

EOORC | Setting Our Sights 2026–2028

Strategic Plan | Summary

Where We Are

EOORC stands at a watershed moment. The church it serves is changing. The Toward 2035 national initiative has named the reality of significant decline with clarity and courage, and has called every council to respond with faithful imagination.

The 2024–2025 plan was ambitious and well-intentioned. It was also spread too thin. Twenty-one activity streams outpaced available capacity. Staff transitions cost nine months of productive effort. The central lesson: doing fewer things well serves the church better than doing many things partially.

What the Data Tells Us

- 93% of EOORC respondents support Toward 2035 as a direction
- 62% familiar with Toward 2035 ~ 5th highest nationally
- The central challenge is credibility, not vision
- Emotional response: hopeful but heavy. Grief, fatigue, and real skepticism rooted in past failures

What Congregations Say They Need

- Support reaching beyond their walls (55%)
- Help becoming more multigenerational (48%)
- Connection with nearby congregations (42%)
- Resources to discern their future (36%)

The data gives voice to what many across EOORC already know and feel. Communities of faith are carrying real questions of sustainability, leadership, identity, and purpose. There is strong support for the broad direction of Toward 2035, but there is also grief, fatigue, and understandable caution about whether change will be accompanied well. This plan is shaped by that tension: the need to move with courage, while also building trust, clarity, capacity, and care along the way.

For Such a Time as This

The theme of this Annual Meeting, “for such a time as this,” offers a fitting frame for this plan. In Esther’s story, the question is not whether the moment is easy, clear, or without risk. The question is whether those entrusted with responsibility will recognize the moment before them and act with courage, humility, and faithfulness. EOORC stands in such a moment. This plan does not presume that we can control the future of the church. It does affirm that we can attend faithfully to the responsibilities now before us: strengthening communities of faith, supporting leadership, clarifying regional systems, and creating space for new and collaborative ministry to emerge.

Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this. Esther 4:14

How This Plan Works

This plan is built on three disciplines learned from 2024–2025.

Small-batch focus. EOORC will focus on no more than three active regional-wide priorities at any one time. This gives us permission to say “not yet,” so that what we do take on can be done with care, clarity, and follow-through.

Outcomes, not activities. We will track whether anything changed in the system, not only whether an activity happened. The question is not simply, “Did we do the thing?” but, “Did it make a difference?”

Permission for the strategy to change. Built-in review cycles at six months and annually will allow EOORC to learn, adjust, continue, pause, or release work as needed. Fidelity to this plan means fidelity to the learning, not rigid attachment to the original document.

Change management is not a separate program in this plan. It is woven throughout. EOORC is not managing an institution through a difficult period. It is leading adaptive change within a living faith community.

The Four Strategic Commitments

Commitment	Why It Matters	What We Will Do	Outcome by 2028
1. Congregational Health & Sustainability	Congregations need honest self-knowledge and proactive support before crisis narrows their options. This is not about grading communities of faith. It is about seeing clearly enough to accompany faithfully.	Self-assessment framework, Health Dashboard, Vision Keepers Formation Plan, Transition Toolkit, structured accompaniment.	Communities move from reactive survival to faithful, proactive discernment.
2. Resilient & Supported Leadership	Ministry personnel and lay leaders are stretched thin. Isolated leadership cannot sustain change.	Peer ministry networks, lay leadership formation pathway, potential clergy chaplaincy role, Keeping in Touch rhythm. Modular process toolkits or administration clusters.	Leadership is distributed, sustained, and no longer dependent on heroic individuals.
3. Regional Systems & Operational Clarity	When systems are confusing, they consume energy and erode trust. Every improvement to clarity is an act of trust-building.	Process mapping, plain-language pastoral relations resources, Accompaniment Protocol, simplified reporting, trustee toolkit.	Communities feel accompanied, not processed. Trust in regional systems increases.
4. Collaboration, Adaptive Ministry & Emergence	The future is not in isolation. New forms of ministry are already emerging and need intentional support.	Collaborative Ministry Toolkit, new ministry pathways, justice network plans, Faithful Footprints, support clusters, and shared ministry models.	Collaboration becomes a first instinct. New ministry expressions emerge from congregational life and collaboration, not regional programming.

