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The power of asset mapping: how your congregation can act on its gifts

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on strategic planning not simply as an organizational or administrative process but as a spiritual practice for congregations to engage, especially around the questions: Who are we now? What is God calling us to do and to be now? Who is our neighbor now? I also appreciate their perspectives on leadership, primarily helping people and congregations participate in “Holy Conversations”!

This is a storehouse of treasures that can help strengthen leadership particularly at the congregational level, but also in judicatories and in seminaries. It is also a text that I commend to seminarians and to seminary professors teaching in practical theology.

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The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts

Luther K. Snow
Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004
148 pages, \$18.00 Softcover

The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts is a unique resource for pastors and congregational leaders. While there is no shortage of books and articles on congregational vitality and renewal, few of them are as versatile and broadly applicable as this one. In a refreshing twist, and contrary to the conventional order most often taken by authors, Snow moves from first presenting a practical application of the “asset mapping” procedure, then to explaining the theory behind it and finally to theological reflection on it.

Thus *Power* is divided neatly into three sections: *The What*, *The How*, and *The Why*. In the first section, Snow outlines the three-step process of asset mapping in a “Quick and Simple Experience,” a convenient guideline giving enough practical information for the venturesome reader immediately to begin facilitating a group through such a process. This three-step process involves recognizing a group’s assets and resources, connecting them together in creative

ways, and mobilizing people to act on those new associations.

In the second section, Snow goes through each of the three steps in detail and gives additional information and resources for the would-be group facilitator. There is also a chapter describing various situations in the church in which asset mapping can be used and a chapter focusing on how groups can reflect on and learn from the process after the fact.

Finally, the third section talks about why asset mapping works and the dynamics at play behind the process. Here Snow talks about “open-sum thinking” and escaping from cycles of negativity among other things. The book closes with an epilogue focusing on biblical and theological support for asset mapping.

In essence, asset mapping is a way of recognizing and lifting up the assets and gifts of a group of people over against its deficits and inadequacies. Even perceived needs are to be turned on their head and seen as gifts and assets. In doing so, people are mobilized and empowered to use those gifts in new and creative ways. The basic truth of the method is reminiscent of such movements in the past like “win-win” negotiation and the “power of positive thinking” which have now become firmly entrenched in the popular mind.

The Power of Asset Mapping is written in a conversational tone and in an easy to read format. Sprinkled throughout the book are inspiring stories and experiences drawn from Snow’s many years as a consultant sharing asset mapping for rural churches and communities. The book’s greatest strength is that it is eminently practical, and the asset mapping procedure that Snow lays out can be applied to just about any setting both within and outside the congregation. However, its broad applicability is probably also its weakness. I was left with the impression that though useful, its application in the church was not much different than in any other social organization despite Snow’s brief addendum of theological reflection. Nevertheless, pastors and church leaders will undoubtedly find this book helpful and can quickly and easily apply its principles to local settings. It will both empower churches to recognize their many gifts as well as challenge them to act in greater faith on those gifts.

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