

## **Tool #37: Imagine Your Church...**

*In a group setting, read this selection out loud together. Then discuss which "imagine" passages most resonate with your own dreams for your church. Ask people to paraphrase these passages for your church context. Be as specific as possible. Explore what people think might be holding back the church, and yourselves personally, from following these ministry dreams. (But dwell on the dreams, not the obstacles.)*

Through his teachings, Jesus asked people to imagine a new life—one lived in loving, reconciled relationship with God and others. Dream about how that might look in your life together as God's people:

**Imagine what your church would be like** if its central focus was experiencing God's love, loving God with all your being, and finding ways to mirror God's love to others, as taught and modeled by Jesus. Imagine how that might begin to alter your current congregational activities and priorities.

**Imagine your church**, filled with God's spirit, being of one mind and one heart in seeking first the kingdom of God. Imagine every one of your members fully committed to praying for God's kingdom to come on earth – and in your neighborhood – as it is in heaven. Imagine every one of your members yielding themselves to God as a part of the answer to that prayer.

**Imagine your church** breathing a missional theme into every Sunday school class, small group and committee meeting: to equip people for living and sharing more effectively God's love in the world.

**Imagine your church** joyfully recognizing and putting into use the particular gifts and capacities God has given you. And imagine yourself finding deep joy in developing those gifts for the purpose of offering them back to God in passionate, life-long witness and service to others.

**Imagine your church** so connected with the neighborhood that you begin to reach people's deepest hurts, needs and dreams. Imagine their dreams becoming your dreams. And imagine inviting neighbors to share their gifts with one another, tapping into hidden potential and building a web of cooperation as you work together toward your dreams.

**Imagine your church** being committed to daily intercessory prayer for neighbors, classmates, co-workers, colleagues and friends.

**Imagine your church** being so welcoming of sinners, so filled with compassion for the lost and the broken, that word of your love and care spreads throughout your community.

**Imagine your church** being sought out by those experiencing injustice, because you have become known for challenging oppression and for advocating just relationships.

**Imagine your church** designing worship experiences that celebrate what God is doing in the congregation, in your neighborhood and around the world, and that invite each member to explore and expand their participation in God's work.

**Imagine your church** seriously searching the Scriptures in a vibrant new way, recognizing them as a blueprint for creative resistance to the seductive influences of the surrounding culture.

**Imagine your church** making waves for its firm stand on loving enemies, offering hospitality to strangers, and extending open arms to people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. And imagine trusting God to such an extent that you risked your security for what you believed and practiced.

**Imagine going to lunch** with the person in church you dislike the most. Over lunch God's reconciling Spirit enables the two of you to become friends. Others in your church are inspired to follow your lead. The unity and wholeness the church experiences spill out the front doors, across the street, and into the entire neighborhood. And your church becomes known as a place for reconciliation and restoration.

**Imagine your church** being the best window your neighbors have into the life God intended.

**Imagine learning that other churches** are experiencing new life in Christ just as you are. That you discover that a nearby congregation is also catching the vision to extend your new-life experiences beyond your own membership. And a third church, then a fourth, links with you. And in collaboration with this community of churches you begin calling out people from among you to share God's mission in neighborhoods both near and far. And together, you connect with other churches in still other places to support their sharing new life in their neighborhoods and beyond.