

God Gives the Vision

Vision comes from God! Vision lifts our gaze beyond the routines of every day so we glimpse the magnificent future to which God calls us. Vision connects us with God's redemptive work in the world and calls us to join in what God is doing with renewed spiritual vigor.

God's vision is rarely revealed to the inattentive. With all the busyness and noise in our lives, it takes stillness and focus to prayerfully discern God's leadership. The South Georgia Annual Conference sought a measure of stillness and focus as we engaged in a period of spiritual discernment in 2002 and 2003. Participants at the 2002 Annual Conference session joined in Bible study around three primary Bible passages.

First, we studied how the child Samuel received a vision after saying, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3). The vision God gave Samuel was bold and breathtaking. The vision disturbed and judged many, but the vision pointed to new life for God's people.

We then studied the Great Commandment and the Great Commission (Matthew 22:36-40; Matthew 28:18-20). These passages revealed a significant gap between where we are in living out our faith and God's high calling.

The Conference's Leadership Forum continued the discernment process during the next year and presented a Vision statement and an Action Plan to the 2003 Annual Conference. The Conference enthusiastically embraced the vision and the ministry direction it offers.

We are now living into the vision! This statement is dynamic. Many have lifted their sights above the routine patterns of living and doing ministry as they have lived with and lingered around each word in the vision statement. God has used these words to stir our spiritual imaginations to envision the breathtaking future God has for South Georgia United Methodism.

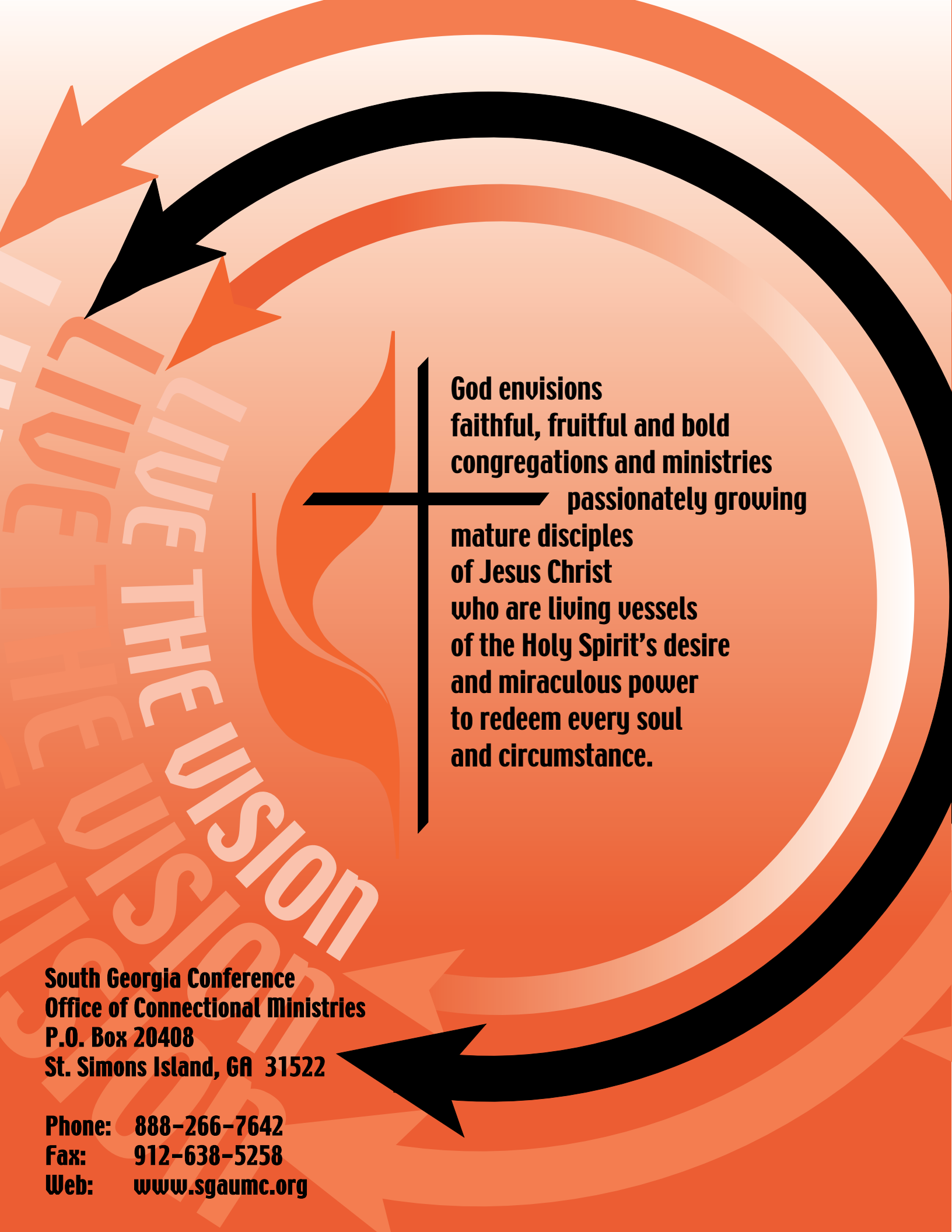
This document is designed to remind us all of our Conference's vision-led journey. I invite every person, congregation and ministry to join in this spiritual adventure. I urge you to read and pray through this document as one way to embrace anew God's awesome invitation for each of us to join in Holy Spirit's redemptive work for every soul and circumstance.



