

Identifying Skills

The distinction between gifts and skills is not absolute, but in this context whereas spiritual gifts are seen as particular endowments given by God to equip the church, personal skills are those aptitudes and competencies which everyone acquires, or discovers they have, in the course of life, and which enable them to make a positive contribution in a particular field. Put simply, my skills are 'what I am good at'.

An exercise to help identify key skills (again this could be done by individuals on their own, but doing it in a group gives more opportunity to build on the results):

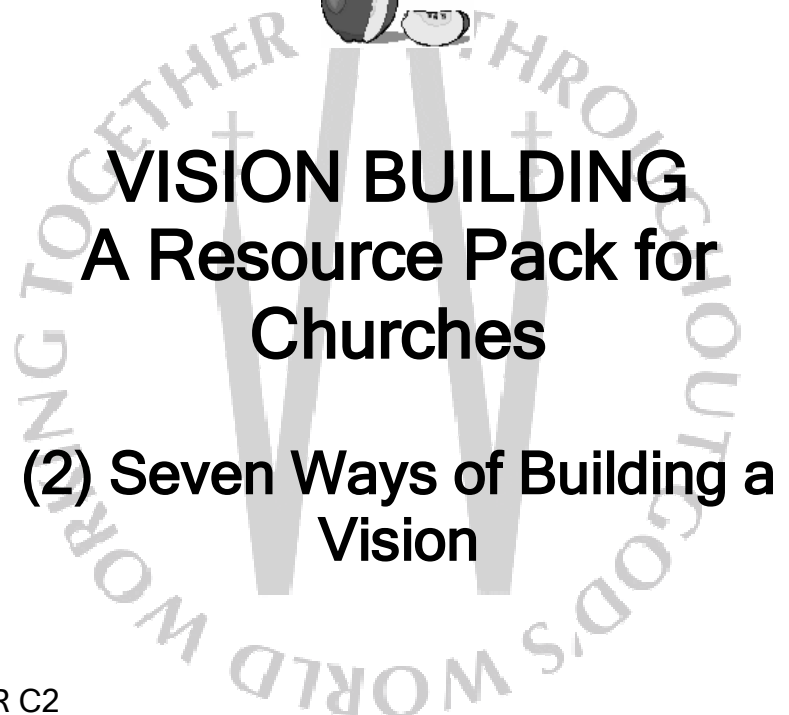
Think of your life in periods of ten years, starting from age 5. For each ten year period, think of two things you did which gave you a sense of fulfilment, things you felt proud to have been involved in. They do not have to be things of major importance, but simply achievements you remember with pleasure. Write down the things you have thought of and against each one try to put the factors you think made them so rewarding. What were you contributing that felt good? Where was the self-esteem coming from?

A suggested list of 50 appropriate skills is given on a separate sheet. Go through this list and tick a box each time a particular item comes up in connection with one of your identified achievements. (Add others to the list if nothing seems to fit.) Where do you have most ticks? These are your key skills. If the exercise is being done in a group, share your results. List the key skills you have between you. Consider how they are effective in the life of your church. The vision which a church can find and build will be a vision which will harness and use the skills of the people, and so boost morale, a sense of achievement and glory to God!

August 2006



Wakefield Ministry Scheme



VISION BUILDING A Resource Pack for Churches

(2) Seven Ways of Building a Vision

This material suggests seven ways in which individuals and groups might work towards finding their church's vision for the future. You do not have to use all seven methods, but a selection of several will probably be more fruitful than just choosing one or two. The material is adapted from the work of Peter Brierley as outlined in his book **Vision Building**.

Using the Bible

This could be done as an individual exercise or used in a group. Take a few minutes to think back over your life as a Christian and call to mind any specific verses or passages from the Bible which have been especially significant for you over the years. There may be a particular verse or passage which has kept on 'coming back' as circumstances have changed; or perhaps there was one memorable occasion when a passage or verse had a major impact.

What do you think God was saying to you through this verse or passage? How does that affect how you now see the church to which you belong and your part in its life?

If the exercise is done in a group, people should now share their responses and try to discover whether any common threads emerge which are significant for the life of the church. But do this in an open-ended way: don't try to force an answer!

Identifying Spiritual Gifts

People can be reluctant to identify their own gifts, sometimes out of a genuine humility and a feeling that it is boastful to claim to have some gift, sometimes out of fear that if they say they have a gift they will quickly be pounced on to do some job in the church! If an exercise in identifying gifts can be done in the context of building vision rather than filling vacancies, the latter fear may be allayed. The first fear can be addressed by a group work process in which there is an element of mutual identification and affirmation of gifts. (This of course requires a group with a good level of trust and security in its relationships.)

