

Eyes to See, Ears to Hear – Uncovering Vision

Vision and Strategic Planning Consultancies

Phase I: Preparation - Believing that there will be something worth seeing

Assisting a church find a compelling vision for its future is one of the most common reasons for church health consultancies. Facilitating this effectively is dependent on several key elements.

1. **Time:** Vision consultancies are not usually simple or short. To get the best outcome they may take 6 – 9 even 12 months.
2. **Participation:** For a vision to be owned and acted upon it must arise from wide and deep conversation in the church. As many as possible need to be involved in bringing it to the surface and shaping it. All voices need to be heard in the visioning process.
3. **Listening:** A sense above all that God has communicated within this process and that the church has listened and responded is essential. Assisting the church with a process which actively engages the spirit, mind and heart in listening to God collectively is fundamental to effective vision work.
4. **Wrestling:** A compelling vision is usually is hard work. It means change, letting go of the past, even past visions. It means embracing new realities of where the church is at and where it could go in years to come. Some of these elements may not be what people expect or even hope for. Vision often has some surprises. Without the honest questioning and wrestling with “Is this really what God wants and what we want for this church?”, again the process will end up disconnected with reality.
5. **Commitment:** Once the vision has been uncovered, articulated, agreed upon, it must be implemented. Most vision statements are simply that! Statements which mean little and do not become the basis for planning and action.

Unless each of these elements are understood at the outset of the process, visioning can lack traction. Talking this through with the leadership who are requesting the consultancy is important.

Surfacing Vision

1. Appointment, commissioning and formation of the Vision Group
 - The Vision Group is appointed by the governing group of the church and reports to them
 - A clear task description – this also helps the governing group have clear expectations of the group.
 - The group is usually given some process guidelines i.e. participation, time-frame, etc
 - Like all small groups, an intentional process of group formation is needed
 - Consultants assist the governing group with selection criteria, task clarity and, once the group is appointed, the formation process. Consultants usually chair the Vision Group initially.

2. Designing a process suited to the church
 - How will the group best involve as many people as possible in surfacing the vision of the church?
 - Who are the key groups to consult with? I.e leadership and staff, emerging leaders, key voluntary leaders, governing group members, new members, long term members, the congregation as a whole...
 - What processes will be most useful here? How do we anchor the process Biblically? Creatively? Realistically?
 - How will the process remain communal with honest, open and reflective conversation? How will the vision become self-revealing in community?
 - How will we all ensure we adequately listen to God and collectively discern his vision for the church? What is the theology and spirituality of this church around listening to God?
 - Consultants have a key role in resourcing the design process.

3. Facilitating and overseeing the data gathering process
 - Reflections on the vision are gathered and feed back where possible is given in process to the church to enable this to be a conversation rather than a once off event.
 - Creative as well as cognitive processes need to be encouraged (i.e. street retreats, vision wall)
 - History needs to be acknowledged without being determinative of the future. People need to restate but then release past visions, these are stepping stones to a new future.
 - It is wise for the consultancy team to facilitate some, but not all, of the data gathering processes, this keeps the consultants involved. The Vision Group itself however needs to facilitate as much as possible

4. Shaping the elements of the first draft

- Assist the group identify and document recurring, significant themes.
- Be on the lookout for ideas which seem to have traction, impact and that energise the group.
- Which ideas resonate with the group and which don't – why?
- The first draft is compiled using dot points and should not look like a finished document.
- It should be titled FIRST DRAFT

5. Testing and refining through feedback to key groups

- Give the First Draft to various groups in the church asking for feedback.
- Key Questions:
 - Is this clear enough to be the guiding vision for our planning over the next 5 years?
 - Is it inspiring? – Do I want to be part of a church like this?
 - Do we sense God's hand in shaping this vision?
 - Does it challenge us and call us to commit in faith?
- The vision is refined and sharpened on the basis of feedback. This is usually to make it more specific and focussed.

6. Presentation and adoption

- The Vision Group presents the completed vision (Draft) to the governing group.
- The governing group board / elders usually brings this to the church with the Vision Group for formal adoption at a Covenanting service.
- The Vision Group is usually released following the service once the implementation process is agreed.

7. Establishing an implementation process

- Vision rarely goes anywhere without an appropriate implementation plan and implementation group which is usually agreed upon by the church as part of adopting the vision.
- The vision normally becomes the framework for a 5 year strategic plan (NB This may involve a secondary process of its own).
- The decision making process for aligning resources, programs and activities with the vision needs to be understood and clear to all.
- The accountability process to the governing group and the congregation for implementation needs to be agreed I.e a quarterly report. ½ yearly update...
- Once the implementation process has been agreed the consultancy is usually complete.

Surfacing Vision

- A vision created quickly in a rush of enthusiasm will normally sit quietly in the corner and lead to complacency.
- God has a vision for this church, he is already communicating this vision, how do we assist a church listen, articulate this, commit to it and act upon it.
- God usually speaks in many and various ways in and through his people – How do we empower a congregation to discern wisely and well.
- Vision formation always involves spiritual formation.
- Surfacing a vision is work for the spirit, the heart and the mind.