

**God's Vision for the People of Holston Conference**  
**Draft Commentary – Chattanooga and Cleveland Districts**  
**February 5, 2006**  
**Ooltewah UMC**

Concern: length--If we need everybody to embody this, it's too long to "remember"

Hunger--consider another word: ex. "passion" (Where meaningful worship and a *passion* to serve...)

What implications does a vision statement like this have? What is the *therefore*?

How does this vision statement apply to us specifically? Will this be a statement that is for one year or a longer term?

"With active compassion and risk taking *showing* love"

This is very prophetic! But in each of the prophets, somebody must respond. State that we will respond: We, the people of the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church, seeing/living/realizing God's vision of...

This is a wonderful statement; where's the accountability?

If this is adopted, each of us should be praying that God will give us courageous, compassionate commitment that God gave all the disciples of the early church.

Stronger word than envisions: "God is calling us to BE..." To *be* puts a call on us to ACT.

Passionate language: hunger, passion, risk taking--how does this language also play out in the life of the local church? How will this be implemented in the local church? Is this language open to all types of churches?

Problem: "meaningful worship"--who decides what is meaningful? Meaningful implies that WE are the ones getting something from worship not God. Change: responsive worship; vibrant worship; vital worship

Too long: Bold, passionate, and joyful communities of faith is all that's needed.

Good statement but will the Connectional Table have the "longings" statements so that they can help the Conference make a true action plan?

Realizing this is a vision statement for the Annual Conference and ultimately will go back to the local church, it must begin with individuals!

Needs to be shorter.

The Connectional Table **does not** need to define “meaningful worship”--reconsider the implications of the wording

Someone needs to explain the difference between a MISSION statement and a VISION statement (mission statements are “slogans” vision statements are not)

The Connectional Table needs to have “broad” and all-encompassing guidelines

I love every part--I pray that it were truer.

Statement about Holston Conference claiming this statement as our own.

Envision is misleading--God doesn't envision, God sees

Saving and redeeming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

...and recognizing that we are all at different stages of spiritual development

Reexamine the core beliefs (God does not call us to do something that we are not gifted to do...God gives us the gifts once we are called)

Will there be core beliefs under the statement?

Very good job! Perhaps change third line to “where the spiritual hunger to worship God and to serve Christ sets disciples on fire”

The challenge is for our congregations to have meaningful worship...this phrasing challenges us!

After the session: the following comments written and handed on:

How to move a congregation who is happy with whom they are.

What are the expected outcomes?

What is worship?

God decrees a Bold, Passionate and joyful community of Faith. Then add for explanation: where a Passion to serve Christ leads to worship that we as disciples are alive with sincere compassion. We must be willing to be Risk takers who show Love for all God's children through creative reflecting with redeeming justice and offering Saving Grace through Christ.

**Pre-Conference Briefing February 12, 2006**  
**St. Paul UMC, Wytheville, VA**  
**Nicole Hill, Presiding**

Responses to Vision Statement

This statement generally reads well. I notice you mention God and the Lord Jesus Christ. In respect to the Holy Trinity, could you also include the Holy Spirit? A possibility would be following the words, “set disciples on fire,” you could add “with the Holy Spirit.”

Question: Why are we saying, “God envisions” rather than “we envision?”

Answer: We discerned that this is God’s vision, not ours.

Question: My compliments to the writing team. What distinguishes this to be particularly Wesleyan?

Answer: We, as a writing team, relied heavily on scripture and prayer for the formation of the statement.

Question: Why the use of “all creation,” rather than “all humankind?”

Answer: Because the conference addresses issues as environment, cultural and social structures, etc., we felt we needed to use a term that would be inclusive.

Comment: The terminology as “God envisions,” “creation reflects,” are almost Unitarian Universalist. Perhaps we need to make these phrases more Wesleyan. We know scriptures say that not all creation will be redeemed.

Response: We know that God desires that all creation be redeemed.

Comment: “God envisions bold, passionate, and joyful” could be for any church. Maybe we should we add Holston Conference in the first line.

Question: Will this be open for further input?

Answer: The next meeting of the writing team is March 7<sup>th</sup>. You may certainly contact me or any other member of the team between now and then with your input.

Question: What happens after this statement is complete?

Answer: The Connectional Table is charged with implementation of the statement on the conference level. We also hope that the vision statement can serve as a ministry tool for local churches and agencies. For instance, we at the local churches, will be aligning our church activities with the vision statement, asking ourselves as we do our work, if it is in accordance with the conference statement.

Question: Does this statement, in your opinion, encompass the mission statement?

Answer: Yes.

