



TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

November 2019

Mission & Vision

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

Mission & Vision

Mission seeks to answer these questions: "Why do we exist? What is our purpose? Whom do we serve?" Vision, though related, focuses on these questions: "What is the picture of the future that we want to create? What or who do we want to become?" Together, they articulate a purpose and goal for an organization.

The importance of mission, vision, and covenant emerged in 1979 as the Unitarian Universalist Association reached a low-point in the number of congregations and members. It was as if the promise of the merger of the Unitarians and Universalists in 1961 had been squandered. In response, the UUA

Board of Trustees and President Gene Pickett issued a call for renewal and growth, which launched a new era. In launching this, Pickett was informed by the words of an orthodox theologian, Emil Brunner, who wrote, "The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning." Pickett wrote, "A sense of mission is essential to our wellbeing and growth." He then added, "Let our mission be rooted in a message of hope and affirmation. Let our message speak to evil and good, pain and joy; let it inspire honest and persistent thought, let it develop informed minds and loving hearts, let it proclaim that people matter, that love and justice and decency really work."

At that same time, Rev. Robert Lat-ham lamented the fact that many of our congregations had settled for a myopic vision. He wrote, "A myopic existence is rarely deliberate. It happens gradually as congregations grow into self-sufficiency...." He believed that too

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Mission, Vision & Building Beloved Community

The Beloved Community is both mission and vision. Those who hold it up as an essential goal have as their mission its creation. Beloved Community is also a vision, a future reality to bring into being. Rev. Shirley Strong writes, "Martin Luther King, Jr. ...came to believe that in addition to the radical transformation of individuals, there was a need for a 'deep restructuring of institutions if the Beloved Community was to be realized.' King did not believe that the realization of the Beloved Community would ...automatically come to pass. Rather he saw it as an ideal that first must be envisioned, and then consciously and intentionally worked toward. It was King's hope that in every succeeding generation, visionary people will commit their lives and resources to the achievement of such a community."

Touchstones is committed to exploring liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations. For daily meditations, photos, and more visit/like Touchstones at <https://www.facebook.com/Touchpossibility/>

The Chief's Three Sons

Anonymous, adapted

Once there was a Native American chief who was nearing the end of his life. Even though he had tried many times, he was not able to decide which of his three sons should succeed him as chief. They all had admirable qualities, but he could not choose. He knew by tradition that he should select his eldest son, but he felt that the choice was too important to rely only on tradition.

One day, he gathered his sons together and said to them, "Do you see that mountain in the distance? I want you to journey to that mountain, climb to its summit, and bring back the thing that you think will be the most helpful in leading our people."

The eldest son went first and after several days he returned with a large cloth bag filled with flint, a stone that was used to make arrow tips and spear points. He said to his father, "Our people will never live in fear of our enemies. I know where there is a vein of flint that will last us for many years. We will always be able to have enough weapons to defend ourselves and to hunt the buffalo."



The middle son was the next to make the journey. He climbed to the top of the mountain, and on the way found forests

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Building Beloved Community

Wisdom Story

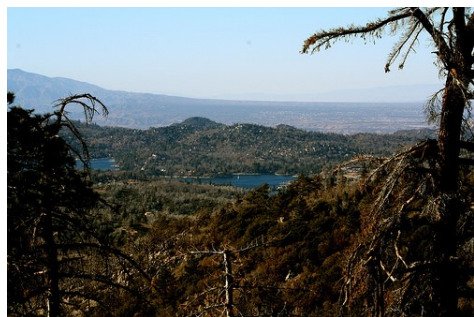
(Continued from page 1) **Three Sons**



rich with wood for making fires. When he returned, he said to his father, “Our people will never be cold in winter. I know where wood can be found in abundance to keep them warm and to cook their food. We

will never have to fear winter again.”

The youngest son was the last to take the journey. He was away many days, only to return empty-handed. He said, “When I reached the summit, I found nothing worth bringing back. I searched everywhere, but the top of the mountain was barren rock and useless. Then I looked out toward the horizon, far into the distance. I was astonished to see a new land with forests, meadows, mountains and valleys, fish and animals—a land of great beauty and great peace. I brought nothing back, for the land was still far off and I didn’t have time to travel there. I would love to go there someday. I delayed coming back because I found it very difficult to return after seeing the beauty of that land! I want to take our people to this new land.”



