

## The Best Church Visions

Christian congregations derive energy from reflecting on their unique identities, gifts, aspirations and callings. Churches that discern the most exciting visions learn five important lessons.

First, these churches see visioning as a process of connecting to a spiritual path or journey, not simply as a means of adding new church programs or tasks. A vision is a simple statement of our call to (and responsibilities in) spiritual community: invitation, formation and service. If this vision conflicts with some of a church's expressed or hidden values, it becomes a basis for re-evaluating the values. By asking how to act as a church where people may Come and See Jesus, Come to Know Jesus, and Come to Serve Jesus, a congregation discerns God's call to live out our baptismal covenants in community.

Second, these churches recognize their unique contexts and personalities and discern God's unique and individual calls to them as spiritual communities. The Great Commission is a broad framework for the mission of the Church that requires individual definition by each congregation. There is no single way for a church to serve God and visioning is not measuring the church against some third party objective standard of what a church should be. Part of God's call is leaving up to us the possibilities of choosing what we are gifted at or enjoy doing.

Third, these churches discover that they cannot simply be church for themselves; they must help introduce others to Jesus. Our activities need to bring people to Jesus or serve people for Jesus.

Fourth, these churches realize that the heart of the discernment process is prayer. Prayer begins in gratitude for the gifts and opportunities the church has received and continues with a careful listening for God's will for the church.

Fifth, these churches recognize that their discernment processes are ongoing. God calls each church to new realizations and activities and the process of learning and growth will continue as long as the church community is alive.

With these lessons in mind, churches often develop specific plans for evangelization, formation and service. For evangelization, some churches focus on becoming more welcoming through newcomer's ministries and encouraging individuals and small groups to develop relationships with people outside of church and bring them to church.

For formation, some churches develop more small groups in which individuals may discover the love of a supportive community, become rooted in the gospel and scriptures, center their lives in prayer, experience the power of God's presence in their lives, discern and follow their unique vocations, and, eventually, gain experience in witness and ministry.

Many churches become involved in helping others with pastoral care ministries or community outreach ministries. Some churches develop specific ministries on their own to meet identified local needs, such as shelters or food pantries. Other churches partner with

other agencies to meet the needs of the larger community. These agencies become part of the outreach ministries of the church by involving church volunteers, financial contributors and individuals who lift up their work in prayer.

Thus, these churches truly become congregations where people may *Come and See Jesus, Come to Know Jesus and Come to Serve Jesus.*