

Developing a Theological Vision

West End Presbyterian Church Theological Vision Team

November 21, 2014

What is a “Theological Vision”?

A Theological Vision is the middle ground articulation of “what we believe” (doctrinal foundations) and “what we do” (ministry expressions) as a local church. This is not a summary of the tenets of Christian faith, nor is it an action plan for ministry. Rather, our Theological Vision highlights how our church’s vision, mission and core value intersect with our community and particular cultural setting. It is an expressed vision for how WEPC desires to bring the Gospel to bear in the lives of our members, our neighbors, and our culture.

Why is a Theological Vision Important for WEPC?

We desire to give a Christ-centered reason for our ministry as a local church. A Theological Vision allows us to see our culture with new eyes and empowers us to not just react to or retreat from our context, but take initiative to understand and speak to our culture from the framework of the Scriptures. We hope that this vision stimulates new and creative approaches to reaching our community, jumpstarts new ministries, and encourages and unifies our missionally-minded worshippers.

What Undergirds WEPC’s Theological Vision?

WEPC’s Core Value is that the Gospel Changes Everything. The Scripture tells us that “the Gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (*Romans 1:16*). God has paid for our sins and given us new life by His grace alone. This has been accomplished, once and for all, through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. And this Good News changes absolutely everything.

There is not one person, relationship, situation, people group, culture or neighborhood that is so wrecked and sin-affected that it falls outside the redemptive mission of Jesus. No corner of our city and no dark chamber of the human heart can escape the Holy Spirit’s invasive and transforming work. The bold ministry of reconciliation that God has entrusted to His people advances in and through the Church. And we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

WEPC’s Vision is to be a Biblically Authentic Community of Faith Expressing Itself Through Love. God declares that “in Christ Jesus... the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (*Galatians 5:6*). His design is to change and redeem His broken creation. We boldly proclaim the Gospel to all people-- both believer and skeptic. And we recognize and are motivated by a captivating sense of God’s favor on the Church.

We believe that our God is growing a people marked by humility and confidence here at WEPC. A community that corporately finds its life and meaning in our passion to know Christ and demonstrate His grace toward one another. A fellowship that loves to follow wherever God leads and can’t help but boast in His salvation before the watching world.

We know that God’s design for us is that we are made more and more to look like Jesus. As the image of God is renewed in us, we eagerly give ourselves to His worship and work. That’s why we can only see ourselves as a people belonging to God participating in God’s purposes.

WEPC’s Mission is to Make Followers of Jesus who Bring the Gospel to Bear on Every Facet of Life and Culture. The congregation that is corporately amazed at their Heavenly Father’s boundless grace is revived. This moves us out in unified mission—in the Name of Jesus Christ, and in the strength of His Spirit. All the time, we are learning to say “Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts” (*Isaiah 26:8*).

Our vision as Christ’s community drives us to boldly participate in His redemptive ministry. We believe that individual and corporate renewal will ultimately lead to Metro Richmond transformation. WEPC is committed to the large-scale renewal of the place where God has planted us spiritually, socially and culturally. We seek to build strategic bridges between our church, our members, and our communities in which we live, work and play in order that the Gospel may radically influence our neighborhood and city.

A Balanced and Integrated Theological Vision

WEPC’s Theological Vision encourages us to pursue a balanced and faithful ministry on all fronts. The Good News of Jesus Christ not only changes individuals, it also bears fruit in the communities and culture where they live. Therefore, we teach our people to seek personal conversions, practice deep Christian community, engage in ministries of mercy and justice, and labor for the cultural renewal of Richmond. These ministry targets should not be seen as optional or independent, but complementary and fully Biblical.

To that end and as a means of expanding what we believe it means for us to pursue our mission as a church, we propose using the following framework:

WEPC’s Core Value, Vision & Mission	Four Ministry Fronts	Ministry Practice
“The Gospel Changes Everything”	Connecting People to God	Spiritual Formation
“A Biblically Authentic Community of Faith Expressing Itself Through Love”	Connecting People to One Another	Community
“Making Followers of Jesus...”	Connecting People to Our Neighborhood, City & World	Mission
“...Who Bring the Gospel to Bear on Every Facet of Life and Culture”	Connecting People to Our Work & Culture	Vocation

WEPC Theological Vision for Ministry:

It is WEPC's Priority to Connect People to God

To Belong at WEPC is to Worship God and Invite Others to do the Same

Corporate worship makes the Church different from any other institution. In worship, both adults and children are called to commune together with the living, triune God, and as a result are changed. The Scripture encourages us to gather in worship to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:23-25). At WEPC, worship provides an environment and vehicle for declaring the Gospel, informing non-believers and reminding believers that it is true, and strengthening the church to live in light of that Truth. We worship God in song, word and deed in response to His saving work for us.

