

A Church With Vision

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Proverbs 29:18a (KJV)

Proverbs 29:18a
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
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Two weeks ago, in the sermon entitled “Live Your Transformation,” I opened with the following question: In an age when so many mainline churches are dwindling in membership, or have had to merge with another church to stay alive, or to close their doors all together, **why do you suppose College Hill Presbyterian Church is still here? And not only still here, but so vibrant and relevant?**

I answered that question, in part, this way: **Throughout its history, this congregation has chosen to respond in dynamic ways to constant change** – change within its staff and membership, within the neighborhood, and within society in general.

This morning I would like to add another answer to that very important question. **Throughout its history, this congregation has maintained a clear vision for its mission and ministry.**

Some churches just seem to have a stronger guiding vision than others. And those whose ministry has the greatest impact on the lives of its members and its community are those with a solid and clear vision of:

- who they are,
- what they hope to accomplish, and
- where they believe God is leading them into the future.

And why is this so important? The author of an Old Testament proverb, in Proverbs 29:18a, writes, **“Where there is no vision, the people perish”** (KJV). It is important to note that in this context, the Hebrew word used for “vision” refers not to human vision, but rather to vision provided by God.

In other words, **it is not the vision of the people, per se, that keeps them from perishing, but rather the vision given to the people by God. Our task, then, as a community of faith, is to try to discern God’s vision for us.** This is a continually ongoing task, and it involves constant prayer and reflection and goes back to that need for openness and willingness to change and adapt. And while I admit that at times it just seems to be part of our human nature to resist change, the need for flexibility is crucial.

But a church cannot survive and thrive on mere vision alone - it requires its leaders and all its members to take the action necessary to carry out that vision

– **to turn vision into reality.** That is why a big part of my vision for College Hill is that each and every member contributes what he or she can to our ministry efforts.

Not long before my arrival, back in March, the Session adopted a new Vision Statement for this congregation that was initially developed by our Acts 16:5 Leadership Team. It appears on the front page of each monthly Newsletter, and I will make sure we start printing it in our weekly worship bulletin as well.

There are three bullet points to our **Vision Statement**, and they include:

- ***Building an inclusive community of faith.***
- ***Receiving and openly sharing the love of God.***
- ***Reaching out with a compassionate voice for peace and justice.***

Note the verbs: building, receiving, sharing, reaching out.

It is imperative that each and every committee, ministry team, or area of ministry look at all that it does, and plans to do, through the lens and filter of this vision statement to see how, and if, it is helping us fulfill the vision that we believe God has provided to us.

You have heard me state before that we need to constantly be aware of the principle of **Reach, Grow, Send**. Through and with our vision for ministry:

- How are we *reaching out* to each other and those in this community?
- How are we *growing* both in faith and in numbers?
- How are we being *sent forth* to live our ministry and calling in our daily lives?

A congregation that constantly reflects upon how it is fulfilling its vision for ministry is one that has a much better chance of not only being vibrant and relevant, but also being able to discern where God is leading it into the future.

This process of reflection and discernment is what the Session engaged in last month when we unanimously voted to expand our Hispanic Ministry efforts to include a Spanish-language Service of Worship each Sunday.

This is the process that our Hispanic Ministry Team has been diligently going through over the past year since College Hill began an intentional outreach to not only our Hispanic brothers and sisters in the faith, but those who specifically speak only Spanish.

In the many years that I was involved in Hispanic ministry outreach with the congregation I served in Dallas, we came to realize that we had to develop a mantra that is so very foreign to us “all-things-decently-and-in-order” Presbyterians. That mantra is, **“We’re having to make this up as we go along.”**

That’s because there are no clear guidelines to follow in extending a ministry of openness, hospitality, and acceptance across language and cultural differences. It’s only through a process of trial and error that a congregation makes its way through such uncharted territory.

When we come up against a roadblock (and we will), we must be flexible, patient, and diligent in communicating with each other in order to move ahead, to change what needs to be changed, and to try new things so that our vision becomes a reality.

Yes, we are trying new and different things here at College Hill. Not everything will work out the way we initially plan, but **the point is that we are seeking to be faithful to the vision that we have discerned God has blessed this very special congregation with.**

So may God empower us to discern and realize that vision. For where there is no vision, the people perish.

Amen.