

Developing a Visioning Process

Important Considerations:

- A vision created quickly in a rush of enthusiasm will normally sit quietly in the corner and lead to complacency.
- God has a vision for this church, he is already communicating this vision – how do we assist a church to listen, articulate this, commit to it and act upon it?
- God usually speaks in many and various ways in and through his people – how do we empower a congregation to discern wisely and well?
- Vision formation always involves spiritual formation.
- Surfacing a vision is work for the spirit, the heart and the mind.

Preparation – 5 Key Elements:

1. **Time:** a Visioning process is not usually simple or short. We recommend initially scheduling meetings with the church and an appointed Visioning Team aiming to start and finish within a 4-6 month period, including a final Church Meeting to formally affirm the Vision. It should not be rushed and may take longer than planned. It's possible that to get the best outcome it may take 6 to 9, even 12 months.
2. **Participation:** For a vision to be owned and acted upon it must arise from wide and deep conversation in the church. As many as possible need to be involved in bringing it to the surface and shaping it. All voices need to be heard in the visioning process. The insights of mature and respected leaders need to be carefully considered, but sometimes God speaks in surprising ways even through those on the fringes of church life.
3. **Listening:** A sense above all that God has communicated within this process and that the church has listened and responded is essential. Assisting the church with a process which actively engages the spirit, mind and heart in listening to God collectively is fundamental to effective vision work.
4. **Wrestling:** Finding a compelling vision is usually hard work. It means change, letting go of the past, even past visions. It means embracing new realities of where the church is at and where it could go in years to come. Some of these elements may not be what people expect or even hope for. Vision often has some surprises. Without the honest questioning and wrestling with “Is this really what God wants and what we want for this church?”, again the process will end up disconnected with reality.
5. **Commitment:** Once the vision has been uncovered, articulated and agreed upon, it must be implemented. Many “Vision Statements” are simply that – statements which mean little and do not become the basis for planning and action.

A healthy and successful Visioning Process requires that each of these elements are understood from the outset. Talking this through with the Leadership team is important.

The Visioning Process:

**** See separate document outlining an example of a Visioning Process.**

1. Appointment, commissioning and formation of a **Visioning Team**

- The Visioning Team is appointed by the governing group of the church and reports to them
- The Senior Pastor / Leader should be on the Visioning Team along with a mix of members from the formal church leadership team, as well as other mature and respected believers from the wider church community
- Aim for around 5 people – enough to share the load and provide a degree of representation across the church, without being cumbersome
- The role of this team is to assist in designing and facilitating the process, including compiling feedback and forming draft and then final statements
- They will usually need to meet before the process commences with the wider church, once between each church forum, and after the final forum
- As with all small groups, it is wise to consider an intentional process of group formation
- The Senior Pastor / Leader will usually lead this team

2. Designing a **process** suited to the church

- Start by answering the ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions for the church
- Consider how to involve as many people as possible in surfacing the Vision of the church
- How can key groups be given a voice? E.g. leadership and staff, emerging leaders, key volunteer leaders, governing group members, new members, long term members, children and young people, the congregation as a whole...
- How will we consider both internal and external factors? Internal factors include values, history, people and gifts. External factors include community demographics, change (such as housing, family structure, employment, age, people,...), needs, existing services,...
- Consider whether some ‘community mapping’ activities should be incorporated
- How will we help people lift their eyes to God’s big kingdom purposes? E.g. preaching series and / or small group studies, speakers (such as church planters, missionaries, pastors of thriving churches) or books (like Andrew Turner’s “Fruitful Church” or Michael Frost’s “Surprise the World”)
- How to facilitate open, honest and reflective conversation and listening? How will the Vision become self-revealing in community?
- How will we ensure we truly seek to listen to God and collectively discern *his* Vision for the church? How will prayer be fundamental to the process?

