

Developing a Church Vision

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What is Church Vision?

A church's vision is a description of the church's best-possible, most effective ministry. It is a forward-thinking image of what could be, and it acts as the ideal which all the church's ministry efforts are directed towards achieving. It is often (but not always) summarized into a short "vision statement" which can act as a mantra for ministry leaders, as a reminder of what the ultimate goal is. Some example vision statements are listed below:

- "The Redeemer family of churches and ministries exist to help build a great city for all people through a movement of the gospel that brings personal conversion, community formation, social justice, and cultural renewal to New York City and, through it, the world." - Redeemer Bible Church in New York City, Pastor Tim Keller.¹
- "Know the Love, Show the Love" - Shiloh Hills Fellowship in Spokane, Pastor Aaron Michaud²
- "From the Scenic City to the World" - Brainerd Baptist in Chattanooga³
- "A Gospel-centered church that equips culture shaping Christians." - Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Ft. Lauderdale⁴
- "To be a biblically functional community of believers so Christ's redemptive purposes can be accomplished in the world." - Willow Creek, Chicago, IL⁵

Some Churches will push back against this trend. Opponents will correctly note that the idea of a "vision statement" has more roots in corporate leadership jargon than in Scripture. As such, some churches take a more pragmatic take on their church's vision: rather than describing the idyllic future of their church, they describe the biblical ministry *already happening* at the church, and their intentions to improve and continue this ministry. As an example, the "vision statement" of Capitol Hill Baptist church (Washington, DC, Pastor Mark Dever) reads this way:

"Our vision is the same as for every gospel congregation throughout time and around the world. As those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, we want to bring him glory. The main way we do that is through our life together as a church, as this gospel community demonstrates the love of Jesus through our love for each other (John 13:35). We gather together to sing his praises, offer our prayers, hear his Word, and care for one another. And we serve side by side to see Jesus worshipped as the true King both here in DC and to the ends of the earth.

¹ <https://redeemer.com/>

² <https://shfspokane.org/>

³ <https://www.brainerdbaptist.org/>

⁴ <https://crpc.org/>

⁵ <https://www.willowcreek.org/>

“We cannot be sure what life in the future will bring for us as a church any more than we know what tomorrow will bring for us as individuals. We are nonetheless delighted at the spiritual health God has cultivated here and are thankful that He continues to bring committed believers into our fold. It is a blessing to serve God in the mission field of Capitol Hill with these brothers and sisters of all ages, backgrounds, and occupations.”⁶

Why Have a Vision?

The Purpose of Church Vision is to provide an agreed-upon goal for the ministry of the church. This ensures that every ministry of the church is moving towards the same goal. This unifies members, but also ensures that each ministry of the church is being used most efficiently. With no vision, each ministry operates on its own while ministry leaders and volunteers feel like they are giving themselves to a disjointed network of programs and obligations. When a church has a vision, people can unify under a goal, and everything the church does can point to this singular objective.

Simply put, a vision acts as the boundary for change in a church. When change happens, it should always happen for the sake of the vision of the church. The question of “Why start this new ministry?” or “Why change this thing we’ve always done?” can (hopefully) be easily answered by “To accomplish the church’s vision.” If a church desires to change and grow, they must have a vision of what they want to change and grow into, otherwise they are compelled to grow and change for its own sake, leaving plenty of room for egos and opinions to cloud judgement.

Starting With Values

If a church’s vision is future-thinking, then there must be something already present in a church which points this direction. In other words, for a vision to have any practicality, it must be supported by some underlying principles *which the congregation already values*. The production of a vision statement should start with interpreting the values of a church. The following questions should be answered:

- If asked, what would the average member say about our church values?
- If asked, what would a member of the community say about our church values?
- What does the church leadership value?
- What values do church leaders see in the congregation?

⁶ <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/about-us/our-vision/>

- What ministry is our church uniquely equipped to do?
- What gifts are abundant among our church members?

It is likely that asking these questions will produce values which are not biblical, or may be detrimental to the missional goals of the church. One of the goals of church leadership is to help correct these misplaced values. For the purpose of forming a vision, these misplaced values should either A) be removed from the list or B) be interpreted in their “best possible intent” as a good value. For example: a church which values an exclusive social circle certainly values community, even though they lack a value for diversity.

