

Vision Sharing

Communicating and Developing Vision

Although the vision for a church or organization is usually initially discerned by individual leaders or small leadership groups; it will need to be shared and developed by a much larger group of people if it is to become a reality. This sheet offers some thoughts on how that might be achieved.

Step six of the vision process outlined on the previous sheet is to share and develop this vision with others. This is vital if the church or organisation is to truly "own" the vision for themselves. Robert Warren writes *"The Holy Spirit has been at work in society making it more participative. Therefore people will not own a vision unless they have had a part in shaping it."* Here are three simple checks on whether the members of your church or organisation have really adopted the vision for themselves :

- ❶ They understand it - and can be heard explaining it to others, simply and correctly.
- ❷ They share it - when talking about it, they use "we" rather than "the vicar/pastor".
- ❸ They are moving towards it - suggestions and activities are consistent with the vision, rather than pointing in a different direction.

Achieving this level of adoption of vision requires a conscious process of communication and vision development over a period of time. There can be a danger that a vision is simply a statement on a poster on the wall in the minister's study, developed on some long-gone away day. Clarity of thinking is a prerequisite of clarity of communication. Until you are clear in your own mind what the vision for your church or organisation entails, you cannot hope to be lucid in explaining it to others. Here are some questions to help you think it through in sufficient depth to communicate it to others.

What exactly is the vision? Can you write it down simply and clearly? When shared with someone outside the church, do they understand it? Many visions have a number of themes or elements to them, and it can be helpful to separate these out. Having done this, the clarity of the communication will be improved if the main two or three elements are highlighted, and those parts which are supporting the main elements, or are of secondary importance are identified.

What does achieving the vision mean for people, and for God? If the vision is realised, in what ways is the Kingdom advanced? Will people benefit? If so, who? Those inside or outside today's church?

What impact will it have on different members of the church or organisation? A natural reaction to any future change is to want to understand the impact on ourselves. Detail is unnecessary at this stage, but major implications of the vision should not be hidden.

What will people see as positive and what as negative? Don't oversell the positives and don't hide the negatives - but be aware of how different points are likely to be perceived by the majority of the congregation.



Writing Down the Vision

The Vision Statement has the potential to be a very powerful piece of communication. Sadly many vision statements don't quite realise that potential. A Vision Statement can paint a picture which creates a sense of desire and builds commitment to reaching the vision.

Vision statements are different to Mission statements. A mission statement explains the main aim or purpose of the church or organisation. It is not surprising if many churches have very similar mission statements. However, the vision statement expresses the desired destination of the church within a certain time-frame. Given the number of different elements to the faith, the many ways of growing the Kingdom, and the diverse ways of serving those in need, vision statements may well differ between churches, as God's specific calling to different churches at any point in time differs. They are likely to be specific without being comprehensive. Let's consider two examples :

By planting a new neighbourhood church at the north end of our town, a number of families will come to faith. Worship in an accessible and informal style and a practical concern for the community, and involvement with it, will encourage people into the church. A programme of nurture and teaching alongside a growing fellowship will lead people into a deeper spiritual experience.

Year 2005 Vision :

Growth in attendance , of 15% per year for the last five years, has allowed us to expand our offering of worship styles on a Sunday morning. This growth seemed to stem from the highly successful ecumenical Millennium celebrations, and the increased prayerfulness of our church, both individually and corporately. It's great to see people enjoy spending time with God. Most of the congregation meet weekly in some form of prayer group.

- Both statements make choices as to what is included and what is left out. It is vital that this is the case if the vision statement is not to become a "catch-all" justifying everything that the church would like to do.
- Both are reasonably specific in outlining one or two key details behind each of the major statements. All vision statements will need further expansion, particularly as a church walks forward into reaching out for such vision. There will be alternative options and choices to be made - the vision statement can be updated if necessary.
- The second statement gives an idea of timing. It's often better to paint a vision between 3 and 10 years out in order for the vision to represent more than next year's project list. You may not yet have a timing, feeling that God has called the church to a specific action, but as yet as not given a time scale. That's His prerogative!
- The second statement describes what the church is like when the vision has been reached. This is powerful way of helping people feel the vision - it doesn't need to be accurate in every degree, - details can be worked later.

MISSION STATEMENTS should be a simple statement of purpose :

An Effective Mission or Statement of Purpose.....

- * Provides a "reason for being"
- * Provides clarity and focus and makes choices.
- * Is clear and concise
- * Is agreed by the wider organisation

Example :

The Mission Appeal team exists to raise funds for the mission work of the church in two thirds world countries. By holding special collections and appeals we will encourage those within and outside the church family to regularly support such work.

VISION STATEMENTS express a desired future state in a way that builds commitment to it.

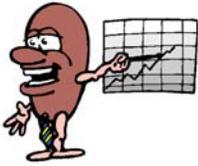
An Effective Vision

- * Arises through prayer & has been bathed in prayer.
- * Creates a sense of desire and builds commitment.
- * Expresses God's challenge to the church.
- * Is an expression of faith and hope.

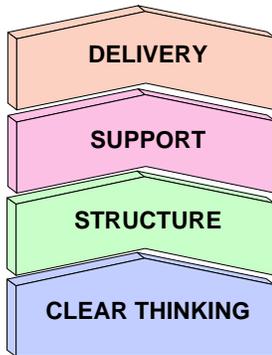
Example :

By planting a new neighbourhood church at the north end of our town, a number of families will come to faith. Worship in an accessible and informal style and a practical concern for, and involvement with, the community will encourage people into the church. A program of nurture and teaching alongside a growing fellowship will lead people into deeper spiritual experience.

