

“Renewing Our Vision”

Updated March 2021



International Council of Community Churches

- **Why Plan?**
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“Renewing Our Vision”

A Venture For a Local Congregation

Why Plan?

“If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there”

Lewis Carroll

Do you have a vision for your congregation? As of five, ten or twenty years from now, what should your congregation be doing? What kinds of witness, outreach and service should it empower? Do others in your congregation share your vision? How will you get from where you are to where you believe that, by God's grace, you should be?

Involved in the answer to each of these questions is the need for a plan that captures the imagination and inspires the efforts of your entire congregation.

Does Planning “Work”?

“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood. Make big plans, aim high in hope and work.”

Daniel H. Burnham

Many local congregations engage in periodic planning meetings and planning retreats. Too many such gatherings produce plans that are ambitious in scope, exciting in their possibilities, and that -- after all the time and effort expended in their development -- fail to become reality. Some plans fail because they outreach the congregation's available resources, or depend on talents that the congregation does not possess. Some plans are overtaken by changing circumstances that nobody could have foreseen. But most failures take place because the majority of the congregation have not been engaged in the process, do not understand how the plans were developed, and/or fail to see the connection between the vision and current reality.

The process of developing an effective plan will involve as nearly as possible, your entire congregation. It will be grounded in the life of your congregation, and it will seek to build on the strengths of your congregation. A truly effective plan will have a specific understanding of ministry. Ministry is not the activity of a church's pastoral staff; ministry in its fullness is the life and mission of your congregation.

Planning Your Plan

Bite off more than you can chew, then chew it. Plan more than you can do, then do it.

Anonymous

“Renewing Our Vision” grounds a congregation's planning in its prayer, worship, and shared life. Included in the schedule of events and activities designed to produce a plan are a Bible study, home gatherings, a prayer vigil, and a one-day retreat. This process for developing a congregation's plan requires a ten week investment of time in the life of your church or center.

"Renewing Our Vision" is not the only possible way for a church to develop a vision for ministry, but our prayer is that it may be a useful tool for your congregation. "Renewing Our Vision" is a work in progress. As your congregation engages with this resource, please evaluate the process and its component parts and forward your suggestions to the International Council of Community Churches.

*Our thanks to all the Council clergy and laity
whose ideas and inspirational example
have made this document possible.*

*From First Edition
2012*

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INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY CHURCHES

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KEY ELEMENTS

Logo (Communications team)

Timing: the logo will be prepared for display no later than Week 3 and displayed throughout the remaining weeks of the venture.

The logo should suggest broadening vision, open horizons, and hope. The logo should appear on all printed materials produced in connection with the Venture. The logo should appear on banners, posters, placards videos, etc. in every venue connected with the church during the period of the Venture. Don't forget the church's website and all internet communications including social media. The purpose of the logo and its frequent appearance is to keep the Venture in the consciousness of the congregation.

Bible Study (Bible Study team)

Timing: the five session weekly Bible study will begin on Week 3 and continue through Week 7. Multiple study groups are a possibility, covering the same material but meeting on different days of the week. The materials for the five sessions are rich enough that each topic could be considered for two weeks in a row, resulting in a ten session Bible study. If you choose this possibility, plan to begin the study two weeks before the program's Week 1 so as to conclude the study prior to the week of the retreat.

Each week the study will consider a different cluster of Biblical images of the church. Suggestions for the Bible study appear as an appendix to this work.

Fellowship Gatherings (Fellowship Gatherings team)

Timing: the Fellowship Gatherings will take place during Week 8 (and if necessary, during the early part of Week 9) of the Venture.

Depending on participants' schedules these gatherings could be held at any time of day. (Some seniors will respond well to a breakfast gathering; some young adults may be available only in the late evening.) The gatherings will be held in homes. Hosts will select the names of persons they will invite. Each gathering will consist of not more than 14 persons including host(s).

Following personal introductions, the nature of each gathering will be a directed conversation; attendees will be asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What is your religious background?
2. How did you get involved with this congregation?
3. What are the two greatest strengths of this church?
4. What are two areas where the church needs to find new direction/ try something new/ do something different?
5. What is your one "big idea" for this congregation? (Some answers may be programmatic; others may be more general or conceptual.)

The Fellowship Gatherings will provide an opportunity for attendees to submit prayer request cards for use during the Prayer Vigil.

Prayer Vigil (Prayer Vigil team)

Timing: the Prayer Vigil will take place during Week 9 of the Venture and will be timed to conclude one hour before the beginning of the Retreat.

Every member of the congregation will be invited to submit requests for prayer, printing their requests on printed cards. Cards should be provided on several occasions in several venues. It will be necessary to remind everyone that the requests will be shared with those who take part in the Prayer Vigil, and that requests for prayer may be for personal situations, for the life of the congregation in its specific parts, for the wider church, and for the needs of the society and world in which we live.

Those who wish to participate in the prayer vigil will "sign up" for a specific hour during a designated 24 hour period. During each hour, those who have signed up for the hour will be present in a specified location at the church building.

All the prayer request cards will be placed in one stack on a table in the gathering area. Participants will take one or more cards from the stack, read the requests and make them the subject of prayer, and then return the cards to the table in a second stack, to be re-read and prayed over anew by new participants as the hours pass.

The Prayer Vigil will be (among other things) a reminder that church planning differs from secular planning, and that the life of a church is not primarily to be found in organization but in spirit. The Prayer Vigil is designed to draw the congregation closer together in mutual support, and also to reveal possibilities for congregational ministry that may not already be evident.

Video Production (Video Production team)

Timing: The production will be assembled and readied for viewing during Weeks 3 through 8 of the Venture, and will be debuted at the Retreat at the end of Week 9.

The video production should display the array of ministries, programs, activities and interpersonal links that already exist within the life of the congregation. Typically only the pastor and the core volunteer leadership group are aware of the totality of the church's life. Others may be surprised and certainly will be encouraged to discover the scope of the church's ministries. The video will provide a commonly understood base line from which future planning can be launched.

