

Week 9 Prayer Guide

Vision



We've prayed about self-examination, guidance, and unity, and hope. Now we'll pray about what's needed for developing VISION. Here is an excerpt from an essay found at

https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/discriminating-gods-vision-together.pdf

Becoming a Discerning Community Communal discernment occurs within a community of giftedness: all have received gifts of the Holy Spirit to be used for the edification, encouragement, and consolation of the entire body. Thus it is important for all to be involved in the process of discerning God's future vision.

The Apostle Paul continually insists that every member of the body of Christ has the responsibility to share the particular insights she or he has been given (cf. 1 Cor. 12-14). All are called "to instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14), to speak God's word "so that all may learn and all be encouraged" (1 Cor. 14:31), to "teach and admonish one another in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). It is through "speaking the truth in love" that the community is to "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

So the characteristic setting in which the church discerns God's vision is when Christians come together to share and evaluate the gifts given to them. Here in a variety of complementary ways, guidance is conveyed through each to all, and through all to each.

The communal process of discernment thus both assumes and creates a church characterized by open dialogue, critical reflection, genuine respect, mutual trust, and active collaboration. In other words, the goal is not simply the development of a "product" -- a vision statement, but the experience of koinonia -- Christian community. Rather than expecting people to be of like mind, the intent is to enable a diverse people to discern one mind -- the mind "which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). *I.T. Dietterich*

The Church must be a **community** living in conformity to the paradigm of the **cross** and thereby standing as a sign of the **new creation** promised by God." *Richard B. Hays, The Moral Vision of the New Testament*

Day 1 – Community (a)

Read: Those who by faith and baptism form the body of Christ, are called to:

- *be "members of one another"* (Rom. 12:5),
- *"who are to build up one another"* (1 Thess. 5:11),
- *"be devoted to one another in love"* (Rom. 12:10),
 - *"admonish one another"* (Rom. 15:14),
 - *"be servants of one another"* (Gal. 5:13),
- *"live in harmony with one another"* (Rom. 12:16)
- *"Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ"* (Gal. 6:2)

Think/Meditate:

- Is such a community possible? How could it be?
- What would it be like to live, serve, and worship in such a community?
- Why do we settle for less?
- How can we work toward following scripture in these areas? Where does it begin?

Pray:

- Pray for a personal vision of life in such a community.
- Pray that our church will renew and develop a vision of the community of God.

Day 2– Community (b)

Biblically, however, the Christian community can be viewed from two additional perspectives. First, the Greek word for church (**ekklesia**) referred to an assembly or gathering of people. The early church was known for frequently gathering together in homes or in public places for friendship, prayer, learning, and worship (Acts 2:42).

Second, the Bible expresses Christian community through the word **koinonia**, a term usually translated as "fellowship." Acts 2 also reveals the early church's emphasis in this area. This type of Christian community was the goal of the early church

Read: Read the passages from Acts 2 below.

¹ On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. ² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Think/Meditate:

- What is the source of Christian community? How does this differ from other communities?
- Ask, "How might I foster such a community in Queensway – today... and in the future?"

Pray:

- That each person in our church will be led to, and take up, such a vision.
- That you would follow through with fostering such a community and would have the strength and vision to do so today.
- That just as with the early church, people will be attracted to the love among us and so be drawn to Christ.

Day 3 – The Cross

While it may be comforting to believe that Jesus died for our sins, we may not be as ready to embrace the image of the cross as indicating the shape, direction, and destiny of the life and witness of the church: "take up your cross and follow me." We much prefer to believe that the world will welcome our faith, our spirituality, our morality, our service -- our vision of reality, and reward us with growth in members, wealth, status, and influence. The way of the cross -- humility, sacrifice, rejection, persecution, and suffering, even unto death -- does not market well in a consumer-oriented, "meet my needs" culture.

Read: The verses below from 1 Corinthians 1.

¹⁸ The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. ¹⁹ As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."

²⁰ So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God

has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.²¹ Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.²² It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom.²³ So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

²⁴ But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles,²⁴ Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.²⁵ This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

²⁶ Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy²⁶ when God called you.²⁷ Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.²⁸ God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.²⁹ As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

³⁰ God has united you with Christ Jesus.

Think/Meditate:

- How should we look at human wisdom? Where is it deficient?
- What does this say to our plans and preferences in the church?
- How do we genuinely seek to be ruled first by spiritual wisdom in our human planning?

Pray:

- For the courage to put your trust in God's word and in the guidance of His Spirit.
- For spiritual insight as we review how our church organizes and plans and sees its possibilities.

Day 4 – The New Creation

In Jesus Christ God's promised future invaded the present. What God brought about through the cross and resurrection, was not a new religious system or a new set of moral principles. The raising of Jesus from the dead was an event of cosmic proportions: into the midst of the old creation of sin, darkness, and death, God inaugurated a new creation of forgiveness, light, and life. The biblical image of new creation signifies not only a redeemed humanity, but a renewed earth, set free from its "bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:21).

Read: The following verses:

- 2 Corinthians 5:17: *This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*
- Colossians 2:15 *In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.*
- Micah 4: *In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's house will be the highest of all—the most important place on earth. It will be raised above the other hills, and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.*

² People from many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of Jacob's God. There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths."

For the Lord's teaching will go out from Zion; his word will go out from Jerusalem.

³ The Lord will mediate between peoples and will settle disputes between strong nations far away. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore.

⁴ Everyone will live in peace and prosperity, enjoying their own grapevines and fig trees, for there will be nothing to fear. The Lord of Heaven's Armies has made this promise!

⁵ Though the nations around us follow their idols, we will follow the Lord our God forever & ever.

Think/Meditate:

- What does God think about the way we do things on earth today?
- How can we gain God's perspective on our practices and attitudes?
- What would seeking to 'live in the New Creation' mean for our lives today?

Pray:

- That we are willing to live by New Creation priorities
- That we bring these priorities into our relationships in the world
- That we will stand for truth, justice, and righteousness as individuals and as a church.

Other Days & Continuing

Here's another excerpt from that essay with which we began the week.

Communal discernment occurs within a community of giftedness: all have received gifts of the Holy Spirit to be used for the edification, encouragement, and consolation of the entire body. So it is important for all to be involved in the process of discerning God's future vision.

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- *All are called "to instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14), to speak God's word "so that all may learn and all be encouraged" (1 Cor. 14:31), to "teach and admonish one another in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16).*
- *It is through "speaking the truth in love" that the community is to "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:15).*

So the normal setting in which the church discerns God's vision is when Christians come together to share and evaluate the gifts given to them. Here in a variety of complementary ways, guidance is given through each to all, and through all to each. The communal process of discernment assumes and creates a church characterized by open dialogue, critical reflection, genuine respect, mutual trust, and active collaboration.

In other words, the goal is not simply the development of a "product" -- a vision statement, but the experience of koinonia -- Christian community. Rather than expecting people to be of like mind, the intent is to enable a diverse people to discern one mind -- the mind "which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5) Adapted from I.T. Dietterich

Think and pray about each paragraph.

- Do you agree with what each paragraph says it? Why or why not?
- Are we willing to hear and learn from each other?
- Will we work to find 'the mind of Christ' instead of following our own tendencies?
- How will we help each other to find the way? What does this say to us as we seek to move forward.