We Expect Skeptics to Fall Under Conviction and be Persuaded through Authentic, Comprehensible, Christ-centered Worship

Corporate worship must engage the hearts and minds of believers and non-believers alike. This does not mean catering to tastes and preferences, but rather avoiding erecting barriers and distractions that inhibit worshipful connection. At WEPC, our worship is grounded in Biblical theology, draws on Reformed tradition, and applies the discipline and structure of liturgy. Our liturgy is not in a “high” tradition that requires detailed knowledge from worshipers, but rather is inspired by such traditions to provide logical organization and flow so that the purposes are clear and the service reflects the order of God’s creation. Our services blend an array of musical styles and traditions, not simply to reflect the diversity of church backgrounds of our worshipers, but in varied ways to instruct, exalt, lament, celebrate, encourage and remind the worshipper. Regardless of style, our music is intentionally selected to convey the rich truths of the Gospel and to reflect glory back to God. Administration of the sacraments -- baptism and the Lord’s Supper -- provides tangible evidence of the believer’s connection to God, is accompanied by explanation of purpose to remind all worshipers of our need for, and salvation in, Christ.

We Expect Believers to Encounter Jesus Christ in Worship, and Undergo a Re-orientation of their Hearts and Lives through Spirit-given Repentance and Faith

The preached Word is at the center of our worship: the Word of God and its interpretation informs and encourages the worshipper to examine the truths of Scripture, evaluate his own heart in light of those truths, and to better understand the power of the Gospel. In all that we do in corporate worship, we point to our common need for a Savior and the faithfulness of God in redeeming His creation through His only Son, Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the life of the Church is reflected in her worship, and specifically the ongoing conversions and evidence of sanctification among its worshipers.

And so, we pursue Spiritual Formation through Worship & Evangelism.

WEPC Theological Vision for Ministry:

It is WEPC's Priority to Connect People to One Another

To Belong at WEPC is to get Close Enough to Love One Another

At WEPC, community looks like a beehive of activity. We work, love, and walk together for the purpose of the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom in the world. It also shapes the development of our character as we learn and apply what we learn in small groups, serve within ministry teams, develop friendships, and lead our children to trust Jesus Christ. This community is marked by lively group gatherings characterized by visibly warm interactions between regulars and energetic welcoming of new attendees. Our gatherings are attractive places where the outsider is welcomed and the insider is challenged. Our community is attractive and “sticky”, where regular conversions occur and new people are quickly brought into ministry opportunities and small groups. Our ministry teams are a great place to see our community in action and are spontaneous, loving, open, outward-facing, and carrying out the mission of the church.

The Church is a Counter-Cultural Community on Mission

Connecting people to each other means bringing people into our Gospel centered community, where we know and love each other in counter-cultural ways. In this community, relationships trump money, power, social status, and achievement. We prioritize others above ourselves. We extend grace and forgiveness. We minister to each other and the community, energized by the power that comes from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Growing in grace happens through deep relationships where the implications of the Gospel are discovered and worked out practically. Defined Biblically, deep community is always formed around Christ's mission as we love and serve our neighbors who are different from us in a world of broken relationships.

The Church's Community Reflects God's Heart & Purpose

Our God is fundamentally relational. Before we were even aware, He knew, loved, and created us, and sent His Son to die in our place. Accordingly, as His followers, we demonstrate our connection with Jesus when we connect with others. This community is radically different from the culture around it. The Gospel breaks down walls of division between us. He is building a new community that transcends typical human divisions, breaking down fear and pride. The Scripture commands us to love, encourage and serve one another and we are called to live out of service, not selfishness. We are also called to holiness, and our community provides mutual accountability and discipline. We were created for community.

