

## **Hinton Center's Visioning/Planning Process**

For over 50 years Hinton Center has provided a resource and consultation service to congregations to assist them in developing more effective programs of ministry and outreach.

Hinton staff facilitates the visioning/planning process with about 60 churches each year. The Hinton model is based on the conviction that God has called every church to significant ministry. The task of the lay and clergy leadership in a church, then, is to ask the question, "What is God calling us to be and do as a congregation?" Visioning is primarily about spiritual discernment. It is about discerning where God is at work within the congregation. The whole process takes about three hours to work through and helps the church develop a plan for ministry for the next 8 to 12 months.

At Hinton, we believe that the experts about a particular congregation's call to ministry are the people who are members of that congregation. Therefore, the Hinton staff does not come in to dictate any particular plan, but rather, to help the members of the congregation reflect on their own strengths and opportunities for ministry, and then design a basic plan for realizing that ministry.

It is helpful in most congregations to have every member of the church present for the visioning process so that all can be included. The first hour will be spent in a brainstorming session about the strengths and gifts of the church, what is happening in the local community, the critical issues facing the church, and the vision for the future. The group will then move to identify the four or five critical areas for the coming year, and write specific, measurable targets and action steps to guide the ministry teams.

After the visioning process is completed, the church council or governing group will take the plan for ministry and guide its implementation from month to month during the year.

The Hinton visioning/planning process is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis or long range planning process. Rather, the process is brief, focused and action oriented. The best results from this process come about when a congregation repeats the process at least annually so that visioning/planning becomes a part of the "life-style" of the church.

## **Planning in the Local Church – Basic Principles**

1. Planning is an exercise in spiritual discernment.  
“What is God calling us to do? Where is God calling us out to be in ministry in this community?”  
Church members are not resourced for spiritual discernment simply by a brief Bible study at the beginning of the planning process, but rather by their life together as a Christian community throughout the year. Specific occasions include: worship, sacraments, Sunday school, individual devotional lives, program activities.
2. Self-determination. Everyone who is affected by the planning should be involved in the planning – especially in small membership congregations. Broad participation in the planning builds a broad base of support for and participation in the program of the church. Self-determination is a key to building positive self-image in a local congregation. When people are more in control of their own destiny they gain a sense of power and authority from this experience.
3. People in the local situation are the experts, not the process leader. The local people know the issues and realities in the local church and community. Local people should be in control of the agenda.
4. One of the primary benefits of planning is usually the process itself – not the end product. Planning is a structured way of involving a number of people in thinking about the future – that is its chief value. A typical reaction of church groups after planning is: “We always knew what we needed to do – we just were never able to put it together before.”
5. The simpler the process, the more likely it is to succeed. There is no “right” way to do it. The best process will probably be custom designed to fit the needs of a particular group.
6. Planning produces conflict and anxiety. No one can completely control the outcome of a planning process – this produces tension – especially where a small group has been in control. Conflict is normal.

(Hinton Rural Life Center – 05)

# VISIONING AND PLANNING FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

by Hinton Staff

*Models for Ministry in Smaller Membership Churches are publications of the Hinton Rural Life Center and demonstrate examples of programs, organization, or procedures that have provided effective ministry and mission in small membership church settings. The models are suggestions by which a local church may gain insights for strengthening their own ministry and mission.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This visioning/planning process is based on several assumptions we at Hinton believe to be vitally important:

1. Every local congregation or cooperative ministry, regardless of size or resources, is called by God to significant ministry.
2. Envisioning these ministries and planning for them is a spiritual discernment exercise, recognizing where and what God wants this particular congregation/group to be and to do. As such, it should always be entered into with prayer and study; the insert in this leaflet suggests scriptures and reflection questions for preparatory study.
3. Self-determination is key to healthy self-esteem; empowering people to be about their own ministry is vital. They are the "experts" in their congregation and community; no one from the outside can come in and plan for them. This process of visioning and planning will actually help them identify and organize what they already know.
4. Visions, dreams, and ministry will grow and change from year to year; they are particular to time and situation. Thus, visioning and planning done regularly (every 6-12 months) is most effective.

## USING THE MODEL

This model may be used by a local congregation, cooperative ministry, or other group, and the process may be led by the pastor, a layperson, or, ideally, by a more neutral third party. Visioning/Planning is not "just one more thing to do" but an integral part of the programming process for ministry.

The time involved is intentionally brief; it will vary, but the process can usually be completed in two to three hours. (This is particularly helpful where churches or other groups are not practiced at this type of planning.) It is best done at one sitting and at a time most convenient for all; the more people who are actively involved, the better, especially those who are at the fringes of the congregation/group. This model for planning is intentionally shorter-term in nature, planning only one year at a time. It is most effective when the process is repeated at least annually.