The old chief’s eyes blazed with gratitude. He grasped his son in his arms, proclaiming that he would succeed him as the new chief. The old chief thought to himself, “My other sons brought back worthy things, necessary things. But my youngest son had a vision. He has seen a better land, the Promised Land, and he burns with desire to lead our people there.”

Source: adapted from *One Hundred Wisdom Stories from Around the World* by Margaret Silf

Waking to Vision

Characteristics of a Vision

Lovett Weems, Jr (adapted)

A vision is related to mission but different: Mission is the means and vision is the end.

A vision is unique: While many UU congregations could have the same or a similar mission, their vision would be different based on their history, context, culture, and membership.

A vision focuses on the future: A vision articulates a preferred future for the congregation.

A vision is for others: The focus of a vision is on outcomes, results, and contributions for others because it is related to the mission in challenging ways. The vision relates to meeting needs.

A vision is realistic: A vision needs to be sufficiently realistic for there to be some reasonable hope of success. Otherwise visions become fanciful imaginings or pipe dreams.

A vision is lofty: A vision should also be lofty and inspiring. The vision should be values-filled and show that the congregation has a choice among values. Visions finally become a question of values.

A vision is inviting: A vision should be an attractive, clear, compelling, and appealing picture of what the future can be. It should be inviting and should claim the minds and hearts of people in the congregation.

A vision is a shared vision: An effective vision is a vision shared by members of the congregation. It needs to “ring true” for most of the people.

A vision is good news and bad news: A vision holds in it both promise and judgment. It is the promise of a better future. However, within the promise is some degree of judgment of the past and the present.

A vision is a sign of hope: A vision should inspire hope. When there is no hope within a congregation, there is despair and a lack of motivation and energy to accomplish the mission.

Source: *Vision: Discern & Articulate a Shared Vision in Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, Integrity* by Lovett Weems, Jr.

Mission Possible

A Personal Mission Statement

Viktor Frankl said that we do not invent our mission in life, we detect it.

Stephen Covey suggested that 10% of life is made up of what happens to you, which you can’t control, and the remaining 90% of life is determined by how you choose to respond. Covey argued for intentional, thoughtful, effective responses informed by your principles and your personal mission statement.

According to Covey, your personal mission statement

1. “Represents the deepest and best within you. It comes out of a solid connection with your deep inner life.
2. “Is the fulfillment of your own unique gifts. It’s the expression of your unique capacity to contribute.
3. “Is transcendent. It’s based on principles of contribution and purposes higher than yourself.
4. “Addresses and integrates the fundamental human needs and capacities in the physical, social/emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions.
5. “Is based on principles that produce quality-of-life results. Both the ends and the means are based on ‘true north’ principles.
6. “Deals with both vision and principle-based values. It’s not enough to have values without vision—you want to be good, but you want to be good for something. ...An empowering mission statement deals with both character and competence; what you want to be and what you want to do in your life.
7. “Deals with all the significant roles in your life. It represents a lifetime balance of personal, family, work, community—whatever roles you feel are yours to fill.
8. “Is written to inspire you—not to impress anyone else. It communicates to you and inspires you on the most essential level.”

A personal mission statement focuses first on who you want to be (character),

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Readings from the Common Bowl

Mission

Day 1: "A leader's

responsibility is to

cause a mission and vision to have tangible results in the real world." Henry Cloud

Day 2: "My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style." Maya Angelou

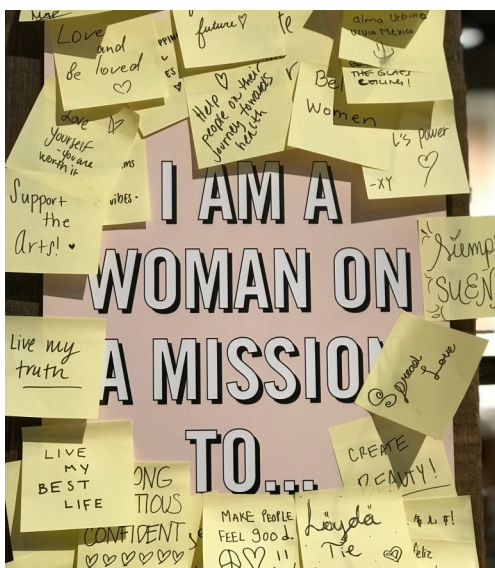
Day 3: "Make your life a mission—not an intermission." Arnold Glasgow

