

"Developing the Vision Trail"

ASSISTING TEAM CENTRAL CONGREGATIONS
TO DISCOVER THEIR UNIQUE GOD GIVEN VISION



1

Discovery Point

DISCOVERY POINT

- Who am I?
- What are our team strengths?
- A unique discovery?
- Are we missional?

2

Dreamer's Outlook

DREAMER'S OUTLOOK

- The Goal: Dreaming God's Dream!
- How far can I see from here?
- Lord, teach me to dream again
- Examining "Our" Mission Field

3

Designer's Peak

DESIGNER'S PEAK

- God is the source of vision
- The power of *HERE*
- Celebrating Simple
- Transforming dreams into design

4

Developing Disciples Summit

DEVELOPING DISCIPLES SUMMIT

- "Go and Make Disciples" - Matthew 18
- Embrace the Perpetual Process
- Defining and redefining our vision
- Developing a personalized Vision Trail

“Developing Your Vision Trail”

Assisting Missional Churches in Clarifying Their God-given Vision

Objective: To resource congregations in discovering, clarifying, articulating and processing their personal God-given vision to reach the lost and develop disciples.

Relax

Don't panic. Calm down. Now, take a deep breath . . . e-x-h-a-l-e. Feel better? Anxiety washes over most preacher types when we sense someone is trying to sell us another widget. Me too. The world is filled with schizophrenic churches existing on canned programs. Without a plan or vision, a church's identity, focus and philosophy changes with the latest published “40 Days of Something”. Dizzied by moving target ministries, disillusioned believers are fleeing schizophrenic churches at a record breaking pace.

Vision Trail is not a program. The good news is that we are talking about a process that provides guidance in discovering, dreaming, designing and developing God's unique vision for each unique church. The district's role is to come along side pastors and congregations. The most significant thing I can do is to help you identify, pursue and celebrate God's Vision for the community of believers that you serve.

The journey before the journey

Elected DS in 2000, I served the first four years with the broad brush approach. Frustration was the monkey on my left shoulder and minimal results rode on the right. Committed to being all things to all people, yet deep in my heart I knew there had to be a better way. In September of 2004, I received a transfusion of hope while listening to Dr. Paul Borden speak at a DS gathering in Lansdale, Virginia. A Baptist judicatory in California, Borden's commitment to coaching and holding pastors accountable was what I was convinced needed to happen.

Arriving home, I immediately invited 30 pastors to join me for a day of prayer, dreaming and interaction. Group synergy and obvious presence of the Holy Spirit created an invaluable day for me personally and in the life of the Central Florida District. After 9-10 months of intense labor the **Building Stronger Initiative** was born. Ten pastors and congregations volunteered to commit to twenty-four months of assessment, accountability, team building and coaching. The majority experienced renewed strength, health and improved results. We were on our way.

Gratified but only partially satisfied with the BSI outcomes, the Lord continued to nudge me forward. As I desperately prayed, fasted, read and sought God's face, He was increasingly generous with His grace and guidance. I was convinced that He was leading me to assist congregations in clarifying their vision, writing an action plan and personally coaching them through the process.

In the summer of 2008, the Central Florida District DAB blessed me with a three month sabbatical. In addition, the Lord unexpectedly provided me with an executive coach and new friend, Jeff Doolittle. The timing was perfect. After 35 years of ministry, this break afforded me the opportunity to spend quality time in researching and developing a proposed course of action. A few weeks into my study leave, with a gifted coach and the guiding me, the pieces together, the *Vision Trail* concept began to evolve.

The Vision Trail

“Go and make disciples” (Matthew 29:19) could not be more clear. These four words are the church’s imperative. Jesus spoke clearly, succinctly and passionately. Developing disciples is His ultimate, nonnegotiable commission upon the church. Without connecting to God’s unique vision, congregations cannot develop disciples at their full potential.

“Every day local churches step either closer to or further away from becoming the movement that God has designed them to be.”(Will Mancini). Without a clearly articulated, God-anointed vision, the burning passion of becoming a disciple-making community too often fades and waxes cold. We ultimately have two choices; remain a slave to our ineffective efforts or actively seek to connect with God’s vision and the hope and victory that accompanies it.

