

OUR VISION FOR MISSION

*A Congregational Half-Day Process for
Discovering, Dreaming and Designing
New Opportunities for Participating in
God's Mission*

Yahweh said: Listen to my words!
If there are prophets among you,
I reveal myself to them in a vision,
I speak to them in a dream.
(Num. 12:6)

From the beginning I revealed the future,
in advance, what has not yet occurred.
I say: My purpose will come about.
(Is. 46:10)

Set your hearts on God's kingdom first,
and on God's saving justice,
and all these other things will be given you as well.
(Mt. 6:33)

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Note: biblical quotations are based on the New Jerusalem Bible.

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Part I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE PURPOSE OF THIS SESSION (1 MINUTE)

Have the section below read aloud for the group.

God has plans for what should and will happen in this world. God is already at work in the world with a mission of saving justice for all of Creation. Our hopes are shaped by a vision of what might and will be — a vision of God’s promises coming to fulfillment. We in the church can provide helping hands to assist God’s will in coming into being.

We are gathered today as a congregation. We will work together for the next five hours to search for ways in which we can assist God’s mission in the world. Our focus will be on what we are going to do together, not on what we have been or who we think we are now.

Today’s events will fall into three main stages — the first three of the four “D”s:

- 1. Discovery: We will begin by uncovering what works by reminding ourselves of our best experiences of the church in mission. Knowing what has given life and inspired people to action in the past will help us in our planning for the future.*
- 2. Dream: We will allow ourselves to dream about possible futures, about what might be. We will work together to arrive at a shared vision for our congregation’s future.*
- 3. Design: We will give shape to our vision for the future. By the end of the day we will have written a set of Vision Statements to set into motion new forms of mission directed to the world around us. The Vision Statements will guide us as we move forward to fulfill the Destiny of our new mission activities.*

During our session:

- We will set group agreements for how we will work together and treat each other.*
- We will pray together.*
- We will briefly reflect on the meanings of the terms “vision” and “mission.”*

- *We will tell stories to each other of our best experiences of mission. Stories are ways in which we compress a richness of experience and wisdom.*
- *From these stories, we will pull out good ideas for what makes for success and how to get things done. We will not be searching for problems but for opportunities, not for what is missing but for what gives life, not for weaknesses but for strengths.*
- *We will reflect on opportunities for new ways to be involved in God's mission.*
- *We will playfully create a collective vision for what we will do together.*
- *When we are finished, we will have produced a set of Vision Statements that will challenge us and set out new directions for our mission activity. These statements along with other results will be shared with the Diocese of Rupert's Land in order to inform the diocesan vision for mission.*

Underlying everything we are doing here today is God's mission. The reign of God is coming into being in our world. The role of the Church is to support God in this work.

B. GROUP AGREEMENTS (5 MINUTES)

Post the list below on the wall. Read out each of the Agreements and make sure everyone is clear about what it means.

We want our meeting to be productive and fun for everyone. Let us set up some ground rules for how we will work together and treat each other. Look over the list. Are there other standards that anyone would want to add to the list? Are there changes that anyone would want to make to any of the Agreements?

HOW WE WILL WORK TOGETHER AND TREAT EACH OTHER

- (1) STAY FOCUSED ON OUR SEARCH FOR NEW WAYS TO SUPPORT GOD'S MISSION IN THE WORLD.
- (2) SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUCCESSFUL GROUP DISCUSSION — EVERYONE PARTICIPATE FULLY
- (3) LISTEN MORE THAN YOU SPEAK
- (4) BE GENTLE AND FORGIVING WITH EACH OTHER
- (5) VALUE DIFFERENCES
- (6) RESPECT CONFIDENCES SHARED
- (7) ENJOY OUR TIME TOGETHER AND HAVE FUN
- (8) KEEP TO THE ALLOTTED TIMES

If additions or changes are made to the list, make sure everyone agrees.

Once everyone has agreed to live by the Group Agreements on the list, the group can refer to it at any time in order to keep the process working well for everyone.

C. OPENING PRAYER (3 MINUTES)

1. PSALM 146:5–10

One person reads the Psalm aloud for the whole group.

