

Mission, Vision, and Values

Sharing Your Congregational Identity Through Your Guiding Statements

Bible Study/Conversation Guide For Clergy & Lay Leaders

Context Matters

What does it mean to be Church in society today? How is your congregation embodying Jesus' mission, and what impact is your church making on the lives of your congregants and local context?

Communities worldwide are struggling with the lingering effects of natural disasters, war, immigration policies, poverty, violence, laws, political division, false metanarratives, health disparities, and more. Like in times past, these realities continue to wage assaults on the hearts, minds, bodies, and contexts of God's people, holding one captive to conditions making abundant living nearly impossible for far too many. Today, many are physically, communally, culturally, emotionally, spiritually, and theologically situated like the Prophet Ezekiel in a modern valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37), wondering if life is possible again. Realities like these create significant challenges for seeing, hearing, experiencing, and maintaining hope in the salvific love of God.

The realities named above, including those you face within your own context, serve as opportunities for congregations to discern, declare what it means to be Church, and engage society today. Throughout the bible, God consistently demonstrated God's ability and power to liberate and restore lives and communities. Similarly, Jesus consistently aligned himself and his efforts with helping folks reject a Roman Empire-informed world so that one could live again. He was the model and embodiment of what it meant to be the Church in society.

So, what is our task? Who are we, and how should Disciple congregations respond to the evils of our present age? The road ahead begins with seeking clarity about who we are in context and determining how we feel called to offer hope, good news, and transform the world.



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Who are we?

Who have we been as a congregation over the past few decades? Who are we today? What currently makes our congregation unique from other faith communities and organizations in our local community? What are we known for?

When reflecting on who and what God is calling a community of faith to be and do in the world, it is crucial to know what a congregation values and understand the statements and images it embraces and shares. A congregation's value, mission, vision/identity statements, and the images associated with them declare who the congregation is or hopes to be in its context. Congregational statements reveal a great deal about a church's commitments. Erin Cash and Kory Wilcoxson, the authors of *Thriving Church*, suggest, "The single most pervasive trait of any congregation seeking to be a thriving church is a clear understanding of its mission and vision. Without a sense of who the congregation is striving to be, other traits lose their grounding in God's unique call to this particular body of Christ."

To foster a shared understanding of how congregations communicate their identity, the following definitions are provided below:

Mission statements: Lake Institute on Faith & Giving suggests, "Mission statements for a congregation or religious nonprofit convey its unique role in God's work, focusing its activities, discipleship, and outreach toward spiritual and social transformation." Simply put, these statements represent what a congregation will be and do to reveal the love of God in our present age and in the future.

Identity/Vision Statements: Erin Cash and Kory Wilcoxson suggest, "These statements often demonstrate reasons a congregation exists or who they include. These statements are often aspirational; it's who or what the congregation dreams to be."

Value Statements: These statements clarify and communicate what the congregations collectively care most about. These statements often include shared beliefs that guide a congregation's practical ecclesiology and programming, such as the missional activities sponsored by Christian education, outreach ministries, affinity groups, and other initiatives.

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Before you begin the process of discernment and reflection on your congregational identity, guiding statements, and more, it is essential to talk with God and engage sacred texts for direction and inspiration.

Let Us Pray

Dear God, thank you for being the most incredible visionary humanity has ever known. You imagined, breathed, spoke, and created a world out of chaos. You ordered creation to exist in cohesive and collaborative ways. Forgive us when we create or become complicit with disorder, sin, and realities that separate us from you and one another. Help us create new visions of hope, peace, and love that break down barriers of many kinds. Help your Church create and engage a vision and mission that transforms lives, communities, and eradicates evil of every kind. Be God in our midst in Jesus' name, Amen.



Scriptural Lesson: Habakkuk 2: 1-3, NRSV

1 I will stand at my watchpost and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me and what he will answer concerning my complaint. 2 Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. 3 For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.



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Group Discussion Questions:

BibleStudy

Habakkuk 2: 1-3, NRSV

- What words or images stand out in the text?
- What's happening in the historical context of this scripture?
- What is the prophet's complaint about, and how does God reply?
- What does this text suggest about humanity, power, communal chaos, and God?
- What revelation/vision is God proposing, and why must it be relatable to others?
- What might a new vision do for the people in the context?
- What does this scripture teach congregations about vision casting and revealing the love of God to their neighbors?

Additional Scriptures for Exploration

Proverbs 29:18 (Revelatory Guide),

Matthew 5:14-16 (Public witness)

Acts 2:42-47 (Commitment to Community)



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Are You Reflecting on or Creating New Guiding Statements? 8 Steps to Consider.

Step 1

Talk to God and Study Scriptures Together for Foundation, Direction & Inspiration
(Repeat Throughout)

Step 2

Secure Support from the Appropriate Leaders in Your Congregation. Then, Assemble a Team with Diverse Voices From within the Congregation.

Step 3

Introduce the Discernment Process to the Congregation and Access Tools & Resources.

Step 4

Determine The Questions You Are Asking of the Congregation.

Step 5

Learn About & Connect with Your Local Community. Ask Questions, Such as "Who Are Our Neighbors, and What is Positively and Negatively Impacting Their Lives?"

Step 6

Listen Well and Often. Host Listening Sessions.

Step 7

Rebrand, Celebrate, and Then Act.

Step 8

Evaluate the Discernment Process & Decide When Your Congregation Will Review Its Mission, Identity/Vision and Value Statements Again
(Every 5, 10, 15 years).

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More Possibilities to Consider
When Naming Who You Are or
Hope to Become.

Congregational Identity

- What are our mission, vision, and value statements? How relevant are our statements today?
- How well do our congregants and community partners understand and participate in helping us live into our mission, vision, and value statements?
- Based on our statements, what do we care about most?
- How does who we say we are impact our choices, strategies, programming, and missional efforts?
- What changes must our congregation make to communicate better and engage with who we believe God is calling us to be today?

Mission Beyond The Walls

- What local community needs exist near or around our congregation?
- What's breaking our hearts the most right now?
- What are we called to do about those realities, and what gifts or partners do we have to engage the opportunities before us?
- What is our congregational missional reputation within our local context? What do we want our reputation to become?

Despite the current communal challenges that exist globally, nationally, and in our local context, God is not done partnering and collaborating with God's Church to bring healing. Continue to seek clarity, understand your congregational identity, search, listen for God's direction for your shared life together, and act. Your congregation will impact lives in new and relevant ways.

Let Us Pray

Dear God, guide and lead, and give us the courage to follow and imagine along the way. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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