

Vision: The Primary Ingredient for Mission Mobilization

by E. David Dougherty & David Mays

Several years ago the story of Preston Tucker exploded across the movie screens. Tucker was a man with a burning desire to put the public in a radically different kind of automobile—different from anything Detroit had ever produced. Thirty years ahead of his contemporaries, he envisioned a rear-engine car with safety belts, disk brakes, padded dashboards, and dozens of other safety and performance features.

Against tremendous odds, he attracted a hearty band of supporters who managed to produce 50 of these amazing vehicles soon after the end of World War II. Amazingly, 46 of the cars are still on the road today.

In the go-go days following the close of World War II, many entrepreneurs had ideas about what to do with the surplus manufacturing capacity the war had produced. What made Tucker able to turn his dream into reality when so many other were unable to do so?

Primarily, it was vision. Preston Tucker had the uncanny ability to see the car he wanted to produce and to describe what he saw in such compelling ways that others caught the vision and wanted to become part of his dream. He was able to focus his entire energies on a single purpose—to put the public in a new kind of car. He was able to define the values of his project: safety, innovation, risk taking, and he was able to communicate vision in a way that made others willing to sacrifice their own careers and savings to bring the dream to reality.

Tucker's vision, his passion and the impact he had on the entire automo-

tive industry for almost half a century, illustrate principles God may want us to know and use as we mobilize God's people for world evangelization. Today, many pastors and church leaders have been stirred with a dream of what their church could accomplish in world evangelization. Their ability to define a single purpose, to identify clearly the values essential for accomplishing the purpose, and most of all, their ability to see and articulate God's vision in a way that will stir others to share in its accomplishment, can change lives, churches, and especially the world they seek to reach with the gospel.

The Power of Focus

How is a church mobilized for success in world evangelization? I would like to suggest that God uses leaders with the ability to identify a clear and focused purpose, and then to mobilize the church's total resources in pursuit and realization of that purpose.

Hence singleness of purpose, clarity of values, and passionate pursuit of a well-articulated vision will help to insure effectiveness and success in world evangelization in any congregation as nothing else will. In order to do this, a church has to be able to the following

- * Define its missions purpose clearly and succinctly
- * Clarify congregational values which contribute to the purpose
- * Discover and share God's vision and heart for the future which He wants to accomplish through the Church. Like nothing else, such a vision motivates and mobilizes others to join in accomplishing the purpose and task.

Purpose of the Vision

Purpose answers the "why" question. It declares the main reason congregations exist as organizations. Purpose helps us zero in on the overall direction in which we will move. Purpose statements are mission statements.

Many churches have worked hard to define an overall purpose or mission statement for their ministry. A.C.M.C. has collected a number of them. The purpose of Crystal Evangelical Free Church is to proclaim and live the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that will impact our community and the world to the glory of God. (Minneapolis, Minnesota) The purpose statement of Reinhardt Bible Church is twofold: (1) To provide worship, fellowship and instruction for Christian believers, and (2) To proclaim the Gospel of grace at home and abroad. (Dallas, Texas) The mission of Castlevue Baptist Church is to glorify God, build up its members in love, and reach out to unbelievers to win them to Christ. (Indianapolis, Indiana) The purpose and mission of College Avenue Baptist Church is to win and equip committed followers of Jesus Christ who will share his love and truth from San Diego to the ends of the earth. (San Diego, California)

Purpose statements have a remarkable degree of similarity because each church recognizes as its Head the Lord Jesus Christ, and responds to His purpose and plan for their ministry. As a church starts to formulate its overall purpose statement, the first step in clarifying a mission focus is to work out a clear purpose statement for the church's specific missions involvement.

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Though each congregation will probably share some common elements, there will also be a large degree of diversity. Possible areas to consider are:

- * Clear definition of world missions and its biblical bases.

- * The church's understanding of its involvement and role in world evangelization are primarily as supporters, senders or strategists in reaching across cultural barriers to the unreached.

- * The church's resources. Will the church help to fund ministries of others, or only develop and support their own programs and ministries?

- * The target audience for the church's ministry, which could be assisting churches elsewhere or planting churches among unreached people groups.

Questions that can help develop the mission or purpose statement for world evangelization could be:

- * What now? What should we be doing right now? What is the task that the Lord expects us to address in our ministry this month, this year, this decade?

- * What next? When we have established a good focus and pattern for our current ministry, what are the additional concerns or needs to which we must give our attention?

- * What not? What are the possible avenues for our ministry which we definitely feel we should *not* pursue at this point or later?

