

Living into Our Inclusive Vision: Congregational Exercise



The aspirational vision passed at annual conference begins: “We envision a Methodism rooted in Jesus, grounded in Wesleyan theology, inclusive of all persons, and engaged in the work of justice and reconciliation.” An aspiration is simply that unless we build a culture that embodies those practices. This activity offers a template for taking the next step: clarifying what each of those values looks like in your unique context, and discerning what you are called to do in order to realize the vision in your setting.

This exploration could be done by breaking into four teams, with each team working on one value, or you could do this activity over successive gatherings, focusing on one value at each gathering. This guide is written as a congregational exercise to be done at a large group gathering, perhaps after church on a Sunday.

Preparation

- Have copies of the aspirational vision for the group. If you have not ever interacted with the aspirational vision, you may want to first use the study guide to engage people in simply reading and responding to the vision.
- Have four sheets of poster paper and markers, one for each table.
- Set up four tables with an equal number of chairs. (Divide the total attendance by four.)
- Recruit four facilitators for each group to lead the conversation and be the timekeeper.
- Have extra poster paper for the group discussion to note the key next steps.

Introduction

Say: The basic question we are seeking to explore is: If we envision a Methodism that is rooted in Jesus, grounded in Wesleyan theology, inclusive of all persons, and engaged in the work of justice and reconciliation, what does that look like and what do we need to be doing to fully live into that vision?

Today, you are invited to help us think more deeply and imaginatively about how we can live out this vision in our church and community. We will be grouping ourselves into conversation tables: one for each value. You are invited to go to the table you are most interested in/passionate about. You will see there are [number] chairs at each table. If all the chairs are taken at the table you wish to be at, please choose another table that represents your second choice.

This is Holy Spirit work! You are invited to have a posture of deep listening to one another and the Spirit as you engage in this conversation. We encourage creativity and imagination. Let’s see where God might be birthing something new in our midst.

Facilitator instructions for table conversations

1. As you begin, have people introduce themselves to each other.
2. Remind the group that the basic question we are seeking to explore is: If we envision a Methodism that is rooted in Jesus, grounded in Wesleyan theology, inclusive of all persons, and engaged in the work of justice and reconciliation, what does that look like and what do we need to be doing to fully live into that vision?
3. Our group’s focus is [name your assigned value] and I will guide us through a series of questions to take a deep dive in unpacking this value.
4. We don’t have to refine everything at this point...so let’s give space to dream!
5. Is someone willing to be our note-taker/map maker...on the newsprint to collect our collective wisdom.

Table conversation

Allow about eight minutes for each of the first two questions and 10 to 12 minutes for the third and fourth questions. It might be helpful to ask “Why is that important?” or “Can you say more about this?” as people flesh out their ideas to get to the heart of what matters. Use a brainstorm sheet to record ideas as they are shared, and then after the conversation, create a summary sheet for presenting to the large group (see next section).

Question one (mandate): When we say [name particular value your group is exploring], what do we mean? How would we describe this to someone who has no idea what we are talking about?

Question two (motives): Why are you passionate about this value and why do you believe it is critical to our future as a church to hold this value as central?

Question three (marks/mastery): If we were fully embodying this value, what would be doing? What would be happening? How would we know we were successful?

Question four (map): What are the gaps from where we now to where we want to go? What are the steps or processes we need to put in place or enhance to make this vision a reality?

Reporting out

After each table group records its ideas, draw this table on a fresh piece of newsprint and have each group fill out the four quadrants for the value it explored. Encourage the groups to be as clear, concise, and compelling as possible in their distillation/summary. Work toward a shared agreement in each of the four areas.

<i>Missional Mandate (What)</i>	<i>Missional Motives (Why)</i>
<i>Missional Marks (Fruitfulness)</i>	<i>Missional Map (Next Steps)</i>

Decide who from each table group will present the group's ideas to the large group.

Large group discussion

- Invite each table group to share their conversation and table.
- Ask the larger group if there are questions of clarity or responses to each small group conversation.
- Ask the presenting group to name the one or two next steps it believes are most important to live into the value it explored. Put those up on a piece of newsprint.
- Repeat that process for each small group.
- Once all the table groups have reported and all the next steps are recorded on the newsprint, invite the large group to discuss collective next steps: Are these the right next steps? Is something missing? How would we prioritize these? If we focus time, resources, and attention on these next steps, will they help us more fully live into this vision? If not, what else should we consider?
- At this point, you could either take this work and hand it off to the leadership/strategy team for further refining, or you could ask people to name where they have passion/energy and form some small task groups to move each area forward.

Thank people for their participation and commitment to being a church that is rooted in Jesus, grounded in Wesleyan theology, inclusive of all persons, and engaged in justice and reconciliation. Close in prayer.