The final product should be between 10 and 15 minutes in length, recorded onto DVD discs in a format usable by television video players and computer disc players.

The video production team's product will be useful after the Venture is complete. Opportunities for viewing in community outreach events, annual stewardship campaigns, etc. are sure to present themselves. A video production's useful life is estimated to be about two to three years; after that circumstances and church membership will change enough that an updated video will be needed.

A note to church leaders: some of you may wonder how it might be possible to assemble and edit a video without resorting to an expensive outside vendor. The answer is in your children and grandchildren. You may not have the skills, but they do. Ask! And, what better way to involve youth in this venture, than to give them a significant role in the process?

Retreat (Retreat team)

Timing: the Retreat will take place on Saturday of Week 9 of the Venture.

The retreat is the climax and focal center of the process. During the retreat the logo will be on prominent display. The video production will be debuted at the retreat. The thoughts and ideas from the Fellowship Gathering will be posted on placards around the

room in which the retreat participants meet. The stack of prayer vigil cards will be placed where highly visible.

Retreat participants will have all of these resources to assist their thinking as they engage in a planned process of visioning, sorting and making decisions about priorities, directions and strategies for the church for the next half-decade or more.

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY CHURCHES

“Renewing Our Vision” A Venture For a Local Congregation

LEADERSHIP

The following persons will be the Venture Planning Team, responsible for all aspects of the Venture:

Pastor
General Chair
Bible Study Chair
Communications Chair
Fellowship Gatherings Chair
Prayer Vigil Chair
Retreat Chair
Video Production Chair

The Pastor

If the church has multiple pastoral staff, additional staff may be a part of the team and assist lay volunteers in their tasks. However, the presence of the Pastor at every Venture Planning Team meeting is essential.

Prior to Week 1, the Pastor will have done research (or enlisted a researcher) to collect information on:

1. Government census data on the census tract in which the church building is located; school-age population information including attendance projections for future years from the local school department;
2. property valuation data from the local municipal government office; land-use projections from the local planning department or its equivalent office (including recent and/or projected zoning changes within ½ mile of the church building;
3. business data and projections from the local Chamber of Commerce or equivalent organization;
4. and any other demographic or related information or projections that may be available from additional sources.

This data will be shared with the Venture Planning Team and with attendees at the Retreat.

During the ten weeks of the Venture, the sermons during worship should be related to the Venture's process and its outcome. The Pastor should refrain from using these sermons as a means of promoting her/his own program ideas. Instead, the Pastor should seek to broaden and deepen the congregation's understanding of the church's ministry and mission. See Appendix 2 for some conceptual thoughts.

General Chair

The General Chair should be a layperson who is recognized as a leader within the congregation. The General Chair will be proactive and engaged in all parts of the Venture to ensure its success.

Bible Study Chair

The Bible Study Chair should be a layperson who is recognized as a Bible study leader within the congregation, and who is acquainted with others who are currently leading or who could lead a five session Bible study on New Testament images of the church.

Communications Chair

The Communications Chair will need to be creative in leading the Communications team in selecting an appropriate logo; and detail-oriented in ensuring that printed and electronic materials and communications are produced and distributed on time.

Fellowship Gatherings Chair

The Fellowship Gatherings chair will need to enlist a large number of hosts, and will need to be attentive to the invitation lists so that all members of the church family are included in the gatherings.

Retreat Arrangements Chair

The planning process to be followed during the retreat will be overseen by the Pastor and the General Chair. The Retreat Arrangements team will be responsible for everything else including: room set-up; arrangements for the showing of the video; refreshments and meal; and clean-up.

Video Production Chair

The Video Production chair does not necessarily need to have technical skills, but will be responsible for enlisting those who have such skills. The chair will need to help the production portray the life of the church in a comprehensive and sympathetic way. In this, the "voice over" description of activities, programs and events will be crucial.

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SCHEDULE

Week “Zero”

Week Zero may be as short as a week or as long as several months. During this time you will want to introduce this venture to your church Council or equivalent group that represents the congregation. You will want to discuss the venture with key leaders, identifying those you will want to enlist to key positions. And you will want the congregation's leadership and staff (including such individuals as the church secretary and building custodian) to become accustomed to the idea of a program that will be a major disruption of their routine.

The schedule for recruitment of personnel during Week 1 is crowded. Some churches simply cannot or will not adhere to such a tight schedule. If this is your local situation, begin personnel recruitment earlier. If need be, make your “Week Zero” a month long event. Your objective is to assemble the best Venture Planning Team possible, and to have the team functioning by Week 2.

Week 1

The Venture is introduced from the pulpit at Sunday worship. (Pastor)

Pastor enlists the General Chairperson for the Adventure; together they enlist the remaining members of the Venture Planning Team:

- Bible Study Chair
- Communications Chair
- Fellowship Gatherings Chair
- Prayer Vigil Chair
- Retreat Arrangements Chair
- Video Production Chair

Bible Study Chair enlists others to lead the five session Bible studies (see Appendix 1), and submits a schedule of all study group sessions to the church office for inclusion in worship bulletins, newsletters, church website and the like. (Bible Study Chair)

Week 2

The Venture Planning Team is introduced from the pulpit at Sunday Worship (General Chair)

The schedule for Bible studies is announced at Sunday worship; attendees have the opportunity to sign up to attend one of the study groups. (Bible Study Chair)

Venture Planning Team holds its first meeting to review the overall design of the Venture, and to determine their (and their teams') assigned tasks. Team chairs share their ideas about possible team members and negotiate duplications of names. No person

should be on more than one team. The Pastor shares demographic and related research data with the team. (Pastor and General Chair)

Venture Planning Team members enlist their task teams. (All chairs)

Beginning this week: the Pastor and General Chair share plans for the Venture with each board, committee and auxiliary group of the church. Each group will be informed that the process and the culminating retreat will establish the priorities of the church for the next half-decade or more. Any church member who has a personal attachment to any prominent aspect of the church's life and ministries will need to be involved, lest that aspect be ignored or downplayed in the process. (Pastor and General Chair)

Week 3

Venture Planning Team members complete their team enlistments. (All chairs)

Task teams meet to review their responsibilities and to make individual assignments of duties. (All teams)

Bible studies on "Images of the Church" begin meeting.