Hopefully, there will be some values in-line with the general vision for church ministry: a value for gospel teaching, enthusiastic missions, and communal worship would never be out of place on such a list. However, it is very important that this list be comprised of the *actual* values of the church, not its ideal values. If a church does not show an outward sign of valuing gospel teaching, then that value is likely not present, no matter how much it is claimed.

This process should return a list of values which can each be easily phrased in 1-3 words. Ideally, there should be at least 3 and up to a total of 10-12 values.

Finding Core Values

From this list, a set of values should be selected to be Core Values. These are the values *already present* in the church which the leadership wishes to reinforce. For simplicity, the number of core values is best kept under 5-6. These values should be *ministry* values. In other words, they should be verbs or easily understood as verbs. For instance, “Community” is a great core value if understood as “Creating Community.” However, “Mercy” as a value is difficult to convey as ministry action.

Understanding the Mission

A mission statement should write itself at this point in the process. The Mission of the church should essentially encapsulate two things:

1. The Biblical Mission of the Church⁷
 - a. Making Disciples of the World
 - b. Baptizing New Believers
 - c. Practicing Community
 - d. Corporate Worship
 - e. Teaching the Gospel
2. The Specific Gifts, Values, and Abilities of the Church

⁷ See “What is gospel-centered ministry?” From The Gospel Coalition’s *Theological Vision for Ministry*

The Mission of the Church is given by Scripture, but the means of accomplishing this assignment are unique to the local church. The core values of the church will determine how it contributes to the Gospel Mission. Oftentimes, this is given as a Mission Statement. A mission statement defines what a church *does*. This lays the groundwork for the vision, which defines what a church *becomes*.

A mission statement should eventually read like “Our Mission is to [do Gospel Ministry] through/by [our core values].” Values may be rephrased to indicate the action which comes from that particular value. As noted in the “Finding Core Values” section, it is important that these core values are actionable.

Vision From Mission

The Mission of the church will define its vision. In essence, the Vision of the Church is *to become* a church defined by its Mission. If the Mission Statement says “We Will Do,” The Vision Statement says “We Will Be.” The vision assumes that the Mission of the church is being done, and assumes that the values of the church are constantly shifting to support this vision. Misplaced values are becoming less important, and the Core values are being reinforced.

Leaders should prayerfully consider their values, mission, resources, and unique challenges to the church’s ministry when forming a vision for the church. The vision should be broad enough to be adopted by every member, yet specific enough that it can be used to sort and determine the usefulness of ministries in the church. If it cannot be stated in a short, brandable catchphrase, that’s okay. The most important part of a vision statement is that it encapsulates the ministry goals of the church.

Excerpt From *Theological Vision for Ministry* from The Gospel Coalition

V. What is gospel-centered ministry?

It is characterized by:

1. **Empowered corporate worship.**

The gospel changes our relationship with God from one of hostility or slavish compliance to one of intimacy and joy. The core dynamic of gospel-centered ministry is therefore worship and fervent prayer. In corporate worship God's people receive a special life-transforming sight of the worth and beauty of God, and then give back to God suitable expressions of his worth. At the heart of corporate worship is the ministry of the Word. Preaching should be expository (explaining the text of Scripture) and Christ-centered (expounding all biblical themes as climaxing in Christ and his work of salvation). Its ultimate goal, however, is not simply to teach but to lead the hearers to worship, individual and corporate, that strengthens their inner being to do the will of God.

2. **Evangelistic effectiveness.**

Because the gospel (unlike religious moralism) produces people who do not disdain those who disagree with them, a truly gospel-centered church should be filled with members who winsomely address people's hopes and aspirations with Christ and his saving work. We have a vision for a church that sees conversions of rich and poor, highly educated and less educated, men and women, old and young, married and single, and all races. We hope to draw highly secular and postmodern people, as well as reaching religious and traditional people. Because of the attractiveness of its community and the humility of its people, a gospel-centered church should find people in its midst who are exploring and trying to understand Christianity. It must welcome them in hundreds of ways. It will do little to make them "comfortable" but will do much to make its message understandable. In addition to all this, gospel-centered churches will have a bias toward church planting as one of the most effective means of evangelism there is.

