

Covenant of Openness to Visions

**We promise to be open to the visions God would reveal to us.
Come, Holy Spirit, and show us the way!**

Greetings in the spirit of Christ ... the light of the world!

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 internationally. My website is www.ThrivingChurch.com.

The word "Vision" comes from the same root word as "Vigil". A "prayer vigil", for example, is a discipline of devotional wakefulness. The vigil may last for hours, days, weeks, or even months, but is a time of "wakefulness" or "watchfulness". The goal is to see a vision from God.

I find that many churches want to see a vision ... without the vigil. They expect God to reveal a vision for the church in a tidy timeline of an evening meeting or weekend retreat. They expect vision to come without any real sacrifice or effort. In other words, they confuse "visioning" with "brainstorming". But true vision is less a rational reflection than a mystical experience. Visions are revealed, not created.

Therefore, churches seeking a vision need to know what they are letting themselves in for. God's vision will only be revealed in a context of spiritual waiting. This will require preparation and self-discipline.

A good visioning process always begins with a covenant among those leaders who will be seeking the vision. This is a covenant in which they declare their commitment to the vigil ... a discipline of watchfulness. The covenant creates an atmosphere or context of spiritual yearning that includes prayer, bible study, conversation, experimentation, and ultimately, surrenders self to the will of God.

Today I want to introduce you to the "Covenant of Openness to Visions" that I use when consulting with churches, and guiding a visioning process. This process begins with laying a foundation of trust. Churches build clarity and consensus about core values and bedrock beliefs. In this context, church leaders then open themselves in a vigil of watchfulness. God will reveal his vision for the church.

Here are the eight disciplines of vision discernment for which we will hold one another accountable in the coming vigil. I call these "declarations" of our readiness to receive visions. After each declaration, I invite you to pause this video to ponder and discuss how challenging this will be to your church.

We declare our readiness to:

1. Let Go

We are ready to risk our traditions and comfort zones to discern the new directions God would lead us. In other words, we hold nothing back. There is no tactic, technology, property, money, office, committee, staff position, or anything else that is somehow "off the table". Everything is "on the table" and "up for grabs" so that we can completely surrender to God's vision.

Philippians 3:10-14 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

2. Let God

We are ready to be surprised and challenged in any way God chooses to speak to us. This means that we go beyond mere brainstorming. We surrender control over the church, and give it all to God. We are open to seemingly "crazy" ideas and audacious goals.

Luke 8:22-25 A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was calm. He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?"

3. Go Deep

We are ready to pray daily and read scripture weekly to go deeper in Christ and further in Christ's mission. This means we will set aside time on

a daily and weekly basis to read the great visioning passages of the Bible, and to pray for guidance.

Ephesians 6:10-18 Take up the whole armor of God. Fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all. Keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

4. Open Up

We are ready to consider any change or opportunity for the sake of our walk with Jesus Christ. We will open our hearts and listen. We will pay attention to people who are strangers to the church or on the margins of the church. We will be ready to weep in compassion for strangers to grace.

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

5. Bear Down

We are ready to set aside trivialities and focus on what is truly important about our future and our faith. Set aside comfort zones and membership privileges. Stop obsessing over your personal tastes, pet projects, or individual likes and dislikes. Think not only of the common good ... but the wider purpose of God to redeem the world.

Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

6. Share the Load

We are ready to support our pastor and staff to deepen spiritual life and listen for the callings of God. In order to allow our pastor and staff to participate in the vigil, volunteer to help with visitation, administration,

and other tasks that burden the pastor. Allow them to invest time and energy into the vigil.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

7. Stretch Out

We are ready to listen to consider the impossible and listen to strangers so that God can help us grow. Open our imaginations. Be willing to step beyond comfort zones, and consider things that might be uncomfortable for the sake of being faithful to the Lord. Make real sacrifices in to your normal lifestyle habits in order to discern God's will.

Mark 10:25-31 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age-- houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions-- and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

8. Laugh and Learn

We are ready to laugh at ourselves, and laugh with each other. We are eager to try, and try again. This means that we are prepared to experiment, fail, and learn from our mistakes. We leave behind ego and pride, and we are willing to be embarrassed. We are ready to be "fools for Christ" ... and we may look foolish to our ecumenical partners and professional colleagues. Let us not take ourselves that seriously! Let us laugh at ourselves so that we can take God, and God alone, seriously.

1 Corinthians 1:25-31 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, so that no one might boast in the presence of

God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

These are the eight disciplines of vision discernment. Before your church enters into the discernment process, I encourage you to share this covenant as an insert in your bulletin during Sunday morning worship. The pastor may want to preach about it, using one of the texts above that is especially relevant or challenging for your church. Then ask everyone member in worship to sign the covenant ... and place it on the offering plate in worship.

Now you are ready to begin the visioning process. You will discover two things.

First, you will discover that God reveals vision in unexpected ways, to unlikely people. Visions are often revealed at the margins of congregational life, and to people of different ages, cultures, backgrounds, or lifestyles than you might expect.

Second, you will discover that God's vision really changes your life. Yes, God's vision will be joyous and exciting. But it will also be stressful. Many churches discover that God's vision leads them to make big changes. They might even relocate, or change the name of their church. It may renew old routines with new significance; but it may also introduce new ideas and practices.

God bless you on the journey!