

Claiming God's Vision

(Revised)

A Strategic Ministry Planning Tool

Prepared jointly by Disciples Home Missions and Church Extension

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord; plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

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Introduction

An Introduction to Claiming God's Vision

Claiming God's Vision is a guide designed to assist congregations as they pray and seek God's guidance for future direction in ministry. Similar to the initial Claiming God's Vision guide, it is a planning process which emphasizes prayer, the use of scripture, and the importance of discerning God's will for a congregation.

In addition, the revised Claiming God's Vision is designed to assist a congregation in setting ministry priorities and goals. This strategic ministry planning tool helps congregations:

- Assess their current ministry situation
- Determine priorities and goals
- Develop a plan of action

The term "strategic ministry planning," in the context of this guide, refers to both effective visioning and the development of an effective plan for implementation. The guide consists of an outline of the process as well as resources which are intended to be reproduced. It may be helpful to color code copies that are made.

Using Claiming God's Vision a congregation can ...

- Seek God's specific purpose for the congregation
- Pray and rely on the Holy Spirit to lead the process
- Use skills and individual gifts given by God
- Explore the community and its characteristics
- Learn about congregational strengths and resources
- Create a specific Vision/Mission or Statement of Calling
- Make decisions about possible ministry opportunities
- Set ministry priorities
- Develop a ministry plan which provides clear direction

Three primary questions guide the process:

Where are we now?
Where is God calling us to be and go?
How do we get there?

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Introduction

An Introduction to Claiming God's Vision

Claiming God's Vision involves the entire congregation at key points, but it is primarily carried forward by a small group of persons who are able and willing to bring their gifts to the process of seeking and claiming God's vision for the future of their congregation. This small group is hereafter called the "Team." Once the Team is formed, it will be important to share the list of members with the whole congregation so that members will know who to talk with, if and when they have input to the process.

It is recommended that the Team be composed of the following:

- Persons who are visionary and creative;
- Persons who are deeply committed to the congregation;
- Persons who are knowledgeable of the congregation's life;
- Persons who are dependable, able, and willing to attend extra meetings and follow through with their responsibilities;
- At least one person with computer experience who can help the Team find additional resources on the Internet.

Additionally, make sure your Team represents the makeup of the congregation according to:

- age
- gender
- ethnicity
- long and short-term membership
- leaders and those who have not served in leadership positions

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Introduction

An Introduction to Claiming God's Vision

Choose a leader with good administrative abilities who can take initiative and delegate responsibilities. The suggested group size is:

Up to 100 average worship attendance	7 persons, plus minister and board chairperson
100-150 average worship attendance	7 persons, plus minister and board chairperson
150-200 average worship attendance	9 persons, plus minister(s) and board chairperson
Above 200 average worship attendance	11 persons, plus minister(s) and board chairperson

This exciting process is based on the reality that the Church does not set its own agenda: the Church belongs to God, with Jesus Christ as the head of the body. Therefore, it is imperative that prayer, meditation, scripture reflection, and intentional discernment form the foundational stones that hold together a congregation's ministry planning process. Suggested guides and resources related to discernment and prayer are included in the Resources section (see **Resources A and B**). With a commitment to that foundation, along with intentional research and strategic planning, the process will produce lasting results and the congregation will be **claimed by God's vision**.

An Overview of the Purpose and Process

Claiming God's Vision is offered as a tool with many facets. It is understood that there is no one way to approach strategic ministry planning. This tool, however, offers guidance and direction in a variety of areas related to ministry planning. The material provided is designed to be used by congregations on their own, though the participation of an outside resource person may help a congregation see things from a different perspective. Information related to securing outside resource persons are included in **Resource C**. The process is flexible, providing for more or less research and evaluation of information so that planning can be completed within three to six months.

This approach suggests that a Team meet regularly and that the process of gathering and sharing information occur early on in the process. This could include a retreat style event. Whatever the method, the goal is for the Team to understand and have consensus on the data related to the question, "Where are we now?"

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Introduction

An Overview of the Purpose and Process

Next, the Team and congregation address the question, “Where is God calling us to be and go?” This portion of the process moves into a time of discernment and revelation regarding the congregation’s vision and ministry possibilities. Finally, this process leads to the development of a strategic ministry plan; a guide which answers the question, “How do we get there?” This is the ultimate goal of any ministry planning process.

The Team is encouraged to saturate their process with:

- Prayer
- Scripture Reading
- Worship

Individual research assignments can be made early on and the group will also want to be prepared for joint assignments. Congregational input and discussion are essential for creating a plan which results in action. Supplemental resources and suggested approaches are included in the Resource Section.

Spiritual Emphasis and Preparation for Ministry Planning

This is the “get ready” time as Claiming God’s Vision is first introduced to the congregation. It involves very intentional congregational communication. For congregational communication use every source you can think of, such as:

- Newsletter articles
- Spoken statements during worship, church school and other gatherings
- A visit from a member of regional staff
- A church Web page
- Letters and e-mail messages
- Banners
- Posters
- Messages on bookmarks, balloons, tee shirts

Do whatever it takes to say to your congregation, “This is our spiritual journey. It is important to our life together as a people of faith. We want everybody involved.”

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Introduction

Spiritual Emphasis and Preparation for Ministry Planning

During this time, the Pastor is encouraged to develop at least two sermons (or even a series) around themes of the congregation's basic identity, the importance of "vision" for the future, trusting the leading of God, submission to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, moving from the past to the future, etc. The sermons should be linked clearly to the process of ministry planning.

This also is a time to involve key leaders or any interested persons in Bible studies, book studies, or reflection groups focusing on similar issues—vision, core identity, basic values, etc. (**Resource D provides a Key List of Core Values**). In addition, this is an ideal time to involve the entire congregation in an intentional process to discern individual Spiritual Gifts. For more information see **Resource E, Discovering and Using Spiritual Gifts**. This process provides valuable information as a strategic ministry plan is developed.

Another suggestion is the formation of a Prayer Support Group for the entire process. Select people who are acknowledged prayer leaders and commission them for the ministry of prayer support. The congregation's awareness and acceptance of the process, and members' commitment to the spiritual dimension of the process, reduces the possibility of Claiming God's Vision becoming "just another planning process." Let the Holy Spirit work ... cultivate the ground ... nurture the process with spiritual sharing and insight ... call the congregation to spiritual deepening ... and God will do the rest!

Where are we now?

Community and Congregational Demographic Information

During the ministry planning preparation period, members of the Team begin to collect important community and congregational demographic information to be used later.

Included in the Resources Section are outlines of key demographic questions and issues about the community and congregation (see **Resources F - Gathering Information [short version]** and **G - Gathering Information [expanded version]**). The Team can collect relevant information using either of these outlines in addition to information from city or county records.

Who are we as a congregation? This question needs to be raised as part of the planning process. It is helpful to have some sense of the congregation's past as well as its present core values and beliefs. What does the congregation hold near and dear? Once again, during the ministry planning preparation period using **Resources F or G**, members of the Team can begin to collect important congregational demographic information.

In addition, an excellent resource for gathering community demographic information is available through Percept on the Link2Lead.com site jointly promoted by Church Extension, Disciples Home Missions, and Regions. Information needed to secure community demographic information through Percept as well as additional sources are found in **Resource H**. This information is very important to have as the Team and the congregation consider where and how God is leading in relation to your particular community and its needs.

Where are we now?

Congregational Life Information

How are we living out our call as a congregation? Another important area for the congregation to be clear about during this process has to do with the way it is living its life. Along with community and congregational demographic information, the Team will want to gather information on the congregation's life. Resources and sample approaches which can be used in this process are listed below and can be found in the Resources Section:

- Congregational Questionnaire (highly recommended) (**Resource I**)
- Retreat Model (including preparation notes and a schedule) (**Resource J**)
- Small Groups (**Resource K**)

This phase of the process will need extensive involvement by the whole congregation in order to be accurate. Data is concrete, but congregational life has to do a lot with opinion. Once the information is put together, based on input from the congregation, the Team should take the results back to the congregation as a reality check, posing the question: "Did we accurately reflect where we are now?"

Where is God calling us to be and go?

Vision/Mission/ Statement of Calling

“Unless you know where you are going, any road will take you there.” This frequently quoted statement emphasizes the importance of a congregation knowing its aims and purposes in order to take the right road: thus the importance of a congregation periodically evaluating its direction.

At this stage in the planning process, the Team is encouraged, based on an emerging vision, to prayerfully reflect on a congregational Statement of Calling, sometimes called a Mission Statement. In the context of this guide, this statement is referred to as a ministry statement. This is a concise and practical statement of what God is calling the congregation to be and do. It is based on the reflections and insights gained during the planning process and needs specificity based on core values, basic beliefs, hopes and dreams, and practical applications of ministry.

Ministry Possibilities

As the congregation, led by the Team, prayerfully moves through the strategic ministry planning process, the experience can be similar to that of Moses on the mountain. God knew the plans for Moses and the Israelites and yet only revealed portions of the plan for the prophet to follow.

Along with the identification of a ministry statement, the Team is called to prayerfully discern ministry possibilities (portions of the plan) for the future of the congregation. The list might be short or long, depending on the leading of the Spirit and the amount of information gained during the planning process. The Team reflects, talks, prays, and listens for the leading of God toward future ministries, and takes as long as necessary to come to consensus around a list of possibilities. The list is prepared for sharing with the congregation along with the ministry statement.

A primary reason for a congregation to exist is to serve God by being a loving, serving presence in the local community and the world. Once a congregation is clear about its reality, the challenge is to identify ways to reach beyond itself as well as care for current members. Sample approaches that can be used to accomplish this are offered as **Resources L and M**.

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Where is God calling us to be and go?

Ministry Possibilities

God calls us into relationship. As the Team prepares the list of ministry possibilities, consider the various kinds of relationships a congregation has and what the possibilities are for ministry in those relationships:

- The relationship between members of the congregation and God
- The relationship between the members within the congregation
- The relationship between the congregation and its community
- The relationship between the congregation and the broader denomination
- The relationship between the congregation and the world

Depending on how the planning process unfolds, identification of ministry possibilities may precede the development of a ministry statement. In either case, the next stage in strategic ministry planning is prioritizing, developing, and laying out a plan which can be followed by members of the congregation and that reflects their faith response to God's call.

Wait on the Spirit. Listen carefully to each other. Find consensus in the crafting of the language. This important statement will be your benchmark for the future. The completion of the congregational statement may not be accomplished until final approval is given by the congregation. A sample Statement of Calling is provided in the Resources section (see **Resource N**).

How do we get there?

Priority Issues and Ministry Goals

Based on the response to the question, “Where are we now?” and the emerging vision in response to the question “Where is God calling us to be and go?” the challenge now is to respond to the question, “How do we get there?” Priority issues and ministry possibilities are identified and presented at this stage.

Some congregations may choose to identify the issues and possibilities through a “town hall” meeting with the total congregation. Others may choose to have the Team or another small group do this work. If the Team or another small group identifies the issues and ministry possibilities, it will be important for the congregation to have input and ownership as they prepare to move forward with ministry plans. (Detailed information regarding one approach is included in **Resource O**.)

Once the congregation has received the congregational ministry statement and the list of issues and possibilities, it will be necessary to prioritize the possibilities. All of the possibilities may be valid for some time in the future; however, it is important for the congregation to prioritize the immediate ministry needs as these needs will become **THEIR MINISTRY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**.

How do we get there?

