

## A Holy Grail Or A Holy Quest

By Rev. Jeannette Flynn



If I were frankly honest with you, I would be bold enough to just tell you, "I hate meetings!" Not because I don't enjoy hearing from others and understanding their thoughts and ideas – that's actually the best part. It's not even that I mind sitting in a room without windows for hours! It is simply

because the majority of meetings that I have attended in my life are void of producing any real lasting Kingdom expanding results! There it is. Pure and simple. Don't misunderstand that I am placing all blame for this on others – I've led some of those meetings that weren't worth the paper we kept notes on.

So much time spent - so few results. Days and days are spent discussing vision, examining various strategies and yet most of the time the so-called "big picture" strategic direction remains vague, elusive and void of sacrificial commitment. Clarity of direction is lacking, hidden behind a haze of generalizations and grand strategy statements that don't provide meaningful direction to the realities of day-to-day ministries. Authority to lead, the alignment of organizational structure to empower, and the redistribution of resources to achieve the goal seem held hostage by politics, power struggles and personal preferences.

There can be little doubt, even by the least informed leader, about the significance of **VISION**. Books, conferences, seminars, articles, conversations, and scripture have elevated this topic to the most addressed and vital characteristic of any leader or organization.

Unfortunately, all of this communication has somewhat created the thinking that **VISION** alone is the golden bullet. It's kind of like the Holy Grail – we just search and persevere until we find it, then everything falls into place and miracles happen.

Truthfully, nothing could be farther from the truth. Discerning God's vision for your ministry – His vision for His congregation that you serve is just the "beginning" of the Holy quest! **VISION** is the map that guides you and the goal that compels you when the going gets tough and tougher!

Moving from meetings that leave us empty and frustrated to ministry that produces genuine Kingdom fruit means that we begin to not only seek out God's vision – but then we begin the hard work of implementing the practices that actually help us “win on purpose!”

The successful leadership of a congregation is one that gives attention to both current productivity *and* viable long term effectiveness. ***In order for that to take place there has to be a thorough integration of the vision, with strategy, structure and finances.***

The ability of any leader or congregation to achieve their potential depends first upon the organization's clarity of vision. Secondly, it depends on its ability to select the appropriate strategy (or strategies) to accomplish the vision. Next, vision leans on an empowering structure that aligns authority with responsibility and is accountable to the vision. Ultimately a redistribution of time, talents, expenditures is needed so that all the necessary resources to achieve the goal are provided. Not any one of these four elements are negotiable. Fail to thoroughly address and implement any one of them and fulfilling the vision will be forfeited!

Identifying vision can be a challenge, but clarity of vision is essential! No congregation can serve every master or every preference. When there is a clear vision of what the church is meant to be and do, then the congregation must redirect its scarce resources (time, personnel and finances) to its priority activities. The vision of the organization must be the consistent thread that weaves throughout all levels of the decision-making process.

Jim Clemmer, author of such books as, “*Growing @ the Speed of Change,*” and “*Moose on the Table,*” makes the following distinctions for companies and organizations. I have adapted them for our role as leaders in congregations and ministry so we can think about whether we have stopped with just getting vision instead of starting with vision and then following through with all the elements needed to be fruitful and effective. Read through them and see if perhaps they identify some areas you may need to address with your leaders or perhaps they will affirm that you and your congregation are right on Kingdom target!

**Here are some symptoms of a congregation with announced vision but unclear strategy, inadequate structure, and ineffective roles**

- a. Little awareness of or commitment to the identified vision and agreed upon strategies by the congregation – or worse yet even among the leadership.
- b. Lack of understanding the culture and lack of interest in the community or unbelievers surrounding your church.
- c. Blurry line of sight from what we do inside the building to how it connects with those outside the building.
- d. Teams/departments/individuals work at cross-purposes with each other instead of sacrificing personal preferences to accomplish the vision.
- e. Confusion about roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities
- f. Meandering decision making loops, uncertain approval process, and multiple layers of sign offs.
- g. Structure does not reflect the reality of leadership responsibility and lack of authority by those doing the ministry day by day.
- h. Finances for ministry held captive by fixed expenditures; outdated programming; and a lack of faithful, committed, sacrificial giving by the majority.

**Here are some significant signs revealed in congregations who have effectively implemented clear, well-developed strategies organized around empowering structure. They have boldly identified appropriate leadership models for the whole congregation, and courageously redistributed all resources to focus on fulfilling the vision!**

- a. Vision, strategy, structure and goals are simple, clear, and compelling and are modeled by the leadership and embraced by the body.
- b. Strategy, goals, expenditure of funds and effectiveness are evaluated and measured by the vision, and leadership is supported and held accountable to the fulfilling of the vision.
- c. Communication of the vision for the whole body is consistent, frequent, creative and penetrating.
- d. Design of all programming and ministries is developed from the perspective of fulfilling the vision and impacting the community from the outside in with intent.
- e. Ownership of the vision and goals is widespread among the body and clear role involvement is broad.

- f. Clear and accurate knowledge and engagement of the community that surrounds the church guides the decision and development of ministries and outreach so that there is a constant and intentional serving and drawing of those not yet a part of the body.
- g. Everyone can easily answer this question: "Do I know clearly what is expected of me in my role?"
- h. The number of structural levels have been minimized — flatten don't fatten
- i. All financial and resource decisions are made servant to the vision and mission – not to history and influence.

Well, there you have it. If you enjoy meetings, just for the sake of meeting, then throw these ideas in the garbage and start scheduling your next get together. On the other hand, if you, like me, want to find ways to go from vision to effective Kingdom expansion, it might be worth exploring these ideas. Fearlessly identify where you and your congregation are, and then begin to design the path that moves you to where you know God's Commission has called you.

Know you are prayed for this day and may His grace set you free!

Jeannette