

# DAWNINGS 101



By Harry Rowland, CBF Missional Congregations Director

**Dawn** — that miraculous morning moment when darkness gives way to light. Some sleep through it. Some work through it. Others choose to wait in the quiet hints and colorful hues of morning to experience it. There is nothing we can do to make dawn happen. At best, we can be present, orient ourselves toward the horizon and wait with our eyes wide open.

**T**hese opening words in the *Dawnings Retreat Guide* encourage me to glance backward at more than 25 years of church leadership and gaze forward to what is dawning within and around the church.

For many years as a pastor, I entered the dawn of each year burdened by the awareness that, once again, I was to facilitate a new church vision. I knew the well-oiled drill: predict, plan, invent and sell! This sounds crass, but it is what we pastors were trained to do. After all, the people perish where there is no vision!

So, with the dawning of another year, I would gather my team of leaders, begin with prayer and jump into predicting what needed to happen for our church to “grow,” “be vital,” “be relevant” and even “be missional.”

After we had gone around the room and heard about the desire for more young families, more youth, more tithers, a tweaked style of worship music and better small groups, we would start planning to meet our predictions. Limited resources would be apportioned and re-apportioned. Events would be plugged into the church

calendar. A catchy slogan would be created and a new logo designed.

We would close the season of meetings, beseeching God to bless our church-shaped vision. Then, I would be tasked with selling the vision to the congregation. We could so *do* church! But, what about being church?

CBF’s congregational initiative called Dawnings is an organic, contextual, collaborative process — not a program — which is creating holy space and a spiritual rhythm within churches where vision is being discovered rather than invented.

Questions and ideas suddenly dawn on us. What might it be like to live within a mission of God-shaped church rather than charge ahead with a church-shaped mission? This is the paradigm shift that Dawnings encourages.

Through a rhythm of prayer, preparation and discovery, rather than the strategy of predicting, planning and inventing, churches are experiencing what it means to be church. If we believe spiritual vision is from God and not from our own efforts, then we must create sacred space where we can sense the Spirit and discover the next step in

our kingdom journey. Dawnings invites a fresh, new day of light and passion for God’s mission.

Presently, CBF hosts Dawnings retreats each month across the Fellowship. Participating churches bring a small leadership team to a three-day retreat. There, leadership teams collaboratively learn the visioning, forming and engaging process of Dawnings, while meeting God within the holy rhythm of prayer, preparation and discovery. Following the retreat, if the church decides to continue the Dawnings process, the congregation receives resource materials and a trained Dawnings coach to journey with them through the process.

We can study the struggle of church and culture from every angle. We can explore our options until exhausted. And we can do all of this to no avail. Then, with seemingly no effort of our own, in an unexpected moment, darkness can give way to light.

Something dawns on us. We did little more than be present, orient ourselves toward the horizon and wait with our eyes wide open. This is when we meet God. Welcome to Dawnings!

## Learn more

Dawnings is currently funded by a grant, which enables an initial 75 churches to attend the retreat free of charge. Find a listing of the upcoming retreats and brochures, videos and other helpful resources about Dawnings at [www.cbfdawnings.org](http://www.cbfdawnings.org)