## I. GATHERING INFORMATION

*Tools: newsprint/large pieces of paper; markers, masking tape*

The questions below are information-gathering questions to involve everyone. Use an easel or a wall to hang newsprint for recording responses and, if possible, arrange the group in a semicircle around the newsprint so everyone can see. Work with a brainstorming process: get as much information as quickly as possible without evaluation or discussion - no negative comments or discussion allowed. The ground rule is Luke 1:37 (“With God, nothing will be impossible.”) Write *all* responses on the newsprint, using the respondents’ words as much as possible. When a page of newsprint is filled, move it to another section of the wall where everyone can see it. Keep answers to the same questions together.

- A.** *What do we as a congregation/cooperative/group specialize in? What are our **gifts and strengths**? What do we really do well? What is there in our present or past that could be a building block for the future? Another way to ask this question is: "What are we known for in the community?" [Hang the information gathered from this question apart from the others; these are resources, not issues.]*
- B.** *What is going on in the local **community** you serve? Think particularly of those persons who are not a part of your congregation: What are the strongest realities? What needs exist? Where are people hurting? Where are there opportunities to be in ministry with the community?*
- C.** *If you could choose **one issue** for this congregation/cooperative/group to focus its energy on in the year ahead, what would it be? If you were given two minutes in the pulpit to tell of your concerns or visions for the group, what would you focus on?*
- D.** *What is your **dream** for this congregation (cooperative/group) for the next twelve months? If you could imagine yourself leaving and walking back into the church a year from today, what would you like to see happening here? What is your sense of God's call/claim for ministry here?*

## II. WRITING A MISSION OR PURPOSE STATEMENT:

Continue the brainstorming process with the following questions: *"What is our purpose or mission? Why do we exist? What are we here for? What words would we put on a banner hung in the foyer of our church for all to see that would state what we are all about?"*

Ask for two or three volunteers who will work with the pastor during the break on the results to the questions above to write out a *tentative* purpose statement. This is not just stringing words or phrases together from the newsprint; these volunteers should attempt to write a comprehensive one-sentence statement. They must understand that the total group will review their work and probably change it.

## III. BREAK FOR 15 MINUTES

During break, ask each person to take a marker and vote for the responses to questions A, B, and C that they feel are most important. If the group is 10-12 people or less, allow each person to have a total of two or three votes, which they may use all on one thing, if they want. After everyone has voted, some priority issues should emerge, which the leader should write on a separate piece of newsprint. Be sure to combine votes if the same issue or idea comes up more than once.

#### IV. PRIORITIES

**First**, gather the participants following the break and process the **purpose/mission statement** with the whole group, adding and deleting until a satisfactory statement has been reached.

**Second**, review the priority issues with the entire group and then form smaller **working groups** by inviting everyone to choose the area in which he/she has the highest level of interest. The assumption is that these persons will work on planning in this area today and then work on implementation of plans throughout the year ahead. (Note: There may be one or two areas which have no volunteers, which is acceptable; put these aside for later work and reflection.)

During this part of the process, it is sometimes helpful to take two or three of the most important issues and have the whole group process ideas and suggestions for them. This will give the smaller planning groups helpful information when they get down to specific program development. This exercise is also a good time for any outside leader or "expert" to suggest possible programs and strategies that may have worked in other situations. The Pastor should be a part of the working groups; he/she may then contribute ideas in both the earlier brainstorming and specific planning.

1. These small **working groups** then meet in different parts of the same room or even different rooms to work with the items in their area. Their assignment is to develop one or two **Target Statements** (see below) to address and implement plans for the priority issue they have chosen. These statements should be written on newsprint to be presented to the group. Also write on the newsprint the names of those in the working group. [Note: If the total group is very small, an alternative method of working is to treat the whole group as one group to work through all the priority issues.]
2. After a defined period of time (usually at least ½ hour), each working group reports back to the whole group on their Target Statements. As they are reported, post each sheet of newsprint. Good ideas should be enthusiastically received; vague or unrealistic ones should be questioned and perhaps even returned for further work.

**Last**, ask for a volunteer who is willing to transcribe all information on the newsprint. *It is important to have the Mission Statement, Priority Issues, and Target Statements copied and available for the entire church by the next Sunday, if possible.* All information gathered and generated should then be transcribed in time for the next Council meeting and then made available to the entire church. If the Mission Statement is incomplete, refer what the group developed to the next meeting of the Council.

#### V. CLOSING THE MEETING

It is valuable to close the meeting with a prayer of thanksgiving and celebration, perhaps with everyone gathered into a circle, joining hands, and offering their own sentence prayers.