*How blessed are those who have Jacob's God to help them, their hope is in Yahweh their God,
who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them. Yahweh keeps faith forever,
gives justice to the oppressed, gives food to the hungry; Yahweh sets prisoners free.
Yahweh gives sight to the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down.
Yahweh protects the stranger, sustains the orphan and the widow.
Yahweh loves the upright, but frustrates the wicked.
Yahweh reigns forever, your God, Zion, from age to age. Amen.*

2. WHAT DOES THIS PSALM SAY ABOUT GOD'S MISSION?

Invite persons to speak aloud a word or phrase they heard in this Psalm that speaks meaningfully to them about what God is doing in the world.

3. STAND AND READ THE PSALM AGAIN TOGETHER

D. WHAT IS A VISION? (1 MINUTE)

Have the section below read aloud.

Using Psalm 146, which we just read, we could build a picture of the future God is seeking to create.

We each can have our own visions for the future. However, for a congregation to have a shared vision it is necessary to bring these personal visions together. If we can have a shared vision then it can help us to work together and stay focused on the future we want to create.

If we start by rooting ourselves in what God is trying to do in the world, it is more likely that our vision will serve to assist the changes God is trying to bring about.

A vision is not just an idea. It is a picture of the future that can inspire us as a group to work together to bring about what it is we hope for. A vision describes a state of affairs in the future but is worded in the present tense as though it were already happening. This is because the vision depends on us to do things now.

Many visions can and will be achieved in the process of assisting God's mission. This is why we need to go return to the task of visioning on a regular basis — to make sure our vision for the future is still working in the present.

The activities we will be doing today will help us create a shared vision for our involvement in God's mission. We will formulate this vision in terms of a set of Vision Statements. These are not the same as mission statements which describe a congregation's general aspirations. Rather, they will set out challenges to our activity together. They will help us set a new course for our relationship to the world around us.

E. WHAT IS MISSION? (10 MINUTES)

Have the section below read aloud.

Our congregation's vision for mission will start with our personal experiences of God's mission. But what do we mean by "mission?"

The church's understanding of what mission is has been shifting over the last half century. Let us look briefly at two differing views of mission and what they say about the role of the church. Both these views have been part of the church's life.

- 1. For much of its history the church has seen mission as originating with the church. For instance, the church would send missionaries to evangelize non-believers. This was understood to be the way in which people were saved and brought into the church — made members of the*

body of Christ. Many charitable works have been done by the church operating according to this church-centred approach to mission. However, many peoples throughout the world experienced Christianity as a religion that treated them in a paternalistic manner and imposed a European culture on them. At the same time, local congregations were often left out of meaningful participation in mission.

- 2. What God is already doing in the world is the primary focus of mission. Jesus the messiah, who proclaimed the coming of God's reign, calls us to act in solidarity with others, to be guided by love and justice in everything we do. In this way, the church can assist the fulfillment of God's promises made to humanity. The church comes to see itself as a servant to the world and to understand that God's mission is already happening wherever the church finds itself — on our doorstep. Each individual Christian has a responsibility to contribute to this process. When we are baptized, we receive a God-given vocation to ministry, a ministry we carry out in service to the mission of God in the world.*

Review the questions for discussion below. Allow a few minutes for discussion.

Turn to one person beside you to discuss the three questions below.

- 1. Which view is more familiar to you?*
- 2. Which of the two views is closer to the New Testament's view of mission?*
- 3. Do you feel that you have been given a unique vocation to assist God's mission through your own ministry?*

Bring the group back together and ask people to say something briefly about how they were responding to the questions.

The point of our work together today is to discover new ways in which we can take part in helping God's will for our world to come into being.

Part II. DISCOVERING OUR STRENGTHS FOR MISSION

A. PAIRED INTERVIEWS

1. INSTRUCTIONS FOR PAIRED INTERVIEWS (10 MINUTES)

Before beginning the Paired Interviews have this section read out and make sure people are clear about the Instructions. Also, go over the Interview Questions in advance.

a) WORK IN PAIRS

Pair up. Find someone to work with whom you do not know well. Each interview will last 30 minutes. One person at a time will act as interviewer, the other as storyteller. After 30 minutes switch roles and start the other interview.