God is all about vision – God is vision. Due to lots of talk and limited action, our eyes frequently glaze over when we hear the word *Vision*. The best news church leaders can hear is that God has a unique vision for every church on the planet. He is eagerly waiting to share an individualized disciple-developing vision with every congregation, pastor and leadership team. Not another program. Working through each congregation’s unique DNA, God awaits our invitation to help us begin the process of connecting to His personalized Vision for us.

Embarking on your personalized *Vision Trail* is actually pretty simple. On our quest to simplify the approach to reaching the lost and making disciples we will encounter four different guideposts. My goal is to personally coach 8-10 congregations who are willing to embark on their God-ordained *Vision Trail*.

1. **Discover:** Is all about determining who we are as individuals and leaders and how God can achieve His will, working through our personal and congregational strengths.
2. **Dream:** Allowing the Lord to speak and prepare us to embrace His unique vision.
3. **Design:** This step is extremely energizing! The discover stage actually brings us face to face with God’s unique, tailor-made vision for our congregation.
4. **Develop:** This point in the trail confirms that leadership is an unending developing process. We set goals and determine objectives while being flexible and responsive to shifts and changes along the way.

Working together, it will be important to pause at each marker to look, listen and learn how to jointly navigate this unfamiliar trail. Exploring this new pathway has introduced me to writers who have become my faceless new friends. I have read, perused, and scanned a backpack full of books over the past months. The six I have mined the deepest and borrowed from the most liberally are Church Unique, Will Mancini: Simple Church, Thom Rainer: There’s No I In Church, Keith Drury: The Power of Appreciative Inquiry, Diana Whitney: Practicing Greatness, Reggie McNeal and Strengths Finder 2.0, Tom Rath. I owe all of these authors my sincere gratitude in assisting with the design of the *Vision Trail*.

Larry D. Dennis
District Pastor, Central Florida District Churches of the Nazarene
January 2009



DISCOVER

If we let it, the discovery phase can turn back our biological clock to the happy and carefree days of childhood. Remember when everyday was a new adventure? When we faced each morning with a new sense of optimism and discovery? Reaching people and discipling believers is an unequalled adventure. The key is discovering God's vision for the community of believers we serve. The next step is to embark on the journey with Him as our guide. A long and rewarding walk awaits us.

A. Self Awareness. Who am I? God has endowed each congregation with a unique set of leaders gifted with distinct strengths and qualities. What strengths has God blessed your leadership team with? How has He equipped your team to accomplish the task before you?

1. [Gallup Strength Finders Survey](#) is one of the helpful tools available for assessing a team's Personal strengths.
2. Based on Tom Rath's book, [Strength Finders 2.0](#), leadership team members will discover how their strengths play a part in decision making and their role in developing disciples.
3. Ultimately our goal is for team members to unite together in the area of their God-given strengths, desiring to collectively accomplish the ultimate goal of developing disciples.
4. Over the past decade, Gallup has surveyed more than 10 million people worldwide on the topic of employee engagement (or how positive and productively people perform at work), and only one-third "strongly agree" with the statement: "*At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.*" And for those who do not get to focus on what they do best – their strengths – the costs are staggering. In a recent poll of more than 1,000 people, amount those who "*strongly disagreed*" or "*disagreed*" with this "*what I do best*" statement, not one single person was emotionally engaged on the job. (Tom Rath, p ii)
5. The good news is that when tasks are assigned to pastors and their leadership team that complement their strengths, everyone wins. As a result, the church becomes exponentially more successful at developing disciples.

B. Employ a professional assessment instrument for surveying the Congregation

1. Where are we right now as a congregation?
2. What our people thinking?
3. Do we really want to know what the Body of Christ has to say?

C. Rediscover our Uniqueness. God knew what He was doing. He uniquely created all of us. Unique people in unique cultures, with unique needs, attending and serving unique congregations. Amazing, there are 6 billion individuals on the planet, no two or us are exactly alike.

1. Where is the starting point for determining our church's distinctive future?
2. We begin by discovering and celebrating our uniqueness. A unique church in a unique setting.

In contrast to the church's question of identity, the post Christian era asks, "Now that our influence is gone, how do we reshape our self understanding so that we can be like Christ in the world?"