Day 4: "Here is a test to find whether your mission on Earth is finished: If you're alive it isn't." Richard Bach

Day 5: "My mission is to create a world where we can live in harmony with nature." Jane Goodall

Day 6: "Many pastors are leaving ministry or retiring earlier. Many laypeople have given up any hope of having a thriving church. I'm convinced the primary reason is the absence or loss of a personal mission in life that is bigger than their own lives." Bill Easum

Day 7: "The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning." Emil Brunner



Day 8 "A mission-focused institution is inevitably a growing institution." Robert Latham

Day 9: "When a congregation is not mission-focused it loses its way and its purpose for being." Anonymous



Day 10: "A mission to survive is not a mission." Thomas Bandy

Day 11: "Life is a mission, not a career. A career is a profession, a mission is a cause. A career asks, 'What's in it for me?' A mission asks, 'How can I make a difference?'" Sean Covey

Day 12: "Our mission ...is to confront ignorance with knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the outstretched hand of generosity. Racism can, will, and must be defeated." Kofi Annan

Day 13: "When you see people only as personalities, rather than souls with life missions to fulfill, you forever limit their growth and possibilities...." Shannon Alder

Day 14: "A mission statement is not something you write overnight, but fundamentally, your mission statement becomes your constitution, the solid expression of your vision and values. It becomes the criterion by which you measure everything else in your life." Stephen Covey

Day 15: "Without a mission statement, you may get to the top of the ladder and then realize it was leaning against the wrong building!" Dave Ramsey

Day 16: "Would you be willing to give your life to save the world if no one ever knew your name? If anonymity was the price you would have to pay for significance, would it be too great a price? To live a life of courage is not a guarantee of prestige or adulation. It only matters if you live and die fulfilling the mission you were born for." Erwin Raphael McManus

Vision

Day 17: "Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes." C.G. Jung

Day 18: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29:18

Day 19: "There is a simple and familiar cycle through which organizations tend to move. The movement is from initial vision to maintenance to decline." Lovett Weems, Jr.

Day 20: "Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare." Japanese proverb

Day 21: "Leaders keep the conversation alive... in the congregation, allowing the vision to be shaped by past history, current practice, and future opportunities." Gil Rendle

Day 22: "Everyone takes the limits of his [or her] own vision for the limits of the world." Arthur Schopenhauer

Day 23: "The real voyage of discovery consists of not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." Marcel Proust



Day 24 "Having a vision is not enough. It must be combined with imagination, determination, faith, hope and passion. It is not enough to just stare up at the stars... we must become the stars that the stars shine down on." Victoria June

Day 25 "Don't let the limitations of others limit your vision." Roy Bennett

Day 26 "The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight but no vision." Helen Keller

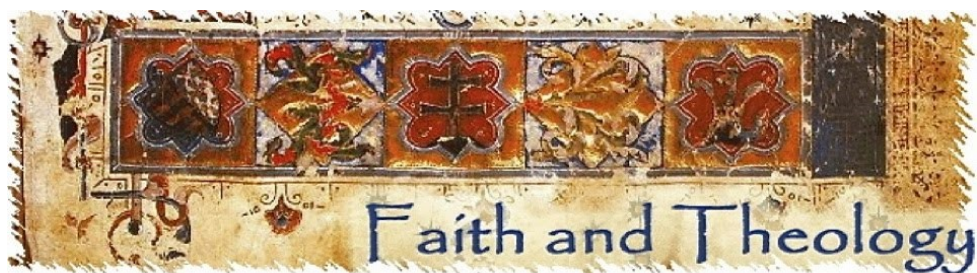
Day 27: "Visions are worth fighting for. Why spend your life making someone else's dreams come true?" Tim Burton

Day 28: "Create a vision for the life you really want and then work relentlessly towards making it a reality." Roy Bennett