Use a questionnaire such as the one devised by Peter Wagner (see separate sheet). He has put together a list drawn from several New Testament passages: you may want to edit it if you feel that asking people to trawl through a list of 27 gifts is too much! Members of the group should complete the questionnaire for themselves as honestly as possible. When all have done so, everyone should then be invited to write down on a piece of paper up to three gifts they see each of the other members of the group as having. People are not asked to declare how they filled in the questionnaire for themselves, but instead each person in turn reads out the gifts they saw each of the others as having. There then needs to be time for sharing about how people felt about the outcome: were they surprised, did it feel affirming, were there points they need to take away and think or pray about.

In some churches, particularly with small congregations where people know one another well, it may be possible for a gifts exercise to be done by the whole church, possibly by people completing a questionnaire and handing it in within a context of worship. A 'gifts profile' of the church can then be built up as another valuable resource towards the discerning of God's purpose.

Reflecting on Experience

Few people are called into ventures in life which involve a complete break with everything they have known in the past (though this can happen). For the vast majority of us, progress is evolutionary. We are better able to build for the future, and to discern where God may be leading us, if we have some sense of security about who we are and what our role is in the present, and this usually comes from a sound understanding of our past, and the extent to which we have learned from experience. This applies both to individuals and to bodies like churches.

As an individual exercise: think back over your life. Which were the 'key moments'? in making you who you are today? What are the essential things about yourself which most identify you as a unique person? Supposing someone who knows you well is describing you to someone who does not (for example, by writing a reference for you). Write down three things you think it would be vital for that person to mention. This gives you a starting point for discovering your contribution to the vision for your church today.

As a group exercise for the church: make a 'time line'. Use a long sheet of paper or tape together several pages of flip-chart, long-ways on. Draw a horizontal line along the middle to represent time in the history of your church. Go back as far as you wish, but probably it is most realistic to limit the time-scale to the living memory of those present. Everyone is invited to contribute their perceptions of the important milestones along the way, and items are entered along the line at the appropriate point. Enter the items closer to the actual line if they are directly to do with the life of the church (e.g. the year the building was re-ordered, the year the church was put together with a neighbouring parish), and further from the line to the extent that they concerned the wider parish or the world (e.g. the year the big new housing estate was built). When the line is complete have a good look at it and try to get a sense of what has been significant for this church and community over the years, as a way into what God might be saying today.

Through Prayer

It should go without saying that a church is unlikely to develop a vision unless people are praying. But what about holding a special meeting for prayer to seek the way forward? This could be done in various ways.

Leaders of the different church groups and organisations could each be invited to give a short presentation of 'hopes and dreams' and time be given to praying for each of them in turn.

The results of a 'SWOT' analysis (or Apples Pears Blackbirds Maggots) could be used as the basis for four segments of prayer.

In a largish meeting people could be split into smaller groups after an introductory time of worship, with each group focusing on one or two key areas; when everyone comes back together the groups are invited to volunteer any important ideas they feel came to them during their prayer time.

Dreaming Dreams

Being given free rein to dream dreams can be a way of sparking creative thinking. Sometimes people are reticent about saying what they really long for because it seems so unrealistic. But when they are given permission to do so they welcome the opportunity. This is the thinking behind the 'brainstorming' technique where anyone is allowed to say anything that comes into their head in response to a question, and it will be written up without being criticised or queried by anyone else. This method is a good starting point for a group seeking a vision.

For example: ask everyone present to think for a few moments of three things they would most long to see happen in the church which would indicate that the Kingdom of God was really coming!

Or ask everyone to complete the sentence: 'My greatest desire for our church at the present time is...'

Once all the results of such an exercise are out in the open the work can begin of sifting through them and asking questions about practical options, as a way of starting to identify priority areas to work on.

Gathering Information

Vision is most likely to be developed from a well-stocked mind. This is more than a matter of assembling lots of facts. Being 'informed' means knowing the facts but also having some clues about what to do with them. The process of building vision needs literally to be 'in-formed': to be resourced with formative material out of which imaginative ideas may come.

A parish audit can help to stimulate creative thinking. Census findings, parish records, evidence from church registers, insights from other organisations active in the parish; maps of the parish, past and present; all these can supply pointers towards trends and developments which people may not have been explicitly aware of until the audit or survey revealed them. If the church has never done such an exercise in a systematic way, the beginning of a vision-finding process is an ideal time to do it.

However, other sources from outside the local church and context can be used as well. A group could spend an intriguing session bringing along examples of advertising from newspapers and magazines and examining them to discover what they reveal about the surrounding culture. People could be asked to search the public media for examples of religious imagery and explore together how it is being used. There may be someone who has an enthusiasm for some aspect of contemporary culture: popular music, modern architecture, TV soap operas!- who could bring along examples of material to stimulate fresh thinking about the current context and the church's mission within it. Use every means possible to get people thinking, talking and sharing, to broaden horizons for vision.