3. How much uniqueness is in your leadership team? Congregation?

4. Is it possible that all churches, big or small, have a unique DNA? A DNA impacted by the distinctiveness of each member of the Body? Location? Community? Geography? Culture? History?
5. Step back and imagine what God does when a group of leaders come together in His name. What unique gifts do your individual leaders possess?

“The starting point for vision -- for considering our church’s unique future -- is not deciding where we want to go or exploring what is working for other churches but understanding how we are unique.” ~ Mancini

George Barna celebrates uniqueness focusing on the, “*complex intermingling of knowledge, beliefs, values, assumptions, language, morals, rules, symbols, traditions, habits, relationships, rewards, and laws that provide meaning and identity to a group of people.*” Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro go a step further writing, “*Church culture is foundational to the life and witness of every church. Unfortunately too many church leaders fail to recognize or understand the implication of this reality.*”

D. Aptitude for Change. Dr. John Vaughn, Mega-church consultant writes, “*Churches grow in direct proportion to the congregation’s willingness to be uncomfortable.*”

1. Change flirts with us and frightens us. With accelerating speed transitions and changes are happening to every church.
2. Ready or not: Connecting to God’s vision will require a congregational openness to change. The following purported, letter to President Andrew Jackson reminds us that resistance to change is timeless:

“Mr. President, railroad carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of fifteen miles per hour by engines which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speeds.”

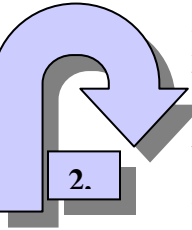
~Martin Van Buren, 1829, Governor of New York

3. Our response to such opportunities is critical to vision becoming reality.
4. Dr. John Maxwell often says, “*Until the pain of remaining the same exceeds the pain of change, there will be no change.*”

E. A Missional Mindset is synonymous with a Vision for Developing Disciples

1. To be Missional says that church is not something you do, or a place you go to, but what and who you are.
2. Our challenge is to move from a church with a mission to a Missional church.
3. Moving from doing to being is a seismic shift. This is a transformation **from methodology to identity.**
4. Mancini writes: “*Take your pick; from the boomer power-pastors of suburbia to the preaching punks of “emergia” and the collared intellectuals of “liturgia”, everyone wants to be Missional.*”
5. To be Missional says that the church is not something you do, or a place you go, but who you are. **Our challenge today is to move from a church with mission, but to Missional church.**
6. Becoming **intentionally Missional** is the reclaiming of our Apostolic Roots.
 - a. We reclaim our **sentness.**

- b. ‘Sent’ is used 24 times in the book of Acts . . . referring to the church sending out believers, reach the lost and make disciples. “...they placed their hands on them and *sent* them off”. Acts 13:2
- c. The true measure of a church today is **not its seating capacity but its sending capacity.**



DREAM

What a privilege and honor for God’s children to embrace the dream of being anointed spiritual leaders. Anointed leaders are purveyors of hope and God will use these leaders to bless people by taking them to new spiritual heights. Jesus illustrated this thought with an unforgettable visual image, “Neither do people **light** a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives **light** to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your **light** shine before men.” Matthew 5:15-16a

“You are faced with the option of greatness as a spiritual leader. You can choose . . . to settle for less. If you do you die a premature death. And rob others of the chance to live a better life. If you decide to go for greatness, it will cost you everything you have and are. You will have to surrender your life. Your days and years will belong to the one who believes in you so much that He has risked his agenda on you. You will die first, only to discover this is the way to life”
(Reggie McNeal, Practicing Greatness)

Are we willing to accept God’s invitation to take the chance and dream of being a God-anointed spiritual leader?