Day 29: "Your identity and vision are composed of a certain constellation of ideas and feelings that surfaced from the depths ... within you. To lose these now would be to lose yourself." John O'Donohue

Day 30: "When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." Audre Lorde

Day 31: "Vision is ongoing and never-ending." Peter Senge



A New Paradigm for Unitarian Universalism

One of the more engaging blueprints for programmatically connecting mission and vision for Unitarian Universalist congregations was developed by Rev. Roy Phillips. He first presented this in his 1995 Minns Lectures, *Transforming Liberal Congregations for a New Millennium*. These were published in 1996 by Unity Church-Unitarian where Phillips was serving as the senior minister. He significantly revised this book and republished it in 1999 as *Letting Go: Transforming Congregations for Ministry*. It is not clear that the book received the reception that it deserved, which is why this overview is offered.

The four pillars of this transformation, as summarized by Michael Cowan, are:

- ♦ **"From membership**, in which congregants understand themselves as recipients of spiritual care from professional providers, **to ministry**, in which they carefully discern their gifts and the responsibilities to which these gifts correspond."
- ♦ **"From entitlement**, in which congregants remain members because they are given standing influence over some piece of the congregation's life, **to mission**, in which they become mindful of calls to service both inside and outside the congregation."
- ♦ **"From education**, in which the congregants are consumers of a curriculum designed and delivered by others, **to spiritual development**, in which they interrupt the frenetic 'doing' of contemporary life to attend to the movement of the spirit in their lives and the response the spirit asks of them."
- ♦ **"From toleration**, in which congregants politely allow otherness but keep it at arm's-length, **to engagement**, in which they embrace diversity as a source of ongoing spiritual transformation."

From Membership to Ministry

Rather than focusing on membership growth (which is an outcome), we need to focus on members ministering to individuals and groups. This means to stop thinking of the congregation as "members" ministered to by clergy, and to start thinking of ministry as something the entire congregation does.

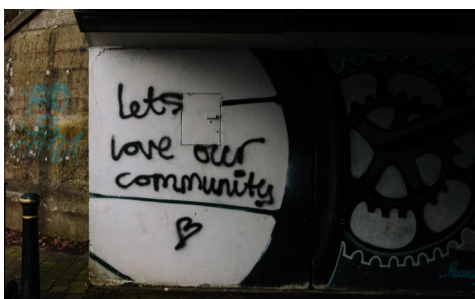
Rev. Sue Spencer asks, "How can we empower others to discover and live their own vocations? How can we, together, create ministries that speak to the hopes, hurts, and hungers of our world?"

Bill Clark writes, "Rather than asking new people about committees, Phillips offers a new paradigm that we ask people what are your values, what are your gifts, what do you see as your spiritual tasks as you enter a congregational community. What are the areas for your personal growth and development that brings you here?"

Phillips writes, "People come to our congregations looking for bread. We tend to give them stones of busyness and pseudo-power."

Kennon Callahan suggests that people are involved in **four foundational life searches**. The task is to help people in each of these searches.

- ♦ **The Search for Identity:** Helping people in their search for individuality and identity—their need to rediscover and reclaim power in their own lives and destinies.
- ♦ **The Search for Community:** Helping people, in a relational way, to build "communities of reconciliation, wholeness, caring, and justice."



- ♦ **The Search for Meaning:** Helping people find a sense of meaning in everyday life.
- ♦ **The Search for Hope:** Helping people move together "to meet specific concrete human hurts and hopes—both societal and individual."

Phillips concludes that "congregations have a need for...a paradigm shift from membership to ministry." "In the **Membership Paradigm**, people become members of an organization that promises to offer spiritual care. They are asked to perform institution-maintenance tasks in order to keep them involved." [In this paradigm, members are consumers.] "The **Ministry Paradigm**, in contrast, engages people in inward gifts of discernment and outward expression of gifts and values, alone and with others, in personal and shared ministry—in their homes and congregations, ...in their communities, among their friends and among strangers, and in their workplaces."

From Entitlement to Mission

Rather than assuming that we are entitled as members in the congregation for influence, power, prestige, etc., consider that we are called to collectively focus on mission.

