



Visionary Leadership

Probably the single most important tasks facing a leader is to develop an understanding of where the organisation needs to be at some future point. Without a future vision, organisations are destined to live in the past, and ultimately die. *"Where there is no vision, the people perish"* Proverbs 29:18. For the Christian organisation such vision must come from God.

A Process for Developing Vision

This process combines prayer and reflection on our understanding of where God has already been moving. This process will take time - maybe some months to work through fully - don't feel you need to rush! It can either be used by the leader alone, or preferably with a small leadership group, which may be the formal leadership group of the church, or may be a selected group of people with appropriate skills and gifts. At the end of this process you should have an understanding of what you believe God is calling your church or organisation to do and to be.

1. PREPARATORY PRAYER : This first stage helps us to "tune in", spending time with the Lord. Pray that he will show you clearly over the coming weeks what he is calling the church to do and to be.

2. BUILDING BLOCKS :

God speaks to the church in a number of ways: through experience, through the Bible, through words and pictures and in other ways. This process allows us to reflect on what God may have been saying to the church in four different elements. We suggest you take time to reflect on, and pray through each of four questions, and to compile a flip chart to answer each one. This stage of the process could be done as a retreat or a day away either with the leader alone, or with a small team. :

<p>(A) <i>THE PAST</i> - The first flip chart answers the following :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What has been our previous understanding of the right direction?</i> • <i>What visions, 5 year plans, strategies etc. have been agreed on previously ?</i> <p>Very often churches do not need to start from scratch, but to dust off previously agreed approaches, update them in prayer, seeing whether they are still relevant, and then re-energising people behind the vision.</p>	<p>(B) <i>OUR EXPERIENCE</i> - The second flip chart looks at the breadth of our Christian experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What has God called other churches to?</i> • <i>What does our reading of the Bible have to say about our current situation as a church?</i> • <i>As we read other books, what insights can we gain?</i> <p>Almost certainly His vision for each place will be different, but there may be some commonality! God's leading for a church does need to be sought afresh in each location, but without rejecting out of hand that which has been found to be appropriate elsewhere. The "Alpha" course is a great example of churches reapplying something which has been found to work elsewhere, in very different situations.</p>
<p>(C) <i>PRAYER</i> - the third chart summarises what God has been speaking through the church in recent times.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Look through any prayer diaries to see common themes, pictures or words given.</i> • <i>Talk with other members of the church who pray regularly.</i> • <i>Spend some time with others being open to God.</i> <p>After spending time in prayer, write down whatever is on your minds. This may or may not be from God, but there may be a surprising degree of commonality.</p>	<p>(D) <i>CHURCH/COMMUNITY</i> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reflect on the church and the community which it serves. Try to see it how God sees it -</i> • <i>Where are the needs, the pressure?</i> <p>Taking a look at previous parish assessment & mission audits can be helpful here.</p>

3. PRAYER : Having compiled the four flip charts, spend some more time in prayer, asking God to speak to you through this reflection, and to give you His direction and vision for your church in the coming years.

4. DRAFTING A VISION : Now each member of the group should write down what they feel God is calling the group to. Everyone should write something. Try to keep it to a few sentences and stick to the big ideas. Then share amongst the group.

After each person has shared his/her draft, spend some more time in prayer, asking the Lord to confirm which elements of your discussions are his, and which are human desire. Discuss openly, and move on if you have agreement, otherwise repeat step 3. You may find these checks helpful :-

- ♦ *Is it in line with scriptural teaching?* Does the vision that you have received lead to God being glorified, and His church taking a servant role in meeting the needs of His people?
- ♦ *Is there a consensus in the pictures, scriptures and words of knowledge received?* Spend some time going back over this sheet and identify whether any elements point in an opposite direction. (They may point in a different direction if they are related to meeting a specific need, rather than setting God's agenda for His church.)
- ♦ *Do you, and others with you in the process, feel at peace with the vision in prayer?* This does not mean that you feel comfortable about achieving it - merely that you feel it may be "right"!
- ♦ *Does this fit with where God is already moving?* It may not if this is a new wave of God's Spirit at work, but in many cases it may be a continuation of God's prompting in the wider church.
- ♦ *When shared with other mature Christians in the church, does their prayer confirm it?*

5. SHARING THE VISION : Once you are in agreement, it is time to share and develop the vision with the wider community of faith. Encourage people to think, reflect and pray through the vision. It may be necessary to change it over time as the whole community comes to "own" the vision for itself.

6. ACTION : A vision that does not lead to some kind of action is unlikely to be of much help to the church or to God! Yet, turning a vision into reality can be extremely difficult. As a first step, take more time with a small leadership group and begin to explore ways that the vision might be turned into reality. Many of the later sheets in this pack seek to help this process.



Visionary Leaders in the Bible – two biblical models to develop visionary leadership.....