Developing and Implementing the Ministry Plan

Once the congregation has affirmed the ministry statement and ministry needs or objectives, the Team will need to spend sufficient time outlining a specific ministry plan for implementation. A ministry plan has two parts:

- A list of congregational goals and objectives
- A plan of action

To become a reality, each priority will need to have appropriate allocations made for time, space, leadership, funding, and all other aspects which affect the final outcome. Additionally, each priority should include specific implementation timelines and measurements. Information on preparing a ministry plan as well as samples of ministry plans are included as **Resources P and Q**.

Once the Ministry Plan is completed, the Team brings it to the congregation for review and additional input. Ultimately, the statement and plan become a reality as the congregation moves into ministry. It is important for the plan to move from information gathering and data to a living document which drives ministry. It is also important for the congregation to revisit the ministry planning process on an ongoing basis as the ministry needs of the congregation change.

When the Board and congregation have affirmed both the ministry statement and plan, an appropriate worship celebration might be held to bring the planning process to closure (see **Resource R**). In this special service it is appropriate for the congregation to celebrate their hard work and plans for the future, to honor those who served on the Team, and for members to commit to pray and commit their gifts and resources to God for the congregation's future ministry.

Claiming God's Vision Evaluation Form

1. When did you start the Claiming God's Vision process? (Approximate date)
2. How much of the process did you use? Did you develop a Statement of Calling and a Ministry Plan? (Please attach copies, if available)
3. What results of the Claiming God's Vision process do you see in the life of your congregation?

Please evaluate the following on a scale of:

5	4	3	2	1
Very Helpful	Helpful	Adequate	Not Very Helpful	Not Helpful at All

4. The overall benefit of the process to the congregation
Comments:

Rating:

5. The design of the process
Comments:

Rating:

6. The Claiming God's Vision Guide
Comments:

Rating:

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Claiming God’s Vision Evaluation Form

7. Demographic Information

Rating:

Please note the source of your information.
Did you access Link 2 Lead?

8. Information from the Congregational Survey

Rating:

Additional comments or suggestions for improving the Claiming God’s Vision process:

Name of Congregation _____

Church Address _____

Name of person or group submitting this evaluation _____

Please complete and return this form to:
Church Extension
P. O. Box 7030
Indianapolis, IN 46207

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Discerning God's Vision Through Scriptural Reflection and Prayer

A

Resource A

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

Congregations that strive to claim God's vision for their future, must begin by striving to discern God's vision. Although humankind can never see the world completely through God's eyes, scriptural reflection and prayer can be helpful as we consider where God is leading us to go.

The following is offered as one possible model to help the Team and the whole congregation as they try to discern God's vision. The Team can use this model whenever it meets, and the different groups within the life of the congregation (the board, the committees, youth groups, Disciples Women/CWF, CME, etc.) can use it at least one time during the visioning process. In addition to this model, a congregation may want to form a prayer support group or use a prayer group already in existence to pray for the whole Claiming God's Vision process on a daily basis during the time that the Team and congregation are working on it. Additionally, the pastoral prayer during worship each Sunday can lift up the Claiming God's Vision process and the Team members.

The following model enables a group to gather in the presence of God and discern the voice of God in its midst. It invites an atmosphere of prayer and listening, rather than efficiency and productivity. In typical church meetings, emphasis is often placed on accomplishing tasks. In this model, emphasis is placed on deepening relationships—with oneself, others, and God. This model avoids prayers or other rituals that rely on the gifts of only one person, instead it relies on the full participation of all persons present.

A Model for Scriptural Reflection and Prayer:

- Begin by preparing the setting. Establish a worship center that consists of a candle, a Bible, and any other materials (a special cloth, flowers, a symbol of the congregation, etc.) deemed appropriate.
- Remind everyone that God is always present with us. Use the lighting of the candle as a way to remind everyone that God is in their midst.
- If the group is small, spend a few moments to allow each person to share by asking: "How are you?" Explain that this is a time to listen to each other without interrupting or commenting—listen with your eyes and ears only because sufficient opportunities for uninterrupted silence enable us to fully be in touch with the Holy. Leave a moment of silence in-between each person to honor what has been said. If there are time constraints and the group is too large, proceed to the next step.

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- Spend a few moments in silence, inviting everyone to leave behind their cares and preoccupations and fully attune themselves to the presence of God in their midst. Be sure not to end the silence too soon!
- Read Jeremiah 29:11 or another scripture. For the Team who is meeting on a regular basis, one of the lectionary scriptures for that week might be read. Read the chosen scripture twice and allow a period of silence in-between and after the readings.
- Invite each person to share what he/she heard in the scripture, what stood out for them, what new insight they gained, etc. Once again explain that this is a time to listen to each other without interrupting or commenting.
- Allow a few moments for silent meditation and prayer as people reflect on all that was shared.
- Ask: “Given all that we’ve heard and shared and given our prayerful reflection on scripture, what is God’s vision for us?” Once again, explain that this is a time to listen to each other without interrupting or commenting.
- At this time the group begins to address its agenda, but it is important for the leader to remind the group to continue to be aware of the scripture, prayer and sharing that has occurred.
- At the end of the meeting the group returns its attention to how it started its meeting and closes with the reading of the scripture, with a word of remembrance, or with a prayer.

Spiritual Discernment of God's Call Resources

Resource B

B

Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church, by Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN, 1997.

This contemporary book offers a fresh alternative to the often-rancorous parliamentary procedures many church groups use when making important decisions. Structured around church traditions and biblical examples of decision-making, this book explains how to seek and find God's will when making a decision. Any size group can use the step-by-step approach.

Discerning Your Congregation's Future: A Strategic and Spiritual Approach, by Robert Friedrich and Roy Oswald, Alban Institute Publication, Bethesda, MD, 1996.

This book provides a step-by-step guide to congregational planning that grounds strategic planning techniques in a process of spiritual discernment. Helps members own the vision. Provides help for addressing specific situations.

Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations, by Suzanne Farnham, Stephanie Hull, and R. Taylor McLean, Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA, 1991.

This powerful, prayerful, and practical guide teaches groups a whole new way of conducting meetings and reaching consensus. Whether your group, committee or board is secular or religious, its members can now move beyond parliamentary procedure to a higher level using this model. Rooted in scripture, *Grounded in God* energizes and inspires.

A Guide to Spiritual Discernment, by Reuben Job, Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN, 1997.

Discernment for the Christian community begins with the individual Christian. Do I want to know God's will more than anything else? This question is the entryway into discernment. This book offers a simple structure, including prayer, scripture, reflection and readings on Spiritual discernment.

Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community, by Suzanne Farnham, Joseph Gill, R. Taylor McLean, and Susan Ward, Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA, 1991.

Discerning a call to ministry and vocation can be aided by the insight and support of a community that helps us discover the answers to important questions of the heart.

TAKE, BREAK, RECEIVE: The Practice of Discernment in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), by Ruth Fletcher, Disciples Home Missions, Indianapolis, IN, 1999.

A process of discernment is one means by which to bring spiritual and theological grounding to the administrative life of our boards and committees. The model for a discernment process described in this resource is based on our experience of communion. We in the Christian Church (DOC) are a People of the Table. This resource is offered by Disciples Home Missions and the Office of the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (DOC).

Suggestions for Securing Outside Resource Persons

Resource C

Claiming God's Vision is designed so that your congregation can work through the process on its own. If you think it would be helpful to have someone from outside your congregation work with you, serving as a guide and resource person, contact the following potential resources:



- Your regional office
- Minister of another congregation
- Retired minister
- Local Council of Churches
- Disciples Home Missions
- Church Extension

Questions about this resource may be directed to the staff of either:

Disciples Home Missions at **1-888-346-2631**
email: homelandministries@dhm.disciples.org

or

Church Extension at **1-800-274-1883**
email: bce@churchextension.org

Key List of Core Values

Resource D

These words are examples of Core Values in the life of a congregation. It is by no means a complete list. Perhaps one or more of these values have been part of your congregation's history, or perhaps you could identify some in your present circumstances. The values that we hold say quite a bit about who we are as individuals and as congregations.



ACCEPTANCE	CHANGE	COMMUNITY	FAMILY
EQUALITY	JOY	EXCITEMENT	FUN
HEALTH	LOVE	INTEGRITY	MISSION
MORALITY	RESPECT	KNOWLEDGE	GROWTH
STABILITY	FREEDOM	SPIRITUALITY	SUCCESS
BEAUTY	PEACE	QUIET	ACTION
EXCELLENCE	CONTINUITY	CHILDREN	FRIENDS
HUMILITY	PAST	HARMONY	NOW
BELONGING	WITNESS	HELPING	FUTURE
ADVENTURE	AMBITION	CARING	FINANCIAL SECURITY
COURAGE	DIGNITY	CREATIVITY	COMPASSION
SELF-ESTEEM	HONESTY	INDEPENDENCE	NURTURE
INNER PEACE	LAUGHTER	LOYALTY	PURPOSE
SERENITY	HERITAGE	SAFETY	STRENGTH
SECURITY			

By the way, not all core values are positive, are they? Consider negative values like Fear ... Survival ... Conflict ... Distrust ... Dishonesty, etc., as these can drive the life of a congregation, too; clearly they are not the values and beliefs on which to build. If your congregation discovers that its life has focused around unhealthy values and beliefs, then it's time to acknowledge it, prayerfully release those impediments, and refocus on the calling of the Holy Spirit. Paul's list of fruits of the Spirit would be good to study in this context (Galatians 5) and also his admonition to "think about these things ..." in Philippians 4.

Discovering and Using Spiritual Gifts

Resource E

Discover Your Gifts and Learn How to Use Them, by Alvin J. Vander Griend, CRC Publications, 1996.

Description: A comprehensive but easy to use group study designed for 7 sessions. A Student Manual and Leader's Guide are available. The resource includes assessment instruments for spiritual gifts, temperament, ministry-passion, skills/talents, spiritual maturity, and availability.

Order from: CRC Publications, 1-800-333-8300.

The Holy Spirit: A Study of Its Origins, Development, and Application, by William Mackie, First Christian Church of Baton Rouge, 1999.

Description: Written by a Disciples minister, this resource is a study of the work of the Holy Spirit as described in the Old and New Testaments, a description of the gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament, an inventory of spiritual gifts, and suggestions for ministry opportunities which correspond with each of the spiritual gifts.

Order from: First CC, Baton Rouge, LA. Phone: 225-926-4175 - Web Site: www.fccbrla.org

Spiritual Gifts and Your Personal Ministry, by Jeanette Calamusa, First Christian Church of Baton Rouge, 1999.

Description: This binder contains a description of how the congregation restructured around spiritual gifts, becoming a "Gifted to Serve" congregation. Also included are the design for training sessions to help people identify their gifts, assessment instruments, and the process by which the congregation invites people to ministries based on their gifts.

Order from: First CC, Baton Rouge, LA. Phone: 225-926-4175 - Web Site: www.fccbrla.org

E

Gathering Information

(Short Version)

Resource F

In order to define a ministry which utilizes the congregation's strengths, the Team must first gather and analyze information about the church, members of the congregation and the local neighborhood.

The Church and Members of the Congregation

Information regarding the church and members of the congregation information can be obtained in various ways. One might be to hold an all-church retreat (see **Resource J**). In this setting, specific questions could be asked, either through a written survey or in group discussion, answers tallied and conversation held regarding the church's strengths, member's gifts and passions, and the state of the facility.

