

## **An Exercise for Sharing Our Personal Visions of the Church<sup>1</sup>**

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*This visioning exercise invites you to share together your personal visions for the church, examine where they've come from, and the implications for your church. You may invite people to complete this at home, and then bring it back into your meeting to share.*

The discernment of a creative and faithful vision of the future of the church depends on the commitment and focus that comes through expressing, sharing, and testing our personal visions. Expressing a *shared vision of God's calling for the church* is not the task of a select few, but comes from the active and intentional participation of the members and leaders of the local church. The goal of local church discernment is not simply to develop a written document, but to reaffirm our rootedness in Jesus Christ. The intent is to discover a sense of shared purpose that can bind the congregation together as a more faithful and effective missional community.

The process of discerning God's calling involves, in part, the sharing of personal stories and visions of the calling, identity, purpose, value, and importance of the ministry and mission of the church. The openness, commitment, dialogue, and genuine caring of the participants enable the process of discernment. The quality of the interchange directly determines the quality and power of the resulting vision. It must be remembered, however, that the intent is not merely to discover the will of individual members or leaders of the congregation, but to enable us *together* to discern the will of God. If a shared vision for the church emerges, it will emerge only out of a coherent process of prayer, Bible study, reflection, and conversation. Such a vision will reflect a collective sense of what is important and why, of where members and leaders of the church want to go, and what they will be like when they get there.

The personal sharing process below is intended to enable you to pause and to listen to your heart, to probe your deepest desires. Then, as a group, spend time sharing your responses to one or more of the questions below.

1. What is it that excites, motivates, and/or satisfies you about your involvement in the life, ministry, and mission of your congregation?
2. If someone who knew nothing of your church asked you, how would you describe the purpose or role of the church, its reason for being?
3. Imagine a future picture of your congregation that fulfills your deepest commitments and aspirations. Describe this future. Indicate how it is satisfying. (What is going on?)

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What are elements of church life? How are members and leaders relating to one another? With whom are you interacting? How are you involved? How does it feel?)

4. What contributes to or shapes your future vision?
  - How is your vision shaped by your current involvement in your congregation?
  - What elements of your denominational heritage shape your vision?
  - What elements of your church's distinctive cultural context contribute to your vision?
  - How has Scripture contributed to your vision?
  - What personal faith experiences and commitments contribute to your vision?
5. What do you believe God is calling your congregation to become? (How would people be involved in the congregation? What would they be doing? What would be the priorities of the congregation? What kinds of ministries would they be engaged in? How would people be related and relating to one another?)
6. What would have to change for your vision expressed in question five to be actualized?

We'd like to know how the Spirit has blessed you through your conversation. What happened in this exercise? What was helpful? What was stimulated by this discussion? Please share your experience with us.

For more information about visioning or to assist in designing a congregation-wide visioning process, please contact us at the Center for Parish Development –

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