



Church of the Brethren

# Vision Statement

**July 1, 2011 working document**

*Prepared for the*  
Church of the Brethren Annual Conference  
Standing Committee

*Offered for consideration by the*  
Standing Committee Vision Task Team

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# Introduction

The Standing Committee is responsible for guiding the Church of the Brethren into God's vision for its future. The idea of a denominational committee to assist the Standing Committee in articulating this vision was suggested by the Leadership Team and the Inter-Agency Forum (IAF). Those two groups took the proposal to the 2009 Standing Committee which gave it an enthusiastic endorsement and asked that the committee be instituted as soon as possible.

The Church of the Brethren has not had long range planning for the whole church since the former Goals and Budget Committee of the General Board was discontinued in the restructuring of the 1990s. Since that time, each Church of the Brethren agency has developed strategic plans and ethos statements, applicable only to their agency.

In 2009 a Vision Committee was appointed by Standing Committee with the hope that they might formulate some visionary concepts that could provide a more unified direction as the denomination moves ahead. The Vision Committee was asked to project broad visionary strokes for the church. The task did not include setting goals or directing the mission and program of Church of the Brethren agencies, districts, congregations or individuals, but rather directed the Vision Committee to articulate a vision that would provide broad, cohesive and compelling language about God's desire for the Church of the Brethren.

Specifically, the purpose of the Vision Committee has been to prepare a document that presents vision and general directions for denominational mission for the rest of this decade. Eight persons were chosen to serve as the Vision Committee, four selected by the 2009 Standing Committee and one each appointed by the agencies (Church of the Brethren, Bethany Theological Seminary, Brethren Benefit Trust, and On Earth Peace). The committee was asked to bring a report to the 2011 Standing Committee who will then bring a recommendation to the 2012 Annual Conference. This document is intended to fulfill the responsibilities of the Vision Committee.

The work of the Vision Committee began immediately upon appointment in 2009 and has included a variety of activities including: soliciting and listening to input from individuals, congregations, districts and agencies; drafting and receiving input on an original statement; drafting a replacement statement, receiving feedback and editing the current vision statement; developing the resources and perspectives outlined in this document. The Vision Committee met in person three times and numerous additional times via telephone conference call. Jim Hardenbrook was asked by the committee to serve as chair. The Annual Conference Office provided valuable administrative support.

This document is intended for Standing Committee. While some sections of this document may readily be distributed to agencies, districts, congregations and individuals, the audience that the Vision Committee had in mind when writing this document was primarily the Standing Committee itself. The Vision Committee fully expects that the Standing Committee will carefully edit and adapt any material intended for purposes beyond its own use.

We submit this vision for the Church of the Brethren with prayers for continued attentiveness to God's guidance for the future.

Members of the Vision Committee:

Jim Hardenbrook, chair (Standing Committee)  
Bekah Houff (Standing Committee)  
David Sollenberger (Standing Committee)  
Frances Beam (Standing Committee)  
Steven Schweitzer (Bethany Theological Seminary)  
Donna Forbes Steiner (Brethren Benefit Trust)  
Jordan Blevins (On Earth Peace/Church of the Brethren)\*  
Joel Gibbel (On Earth Peace)\*  
Jonathan Shively (Church of the Brethren)

\*As the result of conflict of interest precipitated by a change in employment during his work on the committee, Jordan Blevins was replaced by Joel Gibbel as the On Earth Peace representative but continued to serve on the committee.



## **Vision Statement**

Through Scripture, Jesus calls us to  
live as courageous disciples by word and action:

To surrender ourselves to God,

To embrace one another,

To express God's love for all creation.



## **Vision Statement Description**

(The following four pages provide descriptive support for the words of the vision statement itself.)

### ***Through Scripture, Jesus calls us to live as courageous disciples by word and action:***

**We affirm our commitment to Jesus Christ**, as revealed through Scripture and through our openness to the Holy Spirit. Rejecting the world's expectations for us, we courageously choose to imitate the life and ministry of Jesus, who makes peace, serves and is served by others, and reconciles all of humanity to God.