Another way to gather the needed information is to create a questionnaire (see **Resource I**) which can be completed anonymously by members and the results tabulated by the Team for presentation to the congregation. Although it is important to solicit input from the Church Board and Property Committee about the physical condition of the facility, it is equally important to include some questions on the questionnaire about how the congregation views the property.

Regardless of the method chosen to gather this information, it is vital that the Team analyze the data received and present the results to the congregation so they remain connected to the process and feel ownership for the outcome. **Important note: If, during the discernment and strategic ministry planning process, it is determined by the congregation that your present facility may not be adequate to meet the new vision for your church, contact Church Extension at 1-800-274-1883 for a General Consultation and a Building Planning Workbook.**

Some examples of questions you might want to ask during the gathering of information are shown in **Resources G and I**. You may choose to use the questionnaire as written or modify it to reflect the needs of your church.

Neighborhood Information

It is strongly recommended that the Team identify at least one computer-savvy member to take responsibility for the gathering of demographic information. The simplest way to get community demographic information is to access the Link2Lead.com website which is jointly promoted and funded by Church Extension, Disciples Home Missions, New Church Ministry and Regions. This service is provided by Percept, a California company, and provides demographic information as well as data about religious attitudes, preferences and behavior. Congregations can access the information by self-registering on the Link2Lead.com website. There is no fee to the congregation for this service (see **Resource H** for more detailed information and instructions on using Percept.)

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Claiming God's Vision

Additional demographic information is available through your local Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development offices, real estate agencies, school boards, and your local library.

You will want to gather information regarding the population in the immediate area surrounding your church, characteristics of that population (growth patterns, age and gender distribution, education and employment levels, racial-ethnic diversity, mobility, average home values), and information about existing congregations within your geographic area.

In gathering population and community information, consider how wide a geographic area the congregation services. A rule of thumb is to expect that persons will travel up to 20 minutes from their home to church.

After determining the geographical boundaries for your demographic search, the following are some search parameters you may want to include in your review:

1. What is the population of your defined area?

2. What was the population 5 years ago? 10 years ago?

3. What is the projected population over the next 5 and 10 years?



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Claiming God's Vision

4. Determine the following characteristics of the current population:

- Age
- Gender
- Marital status
- Family status (number of children, ages of children)
- Racial and ethnic makeup
- Socio-economic (occupations, education, income, housing patterns)



5. What religious denominations are represented in your neighborhood?

6. What percentage of the community does/does not attend church?

Once this information is gathered, the Team should analyze the data and attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the trend of land use in the church's neighborhood and area of service?

2. What social, economic, and population changes have taken place in the community?

3. Does the church offer programs, worship, and services which meet the needs of the current population?

4. How does the makeup of the congregation compare to that of the community?

—continued

Claiming God's Vision

5. Is there a preponderance of a particular religious group or denomination in your area? What impact does this have on the congregation?

6. What are the trends of other churches in the area? Are they growing, declining, or stable?

7. What trends might affect the church's ability to serve present members or reach new members?

8. What specific needs for ministry and service exist in the community?

9. Are there particular age levels or groups not being served or reached through the church's current programs?

10. What implications can be drawn about the potential for the congregation's future growth?



Gathering Information (Expanded Version)

Resource G

Note: This resource is especially recommended if a congregation is to engage in building planning.

In order to define a ministry which utilizes the congregation's strengths, the Team must first gather and analyze information about the church, members of the congregation, and the local neighborhood. The expanded version for gathering information contains two sections to be used in securing neighborhood and congregational information. The Team divides into two groups, each designated responsibility for one piece of the data collection.

It is strongly recommended that the Team identify at least one computer-savvy member to take responsibility for the gathering of demographic information. The simplest way to get community demographic information is to access the Link2Lead.com website which is jointly promoted and funded by Church Extension, Disciples Home Missions, New Church Ministry, and Regions. This service is provided by Percept, a California company, and provides demographic information as well as data about religious attitudes, preferences, and behavior. Congregations can access the information by self-registering on the Link2Lead.com website. There is no fee to the congregation for this service (see **Resource H** for more detailed information and instructions on using Percept). Additional demographic information is available through your local Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development offices, real estate agencies, school boards, and your local library.



Information on the church and members of the congregation can be obtained in various ways. One might be to hold an all-church retreat (see **Resource J**). In this setting, specific questions could be asked, either through a written survey or in group discussion, answers tallied and conversation held regarding the church's strengths, members' gifts and passions, and the state of the facility.

Another way to gather the needed information is to create a questionnaire (see **Resource I**) which can be completed anonymously by members and the results tabulated by the Team for presentation to the congregation. Although it is important to solicit input from the Church Board and Property Committee about the physical condition of the facility, it is equally important to include some questions on the questionnaire about how the congregation views the property.

Regardless of the method chosen to this information, it is vital that the Team analyze the data received and present the results to the congregation so they remain connected to the process and feel ownership for the outcome. **Important note: If, during the discernment and strategic ministry planning process, it is determined by the congregation that your present facility may not be adequate to meet the new vision for your church, contact Church Extension at 1-800-274-1883 for a General Consultation and a Building Planning Workbook.**

—continued

Section I: Your neighborhood

1. **Geography:** Where is your neighborhood and what is it like?

Define the church's area of service, your "neighborhood." How wide an area does your congregation now serve? How wide an area do you want to serve?

Travel time from residence to the church location is one method of determining the neighborhood. A rule of thumb is to expect that persons will travel up to 20 minutes from their place of residence. Another guide is to determine the usual travel time in your community from home to work. People will generally also be willing to drive this distance to church.

a. What streets form the boundaries to your ministry area, or "neighborhood?" List the boundaries below, and then take a marker and trace the boundaries of your neighborhood on a map.



b. How would you describe your setting? Are you in a rural area? A county seat town? An inner city? A suburb?

c. Are there any special features in your neighborhood? (College or university, military base, large apartment complex, major industrial site, jail or detention center, hospital, etc.)

d. What is the trend of land use in your neighborhood?

e. What significant changes (social, economic, and population) have you noticed in your neighborhood in recent years?

–continued

Claiming God's Vision

f. Does your congregation have more difficulty or less difficulty reaching residents of your neighborhood now versus 10 years ago?

g. Describe the traffic flow past your church. How many cars pass by and on what streets?

2. Demographics: Who are the people in your neighborhood?



a. What is the population of your neighborhood? _____

b. What was the population 5 years ago? _____ 10 years ago? _____

c. What is the projected population growth 5 years from now? _____ 10 years? _____

d. What percentage of the population are male _____ female _____?

e. What percentage are married _____ single _____?

f. What religious groups or denominations are found in your neighborhood? Is there a preponderance of a particular religious group or denomination?

g. What racial/ethnic groups are present in your neighborhood? (List percentages of the total population)

- African American _____
- American Asian/Pacific Islander _____
- Caucasian _____
- Hispanic _____
- Native American _____
- Other _____

-continued

Claiming God's Vision

h. How old are the people in your neighborhood? (List percentages)

- 17 or younger _____
- 18–24 _____
- 25–34 _____
- 35–44 _____
- 45–54 _____
- 55–64 _____
- 65 or older _____

i. Families come in many different configurations. What kinds of families live in your neighborhood?

- Single adult _____
- One adult with child(ren) _____
- Couple _____
- Couple with child(ren) _____
- Other _____



j. What percentage of people have achieved the following levels of education?

- Up to 5th grade _____
- 6th to 8th grade _____
- High school or GED _____
- College graduate _____
- Advanced degree _____

3. **Economics:** Where do the people in your neighborhood work?

a. What percentage work in the following types of jobs?

- Clerical _____
- Farming _____
- Homemaking _____
- Managerial/professional _____
- Manufacturing _____
- Trade _____
- Retired _____
- Student _____
- Other _____

–continued

Claiming God's Vision

- b. What percentage are unemployed? _____ What is the state's unemployment rate? _____
- c. What percentage of people who live in your neighborhood work within 5 miles of their homes? _____
- d. What percentage of people commute to work? _____ How many miles? _____
- e. What percentage of households in your neighborhood earn the following annual gross incomes?
- Below \$12,000 _____
 - \$12,000–\$20,000 _____
 - \$21,000–\$30,000 _____
 - \$31,000–\$45,000 _____
 - \$46,000–\$60,000 _____
 - \$61,000–\$100,000 _____
 - More than \$100,000 _____

G

4. **Housing:** In what kinds of homes do people in your neighborhood live?

- a. What percentage of families own their homes? _____
- b. What percentage rent their homes? _____
- c. What percentage live in the following types of homes?
- Single unit house _____
 - Duplex _____
 - Condominium _____
 - Apartment _____
 - Mobile home _____
 - Nursing home or group home _____
 - Other _____
- d. When was most of the housing in your neighborhood constructed?

–continued

e. How would you describe the general condition of housing in the neighborhood?

5. Neighborhood churches: What other churches also serve your neighborhood?

a. What other Disciples of Christ congregations are in the service area you identified?

b. Where are they located? How close are they to your location?



c. How many participating members do they have? That information is available from the Year Book and Directory which is the official document of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that gives statistical information on congregations.

d. Would you estimate that they are increasing in membership, decreasing, or remaining static?

e. Do you know their ministry focus? If so, what is it?

-continued

Claiming God's Vision

- f. List other churches in your neighborhood, their denominational affiliation, when they were established, what their primary ministry focus is, and your best estimate of whether they are increasing in membership, decreasing, or remaining static:

Church and Date Established	Denomination	Ministry Focus	Growing	Declining	Static

G

-continued

Claiming God's Vision

6. **Subgroups:** What identifiable groups are in your neighborhood, and what are their needs?

a. In the space below, use the data gathered in question 2 and list all the subgroups you can think of in your neighborhood. (Examples: children, youth, gangs, single parents, recently divorced or widowed persons, business leaders, college students, military personnel, senior citizens) Beside each subgroup, list the needs you think that subgroup might have. Then, beside each identified need, list a church or agency in the community that is ministering to that subgroup.¹

Subgroup	Needs	Who is ministering to the need



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Claiming God's Vision

Section 2: Your congregation

While working together as a Team gathering information about your congregation, you may want to discern what individual and collective spiritual gifts God has provided your congregation. Spiritual gift discovery work can help you better ask: “What has God gifted us to do with each other and within the community?”

Resource E, “Discovering and Using Spiritual Gifts” can be helpful in providing a list of resources for reading about spiritual gifts, spiritual gift inventories, and the name of a congregation which has utilized a process of spiritual gift discernment to develop their vision for their congregation. You can feel free to make contact with this congregation to help resource your own spiritual gifts process and, thereby, augment your information gathering for your congregation.

As one group of the Team gathers information on the neighborhood the church serves, the Team members assigned to gather information in this section will explore factors of your congregation that influence your effectiveness in ministry. You will need your congregation’s membership records, worship attendance records, financial records, records of ministers who served the congregation for the past 30 years, and a church calendar for the past year. Please note that several of the following questions relate to facility issues and may not be needed if your facility already meets your needs.

The Year Book and Directory is the official document of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) which provides statistical information on congregations. You may request a print-out of your “10 Year Congregational Profile” from the Year Book Office by calling **317-635-3100**. It is provided without charge.

1. Church location and visibility

- a. Is (are) the building(s) highly visible to the community?
- b. What kind of image does (do) the building(s) and property give?
- c. Are there adequate signs? Are they strategically located to attract?
- d. From what distance are the signs visible?



–continued

Claiming God's Vision

e. Are there any approaches to the church from which no sign is visible?

f. Does(Do) the building(s) create barriers for persons with disabilities?

