



How to Develop a Vision Statement for Your Church

3 Steps to Guide Your Church in Discovering God's Mission



Pastors, elders, and other church leaders are not only called to guide their churches into the future God has for them, but to do so in such a way that as many people as possible are able to join in to advance their shared cause.

Obviously, this isn't as easy as it sounds. Most of our churches are over eighty years old, making it hard to envision change. Because we haven't welcomed new disciples, many of our patterns feel set in stone. With dwindling post-pandemic attendance, we wonder whether there will be enough people to sustain a church, let alone enact new vision.

I was talking with a pastor last month who said, "Now that we're back from the pandemic, I don't know where to lead people next." Up against so many challenges, pastors are in a tough spot:

- We don't have a clear sense of where we are leading our church
- We don't have a clear picture of God's vision for our church
- We change our minds about where we're headed, confusing the people we lead
- Our team members have different ideas of where we're headed, and it's creating conflict
- Our budget is ballooning without any filter for what gets prioritized
- People are drifting in and out, seemingly uncommitted and unmotivated to devote themselves to a shared cause

What we need is a clear vision for our church. Every church needs a vision, a clearly defined destination that rallies a community. A vision is a picture of where your church is headed, even if you never arrive there. In fact, an inspiring vision is one you will never arrive at; by it, God continues to call your community forward in an eternal story of transformation.

How do you know that it's time to renew your vision?

- Your programs and ministries feel like ends of their own
- Few people can recite or reference the vision
- You haven't renewed the vision since a major change (global pandemic, new pastor, location change)
- Your existing vision is not inviting people on mission

Many leaders have been through visioning processes, and you might have negative connotations with the idea of crafting a new vision statement. The truth is, there are a lot of problems with how churches typically write vision statements. For example, many vision statements are not really visions of the future, but descriptions of why the church exists or the history of its existence. Many vision statements are not measurable. Some vision statements are written by “visionary leaders” without input from others. These vision statements are idealistic fantasies that have more to do with ego than with mission. Other vision statements are written by the whole congregation, a conglomeration of everyone’s opinions. Some vision statements are surprisingly good, but are forgotten by lack of communication and implementation.

Cyclical Full Circle guides churches towards more hopeful futures. As we’ve worked with hundreds of churches, we’ve noticed that over half of them haven’t welcomed new Christians, have been losing members, and have been losing money over the most recent years. They are concerned about the years to come, and they need help envisioning the hopeful future God has for them. We walk them through a process of listening and discerning, and it’s amazing to see the energy and inspiration that comes when they discover a shared vision, a worthy cause that motivates them forward into action and growth.

We wrote this eBook to help you experience a similar transformation in your church, from uncertainty about the future, to hope and excitement about where God is leading you. It all starts with casting a new vision, which we are going to break down into 3 main steps.

- First, your team will spend time listening to God and to each other.
- Second, you’ll engage a process of brainstorming and creating a new vision.
- Third, you’ll create a plan to implement your new vision so it actually becomes part of the culture and practices of your church.

Finally, if you get stuck along the way, we’ll offer some ways to get help with this process.

Taking steps to lead a new vision at your church takes courage. You are opening yourself up to change and practicing vulnerability. If it feels a bit scary, you’re probably on the right track. Explore this eBook, take baby steps forward, and we’ll be here to help you along the way so that your church can be reinvigorated with a vision for God’s hopeful future.

Grace and Peace,

Rob Douglas

Director of Cyclical Full Circle



STEP 1

Listening to God and Each Other

The first step in casting a new vision is to spend time listening and discerning God's vision for your church. Humans have a propensity to idealize community and build fantasies about the perfect future they envision. Remember Bonhoeffer's cautionary words:

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first the accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

Listening well to God and to others helps us avoid this "visionary dreaming" that destroys the community we long to live in. When we work with churches, we always recommend first running a church health assessment to make sure you're listening to how your leaders understand the strengths and opportunities at your church. If you don't have a favorite assessment, we developed one for you at cyclicalfullcircle.com/how-healthy-is-my-church. It's free, it takes ten minutes, and it will allow you to have in-depth listening sessions with your leadership team about the realities facing your church.

It's important to make sure to get the right people in the room for a listening session. For many pastors, this is the team of elders at your church. How much trust do you have with each of your team members? Do you need to touch base with any of them one-on-one before meeting? Communicate with your team that you want to invite them into a process to renew the vision of the church, starting with a listening session to gather their input and insights.

We always begin these meetings with an immersive experience in scripture. We prepare a scripture passage, such as Joshua 3, Ecclesiastes 11 or Habakkuk 2:1-4, and we help the team immerse themselves in the text with their imaginations. We ask open-ended questions that help them encounter God through the text and open their minds to new opportunities. Then, we ask them questions that help them connect the experience of the passage to their present circumstances. We've posted some of these exercises for you to download at cyclicalfullcircle.com/blog.

An immersion into scripture will prepare the group well for a discussion about how they perceive God's activity in their current context. Your goal is to gather stories that will help you find clues to how God is transforming lives through your church. As the group discusses, make sure to take notes on a whiteboard or on a notepad so that all the input is gathered. Thank the group for their input, schedule a followup meeting, pray for God's continued inspiration, and celebrate that the first step is done!



STEP 2

Collaborating to Form a Vision

Once you've spent days and weeks contemplating and praying over the things you gathered from your first meeting, it's time to bring the same people together for your second meeting. This one will be focused on brainstorming a vision together.

The vision you're crafting will not be one you'll be able to accomplish in 5-10 years. In fact, we encourage you to shoot for a non-achievable vision, one that will shift your church into a new gear, one where people are always motivated by the ever-expanding horizon.