**We are a people born out of Bible study**, taking the Word of God seriously and using it as a lens by which we evaluate our current practice of faith and behavior. We are called to be radical in extending the mission that Jesus began. Doing so puts the church out of step with the world, yet in continuity with Jesus' teaching. Jesus demonstrates God's radical love and grace for us, and calls us to love others as God loves us.

**We must strive to be faithful in both word and action.** We are called to speak and act in ways that manifest God's reconciling love. We acknowledge both are expressed differently in each of us.

**Biblical texts:** Luke 4:14-30; John 20:19-31; Daniel 3:1-18; Matthew 5:3-11; Colossians 3:17; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 2:11-12



## ***To surrender ourselves to God,***

**Surrendering ourselves to God means we trust God.** Led by the Spirit, we are called to count the cost of discipleship, relinquishing the need for power and control. By doing so, we are empowered beyond ourselves. By surrendering to God's love, we are set apart as recipients and messengers of God's love, holiness and grace.

**In a world of anxiety and fear, we trust** God's ability to transform us. Relying on God rather than our own ability, we pursue another way of living. As we practice continued openness to God's activity, we engage the world of mystery and hope that is the kingdom of God.

**We surrender ourselves to God** knowing that this requires confession and repentance, both individually and corporately. We acknowledge our need for God, accepting the grace of God and living out of it. We expect God to work in ways beyond our attempts to limit the presence and work of God.

**Biblical texts:** Psalm 146; Matthew 6:25-34 // Luke 12: 22-34; Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 16:24-28 // Mark 8:34-9:1 // Luke 9:23-27



## ***To embrace one another,***

**Embraced by God's love we acquire a new identity**, formed in us as we find our story in the midst of God's story.

**As a result of this new identity, we are called to love one another** as God has loved us, unconditionally, full of grace. We must forgive one another as Christ forgave us. We recognize the divine gift of unity. This unity in Jesus Christ, as revealed through Scripture and through our openness to the Holy Spirit, is not of our own making. This unity is not a result of uniformity of belief and practice; rather it is a unity marked by openness and inclusiveness to all people. We find space in the kingdom for one another's gifts, gifts that are being used for the good of the body.

**In the spirit of Matthew 18**, we are accountable to one another, and we live out the priesthood of all believers, while calling appropriate leadership, recognizing that there are a variety of gifts, that combine for the common good, and collectively build up the body. We pray for one another, advocate justice for one another, bear one another's burdens, build one another up, and listen to one another without judgment.

**Biblical texts:** Genesis 50:15-21; John 15:1-17; Romans 12:9-21; Ephesians 4:25-5:20; Colossians 3:11-17; 1 Peter 4:7-11



## ***To express God's love for all creation.***

**God loves the whole world.** Jesus came into the world to save it, not to condemn it. God expresses love even to those who are antagonistic to God. Jesus' prayer in John 17 expresses his desire that the world might know that God has sent him. God expresses love for all people, as well as the rest of creation.

**The commands for us to love** are based on who God is and who God loves. Service, peacemaking, evangelism, and care for creation are some ways we express God's love. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) speaks of making disciples and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7) gives practical guidance for loving one another, two inseparable dimensions of expressing God's love. The messages of the prophets are filled with images of re-creation, the hope that the world will be transformed.

**We confess our struggle with our place of privilege** and with the responsibility to express God's love for the whole world. We struggle with the complexities of our culture as they are manifest in political, social, economic, and religious systems. In the midst of this struggle we must depend upon God's love and grace, as we boldly live into God's vision of peace and shalom, whether globally or in our own homes and neighborhoods. Having surrendered to God and embraced one another, we are free to express God's love for all creation.

**Biblical texts:** Genesis 1:24-31; Leviticus 25:8-24; Psalm 36:5-6; John 3:16-17; Romans 8:18-25; Revelation 21:1-5



## Living Into the Vision

Members of a community of faith who seek to live as courageous disciples, surrender themselves to God, embrace one another and express God's love, must decide what form that living will take. It's one thing to articulate abstract and lofty platitudes about what we hear God calling us to do and be; it's quite another thing to consider how closely our practices mirror this vision and to envision what our lives might look like if we embraced this vision.

