





VISION AND MISSION

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF OUR FUTURE

My thoughts have returned often to Chief Apostle Schneider's Pentecost message. His firm and resolute statement about the future direction of our church continues to inspire me. He held up our New Apostolic Vision Statement and declared in simple and unmistakable terms: "This is our direction."

With this clear mandate, it is important that we fully explore this Statement as well as our Mission Statement. I am convinced that they were born out of the timely inspiration of the Holy Spirit. To me they form a roadmap that offers continuity and security, and also provide relevancy for our church within an ever changing contemporary world. This is not a fad or a flavor of the month; we can build a strong future for our church in the USA upon this foundation.

I ask every member to make understanding these Statements a high priority within their personal spiritual growth. There is much substance for one to absorb and understand. The discovery of this substance would provide an excellent journey to take with other brothers and sisters within a small group discussion format over the remaining months of 2013.

Please allow me to help you get started in your discovery. The Vision and Mission Statements are the very foundation upon which our strategic plan "Stepping Forward" has been constructed. I would like to provide you with further food for thought and explain more completely how putting these Statements into practice can shape our culture, define our purpose and substantiate the changes we are actively pursuing in every congregation. Let me begin with a phrase that you have heard me say often or have seen in various presentations describing our future plans:

"First health, then growth, leading to completion."

Let me explain the connection of this phrase to the Vision and Mission Statements.

I feel strongly that the Vision Statement describes healthy congregations and paints a picture of an **ideal internal view** of ourselves and our congregations that we have yet to attain. To grasp how far we sometimes are from this ideal is to also grasp why it is so critical that we continue to create a new **culture of living like Christ.** There are two distinct concepts of health within the Vision Statement that require both diligence to better understand and courage to achieve. The process is ongoing, but our diligence will be rewarded. Each new discovery will inspire new wonder over God's infinite grace and love. Also, our lives as Christians will become more joyous and fulfilled as we experience the tangible evidence of what Jesus taught us to pray for: Your kingdom come! We can begin to experience already today the priceless benefits of His kingdom while on the path to an everlasting reconciliation and fellowship with God our Heavenly Father.



So let us begin with the first phrase of the Vision Statement: *"A church in which people feel at home…"* When do people feel at home? We generally consider ourselves to be friendly. We love fellowship. But this phrase goes far beyond coffee and cake. People feel at home within a community of believers when they are accepted without judgement and, of



course, Jesus Christ is our ultimate exemplar in this regard. Look how He intentionally and courageously broke free of the cultural norms of His time to demonstrate His acceptance of every human being He encountered. To understand the many dimensions of Christ-like acceptance, we can study in detail His interaction with:

The 10 lepers. **Luke 17:11-19**

The adulteress. **John 8:1-12**

Zaccheus the tax collector. **Luke 19:1-9**

The malefactor. **Luke 23:39-43**

The woman who washed His feet at a dinner hosted by a Pharisee. **Luke 7:35-50**

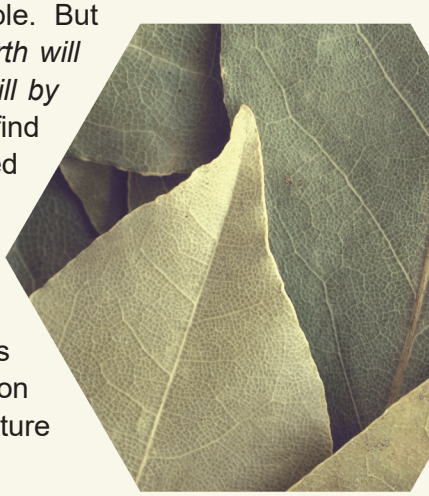
The Samaritan woman at the well. **John 4:1-26**

And there are more of course, each with a special nuance and teaching. When we begin to truly understand the nature of Christ and have the courage to follow His example, we will never allow our cultural norms to define the love of God and to create barriers to His grace. We are not a European, Hispanic or Asian church. We are not conservative or liberal, black or white, democrat or republican, traditional or contemporary. These are human labels that may be significant within our temporal world but they have no meaning within the context of eternal salvation! A healthy congregation will form a new **culture**: living and leading like Christ!

Now we move to the next major concept: *"and, inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their lives to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life …"* This too is a profound statement with powerful relevance as now the focus shifts to the health of each soul as an individual. What discoveries can we make? Firstly, we see that spiritual health is a matter of **personal responsibility**. We prepare ourselves! There is no automatic free pass to life eternal that comes with church membership. There is no express line that avoids the daily struggle to live a God pleasing life and to be transformed into the nature of Christ.

