

“Fourteen Years”

By Doug Hamilton

Part 2: Fourteen Years for the Future

Review:

In the last lesson on August 14th I celebrated my fourteenth year of service in the Camp Hill congregation. Using Galatians 2:1 and 2 Corinthians 12:2, we respectfully covered Paul’s fourteen year recollection of the past and his vision of the future. Paralleling the pattern, we covered the wonderful past fourteen years of Camp Hill’s efforts for the kingdom. Your love for the Lord and his saints has made a difference in the lives of so many. In my eyes we have one of the most loving, caring and encouraging assemblies in the brotherhood.

Lord willing, you willing and me willing, fourteen years from now, if I am still here, I will be sixty-five years old and nearing the closing years of my service to God on this earth. We only have one life to live for the Lord and be influential for His Kingdom.

A Vision is Key to Success for the Future.

We are told in Proverbs 29:18, “Where *there is* no vision, the people perish...” What is a vision in terms of planning for a group of people? According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, a vision is *the act or power of imagination*. Concerning a church family, it is the collective ability of the group to see realistic big picture of the future of the congregation and the steps necessary to carry it out. A vision is the collective mission which drives the church family to success.

What is the Vision for Camp Hill Church of Christ?

The Envisioned House

There was a man who had an exceptionally beautiful home for him and his family. It was one of the finest homes in the community. The man did not inherit or buy a finished home in the beginning, but simply possessed some land and a vision for the future. His “vision home” had a basement, wooden floors, a fireplace, vaulted ceilings and much living space. Even though he did not have all the funds to build it right away, he did not let go of the vision.

- 1) He saved up to by the permits and pour the foundation in year one.
- 2) He saved up again and built the framework for year two.
- 3) He saved up again and put in the windows and a roof on year three.
- 4) He saved more and put in some wiring and heat in year four.
- 5) He accumulated some more funds and put in the drywall and woodwork for year five.

It took over seven years to build his dream home, but in the end the vision had become reality. Even when it seemed like it would never get done, he pressed through all the difficulties by hanging onto the vision of the day he would move into his home.

We all have images of what our future holds for us. It is when we clearly define the vision, write down the objective and set forth on the path of fulfilling it, then they possess a true vision.

“Fourteen Years”

By Doug Hamilton

Having a vision is not just seeing the future, but PLANNING to allow it to become reality. It is the vision which drives the people.

- A young man who envisioned a career as a physician would have used that vision to study hard and move through medical school.
- The Olympic athlete who envisioned himself on the gold medal platform would have practiced hard and competed with hope.
- Even a Christian who envisions heaven will find the strength to press on. *Philippians 3:13-14, “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

In the same way that individuals have a vision, church families are also expected to possess the same. It was like that from the very beginning of the church.

The first-century church had a vision.

According to Matthew 28:19-20, the first-century church had a two-fold vision. It was an evangelistic vision (baptizing) and a retentive vision (teaching).

- Mark 16:15, “Preach the gospel to all creation...”
- Acts 10:42, “And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.”
- Luke 24:46-47, “the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

They envisioned a worldwide mission for the spreading of the gospel and it spread out from “Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). They received this vision from Jesus Christ, the greatest visionary all. Even though they would face many obstacles in the path of their vision, they overcame and the end goal was attained.

- From the very beginning in Acts 2, the vision was met with disdain on the day of Pentecost. Peter and the rest of the apostles kept preaching and teaching. By the end 3,000 souls were added to the church and they were being nurtured in their relationship with Christ. Acts 2:47, “*And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*
- In Acts 4 the Jews were becoming hostile, but the conversions numbered over five thousand (4:4). The Jewish Supreme Court moved to end the vision through intimidation and persecution, but they continued to speak the word of God with boldness (4:31).
- When poor economic times had come upon the church in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 5, they did not surrender their two-fold vision of evangelism and retaining the converts through instruction. They simply began to pool their resources and continued to add to their number (5:14).

“Fourteen Years”

By Doug Hamilton

- Later on in the same chapter there was a law passed by the Jews which forbid their vision by banning the preaching and teaching in Jesus’ name. The apostle’s said we will follow God and not man. They refused to stop pursuing the vision. *Acts 5:42, “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”*
- In Acts 6 there arose division from within the church family concerning the ministry of the Hebrew and Proselyte widows. The apostles refused to let this get in the way of the ministry, for that was part of the vision. They overcame the obstacle by appoint seven proselyte deacons to tend to the tables and the vision remained intact. *Acts 6:7, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”*
- When the Christians faced even greater persecution and death in Acts chapters 7 and 8, they did not give up their vision. They simply expanded it. *Act 8:4, “Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.”*

Throughout the entire New Testament the vision stayed the same, evangelize and retain the converts through instruction. It has been estimated by some that by the end of the first-century that twenty-five percent of the Roman Empire had already been converted. When a church has a vision and it is embraced by the leaders and the followers, there will be success.