2. Condition of the church building(s)

a. Are there any major maintenance or structural problems?

3. Land

a. How much land does the congregation own?

b. How much does a comparable size lot in the immediate vicinity cost? (A Realtor should be able to provide this information)



4. Parking

a. How many off-street parking spaces are provided? _____

b. Do you have a parking space for every 2 worship attenders? _____

c. Does your present parking allow for growth in numbers of attenders? _____

-continued

Claiming God's Vision

5. Staff

a. Who are your paid staff persons? Indicate whether they are full-time or part-time. List their major responsibilities.

Name	Position	Full- or Part-time	Responsibilities



b. Is additional staff needed?

c. List the senior ministers that have served your congregation for the past 30 years.

Name of minister	Served from (date) to (date)

-continued

6. Membership, Attendance, and Giving (Refer to the “Statistical Reports”)

a. Do you think the figures your congregation turned in to the Year Book are accurate?

b. What significant trends do you see in the membership and attendance figures?

c. If the figures show significant growth or decline, what was happening in the life of the congregation or your neighborhood at that time?



7. Financial Resources

a. What is the number of “giving units” in your congregation? _____

b. Does the congregation conduct an annual financial commitment program?

c. What type of financial commitment programs have been used in the past 3 years?

d. Is there a Memorial Fund? Summarize the guidelines for use of these funds.

e. Does the church have a major gifts and bequests policy? Summarize the guidelines for use of these funds.

–continued

Claiming God's Vision

f. List the following amounts which apply to the congregation:

Total permanent funds \$ _____

Income from the funds is used for what purposes?

Total indebtedness \$ _____ Monthly debt payment _____

Total cash on hand \$ _____ Value of property \$ _____

Other assets _____ \$ _____

Are these income producing? _____

Does the church have capital or building fund pledges or income?

If yes, amount? \$ _____



9. Worship

a. Does your congregation have more than one worship service?

b. Describe your worship service, or services (style, type of music, time of service)

c. Using your weekly worship attendance record, fill out the following chart on your average worship attendance each month for each service (pages 37-38).

d. Who typically attends each service? (age group, race, preferences, etc.)

e. Do you see any patterns in worship attendance through the year?

-continued

Worship Attendance Record

Check church records and fill out worship attendance for each week.

	Day of Service	Type of Service (New, Contemporary, Traditional, etc.)	Time of Service	Number in Attendance
January				
February				
March				
April				
May				
June				



-continued

Claiming God's Vision

Worship Attendance Record (continued)

	Day of Service	Type of Service (New, Contemporary, Traditional, etc.)	Time of Service	Number in Attendance
July				
August				
September				
October				
November				
December				

G

-continued

Claiming God's Vision

9. Programs, Groups and Ministries

a. Fill out the following Building Use Worksheet and the Group Life Worksheet.

Building Use Worksheet

Enter every group or program scheduled in the building at its regular meeting time. Include any community groups using the building. (For monthly meetings note M.)

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
7 AM							
8 AM							
9 AM							
10 AM							
11 AM							
12 PM							
1 PM							
2 PM							
3 PM							
4 PM							
5 PM							
6 PM							
7 PM							
8 PM							
9 PM							
10 PM							



-continued

Claiming God's Vision

c. Which programs, groups, or aspects of congregational life are the most effective in ministering to people? Which ones really make a difference?

d. Which programs or groups are most effective in attracting new people?

e. Which programs or groups are most effective in involving new people in the life and mission of the congregation?



f. Which programs or groups are no longer effective?

g. Are there persons or groups in the congregation who are not being reached by your present programs and services?

h. Are there persons or groups in the neighborhood who are not being reached or served by your present programs?

–continued

Claiming God's Vision

i. Is the congregation known in the community for excellence in specific programs or ministries? If yes, what are they?

j. What evangelistic activities has the congregation attempted?



k. Where do the majority of your new members come from?

l. How did they learn about your church?

11. Facility

a. Is your building adequate for the programs and ministries you now offer?

b. Is your building adequate for the programs and ministries you hope to offer in the future?

Note: If the answer to either of these questions is “no,” contact Church Extension at 1-800-274-1883 following your ministry planning process for a General Consultation and a Building Planning Workbook.

Demographic Information

Resource H

Church Extension, Disciples Home Missions, New Church Ministry, and Regions are offering demographic services through Percept. Percept, a California company, provides demographic information and data about religious attitudes, preferences and behavior to regions and Disciples congregations.

Congregations can simply go to **Link2Lead.com**. Instructions are posted on the web for self registration. Registration only takes place once and there is no fee. One person should be assigned as the user.

Simply go to **Link2Lead.com** and click on “register.”

Click on “start registration” at the bottom of the page.

Select your denomination.

Select your regional body.

Select your church’s city.

Select your church.

Following a brief questionnaire, simply click on the registration button.



Leaders from local congregations who are part of a regional body that is a Percept Vista client can register on **Link2Lead.com**. Congregations will be able to access book reviews and receive information about how to be the church in the 21st century. The site is dedicated to providing congregations with the latest demographic information about their local community.

Additional Sources of Demographic Information

Sources of demographic information in your community:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Economic Development Offices
- Real Estate Agencies
- School Boards
- Local Library

Websites:

<http://www.census.gov>

U.S. Census Bureau: the preeminent collector and provider of data about the people and economy of the U.S. In over 100 surveys annually and 20 censuses a decade, the Census Bureau provides official information about America’s people, businesses, industries, and institutions.

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Claiming God's Vision

<http://www.marketingtools.com>

American Demographics magazine

<http://www.electronicchurch.org>

The Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches—The best single source of information and statistics on religion in North America

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Statistics.html>

Provides a wide variety of links for U.S. statistical information in a wide spectrum of research areas

<http://govinfo.Kerr.orst.edu>

Provides access to federal statistical information



Congregational Questionnaire

Resource I

Your input is vital as we seek to define our church's future ministry. Please help by completing the following survey and returning it as instructed. The questions are designed to give the Team an idea of what we consider to be our Strengths and Growing Edges.

Beside most statements are the numbers 1 2 3 and 4. Please circle the number which most closely reflects your opinion.

1 = Strongly Agree

2 = Agree

3 = Disagree

4 = Strongly Disagree

Where a written response is requested, please print and be as specific as possible. Answer honestly and thoughtfully, and don't hold back. This is an anonymous survey and your input is important and valued. The results will be tabulated and reported back to the congregation for reflection and discussion.



1. A nursery is available and staffed:

(Please rate each category.)

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| a. During church services | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. During fellowship events | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. During special events | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d. Whenever the church gathers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

2. The church does a good job of ministering to:

(Please rate each category.)

- | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|
| a. Children | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. Youth | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. Young adults | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d. Older adults | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| e. Seniors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| f. Women | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| g. Men | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

-continued

Claiming God's Vision

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. Job descriptions are available for all those asked to serve. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Our worship service appeals to all ages. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. The worship service is uplifting and strengthens me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. We have a strong music ministry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Our congregation is racially diverse. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. Our congregation teaches and encourages people to give money for God's works. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. Leadership by lay persons is encouraged. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. We are a friendly and welcoming congregation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. Follow-up cards and/or personal visits are made to all visitors. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. Fellowship and/or recreational activities are sponsored by the church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. This congregation is well known in the community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. The congregation is encouraged to talk about their experiences with God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. We are effectively reaching unchurched people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. We are open to considering and trying new ideas. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. Bible study is an important aspect of the congregation's life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. People are encouraged to identify and use their special gifts and abilities in service to God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. I feel hopeful about the future of this congregation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. We have a clear sense of purpose or mission. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. We have goals and direction for the future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. We have opportunities to make a difference in our community through the church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 23. We are open to bringing together people of diverse backgrounds: religiously, ethnically and racially. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 24. Our church facility projects a positive image to the community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 25. All buildings and rooms are accessible to the handicapped. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 26. The buildings are in good repair. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |



-continued

Claiming God's Vision

27. The worship space is attractive and functional. 1 2 3 4

28. Our facility is utilized by outside groups and/or the community. 1 2 3 4

29. List any maintenance or structural problems you are aware of:

30. What do you think are the greatest strengths of this congregation?

31. Which programs or groups are most effective in involving new people in the life and mission of the congregation?



32. Are there programs, activities, groups, etc., that you feel are no longer effective?

33. Do you have suggestions for new programs or services?

Scoring the Questionnaire

After participants have completed the questionnaire, collect them and give all completed questionnaires to designated scorers. Let's assume that there are 30 people at the retreat and they all filled out the questionnaire.

Using simple "tally marks" to mark the Questionnaire Tally Sheet, have one person read each questionnaire, calling out the responses to each question as a second person records the responses on the Tally Sheet. For instance, taking the first completed questionnaire, the reader would say: "Question number 1a is a 2; question number 1b is a 1; number 1c is a 4; number 1d is a 1," etc. until each response to each question has been recorded. Then, begin with the second completed survey, then the third, etc. until the responses on all surveys are recorded on the Tally Sheet.

Here's how the score recording for Question 1a might look if all 30 people responded:

Question #	Response			
	1	2	3	4
1a	///	////	////x////	////x////x ////
1b				
1c				
1d				



What conclusion would you draw from this set of markings concerning the first statement on the survey? Do those surveyed believe the nursery is available and staffed during church services?

Consider each survey statement in the same way: What is the strength of "agrees" (answers 3 and 4) as opposed to "disagrees" (answers 1 and 2)?

When all responses have been entered, look for which issues received the most "strongly agree" or "agree" and which received the most "disagree" or "strongly disagree."

-continued

Claiming God's Vision

Questionnaire Tally Sheet

Question #	1	2	3	4
1a				
1b				
1c				
1d				
2a				
2b				
2c				
2d				
2e				
2f				
2g				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				



-continued

Claiming God's Vision

Questionnaire Tally Sheet (continued)

Question #	1	2	3	4
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				
21				
22				
23				
24				
25				
26				
27				
28				

I

All-Church Retreat Model

Resource J

As the original Team, you will serve throughout the congregational retreat. Upon completion of the retreat, it is suggested that, in consultation with your Pastor, you identify two or three additional persons to join the Team. These new members should be people who participated in the retreat.

The retreat model includes many components from the whole Claiming God's Vision program that will help members of your congregation discover who they are as a congregation and as a community. The retreat model is designed so that your congregation can work through it on your own. If you think it would be helpful, you may invite someone from outside the congregation to lead the retreat. For suggestions of possible leaders, see "Suggestions for Securing Outside Resource Persons," **Resource C**.

Included in this section on the All-Church Retreat you will find:

1. An Advance Preparation Checklist that outlines the preparations needed for all aspects of the retreat and suggests a time table for completing tasks (p. 52)
2. A Team Outline and Retreat Notes (p. 58)
3. A Model for Individual Prayer Time (p. 62)
4. A Retreat Schedule that is camera ready for you to copy and use for your congregation. Room is left at the top of the page for you to add the date and your church's name. (pp. 63-64)



Whatever location you choose for your retreat, remind participants that it is to be a "retreat" from the usual routine. It needs to be a time away from the interruptions of phone calls and other commitments.

If you need help with any aspect of your retreat planning, do not hesitate to call **Disciples Home Missions** at 1-888-346-2631 or **Church Extension** at 1-800-274-1883.

