Black Ministries

NEW VISIONS
Congregational renewal and vitality
WHAT IS NEW VISIONS?

New Visions invites historically black communities of faith to share their journeys with one another and to gain sustenance as they engage in fellowship, learning, prayer, study and spiritual reflection. The New Visions Initiative is built upon the foundation of lifelong Christian formation and takes its purpose from several sources. We are a “sent” people, ordained by God, and as followers of Christ are duty bound to respond: “Go into the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15), and so we pray: “And now Father send us out into the world to do the work you have called us to do” (Book of Common Prayer, p. 366). It also is based in the statement of mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18), and “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord” (Book of Common Prayer, p. 366). This is all built upon the greatest commandment: “Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).
WHAT IS THE PURPOSE of NEW VISIONS?

The purpose of New Visions is to renew and revitalize communities of faith for engagement in God’s mission in the world and to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.


THE GENESIS of NEW VISIONS

Having recognized that approximately fifty percent of congregations are on a downward spiral, New Visions works to counter that using the concept of the congregational life cycle – the idea that congregations have a life cycle just as every living organism does. The New Visions Initiative asserts that the point at which it is tempting to reminisce and celebrate the status quo is the very place at which revisioning becomes necessary in order to prevent decline. (See illustration below.)

Without rebirth and renewal, decline is the natural tendency for most congregations. Rebirth and renewal are possible at different levels of decline, but they involve discovering a different purpose or ministry.
New visions covenant

Covenants are signed by clergy and lay leadership, bishops, and the Domestic & Foreign Missionary Society staff to solidify the relationships with the congregations on their journeys.

Leadership training

Leadership training is continued through the use of webinars and zoom meetings and revolves around topics that are identified as needed by the group.

Know your neighborhood

The Episcopal Church’s tool, Know Your Neighborhood, assists congregations in studying their own congregations and their own communities in order to plan for future ministries and interactions: [http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/studying-your-congregation-and-community](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/studying-your-congregation-and-community)

Research and statistical information can be found here: [http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/research-and-statistics](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/research-and-statistics)

The tool MissionInsite is a more expanded form of

HOW DOES NEW VISIONS FUNCTION?

This dynamic movement utilizes experienced clergy to serve as coaches/mentors/consultants to work in partnership with teams of clergy and lay leaders using adaptive change methods for transformation. Congregational teams attend consultations that include the following activities:

**SWOT analysis**

SWOT analysis determines a ministry or mission project and maps assets in order to match gifts to need. SWOT analysis encourages participants to consider and identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of a project or activity and then discuss them together.

**SMART goals**

The development of goals is necessary and goals should meet these criteria: Sustainable, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound.

**Mission statement**

Mission statements are reviewed for brevity and effectiveness.
community information taken from census results. The three tools above offer congregations insight into their communities.

**Neighborhood walk**

A walk through the neighborhood is at times surprising since church members may usually drive to and from worship. Walking provides the opportunity to become acquainted with potential ministry partners, people in the community, ministries that are currently taking place and ministries that may be missing.

**Asset mapping**

Following the neighborhood walk, it is time for the congregation to identify its gifts and resources including parish halls and the gifts and talents of the congregation members. The congregation can then determine how these gifts could be applied in various ways.

**Resource sharing**

Groups are encouraged to share success stories, best practices and helpful materials.

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**READING LIST**

Book discussions are held monthly via webinar and led by members of the core New Visions Team and other church leaders.

- *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church*, by Michael W. Foss
- *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church*, by Diana Butler Bass
- *Liturigical Life Principles*, by Ian S. Markham
- *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, by Alan J. Roxburgh
- *Pastor on Track*, by Emanuel Cleaver III
- *The Sacred Art of Listening: Forty Reflections for Cultivating a Spiritual Practice*, by Kay Lindahl
- *The U-Turn Church: New Direction for Health and Growth*, by Kevin G. Harney and Bob Bouwer
CONGREGATIONAL TIME LINE

This activity engages the entire congregation. Cover the walls of the parish hall with newsprint with dates that span 30 years. Parishioners can easily share their experiences of what was happening at a particular time within the congregation, the community and the world. The information gleaned from this activity provides insight into why things might be the way they are, what might have led to ongoing conflicts and how to provide avenues for change.

REPORTS AND EVALUATION

Congregations report their ongoing progress on how their committees and their other congregational involvement are coming along. They determine what’s working and what is not, they identify challenges and barriers, noting what needs to be replaced and how best to move forward. The congregations answer four questions: Where are you now? Where would you like to be in five years? What do you need to do to get there? What are you willing to give up to accomplish your goal?

MEETINGS AND NETWORKS

Periodic meetings provide the opportunity for holding general conversations, sharing practices that work, celebrating accomplishments, networking for collaboration and reporting on other aspects that are found to be helpful.
CONSULTATIONS

When clergy and lay leaders gather they begin to look at their congregation, consider a mission statement, set goals, envision the future, form committees, and understand the extensive and intensive work that is expected as a participant in the New Visions Initiative. Consultations also provide training in the following skills: problem solving, conflict management, group dynamics, team building and communications.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The program includes the discussion and implementation of a rule of life, spiritual classics and the Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation.

LANGUAGE

Language impacts the psyche in ways that we do not even realize. In New Visions, changing the words we use has proven to have great impact on attitudes and perceptions. Below is a list of words currently used and words suggested to replace them. This is not an exhaustive listing since this relearning is open-ended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current use</th>
<th>Change in usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congregation</td>
<td>Community of faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shut-in</td>
<td>Homebound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rector</td>
<td>Spiritual leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church facility</td>
<td>Center for mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laity</td>
<td>Saints, disciples</td>
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</tbody>
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LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

A Leadership Training Institute for Clergy and Lay Leaders is an essential part of the New Visions Initiative and includes training through online seminars, discussions, meetings and attendance at conferences. Topics for discussion and training include:

SWOT analysis

- Lifelong Christian formation
- Radical welcome and hospitality
- Group dynamics
- Problem solving
- Conflict management
- Financial management
- Worship and preaching

- Team building
- Webinars
- Administration as ministry
- Planning and implementation
- Church finance and stewardship
- Listening

MISSION

The conversation about mission connects us to why we exist as a church, the Body of Christ. We follow in the footsteps of Christ and exist not for ourselves but for others as we evangelize and share the good news of the Gospel. Participants are introduced to the Rising STARS Experience (RISE) as a potential mission project.

Additional activities include:

- Prayer development for the New Visions Initiative
- Bible study
- Community revivals
- Pew and pulpit exchanges
- Ministry with children, youth and young adults
- Indaba circles
FIVE REASONS TO PARTICIPATE

An opportunity to:
• Share your faith journey with others on the same path
• Attend consultations and meet your colleagues
• Develop strong relationships with partner congregations
• Work with a committed coach
• Make broader connections across the church

HOW DO I PARTICIPATE?

To participate in this dynamic movement, complete an enrollment form here and return to the Rev. Angela S. Ifill, The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, New York, 10017.