Communications team finalizes Venture logo and assigns responsibilities for arranging the printing of all necessary materials. (Communications chair)

Fellowship Gathering team enlists hosts for Fellowship Gatherings, 10-14 persons per gathering depending on location. (Fellowship Gatherings chair)

Prayer Vigil team arranges location, sign-up placard for posting in the church, and other needed items for the prayer vigil. (Prayer Vigil chair)

Retreat Arrangements team makes decisions regarding the menus for refreshments and meal during the retreat, and makes assignments related to caterer contacts. (Retreat chair)

Video Production team gathers still photos and begins the process of making and editing a video that features and interprets current ministries, programs and identity-related affiliations and activities of the church. (Video Production chair)

Week 4

Venture Planning Team members follow up with their teams to determine progress. (All chairs)

Communications team should have decided on logo and placed appropriate printing orders for all materials. Team makes assignments regarding the all-church mailing—both electronic and postal—for week 5. (Communications chair)

Fellowship Gatherings team should have completed enlistment of hosts. Fellowship Gatherings team will announce a meeting during Week 5 for hosts. At that meeting, hosts will select names to invite to their homes for the gatherings. (Fellowship Gatherings chair)

Prayer Vigil team should have completed all physical arrangements related to the vigil, including the “sign up” placard. (Prayer Vigil chair)

Retreat Arrangements team confirms caterer arrangements and makes assignments related to purchase of any needed items. (Retreat chair)

Video Production team should have assembled all needed still photos and be in the process of capturing all needed videos. (Video Production chair)

Venture Planning Team holds its second meeting to review progress. (Pastor and General Chair; all chairs)

Church office begins to produce for the Fellowship Gatherings team a list of church members/friends on 3 by 5 cards—one name or couple per card—for the Fellowship Gatherings host meeting in Week 5. Each card will contain name(s), contact information, name of spouse or “significant other,” and any relevant information that relates to the gathering. Example: if an individual works at night, is unable to climb stairs, etc. such facts should be noted on the card. Older teens’ names should appear on separate cards rather than with their parents. (Pastor)

Introduction of the Venture is sent by electronic and postal mail to the entire congregation. See the sample letter in the Sample Materials section of this manual. (Communications team.)

Week 5

The goals for the Fellowship Gatherings are interpreted from the pulpit (Fellowship Gatherings Chair)

All teams meet to review progress. All teams should have needed tasks completed, with the exception of the Video Production team, which will complete its video capture this week. (All chairs)

Prior to the Fellowship Gatherings meeting, the team chair picks up from the church office the 3 by 5 cards listing church member/friends names. (Fellowship Gatherings chair)

Fellowship Gatherings team and hosts gather; hosts select names of persons they will invite to their homes during Week 8. Hosts begin to invite their selected guests. (Fellowship Gatherings chair)

Video Production team continues to collect video. By now the outline of the video is emerging; the team begins to develop “voice over” and other audio that explains and interprets various aspects of the church’s ministries. (Video Production chair)

Week 6

The Fellowship Gatherings are interpreted again from the pulpit at Sunday worship (General Chair)

Communications team makes assignments regarding the all-church email of prayer request cards for Week 7. (Communications chair)

Fellowship Gatherings hosts complete inviting their selected guests, and report to the chair the names of any whose schedules demand a different date/venue. (Fellowship Gatherings chair)

Fellowship Gatherings team chair and General Chair cooperate in re-assigning host/guest names as needed so that all who wish to attend the Fellowship Gatherings may do so, and communicate with hosts and guests to be sure that all have received invitations. (Fellowship Gatherings chair; General chair; Pastor)

Video Production team continues to collect video and to develop the audio portion of the production. (Video Production chair)

Week 7

The Prayer Vigil and the prayer request cards are introduced from the pulpit at Sunday worship. Worship attendees have the opportunity to complete and submit prayer request cards. (Prayer Vigil Chair).

An email to all who have email addresses introduces the prayer request cards; the prayer request card is attached to the email as a .pdf file. (Communications chair)

Video Production team continues to collect video and to develop the audio portion of the production. Editing and assembly of the final product begins. (Video Production Chair)

Week 8

The final Bible study sessions should be meeting this week. (Bible Study chair)

The Fellowship Gatherings and Prayer Vigil are interpreted again from the pulpit at Sunday worship. Worship attendees have the opportunity to complete and submit prayer request cards. (Retreat Arrangements Chair)

Fellowship Gatherings are held in homes. Each host enlists a recorder to take notes on the conversation and ideas suggested there. Prayer request cards are distributed and collected there. Prayer request cards are due at the church office by Sunday of Week 9. Hosts submit recorders' transcriptions of attendees' responses regarding strengths, new directions and "big ideas" to the Communications team through the church office. (Fellowship Gatherings Chair)

Communications team collects Fellowship Gatherings recorders' notes and creates placards summarizing strengths, new directions, "big ideas" for posting at the retreat. (Communications Chair)

Video Production team completes the editing and assembly of its final product. The Venture Planning Team previews a "first draft" of the video product and makes any needed suggestions. Following the preview the final version of the product is completed. (Video Production Chair)

Week 9

Sunday

The Prayer Vigil and Retreat are interpreted again from the pulpit at Sunday worship. Worship attendees have the opportunity to complete and submit prayer request cards. (Pastor)

Any remaining prayer request cards are collected after Sunday worship and delivered to the church office. (Prayer Vigil Chair.)