-continued

Advance Preparation Checklist

-EIGHT WEEKS BEFORE-

- Begin meeting weekly for prayer and Bible study.
- Review the Introduction, Overview of the Purpose and Process, and Spiritual Emphasis and Preparation for Ministry Planning sections of Claiming God's Vision (pp. 1-5).
- Assign person to collect demographic information (see **Resource H**) and prepare for presentation at retreat.
- Make a decision about the retreat location.
- "Get the Word Out!"—Decide when and how to communicate to the congregation about the Claiming God's Vision process—newsletter articles, sermons, letters, conversations with individual members, verbal announcements, bulletin boards, displays, book markers, etc.
- Other ideas for promoting the retreat and explaining Claiming God's Vision ...
- Assign person(s) to do publicity for the Claiming God's Vision Retreat.



-SIX WEEKS BEFORE-

- Analyze collected demographic information.
- Review **Resource D** "Key List of Core Values."
- Discuss, add to and assign the following tasks:**
 - Preparations for the care of children:*
 - Deciding what ages of children will be included in retreat.
 - Recruiting no less than two adult care givers.

—continued

Claiming God's Vision

- Making arrangements for the contributions of elementary age children, if they are not included in the retreat.
- Making every effort to invite and involve middle and high school age youth in the retreat.
- Other needed preparations ...

- Assign person(s) to carry out team decisions.

Preparations for meals and snacks:

- Making decisions about kinds of food and ways that food will be served. It is suggested that you keep meals simple and relaxed. Consider having a buffet meal available at 5:30 on Friday evening so that people can come straight from work. Have continental breakfast for Saturday morning. Order pizza or have sandwiches made ahead of time for Saturday lunch. Will young children be included in meal times? Keep snacks simple and healthy.
- Recruiting people outside of Team members to help with meal preparations.
- Other needed preparations ...



- Assign person(s) to carry out team decisions.

Preparations for worship and celebration times:

- Developing orders of worship.
- Creating a worship table that is centrally located in your retreat space. Perhaps there are symbols or pictures from important times in your church's history that could be incorporated in this worship center. Include a new Christ candle in the worship center that remains lit throughout the Claiming God's Vision process. This can help to remind participants of God's presence.
- Recruiting leadership from beyond the Team to light the Christ candle, read scriptures, lead litanies and singing, etc. Will young children be included in worship times?

—continued

Claiming God's Vision

- Discussing, as a whole team, the elements you want included in worship and celebration times.
- Other needed preparations ...

- Assign person(s) to carry out team decisions.

Preparations for small groups:

- Devising a way to place people in small groups while striving for diversity in age and in length of membership in your faith community.
- Taking into account the number of people expected, deciding on the size of small groups.
- Deciding who will facilitate small groups. Consider having members of the Team serve as facilitators.
- Deciding on and setting up meeting spaces for small groups. Collecting the materials they will need such as paper, pencils, markers, newsprint, Bibles.
- Writing on newsprint the questions about history, core values and basic beliefs for each group's use.

These questions and statements are:

Friday Evening

1. Where and how has God guided us in our history?
2. What are the "core values" we identify from our church's life?
3. What basic beliefs identify us as a community of faith?

Saturday

1. What are our points of vitality?
2. What are our growing edges?
3. What are our hopes and dreams for the future?
4. What are the characteristics and needs of the surrounding community?

- Choosing a leader to introduce and explain the work of the small groups, see p. 59 of **Team Outline and Retreat Notes** for ideas.

- Other needed preparations ...

- Assign person(s) to carry out team decisions about preparations for small groups.

–continued



-FOUR WEEKS BEFORE-

- Receive progress reports from those responsible for planning:**
 - Has a location been chosen?
 - Has publicity been effective?
 - Are childcare arrangements made?
 - Have decisions about food been made?
 - Have materials for small group work been gathered?
 - Have worships and celebrations been planned?

-TWO WEEKS BEFORE-

- Make sure the following specific retreat leadership roles are covered:**

Leadership Roles Friday Evening -

- Registration table
- Prayer of thanksgiving, welcome and retreat overview
- Opening worship
- Convening small groups to identify key historical markers and features of vitality of the congregation.
- Lead the whole group in developing a comprehensive timeline out of small group work.
- Introducing and explaining “core values” (see **Resource D**) and “basic beliefs.” Explain relationship to timeline.
- Lead retreat participants in a closing celebration.

Leadership Roles Saturday Morning -

- Offer opening prayer
- Convene small groups to identify core values from the Friday evening timeline exercise. Ask groups to develop one basic belief sentence for each core value they name.
- Lead whole group in compiling one list of core values and basic belief sentences.
- Explain and administer the Congregational Questionnaire (**Resource I**).
- Compile and display results during lunch.
- Offer prayer of thanksgiving for lunch.



-continued

Claiming God's Vision

Leadership Roles Saturday Afternoon -

- Summarize results of questionnaire, paying particular attention to clusters of points of vitality (Strengths) and growing edges (Weaknesses).
- Lead a celebration that lifts up strengths and owns weaknesses.
- Present information about the demographic characteristics of the community, focusing on key issues which impact the life of the church.
- Convene small groups to “brain-storm” hopes and dreams for the congregation that focus on the next 3 to 5 years.
- Lead whole group in receiving the hopes and dreams of each group.
- Lead closing worship.

- Make copies of:**
 1. The Congregational Questionnaire (**Resource I**)
 2. Orders of worship and celebration
 3. Retreat schedule (example included in this section)
 4. List of Team members and contact information
 5. Song sheets, if hymnals are not being used
 6. Individual meditation model
 7. Copies of the important questions to be addressed during retreat

- Make sure the following materials and supplies are available:**
 1. Name tags
 2. Sign-up sheet for each day
 3. Colored dots or some other way to designate small groups
 4. Pencils/pens
 5. Paper
 6. Flip chart paper
 7. Masking tape
 8. Markers
 9. Materials for worship center
 10. Bibles
 11. Hymn books or song sheets
 12. Participant folders
 13. Paper products
 14. Food



—continued

-A FEW DAYS BEFORE-

- Set-up:**
 - Registration table
 - Snack table
 - Food service table
 - Small group areas

- Put together participant packets:**
 - Schedule
 - Name tag and small group designation
 - Song sheet
 - Orders of worship and celebrations
 - List of Team members and contact information

You have prepared well. It is time to trust and rest in God remembering the words of Jeremiah:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord; “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11



-continued

Team Outline and Retreat Notes

FRIDAY - 5:30 to 9:00 P.M.

5:30 Registration and Fellowship Meal

Even if you have done a pre-registration, you will need to have extra name tags and participant folders.

6:00 Prayer of Thanksgiving

Welcome and introductions

Be sure to introduce members of your Team.

Retreat agenda and explanations: Give an overview of the whole weekend, explaining what you hope to accomplish, and give people a chance to ask clarifying questions to help put people at ease. See the Introduction section of Claiming God's Vision (p. 3) for help with what to say when giving a retreat overview.

6:30 Opening Worship

6:45 Small Group Work

"How have we, as a congregation, been shaped by our history?"

"What features of our congregational life have promoted or created vitality?"

These questions should already be written up on newsprint for each small group. They are also printed on the Retreat Schedule. This is a time to examine the congregation's history. The timeline will lift up significant events, moments and experiences in the life of your church. As you introduce this activity, it will be helpful to have them think about what they see as significant markers along the way in your history.

7:30 Break

When small group work and breaks are ended, consider using a favorite song to draw people back to the large group.



-continued

FRIDAY - 5:30 to 9:00 P.M. (continued)

7:45 Timeline Creation, Explanation of Core Values and Basic Beliefs, and How they relate to Timeline

Put a long piece of newsprint around the wall at eye level or place on long tables. Make a congregational timeline. Mark the beginning with the date your congregation was formed. Mark the end with the present date. As each small group finishes discussing the questions relating to history and vitality, have them write up the significant markers on the timeline.

Review section of Claiming God's Vision "Where are we now?" (p. 6) and the list of Key Core Values (**Resource D**).

Out of your congregational history, there are probably core values that seem to be expressed or demonstrated in your faith journey. These values are part of your congregational DNA, the essence of your faith life, and these values usually find expression in basic beliefs—the practical applications of the values. For instance, in a congregational timeline depicting the faith history of the community, there might be recurring, specific examples of intentionally reaching out to the needs of the community. Perhaps the core value expressed here is outreach or caring. From that core value, it might be concluded that the basic belief lived out through this congregation is: "We believe that God calls us to seek out specific needs and fill them." Or, in another congregation that remembers its life centered around joyful, creative worship, the core value might be: "celebration." Then the basic belief could be expressed as: "We believe God calls us to be people of joyful, celebrative worship." **The core values and basic beliefs are pretty good guides from the past toward the future.**

Ask this question: "If these are the things God has called us to be and do in the past, and if we value them and have lived them out over our history, could it be that God may yet be calling us to build on these values and beliefs for our future?"

This is really more intuitive, reflective thinking than rational deduction. Let the Spirit guide the remembering and the observations about those historical markers.

8:45 Celebration of our History

9:00 Good Night!

Continental breakfast available at 8:30 am. Retreat work begins at 9:00 am.

You might consider closing by saying: "Please pray tonight and early in the morning, seeking God's leading and insight about the meaning of our history. You will find a model for individual meditation in your packet."

—continued

Claiming God's Vision

SATURDAY - 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

8:30 Continental Breakfast

9:00 Opening prayer

Explanation of Small Group Task: Ask each small group to identify the core values that they see in the timeline that was created last night. Also ask each group to develop one basic belief sentence for each of the core values they name.

9:15 Small Group Work

Identify core values from timeline exercise.
Write a basic belief statement.

10:15 Break

10:30 Listing of core values from small groups.

Receiving Basic Belief Statements from Small Groups: Call the small groups back together and display the core values and corresponding belief statements of each group.



11:00 Congregational Questionnaire

Distribute questionnaire and ask that people work alone to complete it. Collect questionnaires, score them during the lunch break, have results displayed for use in the afternoon session.

12:00 Lunch

1:00 Summary of questionnaire

“Where are our Points of Vitality (Strengths)?”

“Where are our Growing Edges (Weaknesses)?”

Lead a discussion of the questionnaire results using these questions.

2:00 Celebration of our Vitality

–continued

SATURDAY - 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. (continued)

2:15 Demographic Information about our Community

“What are the characteristic of this community?”

“What key issues impact the life of this church?”

As demographic information is presented try to stick with answering the two questions about characteristics and impact issues. Are there any surprises in the information that has been collected?

2:45 Break

3:00 Small Group Work - Hopes and Dreams for the Future

“Where is God calling us to go?”

“What do we hope our congregation will be in the next 3-5 years?”

“What do we dream for our congregation during that time?”

Ask participants to make a gift of their hopes and dreams for the future. Ask small groups to "brain-sail" hopes and dreams for the congregation that focus on the next 3 to 5 years. Remind them that there are no wrong answers. They can dream as big as they want. They can even color outside the lines. Make sure to tell them to list ALL contributions. There is to be no debating about whether or not something is possible. They are to list everything.



4:00 Small groups present Hopes and Dreams

Give each group an opportunity to present the collection of their hopes and dreams.

4:30 Closing Worship - A Celebration of Hope

Be sure to save EVERYTHING from your retreat. Arrange a follow-up meeting as soon as possible to examine information and insights from your time of retreat and to decide on additional Team members.

Keep seeking God's guidance as you begin to explore your options for the future.

–continued

Claiming God's Vision

Individual Daily Prayer

Even when we are not aware, God's spirit is with us. It takes times and practice to become inwardly quiet and open ourselves to the leading of God's Spirit.