Part 1: Gathering Input

Below are some exercises to run with your team in order to collaborate in forming a vision.

Mining Missional Impulses

Your church's vision or cause will not be exclusive. In other words, people can and do join and sacrifice for multiple causes at once. The key is finding a vision that you, your team, and your community are willing to join and sacrifice for.

Here are a few examples of the organizations and their accompanying visions I have been willing to join and sacrifice for because I believe in them:

- NPR (National Public Radio): To create a more informed public
- Los Padres Forest Watch: To advocate for and protect Los Padres National Forest
- Cyclical INC: Inspiring faithful innovation through the church
- Patagonia: In business to save the planet
- Harbor House: Helping those who are struggling in the Conejo Valley

At the beginning of your meeting, have each team member write down the causes and visions that they are currently joined to. Have them each share one with the group. Ask them:

1. Why did you join this cause?
2. What sacrifices have you made in joining this cause?

What House Are We Building?

Draw an outline of a house on butcher paper. Write your church name on the foundation. Ask your team, What kind of house does our church want to build? What are the characteristics of the world that we want to build together? Write these words down on the picture of the house.

Questions to Explore the Present

- How did the founders of this church understand God's original design or intent for our church? How has our understanding changed since?
- What are the problems in the community that our church is currently praying for?
- If a newspaper were to write a headline about our church today, what would it be?
- How do our community partners describe our church?
- What business are we in as a church?

Questions to Explore the Future

- How do we believe our community and church will be different in the New Creation?
- On what adventure might a refreshed vision lead us?
- What will it look like when all our prayers for the community and world are answered?
- If we could do only one thing, what would it be?
- What would we do with infinite money, time and energy?
- What kind of world do we want to live in?

As you gather the responses to these exercises, you'll hopefully begin to notice patterns. Consider an activity to help the team categorize their responses.

Part 2: Developing Language

Now comes the hard work of using this data to craft a vision. How will you know you've found a worthwhile vision for your church? Simon Sinek, in his book *The Infinite Game*, talks about five parts of a good vision statement. Use these five parameters to make sure you've got a vision that's worth following.

A good vision must be...

1. For Something.

It is something we believe in, not something we oppose. It is what we are for, not against. Being for something is inviting and not polarizing. Instead of "fighting poverty," a good vision is about "the right of every human to provide."

2. Inclusive.

Human beings want to belong to something bigger than themselves. A good vision statement creates room for anyone and everyone to join. A good vision describes a future state that does not yet exist, one that is so compelling that people are willing to make sacrifices to advance that vision.

3. **Service-Oriented.**

The primary benefits of your church's contributions must be for people outside of your church. Ultimately, God's vision for your church is not about your church. You are blessed to be a blessing to the world.

4. **Resilient.**

Your vision should be able to endure all kinds of change. It must be greater than the programs, practices or gatherings that currently define your church. These things will change and evolve, and one of the advantages of a strong vision is the way it stays constant during seasons of change.

5. **Idealistic.**

A strong vision is big, bold, and ultimately unachievable. It is like an iceberg; we only ever see a small fraction of it while the rest remains hidden. Your vision must be big enough to never be completed, and compelling enough to keep people working for this vision of the future that they long for.

Using the above criteria, combine the gathered input into a short statement that describes the new vision for your church. Perhaps you have a few different versions. It's okay to sit with them prayerfully over a few weeks to make sure everyone has a chance to settle on the one that most clearly represents the vision you are pursuing together.



STEP 3

Leading the Vision

Congratulations, you've created a vision statement! ...Now what?

A vision statement on a piece of paper is completely useless. Unless you put it into practice and begin leading the vision, it will become another forgotten document. It's important to have a plan to enact the vision. Gather your leaders one more time to develop a plan of action to implement the vision. Admittedly, there are many good plans for implementing a vision. Consider the following ideas as starting points.

Communicate

Make sure to use multiple platforms to communicate the renewed vision with excellence across multiple platforms. Depending on the platforms at your disposal, this could be an email to the congregation, a series of social media posts, a sermon series, or a video that visually depicts the vision.

Disciple

Develop or redevelop your discipleship cycle. Discipleship is the constellation of contextual practices by which people in your church learn to follow Jesus. You have an opportunity to alter these practices to bring them more in line with how Jesus is leading your church into a specific vision of the future.

Multiply

It's likely that people won't all get involved in the new vision at once. Consider creating teams that can begin embodying the new vision in smaller groups.

Evaluate

Review your existing programs, activities, ministries, and budget to evaluate to what degree they fit the vision. Create a process for phasing out and letting go of the ones that don't point in the direction of your new vision.

Experiment

You will most likely need safe spaces to road test your new vision and experiment with how some of your ideas look in practice. Instead of launching new programs all at once, begin innovation cycles that allow a group of people to try, fail, and report their learnings to others.

Commit to at least a year of working out your new vision before you start adapting it. Even if your vision isn't perfect, there is real value in a community planting small seeds of faith for a more hopeful future. God tends to multiply the efforts of people who are willing to take bold risks to give themselves to a greater vision of hope for the sake of the world.



Next Steps

As you finish this eBook, I hope you are filled with a fresh sense of clarity and confidence to be able to lead your team and your church towards a more hopeful vision.

Even so, you might also have some questions that have come up. Maybe this process doesn't fit your context, or maybe you've tried things like this before and it hasn't worked. Or maybe you're half way through and you've already hit a road block.

I get it. Leadership is messy. And eBooks are just ... eBooks. It's easy to read, and much harder to gather people into a significant leadership moment.

I would love to connect with you. If you're encountering obstacles or questions, please shoot me an email and we'll find time to connect so you can keep moving toward the vision God has for your community.

Grace and Peace,

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