What is the Vision for Camp Hill Church of Christ?

It should be the same as the first-century church, the second century church, the third-century church and all other century churches. We are to have the vision of expanding the kingdom of God through the two-fold process of evangelizing and education for retention of the converts (Matthew 28:19-20). The vision is already defined for us, but we must be able to more clearly and realistically define it.

The Visionless Obstetrician

Many years ago there was a teenager named Gary. He was not a promising student in high school and his father asked him to try and come up with a life plan. One day young Gary came home and announced that he was going to be an obstetrician because they can make a lot of money. His father asked him, “What exactly is involved in becoming an obstetrician?” Gary said, “Well first of all I will have to make it through high school and that is questionable. After that I will need to go do four years of undergraduate college, then four more years of medical school, a few more years of specialty and then a one or two year internship. After that, then I will be an obstetrician!”

Gary’s father, a man who did not graduate middle school, lowered his voice in reply, “By the time you make it through the four years of undergrad, four years of medical school, three years of specialty and a two year internship, they will have already found a cure for it.” Needless to say young Gary no longer had a vision to become an obstetrician for it was not realistic.

“Fourteen Years”

By Doug Hamilton

What is the Vision for Camp Hill Church of Christ?

Three Vision Techniques for Expanding the Kingdom in Our Area

1) Cold Plant Method

This method might work in areas where there is no congregation of the Lord's church. A group of churches will pool together talent and resources, bring in a missionary or missionaries and then evangelize the community. In this case if we wanted to plant a new congregation in Dillsburg, then we could team up with the Gettysburg and Carlisle congregations, pool some talent and evangelize the Dillsburg area. Perhaps there would be a location for meeting picked and leaders from the three congregations heading up the mission. The difficulty with this is that often congregations do not work together because of their collective lack of vision.

2) New Building Method

Since I come from Iowa, the location of the Field of Dreams, we are used to the saying, *Build it and they will come*. This method works well in some foreign rural areas of the world, but really carries with it some very big problems. First of all it can be very, very expensive. Today in our area, to buy the land and build a structure for a congregation of 400 would be more than ten million dollars. Most congregations of the Lord's church, which are under 100 members do not have near the funds to do this. Also this tends to put all the congregation's “eggs in one basket”, bringing great risk to the body as a whole.

3) Church Plant Method

This is the most viable form a vision because it does not require the building of expensive structures and is handled in house concerning the initial structuring. This is the vision I most favor as based on our thorough research from a decade ago. Here is how it would work:

- a) Target a particular area, for example Dillsburg or Halifax. It is preferable to do so in areas where you already have a presence from the congregation. Set up studies and events in those areas and begin to evangelize.
- b) When there are converts in those areas we must make sure to relay the vision to them as well. They must know that we are planning to plant a congregation in their area, but for now they can worship with the other saints at Camp Hill.
- c) When the congregation approaches about 300 to 350, then take these people along with some of the developed leaders and plant a seed a new autonomous congregation in the community closer to their home.
- d) Once that congregation is on their feet then repeat it again in another targeted area. This method make it possible to surround yourselves with many congregations, elderships and church planters.

There is a fourth method, but we should in no way desire it. It is the vision of having no vision. That type of congregation will eventually die out like the aspiring and visionless doctor, athlete

“Fourteen Years”

By Doug Hamilton

or even a visionless Christian. Not having a vision is NOT a vision, but a prescription to failure in the end.

It is the “church plant method” which I possess as my vision, but what is our vision together. What is the Vision for Camp Hill Church of Christ? Do you like the third method as well, but are fearful of some of the many obstacles for which we might encounter?

This is what this evening’s lesson will be about. The third part of this will be an open discussion to focus what should be our vision for Camp Hill Church of Christ. We will struggle together to answer these four questions:

1. Will we have a collective vision for the church in Camp Hill?
2. What will this vision be?
3. What will be the important mechanisms for the vision?
4. What will be the primary obstacles of the vision and how will they be overcome?