Begin in Silence in a comfortable place set aside for your time of prayer and meditation. Lighting a candle reminds you of God's presence. To become inwardly quiet, breathe normally, conscious of your in-and-out breathing; letting it lead you into peacefulness.

Read one or more of the passages lifted up at the retreat.

God's hope for the future - Jeremiah 29:11

Discerning God's purposes - Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 12:1; 1 Kings 3:9-12

Being led by the Spirit - Acts 1:12-26; Acts 6:1-7; Acts 15

Pray the Scripture in your Heart by letting it speak to and for you. Do not dwell on the parts that "trip you up," which don't seem to speak to you or make sense. Bring the scripture to your own life experience and spiritual condition. Sometimes reading the scripture aloud can lead you into the prayer of your heart. Read the scripture through twice. The first time you read it, read for comprehension. Ask yourself, "What is it about?" "What is going on in the story?" "What are the main points the writer seems to be making?" Again, don't dwell on words or portions that you don't understand or don't make sense to you. Some of those "obstacles" bring insights later. As you read through the scripture a second time, read with the following questions in mind, "What is this saying to me?" "What words or descriptions stand out to me as I think about the life of my congregation?" "Is there a particular 'Word' this reading holds for me and my congregation?"



Journaling - You may find it helpful to write down your responses to the reading.

Intercessory Prayer - Lift up to God the concerns and joys that are on your heart. Pray for your congregation, for individuals, for the world, and for your own life and family.

Closing Prayer - Pray silently or aloud the Lord's Prayer as your own benediction for this time of prayer.

End your Prayer/Meditation Time by again following your breathing, being fully present to yourself, to God, and to this moment in time.

-continued

Claiming God's Vision

Retreat Schedule

name of congregation

date

FRIDAY - 5:30 to 9:00 P.M.

5:30 Registration and Fellowship Meal

6:00 Prayer of Thanksgiving

Welcome and Introductions

Retreat Agenda and Explanations

6:30 Opening Worship

6:45 Small Group Work

“How have we, as a congregation, been shaped by our history?”

“What features of our congregational life have promoted or created vitality?”

7:30 Break

7:45 Timeline Creation and Explanation of Core Values and Basic Beliefs and How they Relate to Timeline

8:45 Celebration of our History

9:00 Good Night!

Continental breakfast available at 8:30 am. Retreat work begins at 9:00 am.

Please pray tonight and early in the morning, seeking God's leading and insight about the meaning of our history. You will find a model for individual meditation in your packet.

SATURDAY - 8:30 AM TO 5:00 PM

8:30 Continental Breakfast

9:00 Opening prayer

Explanation of Small Group Task

-continued



Claiming God's Vision

SATURDAY - 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. (continued)

9:15 Small Group Work

Identify Core Values from timeline exercise

Write a Basic Belief Statement

10:15 Break

10:30 Listing of Core Values from Small Groups

Receiving Basic Belief Statements from Small Groups

11:00 Congregational Questionnaire

12:00 Lunch

1:00 Summary of questionnaire

“Where are our Points of Vitality (Strengths)?”

“Where are our Growing Edges (Weaknesses)?”

2:00 Celebration of our Vitality

2:15 Demographic Information about our Community

“What are the characteristics of this community?”

“What key issues impact the life of this church?”

2:45 Break

3:00 Small Group Work - Hopes and Dreams for the Future

“Where is God calling us to go?”

“What do we hope our congregation will be in the next 3-5 years?”

“What do we dream for our congregation during that time?”

4:00 Small Groups present hopes and dreams

4:30 Closing Worship - A Celebration of Hope



Small Groups

Resource K

The small group approach in gathering information about the congregation's life will offer members the opportunity to share their feelings and bounce their ideas off other members. It is especially beneficial in congregations where members do not know each other very well, because it offers the opportunity to make connections between members.

Secure a Coordinator

In order for the small group approach to work effectively, it will require a person or group to coordinate the process. This could be an individual or your overall Claiming God's Vision (CGV) Team. The role of the Coordinator is to facilitate the creation of the small groups and to compile the reports of the small groups into one unified report for the whole congregation.

Invite Members to Join a Small Group

Begin by inviting all members of the congregation to indicate whether or not they are willing to be part of a small group—hereafter called a Sharing Team. Encourage everyone to participate—the results of the small-group process will be more successful if the maximum number of members possible are involved. Advertise the formation of Sharing Teams widely in the congregation through things such as announcements on Sunday morning, articles in the church newsletter, a letter to all members, and/or posters made by the children or youth of the congregation.

Distribute cards or slips of paper that allow members to check if they are willing to participate in a Sharing Team. Also have them list up to eight other members that they don't know very well, but would like to get to know better. Assign those who return cards to Sharing Teams of four persons each, attempting to form the Sharing Teams so that they will be with people they don't already know very well. Designate one of the persons in the Sharing Team to be the convener to get the team together the first time. The Sharing Teams can decide on their own convener and recorder once they meet together.

K

Include everyone, to the extent possible. Youth should be incorporated into the Sharing Teams. Children can be asked a simplified version of the questions in their Sunday School Classes and the teachers can record their responses to be shared with the Coordinator. Persons who do not sign up for a Sharing Team should be encouraged to submit their thoughts on the questions in writing with the Sharing Team Coordinator (an individual or the CGV Team). Be sure to label those responses as an "individual response" so that they are not given as much weight as the Sharing Team responses, which reflect the input of four persons.

—continued

Sharing Team Meeting Guidelines

Sharing Teams should meet three times for no more than one hour each time, over the course of a two-month period. The Sharing Teams can meet at any time and place convenient to the whole team—at the church on Sunday morning after worship, in a member's home on a weekday night, at a restaurant on a weekend, etc. During the three meetings, the Sharing Team will answer a series of questions and the recorder will keep notes of the discussion. A written report of their discussion will be sent to the church office or to the overall Sharing Team Coordinator (an individual or the CGV Team). Stress that the written report from each Sharing Team or individual should be no more than two pages long. This will assist the Sharing Team or individual in being clear about what the priority issues are and will make the compiling work of the Coordinator less tedious.

Sharing Team Meeting Questions

The following are suggestions for questions to be answered by the Sharing Teams. Feel free to adapt these questions to fit your congregation. For example, if most people in your congregation grew up in the congregation, you won't need the first question. Or if there is one particular issue that your congregation is struggling with, you will need to add a question relative to that issue.

Meeting 1: The first meeting of the Sharing Teams will be for the purpose of getting to know each other and answering the following questions:

- What was your connection to the Church universal prior to becoming a part of this congregation?
- What attracted you to this congregation and made you want to become a part of it?
- What are two or three of the greatest affirmations you would share about this congregation? What does this congregation do really well? Where have you sensed God working in or through this congregation?

Meeting 2: The second meeting of the Sharing Teams will be for the purpose of answering the following questions:

- What are two or three of the greatest challenges facing this congregation? What does this congregation not do as well as it could?
- What are two or three of the greatest opportunities for growth in spirituality and ministry at this congregation? In what ways do you feel God calling this congregation to grow?

—continued



Claiming God's Vision

- For you, what is the ideal size of a congregation and the ideal number of programs/ministries it should have and why?

Meeting 3: The third, and final, meeting of the Sharing Teams will be for the purpose of answering the following questions:

- If someone who has visited this congregation and expressed interest in joining were to ask you what the vision or purpose of this congregation is, what would you answer?
- What would you like the vision or purpose of this congregation to be? What do you sense God's vision or purpose for this congregation to be?
- If you had to move away from this city, what would you look for in your next church?

Compiling the Data

Once the Sharing Teams have met and turned in their reports, compile a report of the input given. Some of the input from the Sharing Teams will probably be clearly recorded as comments from individuals, rather than from the whole team. Treat those individual comments the same as comments from persons who were not part of a team. In other words, your compilation will be of two levels of input—that from teams and that from individuals (who may or may not be members of a team).

As you compile the data, record every time an issue is raised—those issues raised the most will become your priority issues that need addressing. Your compiled report will consist of a unified response to each question. The first two questions can simply be a list of the things that brought people to the Church universal and that brought people to your congregation. The report of the other questions should be a list of issues in priority order and could also include significant quotes from some of the reports.

Once you have a draft of the combined report, share it with the congregation for further input by putting it on the agenda of all church meetings, mailing it to members, and/or holding a congregational meeting to discuss it. Refine the report and lists of issues based on the further input you receive.

K

—continued

Claiming God's Vision

Sample Letter/Newsletter Article

The following sample can be used to let your congregation know about the formation of Sharing Teams:

As you are aware, our congregation is in the process of Claiming God's Vision for the life and ministry of this congregation. Our Claiming God's Vision Team has been hard at work in its efforts to lead us through this process. Now we are ready to involve the whole congregation in the process of looking at "Where We Are Now." Your input is needed! All members and friends of our congregation are invited to join a Sharing Team to help us examine where we are now. It is important that as many people as possible become involved in one of these teams!

The Sharing Teams will be made up of four persons—hopefully, of persons in the congregation who do not know each other as well as they know other members of the congregation. The teams will be asked to meet three times over the course of a two-month period. Each meeting should last for no more than one hour. The timing of the three meetings will be determined by the four participants—after Sunday worship at the church, at a team member's home in the evening, at a restaurant, etc. One member of the team will be designated as the convener to help the team set their first meeting time and place.

The three meetings will be for the purpose of answering a series of questions. The questions range from simple questions (like what led you to become a part of this congregation) to questions that require more thought (like what the vision and purpose of this congregation should be). The team will write a written report of their discussion (no more than two pages) which will be used in preparing a combined report for the whole congregation.

Please join us in giving your input to help our congregation Claim God's Vision! Please complete the following form and either send it to the church office or put it in the offering plate. The forms are due on or before SUNDAY, (DATE)! After that date, the teams will be formed.

K

Yes, I am willing to participate in a Sharing Team to help claim God's Vision for our congregation!

YOUR NAME:

EIGHT PERSONS IN THE CONGREGATION THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO GET TO KNOW BETTER (Please note we will try our best to include at least some of these persons in your Sharing Team.):

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1. | 5. |
| 2. | 6. |
| 3. | 7. |
| 4. | 8. |

—continued

Claiming God's Vision

Sample Letter to Persons Who Signed Up for Sharing Teams

Dear Member/Friend of _____ Christian Church:

Thank you for agreeing to be on a Sharing Team to help us Claim God's Vision for our congregation. We are excited about this process of sharing among members and friends of our congregation to discuss the future of our congregation and to get to know one another just a little better. We are glad you have chosen to be a part of this process!

Enclosed you will find a list of the teams that have been formed. We are asking the first person listed to be the convener for the purpose of calling the group together for its first meeting. At that meeting you can decide who you want to convene your team and to prepare the written report of your team.

We are asking each team to meet three times before (DATE) to answer the questions you will find below. The meetings should last no more than an hour each and should be held at the convenience of the team members—perhaps after Sunday worship at the church, in a team member's home some evening of the week, at a restaurant, etc.

We are asking each team to prepare a written report of their conversations to be turned in by (DATE—allow a week or two beyond the above date to allow for reports to be written). That written report should answer the questions you will find below. The reports should be no longer than two pages and should summarize the main points of the team's discussions and any resulting issues that the team feels our congregation needs to address in its efforts to Claim God's Vision. Please note on your report which team the report is coming from so we can make sure we get all the team reports and can ask follow-up questions, if necessary for clarification.

