



Charting Your Dream— Where Is God Inviting Us to Go?

Use the following detailed questions to explore God's dream for your church, what it would look like if you lived into the dream of radical welcome as a congregation.

The assessment presents questions for each of the five areas of congregational life: **Mission and Vision, Identity, Ministries and Relationships, Leadership and Feedback Systems,** and **Worship.** For each set of questions, feel free to engage others in the conversation: newcomers and old-timers, people from different cultural and class backgrounds, families and single people, those who hold power and those who are on the margins. In some instances (for example, when looking into fresh ministries and partnerships, or examining your identity versus the identity of your neighborhood), you might also pose the questions to local civic and community leaders.

The sets of questions are detailed and comprehensive, for the purpose of a thorough assessment. If your time is limited, or you are at the earlier stages of planning and discussion, begin with the Central Question and then look over the supporting questions and see which ones seem most relevant and urgent for your context.

Your Mission and Vision

Central Question:

How could your church's stated purpose (mission) and the specific picture of your future over the next few years (vision) reflect the dream of God?

- How could you reconfigure your mission and/or vision so that it reflects your commitment to radical welcome? How could you invite the community to take part in that visioning process?
- In what ways can you ensure that the fresh mission and/or vision affect the church's decisions and direction?
- How could you make sure you hold yourselves accountable to this vision?

Your Identity

Central Question:

Who does the dream of God call you to include as fully present and empowered members of your congregation?

- Who is The Other on the margins of your community?
- How could you publicly, authentically proclaim your desire to radically welcome, particularly with groups usually left on the margins?
- How could you prepare members for embracing the culture and identity of people coming from the margins?

Your Ministries and Relationships

Central Question:

What kinds of activities and relationships reflect the radically welcoming dream of God? How could your ministries and relations more fully proclaim, fulfill and prepare you for that dream?

- What activities and relationships would most fully reflect and prepare you to live into your mission? Are there new ministries that would reflect your mission and your hope for radical welcome?
- How could your current ministries help people to build authentic, mutual relationships between members and with your neighbors?
- How could your ministries and relationships empower people, transform systems, and enable others to find their voices and speak their truths?
- More specifically, how could you engage in:
 - care-giving that serves both pastorally (helping people to heal and reckon with hurt) and prophetically (challenging people to test and stretch into vulnerable areas)?
 - evangelism that more effectively reaches marginalized people where they are and on their own terms?
 - community engagement that looks less like serving “them” and more like genuine partnership?
 - becoming an ally with those who lack your power and access, advocating and seeking justice in the wider community and society?

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- community gatherings and celebrations that reflect the priorities and styles of different groups?
 - formation programs and other activities that help members and or ministry partners to share stories and cross boundaries?
 - stewardship programs that truly welcome the gifts of all members, sincerely highlighting the value of time and talent and not just large financial contributions?

Your Leadership and Feedback Systems

Central Question:

How is God calling you to recast leadership and to expand your notion of who is truly worthy of exercising power? How could you create structures for feedback that allow more voices to be heard and honored?

- How could your leadership—clergy, staff, top lay leaders, committee members—better include cultures and groups present in and around the congregation? Be sure to consider formal and informal processes by which people become leaders (i.e., election of vestry members vs. appointments to key committees).
- How could your hiring policies make explicit a commitment to building a radically welcoming congregation?
- How could you mentor and promote leaders from marginalized groups?
- If there is a link between résumé/pedigree/wealth and fitness for leadership, how could you sever it? How could you help the congregation to expand its understanding of what is required for leadership?
- How could you expand the community's understanding of the various gifts and skills needed for leadership, so that you honor the gifts and practices of marginalized cultural groups?
- Are there ways to reconfigure certain ministries or leadership bodies so that excluded members could take part?
- How could you open communication lines so that more members have access to information and decision-making processes (even if they are not the ones actually making the decisions)?
- What feedback systems could you put in place to allow more voices to be heard and honored?

Your Worship

Central Question:

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What would it communicate about your community's culture(s), values and mission?*

- How could your liturgy and music reflect the dream of God for your community?
- What would it communicate about your community's culture(s), values and mission?
- How could the language, symbols, readings, music, preaching, physical movement and other elements reflect a wider range of cultures, generations or classes?
- How could you craft liturgy that are not quite so “controlled and contained” but sometimes “threaten to leap off the page and bite us?”¹ How might you accomplish this goal faithfully, responsibly and effectively, continuing to craft “good” liturgy?
- How could you include different gifts and values without misappropriation—that is, making sure you don't incorporate cultural traditions without either seeking relationship with the community of origin or at least sharing the background and story of that community?
- How could you ensure the full participation and welcome of people new to the tradition and to your church, especially people who come with the experience of being marginalized by the groups that hold power in your church?
- How could you introduce fresh music and liturgical forms in ways that are inspiring and least threatening to your members?

1. Richard Giles, *Creating Uncommon Worship: Transforming the Liturgy of the Eucharist* (Norwich, England: Canterbury Press, 2004), 12.