Our first biblical model is Nehemiah, the rebuilder of Jerusalem's walls. Read Nehemiah chapters 1 to 6, and reflect on the characteristics of Nehemiah which help his visionary leadership.

Nehemiah is clearly a man of prayer, and his desire to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem comes out of days spent in prayer (1:4ff). He is dependent upon God, and before asking King Artaxerxes' permission to rebuild the walls, spends time with God in prayer. Nehemiah translates the vision into action, and the walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt in 52 days. The people's commitment to the plan resulted from Nehemiah's ability to communicate the vision to them in a compelling and motivating way. Despite much opposition, the Jews remained committed to the vision, and persevered in rebuilding the walls, whilst half of the team provided protection. (4:16).

Nehemiah's leadership was not simply focused on rebuilding the walls - he also had concern for the people and their well-being. In Chapter 5, he reminds the people of the vision for how they should be living, and how far short they are falling. Nehemiah is personally committed to this, and didn't claim the benefits that were due to him on account of his office (5:14,15).

We move on now to Joseph. Read Genesis 39 to 41 and think through the characteristics that Joseph displays.

Joseph displays a number of the characteristics of visionary leaders. Although his prayer life is not specifically mentioned, 41:38 tells us that the Egyptians perceived the Spirit of God to be upon Joseph.

His accurate interpretation of the dreams, both inside prison, and in front of Pharaoh, clarifies his prophetic gifting as he speaks out what God has told him. (41:16). His appointment as principal minister over Egypt, and the degree to which he was able to prepare the land to withstand the famine are testimony to Joseph's ability to communicate God's plan in a compelling way. That the implications of the vision were to last for fourteen years demonstrates the length of commitment involved in carrying out preparations ahead of the famine. Such long term preparation and planning would require a very practical approach to complement the spiritual and prophetic ability that he had displayed earlier.

From these studies of Joseph and Nehemiah we can identify some characteristics of visionary leadership. Visionary leaders are prayerful men and women, who are aware of God's prompting, and able to translate vision into action. They need to be able to communicate the vision to others, and be personally committed to it. They will need to persevere through hardship.



Vision Sharing

Communicating and Developing Vision

Although the vision for a church or organization is usually initially discerned by individual leaders or small leadership groups; it will need to be shared and developed by a much larger group of people if it is to become a reality. This sheet offers some thoughts on how that might be achieved.

Step six of the vision process outlined on the previous sheet is to share and develop this vision with others. This is vital if the church or organisation is to truly “own” the vision for themselves. Robert Warren writes *“The Holy Spirit has been at work in society making it more participative. Therefore people will not own a vision unless they have had a part in shaping it.”* Here are three simple checks on whether the members of your church or organisation have really adopted the vision for themselves :

- ❶ They understand it - and can be heard explaining it to others, simply and correctly.
- ❷ They share it - when talking about it, they use “we” rather than “the vicar/pastor”.
- ❸ They are moving towards it - suggestions and activities are consistent with the vision, rather than pointing in a different direction.

Achieving this level of adoption of vision requires a conscious process of communication and vision development over a period of time. There can be a danger that a vision is simply a statement on a poster on the wall in the minister’s study, developed on some long-gone away day. Clarity of thinking is a prerequisite of clarity of communication. Until you are clear in your own mind what the vision for your church or organisation entails, you cannot hope to be lucid in explaining it to others. Here are some questions to help you think it through in sufficient depth to communicate it to others.

What exactly is the vision? Can you write it down simply and clearly? When shared with someone outside the church, do they understand it? Many visions have a number of themes or elements to them, and it can be helpful to separate these out. Having done this, the clarity of the communication will be improved if the main two or three elements are highlighted, and those parts which are supporting the main elements, or are of secondary importance are identified.

What does achieving the vision mean for people, and for God? If the vision is realised, in what ways is the Kingdom advanced? Will people benefit? If so, who ? Those inside or outside today’s church?

What impact will it have on different members of the church or organisation? A natural reaction to any future change is to want to understand the impact on ourselves. Detail is unnecessary at this stage, but major implications of the vision should not be hidden.

What will people see as positive and what as negative? Don’t oversell the positives and don’t hide the negatives - but be aware of how different points are likely to be perceived by the majority of the congregation.



Writing Down the Vision

The Vision Statement has the potential to be a very powerful piece of communication. Sadly many vision statements don't quite realise that potential. A Vision Statement can paint a picture which creates a sense of desire and builds commitment to reaching the vision.