Bishop Mike Watson

Mike Watson

*Resident Bishop
South Georgia Area*



**God envisions
faithful, fruitful and bold
congregations and ministries
passionately growing
mature disciples
of Jesus Christ
who are living vessels
of the Holy Spirit's desire
and miraculous power
to redeem every soul
and circumstance.**

**South Georgia Conference
Office of Connectional Ministries
P.O. Box 20408
St. Simons Island, GA 31522**

**Phone: 888-266-7642
Fax: 912-638-5258
Web: www.sgaumc.org**



LIVE THE VISION

LIVE THE VISION

LIVE THE VISION

LIVE THE VISION

Spiritual Longings For More

Over one thousand people studied the Great Commandment and Great Commission Bible passages during the 2002 Annual Conference session in Albany, Georgia. It was a remarkable thing to watch this large group break into smaller groups for guided discussion around two benchmark Biblical texts.

The Great Commandment

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ That is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39)

The Great Commission

“Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28: 19-20)

The conversation focused around three questions. We invited the group to reflect on these questions in light of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

- How would my life be different if I fully lived out these passages?
- How would our conference be different if we fully lived out these passages?
- In what areas is God calling for us to respond with urgency, risk-taking faith, and long-term obedience?

It didn't take long for us to see that God has so much more in mind for us! There is a significant gap between where we are in living out our faith and God's high calling. The world is in need of God's redemptive touch, and God has some pretty high expectations of how we fit into this redemptive activity.

In fact, we came to understand that the Holy Spirit was stirring up within us, individually and collectively, what we have come to call spiritual longings for more.

Considering the responses from over 1,000 participants in the bible study in Albany, we discerned a list of longings for more.

We Long for More...

- More spiritual passion
- More depth of relationship with God
- More faith
- More intentionality
- More confidence
- More focus on essentials of salvation
- More unity and genuine love
- More appreciation of diversity

- More faith sharing
- More sacrifice
- More vitality
- More risk-taking
- More submission
- More obedience
- More spiritual power
- More going beyond our comfort zone
- More support
- More generosity
- More leadership
- More fruit-bearing

One person summed up our longings with these words, “*What we long for is more to our churches than Sunday and the sanctuary.*”

God's Longings for Us

We all know there is much more to life in Christ than what we are presently experiencing. The more we prayed and discussed these God-inspired longings, the more clearly we came to understand that ultimately these are also God's longings for us!

The longings for more became the means by which God's high calling for each member and every congregation and ministry became clearer. In fact, as we prayed through these longings we were led to imagine what our life would be like if God fulfilled each longing. When we use our spiritual imagination's we begin to glimpse God's vision for South Georgia United Methodism.

