



Turning the World Upside Down



Discussion Guide
October 2020

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Welcome

Most often, the word “vision” is a noun. A person’s vision is what enables them to see the world around them. A church’s vision is what enables them to see God, to see what God is up to, and to see where God is leading the church to go.

“Vision” can also be a verb. Specifically, this series is a “visioning series.” Together during this series, we as a congregation will be discerning God, what God is doing now, and where God is leading us next. The hope is that as many people as possible will take part in this visioning process, in order to discern as inclusive a vision as possible.

Register Now for a Small Group!

During the month of October, we highly encourage you to participate in this 4-week, church-wide visioning series and study. Join one of the many small groups and attend as you are able! If you haven’t yet signed-up online, please go to manchesterumc.org/vision to let us know which group you’ve chosen.

If you have questions or need assistance, please contact:

- Rev. Winter Hamilton (winter.hamilton@manchesterumc.org) or
- Tiffany Conway (tiffany.conway@manchesterumc.org) and they will be glad to help.

How to use this booklet

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN: *A Church Visioning Series & Study*, is a church-wide small group process aligned with the accompanying sermon series at Manchester UMC. You are encouraged to worship online at Manchester UMC before coming to the small group, or at least to view the sermon. Each session will open with a short check-in, followed by the scripture reading for the week. The group will then read the *Discussion Prompt* and respond in prayerful conversation. Every week, we will close in prayer.

Share your perspectives

Each small group should identify someone, a scribe, to write down your group’s answers to the questions that are listed in **bold** of the Discussion Guide. Each week, a scribe will take notes on the group’s conversation and submit them in an online form at: www.manchesterumc.org/answers. The scribe should capture as much detail as possible without including names. If different perspectives exist within your group, please write down all perspectives. Either during or immediately after a session, please have the scribe share your group’s perspectives for that week with the church by going to the online form. The combined feedback from all participating small groups will help to inform the visioning and strategic planning processes of Manchester UMC. The responses from the groups will be compiled and included in the visioning process.

How to watch sermons

Our pastors have written this special booklet for your small group that ties into a four-part sermon series that will be preached during the month of October at Manchester UMC. If you miss worship during a weekend in October, please try to view the sermon online before your group meets.

Sunday worship services (and sermons) are streamed live on Facebook or website at 9:30 and 11 a.m. each week. You can also view a recording of all services/sermons afterwards at facebook.com/manchesterumc.stl. Video of the sermons is also posted to our website by Tuesday of each week and can be found online at manchesterumc.org/sermons.

Small Group Guidelines

To help ensure a healthy and successful small group experience for everyone, group members should review and practice these guidelines during your time together.

SAFE GROUP

We will strive to create an environment where everyone can be real, open, and honest with their struggles and victories.

CONFIDENTIALITY

What is said in the group stays in the group.

LISTEN

Let's value one another during the discussions by really listening to what is being shared. Try to avoid thinking about how you are going to respond, or what you are going to say next.

PAUSE

Allow a pause in conversation after someone shares. Give the person sharing the chance to finish and the group the opportunity to consider what was just shared before responding.

SILENCE

It is important to allow silence in the group as it provides an opportunity for someone to share and for members in the group to process the topic or question being considered.

NO "CROSS TALK"

Be considerate of others as they are sharing. No side conversations when someone else is talking.

NO FIXING

We are not here to fix each other. Give encouragement; speak truth, and point to Jesus. Don't try to solve or fix each other.

NO RESCUING

When people are sharing something deeply personal, there can be a tendency to try to make them feel better about themselves by providing immediate condolences. This will often cause them to stop sharing. Resist the temptation to rescue people.

SHARING

Be sensitive about the amount of time you share.

BE SELF-AWARE

Be self-aware of how you are personally effecting the environment through your words, actions and non-verbal communication.

USE "I" STATEMENTS

It's easy to talk about the issues of others, but for our purposes, we want you to focus on yourself. Try to use "I" statements rather than "them", "the church", "us", "we", etc.

Session One: Turning the World Upside Down

Agenda

Opening Check-in	10-15 minutes
Scripture Reading	3-5 minutes
Discussion Prompt	3-5 minutes
Discussion Questions	35-40 minutes
Closing Prayer	1 minute



1856 Oldest Photo of Chapel

Scripture

Acts 17:1-9 (NRSV)

¹ After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you." ⁴ Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house. ⁶ When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, ⁷ and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus." ⁸ The people and the city officials were disturbed when they heard this, ⁹ and after they had taken bail from Jason and the others, they let them go.

Discussion Prompt

Our scripture for this week comes from the book of Acts and the journey of Paul, Silas and the others to a city called Thessalonica. In Thessalonica these disciples were accused of "turning the world upside down." In their context, the accusation is about these disciples challenging the authority of the Roman Empire. They understood their identity to be formed and found only in and by God—not the Empire. They were first and foremost citizens of the Kingdom of God, and would not bow to the authority of the Caesar.

Around the same time period as Paul's trip to Thessalonica, the Jews were being expelled from Rome. Things were getting really heated. As we can imagine, all of this put the early Christians (as well as the Jews) in direct opposition to some very powerful people. We present day Christians in the west have the luxury of practicing our faith openly and are protected legally by our citizenship. So, how are we, like the early Christians called to "turn the world upside down" in our own context? This is one of the questions that we are trying to answer in our sermon series and accompanying study.

Sure, we're not living in the early church and sure, we are not currently causing riots, but the Church of Jesus Christ, was and still is called to "turn the world upside down." And so, it's important that we, together, figure out what that means for us at Manchester UMC. To do this we **MUST** name our mission and our vision. That is what we are doing in this study together.

In this week's sermon we began hearing about the visioning process that we are all entering into. Pastor Andy described the difference between the mission and the vision of the church. The mission of the church doesn't change. It's given by God, though it is expressed differently in different places.

Our mission statement at Manchester UMC is *"Making a difference for Christ by transforming church and community."*

The mission is different than the vision. Vision changes from season to season. The vision brings the mission to life in its context and time. Vision looks for what God is doing now, and where God is leading us next.

In discerning how we discern and live into our mission, we in turn, hope to have a clearer vision for being the Church of Jesus Christ in the church and the community.

Discussion Questions*

1. Sunday's message was "Turning the World Upside Down." What did you take away from Sunday's message?
2. What does Manchester UMC's mission statement mean, in your own words?
3. **In what ways is Manchester UMC already living into this mission?**
4. **How could Manchester UMC better fulfill this mission?**
5. **What hinders Manchester UMC from making this mission more of a reality?**
6. **What in our church and community most needs transforming?**

Prayer

God of all times and places, we thank you for your ever-present spirit, igniting and inspiring your church to turn the world upside down. Keep us at peace with one another as together, we discern your will for our community. Be with us in our rest and in our work. Make right its defects. Help us to receive your grace, and give it as well. **Amen.**

***REMINDER:** Your small group should identify someone, a scribe, to write down your group's answers to the visioning questions that are listed in **bold** above. Please submit your group's answers using the online form at www.manchesterumc.org/answers. Please include as much detail without including names. If different perspectives exist within your group, please submit all perspectives.

Session Two: Why We Do What We Do

Agenda

Opening Check-in	10-15 minutes
Scripture Reading	3-5 minutes
Discussion Prompt	3-5 minutes
Discussion Questions	35-40 minutes
Closing Prayer	1 minute



1942 Chapel Worship Service

Scripture

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 (NRSV)

¹You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, ²but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. ³For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; ⁶nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, ⁷though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. ⁸So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

Discussion Prompt

This week's sermon was about motivation. Why do we do what we do? It turns out that we each may have different motivations for the same activity. At times the motivation behind our actions may even be more important than the actions themselves.

In this week's scripture we get into the book of the Bible, the Letter to Thessalonians, that is our scripture focus for the next few weeks. Last week we talked about Paul's trip to this community in Thessalonica, and how he and the fellow Christians were "turning the world upside down." This week we are getting to the why. What was the motivation to "turn the world upside down?" Paul makes it clear; they do what they do... to please God. They're not trying to flatter people in order to take their money. They are not seeking praise from people. They come as a nurse cares for children. Paul uses a beautiful feminine image for God's work here. Babies don't flatter you or send compliments your way when you care for them. You do the thing, because it's the right thing. It's meaningful work. It's caring for God's most vulnerable. It's a selfless motivation, grounded in a relationship that is "dear."

As we move forward with our visioning work at Manchester UMC it is important that we know our motivations. The last visioning process we went through led to our strategic "2021 Plan" (found on page 8).

2021 PLAN

OUR VISION AND MISSION

We are an inclusive faith community that **LOVES** Christ deeply, **WORSHIPS** Christ passionately, and **SERVES** Christ boldly. Therefore, we are called to make a difference for Christ through the transformation of church and community.

2018-2021 PRIORITIES TO ACCOMPLISH OUR MISSION

WORSHIP: Shape our worship experiences to reach a broad demographic. Goal: By the end of 2021, our worship attendance will increase to at least **1,350**.

MISSION: Provide needed resources and assistance to residents in our local communities. Goal: By the end of 2021, resource **3,000** people within Parkway, Rockwood, and Valley Park school districts

DISCIPLESHIP: Grow the number of people connecting in Christian community and living more missionally. Goal: By the end of 2021, clear and simple pathways/bridges are available and used to help **1,000** people at Manchester UMC take a next step on their faith journey.

YOUTH: Grow the number of middle and senior high students actively engaged at Manchester UMC. Goal: By the end of 2021, **120** youth are actively engaged at Manchester UMC each week.

YOUNG ADULTS: Grow the number of people ages 25 to 35 having a first-time experience with Manchester UMC. Goal: By the end of 2021, **500** young adults between the ages of 25 and 35 will have had a first time experience with Manchester UMC.

GENEROSITY: Strengthen and grow the financial resources of Manchester UMC. Goal: By the end of 2021, **\$500,000** has been raised for phase 1 of the HVAC projects, and **\$400,000** has been raised to pay down MUMC'S debt/mortgage.

Drivers/Values Necessary to Accomplish Our 2018-2021 Priorities

Christ focused

Shared Accountability

Regularly assess progress

Celebrate successes and learnings

Transparent Communication

Grow trust and teamwork

Who We Will Look Like by 2022

We will be an **INCLUSIVE** community where **ALL** who seek meaning and purpose in life are welcomed as equal brothers and sisters. **ALL**, especially children, youth, and young adults, will come to Manchester UMC because they will see it as God's calling and claim on their lives. Our church will be the expression of Christ's unconditional love, within and outside of our walls.

To live into such a vision, we will focus on what it means to reflect Christ's love to one another. To this end, we will:

- Make the mission of God—inviting, forming, sending—our first priority.
- Embody the unity and equality of all believers, including laity and staff, expressing it in genuine acceptance, warmth, and friendliness.
- Demonstrate sincere love to each other with encouragement (2 Thessalonians 2:17) and without complaint (1 Peter 4:8-9).

Visioning for a church needs that same selfless, relational motivation that we read about in today's scripture and this week's sermon. In order to keep our motivations pure while we "turn the world upside down," we need each other and we need God at the center of our identity and visioning. So, we turn to God, and we listen for the Spirit. And as in the Gospel of John, "we do nothing on our own, but speak the things that God instructs."

Discussion Questions*

1. Sunday's message was "Why We Do What We Do?" What did you take away from Sunday's message?
2. What do Manchester UMC's current priorities ("2021 Plan") say about us as a church?
3. **What motivates you to be a part of the Manchester UMC faith community?**
4. **What will people in our community need most from Manchester UMC over the next 10 years?**
5. **What 2 to 3 areas should Manchester UMC most focus on over the next 10 years?**
6. **What does Manchester UMC do that needs to adapt or go away?**

Prayer

God of selfless love, help us more fully understand why we do what we do. Turn our motivations outward, away from our own status, comfort, and privilege. May the relationships in which we live motivate us to be who you are calling us to be, so that your desires take priority over our own. Set our priorities, O Lord, according to your Wisdom and empowered in your Spirit. **Amen.**

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Session Three: Let the Light Shine

Agenda

Opening Check-in	10-15 minutes
Scripture Reading	3-5 minutes
Discussion Prompt	3-5 minutes
Discussion Questions	35-40 minutes
Closing Prayer	1 minute



1956 Combined Choirs

Scripture

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (NRSV)

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴ But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶ So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷ for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Discussion Prompt

Paul's letter to Thessalonica is the oldest of Paul's letters in the Bible. The discussion of the "end times" is very popular in Pauline writings. Many of the early followers of Jesus were convinced that Jesus would be returning to fully restore the kingdom immediately following his resurrection. They were sitting on the edge of their seats waiting for this to happen.