ACTION POINTER : Review any vision or mission statements you have against these checklists..



Presenting the Vision



Sometimes preaching can seem easy compared with presenting other ideas or proposals to groups in a different setting. Yet the planning of any form of verbal communication should have four basic elements irrespective of how long it will last.

Stage 1 : Clear Thinking.

We've already covered the need to think carefully and clearly about the vision before starting to communicate it. The second component of this stage is to think about the purpose of your presentation. What are you hoping to achieve ? Try to write this down in a single sentence.

Stage 2 : Structure.

The next step is to write down an outline of your presentation using bullet points. (This is very similar to writing a sermon outline.) Presentations usually have an introduction, a conclusion, with two or three main elements. These main elements may sub-divide further, although we recommend you have no more than three main elements to avoid over complicating your presentation.

Consider who will be listening to your presentation. What do they know, and how do they feel, about the content of the presentation? In planning the structure, help them hear what they need to know, rather than tell them what you want to say!

You will also need to choose the length of the presentation and your style - how formal or informal do you want to be? Remember, informal presentations require no less preparation, only a different presentation style. Once you've fixed on a length - stick to it!

Stage 3 : Support Materials

Now is the time to add illustrations, materials, visual aids or anecdotes to support your main points. The key point here is to ensure that your material does indeed support your arguments. No matter how good the visual, or how funny the anecdote, unless it supports the flow of the presentation, it should be removed.

Any visuals should be kept simple - far too often overhead slides can be cluttered with too much text. One main message per slide is sufficient, with up to four bullet points. Try to build in some colour or some other visual aid to retain attention.

Stage 4: Delivery

Just as with any important event, a rehearsal can be of immense help. You can check timing, practise using your materials and check the flow of your arguments.

Consider your tone and stance - what message does your body convey? (*Tip : getting someone to watch or even video your rehearsal can pick up unconscious mannerisms!*) Check the practicalities - does the OHP work, and is it in focus? Is there a microphone? Can you be heard?

ACTION POINTER : Work through this process for the decision you have recently taken, or are about to take. This will help you get used to the approach, and more comfortable with it.



Media Tips

Christian leaders are often shy of working with the media – yet used well, they can enhance and amplify our communication. Here are some tips to help you.

Define your audience. - The tighter you can define your target audience, the easier it will be to focus your communication. Are you interested in adults and children? In what area? Churchgoers, non-churchgoers or lapsed Christians? Young or old?

What do you want them to do? - All communication has at least one objective. Whether you want people to come to something, to influence their beliefs or attitudes in a particular way, or simply to make them aware of something, your objective will shape the way that you communicate, and the media choices you make. Writing these down will help you become clear on how your communication can best support what you are trying to achieve.

Understand Your Media Options - The range of options facing a local church is wider than it has ever been before. In addition to local press, local radio, leaflets, parish magazines and notice boards, there are internet options, local tv stations and several commercial advertising opportunities.

Choose your Channels of Communication - Clarity on your target audience, and the outcome you want to achieve make this reasonably easy to achieve. Without such clarity, a rational evaluation of the alternatives is difficult. The size of the available budget will also have an effect, but try to avoid limiting your options on the basis of budget - its amazing what can be achieved for very little cost. You will probably not want to depend on a single channel of communication alone - it can sometimes be much more persuasive to reach people with the same message through several different channels.

Piece together the Media Campaign - Timings are important - if your want to get someone to come to an event, you may need two pieces of communication; the first needs to be early enough to get the event booked in the diary, whilst as the day approaches some further communication will help to build their desire to attend. A communications time chart can help see how the different elements will blend together. Cohesiveness across the different media options being used in the campaign is vital – by using common logos, slogans, typefaces and colour schemes.

Getting in touch with the media

- ♦ use the phone book or local directory to list possible contacts - you may not be aware of all the local newspapers and radio stations.
- ♦ unless you, or a member of your church, has a good contact with someone, your first point of call is likely to be the news desk.
- ♦ give them a call - journalists will welcome possible news stories, and the human touch over the phone is better than sending in a press release.



How do I write a press release?

- ♦ Press releases should be typed, double spaced with wide margins and on one side of the paper only. They should be headed "PRESS RELEASE" and it should be clear who they are from.
- ♦ Make it easy for the journalist to use your story by setting it out so that he/she can select a paragraph or two.
- ♦ Your first paragraph should be a short summary of the overall story, with subsequent paragraphs each expanding on one of the key points. Try to make it as interesting as possible to your target audience - including one or two quotes will make it more personal. Avoid jargon, especially "churchy" jargon.
- ♦ End with the names and telephone numbers of one or two people to contact for further information.

There are several ways of using a local paper :

- ♦ The letters page can also give free space - but is restricted to simple messages such as expressing a Christian viewpoint on a topical local issue, or thanking people after an event.
- ♦ A diary page can also give free publicity. Make sure they get plenty of notice of your event
- ♦ If you are prepared to pay, then advertisement within the paper, or inserting a leaflet within the paper allow you to keep control over your message and the way it is presented.

Using the Internet

- ♦ The internet can be a great addition to your publicity - it allows you to offer lots of background information that people can access whenever they want to, and in the privacy of their own home.
- ♦ The best first step is to find an enthusiastic church member who is willing to develop the site.