

For a Time Such as This

*God, by His mighty power at work within us,
is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of –
infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts or hopes. –
Ephesians 3:20 (The Living Bible)*

This building was built by people with vision. It was built by people who back in the 1930s when they built the building had a dream and did something about it. It was built by people whose dream became a vision and that vision became a reality. This morning we're going to look at another vision. It's a vision God gave me 5 years ago and one that your *Visionary Leadership Team* has helped to shape for the last year.

We've printed it in the brochure you have in your bulletin. I'm going to ask you to read it with me. First, let me point out some of the other things in the brochure. On the front you'll find an abbreviated church *Mission Statement*. The full *Statement* is printed on the inside. You'll also find in the brochure demographic information for persons living in Zip Code 15701. We've provided information for you on marital status, household incomes, population by educational level, population by age, years in the same residence or household and a projection of the Zip Code's population in the year 2009.

The information is a result of the work of your *Visionary Leadership Team's* wanting to know something about the community we are called to REACH. In the brochure you will also find the names of members of the *Visionary Leadership Team* with whom we encourage you to speak.

Starting next Sunday *Team* members will be wearing nametags like this one to help you identify who they are. The tags have their name, a picture of a hand reaching

out and the words “Ask Me!” Feel free to talk to any of the members privately. Feel free to invite them to come to your Sunday school class or small group to talk to them as a group. You can also invite Pastor Linda or me if you want. As a *Team*, we want you to do that.

Here’s something else we want you to do. We also want you to mark your calendars and plan to attend one of the 3 (or all 3 if you like) information meetings listed in the brochure and on the screen. At the meetings we hope to celebrate who we are and what we are doing as a church already and, at the same time, answer some of the questions you may have about the vision. We may not have all the answers you want or feel you need, but that’s why it’s a vision. It’s a big-picture look at the way things *can be*. It’s not a detailed picture look at the way things will be. It’s a vision. It’s also a vision on the 13th of March if you are a church member you will have the opportunity to vote on. We’ve printed the date and time of that meeting in your brochure too. It’s also on the screen.

Church Conference

Sunday, March 13

2:00 PM

At the meeting you will have the opportunity to vote “yes.”

A “yes” vote says you support the vision and give the church permission to begin looking for a building.

A “yes” vote *does not authorize the purchase of a building*.

A “yes” vote merely gives the church permission to *look for a building*.

If, down the road, we were actually considering buying a building the church would hold another meeting and you would then have the chance to vote on that too.

Your other options, of course, are to vote “no” or “yes, I believe in the vision. I just don’t believe the timing is right.” We also want you to pray. We want you to pray hard. It’s why we’ve spent the month of January teaching you how. It’s especially why we spent time in the month of January teaching you how to know if it’s God’s voice you are really hearing.

The Bible says in Proverbs 14:12 –

There’s a way that seems right to a man but in the end leads to death.

Another translation has it –

There’s a way that seems right unto a man but the ends are not the ways of God.

We have to make sure that what we have is really God’s vision.

We have to make sure that what we are thinking about doing is really God’s vision for our future and the ministry God wants to accomplish to build His kingdom.

This is the vision.

Reading again from the screen or from your brochure, let’s read it together.

Our Vision

To establish a Christian based ministry, worship and community center to meet identified needs of children, youth, families and older adults in cooperation with area churches; service providers and University staff, faculty, students and programs.

That’s our Vision. It’s a big vision too. It’s bigger than big actually. It’s huge.

It’s gigantic. It’s monumental.

Like McDonald's french-fries, it's super-sized, but what it isn't, is impossible.

It's just God-sized that's all. We have a big vision because we have a big God and the bigger the vision the more we have to do what? The bigger the vision the more we have to rely on God. Some may even think us crazy.

I don't doubt that there were persons in the church back in the 30s who thought the persons who had a vision for this church were crazy too. I know there were people who thought William Cary was. When God called William Cary to leave his home in England to go to Burma to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, they said he was crazy.