Phillips writes, "Some people are always willing to accept the open welcome they find in a congregation and turn that welcome into their own personal and perpetual entitlement. They feel entitled to have a say, to stop things from happening, to criticize without accountability, and to prevent changes that might unsettle and upset them. They feel entitled to 'do their own thing' whether or not it fits with the congregation's sense of shared mission. They feel entitled to possess and dominate turf of their own—a committee or a task force, for instance."

Michael Durall asserts that the church is "owned" by its mission.

Rev. Robert Latham writes, "A church that is not growing has a mission problem."

Phillips writes, "Congregations that sense their identity as communities of call and that can point to specific ways they are answering that call tend to be healthy and strong. The greater the clarity they achieve about the particular mis-

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The Three Stonecutters



Anonymous

Once upon a time, there was a traveler who came upon three individuals working with stone. Curious as to what the workers were doing with the stones, the traveler approached the first worker and asked, "What are you doing with these stones?" Grumpily and without hesitation the worker quickly responded, "I am a stonecutter and I am cutting stones."

Not satisfied with this answer, the traveler approached the second worker and asked, "What are you doing with these stones?" The second worker paused for a moment, sighed, but smiled a little and then explained, "I am a stonecutter and I am trying to make enough money to support my family."

Having two different answers to the same question, the traveler made his way to the third worker and asked, "What are you doing with these stones?" The third worker stopped what he was doing, bringing his chisel to his side. He looked at the traveler with a beaming smile on his face and declared, "I am a stonecutter and I am building a cathedral."

Source: <http://www.moolanomy.com/153/the-three-stonecutters/>

UU Translator

The UU translator builds a vocabulary to help support entering into a dialogue with each other and with people of different faiths.

Vision (noun) *Imagine an archer letting his arrow fly through the air. Let the arrow represent your life. ...Vision is the target. Vision is actively pursuing one's true calling. Being on the path where your unique talents meet the needs of the world.*

Source: All Souls Parent Resource Network, All Souls Unitarian Church, Tulsa, OK

Family Activity:

A Family's Mission

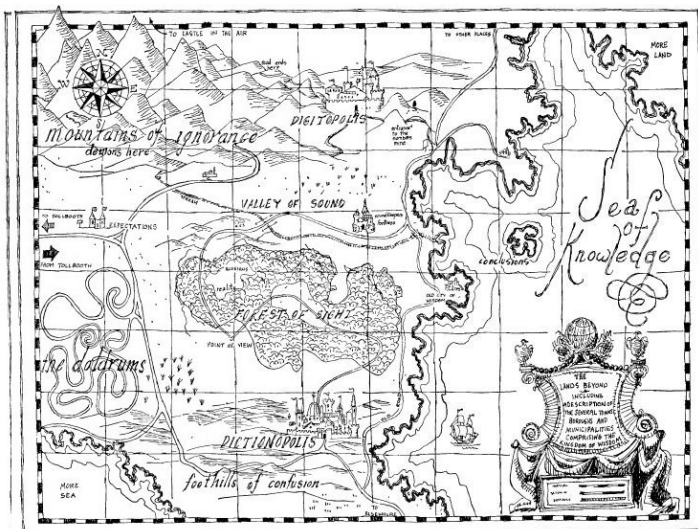
Read the piece on page 2, *A Personal Mission Statement*, to base your approach to discussing as a family what your mission is. An excellent article that you may want to read is *Want to Give Your Family Value and Purpose? Write a Mission Statement* by Bruce Feiler at <https://www.theatlantic.com/saxes/archive/2013/02/want-to-give-your-family-value-and-purpose-write-a-mission-statement/273491/>

Invite your children into a discussion about why you exist as a family. Do you exist just for the members of your family or do you exist for others as well? Who? Why?

Family Activity: Map Making

In a way, a vision is a destination, a place to travel to, a place that we have never been to before. Using a land as fanciful as that in the book, *The Phantom*

Tollbooth (see map) by Norton Juster, create a map of strange and wonderful places and then tell stories about what happens when you travel to each one. Who or what blocks your path? Who or what helps you on the journey? What is it like to finally reach the destination?