**** IMPORTANT NOTE STEPS 3-6: Since Vision needs to be an outworking of the Biblical Purpose and Values of a church, elements of the following 4 steps will likely be repeated first for defining Purpose, then for uncovering Values and finally for surfacing Vision:**

3. Facilitating and overseeing the **data gathering** process

- The Visioning Team can start by gathering, compiling and publishing background and community information, e.g. church profile, history, Church Health Assessment Tool, NCLS results, local ABS stats, historical church attendance and ministry history, establishing need for change, congregational life-cycle insights, demographics / church stats, resources, opportunities, previous Vision Statements,...
- The heart of the data gathering process will usually involve church forums and other activities in parallel with the forums, such as Prayer Walks, a Vision Wall, surveys, focus groups and other small group discussions, community mapping...
- Provide opportunities for feedback and further reflection, so the process is more like a conversation than a one-off event
- Creative as well as cognitive processes need to be facilitated
- Plan processes that seek to give everyone a voice. Consider different groups e.g. children and youth, families, the elderly, different cultural groups.
- History needs to be acknowledged without being determinative of the future. People need to acknowledge but then release past Visions, which serve as stepping stones to a new future

4. Shaping the elements of the **first draft**

- The Visioning Team identifies and documents significant, recurring themes
- Be on the look-out for ideas which seem to have traction, impact, and that energise the group. Which ideas resonate with the group and which ones don't? Why?
- Initial draft(s) will often be in a dot point format. They should not take the form of a final, polished statement
- Draft statements should be clearly identified as such
- The aim is not to draft a statement that somehow incorporates everyone's ideas or that 'keeps everyone happy'. The aim is to discern together what God is saying in the process.

5. Testing and refining through **feedback**

- Give the draft(s) back to the church for their prayerful, reflective consideration and feedback
- Encourage them to ask relevant questions of the draft statements (see the notes about the nature of Purpose, Values and Vision statements). Questions will include:
 - *Is it clear?* Will it serve its purpose?
 - *Is it inspiring?* Do I want to be part of a church like this?
 - *Do we sense God's hand in this?*
- Draft statements will be refined and sharpened on the basis of feedback. In the case of the Vision statement, this is usually to make it more specific, concrete and focused

6. **Presentation and adoption**

- The Visioning Team takes the Vision Statement (incorporating Purpose and Values) to the governing group
- The governing group (Elders / Board) takes the Vision Statement (incorporating Purpose and Values) to the church for final and formal acceptance and affirmation. This may take place at the next or a special Church Meeting. The outcome should be confidently known by the time it is presented for formal affirmation. This moment will often have a celebratory tone about it. It is a time to thank God and prayerfully covenant to pursue the Vision together under God.

7. Establishing an **implementation** process

- Vision rarely goes anywhere without an agreed process for implementation
- The Visioning Team is not an Implementation Team and they will be released once an implementation process is agreed
- This process will look different for different churches – the key is to be clear about process and who is responsible.
- Some churches may develop a 3 or 5 year strategic plan
- Implementation decisions will usually be delegated to ministry leaders who will then report back to the governance group and church on how they are working towards the Vision
- The reporting and accountability process needs to be clear and understood by all
- Strategies (ministries and practices) should be evaluated against the Vision on a regular basis
- Seek to grow a culture of ‘trying new things’, auditing existing ministries, learning to let go of those that may be ‘good but not best’ for this time and season, trusting God enough to not try and do everything, it’s ‘ok to fail’ / ‘failing forward’
- Resource allocation should reflect the strategic priorities that flow directly from the Vision

The Role of the Senior Leader: *Maintaining Vision*

- If Vision is not kept before the people, it will ‘leak’.
- One responsibility of the Senior Leader that cannot be delegated is to continually keep the Vision before the people.
- Communicate the Vision in every possible way: passion, persistence, promotion.
- Celebrate successes in achieving the Vision.
- Regularly review and refine and state the vision – Nehemiah principal – Nehemiah restated or reminded the people of the vision to rebuild the wall every 28 days.