Vision statements are different to Mission statements. A mission statement explains the main aim or purpose of the church or organisation. It is not surprising if many churches have very similar mission statements. However, the vision statement expresses the desired destination of the church within a certain time-frame. Given the number of different elements to the faith, the many ways of growing the Kingdom, and the diverse ways of serving those in need, vision statements may well differ between churches, as God's specific calling to different churches at any point in time differs. They are likely to be specific without being comprehensive. Let's consider two examples :

By planting a new neighbourhood church at the north end of our town, a number of families will come to faith. Worship in an accessible and informal style and a practical concern for the community, and involvement with it, will encourage people into the church. A programme of nurture and teaching alongside a growing fellowship will lead people into a deeper spiritual experience.

Year 2005 Vision :

Growth in attendance , of 15% per year for the last five years, has allowed us to expand our offering of worship styles on a Sunday morning. This growth seemed to stem from the highly successful ecumenical Millennium celebrations, and the increased prayerfulness of our church, both individually and corporately. It's great to see people enjoy spending time with God. Most of the congregation meet weekly in some form of prayer group.

- Both statements make choices as to what is included and what is left out. It is vital that this is the case if the vision statement is not to become a "catch-all" justifying everything that the church would like to do.
- Both are reasonably specific in outlining one or two key details behind each of the major statements. All vision statements will need further expansion, particularly as a church walks forward into reaching out for such vision. There will be alternative options and choices to be made - the vision statement can be updated if necessary.
- The second statement gives an idea of timing. It's often better to paint a vision between 3 and 10 years out in order for the vision to represent more than next year's project list. You may not yet have a timing, feeling that God has called the church to a specific action, but as yet as not given a time scale. That's His prerogative!
- The second statement describes what the church is like when the vision has been reached. This is powerful way of helping people feel the vision - it doesn't need to be accurate in every degree, - details can be worked later.

MISSION STATEMENTS should be a simple statement of purpose :

An Effective Mission or Statement of Purpose.....

- * Provides a "reason for being"
- * Provides clarity and focus and makes choices.
- * Is clear and concise
- * Is agreed by the wider organisation

Example :

The Mission Appeal team exists to raise funds for the mission work of the church in two thirds world countries. By holding special collections and appeals we will encourage those within and outside the church family to regularly support such work.

VISION STATEMENTS express a desired future state in a way that builds commitment to it.

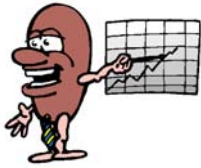
An Effective Vision

- * Arises through prayer & has been bathed in prayer.
- * Creates a sense of desire and builds commitment.
- * Expresses God's challenge to the church.
- * Is an expression of faith and hope.

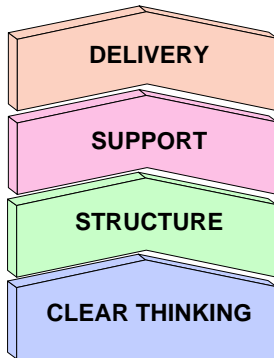
Example :

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ACTION POINTER : Review any vision or mission statements you have against these checklists..



Presenting the Vision



Sometimes preaching can seem easy compared with presenting other ideas or proposals to groups in a different setting. Yet the planning of any form of verbal communication should have four basic elements irrespective of how long it will last.

Stage 1 : Clear Thinking.

We've already covered the need to think carefully and clearly about the vision before starting to communicate it. The second component of this stage is to think about the purpose of your presentation. What are you hoping to achieve ? Try to write this down in a single sentence.

Stage 2 : Structure.

The next step is to write down an outline of your presentation using bullet points. (This is very similar to writing a sermon outline.) Presentations usually have an introduction, a conclusion, with two or three main elements. These main elements may sub-divide further, although we recommend you have no more than three main elements to avoid over complicating your presentation.

Consider who will be listening to your presentation. What do they know, and how do they feel, about the content of the presentation? In planning the structure, help them hear what they need to know, rather than tell them what you want to say!

You will also need to choose the length of the presentation and your style - how formal or informal do you want to be? Remember, informal presentations require no less preparation, only a different presentation style. Once you've fixed on a length - stick to it!

Stage 3 : Support Materials

Now is the time to add illustrations, materials, visual aids or anecdotes to support your main points. The key point here is to ensure that your material does indeed support your arguments. No matter how good the visual, or how funny the anecdote, unless it supports the flow of the presentation, it should be removed.

Any visuals should be kept simple - far too often overhead slides can be cluttered with too much text. One main message per slide is sufficient, with up to four bullet points. Try to build in some colour or some other visual aid to retain attention.

Stage 4: Delivery

Just as with any important event, a rehearsal can be of immense help. You can check timing, practise using your materials and check the flow of your arguments.

Consider your tone and stance - what message does your body convey? (*Tip : getting someone to watch or even video your rehearsal can pick up unconscious mannerisms!*) Check the practicalities - does the OHP work, and is it in focus? Is there a microphone? Can you be heard?

ACTION POINTER : Work through this process for the decision you have recently taken, or are about to take. This will help you get used to the approach, and more comfortable with it.