From Seeing to Vision

Annie Dillard devoted an entire chapter to seeing in her 1974 book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. This was appropriate since the book itself is a tour de force about what it means to see the world, to really see nature. Dillard writes, "Unfortunately, nature is very much a now-you-see-it, now-you-don't affair. A fish flashes, then dissolves in the water before my eyes like so much salt. Deer apparently ascend bodily into heaven; the brightest oriole fades into leaves. These disappearances stun me into stillness and concentration; they say of nature that it conceals with a grand nonchalance, and they say of vision that it is a deliberate gift, the revelation of a dancer who for my eyes only flings away her seven veils. For nature does reveal as well as conceal: now-you-don't-see-it, now-you-do."

Dillard knows that to truly "see" is difficult indeed. She writes, "The secret of seeing is, then, the pearl of great price." Dillard concludes the chapter wanting to see "the tree with lights in it." That was the first thing that a young girl, who had surgery and was no longer blind, saw when the bandages over her eyes were removed. Dillard writes, "I saw the tree with the lights in it. I saw the backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame. I stood on the grass with the lights in it, grass that was wholly fire, utterly focused and utterly dreamed. It was less like seeing than like being for the first time seen.... Gradually the lights went out in the cedar, the colors died, the cells unflamed and disappeared. I was still ringing. I had been my whole life a bell, and never knew it until at that moment I was lifted and struck."

If really seeing is difficult, creating a compelling vision is even more so. It must capture the imagination, as much as the will. It must generate motivation, as well as the creativity to bring it into being, step by step, moment by moment. It must ring true to be pursued. Source: Touchstones

Mission: our reason for being / Vision: our compass

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

many congregations were “absorbed in their inner drama” and “suffering from the malaise” that results. Latham concluded, our congregations “had forgotten their reason for existence.”

Given where many of our congregations find themselves today, that may have happened again. As Latham asserted, a church that is not growing has a mission problem. By growth, he was not talking solely about numerical growth. Growth has many dimensions. How is the congregation deepening as a beloved community? How is it supporting the spiritual growth of its members and friends? How is it making a difference in the wider community of which it is a part?

The following conversation is taken from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice In Wonderland*. “Cheshire Puss,” Alice began... “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the cat. “I don’t much care where...,” said Alice. “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the cat.

In terms of our congregations, we must take seriously the Cheshire cat’s “where [do] you want to get to” question. It is a question about mission and vision.



Mission

While it is not easy to pinpoint when mission statements were first considered, the 1940s is a good estimate. They

became popular in the 1980s and continue to be important in businesses, nonprofits, community groups, congregations, and other organizations.

Articulating a mission is not easy. Initial attempts tend to be an articulation of a congregation’s status quo, which means nothing different or new is required. Further, more important than a mission statement is the sense of mission that informs all that a congregation does. Is it mission driven?

One person has said, “The purpose of a church is to fulfill the mission of the church, not to make people happy!” Another observed, “The church is owned by its Mission, not by its Members.” A third suggested that “the mission of Unitarian Universalism is to transform people who will transform the world!”

A mission statement answers the most fundamental question about an organization. Stephen Covey suggested that we must ask, “what is ‘true north’ for your organization—what is its essential purpose for being?” Latham adds that, “The priority question of any institution is: ‘Why do we exist—what is our business?’”

Latham continues, as above, “A mission-focused institution is inevitably a growing institution. Religious institutions which are not growing have a mission-focus problem. In the midst of such a problem, the tendency is to induce artificial life into the institution by making growth an end unto itself. However, this only masks the deeper problem and reduces motivation to maintenance ...and administration.... That which is being masked is a subtle shift of focus from mission motivation to institutional caretaking. When growth becomes the goal, mission has become secondary and the reason for existence stands threatened. Lasting growth is a natural consequence of an empowered mission. Where mission is a priority, growth is inevitable.”

Mission is our reason for being.

Vision

Vision is necessary for our congregations if they are going to achieve anything of consequence in the world. A bib-

lical writer asserted, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” In a similar vein Barry Posner wrote, “There is no freeway to the future. No paved highway from here to tomorrow. There is only wilderness. Only uncertain terrain. There are no road maps. No signposts. So...[we] rely upon a compass and a dream.”

