

Compelling Vision Conversation Questions Annual Conference 2021

Question 1

In her book, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Season*, Susan Beaumont speaks of the importance of tending the soul of the institution during liminal seasons. Referencing the work of Walter Wink, Beaumont points out that in the Book of Revelations, “the seven letters addressed to the seven churches in Asia Minor are each inscribed to the Angel of the church—as opposed to the people or the leaders of the church. The angels are more than a mere personification of the church; the angels represent the totality of the people, their history, their vocation, their personality, their destiny...(their) divine essence.” She goes on to make the distinction that the soul of an institution is NOT the voice of the leadership body, the culture of the organization, the spirituality of the organization, nor is it the movement of the Holy Spirit through the organization. She recognizes the difficulty in attempting to define something that is essentially mystery, but goes on to articulate the following definition for soul in relation to institutions: “The soul is an agent of the divine spark in the institution. The soul is the authentic and truest self of the institution; the source of its divine calling, character, and destiny; the protector of institutional integrity.” Let’s listen to that again. “The soul is the authentic and truest self of the institution; the source of its divine calling, character, and destiny; the protector of institutional integrity.” With this understanding of soul in mind...

How does the compelling vision reflect the soul of the Church of the Brethren?

Question 2

In Matthew 6:9-10 Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the following manner. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (NIV). What a vocation for congregations! We are called to live out God’s purposes and will as expressed in the heavenly sphere. Taking Jesus Christ into our neighborhood, as an expression of God’s will on earth, transforms lives, frees from bondage and sin, changes hopelessness into hope and brings the healing power of God into situations of struggle and discord. Let heaven come down.....

What are the needs in your community which might be healed by the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ?

Question 3

Jesus was more than just an itinerant teacher. His disciples called him “Master.” Their entire way of life changed when they made the choice to follow Jesus as the Lord of all. That is the essence of discipleship, submitting fully to the authority of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus says: “If

any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me". This call to discipleship is not just for a few, it is for all of us. The Apostle Paul often refers to Christ's followers as the "body of Christ", each member uniquely gifted, all working together to bear witness to the living Christ. In the Church of the Brethren, we claim a commitment to the priesthood of all believers, rooted in 1 Peter 2:9, where Christ's followers are identified as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" called to "proclaim the mighty acts of him who called (us) out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Consider the disciples who walked with Jesus Christ and the radical manner in which they lived out their call. They interacted with outcasts, they engaged others in unique ways, they were molded and shaped into evangelists, encouragers, empathizers, and those who empowered others. To be disciples in the 21st century, we need look no further than those first disciples and the cloud of witnesses that came after them. Disciples throughout the years have been innovative, adaptable, and fearless in their commitment to live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ with all they met. We can do no less.

How might we work at calling and equipping innovative, adaptable, and fearless disciples to live out the Jesus in the neighborhood vision?

Question 4

The body of Christ is called to be generous, sharing its resources with those in need. Many congregations quickly and enthusiastically gather food, clothing, and other resources to help those who face scarcity in relation to basic, physical needs. This vision calls us to go beyond meeting physical needs to a place where we, like Jesus Christ, are walking in authentic friendship with those who share our geographic neighborhoods. This means responding to needs and sharing our resources without partiality or condescension in the face of any differences, but rather with sensitivity, compassion, respect, and a genuine willingness to learn. It is grounded in a deep understanding that every human being stands in equal need of reconciliation with God, and when we have experienced that reconciliation, we become ministers of it through trusting, faithful, long-term relationships with our neighbors.

What are the challenges we might face as we live into the Jesus in the Neighborhood vision in our various contexts and communities?

Question 5

Nearly three centuries ago Alexander Mack said, "As their faith is so shall be their outcome," which in later years was popularly paraphrased among the Brethren as, "We will be known by the manner of our living." The idea that our genuine faith will be evidenced in our way of life has been integral to our heritage and teachings from our beginnings as Brethren.

Theologian and author Miroslav Volf writes: "...*(The) central challenge for pastoral ministry today concerns the most important mark of good ministry: the ability effectively to mediate faith*

as an integral way of life to persons, communities and cultures. This has been true throughout history, in every culture and for every community of faith. In our time, however, communities of faith seem to be falling short precisely at this point... (The) main problem is that the communities of faith have not found effective ways to offer a compelling vision of an integral way of life that is worth living. Many people are seeking precisely that."

Your congregation's way of life developed as a result of a vision, whether purposefully articulated or informally implied. That way of life is one of the greatest factors in determining a congregation's effectiveness in carrying out the work of Christ. As you think about your congregation's vision and the priorities around which you build your life together:

What new steps could your congregation take to more closely align your way of life with the Jesus in the Neighborhood vision?

Question 6

Three of the most effective words used by innovators and visionaries are "how might we..." And so, as we dream of a new future for the Church of the Brethren -- *how might we* be known if we truly embrace and live out our proposed compelling vision? To be specific: picture your congregation and our whole denomination living out "Jesus in the Neighborhood." What results are evident in *your* church's neighborhood and relational networks; what results are evident, as well, for our entire sisterhood/brotherhood as the Church of the Brethren? Scripture assures us, if we keep close to Jesus, we will bear much fruit. "I am the vine; you are the branches." Jesus reminds us in John 15. "The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit..." (John 15:5a, NET). And so, imagine what "fruit" might result, through Jesus, as we join Him in our neighborhood and relational networks!

How might we be known – both as congregations and as a denomination -- if we truly embrace and live out the vision of Jesus in the Neighborhood?