



Three Questions for Visioning

Thriving congregations are those who are clear about their vision and mission, Purpose and calling. They can articulate clearly who God is calling them to be and what God is calling them to do.

Purpose/Vision is aspirational and lasting

Calling/Mission is Practical and updated to be relevant to the times

The Church's purpose and calling has always been *to embody Christ in the world, to serve others, and partner with God in the ministry of healing and reconciliation*. Yet each congregation with its particular gifts and distinctive calling discovers its own special ministry in the wider community in which it makes its home.

The following three questions help congregations discover who they are and who they believe God is calling them to become. They are:

1. WHO ARE WE TODAY?

- Survey the congregation - create a survey based on the questions in the church profile, or use a professional survey company. For examples see:
http://hirr.hartsem.edu/leadership/church_inventory.html
<https://holycowconsulting.com/congregations>
<https://thejoshua-group.com>
- Offer listening Forums/house meetings
- Look for threads and patterns in the church's history
- Do an objective analysis of the church's 'family system'
- Assess conflict "style"
- Hold history day and give thanks for your story
- Celebrate denominational connections
- Identify strengths and gifts of the church to build upon
- Identify also areas of growth for the church to improve and grow

Sample questions for congregational Survey:

1. In your life that this church, what has been most meaningful to you?
2. Has there been anything in the life of the church that has caused you stress or discomfort? What?
3. What keeps you coming back?
4. What do you think the mission, aim of this church should be?
5. How do you, and the small group of which you are part, board/committee/ministry team uphold this church's mission as you understand it?
6. What are the most effective parts of the congregation's ministries?
7. What are the least effective parts of the congregation's ministries?
8. How might the church better accomplish this mission?
9. What is your greatest hope/desire for this church?
10. How can the church better meet the needs of the youth in the community?
11. Where do you envision this church to be in five years?

2. WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

- Mission Insite – use demographic tools, available at <https://livingwaterone.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/missioninsite-info-081618.pdf> to learn about the neighborhood
- Understand the changing religious landscape with local and global research
- Meet with town and school officials (*see Community Interviews below*)
- Hold coffee shop interviews (“you are thinking about moving into the neighborhood...” give strangers an opportunity to tell you what they see)
- Do neighborhood walks/windshield tour – pray for your neighbors as you travel!
- Investigate Global Mission partners (including issues of justice where the church can make a difference beyond its commuter border)

COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

In answering the “Who is Our Neighbor?” question, it is best to actually connect with neighbors! Having outside eyes on the process is a key element of not simply recreating what you are already doing. Churches that look outside of themselves in a visioning process are more likely to engage the neighbors they meet later in partnership and imagination. Here are some steps and questions that could be used in the process:

The first step is to decide who to interview. It is best to get a sample of perspectives from people who have a unique history and connection to the town or city where the church resides. Some people worth considering include:

- ✓ Superintendent/Principal/Teachers in the school system
- ✓ Town Manager/Mayor/Selectman
- ✓ Chair of Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Police and Fire personnel
- ✓ PTA
- ✓ Council on Aging
- ✓ City Library staff

Consider focusing on people that are already involved in the group (demographic/psych graphic) you are trying to reach.

Second, it is good practice to contact them and let them know the questions you will be asking and the approximate length of time it will take. A sample script might be: “This is _____, I am a member of _____ church. Our church is looking for more ways to be more involved and supportive of our community. We would like to talk with you for about 15-30 minutes to hear your perspective on the community and the ways our church might be helpful...”

Third, here are the key questions you might want to ask after you have introduced yourself:

- ✓ What are some of the strengths you perceive from your time and work in the community?
- ✓ What are some key challenges our community is facing or will be facing in the coming years?
- ✓ What do you hear about our church around the community? (If your church has a particular vision—identity and purpose – it might be helpful to mention that here)
- ✓ What are some ways that our church might be helpful to the community?
- ✓ Are there any groups that we might be well suited to partner with or help our community?

Be sure to thank them for their time and the ways in which they are of service. Also, be sure they have contact information for the church if they think of follow-up or specific ways the church can be in partnership.

The question, "How do we use our resources – staff, finances and facilities, to fulfill our purpose and mission?" needs to be the core question that guides this whole process.

3. WHAT IS GOD CALLING US TO BE AND DO?

- Communal Discernment: What is our unique God-determined responsibility, role and possibility in this community? What are our gifts? What will the community miss if we were not here? What is special about us? What is one thing we do that others around us do not in order to make our community a safe, loving and better place?
- Utilize wider church vision/mission/purpose programs – i.e., Churches Alive, Crossroads, Center for Progressive Renewal, coaching
- Create a prayer team
- Examine, evaluate leadership structure, job descriptions and alignment
- Articulate and commit to a vision and mission

A SHORT PROCESS TO DISCOVER VISION & MISSION, PURPOSE & CALLING

- Communal Discernment: What is our unique responsibility, role and possibility in this community to which God is calling us? What will the wider community miss if we were not here?
- Utilize wider church vision/mission/purpose programs. Call your Association for help.
- Examine leadership and governance structure, job descriptions and alignment
- Articulate and commit to vision and mission

A Brief Process to Discern: Vision and Mission for Question 3

VISION: Aspiration of what you believe you are called to be. It is your WHY
Aspirational, motivational, inspirational

MISSION: How do you practically walk on the path toward the vision? It is your HOW
Practical, doable, implementable

VALUES: What is important to you? What do you value?

GIFTS AND STRENGTHS: What are the gifts of this community? What does it do well?

STRATEGIC PLAN or everyday activities – list them

- What you do and how you help, how do you reach out to others?
- What do you value?
- What are your goals?
- What are your Strengths, Gifts and Opportunities?
- What is your story? Your story that gives you identity?

VISION BOARD: List them on a vision board for all to see

- Who does your church help and reach out to?
- What is the purpose of your church/business?
- How do you want to make the world a more loving place?
- How can you heal pain in the world or what issues can you resolve?
- What's your ultimate aim/purpose for the church?

DISTILL TO THE ESSENTIALS

From the above lists and the information gathered, discard that which is not core and central to the church

When you finish this step you have the words for your “basic vision” which you’ll have to flesh out

WRITE

Take the “basic vision” and craft it into a statement

Use short words and sentences to keep it engaging

Focus on what the church does for people and how it impacts lives

This document uses the three narrative questions in the national UCC Church profile to discover the vision of a local church. It is adapted from MASS Conference UCC resources.