Also, this phrase professes that salvation is predicated upon experiencing the love of God, being inspired by the Holy Spirit and aligning ourselves to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence we see the power and significance of our **Divine Service Experience**; the communal worship, the divine truth of God's word and the life changing power of Holy Communion. Here we also see the importance of **Pastoral Care** that provides teaching and support to each soul in their unique and sometimes challenging circumstances of life outside the walls of the church building.

Lastly, both the Vision and Mission Statements have an intense focus upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a source of continuity and security for us. The only constant in our contemporary world is change. Fads come and go as do styles, cultural norms, technological innovations and even people. But Jesus said *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."* We find these exact words recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. His Gospel, the good news of salvation, is as relevant today as 2000 years ago and will remain so until His return. This is the foundation upon which to build our future plans with confidence.



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Where the Vision Statement is about health and an internal view, the Mission Statement is about growth with an outward view of our responsibility to profess our belief, to embrace our communities in the love of God and to serve our fellow man with kindness and compassion. It is a collective call to action. It is an invitation to become passionately involved with the greatest cause the world has ever seen. It empowers all of us to discover our spiritual gifts by which to edify the Body of Christ and to live a meaningful life of service to others.

"Reaching out to all people in order to teach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit…. Providing soul care and cultivating a warm fellowship in which everyone shall feel the love of God and the joy of serving others." This is the very essence of being apostolic. Baptizing with water and the Holy Spirit requires the authority of the apostles and the ordained ministry, but we are all commissioned to reach out and teach the Gospel. Already the Chief Apostle Fehr declared that we are all missionaries. How will we reach out? How will we teach the Gospel?

Reaching out happens outside the walls of the church. It happens where we live, work, learn and play. While some may have the gift to teach by profession, others teach by:

Living an exemplary life based upon the Gospel. They radiate peace. They are kind, compassionate and merciful. They love God in a very visible way. They love their neighbour as themselves. They freely forgive, seek reconciliation, and turn the other cheek; they even seek to love their enemies. What a teaching! What a beautiful and rewarding way to live!

Reaching out in service to others as a tool to share God's love. People do incredible good works every day, but their motivations may vary. Let me focus our attention on the highest motivation; the beautiful expressions of kindness that originate out of the pure love of God. People who perform such good works allow their perspective to be redirected outward from the self to the needs of others. They reach out! They express their unique passions and giftedness in a very practical way that brings the light of Christ's Gospel into darkened lives when it is needed most. Often these passions are forged within the fire of life-changing circumstances that God has permitted along their personal journey. Thereby they fulfil Christ's call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and take in the stranger (Matthew 25:31-46), all in His name and for His sake so that everyone feels the love of God.

Isn't this a form of soul care? Within Stepping Forward, we call it Pastoral Care but the effect is the same. Within a "Missional church," there are no passive members. Everyone may find their calling to edify the body of Christ and to share the joy of serving Him and others. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

This understanding of our spiritual gifts, our unique passions that God has engineered within our lives and the place within the body of Christ that He has called us to serve can be found within the journey of the Work of Ministry. This can be a powerful experience, an experience that helps us reach out to all people in a way that brings our life purpose and deep personal fulfilment. The Bible text for a recent midweek service came from Daniel

where we read: "and Daniel was purposed within his heart." I hope that our Mission Statement can provide us with a renewed sense of purpose and that each member will find their place to express it with the full power and confidence of the Holy Spirit.



Reaching out as a servant leader. The Mission Statement concludes with a reference to the joy of serving. This brings us full circle to our cultural objective of not only living like Christ, but leading like Christ. He was the epitome of a servant leader. Despite having ultimate power and the greatest claim to entitlement, Christ dedicated Himself to the humblest path of servant hood for the benefit of all humanity. When teaching His disciples, He advised them that "the greatest among you will be the servant of all." This is the model for us as we edify the body of Christ. It is a beautiful balance when we can serve with the full power and confidence of the Holy Spirit combined with the humility of a servant leader. Then it is easy for all to feel the love of God reaching into their lives. -LRK

A CHURCH IN WHICH PEOPLE FEEL AT HOME...