Clarifying Core Values

Values help us prioritize important aspects of our purpose. Where the purpose statement answers the question, "Why are we here?", values help define, "what is really important to us?" Values also deal with "how" something fits into our overall understanding of a ministry or issue. They provide the rationale for our purpose and give boundaries to our vision. Taken together, our values determine our philosophy of ministry. They determine the means

we will use and how we go about pursuing our purpose.

Understanding, defining and clarifying our values can "flesh out" the purpose and mission statement and make them come alive for those with whom we work. Values will give depth and dimension to our mission, while helping us prioritize seemingly conflicting purposes. Some examples of how values of certain congregations influence the focus of its mission:

- * A congregation that places a high value on *body life* might focus its attention on helping members of their body find their role in world evangelization. This church might focus efforts in sending members into ministry.

- * A congregation which places a high value on *edification* might focus its efforts on helping as many members as possible get some experience of cross-cultural ministry to benefit their lives and vision.

- * A congregation which places a high value on *in-depth Bible teaching* might focus its ministry on providing theological education for others, including people of other cultures to equip pastors to provide this kind of ministry for their people.

- * A congregation which places high value on *witnessing through relationship* might focus on outreach to international students in their own community or a near by urban center.

Few congregations have the resources to do everything in missions that needs to be done or that they would like to do. Understanding congregational values can help provide a focus for ministry which is natural, which fits into a church's philosophy of identity and ministry and therefore seems valuable, believable, realistic and effective to its members. It integrates missions into the overall life and ministry of the congregation as an extension of the church's ministry, instead of something strange, foreign or supplemental.

Communicating Vision

Once the mission purpose and values have been discovered, developed and recorded, it is essential to take one additional step that will make success very likely. In general, people are much more motivated and can be easier mobilized for involvement when they have been exposed to a clear, passionate vision for ministry. Vision describes what will be true when the purpose has been accomplished. This means helping people actually "see" what can and will be done and what the impact or results of the vision would look like.

Several experts in this area of vision implementation have helped to define this aspect of vision:

- * Vision is a realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization. Joel Barker in *The Power of Vision* (video).

- * Vision is a clear mental picture of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants, and based upon an accurate understanding of God, His Word, self and circumstances. George Barna in *The Power of Vision*, Regal Books.

- * Vision is foresight with insight based on hindsight. Burt Nannus in *Visionary Leadership*, Jossey-Baas Publishers.

- * Vision is seeing where you are going—seeing your destination. Leith Anderson in *A Church for the 21st Century*, Bethany House Publishers.

It is very helpful to describe vision by contrast. Here is what vision is not:

- * Vision isn't simply projecting the present into the future. Vision does not consist of taking the current situation and extending trends into the future. That sort of analysis might be helpful, but it isn't vision.

- * Vision isn't a simple mission statement. As noted above "mission statements" tends to be quite similar for churches. But vision will be distinctive, focusing more on unique factors rather than on similarity.

* Vision isn't merely factual. Vision is spiritual and captures concepts through creating word pictures. It helps to transport the listener or reader into the future and help them see what will be true if the vision becomes a reality.

* Vision isn't static. An initial vision of the future will probably undergo refinement, adjustment and clarification many times as the path to the future comes into clearer focus.

In biblical terms, vision is closely related to *faith*. The writer of Hebrews tells us that "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Biblical faith is rooted in the nature and promises of God and pictures a sure and certain future for the people of God involved in His purpose. Scriptural faith functions between the promise and the performance. The person who understands the promise and purpose of God and looks forward to (believes) its fulfillment is practicing *vision*.

The characteristics of a good vision statement for missions in the local fellowships will include the future. Frankly, it doesn't take vision to describe the past. Faith, although anchored in the finished work of Christ in the past, always looks ahead. Faith should also be visual. Use of picturesque words and phrases will help to clarify what God is leading us and a given church to accomplish. Examples would be: 1) To see the Church of Jesus Christ established among the lowland Lao people, so that they would worship Him regularly, and reach out effectively to share the gospel with friends and neighbors. 2) To see God raise up from among our congregation twenty families or singles to be sent as church planters and evangelists to unreached peoples, with sensitive screening, thorough preparation and complete support for the ministry from their own people.

So the vision statement will be clear, well articulated, and easily understood. It will also set standards of excellence. No one ever had a vision for mediocrity or failure. Furthermore, vision must inspire enthusiastic commitment; it must reflect the uniqueness of the church's life and identity, and it must be appropriate for the times.

The Process of Focus

There are three areas a congregation should investigate in seeking to estab-

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lish its focus in world evangelization. These areas are particularly helpful in discovering God's vision for the church.