- A. Begin with Perfect: The Father’s Dream for us all.** The first and last two chapters (Genesis 1-2 & Revelation 21-22) in God’s Word give meaning to everything in between. Like bookends, these four chapters define utopia and remind us that man was created in God’s image and designed to eternally enjoy fellowship with Him.
 - 1. **Paradise Reclaimed.** Utopia can be defined by reading the first few chapters of Genesis and last two of Revelations. However, we are living between God’s ultimate Utopia in Genesis and Revelation, and have the clear realization that things are not as God intended they should be.
 - 2. Driven to make a difference, leaders **dream of transformation**, new hope and improved methods to develop disciples.
 - 3. Many Christian leaders today have reached a point of **sincere repentance**, acknowledging that we have traded the high calling of developing disciples for programs and gimmicks.
- B. Dreaming God’s Dream.** God still speaks – often His words are best heard when filtered through our own heart as we open up to the needs of others. We are at our best when God’s vision becomes ours and takes breath and shape through us.
- C. Everyone Dreams.** But less than 10% of dreamers ever wake up to act on their vision. God is waiting, maybe impatiently, but He is waiting for pastors and leaders to catch His vision and act on it.

D. God's Dream and Core Values:

1. It is critical that our **vision finds its source in God**. *"If after writing down a vision, you have no idea where it came from, it probably is not God's vision"* ~Mancini.
2. **Core Values Support our Vision**. Our vision journey will be little more than a walk around the block until we, as a local church, establish our Core Values.
3. Core Values are the unchanging ideals and beliefs that constitute our church's DNA.
4. The Core Values of the Church of the Nazarene are:
 - a. We are Christian
 - b. We are Missional
 - c. We are Holiness
5. Every local congregation must agree upon, embrace and articulate their church's core values. What are the basic, etched in granite unchanging values of our church?

Jim Collins, author of **Good to Great**, writes that enduring organizations have two dominant characteristics that are complementary opposites. **One** is a strong conviction about **core ideals that never** change. These are purpose and values. **Two** is a clear understanding that **everything else must change** in order to pre-serve the core. Collins describes this as *"A relentless drive to stimulate progress"*.

E. Granite Etching vs. Sand Writing

1. Etch some things in granite (never changing core values) and
2. Write some things in sand (must change methods).
3. In the absence of vision, the stuff of sand becomes the vision.
4. In the absence of granite, the stuff of sand is all we have.

"But what if our people were so captivated by the granite etching that it sets us free to play with sand drawings? The leader's role is not just to communicate in both granite and sand but to show how the two components work together." ~ Mancini



DESIGN

When we reach the Design marker on the vision trail the fun work begins. This point signals a new energizing and rewarding section of the trail. Clarifying and defining our *Vision Trail* will keep us on track and connected to our leadership team.

A . God's vision or ours? How about both?

1. What's special about God's vision is how it becomes ours, and lives in us.
2. God is the source of vision
3. We cannot strip the personal and visceral reality from the leader's life.

The vision of both God's and ours is where the work of the Holy Spirit moves us so completely that the distinction of our ownership blurs in our intimacy with Jesus.

B . The power of here: Focusing on our unique place and space. *"Most artists look for something fresh to paint. Frankly I find that quite boring. For me it is much more exciting finding fresh meaning in something familiar."* ~Andrew Wyeth

1. God often speaks through others.

We are surrounded by “*a great cloud of witnesses.*” Heb. 12. Every church has a *whispering legacy*, we are doomed to failure when we disregard and forget our unique story.

- A whispering legacy will motivate us.
- A whispering legacy will humble us.
- A whispering legacy will sharpen us.

2. We are called to Clarity.

“*Clarity is the preoccupation of the effective leader. If you do nothing else as a leader, be clear.*” ~Marcus Buckingham

- a) Clarifying the vision is about looking to the past as well as the future.
- b) Clarifying the vision is about identity.
- c) Clarity draws people to the vision.
- d) God is pure . . . He draws us to an unclouded vision.
- e) Clarifying the vision gives a clearer picture of what God is up to:
 - Clarity makes uniqueness undeniable.
 - Direction unquestionable.
 - Enthusiasm transferable.
 - Work meaningful.
 - Synergy possible.
 - Success definable.
 - Focus sustainable.
 - Leadership credible.
 - Uncertainty approachable.

C. Celebrate Simple. Thom Rainer’s, Simple Church: Returning to the Process For Making Disciples, is a true gift to every pastor and leadership team who is serious about developing disciples.

The world is screaming for simple while the church becomes more complex. Rainer suggests:

1. Design a simple process
2. After designing the process , place your ministries along the process trail
3. Unite all ministries around the process
4. Begin to eliminate things outside the process focus
5. **When less becomes more** everyone has more time and energy to **develop disciples**

D. Discovering our Discipling Design

1. The Discipling Design is the simple, clear ‘**Big Idea**’ that defines how your church will glorify God and make disciples.
2. This is how we develop disciples of Christ, for God’s ultimate honor.
3. After a life given to leading and discipling others, the energizing effect of connecting with our Discipling Design is captured in the life of Moses. “*Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone.*” Deuteronomy 34:7. Something dynamic happens when we connect with God’s vision for developing disciples.
4. The **Developing Disciples Diagram** below is an adaptation of Will Mancini’s *Kingdom Concept*. Basically, to begin the process we define our Mission Area, assess our strengths and embrace the Missional mindset.



1. Our Mission Area attempts to define our unique needs and opportunities where God has placed us. We begin by drawing a 1 to ½ mile circle around the church. It demands that we walk, bicycle, or ride public transportation in our Mission Area with eyes and hearts wide open. Next we make note and do a personal demographic study including:

- All local schools
- Colleges and Universities
- Community Centers
- Playgrounds
- Nursing homes and extended care facilities
- Daycares
- Employment Agencies
- Feeding ,clothing all types of assistance centers
- Gather places for the displaced and homeless
- Churches, Mosques, Synagogues
- Identify types of Residential housing communities
- Shopping Centers, office complexes, commercial businesses
- Police, fire and government centers

2. Is it possible that my vision could be alienated from where God has placed me? The answer is a definitive NO! We and our church have been sovereignly placed in our God-given Mission Area.

- What are the unique needs where God has placed us?
- How are these needs reflected socially, economically, ethnically, environmentally, politically, and religiously?
- What special opportunities are found within our immediate mission area? (½ mile)

- What burning issues are alive in the public's eye and brought to attention by the media?
- What needs and opportunities specific to the industries specific to our area create?
- What is the most significant change in our area in the past 10 years and what needs does that create?
- What are the largest community events and what opportunities does that create?
- How would we describe the atmosphere of lostness in our community?
- What is the founding story of our community and what insight does this afford?
- Does the history of our community bring to light any spiritual strongholds?
- What one positive change in our community would have the most dramatic effect in people's lives?

3. Mission Team Strengths

- a. This represents **the unique collection** of individuals in our church.
- b. What are the distinctive gifts and resources represented in the lives of our congregation?
 - Cooperative potential
 - Spiritual gifts
 - Fruits of the Spirit
 - Training and education
 - Shared experiences
 - Financial resources
 - Abilities
 - Common possessions
 - A unique anointing of the Holy Spirit
 - Vocational uniqueness
 - Equipment
 - Tools

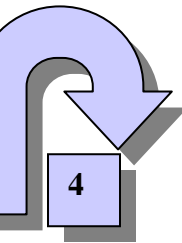
4. Our Missional Mindset

- a. Embracing our 'sentness'.
- b. Waking up every morning celebrating that we are missionaries.
- c. It's Not About Me . . . it's about **we, our, us!** How are **we** impacting our community?
- d. Missional Perspectives that contribute to the Apostolic Spirit
 - Spiritual gifts: Romans 12:3-8, I Corinthians 12:1-11, 1 Peter 4:10-11
 - Natural talents as inborn predispositions. Psalm 139:13-16
 - Strengths or motivated abilities that combine talents with knowledge, skills, experience & context.
 - Leadership orientation. Ephesians 4:12-16.
 - Special calling from God. Jeremiah 1:4-5, Acts 9:6
 - Maturity developed and witnessed through fruits of the Spirit.
 - Focus, compassion on the social concern, target area, or people group.
 - Impressions of the Holy Spirit in daily relationships with Christ.

3. Check-up quiz for our Missional Mindset. In Simple Church, Thom Rainer reminds us that we are to be managers of God's Grace. I Peter 4:10 puts it like this,

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others’ faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”

- After visiting our church several times how would a guest answer the question, “*What did you like most about the church?*”
- If you were bringing a friend to church for the first time, what promise would you make?
- If we were to poll non-attenders who drive by the church regularly and ask them their opinion about the church, what would they say?
- If our church closed its doors tomorrow what would our community feel is missing? Better yet, what could they not get along without?
- What is the biggest impact our church has made on the community?
- What is the most significant ministry inside our church? Outside?
- If we could only choose one ministry to do outside our church walls what would it be?