You're crazy, they said. If God wants to save the heathen, He'll do it Himself.

He doesn't need William Cary. And was he crazy? Who's to say?

What I can say is this. If attempting great things *for God* and expecting great things *from God* is what being crazy is, then we all need to be because that is how William Cary lived his life. It's also how he *pleased God with his life*. William Cary pleased God because he lived a life of faith.

The Bible says in Hebrews 11:6 about the relationship between faith and living a life pleasing to God –

Without faith it's impossible to please God.

In order to please God we have to have faith. That's what the Bible says. In order to please God we have to see without seeing. In order to please God we have to perceive as real what is not real yet.

Hebrews 11:1 says it this way in The Amplified Bible –

Faith is perceiving as real what is not revealed to the senses.

That's what having faith asks of us. It asks it of you. It asks it of me. It asks it of the church.

It's also what a mother eagle asks of her eaglets when it's time to leave the warmth and comfort and security of the nest and fly. She asks them to fly because she knows they were never meant to stay in the nest. She asks them to fly because she knows there is more to life than life inside the nest. She asks them to fly because as eagles they were meant to soar and to stay in the nest means they never will. To stay in the nest means they will never fulfill the purpose God made them for. To stay in the nest means they will never realize their potential *as eagles*. To stay in the nest means to never feel the wind beneath their wings like God intended. Eagles were meant to fly!

Believe it or not, so is the church. The church is also meant to fly, but like the eaglets in order to fly it first has to be willing to leave the nest. If the church is going to fly it first has to be willing to leave the comfort of the nest.

It's like the eaglets. Just like an eaglet will never realize it's potential unless it flies and spreads its wings, churches will never realize their potential, their gifts, their abilities and resources unless they are willing to do the same thing.

As a church, we're no exception. To be able to realize our potential, the abilities we have from God and the resources we have to be willing to fly. We have to want to soar, but first we have to get out of what? The first thing we have to do is get out of the nest. To fly requires our having faith. To fly requires our being able to trust. Whether we do or not is up to us. We can stay in the nest where things are safe and predictable and comfortable the way we are used to. The other thing we can do of course is we can get

out of the nest and open ourselves up to a whole new world of possibilities for reaching people as a church for Jesus Christ.

It's what we saw as a *Visionary Leadership Team* when we went to Phoenix and to Houston.

Here's just a part of what we saw. We saw a ministry center housed in a once abandoned K-Mart. The center had a drug store and a beauty shop to serve the people who lived in the community and a room large enough to seat hundreds, maybe thousands, depending on how you arranged the seats. Certain days and times of the week the room was used for worship and special events like the Conference we went to. Other days and times of the week the room was used for as a banquet hall. The ministry center was a part of the largest United Methodist Church in the country.

We saw another United Methodist Church, who as part of their outreach ministry purchased a strip mall. In one section of the mall they have a youth center. In another section of the mall there is a center for older adults. The other parts of the mall are occupied (for the time being) by businesses whose rent each month pays the mortgage the church owes on the building.

An historic downtown church that we didn't see as a Team but I saw when I was in Houston in 2000 built a second church to reach people in the suburbs. Part of the new church's ministry included a Christian school.

Will it make sense for us to do some of those kinds of things here? Will it make sense for us to do here what I saw Frazier Memorial United Methodist Church doing in Montgomery, Alabama where they operate a medical center staffed largely by retired Christian physicians and nurses who still have something to contribute with their lives?

Will it make sense?

It just might especially, when we remember in any given year there are an estimated 500 students in our very own University nursing program who during their studies need field placement of some kind. Who better for the students to partner with than the church? The other 120 four-year degree programs provide the same possibility.

The same could be said for the 3,000 work-study students with whom we could also partner.

Think of the possibilities!

Finance or Accounting students could help provide budget counseling to families who need it. Hospitality Management and Dietetics students could gain valuable experience working in partnership with our food ministry programs. Health and Physical Education students could provide physical fitness training to children and their families. Students in the Gerontology Certificate program can work with our older adults. The same may be said for students (and faculty) in Psychology and Social Work, Elementary Education, Marketing, Nutrition, Child Development and Family Relations.