b) INTERVIEWER ROLE

- a) *The interviewer's job is to listen carefully. Appreciate what you are hearing — even if you do not agree with or cannot relate to what is being said. Your job is to accept the other person's wisdom so that it can become part of the group's wisdom.*
- b) *Help the other person to explore their story fully. Help them to pull important information out of their story.*
- c) *Space is provided to record notes. But listen more than you write.*
 - a. *Make simple notes of the story to remember it for later.*
 - b. *For Questions (b), (c), (d) and (e), record all the points listed by the interviewee. You will be compiling lists of information later.*

c) STORY TELLER ROLE

- a) *God has already been at work in what you have experienced. Stories are rich and condensed ways of sharing important information. Tell the whole story in order to share how God has been at work in your world.*
- b) *With the interviewer's help you will work through all the questions in order. The questions will take you:*
 - a. *from a mission activity that happened in the past,*
 - b. *through strengths and best practices that can be used in the present,*
 - c. *to your wishes for the future.*

Before beginning the interviews go over the Interview Questions so that everyone is clear how the interviews will proceed.

2. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (2 x 30 MINUTES = 60 MINUTES)

a) A STORY OF MISSION

Tell me a story of a time — within the past five years — ***when you were excited to see a group or community helping others***. In your story tell me what this group did that was ***life-giving and fulfilling*** for everyone.

- Try to limit yourself to your one best story.
- This can be a story of a big activity or a small one — all stories are instructive.
- It does not matter how large the community or group was that was doing the activity. Perhaps this group was working by itself or perhaps it was working in concert with others.
- The others they were helping might have been in the surrounding neighbourhood or the wider world.

b) SUBQUESTIONS

- 1) What was it that excited people?
- 2) What was it that brought people together?
- 3) Did the actions of the group help to further the mission of God?
- 4) Were you involved? What role did you play?

e) GOD'S WILL FOR THIS WORLD

God is already at work in the world to bring about grace and healing. In what ways were the love and justice of God at work in the story you told?

1. Was there some ***larger purpose of God's*** that the actions of the faith community in the story you told were assisting? What was it that God was already doing?

2. Can you point to one thing that is happening in the world now that you believe to be the work of God? What ***change*** is God working to bring about?

f) YOUR WISHES FOR THE FUTURE

Thinking of the story you told, what role do you wish your congregation could play in helping to fulfill God's mission? Imagine that you have three wishes or hopes for your congregation's mission and that these will come true. List at least three hopes or wishes.

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

B. PUTTING TOGETHER WHAT WE'VE DISCOVERED

Interview pairs should join with another pair to form a group of four. If space permits, have tables prepared for them to move to with newsprint and markers.

1. SHARING THE STORIES (10 MINUTES)

When you were acting as interviewer what story did your interview partner relate to you? Summarize the story for the others in the group. Recount the high points.

Go around the group so that everyone's story can be shared (two minutes each, maximum).

2. CREATING LISTS (20 MINUTES)

- a. On four separate sheets of newsprint list the responses you recorded to Questions (b), (c), (d) and (e) in the interviews. Please print or write clearly.
- b. Discuss the responses as you list them. Listen especially carefully to the *Wishes* from Question (e) as they are being listed.
- c. Write each item up with just enough words to make it understandable to someone who was not there at the time to hear it. Keep it brief — use point form.
- d. Your four lists should look something like the following illustrations.

1. List all four interviewees' responses to Question (b), *Strengths*.

<u>Strengths</u>	
<u>The People</u>	<u>The Group</u>
<u>The Context</u>	<u>Self</u>

2. List all four interviewees' responses to Question (c), *Success Factors*.

<u>Success Factors</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • • • • • •

3. List all four interviewees' responses to Question (d), God's Will.

<u>God's Will</u>	
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4. List all four interviewees' responses to Question (e), Three Wishes.

<u>Our Three Wishes</u>	
<u>Name</u>	<u>Name</u>
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
<u>Name</u>	<u>Name</u>
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

3. POST THE FIRST THREE LISTS (10 MINUTES)

Ask each group to post their first three lists in the appropriate areas. Designate four areas of wall surface for the four types of list. Provide masking tape or adhesive putty for posting the lists.

Have the groups hold onto their Wishes lists for the time being.

Allow time for everyone to move around the room and read the lists posted by the groups.

4. SHARE STORIES AND THE LISTS OF WISHES (10 MINUTES)

Assemble in the large group and have each small group in turn share, very briefly, the most inspiring stories their group heard. You might have to limit the sharing of stories if time is short.