Sunday through Wednesday

Any remaining Fellowship Gatherings that could not be scheduled for Week 8 should be concluded not later than Tuesday of Week 9. Prayer request cards returned during these Fellowship Gatherings are due at the church office not later than Thursday morning, to be delivered by Fellowship Gatherings hosts. Recorders at the final Fellowship Gatherings submit their transcriptions of attendees' responses regarding strengths, new directions and "big ideas" to the Communications team. (Fellowship Gatherings chair)

Communications team finishes its task of creating placards summarizing strengths, new directions, "big ideas" suggested within the Fellowship Gatherings, for posting at the retreat. Placards are delivered to the church office for posting by the Retreat Arrangements team. (Communications chair)

Thursday

The Prayer Vigil site is prepared. If a room not customarily used for worship is chosen for the site of the Prayer Vigil, all extraneous and distracting items are removed from the room. A small table is placed at the front of the site. Prayer request cards are brought from the church office to the vigil site, and the site is made ready in every way. (Prayer Vigil chair)

Friday to Saturday

24 hour Prayer Vigil takes place, with the last hour of the vigil concluding one hour prior to the beginning of the Retreat. Members of the Prayer Vigil team look in on the vigil periodically, re-arrange the stacks of prayer request cards if needed, remove any clutter left behind by vigil participants, and ensure that the vigil site is comfortable throughout the 24 hour period. (Prayer Vigil chair)

Saturday (See the manual section entitled "Retreat" for a full schedule and description)

The retreat begins with a showing of the Video Production team's video on the current life and work of the church. The Pastor and/or appointed researcher shares information about demographics and community trends. The retreat continues with a sharing of the congregation's ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of the church as submitted during the Fellowship Gatherings. The retreat continues further with a sharing of "Big Ideas" as submitted during the Fellowship Gatherings. The retreat proceeds with a planned exercise in envisioning, selecting and assigning. At an appropriate time during the process, a luncheon is served. The retreat concludes with a brief time of worship. If the retreat is held at the church building, the preferred location for the concluding worship experience is the main worship area of the church building. (Video Production chair; Retreat Arrangements chair; Pastor)

ALL members of the Venture Planning Team, and ALL members of their respective task teams are expected to be present for the entire Retreat!

Week 10

Sunday

Sunday Worship reflects upon and celebrates the work done in envisioning. (Pastor)

If feasible, the video production is viewed during Sunday worship. If this cannot be arranged, the a viewing of the video is scheduled for before and/or after worship in an easily accessible room. (Video Production chair.)

Monday to Friday

The church office prints and addresses thank you notes to all members of all teams, to be signed by the various team chairs on Saturday. (Pastor)

All Week

Beginning this week, each board, committee and auxiliary group receives a report on the retreat with specific decisions relating to the board, committee or group emphasized, and begins planning that will turn vision into reality. (Pastor and General Chair.)

Wednesday

A report on the entire Venture is sent to the congregation by email and postal mail. (Communications chair)

Saturday

The Venture Planning Team holds its final meeting. Prepared thank you notes to team members are signed by the chairpersons and delivered to the church office for mailing the following Monday. (All chairs)

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RETREAT

Please edit the following sample agenda to fit your situation. The title in parentheses following the activity indicates who is responsible. “Responsible” does **not** mean that the indicated individual does all the work. In each case the responsible individual should have enlisted others to take leadership roles and/or assist.

It is entirely possible to conduct the retreat using the resources of the congregation without outside assistance. However, the presence of an outside “consultant” may be useful for these reasons:

1. An outside consultant has no history with the church. Results of the retreat are less likely to be seen as the imposition of individual or small-group preferences on the entire congregation.
2. An outside consultant can ask questions about long-standing church traditions or habits that may need to be altered if a new vision for the church’s life is to find life.
3. Not every innovation that every retreat envisions will be successful. But every church has at least one or two members who want to assign blame for failures. Obviously the outside consultant is the one who is at fault for every lack of success!

In the sample agenda some activities are assigned to “Consultant.” If the Venture Planning Team wishes to engage only in-house personnel for retreat leadership roles, a member who has experience in small-group process and who is widely respected within the congregation is the best choice to lead these activities.

8:00 a.m. Post-Prayer Vigil Preparation (entire Venture Planning Team) 30 minutes

The entire Venture Planning Team should be on hand to ensure that everything is set up and ready for the retreat. Check the video player/projector; be sure the prayer request cards are moved to the retreat area; make sure the coffee is brewing. All these details should be attended to before the announced time for assembling so that Team members may greet other retreat participants as they arrive.

8:30 a.m. Assembling and Informal Fellowship (Retreat Arrangements chair) 30 minutes

Breakfast beverages and light food offerings should be available. If you offer doughnuts, be sure to have fruit available too for those who cannot/should not eat the sugary treats.

9:00 a.m. Opening Prayer/Worship (Pastor) 10 minutes

It’s still early in the morning. Many groups should not attempt songs unless strong voices and/or a player of a musical instrument are present to lead the group’s singing.

9:10 a.m. Welcome and Announcements (General Chair) 5 minutes

The time limits and parameters of what needs to be accomplished today should be outlined. This is also a good time to introduce and honor the rest of the Venture Planning

Team and task teams. If youth have participated in any way in the video production, be sure to introduce and honor them.

9:15 a.m. Video Production Debut (Video Production chair) 15 minutes
Adjust the schedule according to the length of the video.

9:30 a.m. Demographics (Pastor or appointed researcher) 5 minutes
This portion of the retreat should not be a dry recital of statistics. The figures may be less important than the trends. Use a projector or a large flip-chart. If you wish to summarize the research results in a hand-out, distribute the hand-out at the end of the presentation so that participants aren't looking at the hand-out during this time.

9:35 a.m. Sorting (Consultant) 45 minutes
Placards listing the church's strengths and areas for growth, as well as "big ideas" are posted around the room. Some of the items are values; others are (measurable) goals; others are specific programmatic suggestions in service of values and goals. The Consultant will have received all this material in advance, and will lead the group by defining terms and sorting the items listed on the placards.

The placard listings of values, goals and programmatic suggestions beg for additional suggestions from retreat participants. This is the time for the additional suggestions to be received and added to the three lists.

10:20 a.m. Break (Retreat Arrangements chair) 15 minutes
The break will be announced for ten minutes, but we all know it takes another five minutes to get everybody back in their seats and settled. Breakfast beverages, etc. will be available.

