

Amy H. Hartsfield*

Institutional Vision

When our son, Ryan, was in the third grade, my husband Wallace and I discovered that his vision was so poor he was considered legally blind. I was shocked and felt like the world's worst parent when the optometrist informed us that the probable reason our son was experiencing difficulty staying in his seat at school during the course of the day, was that once he left his seat, he probably could not find it again. Since the beginning of the second grade, we had made innumerable trips to the school because our son was having behavioral difficulties in class. He was considered disruptive during structured learning times. His teachers described him as good-natured, friendly and helpful to both peers and them, but he just could not seem to stay focused during times of individual work, where he was required to read and write on his own. For a year and a half, an undetected vision deficiency was manifesting itself as a behavioral disorder. Because he could not see the letters nor reproduce via writing what he could not see, he created disturbances during such times in an attempt to hide his inability. Our son was being defeated by what he could not see and he feigned disinterest in what he felt he could not achieve. He felt helpless and locked out. His inability to see clearly, negatively influenced his decisions and manifested itself in non-productive behavior.

Recently, Channel 2 Evening News featured a back-to-school segment highlighting the importance of annual vision exams. As I watched the segment, I made a mental note to call Pearle Vision Center to schedule my family's annual eye exams. Both my daughter and my son wear contact lens

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and glasses and I wear bifocals. Because their eyes are still growing and I guess because mine are growing old, each visit results in a new prescription. My son's vision is improving and my daughter's and my vision are diminishing.

The news segment suggested that eye examinations should begin when a person is three years of age and continue on a yearly basis at least until the age of eighteen. For sighted persons, the eye is the primary organ through which we are aware of and relate to the world. Our sight is our major tool for information gathering. We see more than we will ever touch, smell, hear, taste, or feel. Our sight alerts us, invites us, stimulates us and even repels us from persons and/or objects. If a person or an object is pleasing to our sight, often we are motivated toward further interaction with that object through touch, taste, or feel. If the person/object does not sufficiently stimulate our interest, our eye roves on. Thus, information gathered through the eye informs our decision-making which is subsequently manifested in our behaviors. There is a direct relationship between sight, information gathering, decision-making, and behavior.

Although most persons are sighted, many do not have adequate or clear vision. Physiological abnormalities of the eye and cognitive or contextual obstructions are the most common culprits of sighted persons experiencing unclear or distorted vision. Near- and far-sightedness are two common physiological abnormalities of the eye. Boxed perception, or only seeing things as you think they should be or as you have previously experienced them, is an example of cognitive obstruction. Poor illumination of an object is an example of a contextual obstruction. Persons experiencing inadequate, unclear and/or distorted vision often will experience a lack of clarity and distortion in their decisions that will be mani-

fested in inappropriate and/or non-productive behavior.

The Bible makes numerous references to the importance of sight and the ability to see clearly. In Mark 8 two stories appear which speak to persons not seeing clearly. The first story, 8:14-21, describes the inability of Jesus' disciples to see clearly due to a cognitive obstruction. In this story, the disciples appear to be distraught because one of them forgot to bring the remaining bread from a previous mass feeding of four thousand persons. When Jesus cautions the disciples to beware of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod, they mistake his remark to be a rebuke because they now have no bread. Jesus, overhearing their confusion and distress, questions the disciples' ability of sight and comprehension of what they had recently seen. Had they not just seen Jesus feed thousands with five loaves of bread and a few fish? Did they not believe what they had just seen with their own eyes? This is an example of a cognitive obstruction. Had their minds deleted the information that their eyes had seen because that experience was not normative to how they understood bread being provided?

The second story, 8:22-26, describes a man who is unable to see clearly due to a physiological abnormality. This story recounts Jesus' encounter with a blind man brought to him by the people of Bethsaida. The people beg Jesus to touch the man, to make the blind man see. We are told that Jesus proceeds to place spittle on the man's eyes, places his hands upon him and asks, "Can you see anything?" The man reports that he has vision and describes what he is then able to see. He states, "I see people, but they look like trees walking." Upon hearing his reply, Jesus apparently is not satisfied with the man moving from a state of blindness to being sighted. This man sees but does not see. His sight is not

clear; it is distorted. He sees people, but they look like trees walking around. We are told that Jesus again puts his hands on the man's eyes; the man opens his eyes and his sight is restored, seeing everything clearly. It is when the man's sight is restored to see clearly that Jesus sends him on. Jesus worked with and on the man until he not only could see, but he could see everything, and everything clearly.