Then ask the groups, one at a time, to bring forward their lists of Wishes on the fourth sheet and read them out for the others to hear.

Ask if there are any questions. Make sure everyone understands the wishes. You might have to call on the person whose wish it is to clarify what they had in mind.

Then ask the group to post its list of Wishes in the appropriate area.

Part III. GOD'S DREAM (20 MINUTES)

Have people move their chairs to form a semi-circle in front of a flip chart or mural paper mounted on the wall.

Use four different colours of markers.

A. GOD'S REIGN AT THE CENTRE

*Draw a circle in the centre of the paper and print *The Reign of God* inside it (refer to the diagram on Page 17).*

Read Mark 1:14–15

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the gospel from God saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel."

We will be compiling a bull's eye picture of our world from the perspective of "the saving justice of God" (Romans 1:16–17).

B. THE EMPIRE OF THIS WORLD

*Draw a concentric circle around the first circle. Print the label at the top of the new circle — *The Empire of this World*.*

Read John 18:36

Jesus replied, "Mine is not a kingdom of this world."

There are many things in this world that resist the will of God. God passes judgment on much that is human. What do you see in the world around you that is contrary to the will of God?

In the outer circle, print words or phrases to summarize what people offer in answer to this question.

C. A WORLD TRANSFORMED

Draw a concentric circle around the second circle. Print a label at the top of the new circle — A World Transformed.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:31.

This world as we know it is passing away.

There are many good things that are happening in our world, signs of hope and real change. What indications that the reign of God is coming into being in our world do you see?

In the outer circle, print words or phrases to summarize what people offer in answer to this question.

D. PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S KINGDOM

Draw another concentric circle around the others. Print a label at the top of the new circle — Participating in God's Kingdom.

Read Luke 9:7–6

He called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

Quote St. Augustine

God without us will not; and we without God cannot.

God calls us to collaborate in the work of transformation. Suggest ways in which our congregation, or Christians in general, might help to bring about the changes that are required in our world.

In the outer circle, print words or phrases to summarize what people offer in answer to this question.

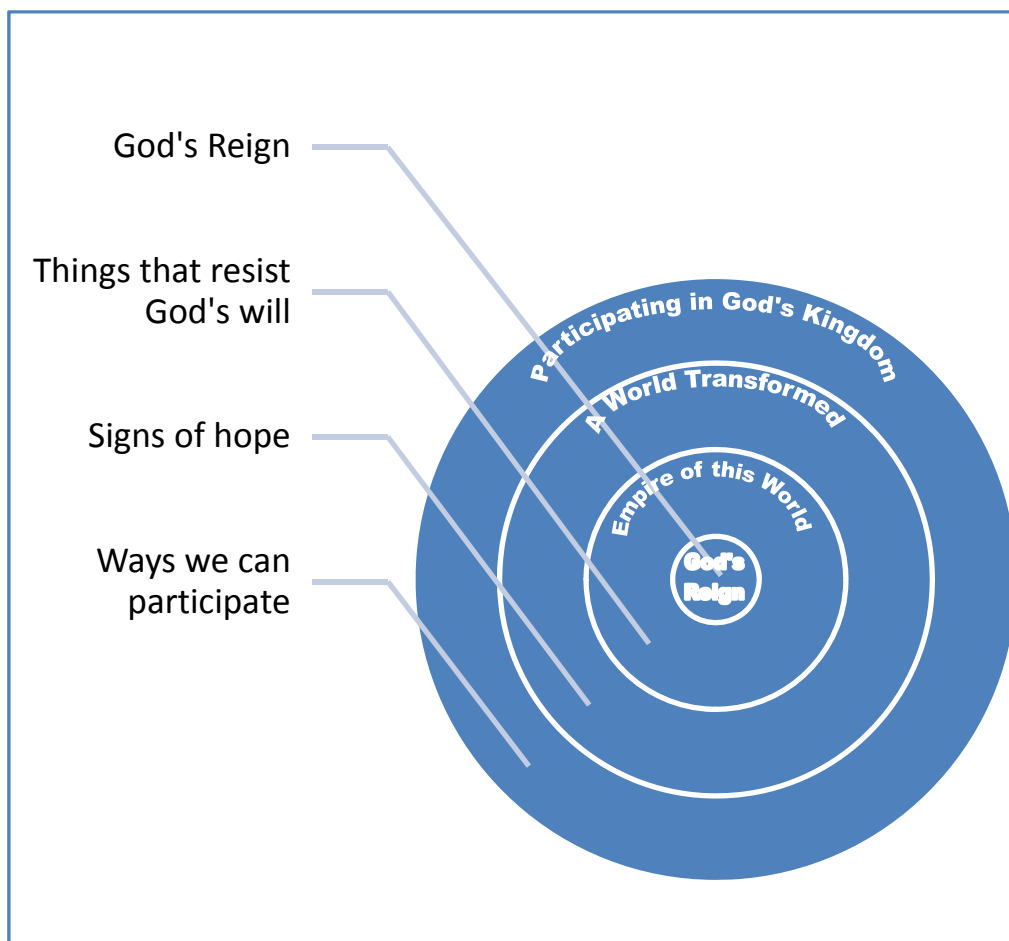


Figure 1: Bull's Eye Diagram of God's Dream

Part IV. OUR DREAMS FOR MISSION

A. ENVISAGING THE FUTURE (5 MINUTES)

Invite people to sit comfortably in their chairs. Take them through this brief guided meditation. At each stage in the process allow enough time for people to relax and for their imaginations to roam.

1. *Clear your thoughts of what we have been doing so far. Allow yourself to relax and feel the chair underneath you. Close your eyes and let your hands relax on your thighs, palms facing down. Take several slow, deep breaths.*
2. *Bring to mind an image of this congregation five years from now. In your mind's eye what actions has the congregation undertaken to be of service to the world around it? Allow your vision to develop. Give it shape and texture. Fill in the details.*
3. *What are the particular things the congregation is doing? Who do you see doing things? What is motivating them to act? With whom are they working? Whom are they helping?*
4. *How has the relationship of the congregation to the world around it changed? How has this new relationship changed the congregation?*

B. CREATIVE ENACTMENTS OF OUR DREAMS (2 MINUTES)

Go over the Instructions for Creative Enactments of Our Dreams.

1. **WORK IN GROUPS**
Work in the same groups of four that compiled the lists. Having several *Enactments* is the objective but, if there is a very large number of people, you might want to combine groups to make groups of eight.
2. **DEVISE A SKIT OR SHORT PLAY (30 MINUTES)**
Your job as a small group is to devise a skit or short play that expresses your collective dreams. You will have **three-to-five minutes** to perform your skit.
 1. First, decide as a group what your skit will be about.

- a. Review and discuss the list of *Wishes* that your group assembled. Also, look at the lists of *Values and Strengths* and *Success Factors*.
 - b. Ask yourselves what you really want to see happen in the world.
 - c. Decide what would give expression to your collective dream.
2. Your skit should communicate clearly to the other groups what your dream is for carrying out God's mission.
 3. Make sure everyone participates in the creation and in the performance of your group's skit.

C. OPTIONAL WORKING LUNCH (10 MINUTES)

If there is a lunch, allow an extra ten minutes for the groups' work.

D. PERFORMANCES (20 MINUTES)

Arrange the chairs to afford a stage area at the front. Each group performs their skit for the large group. Allow a short time for questions after each performance.

The audience should listen carefully for important themes in each of the skits.

Part V. DESIGNING OUR NEW MISSION ACTIVITIES

A. LOOKING FOR THEMES (10 MINUTES)

Set up a flip chart at the front. At the top, put the heading Themes. Read the following questions out to the group. Record their responses on the flipchart.

1. *Watching and listening to the Creative Expressions, what ideas emerge about the future of our congregation's mission activity?*
2. *Where did you sense the greatest life, energy, creativity?*
3. *What common themes did you notice among the presentations?*

Work together to list themes. List everything that you heard or saw that you feel is important. Mark themes that were common to all or most of the performances.

Refine the list, combining similar ideas and clarifying ideas that are not obvious.

Are there any other themes that should go on the list? Include anything that anyone feels is important and that should not be omitted, whether or not it appeared in a skit.

B. VISION STATEMENTS (30 MINUTES)

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF A *VISION STATEMENT*

Have someone read aloud the Qualities of a Good Vision Statement.

a) A *VISION STATEMENT* IS A SHARED IMAGE OF A DESIRED FUTURE.