10:35 a.m. Prioritizing Part One (Consultant) 45 minutes
The participants are divided into discussion groups of six persons each. Each group reviews the values statements only, and places them in order of priority, noting the reasons why. Each group appoints a reporter.
Back in plenary session, each group reports. The consultant "keeps score", assigning points to the top three or five values (depending on number of values statements considered) according to the reports.

At the end of the process, points are totaled and a hierarchy of values is established.

Large newsprint pads may be used to record all of the above. The Consultant may enlist a recorder for this purpose. Dark color crayon is as visible on newsprint as liquid marker, without the potential mess.

11:25 a.m. Envisioning Part One (Consultant) 35 minutes
The consultant asks participants to reflect on their decisions about values, and the demographic trend information presented today, and asks the following questions:

1. What would this community look like if the values we've identified and the demographic trends we've seen were to come together in a good way?
2. What difference would all of this make to this church? How would the church be different/the same?
3. What difference would all of this make to the wider mission giving and involvement of this church (beyond the local community)? Would any causes be added/subtracted from the list of those the church supports?

Large newsprint pads may be used to record all of the above. The Consultant may enlist a recorder for this purpose. Dark color crayon is as visible on newsprint as ink marker, without the potential mess.

12:00 noon Lunch (Retreat Arrangements team) 60 minutes

Each place setting includes a blank paper placemat (8 ½ by 14 inch copy paper is inexpensive) and a crayon. If any artwork that results is relevant to the retreat, the artist can be asked to interpret her/his work at the beginning of the afternoon session.

1:00 p.m. Prioritizing/Envisioning Part Two (Consultant) 60 minutes

With the morning discussion as background, the Consultant invites participants to:

1. Link suggested goals to the hierarchy of values.
2. Link suggested programmatic suggestions to goals.
3. Add additional ideas for goals and programs.
4. Assign programmatic ideas to specific boards, committees and groups within the church.

Large newsprint pads may be used to record all of the above. The Consultant may enlist a recorder for this purpose. Dark color crayon is as visible on newsprint as liquid marker, without the potential mess.

2:00 p.m. Closing Worship (Pastor and General Chair) 15 minutes

The closing worship event should, if possible, be held in the main worship space within the church building.

The newsprint sheets from the last hour of the retreat should be brought to the main worship space and placed on the communion table or altar during this time of worship.

The worship experience should include a prayer offered by the Pastor, committing the work of the day and its results to God, and asking God's blessing on the church and its future ministries.

2:15 Benediction, Clean-up and Follow-up (Entire Venture Planning Team)

60 minutes

Most retreat participants will depart at this point. Some will remain for follow-up and clean-up duties.

1. The Communications chair and team members enlisted for the purpose will transcribe the content of all the day's newsprint sheets into a word processing document, and transmit the document via email to the entire Venture Planning Team.
2. The Retreat Arrangements team and others enlisted for the purpose will perform general clean-up duties, readying the retreat meeting space for its next use.
3. The Video Production team will move equipment as needed for the Sunday morning showing of the video.
4. The Pastor and General Chair will debrief with the Consultant, who may have suggestions regarding retreat follow-up activities including interpretation of the retreat at Sunday worship.

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SAMPLE MATERIALS

ALL-CHURCH LETTER FOR WEEK 5

The postal letter should be printed on letterhead that features the Venture logo, and enclosed in an envelope that features the Venture logo. A "mail merge" computer program can produce letters personalized with recipient's name, inside address and salutation. The letter will be more effective if signed personally by the Pastor and the General Chair.

Your first postal mail challenge is to ensure that the recipient opens the envelope. If possible, print addresses directly on the outside envelope; labels indicate "junk mail." If you must use mailing labels, use transparent labels available from any office supply store. A first class stamp on the envelope is preferable. If you must use the church's non-profit franking, buy non-profit standard-rate stamps for the purpose rather than using the church's non-profit imprint.

The email letter should, if possible, feature the Venture logo and contain facsimile signatures. The subject line should read "[Name of church] News; Big Change!

Please edit the text below to fit your own situation.

Dear [Salutation from mail-merge]; **or** Grace and peace to you:

Your Community Church is embarking on a new venture, "Renewing Our Vision." In the next few weeks, your church will set goals and establish priorities for our ministries together.

You are at the center of this venture. You will have the opportunity to share ideas, pray for and with your church family, and take part in a planning process that is open to everybody's ideas and inspiration. Through it all, you'll be setting the direction for your church for the next half-decade and more.

The process of sharing and discerning will include:

Fellowship gatherings. [Insert dates.] You will receive an invitation to a gathering at which you'll be able to renew friendships and share thoughts about ideas about your church's life, witness and service.

A Prayer Vigil. [Insert date.] You will have the opportunity to request your church's prayers for personal, church, community and world concerns important to you. Then, you'll have the opportunity to spend an hour in prayer during a 24-hour prayer vigil at the church.

Retreat. [Insert date.] You are invited to a day-long retreat for sharing, planning and goal-setting. You will help set priorities for your church for the next half-decade and more.

"Renewing Our Vision" is more than a label or a slogan. Our joint venture during the next few weeks will seek God's presence and power as we look toward the future with hope and energy. Please pray that God will grant us all new wisdom and insight – together.

Yours in service,

[Signature here]

General Chair,
"Renewing Our Vision"

[Signature here]

Pastor

ALL-CHURCH EMAIL FOR WEEK 7

The email should, if possible, feature the Venture logo and contain facsimile signatures. The subject line should read “[Name of Church]: Your Prayer Requests. The Prayer Request card should appear both in the body of the email and as a .pdf format attachment. Hint: send a sample email to yourself first and if needed, reformat the version of the prayer request card that appears in the body of your text. Be sure to monitor the email address from which this note is sent; you are sure to receive some prayer requests via email.

Please edit the text below to fit your own situation.

“Renewing Our Vision” begins with prayer. You are invited to share requests for prayer. Members and friends of First Community Church of Anywhere will pray for you and with you during the upcoming Prayer Vigil [Insert dates.] Please return your prayer requests by email or in hard copy before [insert starting date of the vigil.]

You are invited to take part in the Prayer Vigil. Sign up to pray at the church [specify room] for one hour during the 24-hour vigil. The vigil starts [date and time—specify a.m. or p.m.] and concludes one hour before the all-church planning retreat [date and time—specify a.m. or p.m.]

The retreat begins [date and time]. Please put both dates – Vigil and Retreat – on your calendar and plan to attend. You’ll be glad you did.

[Facsimile signature]

Prayer Vigil Chair, “Renewing Our Vision”

[Facsimile signature]

General Chair, “Renewing Our Vision”

First Community Church of Anywhere
123 Main Street, Anywhere, State, Zip
Phone 123-456-7890
Fax 123-654-0987
Website www.FirstChurchAnywhere.org

PRAYER VIGIL SIGN-UP PLACARD

The placard should be large and have a rigid backing (no floppy tag-board posters, please!) Foam board 30 by 40 inches works well for this purpose. If mounted on a floor-stand tripod, the placard should be affixed to the tripod so that it cannot "flop" forward as would-be participants are entering their names. Use package-sealing or duct tape to affix the back of the placard to the tripod.

One or more writing instruments will need to be available at the placard. A pen attached to a long string mounted on the board, or a nearby tray of pens should be provided. If you use a tray, stock it with several pens and expect to re-stock it from time to time. Some people are sure to absent-mindedly walk off with the pens they have been using.

The space assigned for each hour of the Prayer Vigil should be large enough to accommodate several names. Twenty-three one-hour periods should be available for Vigil participation. The hour immediately preceding the Retreat should not be utilized, so that nobody is rushing from the Vigil to the Retreat. A sample format for the placard (greatly reduced in size) is shown below. Feel free to create your own design for your Prayer Vigil sign-up placard!

Renewing Our Vision

TWENTY-FOUR HOUR PRAYER VIGIL THURSDAY – FRIDAY, APRIL 30 – 31

PLEASE PRINT YOUR NAME IN THE SECTION FOR YOUR SELECTED HOUR.
BE SURE TO LEAVE SPACE FOR OTHERS' NAMES TOO. MORE THAN ONE PERSON MAY SIGN UP FOR ANY HOUR!

THURSDAY, 9-10 AM	THURSDAY, 5-6 PM	FRIDAY, 1-2 AM
THURSDAY, 10-11 AM	THURSDAY, 6-7 PM	FRIDAY, 2-3 AM
THURSDAY, 11 AM-NOON	THURSDAY, 7-8 PM	FRIDAY, 3-4 AM
THURSDAY, NOON-1 PM	THURSDAY, 8-9 PM	FRIDAY, 4-5 AM
THURSDAY, 1-2 PM	THURSDAY, 9-10 PM	FRIDAY, 5-6 AM
THURSDAY, 2-3 PM	THURSDAY, 10-11 PM	FRIDAY, 6-7 AM
THURSDAY, 3-4 PM	THURSDAY, 11-MIDNIGHT	FRIDAY, 7-8 AM
THURSDAY, 4-5 PM	FRIDAY, MIDNIGHT-1 AM	GOD BLESS YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERS! RETREAT BEGINS 9 AM.

PRAYER REQUEST CARD

To ensure maximum return of Prayer Request cards, be sure that the printed card will fit in a standard #10 mailing envelope. One format that fits this requirement is a card printed "3-up" on 8 ½ by 11 inch lightweight card stock. If you do not want to use white stock, select a pale color for maximum readability. Use card stock rather than 20 or 24 lb. copy paper for Prayer Request cards.

FIRST COMMUNITY CHURCH OF ANYWHERE
Renewing Our Vision 24 Hour Prayer Vigil

PRAYER REQUESTS

Your requests will be the subject of prayer during our church's Prayer Vigil on Friday, April 31. If you are not able to attend the Vigil, you are invited to devote an hour or a part of an hour that day to pray for and with your church. Please print your requests below:

Your name is optional: _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS CARD TO THE CHURCH OFFICE BEFORE FRIDAY, APRIL 31.

NOTES

Every member of the Venture Planning Team should have a copy of this manual in hard-copy or electronic form. Each member of the Team should highlight every item for which her/his team (or self) is responsible. (See particularly the manual section marked "Schedule".) Each team member must be proactive. In practice this means that each Team member should pay attention not only to "this week's" entries, but also to entries for upcoming weeks. Think and plan ahead!

Regarding process directions for the retreat: organizational purists may object to the division of ideas into values, goals and programmatic suggestions. It is true that these divisions do not correspond to those of goals and objectives, strategies and tactics. The fact is that many if not most church leaders have not been schooled to differentiate between goals and objectives, and there is little to be gained in spending a portion of the limited time of a retreat trying to educate participants in the details of definitions. If your retreat participants have backgrounds in managerial education and want to use more sophisticated definitions and models, go for it!

The sample schedule calls for a limited number of Venture Planning Team and task team meetings. You may decide that a schedule of weekly meetings will better serve you. Feel free to change the schedule of meetings as well as other details in this outline for your church's venture in planning.

Particularly as you plan your retreat, you may discover that you need more audiovisual equipment than your church currently owns. While your continuing ecumenical and interfaith contacts should mean more to you than a source for borrowing, you may want to call on those contacts to lend you what you'll need. Be sure to return all borrowed equipment as soon as possible, preferably within an hour or two after you're finished using it. Don't forget the "thank you" note!

If you cannot or will not have the retreat luncheon catered and you simply must call on meal-preparation volunteers from within the church, consider the use of "Crock Pot™" style slow cookers so that food preparation is not calling participants away from the retreat. Chili, beef stew or similar menu items are nourishing and can be left to cook "by themselves" during the morning hours of the retreat. Hint: most church kitchens can't handle more than two or three slow cookers without tripping circuit breakers. You may need to spread your slow cookers throughout the church building.