3. **Counter-cultural community.**

Because the gospel removes both fear and pride, people should get along inside the church who could never get along outside. Because it points us to a man who died for his enemies, the gospel creates relationships of service rather than of selfishness. Because the gospel calls us to holiness, the people of God live in loving bonds of mutual accountability and discipline. Thus the gospel creates a human community radically different from any society around it. Regarding sex, the church should avoid both the secular society's idolization of sex and traditional society's fear of it. It is a community which so loves and cares practically for its members that biblical chastity makes sense. It teaches its members to conform their bodily being to the shape of the gospel—abstinence

outside of heterosexual marriage and fidelity and joy within. Regarding the family, the church should affirm the goodness of marriage between a man and a woman, calling them to serve God by reflecting his covenant love in life-long loyalty, and by teaching his ways to their children. But it also affirms the goodness of serving Christ as singles, whether for a time or for a life. The church should surround all persons suffering from the fallenness of our human sexuality with a compassionate community and family. Regarding money, the church's members should engage in radical economic sharing with one another—so “there are no needy among them” ([Acts 4:34](#)). Such sharing also promotes a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the oppressed, the immigrant, and the economically and physically weak. Regarding power, it is visibly committed to power-sharing and relationship-building among races, classes, and generations that are alienated outside of the Body of Christ. The practical evidence of this is that our local churches increasingly welcome and embrace people of all races and cultures. Each church should seek to reflect the diversity of its local geographical community, both in the congregation at large and in its leadership.

4. The integration of faith and work.

The good news of the Bible is not only individual forgiveness but the renewal of the whole creation. God put humanity in the garden to cultivate the material world for his own glory and for the flourishing of nature and the human community. The Spirit of God not only converts individuals (e.g., [John 16:8](#)) but also renews and cultivates the face of the earth (e.g., [Gen 1:2](#); [Psalm 104:30](#)). Therefore Christians glorify God not only through the ministry of the Word, but also through their vocations of agriculture, art, business, government, scholarship—all for God's glory and the furtherance of the public good. Too many Christians have learned to seal off their faith-beliefs from the way they work in their vocation. The gospel is seen as a means of finding individual peace and not as the foundation of a worldview—a comprehensive interpretation of reality affecting all that we do. But we have a vision for a church that equips its people to think out the implications of the gospel on how we do carpentry, plumbing, data-entry, nursing, art, business, government, journalism, entertainment, and scholarship. Such a church will not only support Christians' engagement with culture, but will also help them work with distinctiveness, excellence, and accountability in their trades and professions. Developing humane yet creative and excellent business environments out of our understanding of the gospel is part of the work of bringing a measure of healing to God's creation in the power of the Spirit. Bringing Christian joy, hope, and truth to embodiment in the arts is also part of this work. We do all of this because the gospel of God leads us to it, even while we recognize that the ultimate restoration of all things awaits the personal and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ (CS-[13]).

5. The doing of justice and mercy.

God created both soul and body, and the resurrection of Jesus shows that he is going to

redeem both the spiritual and the material. Therefore God is concerned not only for the salvation of souls but also for the relief of poverty, hunger, and injustice. The gospel opens our eyes to the fact that all our wealth (even wealth for which we worked hard) is ultimately an unmerited gift from God. Therefore the person who does not generously give away his or her wealth to others is not merely lacking in compassion, but is unjust. Christ wins our salvation through losing, achieves power through weakness and service, and comes to wealth through giving all away. Those who receive his salvation are not the strong and accomplished but those who admit they are weak and lost. We cannot look at the poor and the oppressed and callously call them to pull themselves out of their own difficulty. Jesus did not treat us that way. The gospel replaces superiority toward the poor with mercy and compassion. Christian churches must work for justice and peace in their neighborhoods through service even as they call individuals to conversion and the new birth. We must work for the eternal and common good and show our neighbors we love them sacrificially whether they believe as we do or not. Indifference to the poor and disadvantaged means there has not been a true grasp of our salvation by sheer grace.⁸

⁸ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/#theological-vision-for-ministry>

Worksheet

If asked, what would the average member say about our church values?

If asked, what would a member of the community say about our church values?

What does the church leadership value?

What values do church leaders see in the congregation?

What ministry is our church uniquely equipped to do?

What gifts are abundant among our church members?

Other Values:

Core Values:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Mission Statement:

Vision Statement:
