

VISIONING PROCESS

See the next page for the in-depth process of Session 1 (Saturday, October 6, 2024)

We will use these 3 steps (*plus one in-between) towards developing the vision of BLC.

1. **Session (1) is called Listening for God in Scripture (10/6/24).** Through reading and reflecting on portions of scripture we hear what God is calling BLC to BE and to DO. We call this framing the process. We move from 'being' to 'doing' with God.
2. **Session (2) is called Listening for God in the Congregation (10/20/24).** We gather members and participants together to listen to what people are thinking and sensing regarding the vitality and sustainability of BLC. Through small groups we gather information of how others are listening for God. Some points of conversation might include: What are the signs of God's presence in the life of BLC? What are people wondering about? What issues need to be addressed? What are your hopes and dreams for BLC?

We will begin to talk about the next session at the end of Session 2, doing site visits in the community between Sessions 2 and 3, after inviting members ***to train on Zoom or in-person on the evenings of October 24th (Thursday) and November 4th (Monday) – both at 7pm EST.***

Examples of visits:

- A. Observation. Developments of roads, housing, and businesses. Maybe walk the streets just to observe. Notice what is happening around your location. Who is coming to the local food stores and coffee shops?
 - B. Neighbors that live near the church. Maybe two persons together. Smile and introduce yourself. "I am _____ from BLC and I come by today to say 'hello.' And where the conversation goes from there is open ended. If possible—mention that BLC is wanting to hear what the needs are of this neighborhood. Be gentle and kind. If they are not interested, say 'thank you' and move on.
 - C. Gather statics of the city, county, school district, and business community. How have things changed in the last 10 years. What are the plans from city hall about the immediate needs in the community.
 - D. Go visit I.E. - Habitat for Humanity, United Way, Salvation Army, police chief, city manager, and other churches.
3. **Session (3) is Listening for God in the Community & Bringing It All Together (11/17/24).** It is important to go out into the neighborhood/ community to listen and to learn from others. We prepared with prayer and a willing heart. We went to observe, connect, and build relationships. We continue with open minds and hearts to be surprised by what is happening around our building. Up until this point, we are listening, not evaluating what we hear.

Session (3) is Bringing it All Together. We look for patterns, new insights from others, and new information that we have gathered. We bring together our listening to God in the scriptures, congregation, and our community. This data will give shape our vision and mission planning in detail. This is where we work hard to be risk takers as well as being realistic, to realize we can do some new exciting things, and that we cannot do everything. Through prayer and meditation and through deep listening to each other the Vision Team will lead the group in creating a new Mission Statement then work with Roger in January to build on that mission with a new Vision statement with ideas that give vitality to congregational life and that are sustainable in 3-5 years.

LISTENING TO GOD IN SCRIPTURE

We live in a new day and BLC is a different congregation than you were 12 years ago. As you seek to discover anew what God is calling your congregation to BE and to DO, you begin by listening to God. This listening will have four (4) steps; (1) Listening to God in the scriptures, (2) Listening in the congregation, (3) Listening in our community/neighborhood, and (4) Bringing these Listening's together for discernment.

As we begin by Listening to God in Scripture, I would suggest that you suspend your perceived ideas and notions of what you think God desires for this congregation, and of where you think you will end up at the end of this planning process.

Through this Listening to God, let ideas, insights, possibilities come to you. I believe it is through your Listening to God, through Listening to each other, and through Listening to your neighbors that something new or old will be revealed to you.

The scriptures often make the reference to 'walking with God.' Notice the pattern of Jesus' life: with people and away to pray, together in crowds, and alone with God. I believe that you are called to 'walk with God' in this Vision/Mission planning process, and beyond.

(Silence, centering, and prayer)

SCRIPTURES

WHOSE WE ARE: Our identity is from God. This is our grounding.

Isaiah 43:1-3a

Luke 8:40-48

Stories:

Questions to ponder with Isaiah and Luke:

One to one, "(name) child of God, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever."

Isaiah 43:1-3a

Restoration and Protection Promised

But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will
be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not
overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not
be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

Questions to ponder (continued)

What difference does it make to start with Listening to God when you are considering how to strengthen and renew your congregation?

As we live in a pluralist world, how does Listening to God help us 'see' all persons as having worth and value?