Implementation Phases

Phase	Focus	Key Deliverables
Year 1 2026	Establishing the Foundations	Self-assessment launch. Health Dashboard operational. Vision Keepers Integration Plan begins. Process mapping complete. Peer ministry networks established. Lay leadership baseline survey.
Years 2-3 2027-28	Focused Strategic Action	Targeted accompaniment using Self-Assessment and Dashboard data. Lay Leadership Pathway/Support/Training implemented. Chaplaincy role explored and piloted. Simplified reporting. Collaborative arrangement resources created, supported, and celebrated. Modular toolkits.
Ongoing 2028+	Adaptive Strategy & Long-Term Learning	Annual self-assessment cycle embedded. Twice-yearly strategic reviews. Leadership development and peer support are embedded as permanent regional infrastructure. Contribution to national Toward 2035 evaluation.

Integrated Strategic Framework

The following table provides a consolidated view of the four strategic commitments, their goals, phased focus areas, key metrics, and the depth of systemic shift each represents.

Strategic Area	Goal	Year 1 Focus	Years 2-3	Key Metrics	Depth of Shift
1. Congregational Health and Sustainability	Strengthen adaptive capacity and sustainability of communities of faith	Self-assessment launch; Health Dashboard; Vision Keepers Formation Plan	Targeted accompaniment; transition toolkit; collaborative ministry support	% of CoFs assessed; health distribution trend; transition support access; toolkit uptake	High: from reactive crisis response to proactive sustainability support
2. Leadership: Resilient and Supported	Cultivate a sustainable, distributed, and supported leadership ecosystem	Peer ministry networks; Keeping in Touch rhythm; lay leadership baseline survey	Lay Leadership Pathway; chaplaincy role; mentorship and formation programs	Burnout self-report; lay leader training rates; chaplaincy established; new leader pipeline	High: cultural and structural shift from role-based to ecosystem leadership
3. Regional Systems and Clarity	Ensure regional systems are clear, accessible, and proportionate	Process mapping; pastoral relations accompaniment protocol; property framework alignment	Admin simplification; toolkit development; training workshops	Process clarity baseline and trend; admin burden score; congregational trust levels	Moderate: operational transformation enabling structural support
4. Collaboration, Adaptive Ministry and Emergence	Create conditions for new and collaborative ministry to emerge from congregational life	Collaborative Ministry Toolkit; justice network work plans; new ministry pathway	Digital ministry capacity; Faithful Footprints scale; story-sharing and celebration	# collaborative arrangements; # new ministries; ecological engagement; justice network activity	Moderate-High: from program-driven to emergent, contextual ministry

What We Are Ultimately Working Toward

These are the conditions this plan exists to create by 2028.

- EOORC is experienced as a partner that strengthens ministry, not an institution to be endured or one that simply administers it
- Communities of faith make faithful decisions from a place of clarity, not crisis
- Leadership is distributed and sustained: not dependent on heroic individuals
- The credibility gap between what EOORC says and what communities experience closes measurably
- New expressions of ministry emerge from congregational life, not simply regional programming
- EOORC models the change leadership posture it asks of others: honest, adaptive, and trustworthy
- The culture shifts from managing decline to discerning possibility
- By 2028, the conditions for faithful, sustainable, and adaptive ministry are stronger than they were in 2026

A Closing Word: *This is Not Decline Management*

This plan is faithful attention to the conditions through which ministry can flourish. It does not ask EOORC to do more with less, or to launch more programs that stretch already stretched people thinner. It asks us to do fewer things with greater clarity, to learn as we go, to support communities of faith and leaders more intentionally, and to trust that this work is itself a form of ministry.

For such a time as this, may we have the courage to see clearly, the humility to learn faithfully, and the wisdom to move together toward the future God is still bringing to life among us.