Mart and Starbucks are supersuccess retailers in North America. Wal-Mart attracts people because of how many low-priced products it can cram on the shelf. Starbucks attracts people because it does one thing well: serving coffee in the people business. In fact, quality is so important to Starbucks that their stores don’t have microwaves even though they serve hot beverage.

Is your church a Wal-Mart or a Starbucks? Does your church exist to put as many programs on the shelves as possible, in hopes that more people will come? Or is your church a Starbucks, providing a stunningly clear, quality process for missional living that makes disciples? Before leaving this chapter, remember this defining principle: *programs don’t attract people; people attract people.*

Table 14.2. Benefits of the *mMap*

Church Without a Strategy (More Is More; Wal-Mart Approach)	Church with Strategy (Less Is More; Starbucks Approach)
Churches are stuck thinking that more programs means more ministry	The <i>mMap</i> shows how to accomplish the mission with a few right ministries
Churches are deceived by the myth that people want more choices	The <i>mMap</i> clarifies a simple pathway of involvement
Churches inadvertently think that time at church equals spiritual maturity	The <i>mMap</i> limits and stewards time “at church” to release people to “be the church”
Churches can’t say no to their people’s ideas even when the ideas are ineffective	The <i>mMap</i> filters which ideas fit best and which ones don’t fit
Churches allow an immature knowledge-centered spirituality to dictate program offerings	The <i>mMap</i> presents and guides people through a balanced process of discipleship
Churches make religious consumers	Churches make Christ followers

There is real beauty in clarifying, focusing, and strengthening the ministries as defined by your *mMap*; the people who are growing in the process will take other people along with them (Table 14.2). Growing people grow people. Consuming people consume programs. We cannot miss the way of Jesus in this regard. At the end of the Christian era, we cannot expect a Wal-Mart approach to have sustained viability. With a strategy or *mMap*, your church can develop its unique approach to growing disciples.