Comment: It would be good to have the vision statement in a more poetic form that we could remember and use regularly.

Pre-Conference Briefing  
Kingsport/Johnson City Districts  
February 12, 2006

There has been little time to digest the vision process/statement—may need more time to review.

Emphasis on worship—good

Clarity—good, simple to comprehend

Concern over bullet #5 (Core Beliefs and accountability)...Is it a tool for hierarchy? Who enforces accountability? This statement is too vague.

Concern about word “envisions”—need for another term

Connection between conference and local church---how will it impact local church’s statements.

What does radical mean (from core values)?

Is it beyond disciplinary standards?

Is the realm of inclusivity according to our discipline?

Are all ministries included in this vision—camping, Wesley Foundation, etc. ?

Is the phrase “risk-taking love” necessary in the statement?

Comment from another lay member—“Risk-Taking” needs to be included to combat our complacency.

Is this to be voted on at Annual Conference?

Should it not come at the first of the conference so that all other items can be measured against it?

Can other thoughts be sent in at a later date?

**Comment received via e-mail:**

I want to thank you all for the time, effort and spirit that has gone into this process and that shows in this vision. Mark Flynn did an admirable job presenting, answering questions, and accepting feedback at the Pre-Conference Briefing at Ooltewah UMC earlier this month.

The thing that I have to say that concerns me is this... "for **ALL** of God's children..." Already I think we are following a not completely honest nationwide campaign of "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors." I love Igniting Ministry. I really prayed that we could "advertise our way into thinking..." But alas, I don't believe that is the reality of life in the Holston Conference, or the Southeastern Jurisdiction... or maybe even the United Methodist Church.

I don't know what to do with this. I do believe that God envisions disciples who are filled with compassion and willing to take risks in love for homosexuals, witches and pagans, ex-cons, the mentally ill and others that our churches don't do a very good job of welcoming or embracing. But I'm not sure it's honest to put a vision out there that says Holston is a place for ALL of God's children, when in reality, my gay friends or acquaintances would find prejudice, anger, judgment and fear, at least, from I believe, the majority of the churches of this conference.

Does all of God's children include people of a different sexual orientation? IF so... I can buy God's envisioning... but what are we saying about Holston response? Is this true? Or will it only be another layer of hurt and dishonesty for those who are looking for acceptance?

**Comment received via e-mail:**

I am uncomfortable with the inclusive and diverse statement in that we leave out two of the groups that are most excluded at present - persons with handicapping conditions (one would need to check on what is proper language for this currently), and persons of differing sexual orientations.

So the very statement meant to proclaim our inclusiveness is exclusive.

What if we said, "to be truly inclusive of all" and left it at that or added the phrase, "everyone on the planet."

I was pleased that Gary Maudlin did include the sexual orientation phrase in his work with the clergy at Convocation. We have to start breaking down this wall held to so tightly by the southeast somewhere...and if it be in Little Holston so be it. The west is already there. The southeast was also slow in its discrimination towards persons of color.

Vision statement is grand.

Was a little concerned that some of the statements in the prologue make it sound as though we are becoming a "confessing" church. For me Jesus remains the "Word of God" and is the Word within the written word of the Bible.

I also thought one might leave out the phrase about the local church being the critically important arena where salvation is proclaimed experienced, received and embodied, maybe replace it with "One of our most critically important." Our camps have had several go to seminary, several become camp ministry professionals, several become youth ministers, etc. As one goes to Divine Rhythm one becomes well aware of all of the impact of our Wesley Foundations and Camps. If there were some way in the vision statement to affirm our connectional ministries, it would be grand.

**Question received via e-mail:**

Please explain what "risk-taking love" means in behavioral terms. What risk are we suppose to take? Please give me some examples so I may discuss this point intelligently with others at our church.

Thank you for your help.

GOD Bless.

**Comment received via e-mail:**

First let me compliment the Vision Writing team on the significant and daunting work you have done. It is no small thing to hear such meaningful statements from such a variety of people and to distill them into something workable.

My comments on the Vision Statement are made with the assumption that the team is sincerely seeking honest feedback. I do not want to seem like I am picking needlessly; the comments I make are my honest issues with the statement.

My first concern is with the statement "God envisions" and it is a theological concern. I have problems stating in human terms what God envisions, as I honestly do not know that. The Old Testament lectionary reading on Sunday centered on the Noah story in which God envisioned a flood. I think it is problematic for us to make such statements and would much prefer "Jesus inaugurates..." or "Jesus empowers..." as such statements link us to the New Testament narrative in Acts where Jesus (certainly with God's blessing) gives birth to the church.