Unitarian Universalist minister, Roy Phillips, wrote, “Here is one vision of a possible world. It is a world

- ♦ in which people sense their own worth deep down and enjoy being alive in a reality they experience with awe;
- ♦ in which people feel the worth of others;
- ♦ in which people take advantage of opportunities to develop and to express their gifts and values; and
- ♦ in which people see their lives as arenas in which to live out those gifts and values—alone and with others—for the glory of self-expression and the enrichment of the world.”

Phillips concluded, “The mission of a local congregation must be to help bring such a possible world into being.”

In defining the characteristics of a vision Lovett Weems, Jr. writes that a vision is unique, lofty, inviting, and realistic. It focuses on the future, and in doing so, inspires hope. Finally, a vision, if it is to have any motivating power must be shared. Peter Drucker admonished us to create a vision around which people can have a passion. John Navone contended that a vision is fundamental to human life. He wrote, “Vision permeates our thoughts, desires, interests, ideals, imagination, feelings, and body language; it is our world view, our sense of life, our basic orientation towards reality. Our vision gives rise to our character, to our style of life, to our tone of being in the world. Vision is the way we grasp the complexity of life; it involves the meaning and value that we attach to the complexity of life as a whole and to the things of life in particular.”

Our imagination is such that we can articulate a compelling vision. Our creativity is such that we can bring that vision into being. *Vision is our compass.*

Four Pillars for Transformation

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**
sion they have taken as their own and the more explicit they can be about the ... outcomes they seek, the better...."

From Education to Spiritual Formation

Bryan Maupin writes, "Education often gives one person the sense that he or she has all the answers, and has to give these to people who do not have them. Spiritual development is more about listening and learning from each other. It is more of a partnership than a one-way relationship. It is a way to help people deepen and develop spiritually, not just giving out information."

Phillips wrote, "When asked once if he had ever experienced conversion, [19th century Unitarian minister William Ellery] Channing replied, 'I should say not....' If this had been his entire answer, his stand might have been easily dismissed. But he elaborated: '...not unless the whole of my life may be called, as it truly has been, a *process* of conversion.' [David] Robinson suggests that the work of Channing and those associated with him [should] be seen as framing and popularizing a doctrine of conversion that was radically different from that of Puritan Calvinism. In this emerging understanding, conversion is no longer seen as one dramatic experience transforming everything, but rather as a continuing process of spiritual formation and cultivation. This dramatic shift to conceiving conversion as a process has 'enormous consequences for the way people approach the religious life.'"

From Diversity to Engagement

Bryan Maupin writes, "Many people tolerate diversity, but this is a neutral stance which although may seem safe, creates distance between people. Engagement is an approach that is genuine, intimate, risky, and encourages people to be creative."

Phillips argued for the importance of creative interchange and the sanctity and power of I-Thou relationships. He wrote, "Creative interchange requires that both people listen generously and receptively to the other, intending to gain 'an appreciative understanding of the original ex-

perience' of the other and working to integrate the other's experience so it 'becomes part of one's own original experience.' This involves acquiring information from the other, but there is also the exchange of 'appreciations, sentiments, hopes, fears, memories, regrets, aspirations, joys, sorrows, hates, loves, pieties, and other features of that vast complexity which makes up the total experience of every human being.'" [Henry Nelson] Wieman emphasizes that this kind of interaction will not happen automatically, but requires personal commitment. Transformational communication is, thus, a spiritual discipline. ...It requires a genuine and open engagement with another.

Phillips continued, Weiman "was speaking ... of what Jewish theologian Martin Buber had called an 'I-Thou' rela-



tionship. Lowell Streiker, an interpreter of Buber's work, explains the significance of that unusual, hyphenated word. 'There are not two worlds of experience, the scared and the profane,' Buber taught. Rather, there is one world and two possible responses to it. 'We may use, enjoy, manipulate, experience, analyze and know the world. Or beyond this, we may regard the same world of the everyday as the context of our relationship to God.' When we thus hallow the world, we 'bind [ourselves] to God in each act by responding completely, unaffectedly, openly with the wholeness of [our] being to the concrete circumstances of [our] life.'"