The possibilities really are endless! The key is our knowing what will work best for us. The key is our knowing what will work here in Indiana. We're not Houston. Our community is different. So is our ability to form strategic partnerships with the University and other area churches, for example, different. It's why your *Visionary Leadership Team* has been gathering information about the community.

The Bible says we need to be informed.

The Bible says in Proverbs 13:16 –

Every man acts out of knowledge.

Proverbs 18:13 says –

What a shame. How stupid to decide before knowing the facts.

Your *Visionary Leadership Team* has been doing that.

The Bible also says we need to seek advice and your *Visionary Leadership Team* has done that too.

We went to places like Houston and Phoenix so we could learn and why we've met twice just last month with Rev. Homitsky from our Conference Staff.

Proverbs 24:6 says –

The more advice you get, the more likely you are to win.

Proverbs 20:18 says –

Get good advise and you'll succeed.

We've been doing that. We've been seeking advice. Does that mean we won't make mistakes? No. We're going to make mistakes. We're also going to have our share of problems. Here's what I know though. What I know is whatever the problem is if God leads you to it, God will lead you through it. What I know is wherever God guides He really does provide. I also know this. I know that as we talk about vision we can't confuse the vision stage with the problem solving stage.

When Robert Shuller had a vision for an all-glass church they couldn't either. The Bible says we are to plan for them. The Bible says we are to be sensible about the problems we may meet along the way and look ahead. Like anything in life, we aren't to ignore them, but we are not to let them paralyze us either especially at this stage.

Proverbs 22:3 says about looking ahead –

The sensible man watches for problems ahead and he prepares to meet them.

The simpleton never looks and suffers the consequences.

Asking questions like –

“*What will happen if?*” or “*What can go wrong?*” isn’t being pessimistic.

It’s just being sensible. You just can’t let them get in your way that’s all.

You just can’t let them keep you from your realizing your vision because you’re afraid to fly especially when there’s a world out there that’s dying, a world that is our job to REACH.

It’s also why I believe God is stirring the nest and beginning to make it uncomfortable *in the nest* because He doesn’t want us to stay there. God wants us to REACH people. A Center here in Indiana gives us as a church more of a chance to do that. It’s also, I believe, why God has favored us *as a church*. God has blessed us so we can be a blessing. God has favored us so we can favor others. He has favored us with resources, with talent and with people. God has favored us so much that as a church we are now among the top 4% of the Protestant churches in the country.

This is the quote:

Fewer than 4% of all Protestant congregations in the U.S. with more than an average of 500 hundred in worship, have the resources, especially people, to fulfill the promise to welcome and minister to everyone.

The quote is from *What Have We Learned?* by Lyle Shaller.

That’s favor! That’s how good God has been to us and to those whom God has been that God, to those whom God has given that much, what does the Bible say?

The Bible says that to those God has given much that much will be required.

Actually, the Bible says two things.

We read them here in Luke 12, verse 48.

We've also printed them for you on the screen.

Let's read them together.

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Will there be risks? Yes, there will be risks. There are always risks. There's always risk when God asks you to step out in faith. There's always risk when God says it's time to fly. That's why it takes faith.

I know faith is what it asked of Esther. Esther, who we read about in the Bible, had to trust God with her life. To be able to fulfill the purpose God had created her for, to do her part as a part of God's plan to save the world, to experience the power of God *through her life*, Esther had to trust God *with her life*. Rise or fall, succeed or fail, live or die, Esther was willing to try.

Esther said –

If I must die, I am willing to die. (Esther 4:16)

If I must die, I am willing to die because the lives of people depend on it.

They still do.

It's just that they don't depend on Esther anymore. Now they depend on me. Now they depend on you.

Closing Prayers

Prayers for *Visionary Leadership Team* members and our church family to know God's will and plan for ministry for us to reach the people of Indiana and the world for Jesus Christ.