Second, I have no idea what it means to set disciples on fire. I know what it means to challenge people, to be transformed, to be energetic and excited about my faith, to be led by the Holy Spirit. I know such language is Wesleyan but it also seems to reduce to an emotional state that does not seem very helpful to me.

Finally, I think the last two lines are over reaching. "All creation reflecting the saving grace and redeeming justice of our Lord Jesus Christ" is not something we will achieve or are even charged with. We are charged with being faithful disciples where we find ourselves and transforming our lives and communities; the rest is up to God's work in the world.

I would much prefer something like the following:

Jesus Christ empowers bold, passionate, and joyful faith communities where meaningful worship and a desire to serve Christ with active compassion and risk-taking love for all God's children move our churches, communities, and Conference closer and closer to the saving grace and redeeming justice of our Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The statement is a bit too long, but I don't know how else to squeeze all of the hopes and dreams into something smaller.

Again, my comments are made in all sincerity and humility.

Good luck!

**Comment received via e-mail:**

I was too frustrated to even know what to say yesterday. I joined the annual conference 34 years ago and have attended a number of 'bad' meetings in the past. However, I do not think I have ever attended a meeting where the morale of the group was so low at the end of the meeting.

It was not the fault of Larry Martin. I felt he did an excellent job of presenting the material he had. However, the meeting should have never been called in the first place. I wish someone could total up the hours and gallons of gas which were wasted Sunday afternoon. It seems that the leadership of our conference is so focused on getting a few words on paper that the big picture of what is happening to our conference is overlooked.

We have wasted far too much time and money trying to reinvent the wheel. Please do not waste any more of our time and money by printing this in the conference book.

**Suggested revision received via e-mail:**

Another possibility: (as if you need more possibilities)

God envisions bold communities of faithful disciples on fire with a hunger to serve Christ through his Holy Spirit until all creation reflects the saving grace and redeeming justice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Q&A on Pre-Conference Briefing Regarding the Vision Statement  
Knoxville, Maryville, and Oak Ridge Districts  
Sunday, March 5, 2006**

Intro statement by Larry Martin, followed by distributing the handout. Larry then talked specifically about some of the words used – bold, joyful, meaningful worship, hunger to serve Christ, active compassion, risk-taking, sharing the love of Christ, redeeming justice. Larry also explained the process in which we are engaged – receiving feedback in Pre-Conference Briefings, considering that feedback in preparation for the final statement that will appear in the Book of Reports, preparing the report for the Book of Reports.

We are seeking feedback today about the draft Vision Statement as it is written on the back page of the handout. Persons are identified if they identified themselves or I knew who they were. I did not know all of those who made comments.

Comment: We talk of God, we talk of Christ, but there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. He proposes that we say “where meaningful worship and a hunger to serve Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit set disciples on fire ...” because the worship and service are not the means to the end.

Comment: Concerned about the Vision Statement incorporating words that are Biblically based. People come to our churches from many other places. What does God’s word say about what we are doing? God’s word is very important in whatever we do.

Question: Are we defining the thoughts of God? Are we capable of doing that? Why does it say “God envisions” rather than “We envision”? Anne Travis tried to answer.

Comment: God envisions “bold, passionate, and joyful,” and I would like to see something about “prophetic” communities of faith. Is there some way we can include this idea in the statement? Larry replied that we would consider the comment.

Question: Where are we going with this? What will this be? Larry responded that the Connectional Table will be looking at an Action Plan to address the Vision Statement.

Comment: I have read Peter Drucker, and Peter Drucker says if it won’t go on a t-shirt, people will not understand it. When you have to explain at least eight of the words to tell someone what it means, then it really is not intuitive enough to mean anything.

Comment: I am really captured by the words “bold, passionate, and joyful” but then to say “meaningful” worship – meaningful worship does not have quite the same power. “Transforming” worship would capture me.

Question: How is this vision going to be measurable? Anne Travis tried to answer this one. The Action Plan is what we will measure, not the Vision Statement. This will be a multi-year process in which we complete some actions and add more.

Comment: I am sure that “all God’s children” means inclusive to some people, but it doesn’t to all people.

Comment: I am concerned about the last two lines. If a Vision is hopefully years and years into the future, then we do reach a point where we achieve at least some and move on to another Vision, I worry that with the language of the last two sentences, we would never get there!

Comment: “Active Compassion and risk-taking love” mean the same thing and we may not need both of those.

Comment: Based on the comments thus far, we have basically eliminated everything but “set disciples on fire,” so maybe we should just make that our logo!

