

COMPELLING VISION PROCESS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How will the current process be different than past processes?

The current process is structured very differently from past visioning processes. Historically, denominational visioning and goal setting has primarily been completed at the board level. Our current bi-line, “Continuing the work of Jesus: Peacefully, Simply, Together”, formulated to better communicate our identity, emerged from interview-style conversations conducted with Brethren by an outside firm hired by the General Board in the early 1990s. The most recent vision statement, adopted by the Annual Conference delegates in 2012, was drafted by a nine-member committee called by Standing Committee in 2009. Regretfully, that vision statement has had limited impact on our life together because there was not a widespread sense of ownership. While both of these processes included input from across the denomination, the current process is designed to prioritize extensive input from across the denomination.

Initiated by the Leadership Team and Council of District Executives, they will remain involved throughout the process. However, a separate team from within the denomination (the Compelling Vision Process Team), has been called to facilitate widespread conversations across the denomination and to collect and synthesize the data generated by those conversations. These conversations, taking place at Annual Conference, in districts, and with various constituency groups and involving as many people as possible, will be of primary importance as people are encouraged to share their passions and concerns, listen to others, and work together to identify common threads and themes that begin to emerge. The common threads and themes that emerge from these conversations will form the basis of what we hope will be a distinctive and compelling vision for our life together. The role of Annual Conference as a context for key conversations at the beginning and end of the process is also a very new and exciting part of this process.

Where can I find details of the process design?

The Compelling Vision Working Group (CVWG) and the Compelling Vision Process Team (CVPT) will work together in complementary roles to lead us toward a compelling vision. At the 2018 Annual Conference, one full business session and a portion of a second will be structured to begin the visioning process through intentional conversation. During the fall and winter, conversations will continue in districts and various constituency groups. During these two-hour sessions, facilitated by a member of the CVPT or CVWG, participants will engage in small-group conversations around a consistent list of questions. Individual and group responses will be recorded, evaluated, and synthesized to give direction to conversations slated for Annual Conference in 2019, when the visioning process will be the primary focus of our work together. During those conversations, the Process Team will diligently listen for emerging themes and report those themes back to the Annual Conference for affirmation. Following Annual Conference 2019, the CVWG, in consultation with the CVPT, will articulate a final vision product that will inform our life together going forward, and be celebrated and affirmed at our 2020 Annual Conference. Additional questions about the process design can be addressed to any member of the Leadership Team, Working Group, or Process Team.

Why do we need another ‘compelling vision’ other than the Bible? The ‘Great Commission’ (Matthew 28:16-20) -- or -- the Jesus’ ‘Nazareth Manifesto’ (Luke 4:14-22)) -- for example -- seem to be enough.

Good question. Because the Bible offers ‘variations on the same theme’ (e.g both the ‘Great Commission’ and the ‘Nazareth Manifesto,’ for example) we all ‘land’ at different scriptural places – understandably and faithfully. A compelling vision honors all those ‘places,’ but rather than just choosing one text, offers an energizing fusion of Biblical Truth, that reflects God’s unique calling, for this season, for a particular part of God’s family, like the Church of the Brethren. And so, expect an undeniable Biblical emphasis to flavor our compelling vision outcome, that is faithful, in a full-orbed way, to the Word Jesus, and His other way of living.

What is the compelling vision’s ‘bottom line’? Are we after a new vision – or – is this process really about pushing through a predetermined agenda?

There is no predetermined or hidden agenda. The ‘bottom line’ is Jesus, and our conviction that Jesus, through the Holy Spirit will reveal His perfect Will for the Church of the Brethren, for this time. We believe God gives each expression of His family, a unique calling for each season of ministry. We believe a new season is upon us as the Church of the Brethren; as this adventure unfolds, we believe God wants to send us forth with a fresh mission, rooted in His Word, marked by focus, energy, and faithfulness. That agenda is controlling our process.

How will a deep sense of spirituality be maintained throughout the process?

Members of the Compelling Vision Working Group and Process Team, as well as the Leadership Team and Council of District Executives, see this as a spiritual process for our denomination. While there are many logistics to manage, in the end we are ultimately trusting the movement of the Holy Spirit in the lives of each and every participant. We know that in the mystery of God’s work among us, our hearts can be united to go where God is calling us. We invite all to pray fervently for one another and for personal and communal transformation as we walk this journey together.

How will you ensure that every voice is heard?

The Process Team is committed to providing opportunities for all who wish to be part of the conversation to do so. In addition to Annual Conference, conversations will take place at denominational gatherings (including Young Adult Conference and National Youth Conference), within districts, and in other settings such as agency boards and staff. Every voice will be heard as we collect comments from each conversation. It is also our desire that these conversations build and strengthen relationships as we listen to one another and seek deeper understanding.

What is the origin of the Guiding Statement?

The Compelling Vision Working Group desired this process to be unquestionably centered and established on Jesus Christ. This statement of proclamation, intention, and invitation articulates the deep conviction of those leading this process and will guide for us through the final articulation of a vision centered on Jesus Christ.

How will district events be scheduled and publicized? Who will be invited to participate?

The Compelling Vision Process Team is working with each district to schedule events for Compelling Vision conversations. We trust that each district will be proactive in advertising these events to everyone in the district. All who consider themselves a part of the Church of the Brethren are invited to attend these events. You may attend an event in any district.

How will potential negativity expressed on social media outlets be addressed?

In every interaction, whether face-to-face or on a social media outlet, we encourage all to respond to one another with love and grace in the way of Jesus. We realize that entering a process where there are significant unknowns may push many into a place of negativity and skepticism. Leadership invites conversation around those fears and uncertainties, and we hope that all will become part of the conversation regardless of their misgivings about the process.

Will this process address ongoing matters of conflict?

This process is not designed to address with specificity ongoing matters of conflict. We anticipate that part of this journey toward a Compelling Vision will take us through conversations about the way forward from the place of conflict where we have long been stagnated. We believe to have a compelling vision together we will need to discover that way forward.

Will there be a place where updates on the process will be posted?

A “Compelling Vision” page at www.brethren.org will contain various items of information, links to Newsline articles, and a calendar of scheduled conversation times and places. Newsline will be utilized on a regular basis to provide updates.

How will the final product be developed and how will it impact the church?

Following Annual Conference 2019, the Compelling Vision Working Group and Process Team will come together to study the data collected throughout the past year to discern what the church is saying about our life together and how God is calling the Church of the Brethren to move into the future together. We hope this final product will be distinctive, directional, and compelling, drawing us together as we seek to embody it in all aspects of our life as the Church of the Brethren.

Once the Church of the Brethren has a compelling vision statement, how will it guide the denomination in practical terms? Will it be a mandatory governing statement or will it be elective?

The compelling vision statement ‘rises or falls’ on its ability, to indeed, be compelling. By compelling we mean: “...evoking interest, attention, or admiration in a powerfully irresistible way...” (Oxford Dictionary). Note the emphasis on powerful and irresistible. That suggests that the compelling vision’s ‘genius’ will be its ability to persuade with both charisma and substance. To that end, we pray the compelling vision outcome will be motivating for a strong majority of Brethren. The compelling vision process is not designed to impact the autonomy of districts and congregations. We are, however, striving for a vision that individuals, congregations, and districts will embrace and adopt as their own. The Church of the Brethren, Inc, the primary servant organization governed by Annual Conference, will use the compelling vision outcome as a guiding document for establishing mission priorities and parameters.