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY CHURCHES

“Renewing Our Vision”

A Venture For a Local Congregation

APPENDIX 1 - BIBLE STUDY SUGGESTIONS

Paul Minear's Images of the Church In the New Testament was first published in 1960; reprints are still widely available. In this groundbreaking work, Minear identified 96 images/metaphors for the church in the New Testament. A Bible study that explores New Testament images of the church may be appropriate as background for your church's planning for the following reasons:

1. Individuals communicate and learn in different ways. Most Bible studies are highly verbal and conceptual. A study that refers to visual imagery can include more people whose style of learning resonates with what is seen rather than what is heard.
2. Many Bible studies are highly didactic, and communicate the impression that a single interpretation of the material is preferred. By their nature, images are less specific and more open to varying interpretations – which can lead to greater creativity in applying the lessons and insights of scripture to the challenges faced by your church.
3. Some Biblical passages that deal with the church are highly specific in relating to particular situations within a particular culture. Images have the capacity to reveal more universal truths.

This document will not provide you with step-by-step directions on how to conduct a Bible study. Your experience in conducting Bible studies with members of your church gives you greater insight into techniques than any printed matter could hope to provide. Do begin each session of your Bible study with prayer, asking God for insight, imagination and enthusiasm.

Recurring questions that may be asked about each of the images of the church include:

1. What kind of existing situation(s) or challenges may have been addressed by the Biblical writer by using this particular image?
2. What does this image convey to you about the church in all times and places?
3. What implications does this image of the church have for our church today and in the future?

Session One: Agricultural Images of the Church – God's Planting and Harvest

A creative activity for the group: supply small growing cups, seed starting medium and seeds for one or more fast-growing herbs. Basil, mustard, mint and thyme are appropriate for this activity. Ask each attendee to prepare one or more growing cups and to plant seeds. Each attendee should take home his/her planted seeds for tending. Can the resultant “crop” can be used to season a shared dish at a future church event?

Agricultural images of the church include: branches of the vine (John 15); vineyard (Matt 21:28-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16); the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14; Luke 13:6-9; John 1:47); the olive tree (Rom 11:13-23); God's planting (1 Cor 3:9). Ask the group to read some of these passages and to consider for each the recurring questions that appear above.

Session Two: Communal Images of the Church – God's People

A creative activity for the group: in preparation for this session, ask each attendee to bring to the session two group photographs from magazines or other publication. Post two or three photos at the top of one large sheet of newsprint, using as many newsprint sheets as needed to accommodate all the photos. Based only on the visual appearance of each photo, ask each attendee to print on the newsprint below the photo, a "gift" or "blessing" the depicted group can offer to the world.

Communal images of the church include: the people of God (Rom 9:25-26; 1 Pet 2:9-10); Israel (Gal 6:16; Eph 2:10; Heb 8:8-10; 11:25; Rev 2:14); a chosen race (1 Pet 2:9); a holy nation (1 Pet 2:9); twelve tribes (Matt 19:28; Jas 1:1; Rev 7:4); the patriarchs (Rom 15:8-10; 1 Cor 10:1-10); Abraham's sons (Rom 4:16; Gal 3:29). Ask the group to read some of these passages and to consider for each the recurring questions that appear above.

Session Three: Transformational Images of the Church – The New Creation

A creative activity for the group: in preparation for this session, ask an artistic person from the group to reproduce the "labyrinth" pattern on the floor of your meeting place. (You may need to hold this part of your meeting in your church's Fellowship Hall or other large room.) Each part of the path (white portion) should be at least 18 inches wide. The pattern is reproduced from the floor of the cathedral church in Chartres, France. The labyrinth is entered from the lower center of the pattern as it appears in this document. At every turning, stop and read one of the beatitudes from Matthew; and upon the completion of this passage one of the verses from I Corinthians 13, and after the completion of this passage one of the phrases of the Lord's prayer. As you read each passage, consider its application to your own life and the life of your church. Consider how during all the turnings of our lives, God works within us to make each of us a new creation. If possible, leave the labyrinth pattern in place for a week or two so that others may experience it. (Simpler and smaller labyrinth patterns are available on-line.)

The Labyrinth



Transformational images of the church include: the new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15-16; Jas 1:18); first fruits (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15; Jas 1 : 18; cf. Rom 8:23; 1 : 16; 1 Cor 15:20-23); the new humanity (Col 3:10; Eph 4:22, 24); the last Adam (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21-22; Eph 2:14-15); God's glory (1 Thess 2:12; 2 Cor 3:7-18); light (Matt 5:14; Luke 16:8; John 8:12; Acts 13:47; Eph 5:8; Rev 1 :20; 2: 1,5). Ask the group to read some of these passages and to consider for each the recurring questions that appear above.

Session Four: Transmissional Images of the Church – The Fellowship In Faith

A creative activity for the group: prior to the session, prepare enough strips of cloth to serve as blindfolds for half the group. Ask the group to pair off. Each pair will receive one blindfold. One of the pair will lead the other (who will be blindfolded) around the meeting room, or if weather permits outdoors, describing not only any obstacles that might cause the blindfolded partner to stumble, but also whatever visual features the surrounding area affords. Halfway through the time allotted for this, the partners will switch roles. Allow some time at the end of the exercise for partners to reflect on and discuss "walking by faith and not by sight."

Transmissional images of the church include: the sanctified (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2); the faithful (e.g., Col 1:2); the justified (e.g., Rom 3:26); followers/disciples (see the call narratives in the Gospels); road (Matt 7:13-14; Luke 13:23-24; John 14:6; Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24: 14,22); witnessing community (John 15:26-27; 1 John 1: 1-4; 4:11-18; 5:19; Rev 6: 7)-11; 12:11, 17; 19:10); slaves (1 Cor 9:19; 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 1:10; 5:13; Eph 6:6); friends (Luke 12:4; John 11:11; 15:15-20; 20:2; 21:16; 3 John 15). Ask the group to read

some of these passages and to consider for each the recurring questions that appear above.