Today, we are in the midst of our back-to-school preparations. The 1998-99 academic year is before us with challenges, opportunities and much work to be done. As an institution partnering with the African-American faith community to provide exceptional theological preparedness for present and future leaders of African-American churches, we are mission and vision driven and directed. Therefore, as part of our preparedness as we begin this new academic year, we must examine our sight and our ability to clearly see the vision of this institution. Do we see clearly? Could our vision be like that of my son, the disciples, or the blind man? Is our vision distorted by either physiological abnormalities or cognitive obstructions which are or could negatively influence our decisions and our behaviors? And if so, do we exhibit behavior that is counterproductive to the achievement of the institution's vision?

There is a vision exam¹ that tests for three of the most prevalent indicators of unclear institutional vision: inversion, insertion, and deletion. I invite you, at this time, to participate in this vision examination. First, cover your right eye with your right hand, and with your left hand turn to the final page and look at Figure 1. Silently say to yourself what you see. Now close your eyes, using your left hand again turn to the final page and look at Figure 2. What do you see? This

¹See the final page of Dr. Hartsfield's meditation for these vision examinations.

concludes the first test. Figure 1 has the letters "W-E" or the word "WE" printed on it. Figure 2 has the letters "M-E" or the word "ME" printed on it. A visual distortion often identified in persons who express an inability to see an institution's vision clearly is an introversion of the letter "W," resulting in what appears as the letter "M," therefore seeing the word "WE" as "ME." This visual distortion leads to decision distortions, i.e., decisions become individual or me-based as opposed to institutional or we-based. This is further manifested in behaviors that appear contrary to institutional and/or institutional vision-unity.

Now let us proceed to test for the second most prevalent vision impairment. Please, cover your left eye with your left hand and with your right hand turn to the final page and look at Figure 3. Silently say to yourself what you see. Now close both eyes. Keeping your left hand over your left eye and using your right hand to turn to the final page, look at Figure 4. What do you see? This concludes the second test. Figure 3 has the letters "O-U-R" or the word "OUR" printed on it. Figure 4 has the letters "Y-O-U-R" or the word "YOUR." The visual disorder tested here is called insertion. In this disorder not only does one fail to see what is there but one also sees what is *not* there. The impact of this sight impairment on decision making and behavior is similar to that of inversion—both are impaired due to misperceived and, therefore, erroneous information. Consequently, the focus of the institutional vision is altered, misinterpreted and/or misconstrued.

Now for the final test. With both eyes open turn to the final page with either your right or your left hand and look at Figure 5. What do you see? Close both of your eyes for a brief moment, turn to the final page, and look at Figure

6. What do you see? This concludes the third and final test. Figure 5 has the letters "P-U-B-L-I-C" or the word "PUBLIC" printed on it. Figure 6 had the letters "P-U-B-I-C" or the word "PUBIC." In this disorder persons fail to see the full vision. They see partially, missing a crucial component or components. This deletion radically alters the information and like inversion and insertions, the institutional vision is misinterpreted and/or misconstrued.

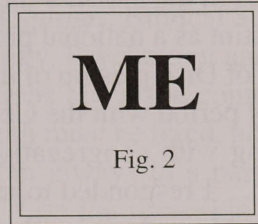
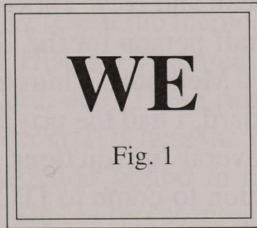
In conclusion, I agree with Channel 2 Evening News. Annual vision exams are a must for everyone, individuals and institutions, and the beginning of the school or academic year might be the best time to have one. My family will be making our visit to Pearle Vision Center next week. I believe it will help to ensure my family's ability and preparedness to see clearly, to decide confidently, and to act responsibly. As we, the ITC community, continue to prepare our curricula, programs, classes, check our supplies, and readjust our schedules, let us also look again at our institution's mission, our institutional vision. What do we see?

Closing Prayer

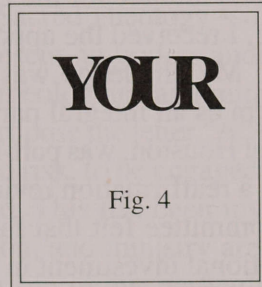
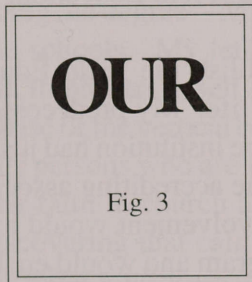
Thank you, Lord, for the Blessing of life.
Thank you, Lord, for the Blessing of sight.
Please, Lord, help us to see clearly,
Help us to see your vision clearly,
Help us to see
this Institution's vision clearly,
Help us to see ourselves, and each other clearly.
Then, Lord, empower us
With strength, courage and love
To act reflective of this clear vision.
Amen.

Vision Examinations

A Test for Inversion



A Test for Insertion



A Test for Deletion

