

The story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 and 11 is a story of crossing culture and class in the early church. The separate world-views and cultural chasm between the Jews and Romans positioned Peter and Cornelius and their respective communities in worlds apart. And yet, grounded in prayer and vision, we find them giving up the divisive messages of their cultures and taking steps to come together in a new community as the body of Christ.

The journey of Peter and Cornelius across culture and class began in prayer and vision. Both were engaged in prayer when they had a vision of where God was calling them to go. Each responded to the vision by sharing it with those around him and taking action. Their openness to receive God's vision was central to the story. Without a vision they could not have imagined the actions they took. Without a vision that prodded him to see life in a completely new perspective, Peter would not have been able to sit in a Gentile house, preach the story of Jesus, baptize, and finally stay in Cornelius' house for several days. Staying with Gentiles, eating their food, meant giving up foundational cultural traditions. The vision of God's great inclusiveness led to concrete action of baptizing Gentiles and expanding the community of the early church.

Vision – in all the many books, workshops, and conferences on congregational change, growth, or development – is always central. If you have come to this resource, you may already have engaged in a process of discerning God's vision for your congregation. Or you may have a vision toward which you are hoping to lead the congregation. Living in an increasingly diverse society, you have a vision of becoming – or becoming more fully – an authentic multicultural church.

Vision is vital for the journey. It grounds us in who God calls us to be as a community of faith in the particular place we are located. It gives us life as a community of faith and connects us in common mission. Vision grows out of the past and leads us into the future. It gathers its life and meaning from the current context and reality. "A vision clarifies what the congregation wishes to become. And then the congregation lives into its vision" (Boots, p. 12).

The congregation's vision grows out of prayer and study of God's word and is held in tension with the current reality. If the congregation has been in a steady decline while the neighborhood has changed around it, there may be a sense of urgency for "getting new members." Vision is fed by a sense of urgency to be about God's work in the particular community, but the vision needs to focus on ministry with the community and not on numbers. A vision of numerical growth is inward focused. God's vision leads outward so that the congregation is known as a place of God's love enacted within the community.

The vision is given shape by the leadership team and/or the entire congregation. It needs to be communicated regularly and re-visited often so that it is embraced by the congregation and becomes the guide

for ministries and priorities.

Movement toward the vision needs to be intentional. It won't just happen. The section "One Body/Similar Members" provides tools to prepare the congregation for the process of discerning the vision. "Meeting my Neighbor" will help take intentional steps into the neighborhood. "One Body/Many Members" provides a picture of a congregation's ongoing intentionality.

Leadership Readiness Completed Continue to Beginning Conversations



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