Session Five: Corporeal Images of the Church – The Body of Christ

A creative activity for the group: in preparation for this session, enlist your friends who have young children or grandchildren to borrow one or more games of “Operation.” The game requires batteries; be sure that the game set is in working order. A feature of the game as you will play it: players must announce which, board, choir, fellowship organization or other church group they will “operate on”, and how it is like the piece of the game set they are manipulating.

Corporeal images of the church include: the body of life (Rom 5:8); members of Christ (1 Cor 6:12-20); the body and the blood (1 Cor 10:16-17; 11:23-26); the body (Col2: 1 1, 18,23); the unity of Jews and Gentiles (Colossians); the growth of the body (Col2:19); the fullness of God (Ephesians). Ask the group to read some of these passages and to consider for each the recurring questions that appear above.

For All Sessions: Process

A Bible study that relates to your church's planning process may draw attendees to whom the entire idea of relating Biblical content to contemporary issues is novel. Some of these attendees may have little or no knowledge of the Bible or of doctrine. Their approach to the material may be naïve or heterodox. Bible study leaders will do well to allow the introduction of ideas that are “different” or idiosyncratic in this study. While individuals' interpretations of the material may be novel or even doctrinally incorrect, the practical ideas for your church's life that result may still be useful and productive.

To encourage the imagination and creativity of your Bible study group, consider imposing the two “Iron Rules” of effective communication during your session. These are:

1. Understanding. Before I can make any comment of my own I must repeat back what the previous speaker has said, in my own words. If my words do not communicate complete understanding of what the previous speaker has said, she/he must rephrase his/her statement, and then I must repeat it again in my own words, until it is clear to both the previous speaker and myself that I have a good understanding of the previous speaker's intent.
2. Affirmation. After it is clear that I understand what the previous speaker has said, I must tell the group two benefits/virtues/“good things about” the statement of the previous speaker before I can offer any criticism of the statement.

Particularly if an attendee has said something that seems off-subject or even heretical, it will be difficult for the leader as well as some other group members to restrain the natural urge to correct the statement. These occasions in particular call for adherence to the “Iron Rules.” Failure to follow the rules will stifle discussion and act as a barrier to creative and innovative thoughts about your church's future. Success in following these rules will encourage a wide-ranging exchange of ideas that will serve your church well.

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APPENDIX 2 - SERMON SERIES CONCEPTS

As your church's Pastor you know what sermon styles will best communicate a message to your congregation. As your church's Pastor you do not need advice regarding what Biblical texts are appropriate to your situation. And you certainly do not need any general advice on public speaking. What every Pastor constantly seeks for her/his sermons, is a compelling way to communicate eternal truths. With that in mind here are a few concepts that may appeal to you.

The Three-Dimensional Cross¹



A cross has four arms. A three-dimensional cross also has depth. A cross reaches in every direction, and so should the ministry of a church. In the illustration above, the part of the cross that reaches toward the heavens could be labeled “ideational,” and the part of the cross that reaches toward the earth “natural.” Most of us would agree that Christians should deal with the realm of ideas, ideals and the spirit. But how? What specifically should a church say, think and do in that realm? Though we may speak about financial stewardship, are we not also called to be responsible for all of the natural gifts that God gives us? What specifically should a church say, think and do with respect to the realm of the natural?

A cross's horizontal beams reach out. It could be said that in one direction the cross reaches into the realm of the individual. We are called to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. Specifically, what should a church say, think and do in the realm of the individual? The cross also reaches out to the realm of the corporate, the group, the community. Surely we do not dwell in isolation, and the very “group” nature of the church testifies to that fact. What specifically should a church say, think and do in the realm of the corporate/the community?

The cross has a depth dimension – the dimension of time. We dwell in the present, but we bring our past (memory) with us. We look to the future with hope. Perhaps both the past and the future (memory and hope) are, in the grace of God, meant to minister to us as we minister in the present.

All the dimensions of the cross -- vertical, horizontal and depth -- meet and intersect at a central point. That point is Christ's church. The cross is for the entire church. The shape of the three-dimensional cross suggests that ministry is the job/mission/calling of the entire church.

Can you find ten sermons in the shape of a three-dimensional cross?

Ministry of the Laity



Is “ministry” confined to church-related activities? If every Christian is called to discipleship and ministry, should that discipleship and ministry not extend to all seven days of the week? Can we see the work of laity within secular vocations as ministry? What would it mean if each church member saw his/her career as a calling – a locus for ministries of compassion and sharing? What changes would take place in workplaces if Christians sought to transform those workplaces into something that more closely resembles a vision of the Kingdom of God? What impact would that have on secular corporations? What would it mean for the families of those whose vocation it is to be homemakers? If Christians saw themselves as ministers within their workplaces, what impact would that have on definitions of “success” for themselves and for the organizations or institutions for and with whom they labor?

Can you find ten sermons in the concept of ministry of the laity in the secular world?

Lines and Shapes



Since different people learn and think in different ways a sermon series based on lines and shapes could speak to those who think “visually”.

History may be thought of as either a circle (endless repetition of cycles) or as a straight line (“going somewhere” toward a goal). But circles can also symbolize wholeness and inclusion, while a medical “flat line” signifies the end of life. A triangle could stand for the Trinity, or it could mean “thesis-antithesis-synthesis.” A mobius strip can signify eternity, or trickery. A “plus sign” could stand for addition, or the cross. A “minus sign” could indicate subtraction, or a simple dashed line between two complementary thoughts. At various times, square has been a synonym for “honest” while at other times it has meant “out of touch with style.” A star could signify the birth of Jesus, or it could be seen as a Wiccan pentagram, or as a type of asterisk to highlight a thought.

Could a consideration of lines and shapes in relationship to the mission and ministry of the church find its way into ten sermons?

¹ Thanks to Dr. Max Stackhouse, retired Professor of Ethics, Princeton Theological Seminary, who presented this concept in an entirely different context, in a lecture at Andover Newton Theological School during his tenure at that institution.