One more thought regarding this phrase from our Vision Statement: On the one hand, we may not feel at home within our congregation because of the various changes or adjustments that are taking place. *I don't feel at home with more contemporary music, or congregational singing, or the manner in which the Sunday School is being taught, or, or…*

But let us look at this expression a little more closely. The word "I" is problematic. Our VISION says a ***church*** in which ***people*** feel at home. Thus it becomes a collaborative effort to feel at home. For example, when two people marry, each formerly felt at home in their own living conditions, styles, habits, etc. Now, however, they must work together to build a new "at home" feeling that fits them as a couple. This evolves again if children come, so that the family feels at home together. A congregation is more complex yet, it is an entire community of believers. An individual cannot remain isolated and insensitive to those around them and expect to feel at home within this community. It is incumbent upon me to work together with the whole family of my congregation to be at home and in peace in the presence of Christ.

After all, we must remember it truly is His home! The more we grow in Him, the more we feel at home with Him and with all those whom He loves. Hence this simple expression gives cause for a fair amount of struggling and adjustment prompted by the love and thankfulness we have for the Lord. -LRK



Health, growth, completion

Vision

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Once more, a new year lays before us. Only God knows the content of the hours and days that we will encounter. Naturally, we want to have a bright and positive outlook considering what is to come. We wish for health, success, and good things to happen; there is nothing wrong about such wishes, and we know, with God, all things are possible. In this regard, we are mindful of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:19 - *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.* Perhaps this verse becomes a little clearer in a different translation: *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied* (NIV). It is a strong, yet truthful statement that if we only rely on Christ for things of this life, we have missed what His divine, and eternal, intention is for us.

On the other hand, it is also in our human nature to look towards the future negatively, with fear of the unknown, dread for an approaching concern, or anxiety over present shortcomings.

Let us consider a different perspective through the eyes of our faith. We approach each day with confidence and courage in the belief and knowledge that the almighty God, our Father, is with us! With such an understanding, we recognize the fact that whatever the day brings is of little consequence to us. When we live in the Spirit and abide in the environment of God's will, we live a life of freedom procured for us by Jesus, and our future is secure.

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Here, the Magnificat of Mary, gives us the right attitude:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.
For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His name. (Luke 1: 46-49)

Mary composed this prayer in a time of uncertainty, not knowing the full extent of God's plan. Yet, strengthened by her cousin, she remained resilient and exclaimed such a hymn of confidence.

It is wise for us to be aware that the time prior to the coming of Christ will, at times, be fraught with difficulty and tribulation, causing one to even question the Lord's presence in their life, the church, or even His power in the world. At such times of disappointment and misunderstanding, the evil one will attack with doubt, and try to create distance, damaging our relationship with the Lord.

As in the time prior to Christ's birth, this also occurred during His Passion with the disciples. We can imagine the dismay and confusion when Jesus told them of His impending captivity, torture, and death. How was this possible? It seemed everything was on a positive track. However, the intentions of God did not coincide with the ideas of the disciples, especially Peter, whom Jesus warned in Luke 22:31-32.

We live in a similar circumstance today. At one time, we thought the church would continue to grow and triumph in the circle of Christianity, and then the Lord would come. We may have thought that large numbers are a measure of success. But it becomes more and more apparent that the Lord's measurements for success are vastly different than ours. We can see this in the small number of disciples that He left when He ascended, and yet, from these, Christianity spread and has endured over 2000 years!

Dear ones, let us not be dismayed because we do not understand the ways of our eternal Father. He does not expect us to understand. He simply has called us for His mission; to do what Jesus Christ commissioned His apostles to do…



Preach the gospel.

Make disciples of all people.

Prepare for His return.

This is our task and we will continue in it.

Yes, we do not know what the future days will bring, but this we do know: over the past years, under the activity of the Holy Spirit, the Lord has always allowed us the opportunity to grow and become closer in our relationship with Him. One knows it and can feel it! Let us not become tired in advancing the mission He has given us, even if we cannot understand or comprehend His entire plan. The Lord is with us, come what may.

We join with the psalmist - *Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You…in God I have put my trust; I will not fear* (Psalm 56:3-4).

Thus, we rest in our hope in the Lord. This is not wishful thinking, but a true hope in the biblical sense - the confident expectation in the fulfillment of the Lord's promise:

I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. - John14:3

However, even as we look towards this future, Jesus wants to fulfill this word already today! Believing souls, *here and now*, can perceive His presence in the prefiguration of His kingdom as we share in the fellowship of Holy Communion. Our desire to live in this promise, *that where I am, there you may be also,* is articulated in our plea – *Your kingdom come!*

So, while we wait to be with the Lord, in the most complete and perfect way when He comes, we can already tangibly experience that He is with us already today. May this give us strength, courage, and confidence as we look into the year ahead.

With loving greetings,