Comment: Will the Vision Writing Team meet every year as we continue to seek God's vision? The response was that the process will be turned over to the Connectional Table following Annual Conference.

Comment: God envisions churches filled with the Holy Spirit and led by the Holy Spirit. If that happens, then all the rest of this stuff will be there!

Larry thanked everyone for their attendance. He closed the meeting with prayer.

### **Comments received following the meeting:**

Comment: This is a huge waste of time. I am very frustrated that the Annual Conference feels the need to reinvent itself every 5 years, and I am very frustrated that you brought us here today for this. You have totally wasted my time, and I am angry about that!

Comment: Was this the only reason for the meeting? I was late to the meeting and did not hear the original explanation.

Comment: Thank you for your efforts.

Comment: Thank you for all your work on this.

Written comment handed in after the meeting: God envisions communities of faith where a hunger to serve Christ continuously moves disciples to acts of risk-taking love for all. He added that we could put in something about the Holy Spirit.

Comment: I appreciate the work you are doing, but I think it is absolutely ridiculous to call persons from these three districts. I resent it, and I hope you won't do it again with other districts. The call notice said "Conference Briefing," and this was not a Conference briefing.

Comment: I was impressed that someone actually read Peter Drucker before they got here. Have we ever heard of a KPI tree? Key Performance Indicators – I like what you are doing and appreciate what you are doing and that you stood up here and took the "pot shots." My question is, why does it [the process] take so long? Will we have to wait until Annual Conference 2007 to implement an Action Plan? Anne responded that we would not, but the Connectional Table would prepare and begin implementing an Action Plan very soon after Annual Conference this year.

Comment: May I send a rewrite to you? Answer: Yes, absolutely. She read us her suggested rewrite, and she will send it to us. The couple thanked us for our time.

### **Comment received via e-mail**

Dear "Team,"

I do appreciate all the work you have put into "God's Vision for the People of Holston

Conference" draft. The first 2 bullets caught my attention.

(1) "Salvation comes from a relationship with the resurrected Jesus Christ." I personally feel and think the Church teaches that salvation is much broader than a relationship with the resurrected Jesus Christ. I do not doubt that this is a part of it, but salvation is about the renewal of the whole cosmos through the work of God in the "eschatological" future. We get a glimpse of that through a relationship with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. I felt the statement places too much emphasis upon a personal relationship, not that that's not important, but I think the focus of salvation should be upon God's work to save the world. Salvation of the world (cosmos) will occur regardless of my relationship with the resurrected Jesus Christ. Maybe something like "salvation has been announced in the life of Jesus Christ and through the scripture that bears witness to the Word of God (Jesus Christ) we have been given a glimpse of salvation through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and through a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit we can give the world a glimpse of that salvation through lives of love, mercy, kindness, and working to build a just society." Or, "salvation is when we are caught up in the plan for the renewal of the world. A plan revealed in Jesus Christ and brought to us through the Holy Spirit. Salvation comes from God."

(2) "The Bible is the authoritative Word of God for the People of God." Perhaps better would be "The Bible is authoritative in that it bears witness to the 'Word of God' who was in the beginning with God and became human and lived among us, Jesus Christ." I feel this clearly shows how we interpret scripture and the lens through which we interpret it as a Church. I also feel this makes us think twice about picking OT scripture to highlight the "abominations" of others.

Maybe I have read too much into the above mentioned statement, but they did draw my attention.

### **Comment received via e-mail**

This is not a vision statement it is a mission statement. A vision statement is a picture of the future state of things in an organization. I will be happy to teach people how to write vision statements. After 20 years as a management consultant this is an insult.

### **Comment received via e-mail**

Want my opinion? I think you've done a fine job with this, and hope you'll continue refining it before annual conference. Here's a little constructive commentary. This statement struck me as problematic

"We long to be more evangelical, reaching out to the un-churched and those who have left the church."

The term "un-churched" and "those who have left the church" are negative. The statement is stuck in language of the past. Can we define these people

in more positive, forward-looking, less churchly terms? That might get at the meat of this longing. Since this is the first longing, it should express a more positive view of the church's task. Something like "we long to become more intentional about faith-sharing and disciple making, seeking to invite all people from all walks of life into a loving, life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of faith, the church." (To address "those who have left the church" you might want to express that in a second statement about "reconciling" -- of course that has its connotations, doesn't it? -- "restoring" or "renewing" relationships with persons who have walked away from the life in faith. Language that is simple, straightforward, and evocative will do much to improve these longings, as well as the other sections.

You have done much to make this a worthwhile endeavor. Keep up the good work. I'm glad I don't have to do it!