*God envisions
faithful, fruitful and bold
congregations and ministries
passionately growing mature disciples
of Jesus Christ
who are living vessels
of the Holy Spirit's
desire and miraculous power
to redeem every
soul and circumstance.*

The words of this statement were written in a genuine attempt to communicate deeply-held spiritual convictions about God's call for each of us. Like St. John, who tried to tell others about his visionary glimpse of heaven, our limited vocabulary restrains our description of the awesome future we envision through eyes of faith.

An Invitation for You

Each word of the vision statement has a depth and richness that we pray you will explore. We invite you to spend time reflecting on the vision statement. We offer these questions and references to aid you in finding your place in the vision.

Faithful, Fruitful and Bold

What does it mean to be faithful, fruitful and bold? What adjectives could you use to describe each aspect of this calling? What Biblical examples help express these powerful aspects of our calling?



Faithful means to be full of faith, believing, obedient, unwavering, dutiful, uncompromising, firm, unyielding, constant, trusting, trustworthy, authentic, rock-solid, steady, loyal, and fervent. We all have a degree of faith--but we have a greater capacity for faith.

Fruitful means to be ripe, productive, rich, tasty, appealing, healthy, nutritious, obvious, relevant, results-oriented, reproductive, measurable, abundance, seed producing, and generating the desired outcome. We have all had periods of fruitfulness--but we can still bear much more spiritual fruit.

Bold means to be confident, against all odds, determined, looking forward, valiant, assured, brave, daring, courageous, and bodacious. We all have had our moments of spiritual boldness--but we still have much timidity to overcome.

One Bible passage that poignantly sums up God's call for us to be faithful, fruitful and bold is the Parable of the Talents found in Matthew 25:14-30. Three servants were given various property over which to exercise stewardship. Two demonstrated appropriate stewardship by doubling the value while the Master was away. The third steward played it safe and buried the property so he wouldn't lose that which had been placed in his care.

In this passage, faithfulness is portrayed as doing what the Master would do if the Master were here. Fruitfulness is shown by the servants who wanted to have something to show for their period of stewardship. Boldness is illustrated by the two stewards who take risks based on the Master's high expectations, rather than playing it safe.

What would your church look like if every member was fully committed to being faithful, fruitful and bold? What one or two things can you begin doing in your life right now to demonstrate a greater desire to be faithful, fruitful and bold?

Passionately Growing Mature Disciples

God's mission for the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28: 16-20). What would it look like if your church were passionate about disciple-making? We would have an all consuming focus on this primary task:

Making Disciples – An Ongoing Process

- *Seek, welcome and gather persons into the body of Christ;*
- *Lead people to make a commitment to God in Jesus Christ and be baptized;*
- *Nurture people in Christian living through prayer, worship, Bible and other studies, the Sacraments, and the other means of grace;*
- *Send people out to live lovingly and justly as Christ's representatives; and*
- *Continue the process of seeking, welcoming and gathering people into the body of Christ.*

(¶ 122, The Book of Discipline, 2004)

What would your church look like if you were passionate about growing mature disciples? We would be enthusiastic, energetic, committed, constantly striving, magnetic in our drawing others to faith, disciplined, going over and above, and extravagant in our efforts to help people at all stages of the faith journey.

Is your church passionate about disciple-making? How are you focusing on bringing people to New Life in Jesus? What are you doing to nurture folks into a deeper walk of faith? How many disciples are showing evidence of maturing faith in your church? What is your spiritual maturity?

Living Vessels of the Holy Spirit's Desire and Miraculous Power to Redeem Every Soul and Circumstance

Before the beginning, God had a vision for the creation. When God created, everything was very good. It was not just the absence of the bad or blemished, it was the very best!

Life portrayed in the Garden of Eden was beautiful. All creatures and plants experienced well-being. Everything was interdependent and interconnected. Abundance was evident. Peace filled the whole creation. Innocence permeated everything that existed, except for the serpent.