And so, we pursue Community through Discipleship & Fellowship.

WEPC Theological Vision for Ministry:

It is WEPC's Priority to Connect People to our Neighborhood, City & World

To Belong at WEPC is to Take Part in the Mission of the Church

This is most profoundly seen in our being sent into the world as Jesus was sent by His Heavenly Father (John 17:18).

The Church has a Message for the World

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He commissioned His followers to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe everything that He had commanded, with the power and promise of His presence until He returns again (Matthew 28:18-20). We believe, therefore, that WEPC should labor to winsomely persuade people to trust Jesus Christ for salvation. The Scripture tells us that God has paid for all our sins and given us new life by His grace alone. This has been accomplished, once and for all, through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Church Exists for Others

It is the heart and nature of the church to exist for the sake of the world, and not for its own sake. God has always blessed His people to in turn multiply blessings to others (Gen 12:2; Jer 29:4-7). The ultimate blessing of the Good News spread from the first Christians to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; Rev 5:9-10). So, WEPC exists for Our Neighbors, Our City & Our World:

WEPC is called to serve Christ in our immediate neighborhood. We rejoice in the rich diversity and complexity of our neighborhood and the unique opportunities for the ministry of Word & Deed delivered close at hand in the West End of Richmond. We rejoice that the world has come to us through many cultures represented here. We enjoy unique Gospel partnership with believers from all over the world.

WEPC is called to minister in the greater Metro Richmond area in partnership with other churches and ministries. It is impossible to minister effectively in our area without giving attention to the unique needs, opportunities and challenges of the city itself. Too often the church has distanced itself from the needs of our city, seeing them only as centers of crime, poverty and corruption. But the city of Richmond is our primary mission field, and we believe that the Lord Jesus has a redemptive plan for it. Church planting is of first importance to saturate Metro Richmond with the Gospel. We long to see Metro Richmond full of His churches and reflecting the beauty of Christ's redemption.

WEPC is called to take part in Jesus Christ's worldwide mission in partnership with other like-minded missions and church plants.

And so, we pursue God's Mission through Church Planting & Ministries of Mercy.

WEPC Theological Vision for Ministry:

It is WEPC's Priority to Connect People to their Work & Culture

To Belong at WEPC is to be God's Fellow Worker

The Scripture reminds us that “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). Every aspect of the life of the believer is impacted by the Gospel. Our hearts, minds, souls, relationships, exercise, work, play, worship and rest are all interrelated and changed by the power of Jesus. It is most remarkable that we in the Church are now “God's fellow workers” to bless the world (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Your Work Matters to God

We will prayerfully engage people in their calling, challenging individuals to see that their work matters to God. We desire to see in WEPC a movement of believers integrating their faith with their work as a means of God's grace and mercy. And in so doing, we will be transformative agents through our vocations for the glory of God.

The Church is Salt and Light for the World

We also desire to see a movement of Christians impacting the greater culture as they follow Jesus. The Church serves as “salt and light” within our spheres of influence in the world. Jesus prayed for us, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of this world, just as I am not of this world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” (John 17:15-18). As Jesus' disciples, the Church is not to be cut off from the world and culture, but is to be sent into it as a blessing.

And so, we pursue our Vocation through the Integration of Faith, Work & Cultural Engagement.

A Final Word

We recognize that we are a partner congregation in an organic network of churches, and we don't want to be an autonomous “superchurch”. A partnership of Christ-centered churches saturating Richmond will have a deep and diverse impact on our city for decades upon decades. We remember that the purpose of the church is to be the front line for the advancing Kingdom of Jesus. We are tempted to feel false obligation to do it all. But only an outward-facing, dynamic, interdependent family of churches in partnership with strategic ministries will have the variety to reach into every neighborhood, culture, people, language and economic class of Richmond and the surrounding counties. Because of this, we are actively collaborating with other local congregations—both inside and outside our denomination—to advance the work of the Gospel.

In the process of developing a theological vision, the WEPC Theological Vision Team utilized Redeemer City to City & Tim Keller's Center Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

Members of the WEPC Theological Vision Team include Joe Brown, Tim Cornwell, Shangwok Deng, Max Doerfler, Kevin Greene, Roger Johnson, Steve Shelby and team leader Gary Witthoefft.