

# Comments on the Vision Statement

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As the Vision Statement takes on a life of its own in congregational usage, I think it's important to document certain aspects of the thinking of the Vision Team in crafting the statement. The statement itself is the official vision, but it may prove useful in future interpretation of the Statement to bear in mind the thinking of the Team. To that end, in this document I have tried to record my thoughts on the thinking of the Vision Team and the underlying philosophy and consensus that we reached. Sometimes it is difficult for me to know where I speak for the Team and where I am simply launching out on my own. I leave that to the discernment of the other team members.

Besides the Vision Frame, the vision team generally operated under the following philosophical notions (not exhaustive). Many of these crystallized along the way, rather than being handed to us as a founding mandate.

- There is a natural analogy between a individual understanding and exercising his/her spiritual gifts and the church doing the same with a Vision Statement.
- We (the church) should DO what we ARE (alluding to the title of the book by Tiegler and Tiegler). As such the Vision Statement is neither a mirror nor an open window but rather a glass in which we can see both our reflection and our way forward.
- The Vision Team believed that identifying our strengths/gifts and also our unique opportunities was key to knowing what God wanted us to.
- The congregation surveys really identified these for us. The Vision Team discerned the major themes from the surveys and did some additional homework to make sure we were being complete. Everything ended up supporting the 3 main thrusts identified in the congregational survey responses.
- The Vision Team acknowledges that there is a tension between being too prescriptive about ministries (and thus limiting what God might want us to do in the present and in the future) and being too vague (and thus providing no real guidance for the church about where to spend its collective resources). We generally opted for vague wording but with the hope of interpretations that are as narrow as possible given the opportunities God lays in front of us.
- There is another tension between the 3 main thrusts and the fact that the church has and will continue to have other ministries that are not identified in the Vision Statement. Just because a particular ministry is not highlighted does not mean that it will not exist. But if it exists, it should align with and support the 3 main thrusts identified in the Vision and not significantly distract resources from them. (For me, the most obvious of these is worship and music, and I have to ponder the implications for music ministry.)

And now to some comments about the thoughts underlying the phrasing of the Vision Statement:

## ***As God's family at Mount Olive Lutheran Church,***

The essence of the vision (as determined by what we intend to DO) really starts in line 2, so this is a preamble. This clause exists in the Statement for essentially 2 reasons:

- It identifies us and references our Lutheran heritage.
- It emphasizes inclusiveness. We are ALL part of the family. No ministry or people group is overlooked or excused just because they may not be specifically mentioned later on.

## ***We***

This word is important because it reminds us that the Vision is for US. The Vision Statement is not a definition of Mt Olive for outsiders to read (though that may happen), but rather an ongoing reminder to US that this is the direction we believe God is calling US to go. This is *Mt Olive's* Vision, given to us by God, and we affirm our need to own it.

## ***are firmly rooted and growing in God's Word,***

This is the first of the 3 main thrusts of the vision: the importance of God's word. It has historically been a mark of Mt Olive. Acknowledging that history, we affirm its continuing importance and the fact that it is never complete, never a "done deal." We recognize its historical influence and also its present and future import.

How this works out in practice is beyond the scope of the Vision Statement, but it is intended that this will go beyond pastoral teaching (e.g., pastor as translator of God's word for the masses) into God's people studying for themselves and being trained directly by the Word, and in a "looping" sense, those people in turn spawning a love for God's word in others.

## ***Raising up the next generation***

This is the second of the three main thrusts. We recognize our current gifting in this area, and we also perceive the need, both as we observe it in our church body and in our community. The main idea here is children and youth and support of families with children, though we had some concern that this might imply that other demographic groups are excluded (e.g., seniors, singles, empty nesters). Choosing the words "Raising up the next generation" implies an important role for everyone in the church, including the older adult or those without children. It also opens up a wider sense of what the next generation might be. Could it include training for the next generation of elders? Of college students into work life? Of "young marrieds" into "old marrieds"? Of working into retired? There is an analogy here to what the business world might call "succession planning." Mt Olive strives to be intentional first about the raising of children in Christian faith and also facilitating generational transitions in other areas.

There is also in this phrase an important sense of "looping" or "circularity." The Vision is successful when the next generation takes it up, implements it, and passes it on.

## ***To know and follow Jesus Christ,***

This is the essence of discipleship.

### ***Joining Him in His compassion and work of Rescuing the lost and healing the broken,***

Regarding "Rescuing the lost and healing the broken":

This is included because it conveys a sense of urgency about our vision. It prompts the question, "What are the consequences of not executing the Vision?" Without this or a similar phrase, the Vision would lack a sense of the desperateness of people's need for Christ.

We toyed with other phrases but found doing so to be a delicate matter. We chose this particular phrasing because these images are biblical and because they also do not carry much "baggage" of connotation. (Just think about "saving the damned" or "converting the heathen" or "persuading the Godless" or similar phrases to realize the difficulty.)

Regarding "Joining Him in his ... work"

Salvation is of God. Christ is the Savior. We do not presume to be saviors, but we affirm that God has called us to be a part of His plan to redeem people.

Regarding "compassion"

Jesus no doubt had many emotions and also many motivations while on earth (e.g., obedience, love, purity, joy, compassion, glorifying the Father, desiring his reunion with the Father and his vindication/glorification...). We choose to focus on compassion. It connects to our Mission Statement, and it resonates with our collective gifts of mercy and sense for what our world needs.

## ***Starting at Mount Olive,***

This begins the third thrust-- outreach. It has 3 components, the first of which recognizes the needs within our church body. We all need to grow in the Word and in discipleship. We have people within our walls who are broken and lost. We have people who are church members but who do not attend and are not connected.

### ***Reaching out to our community,***

This is the second component. "Community" is not defined but is intended to emphasize OUR collective community rather than a collection of individual communities of our members. It conveys a sense of the immediate surroundings of the church property (e.g., within walking distance), and in a wider sense, the City of Anoka and its neighboring cities (roughly a 6-mile

radius where most of our members live). While the word was deliberately left undefined, it was not intended that this be interpreted as "the greater Twin Cities area" or even "the northwest suburbs." There might be an occasional outreach outside of our 6-mile radius, and in future God may lead us to have a larger radius, but this part of the vision statement was intended to emphasize needs that are "close to home."

### ***And extending to where God leads.***

This is the third component-- the global view. By "global" we mean places beyond our community. It definitely includes other countries and continents, but it can also include places in our own country or state. We want to have a global impact, though we recognize that we cannot go everywhere or impact everyone. This will call for wisdom, especially when individual ministries or trips consume large resources of people, time, and money.

We do not presume to name a place in the Vision Statement because this may change over time. Right now it seems to include certain countries in Africa, where we aim to have a sustained impact through repeated ventures, and where we have some evident opportunities and, hopefully, relevant spiritual gifts. In future it may be somewhere else. The choice of exactly which ventures to undertake in future will hopefully be guided and prioritized by the same principles that underlie the Vision in general: the best ventures would be those that emanate from a combination of our gifting and our unique opportunities and that allow us to execute the Vision while away from home (e.g., emphasizing the Word and compassion and rescuing the lost and having a sustained impact consistent with that implied by the phrase "training up the next generation").

But for the Vision Statement, the important emphases are that we choose to be active in global missions and that we want to pay attention to where God is leading so that we can be wise in our resource usage.