Phillips' four pillars integrate mission and vision in a powerful way for our congregations. He offers a new way of "doing church," a way that has the potential to transform community into beloved community because it involves members in deeper, more compelling ways.

Holy Boldness

Holy, Holy, Holy!

Pursuing a vision is never easy, and the more audacious the vision the greater the difficulty. A compelling vision tends to emerge out of a **(1) holy curiosity**. Albert Einstein said, "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when contemplating the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. ... Never lose a holy curiosity."

But holy curiosity is not enough. It does not, to use Sam Keen's phrase, put "fire in the belly." A compelling vision becomes a great vision because of a **(2) holy discontent**. In his play *Back to Methuselah*, George Bernard Shaw had the Serpent in the Garden of Eden say to Eve, "You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say, 'Why not?'" Senator Robert F. Kennedy used these words as a theme in his 1968 campaign for the presidential nomination.

The combination of holy curiosity and holy discontent can create a commanding vision, but more is needed. Toni Cade Bambara's novel, *The Salt Eaters*, is a story about a black community in the south, its terror and fear, its strength and desire. Velma who was sturdy and dependable fell into the depths of despair. As Bambara reminds us, "people sometimes believed that it was safer to live with complaints, was necessary to cooperate with grief, was all right to become an accomplice in self-ambush." Minnie, the wise, eccentric healer asks Velma, "No sense wasting each other's time, sweetheart.... Can you afford to be whole? Can you afford it, is what I'm asking you, sweetheart. ...?" With Minnie's help, Velma moves through despair in the direction of healing and wholeness. Velma takes up dancing and finds freedom, a freedom so powerful that she could, writes Bambara, "with no luggage and no maps ... go anywhere in the universe on just sheer holy boldness." **(3) Holy boldness** is the final ingredient to bring a vision into being.

Source: Touchstones

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Mission & Vision

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this journal & *Living the Questions*)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “So many congregations have mission statements that are too long, too convoluted, too verbose for anyone to really take the congregation seriously. They read like they were trying not to offend anyone and, in the end, become unable to offer direction to the congregation. Mission statements are not about stroking anyone’s egos or intellect. They are about purpose. ...The best mission statements are easily memorable. The guide then to any action that is proposed by the congregation is the question: How does this fit the mission statement? How does this action that we are proposing advance our mission statement or purpose?”
Rev. Fred Hammond

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) (adapted)
(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “The great tragedy of speed as an answer to the complexities and responsibilities of existence is that very soon we cannot recognize anything or anyone who is not traveling at the same velocity as we are.

We see only those moving in the same whirling orbit and only those moving with the same urgency. Soon we begin to suffer a form of amnesia, caused by the blurred vision of velocity itself, where those germane to our humanity are dropped from our minds one by one.” *David Whyte*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What is the value of a mission for an organization? An individual? Who or what do you serve with your life?
2. What elements do you think should be part of the mission for beloved community? For your congregation?
3. What should be the mission of our society? How would you describe what that mission actually is? What is the gap between reality and your aspiration?
4. What prejudices, assumptions, or fears have affected your vision? What happened when your field of vision was limited by these blinders?
5. What vision of the future gives you hope? What are the challenges to realizing that vision?
6. Were there periods in your life when you lacked vision? Why? How?
7. What helps you/supports you to gain clarity of vision?
8. Do you travel so fast that you cannot really see those around you? Why?
9. How do you respond when others do not share your vision? How do you respond when they do?
10. To what extent have you practiced holy curiosity, holy discontent, and/or holy boldness? What was the result?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Today & Tomorrow

(Continued from page 2) **Your Mission** then on what you want to do (contributions and agreements). It is informed by the principles on which your being and doing will be based.

A personal mission statement is the blueprint that you use to build your life and relationships. It empowers you to live with integrity at the moment of choice. It is a moral compass by which we guide our life, a compass with a “true north” based upon the principles that were used to design the compass. A personal mission statement is rooted in your principles and it governs all the decisions that you make. It is a tool that you can use to “open the gate of change” within yourself because it is informed by the second habit of highly effective people: *Begin with the End in Mind*.

The personal mission statement takes into account who you presently are and who you want to become based on today and tomorrow.

Source: *Touchstones & First Things First* by Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill & Rebecca R. Merrill and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey



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