One more aspect must have filled God's heart's desire when formulating the creation vision: the gift of intimacy with God. The image of Adam and Eve in close fellowship with God is profound. It was God's vision to have creatures and the creation enjoy such intimacy and blessing.

The Hebrews have a word that describes this state of being: Shalom. The English language weakly translates Shalom into peace. Shalom expresses the richness and vastness of God's best intentions for the whole world.

Of course, sin entered the picture and destroyed the pure Shalom of Eden and the whole creation. Sin, however, did not eliminate God's vision.

It is God's heart's desire that every soul and circumstance be redeemed. In fact, the Bible records God's efforts to restore the creation to the original vision of Shalom.

The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ is the most dramatic of God's interventions to-date. Yet, every day the Holy Spirit is at work awakening, convicting, justifying and sanctifying people all over the world. Ultimately, God will radically establish the Reign of God, as promised, in pure Shalom.

What images from the Bible communicate God's plan for us to be Living Vessels of God's desire and miraculous power to redeem every soul and circumstance?

"So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

(2 Corinthians 5:15-20)

The Apostle Paul understood the role we were created to play in God's redemptive work. Both Paul and we understand that God through Jesus Christ does the redeeming! But, God uses us in the redemptive process to communicate the Holy Spirit's heart's desire to restore Shalom--and to be the living vessel through which miraculous power can flow.

Whether we call ourselves ambassadors for Christ or the Body of Christ or Living Vessels, God is making His appeal through us. As we gather and scatter we are the channels through which the Holy Spirit moves to redeem souls and circumstances.

What are some ways your church calls forth the gifts of your members to be Living Vessels of God's redemption? How are you expressing the Holy Spirit's desire to redeem every soul and circumstance? How have you seen the Holy Spirit's miraculous power flow through the expanded ministries of your Church?

The Vision-Guided Journey

This vision guides our journey into the future. The South Georgia Annual Conference leaders are intentional about viewing everything through the lens of the Vision God has given us. Leaders are grateful for our spiritual ancestors who brought us to this place in our spiritual journey, while recognizing the significant gap between where we are and where God is calling us. We are mindful of our period of stewardship and want to be found faithful, fruitful and bold--all to the glory of Jesus Christ.

We invite you to join in this journey. What a sacred privilege God has given us to join with countless other humans who

since the days of Eden have been God's choice instruments in redeeming souls and circumstances and introducing others to Shalom.

Here are five different ways your church or ministry can intentionally engage in living the Vision:

Embrace the Vision

Spend time teaching and praying the vision and exploring the vast dimensions of the spiritual future to which God calls us.

Live the Vision

Find your place in this vision. In what areas does God stir you to expand your life of faith as an individual and as a congregation?

Be a Vision-driven Congregation or Ministry

Allow this conference vision statement to become a guiding force in what you do. What new aspect of ministry is God calling you toward so that you become more faithful, fruitful and bold? What would you need to give up in your ministry in order to more fully realize the fulfillment of God's vision? Vision-driven congregations and ministries make the tough choices because they are consumed with an all consuming focus on disciple-making.

Monitor the Vision Benchmarks

Each congregation is asked to complete a Benchmarks Report each year for Charge Conference. This report seeks information about the disciple-making efforts of your church. We encourage local church leaders to accurately complete this report and use the information gathered to focus your ministry efforts for the coming year. The Benchmark report is taken seriously by the Bishop, Cabinet and other conference leaders to monitor our conference's efforts and fruitfulness.

Be Stewards of the Vision

Nehemiah led the people of God in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Disruption and dissonance emerged mid-way into the efforts. Unforeseen external and internal challenges brought the construction process to a screeching halt. Nehemiah did two very important things: he reminded people of the Vision and he made mid-course adjustments. His adjustments took seriously the concerns raised without abandoning the vision. Ongoing stewardship of the vision is needed by spiritual leaders from every segment of our Annual Conference. We need to constantly remind each other of why we are doing what we are doing and to make necessary adjustments without abandoning the vision.