

Inspiring Image

Greetings in the spirit of Christ, our trustworthy companion in the journey of life!

My name is Tom Bandy. For over twenty years I have consulted with churches of all sizes, cultures, theologies, and traditions ... in North American and around the world. My website is www.ThrivingChurch.com.

Many churches are involved in visioning processes. Visioning is a matter of spiritual discernment ... not strategic planning. Visioning leads to strategic planning, and comes before strategic planning. However, the goal of visioning is to align ourselves with God's purpose to bless the world. Motivation and direction comes first ... tactics come later.

A good visioning process results in three very practical tools that will be used in future strategic planning: Theme Song, Inspiring Image, and Mission Statement.

Today I want to coach you to develop an Inspiring Image.

I speak especially to all those photographers, painters, graphic artists, and anyone ... young and old ... who love the visual arts. Our church needs an image or picture that captures our love of Christ and identity as a church. Can you create such an image?

Imagine a mural or picture in the vestibule of your church building. It is the first thing members and visitors see when they enter. Members will rejoice to see an image that perfectly expresses their essence ... their identity ... as a congregation. Visitors will immediately discern if this is a church that will meet their spiritual hunger. A picture is worth a thousand words.

For example:

A church (that I once served personally in an urban core setting) elevated a picture of a contemporary phoenix rising from the ashes of broken lives. This tapestry was above the altar in our sanctuary. The phoenix was a contemporary abstract of an ancient symbol. The points of flame were the skyscrapers of the city. The ashes were profiles of real

people ... immigrants and refugees who longed for resurrection and a new life.

Another church in a multicultural neighborhood of a Midwestern city framed an image in their vestibule of Jesus in a boat on the stormy Sea of Galilee. A young, vibrantly healthy, African Jesus stares confidently across the waves at newcomers entering the church. The disciples represent all races and cultures, and sit smiling and joyously around him. Jesus is holding a fish in one hand, and inviting newcomers into the boat with the other.

Yet another church in a rural small town has a triptych above the communion table of three angels. Each angel is a strong, authoritative, mature, confident spiritual leader. One angel is female and holds the sword of justice. A second angel is male, and holds an open Bible of wisdom. The center angel is unisex, and lifts high the cross. They are stern and unsmiling ... yet strong and safe. The mission of the church is to be a “guardian angel” for everyone in the rural communities.

I invite you to paint a picture for your vestibule. It articulates your experience with Jesus. It describes your identity as a church. This is a great exercise for children in the Sunday school, and for young adults, as well as all members of the church who are artistic. Sometimes the simplest drawing by a child is the most profound revelation of congregational purpose.

You might have an art exhibit in the Worship Center or Fellowship Hall of visual expressions of your identity as a church ... and your relationship with Jesus. Wouldn't it be wonderful to create a book of pictures about your church identity and purpose that we could give newcomers and visitors?

Thank you! And thank God for your commitment to bless the world and renew the church. God bless all here!