K

The following is an outline of the three meetings and the questions we hope you will cover. We encourage you to begin your sharing at each meeting with a time of prayer to invite God's direction in your deliberations.

Meeting 1: The first meeting of the Sharing Teams will be for the purpose of getting to know each other and answering the following questions:

- What was your connection to the Church universal prior to coming to this congregation?
- What attracted you to this congregation and made you want to become a part of it?

—continued

Claiming God's Vision

- What are two or three of the greatest affirmations you would share about this congregation? What does this congregation do really well? Where have you sensed God working in or through this congregation?

Meeting 2: The second meeting of the Sharing Teams will be for the purpose of answering the following questions:

- What are two or three of the greatest challenges facing this congregation? What does this congregation not do as well as it could?
- What are two or three of the greatest opportunities for growth in spirituality and ministry at this congregation? In what ways do you feel God calling this congregation to grow?
- For you, what is the ideal size of a congregation and the ideal number of programs/ministries it should have and why?

Meeting 3: The third, and final, meeting of the Sharing Teams will be for the purpose of answering the following questions:

- If someone who has visited this congregation and expressed interest in joining were to ask you what the vision or purpose of this congregation is, what would you answer?
- What would you like the vision or purpose of this congregation to be? What do you sense God's vision or purpose for this congregation to be?
- If you had to move away from this city, what would you look for in your next church?

You may choose to keep notes for your written report at each meeting or you may choose to spend time in your last meeting preparing the report. The process you use for the report is up to you, but it is very important that we have the report of your team's discussions by (DATE). Please send the reports to (the church office or the Coordinator of the Sharing Teams). A combined report of all the teams will be compiled and shared with the congregation.

We trust that you will find your experience with your Sharing Team to be rewarding. Thank you again for your participation and your support of our congregation's efforts to Claim God's Vision!

K

Identification of Community Sub-Groups and Their Needs

Resource L

In the space below list all the subgroups you can think of in your neighborhood. (Examples: children, youth, gangs, single parents, recently divorced or widowed persons, business leaders, college students, military personnel, senior citizens.) Beside each subgroup, list the needs you think that subgroup might have. Then, beside each identified need, list a church or agency in the community that is ministering to that subgroup.¹

Subgroup	Needs	Who is ministering to the need



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Connecting the People of God with the Rest of God's People

Resource M

After reviewing the congregational and demographic data, here are a couple of questions for the Team to ask, taken from *Revitalizing the 20th Century Church* by Norman Shawchuck and Lloyd M. Perry (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982).

1. What unique and specific needs and interests do our own church members look to our church to fulfill?
2. What specific needs in our community **can** and **should** our church do something about?

Consider the following scripture: Matthew 9:35-36. As a team, discuss the following question: How does the action of Jesus in this scripture connect the mission of the congregation to the needs of the community?

Two Stories from Real Life

It was Sunday morning in a community located near a major theme park. In a motel located right across the street from the amusement park, I sat and sipped coffee before church. I noticed that the breakfast area of the hotel was filled with families: parents with sun visors on, shorts and tennis shoes; children smelling of sun screen and wriggling with excitement over their anticipated day at the park. I thought to myself, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if a local church rented a meeting room here in this motel, and offered a very brief service of blessing for these families before they leave for a day at the park?"

Consider this story of another church, whose facility was located right along a major commuter thoroughfare leading from the outskirts of the metropolitan area to the downtown business district. Over 10,000 cars pass by that building every business day! When I heard this figure, I thought about my own experiences as a commuter headed downtown from the outskirts of a different metropolitan area. (I have a hunch that commuters in metropolitan areas have some very common needs.) I thought to myself, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if, in this church's parking lot, they offered commuters a free cup of coffee and a word of greeting or encouragement on the way to work every morning?"

The demographic data reflects the makeup of the community around your congregation. It is, in short, "the matrix" within which the congregation provides ministry.

But always remember that the data also reflects the lives of real people; the same kind of people for whom Jesus had compassion in the 9th chapter of Matthew's gospel.

M

—continued

Claiming God's Vision

If, for example, the demographic data reveals a high percentage of single parent families in the community, think of all the single moms and dads in the congregation. What do they need? Some needs that come quickly to mind include opportunities to socialize with other single parents and their children; or for single dads who may only have custody of their children on a part time basis, perhaps summer church school classes designed specifically for children/youth who will be present on a temporary basis. Another possible need would be for occasional free or inexpensive child care offered at the church. This is only one small example of “the rest of God’s people” who are the flesh and blood reality behind the demographic data.

The connecting points are where the demographic data and God’s call to ministry for the congregation intersect. Begin with the realization that the data is more than numbers. To help the Team identify those connecting points, here is a proposed exercise.

Exercise

1. On a designated Sunday morning at the beginning of worship, have a commissioning service for the Team, to send them out in the community during church to see who and where the unchurched people in the community hang out.
2. Members of the team should select different locations (Wal-Mart, Starbucks, the city park, local hotels/motels, restaurants, laundromats, neighborhood streets, etc.) to make the following observations:
 - Who did you see? (Be as specific as possible regarding age, gender, probable economic status, ethnic background, family style, etc.)
 - What guesses can you make as to their needs? (Again, be as specific as possible.)
 - What resources do we have in our congregation for addressing some of these needs?
3. At an appointed time, members of the Team meet back at the church to discuss their findings and make some preliminary connections between the needs in their community and the resources available through the congregation’s ministry. These “connecting points” can become grist for the mill during the “ministry opportunities” brainstorming later in the ministry planning process.



Sample Statement of Calling

Resource N

Growing in God's Love

**Disciples of Christ Christian Church
Charleston, Illinois**

Statement of Calling

This Statement of Calling was adapted from the Church Constitution.

We believe that the Disciples of Christ Christian Church of Charleston, Illinois, is called:

- to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in faithful response to God's will and purposes as revealed through Jesus Christ and in the world;
- to continue the witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in our community;
- to seek in all persons a faith and commitment to Jesus Christ;
- to promote Christian hope, love, tolerance and inclusion in all that it does;
- to serve its community and to bring the gospel message to bear upon society;
- to sustain and be sustained by the general and regional manifestations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
- to work cooperatively with Christians in other communions;
- to seek the oneness of the body of Christ; and
- in all ways to seek to make known the love of God.

N

Prioritizing Ministry Goals

Resource O

This part of the planning process takes the many ideas generated as ministry possibilities and sorts them through some filters into workable goals. Remember two things: First, no congregation can be all things to all people, nor is that God's call. This is the process where dreams get shaped by reality in order that the congregation can move forward in ministry without feeling overwhelmed by too many possibilities. Second, the ministry plan resulting from this process will cover one to three years. Therefore, the Team will want to save some of the ministry possibilities to become priorities for years two and three.

Here is a helpful sorting process adapted from *The Thinker's Toolkit: Fourteen Skills for Making Smarter Decisions in Business and in Life* by Morgan D. Jones as published in "Getting Along," Volume 10, Issue 5, May 15, 2003. Begin by examining the lists of ministry possibilities. Then:

1. Weed out the weakest.

Delete those that look impossible to implement. Also delete any duplicates, any that do not support the congregation's vision/mission/statement of calling, or any that simply do not inspire the team as "belonging" in this developing ministry plan.

2. List pros and cons.

From the remaining list of ministry possibilities, list the pros and cons (or strengths and weaknesses) of each idea.

3. Rank options.

Look at this new list and see which one(s) had the most advantages with the fewest disadvantages.

4. Make some decisions.

Keep two to three priorities for each year of the three-year plan and throw out all the rest. (If they are worthy of the congregation's time, money and attention, they will resurface in future planning processes.)

In looking toward congregational affirmation of these priorities, be ready to answer these questions:

- Why are you recommending these priorities and in this order?
- How do these priorities fit the congregation's vision/mission/statement of calling?



Preparing Ministry Plans

Resource P

A Ministry Plan has two parts:

- (1) a list of Congregational Goals and
- (2) a Plan of Action.

1. Congregational Goals

Write goals for your congregation for the next 3-5 years. (Some smaller, revitalizing congregations may only want to write goals for the next year.) Goals describe what you want to achieve for the glory of God. They are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed (S.M.A.R.T.).

Some examples of goals:

- We will begin two new Sunday School classes for younger adults in the upcoming year.
- We will complete an addition for youth activities to our building within 3 years.
- We will build a Habitat for Humanity house every year for the next 5 years.

Congregational goals are connected with the Statement of Calling. In your Ministry Plan a general area from the Statement of Calling can be listed with goals for achieving it listed underneath. Example:

Calling: refreshing, moving, joyful worship

Goals: We will start an alternative, contemporary worship service within 6 months.
We will offer a 10-week study on Worship in the fall of year one.

Write your Congregational Goals

Our Congregational Goals

P

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Claiming God's Vision

2. Plan of Action

Think about each goal:

- How can it be achieved?
- What steps need to be taken? By when?
- Who will be the persons or groups with primary responsibility for accomplishing the goal?

Write a Plan of Action for accomplishing your goals for the next 1-3 years by making a chart (sample below). Some examples of complete Ministry Plans can be found in **Resource Q**.

Ministry Plan

Goal	Steps in Achieving the Goal	Resources Needed	When Each Step Will Be Accomplished	Persons or Groups Responsible

P

Examples of Ministry Plans

Resource Q

In this resource, you will find samples of ministry plans from two congregations. The first example is a continuation (from **Resource N**) of a plan developed by Disciples of Christ CC, Charleston, Illinois, based on the theme “Growing in God’s Love.”

The second example was prepared by Hazelwood CC, Muncie, Indiana. This example includes the following:

- Statement of Calling
- Motto
- Specific Ministry Goals
- Ministry Plans

Note: In both instances modifications have been made to keep the examples current.

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Claiming God's Vision

Ministry Plan

Mission Opportunities

1. We will maintain excellent worship services and a quality music program.
2. We will complete the first unit of our new Church building and complete payment for it.
3. We will maintain an excellent understanding and practice of Disciples faith as stated in the Statement of Calling.
4. We will welcome people warmly and seek to maintain a warm and inviting spirit among all our members, friends, and visitors.
5. We will grow in faith and numbers so as to have 200 participating members by year 3.
6. We will maintain an excellent Christian Education program for all ages.
7. We will nurture our existing members to meet their needs and to promote their growth in faith and unity with our church family.

Our Congregational Goals

These goals relate to the Mission Opportunities (above) and pertain to the 3- to 5-year period from November year 1 to November year 3 or 5.

1. WE WILL MAINTAIN EXCELLENT WORSHIP SERVICES AND A QUALITY MUSIC PROGRAM.
 - a. The Minister(s) and the Worship Committee shall meet every other month or so to plan excellent worship services for Sunday morning and other occasions.
 - b. The General Board, with the recommendation of the Worship Committee, shall call and employ an excellent Piano (or Keyboard) Player whenever a vacancy occurs.
 - c. The General Board, with the recommendation of the Worship Committee, shall call and employ an excellent Choir Director before Ash Wednesday, year 1 and afterward when a vacancy occurs.
 - d. The Worship Committee shall seek to enhance personal and family prayer and devotions among our members and friends with semiannual programs (e.g., Lent and Advent).