DEVELOP

We’ve been hard at work, Discovering, Dreaming and Designing. Now it’s time to construct our vision pathway...our plan for developing disciples.

A. Defining and Re-Defining our Vision

“Words create worlds.” Anonymous.

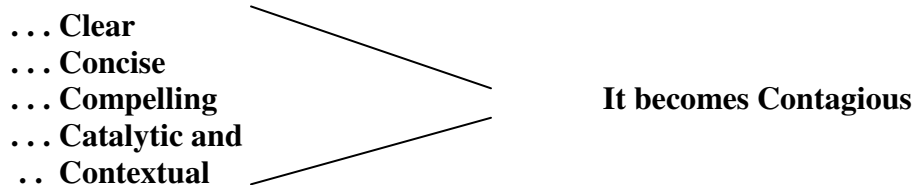
1. Can I define my church’s vision in ten words or less?

- a. The best kept clarity secret is that we say more by saying less.
- b. Fewer words that are well focused have further reach.

2. Do I have a clear understanding of our vision statement?

- **What?** . . . are we doing?
- **Why?** . . . are we doing it
- **How?** . . . are we doing?
- **When?** . . . will we get there?
- **Where?** . . . is God taking us?

4. When the Vision Statement becomes . . .



5. When our motives are clearly defined and adequately aligned we begin to clearly see the benefits:

- A good decision making process that releases leaders to the front line of ministry
- A Demonstrated God honoring unity
- Attract more staff, leaders and members who share our values
- Increase commitment because people know clearly what we stand for

- Enhance leadership credibility because everyone knows what’s most important in the church as a whole
- Change becomes easier due to the buy-in of the mission

“You won’t do ministry that really matters until you define what really matters.”
~Audrey Malphurs.

B. Developing an Uncomplicated map or vision trail is critical

“Churches with a simple process for reaching and maturing people are expanding the Kingdom . . . conversely; churches without a process or with a complicated process for making disciples are floundering. As a whole, cluttered and complex churches are not alive.” Thom Rainer

For example: A simplified outline of The Central Florida District’s reason for existence may be sketched out as follows:

Core Values Identify who we are	Vision Where we are going?	Mission Action Plan How we will we get there?
We are Christian We are Missional We are Holiness	Together, strengthening Team Central Churches and partnering with them in starting new ones	Training and Developing Leaders to discover their unique vision, make Disciples and lead Healthy churches

God’s unique vision for local churches is not complicated and burdensome. His Great Commission can be summed up in four little words, *“Go and make disciples”*. **Thom Rainer defines A Simple Church as**, *“A congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth”*. Sounds like the New Testament church to me. He sites four key components in beginning the process of developing a *Vision Trail* and making disciples, **1. Clarity 2. Movement 3. Alignment and 4. Focus.**

1. Clarity is the ability of the **process** to be communicated and understood by the people. Paul reminds us that we are builders of lives . . . *“If anyone’s work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward.”* (I Corinthians 3:12). Nothing lasting is built without blueprints. We cannot attempt to build spiritual lives without a clear ministry blueprint. The **process** is our blueprint and clarity is the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people. Churches will be ineffective and believers undisciplined unless a clearly defined process is in place.

A. Define. The beginning point is to define your process.

Church leaders must define more than the purpose (the what), they must also define the process (the how). People are more likely to progress through the process if they know and understand it.

1. Determine what kind of disciple you wish to produce in your church. For example one church defines their discipling goal as follows: *“Disciples who love God, love others and Serve the World”*

2. Describe your purpose as a process. *“Love God, Love others, Serve the World”*

3. Decide how each weekly ministry is part of the process. Ministries say what is important to us: therefore, we must define how each ministry is used to produce the kinds of disciples God has called us to make. For example: *“Love God”* in the process listed

above is defined by worship. So, in this disciple developing process, the first step is connecting future disciples to a worship service.

B. Illustrate. If we want our church members to see the simple process clearly, we must illustrate it.

1. The illustration should be reflective of our process.

2. The illustration should show progression.

3. The illustration should help simplify. If it is necessary to explain a lot of symbols and hidden meanings, the illustration is too complicated.