Paul's words to them about us not knowing when this will take place are not written to prove some time or date of Christ's full return. They are written to comfort these early Christians who are grieving their difficult situation of persecution. And, even though we do not live with the persecution that these members of the early church did, it's still hard to live as a Christian. We too need Paul's words of comfort while work with the Spirit to "turn the world upside down." Paul understood that to live as a Christian, was to live a "woke" and "free" life. That to be a Christian was to live as a "child of the light." We are called to be "awake," right now and always, living life in the wakefulness of anticipation for the coming of Christ, and awake in the present moment of God's reign.

This kind of life requires us to be alert, not to the ways of this world, that favor some over others and welcome only a few into the definition of community. As Theodore Jennings writes of this text, "The life of faithfulness and love is one of alertness. Others are drowsy with what they think of as peace and security, as if nothing new was to be expected. They lull themselves into taking the structures of their world for granted. But these structures, and so this social and cultural world, cannot endure. For these structures are opposed to the justice of God."

As children of the light we seek God's expansive vision in all that we do. Manchester UMC seeks to live this expansive, inclusive vision, and has articulated that desire in a statement of welcome:

We extend God's love and grace to ALL people. Therefore, as we journey toward a greater understanding of one another, we respect our human family's diversity of age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, family structure, marital status, socioeconomic status, education, political perspective, faith history and life experience.

As our community continues to live and seek Christ, our vision must be illuminated with the light of God. We move forward awake and alert to the realities of this world as well as the Kingdom of God. We work to be children of the light, encouraging and building each other up.

Discussion Questions*

1. Sunday's message was "Let the Light Shine" What did you take away from Sunday's message?
2. Describe a time or place when you felt unwelcome or unwanted.
3. What does Manchester UMC's Welcome Statement mean, in your own words?
4. How well is Manchester UMC doing at making all people feel welcome?
5. How can we help more people feel welcome and wanted at Manchester UMC?
6. How can Manchester UMC especially reach those who historically have felt unwelcome?

Prayer

God of illumination, you have called us to be children of the light. Comfort us when darkness falls around us. Let the light of you that lives in us, guide our steps. Help our hearts to be more open to each other as we witness to your work in your church. Guide our vision as we wait on and work for you, Jesus. **Amen.**

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Session Four: Entirely Sanctified

Agenda

Opening Check-in	10-15 minutes
Scripture Reading	3-5 minutes
Discussion Prompt	3-5 minutes
Discussion Questions	35-40 minutes
Closing Prayer	1 minute



1969 Worship in Fellowship Hall

Scripture

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 (NRSV)

¹²But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; ¹³esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. ¹⁵See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

²⁵Beloved, pray for us.

²⁶Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. ²⁷I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them.

²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Discussion Prompt

The community in Thessalonica shared a remarkably deep love for each other. We know that from Paul's letter. Paul too, shared in that love. As a church, it is not always easy to love one another well, and not to the extent that we hear in this ancient congregation.

Yet, here we are. Manchester UMC is soon entering its 200th year as a congregation. We will soon enter our 3rd century as a church. How much love have those walls seen? Even more, how much love has been shared between the communion of saints who came before us?

This week we were given a list, from Paul's letter, but reiterated in our sermon. It was a list detailing what it takes to live life in community—with love and gentle care for each other.

And then Paul ends his letter with a prayer. In it, he prays that God would sanctify the people entirely. Sanctification is the part of our salvation in which we cooperate with God's grace. Sanctification is a process of growth, becoming more and more who God desires. And we, as Methodists believe in the entire sanctification of a person. John Wesley called this Christian perfection. Paul not only prays for it, he is certain it will happen, because God is faithful.

As we move forward together, into the future of our congregation, we are blessed to have such a long, rich history to reflect on. And, we are equally as blessed, to be looking toward our future hopeful, with our vision focused on God, and our hearts open to each other.

Discussion Questions*

1. Sunday's message was "Entirely Sanctified" What did you take away from Sunday's message?
2. What have you discovered or learned over these past 4 weeks?
3. What aspects of Manchester UMC's past are you most proud of?
4. What future possibilities are you most excited about?
5. What have we not discussed that should be considered as we plan for the future?

Prayer

God of all time, alpha and omega, love never ceasing, life always flowing...we thank you for inspiring our congregation in this visioning process. We thank you for this meaningful work. Make good it's defects. Bind us more closely than before, to each other and to you. Thank you for new connections that we have found in the past four weeks. Thank you for nurturing old connections as well. We pray for your church. We pray for each other. Help us to be obedient to your vision, tuned to your compassion, and faithful to your word. **Amen.**

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