



# CHURCHES ALIVE

## A Transformational Visioning Program Offered by the Massachusetts Conference

*“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” ~Harriet Tubman*

Over the last few years the MA Conference has been researching a variety of approaches to visioning and vitality for churches. We believe that this is a profound time for change in the landscape of religion in our world. We also believe that it is possible for our churches to have what Jeremiah described as ‘a future and a hope.’ We have seen churches decline. We have seen churches come alive. We have listened to the voices of those beyond the walls of our churches. And we have learned.

All healthy, faithful and effective churches have gone through an intentional process of discernment towards a God Given Vision. And all the various processes available fall somewhere within a common framework:

- They **ANCHOR**: They prepare themselves with the insights and skills and prayer needed to engage in deep, faithful and transformative conversations.
- They **ASSESS**: They listen to stories that help them understand the core identity and purpose of the church. They listen to the stories of those beyond their walls. They get real about their potential, assets and challenges.
- They **ASPIRE**: This is a process of prayerful church wide conversations to discern: Who Are We? Who Is Our Neighbor? And What is God Calling us to do and be in our next chapter of ministry? From this they craft their vision and mission into a compelling future story.
- They **ALIGN**: They begin a process of strategizing and brainstorming how to get from where they are to where God is calling them. They review and realign everything (budget, building use, job descriptions, governance, etc) to allow them to effectively and faithfully move forward.
- They **ADJUST**: Along the way the pause to discern how they are doing and what they need to continue moving faithfully forward.

The following pages provide more detailed information about Churches Alive. They will describe the process and the costs. No matter what approach you use, they will help you get started.

*“Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart.  
Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.”  
~Carl Jung*



*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."*  
~Helen Keller

**THE PROCESS:** Churches Alive utilizes leadership development, trainings, coaching, online and outside resources to accompany a church through the whole process. Typically, this program is done with a small group of similar churches so they can support and encourage each other. Here is a more in depth look at the Churches Alive process:

1. **Anchoring:** Introducing key concepts and ensuring that the congregational as a whole is ready to engage in deeper discernment and reflection. This includes Tapping into the energy of the church's WHY, Understanding the needed shift from Maintenance to Mission/Ministry, Understanding the theory of transformational visioning (Theory U), Familiarity with the Changing Landscape of Ministry, developing and deepening a depth of spiritual practice and ensuring there is solid communication/conflict proficiency enough to engage in discernment that could lead the church faithfully beyond its comfort zone.
2. **Assessment:** Including a process that helps the congregation discover, articulate and claim a deep sense of their God given WHY. (Who are We?: Their Identity and Purpose) Then engaging in a process that helps the church understand the demographics and dynamics and needs of their community and world (Who is our Neighbor and what do they need the churches and faith communities of their town to be best at?) Churches Alive uses the New Beginnings Assessment program to work with the congregation and provide this thorough insight to the church.
3. **Aspiration:** A process that engages at least 2/3 of the active congregation in discerning (based on the Assessment questions and insights): What is God Calling us to Become and to Do in the next chapter of our ministry. This will include crafting a compelling story of a faithful future. This is a combination of small group meetings and congregational gatherings.
4. **Alignment:** How do we get from here to there. This phase works to align all the resources of the church (building, budget, governance, staffing, etc) towards accomplishing strategies that move the church faithfully towards its compelling future story.
5. **Adjustment:** This is ongoing (as is alignment). In this phase the church and its leaders pause periodically to get a bird's eye ("balcony", "30,000 ft") view of their progress and trajectory to see if there are more resources, training or fine tuning needed to move into the future.

**A GOOD BEGINNING:** Support and resources are provided to enable the church to:

- Develop a Leadership Team that will guide and champion the process. This team needs to understand all of the key concepts of visioning. They, with the pastor, will begin to bring these concepts into the heart of the congregation. The Leadership team should be folks who: are trusted and respected by the church, have a sense of the pulse and heart of the congregation, play well together 'in the sandbox', and do not bring any agenda to the meeting, and are grounded in a relationship with God.
- Develop a Prayer Team: This group will surround the process in prayer. They will provide worship and at home prayers for the process on a regular basis to keep prayer and discernment present in the heart and soul of the congregation. They will help the congregation go more deeply into faith and prayer practices (see 'Faith Awakenings' at [macucc.org](http://macucc.org) for ideas)

- Develop Conflict resiliency. At the least, leadership should read the book "Crucial Conversations". We also offer an online Conflict Course to the cohort group that does Churches Alive together so they can learn some basic conflict concepts and strategies.
- Develop a plan through preaching, workshops, dinners, newsletters, Facebook, etc. to bring the key concepts of Anchoring into the congregation.

### **THE SCHEDULE:**

- FALL: In the Churches Alive program we would introduce Anchoring in the Fall and get the church started with this. We would also begin the online Conflict course. We would also provide resources and training for the Leadership Team and church members to conduct Community Interviews.
- WINTER: In the winter we use "New Beginnings Program" for the Assessment phase. They will provide an individual who will work with the church for the internal assessment including a thorough look at finances, building, community, and an evening of Appreciative Inquiry.
- In late winter we will receive the New Beginnings Assessor report and provide a Leadership Retreat to review the draft report and prepare for a series of Small group and congregational meetings to use the report to prayerfully discern a future direction and future story. These meetings typically take place in the Spring. A coach is assigned to the church to help them move into and through this process.
- SPRING: In late Spring we offer a leadership workshop to begin taking the discernment and moving it into a plan of action for the future.

### **THE COST:** of the program is approximate and looks like:

- \$250 Online conflict Course
- \$2500 - \$3000 New Beginnings Assessment and Report (Depending on the Assessors travel expenses)
- \$1200 Coaching (10 - 12 one hour individual or group sessions)
- ?? Miscellaneous meeting costs...(typically minimal if any at all)
- The rest of the costs (approx \$4000) are covered through our Conference churches giving to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM), Fellowship Dues and United Church Mission (UCM)
- Some scholarship support is possible.

If you would like more information, contact Rev. Don Remick.  
You can also visit our Conference website at <https://www.macucc.org/churchesalive>

“A mission statement is not something you write overnight...  
But fundamentally, your mission statement becomes your constitution,  
the solid expression of your vision and values.  
It becomes the criterion by which you measure everything else in your life.”  
~ Stephen Covey

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God Bless your journey, our world needs churches who have come alive.  
Our ultimate goal is to foster churches that are  
Healthy, Faithful and Effective in the Changing Landscape of Ministry