C. Measure . . . What gets evaluated gets done. We must learn to measure horizontally if we want to move people through the process.

D. Discuss it. . . The process must be discussed among the leaders consistently. If the hearts of the leaders do not beat passionately for it, the people will miss it.

E. Increase Understanding . . .

1. Articulate the process corporately

2. Share the process interpersonally

3. Live the process personally

2. Movement: Removing Congestion. Many churches are congested, spiritual movement is stifled. Churches should be filled with people who are becoming more like Christ, *“transformed into His likeness”* (II Corinthians 3:18). The goal is always for our people to be more like Him tomorrow than they are today.

A. Developing the process requires Strategic Programming

1. Begin with the clearly defined process.

2. Placing proposed ministries along the process brings clarity.

3. We must begin with the process not the ministries.

B. A Practical Illustration: Pastor Rocky Hambrick and the St. Petersburg Victory Church of the Nazarene have adopted the following Developing Disciples Vision. *“We are a community of believers helping people find Jesus, know Jesus, love and serve Jesus”*. Which is defined by Christ as, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”* Mark 12:30-31.

Committed to designing clear entry points into the process and identifying the next levels of discipleship development, the ongoing process looks something like this:

Finding Jesus is Evangelism. Members are encouraged to intentionally build bridges to family, friends and neighbors with the intention of modeling Christlike behavior before them. The ultimate goal is introducing them to Christ and connecting them to a regular worship experience at St. Pete Victory.

Knowing Jesus is Discipleship. Next, a clearly defined discipleship pathway is designed and identified as a vital part of the process. Small Group participation is critically important to their spiritual development but only one discipleship opportunity on the *Vision Trail*.

Loving Jesus and Serving Others, Focuses on the sanctified life, a growing love and devotion to God and a life of service to others. This part of the process designs clear entry points for believers who are desirous to deepen their faith. Disciples are introduced to spiritual disciplines and to opportunities of service that compliment God’s unique vision for the individual believer and the local church.

3. Alignment. This is the critical component that keeps things moving in the same direction. This mirrors the ongoing commitment to funnel all ministries through the agreed upon unique God-given congregational vision.

4. Focus. We really do want to be all things to all people. Pastors and leadership teams care about the needs of our community. But when we fail to recognize the target we are aiming at, it is impossible to accomplish our God-given vision.

Learning to just say no is often our most difficult lesson.

- a. A clearly defined process requires that we say no to ministries and programming that do not fall within the parameters of our agreed upon vision and process
- b. Many churches are littered with clutter
- c. Floundering programs and ministries are stored and piled on top of one another!
- d. Rainer writes, ‘Churches that eliminated programs were far more likely to excel in the focus element and be among the vibrant church groups.’

Change or Die

Researchers tell us there are over 300,000 protestant churches in the USA, 60 to 80% are plateaued or in decline, and the majority of these congregations did not receive one new convert last year into membership. Viability, effectiveness and discipleship are all contingent upon a congregation’s willingness to change. Thom Rainer concludes Simple Church with a quote that should grab our attention like a screaming smoke detector in the middle of the night.

“A recent medical study reveals just how difficult change is for people. Roughly 600,000 people have heart bypasses a year in America. These people are told after their bypasses that they must change their lifestyle. The heart bypass is a temporary fix. They must change their diet . . . quit smoking . . . exercise . . . reduce stress. In essence the doctors say, ‘Change or die.’

You would think that a near-death experience would forever grab the attention of the patients . . . sadly that is not the case. Ninety percent of the heart patients do not change . . . instead of making changes for life, they choose death . . . In the same way the majority of churches choose not to change. They would rather die. Tragically, in most churches, the pain of change is greater than the pain of ineffectiveness.”

(Rainer, page 229)

God has faithfully designed a unique vision for every community of believers on this planet. He has gifted each church with a uniquely gifted group of leaders. He has a plan for each church and a distinctive and gifted leadership to define and embrace His vision. Working and praying together, God stands ready and willing to help us articulate and carry out His vision for His church.

The *Vision Trail* Relationship between the Team Central Resource Center and Participating Pastors and their Congregations

The vision of the Central Florida Resource Center is to assist local congregations in discovering, dreaming, designing and developing their God-given vision. Positive Kingdom results will occur as congregations unite the Great Commission with their unique God-given vision by creating a *Vision Trail*.