#### VI. IMPLEMENTATION

The plans made at the meeting are implemented through the meetings of the Council or other governing group; in fact, they become part of the agenda for Council meetings. The proposed Mission Statement should go before the Council for approval as soon as possible.

The pastor and the Council chairperson should confer two weeks to ten days before each meeting to plan the agenda. **Any deadline date for a target statement that is within three months of the meeting should be included on the agenda.** Contact all persons who are responsible for agenda items at least one week before the meeting to give them time to prepare their reports. In this way you will always be working three months ahead and be able to resource leaders as needed, spot potential snags, and keep the implementation process moving along. In this way also, the priorities and plans identified become the agenda of the church.

## **GUIDELINES FOR TARGET STATEMENTS**

**Target Statements** provide literal targets for plans. It is critical that they be specific, measurable, and include explicit deadlines for action.

### **1. SPECIFIC**

Target Statements need to be specific, stating what exactly you want to accomplish.

*Examples:* “We want to grow spiritually this year” is an admirable goal but very vague. More definitive would be something like “In order to help us grow spiritually this year, we will have a Disciple Bible Study ...” Or, not “We will visit the unchurched this year” but “We will visit unchurched persons in our neighborhood ...”

### **2. MEASURABLE**

This part of the Target Statement gives a way to measure whether and how well you accomplished what you planned.

*Examples:* “In order to help us grow spiritually this year, we will have a Disciple Bible Study that will include at least 8 people...” “We will contact 10 unchurched persons in our neighborhood...”

### **3. DEADLINE**

This vital part of the statement tells exactly when your plans will be accomplished.

*Examples of complete and adequate Target Statements:* “On September 9, in order to help us grow spiritually this year, we will begin a Disciple Bible Study that will include at least 8 people.” “By March 28 we will have contacted at least 10 unchurched persons in our neighborhood.”

## **NOTE:**

If congregations are not practiced in visioning - thinking about what “isn’t” - it is often a difficult task at first. The brainstorming questions are listed in an order that facilitates groups to whom the process is new, but the order of the questions can be revised with those who are more experienced in visioning. The churches and groups that have used this model most effectively are those who revisit it every 6 months to a year to review, evaluate, and plan. This way visioning and planning become something the congregation does as a matter of course and thus more easily, more creatively, and more productively.

You are welcome to contact the Hinton Center program staff if you have questions or desire further information on planning or other smaller membership church issues.

## **Resources for Study and Reflection**

### *Scriptural, Theological, Faith, Missional*

<u>Sign-Action</u>	<u>Biblical Guide</u>	<u>Question for Reflection</u>
1. Being a window to the truth and to God	Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to [God] except through me." (John 14:6)	As the body of Christ, what of God do we display?
2. Demonstrating forgiveness	Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Col 3:13)	As Christ's Church, do we extend and experience any corporate forgiveness?
3. Serving rather than being served	Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love, [serve] one another. (Gal 5:13)	As the Church of Christ, where and how are we serving others?
4. Reconciling people to each other	Jesus said, "...first be reconciled to your brother or sister..." (Matt 5:24)	As Christ's body, what are we doing to heal broken relationships?
5. Bringing hope by being present	Jesus said, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20)	Where and how is this congregation being the assuring presence of Christ?
6. Struggling for liberation by lifestyle, by presence, and by action	Jesus said, "...to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives...and recovery of sight...to let the oppressed go free..." (Luke 4:18)	How is this church being a liberator in the midst of injustice and sin?

Sign-Action

Biblical Guide

Question for Reflection

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| 7. Proclaiming the Word to the world                            | Jesus said, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15)                               | As Christ's church are we faithfully announcing the Good News?  |
| 8. Manifesting the diversity necessary to be the body of Christ | Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor 12:27)   | Where are the signs that, as the body of Christ, this congregation embraces and cultivates the diversity needed to be the church? |
| 9. Allowing a new creation                                      | So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor 5:17) | How does this church make a new creation known in its very life?  |
| 10. Encouraging each other by sharing our faith                 | ...so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. (Romans 1:12)                               | What are some examples within this congregation that members both give and receive this kind of encouragement?                    |

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## TARGET STATEMENT WORKSHEET

Priority Area: \_\_\_\_\_

Write two or three target statements (action steps) with a deadline date and specific, measurable steps that your task group will plan and implement for this priority area. It is helpful to name the person or persons who will be responsible for each target statement.

Target Statement

Deadline date: \_\_\_\_\_

Specific action to be accomplished: \_\_\_\_\_

Person (or persons) with primary leadership responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_

**Example:**

By June 1, 2007, we will design and print a new brochure about our church and its ministry that includes contact information, brief descriptions of our ministry and program, map, brief history, etc. Primary leaders – Mary and John

Target Statement # 1

Target Statement # 2

(write more target statements as needed)

(1/07)