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Luke 8:40-48

40Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. 41Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, 42for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying. As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. 43Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. 44She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. 45Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you." 46But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." 47When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. 48He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

WHO WE ARE: Our purpose for existence as a congregation.

Matthew 11:1-6

Matthew 4: 18-22

Stories:

Asking participants to lay hands on another and say this prayer:
Confirmation Prayer:" Father, in heaven, for Jesus's sake, stir up in these servants the gifts of the Holy Spirit; confirm their faith, guide their lives, empower them in their serving, give them patience in suffering, and bring them to everlasting life'

Questions to ponder for readings (next page)

Matthew 11:1-6

1Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities. 2When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" 4Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

Matthew 4: 18-22

18As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 19And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

What programs might need to pause so that your new insights and ideas might be sustainable?

Where does BLC need to challenge yourselves as followers of Jesus?

For me personally, knowing Whose I am and Who I am, becomes the source of my strength that frees me up to interact with people freely, not with the lens of wanting them to be like me, to value what I value, or to believe like I believe. I think the same can true of institutions.

When I want others to be different then who they are, this often leads to frustration and the breaking of the relationship. This kind of functioning increases the levels of anxiety and intensity, which dominate our communities and our culture.

We are connected digitally and immediately worldwide. So, the hype of the new data from others becomes a constant feedback loop to increase my anxiety. For me, I often need to get my bearings, my 'true north' daily so that I can function effectively in my family, in my community and in the world. For me, this starts with listening to God on a regular or daily basis, both in the scriptures and through the voices of others. Listening to God frames my day.

I think the same can be true for institutions.

LISTENING TO GOD IN THE SCRIPTURES AS WE COMTEMPLAT THE MISISON OF OUR CONGREGATION.

For this part, you may use any one of the provided scriptures or any portion of scriptures that you would like as a basis of deeper reflection. Use this time to open yourself up to God's word for your congregation.

What word or words is God giving you in these readings that point to what God's intended purpose is for you congregation? The focus of this session is listening to God.

Procedure:

1. Prayerfully read the passage attentive to this moment and to voice of the Spirit in you hear.
2. Rest gently in the Word as you read it.
3. Sit quietly for 5-6 minutes.

4. Use space below to write what you heard through Listening to God in the scriptures.

5. Spread out into small groups of 3-5 people.

Now I invite you to share what you heard in your listening and in your reading with the small group. I would ask that there be no cross-talking or conversation within the group. Just share what you heard. Listen to each other with the ears of your heart to what God is saying to you through each other.

VISIONING TEAM UPDATE: MEET OUR GUEST FACILITATOR ROGER HARDY!

The Bethlehem Visioning Team is pleased to introduce Pastor Roger Hardy who will "co-shepherd" us in our Visioning sessions this fall and early winter. Roger prefers being called simply by his first name and has held many positions of ministry, notably Director of Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop for our synod 2007-2013, as well as pastoring several congregations in Michigan, Minnesota and other states including Alaska!



Roger has a wonderful history of partnering with Bethlehem and was very instrumental in co-creating our 10-year 2012 vision, utilizing his "Listening for God" approach, which he has modified for us do a little differently this time - as our world has changed and our church has adapted along with the new standard span of organizational vision (much shorter - about 3-5 years!)

Roger is indeed "outdoorsy" (enjoys walking/hiking/gardening/kayaking/ cross country skiing/golf) and loves doing projects around the house and garage.) Roger finds meaning through reading, journaling, and visiting family and friends, and he spends time in scripture reading, prayer, and meditation each morning. Roger and his wife Sharon have lived in St. Paul since July 1, 2013

Starting October 6th, Roger will help us begin Listening for God in Scripture, in our Congregation, and within the Community. By gathering on three separate Sunday's, we will share a meal immediately following worship and then spend time on the topic of the day:

Sunday, October 6, Listening for God in Scripture

Sunday, October 20, Listening for God in the Congregation

Sunday, November 17, Listening for God in the Community

We have planned for a little extra food if necessary but still ask that you take time to sign up on the display in the narthex. Please indicate how many of you will be attending in order that we have plenty of food, beverages, seating, and any materials that may be needed. Your help is important!!

We look forward to seeing you at the events. In the meantime, should you have questions or concerns, your Vision Team members will be glad to talk with you. Members include: Pastor Paul, Sherri Helman, Kelly Thomson, Kathie Bair, Jana Rockne, Tim Goebel, and Craig Bauer