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Our Congregational Goals (continued)

2. WE WILL COMPLETE THE FIRST UNIT OF OUR NEW CHURCH BUILDING AND COMPLETE PAYMENTS FOR IT.
 - a. The General Board will continue to seek the counsel and advice of Church Extension before and during the construction of the first unit of our new building.
 - b. The Stewardship Campaign Council will conduct a stewardship drive with the assistance of Church Extension in October and November of year 1 to help underwrite the cost of the first unit and of the General Fund for year 2.
 - c. The General Board will authorize, as necessary, subsequent stewardship drives to complete payments for the first unit and later units of the building.

3. WE WILL MAINTAIN AN EXCELLENT UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF DISCIPLES FAITH AS STATED IN THE STATEMENT OF CALLING.
 - a. We will teach and review elements of the Christian faith during worship and on other occasions as often as necessary to keep faith alive and strong within us, especially those elements of Christian faith which Disciples emphasize. The appropriate standing committees, such as Christian Education, World Outreach, and Community Service, as well as the Cabinet, shall find ways to fulfill this goal at each planning meeting.
 - b. The Christian Education Committee will arrange to teach all new members Christian faith, especially those elements of faith which Disciples emphasize.
 - c. We will participate as a congregation in ecumenical community activities and will encourage individual participation in them.
 - d. We will participate in the life of the General Christian Church, the Regional (CCIW) Christian Church, and the Cluster Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

4. WE WILL WELCOME PEOPLE WARMLY AND SEEK TO MAINTAIN A WARM AND INVITING SPIRIT AMONG ALL OUR MEMBERS, FRIENDS, AND VISITORS.
 - a. The Chairs of the Elders and Deacons will schedule one elder and two deacons to greet members, friends, and visitors at each corporate worship service during the period.
 - b. The Evangelism Committee, at least annually, will train and encourage Elders and Deacons to be excellent greeters.
 - c. The Evangelism Committee will also train and encourage all members to invite people to church activities.

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Our Congregational Goals (continued)

5. WE WILL GROW IN FAITH AND IN NUMBERS SO AS TO HAVE 200 PARTICIPATING MEMBERS BY YEAR 3.
 - a. The Evangelism Committee will continue to find and put into practice programs to enable the congregation to reach out to bring people of Coles County into saving, loving, and healing relationships with Jesus Christ and to unite them with our congregation.
 - b. The Congregation will seek to attain 90 participating members by the end of year 1.
 - c. The Congregation will seek to attain 150 participating members by the end of year 2.
 - d. The Congregation will seek to attain 200 participating members by the end of year 3.

6. WE WILL MAINTAIN AN EXCELLENT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR ALL AGES.
 - a. The Christian Education Committee will manage and will seek to improve our overall program of Christian Education during the next 3–5 years.
 - b. We will begin two new adult classes by the end of year 1 and two more new adult classes by the end of year 2.
 - c. We will have a nursery and at least five classes for children and youth by the end of year 2.

7. WE WILL NURTURE OUR EXISTING MEMBERS TO MEET THEIR NEEDS AND TO PROMOTE THEIR GROWTH IN FAITH AND UNITY WITH OUR CHURCH FAMILY.
 - a. A Membership Committee will be established and it will develop a program to collect and maintain information about the needs of current members by the end of year 1.
 - b. A prayer chain will be established by the end of year 1.
 - c. A program will be developed to assist members in times of crises or special need.
 - d. A program will be developed to maintain contact and interest in members who are nonattending.

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**Hazelwood Christian Church*
Muncie, Indiana**

Our Faithful Plan and Calling

The following Statement of Calling, Motto, and Ministry Goals and Plans will be presented by the Team at the September 23 Church Board meeting for acceptance. If it is approved, we will begin implementing the plans immediately into our structure, programs, and activities here at Hazelwood. It is our prayer that this new “vision” will be caught and owned by our entire congregation. We believe that we are being faithful to God’s Call to Hazelwood with this plan.

Statement of Calling: As members of the Body of Christ, we at Hazelwood are called to share God’s love by introducing individuals to Christ and nurturing personal spiritual growth for Christ’s mission.

Motto: Only our ***BEST*** for Christ
Bringing People to Christ
Equipping People in Faith
Sending People in Mission
T (the Cross of Christ)

Specific Ministry Goals: Reaching unchurched persons
Reaching irregularly attending persons
Nurturing personal spiritual growth

Ministry Plan 1: Nurture personal spiritual growth through a variety of small group experiences

Ministry Plan 2: Alternative-Style Worship Service

Ministry Plan 3: Evangelism Education and Training

Ministry Plan 4: Accountability/Assessment Plan

Each Ministry Plan is tied to a Ministry Goal and has specific objectives, steps, resources, timelines, and persons or groups responsible. This design is to make each Plan achievable and measurable, with accountability built into each objective.

For questions or more information regarding this process, please talk with any of the Team members.

*Note: Modifications have been adapted to keep the examples current.

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Claiming God's Vision

Ministry Plan 1

Calling: To share God's love; to nurture spiritual growth

Context: Emphasis on reaching unchurched, families, irregularly attending members.

Goal: To nurture personal spiritual growth through a variety of small group experiences.

Objectives	Steps in Achieving the Goal	Resources Needed	When Each Step Will Be Accomplished	Persons or Groups Responsible
<p>Make the traditional worship service more "unchurched friendly."</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify parts of worship service that would be puzzling to unchurched persons. Make sure unchurched persons are asked their opinions. 2. Identify ways of conveying explanations of puzzling practices. Examples: information cards, explanations in bulletin, short articles in newsletter, Inquirer's curricula, 4- or 5-week class on worship. 3. Implement suggestions identified in Step 2. 4. Identify any puzzling practices that could be modified or abandoned without compromising the integrity of the service. 	<p>Information on the experiences of other congregations in dealing with this objective.</p>	<p>Step 1: November 1</p> <p>Step 2: December 1</p> <p>Step 3: Easter Sunday</p> <p>Step 4: Easter Sunday</p>	<p>Senior Minister, Committee composed of representatives from Worship, Education, Evangelism.</p>

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Ministry Plan 1 (continued)

Objectives	Steps in Achieving the Goal	Resources Needed	When Each Step Will Be Accomplished	Persons or Groups Responsible
Provide 12-Step Style Group for persons in need of support, fellowship, sharing: "Discoverer's Group."	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe nature, purpose, and format of group. 2. Set regular meeting time and place. 3. Announce group to congregation members and persons in recovery community. 	Meeting time and place, coffee and cookies, flyers.	Step 1: Done Step 2: November 1. Step 3: November 1.	Senior Minister; other interested persons.
Begin lunch fellowship meetings at Ball State Campus.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find meeting space and time. 2. Notify students, faculty, staff associated with Hazelwood. 3. Seek volunteers to give programs. 	Meeting time and place. Volunteers.	Step 1: September 15. Step 2: September 15. Step 3: September 15.	Campus Ministry Task Force.
Plan and implement regular four six-week studies during church school.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop list of topics. Examples include Bible Basics, Prayer, Who is Jesus? 2. Find volunteers to teach (develop or provide curricula). 3. Publicize in newsletter, bulletin board, flyers in pews. 	Volunteers. Curricula.	Step 1: September 9. Step 2: September 9. Step 3: First study-in scheduled for October.	Education Committee.
Begin Church School or other regular group for young parents.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruit members via meeting after worship. 2. Provide assistance in developing curricula. 	Volunteers. Curricula.	Step 1: October 5. Step 2: October 5.	Education Committee.

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Ministry Plan 1 (continued)

Objectives	Steps in Achieving the Goal	Resources Needed	When Each Step Will Be Accomplished	Persons or Groups Responsible
Plan and implement regular four six-week programs on life skills.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify topics. Examples: parenting, job-hunting, coping with bereavement. 2. Develop or find curricula. 3. Find volunteers. 	Volunteers. Curricular.	<p>Step 1: September 9.</p> <p>Step 2: November 9 (next Education Committee Meeting).</p> <p>Step 3: November 9.</p>	Education Committee.
Develop program in which volunteers provide support for young families.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify goals of program. Examples: expanded on-site child care (Parent's Night Out), babysitting, mentoring. 2. Identify volunteers. 3. Coordinate service delivery. 	Staff person. Database. Committee Structure. Volunteers.	Implementation contingent upon recruiting staff person.	Staff person.

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Ministry Plan 2

Calling: To share God's love; to nurture spiritual growth.

Context: Emphasis on reaching unchurched, families, BSU students and staff, and irregularly attending members.

Goal: To implement an alternative-style worship service.

Objectives	Steps in Achieving the Goal	Resources Needed	When Each Step Will Be Accomplished	Persons or Groups Responsible
<p>Implement an alternative-style worship service focused on needs and culture of unchurched and irregular-attending persons.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appoint an oversight team. 2. Research and define elements of the service. 3. Identify target groups and their needs. 4. Determine staffing needs—worship and music leadership. 5. Determine site and time of service. 6. Determine any facilities/tools required—sound system, instruments, etc. 7. Determine budget. 8. Compile detailed proposal. 9. Approve proposal and implement suggestions—hiring, acquiring, promoting. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information on the experiences of other congregations in dealing with this objective. 2. Worship and music leaders. 3. Sound system. 4. Music resources. 5. Funding. 	<p>Detailed proposal completed by December, current year.</p>	<p>Oversight Committee, Sr. Minister, ultimately, new staff person(s).</p>

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Claiming God's Vision

Ministry Plan 3

Calling: To share God's love; to nurture spiritual growth.

Context: Emphasis on sharing God's love with unchurched and irregular attenders.

Goal: Provide training and encouragement for evangelism and faith sharing.

Objectives	Steps in Achieving the Goal	Resources Needed	When Each Step Will Be Accomplished	Persons or Groups Responsible
To train and equip to share our faith in Christ with others— Evangelism training.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Form a ministry team for this purpose. 2. Identify obstacles to sharing our faith. 3. Recruit, promote, advertise opportunities for training. 4. Determine and appropriate budget for these opportunities. 5. Form committed groups to support each other in this process, i.e., "PIE 2." 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prayer 2. Experts who can help with this process. 3. Workshop with R. Pierce on October 11. 4. Off-site workshops (Pittsburgh, PA in November). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Team in place by November, current year. 2. Subsequent dates as scheduled. 	Oversight Committee.

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Claiming God's Vision

Ministry Plan 4

Calling: To share God's love; to nurture spiritual growth.

Context: Inserting accountability into our ministry plans.

Goal: Create an assessment process to ensure accountability in our ministry plans.

Objectives	Steps in Achieving the Goal	Resources Needed	When Each Step Will Be Accomplished	Persons or Groups Responsible
Ensure that we are "doers of the Word and not just hearers."	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create Assessment Document. 2. Identify ministries to be assessed. 3. Schedule ministry assessments. 4. Schedule feedback sessions. 	Prayer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In place by December, current year. 2. Subsequent dates per schedule. 	Oversight Committee, Sr. Minister, (may start with FP Team).



Congregational Consensus and Celebration

Resource R

As a final step, the whole congregation is gathered to hear the Team's final report on Claiming God's Vision.

During this meeting the Team will:

- Inform the congregation about its **overall process of discerning God's leading**.
"Here's how we worked together and how the process developed."
- Share with the congregation the proposed **Ministry Plans** which reflect the prioritized objectives and how they could be accomplished.
- Share the proposed **Statement of Calling** which reflects the Team's best understanding of how God is calling the congregation into the future.
- Entertain conversation and dialogue with the congregation about the Ministry Plans and the Statement of Calling.
- Ask for **consensus adoption** of these items by the whole congregation.
- **Celebrate in prayer, song, and worship as your congregation has now**

***CLAIMED* GOD'S VISION!**