A Vision Statement provides a picture of a future state toward which we want to move. (Note that a Vision Statement is not the same as a "mission statement." It does not describe who we believe we are now.) A *Vision Statement* puts into words what God is calling us to do. It expresses the most enlivening and exciting possibilities for our congregation. It inspires us to action.

b) A *VISION STATEMENT* SHOULD BE STATED IN THE PRESENT TENSE

A vision statement expresses a future state of affairs as though it were already happening. Describe the congregation as it will be in the future — say, five years

hence — as though the congregation has already been doing what it will be doing. “We are...” or “We do...”

c) A VISION STATEMENT SHOULD BE GROUNDED IN WHAT WORKS

Say in concrete terms exactly what it is that the congregation will do. Make your vision realistic and workable. Look over the lists of *Strengths* and *Success Factors* that were identified in the Discovery interviews. Draw on what works and what gives life.

d) A VISION STATEMENT SHOULD BE PROVOCATIVE

A *Vision Statement* stretches the congregation beyond the familiar. State clearly the differences your vision will make to the congregation, the people it will work with, the surrounding community etc. You are not describing a current state of affairs but a new one that will serve as a dream to guide the congregation’s life and work together — a dream that you are already moving towards.

e) A VISION STATEMENT SHOULD BE DESIRABLE

The vision should be something the congregation wants.

2. CREATING *VISION STATEMENTS* FOR EACH THEME

Go over the instructions for creating Vision Statements.

Provide sheets of newsprint and markers for each working group.

1. Form small working groups of persons who are interested in particular themes. If there are more than four people who select a theme, they can be divided into separate working groups.
2. Each group is to write a *Vision Statement* for the theme. Use the newsprint and markers to put into words the dream that this theme represents. Each *Vision Statement* should demonstrate all the Characteristics of Vision Statements.

When people are finished writing up a Vision Statement they are free to find people to work with on another theme.

Make sure that every theme that someone is interested in has a chance to be written up — whether this was a common theme or not.

3. SHARING THE VISION STATEMENTS (20 MINUTES)

Each group in turn posts its Vision Statement, reads it out to the large group and provides any explanations that are needed.

The large group gives feedback and suggests improvements to the Vision Statement. Refer to the Instructions for Vision Statements (Page 20). If the group accepts these changes, they become part of the Vision Statement.

The group works to combine any Vision Statements that belong together.

4. OPTIONAL DOT VOTING (15 MINUTES)

If there are more than about eight Vision Statements, you can prioritize them by dot voting.

Post all the Vision Statement sheets on a wall. Each participant gets five votes. Give each participant a coloured marker (or a set of five coloured sticky dots). Each person distributes their five votes however they wish among the Vision Statements they favour. They do this by making one-centimeter dots with their marker (or by placing dots) on Vision Statement sheets.

Tally the results and list the Vision Statements in order on a flip chart.

C. MOVING TOWARD OUR DESTINY (5 MINUTES)

Is there a *Vision Statement* you would like to help work on?

Compile lists of names of people who are interested in working on particular Vision Statements.

Set a date for a first meeting of each group.

Part VI. CLOSING (3 MINUTES)

A. TIDYING UP

Make sure all the newsprint sheets are collected and that someone is in charge of completing the reporting form.

The Vision Statements will need to be typed up for the congregation's use along with the list of names attached to each project. Each of these Statements becomes the focus of planning.

For suggestions on working together to put Vision Statements into effect, refer to www.rupertsland.ca/healthy_parishes/visioning_planning.html.

B. PSALM 85:7-12

Say the following psalm together.

Show us, Lord, your faithful love, grant us your saving help.

I am listening. What is God's message? Yahweh's message is peace for his people, for his faithful, if only they renounce their folly.

His saving help is near for those who fear him; his glory will dwell in our land.

Faithful Love and Loyalty join together, Saving Justice and Peace embrace.

Loyalty will spring up from the earth, and Justice will lean down from heaven.

Yahweh will himself give prosperity, and our soil will yield its harvest.

Justice will walk before him, treading out a path.

If time permits sing one of the following suggested hymns from Common Praise: 572, 575, 576, 584, or 601.