Together, Developing the Vision Trail

Each year, eight to ten churches will be selected to participate in the *Vision Trail Plan*.

Participants will be selected from a pool of applicants according to the following expectations:

A. Suggested criteria for selecting Vision Trail Churches:

- 1) Leadership Teams that are willing to be fully engaged in the *Vision Trail Plan* by paying the price to initiate, change, growth, renewed health and community ministry awareness.
- 2) Pastors who are leaders, hungry to fully develop disciples.
- 3) Congregations who are passionate about connecting with God's unique vision for their local congregation.
- 4) Churches that can ultimately influence others.

B. All participants must commit to organizing and implementing a congregational wide prayer thrust as the foundational platform for rebirth and renewal. Unless an ongoing, Spirit anointed prayer thrust is the foundational stone, the *Vision Trail Plan* will morph into a program, rather than an initiative.

C. Participating churches will agree to:

1. Administer an assessment tool to the congregation that measures church health, congregational preferences, and mission success potential.
2. Organize and implement an extensive self-discovery demographic study of their mission area. Mission area will be defined as a one mile circle drawn around the local church.

D. The District Superintendent will individually coach the 8-10 participating congregations through the *Vision Trail Plan*.

1. All participating pastors will participate in a joint monthly meeting and training session with the *Vision Trail* pastors and the DS.
2. The DS will make himself available to meet with participating pastors and leadership teams on a monthly basis.

E. Writing a Mission Action Plan (MAP)

1. Upon the successful completion of the Church Assessment and Demographic Study with the assistance of their coach, the *Vision Trail* Team will begin writing a Mission Action Plan.
2. Once the team has completed the rough draft, a copy of the plan will be presented to the coach (DS), and will be shared with the other *Vision Trail* pastors.
3. The *Vision Trail* Team will collaborate and work closely with the coach to refine and reevaluate the plan. The Mission Action Plan will include:
 - a. Discover (Who are we?)
 - b. Dream (Where is God taking us?)

- c. Design (How are we going to get there?)
- d. Develop (What ongoing adjustments do we need to make?)

Once these questions are answered and agreed upon, the pastor and *Vision Trail* Team will meet regularly with their individual coach in a partnership effort to successfully write, implement and carry out the action plan.

F. Paying close attention to strength and health barometers is a critically important part of the initiative. Weekly statistical reports, faxed or emailed to the district office are an important component of the initiative. These regular reports will enable resource personnel and the church to track progress measured against short and long term goals listed in the above mentioned mission action plan. The following data will be posted on the Team Central website each week by a designated member of the local *Vision Trail* Team.

1. Leadership development
2. Visitors
3. Discipleship training
4. Percentage of attendees involved in ministry
5. Income
6. Number of small groups meeting
7. Worship attendance
8. Sunday School attendance

G. The minimal expectation is for those being ministered to on a regularly to increase by a minimum of 3% per year during the year following the focus period. It is also anticipated that congregations will receive new members and that there will be a continued multiplication of small groups. Should the growth results not be achieved, during the prescribed period, the Pastor agrees that it will possibly be in his/her and the congregation's best interest to seek a new ministry assignment. The twelve month, *Vision Trail* period actually begins following the completion of the church action plan.

H. Occasionally, when congregations are engaged in a revolutionary cycle of change, it may become difficult for some long term leaders to embrace ownership and to support the new course of action. Possibly, with the approval of the Senior Pastor and district superintendent, it may be in the best interest of the church and the leader in question to step aside from their leadership position.

I. Responsibility of the District Resource Center to the Participating *Vision Trail* Churches.

1. To see the Team Central mission become a reality. *"Together, strengthening Team Central churches and partner with them in starting new congregations."*
2. To resource participating churches with assessment tools in order to find a beginning point for renewal, growth and improved church health.
3. To make available personnel to help train, coach and mentor participating pastors and leadership team. Resource personnel will be available to the local leadership and pastor via group meetings, email, telephone and on site visits.
4. To provide ministry tools, not limited to but including, printed material, training DVDS, guest speakers and on site visits.