Needs

Everywhere we look around the world we see needs. Each month mission agencies and other organizations publish millions of pages of material primarily detailing spiritual, physical, economic, social and personal needs of people around the world. Focus comes through understanding how to evaluate needs. There are several ways we might look at information about needs to establish focus:

1) *Strategic*: Which need appears to be the most strategic? Is starting a Bible training school for church workers in Nigeria more strategic than establish a training program for house church pastors in China?

2) *Least resources*: Which needs have the fewest resources currently available to meet the need? If more congregations are willing to invest

resources in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, should we invest our resources in Central or East Asia, where fewer congregations seem to focus their interest?

3) *Most impact*: In which area of need can our church make maximum impact? Some peoples of the world are ripe for a gospel harvest, other areas will need years of sowing and cultivation before the harvest is ripe.

4) *Greatest leverage*: Which need provides the closest fit with our resources to achieve optimum synergy? Since our congregation has many farmers should we focus on a needy group who could use help in developing their agriculture skills?

5) *Multiplication potential*: In which area of need can we establish ministry which will multiply and grow that will have lasting effect?

Resources

God has given every congregation unique resources which He intends to be used to impact the world, both the local community and the *uttermost parts of the earth*. Understanding our unique resources can help us find God's specific focus for us in world evangelization. Here are some of the resources which any church might have:

1) *Founding dream*: God uses a vision in the heart of a person or persons to bring congregations into existence. How is that vision or dream logically extended into cross-cultural ministry?

2) *Cultural heritage*: A congregation with strong ties to Eastern Europe or Latin America might be able to have great impact in establishing viable, indigenous, multiplying churches, as well as helping them reach out to unreached peoples, and do this work among the people they are already related to.

3) *Philosophy of Ministry*: A church with a strong philosophy of "soul-winning" through personal evangelism

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might focus its ministry on a people where individual decision making is a high value—rather than one which makes important decisions collectively. Churches that feature sensitive services will gravitate to ministries with cultural relevance, etc.

4) *Special Skills and Talents*: A congregation near a major university campus may have people uniquely qualified to minister to university students internationally through English teaching, or cultural exchange.

Opportunities

Each church has existing relationships and links which can help to provide the connection to a clear and important focus in its ministry. Here are how those links might affect a church's focus:

1) *Denominational links*: Denominational churches will probably relate mainly with denominational mission in particular places.

2) *Current work relations*: For churches which already support a mission ministry, their focus will probably begin with missionaries or work they are already doing—or some extension of that work into contiguous areas.

3) *Geographic connections*. Congregations with members from a certain part of the world will probably look closely to that area to see where they might work.

4) *Mission Agencies*. Churches that relate to a particular mission agency will probably want to begin exploring areas suggested by that agency.

5) *Church Location*: Several congregations in the Tidewater Region of Virginia focus ministry on evangelizing seamen that come from around the world which dock at Norfolk. Education-oriented ministries will be especially interested in leadership training and development, etc.

Although we would suggest that the process of defining a church's missions vision is almost always appropriate, there are times when it is particularly important to evaluate and review it. For instance, when there is confusion about purpose and disagreements about priorities. When there are complaints about insufficient challenges, or when people no longer enjoy the work. Also when there is a sense of being "out of tune" with other elements in the ministry it is time to reevaluate. When there is a decline in members' morale, or there is excessive risk avoidance, or when there is an absence of a shared sense of progress or momentum, and also when there is a lack of trust and respect for leadership, churches need to review their vision and ministry.

Getting Assistance

Congregation may need to get a facilitator or consultant to assist them in identifying, capturing, and communicating their vision. Obviously, this is a task that not just anyone is qualified to undertake. Qualities a congregation should look for in selecting someone to assist them in this area:

1) *In touch with God*: Someone who understands who God is and what He is up to, who knows Him through regular intimate meaningful fellowship.

2) *High regard for the local church*: This person needs to deeply appreciate God's love for the church and recognize the primary role and place of the local church in world missions.

3) *Appreciate the diversity in congregations and support their aspirations*: This person needs to understand and accept differences in doctrine, denominational emphases, styles, philosophy of ministry and priorities. The envisioning role is helping the church find God's mission vision, not the consultant's vision.

4) *Be an avid learner*. He needs to be a person who learns formally and informally, from seminars in the local church, and from leadership.

5) *Be authentic*: It needs to be someone who is actively involved in their own local church. Someone who is actually doing the things they advocate others to do.

6) *Be well established*: It needs to be someone who has the credibility which comes from staying in one place long enough to have accomplished something. It's hard to have confidence in a drifter.

7) *Listen well*: It's more important for someone to ask good questions than to provide good answers. Churches need to look for a person who will help *them* to discover vision, not to deliver it pre-packaged.

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