As Brethren, we believe that the Holy Spirit works through us as we discern God's will in community. In order to understand what this vision means for us, and the way we are called to live it out, members of the Church of the Brethren community must intentionally engage and interact with this vision. Such interaction will take many forms, including personal devotional time, church school classes or small group studies, congregational events, or discussions at the church-wide agency level by a board or large gathering.

The focus for discussion and discernment will seek to discover what God is already doing in the world, what God needs from us, how we can put our words into action, and whether this vision is consistent with both a Brethren understanding of faith and our openness to an unfolding future. In short, each part of our faith family - individuals, congregations, districts and agencies - are called to engage this vision and consider how it impacts life both individually and corporately. To simply read the vision statement and then go about our routine church practices without considering what it calls us to do and become is to deny God's vision for an authentic faith marked by active discipleship.

To live faithfully into the vision requires trust in God and hope for a renewing future. It also requires vulnerability and a willingness to engage hard questions about ourselves and our life together. If articulating this vision is to have any impact in our lives together, it will require intentional leadership from Standing Committee and humble presence to it by all of us.



# Study Guide

The study sessions that follow are intended to help us learn together. Learning does not assume an abandonment of our beliefs and practices, but it does presume a testing of them. Learning requires disturbing our assumptions and comfortable patterns of engaging the world. We should, therefore, expect to be challenged, encouraged, and compelled by engaging the resources and questions on our own and in partnership with one another.

How does learning disturb us? Consider the words of Jesus. Are they words of comfort? Words of challenge? Words of inspiration? More often than not his words had one or more of these affects on his disciples, church leaders and people in the crowd. How do the words of Jesus resonate with you today? With your congregation? With our denomination? With the world?

What if we invited one of our founders into the conversation? Consider the words and lifestyle of Alexander Mack. How welcome would those views be in your congregation today? If someone were to enter your life and share the concerns and guidance offered by Mack, how would they be received?

The following outline is provided to assist you in your study, discernment and active engagement with the vision. It is divided into four study sessions. Each session engages one line of the vision statement and is divided into sections based on the descriptive paragraphs introduced on pages six through nine. Your study will be guided by questions for interaction with the vision statement, its descriptive paragraphs, and related Biblical references.



# Session 1

**Read the vision statement out loud. Consider** the **first** line of the statement:

## **Vision Statement line one**

*Through Scripture, Jesus calls us to live as courageous disciples by word and action:*

## **Descriptive paragraph**

**We affirm our commitment to Jesus Christ**, as revealed through Scripture and through our openness to the Holy Spirit. Rejecting the world's expectations for us, we courageously choose to imitate the life and ministry of Jesus, who makes peace, serves and is served by others, and reconciles all of humanity to God.

**Discussion:** We affirm our commitment to Jesus Christ, as revealed through Scripture and through our openness to the Holy Spirit.

1. What does it mean to rely on Scripture?
2. Identify issues and challenges confronting both your personal life and your congregational life that have been informed by interaction with Scripture.
3. Would you consider yourself a courageous disciple? Why or why not?
4. Where in your life are you called to be courageous?
5. Consider what the world's expectations are for you. How does that differ from what God expects from you?
6. In what circumstances does imitating the life and ministry of Jesus put you at odds with the world, your community, your country or even your family?

## **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Daniel 3: 16-18 and consider what you hear God calling you to do, in light of the faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. What message is God giving to our community through this Scripture text?



**Discussion:** Rejecting the world's expectations for us, we courageously choose to imitate the life and ministry of Jesus, who makes peace, serves and is served by others, and reconciles all of humanity to God.

1. Do you have a role in reconciling all of humanity to God?
2. What are you or your congregation doing to make peace, serve people and reconcile others to God?
3. If we imitate Jesus' life and ministry, for example, what does that say about our obligation to evangelize?
4. What steps could you take to be more effective in helping to reconcile unchurched people in your community - your friends and neighbors - to God? What roadblocks get in your way, and how can they be removed?
5. What other discipleship practices contribute to the reconciliation of humanity to God?
6. Do you see reconciliation of humanity to God as something that's part of your vision as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?



## **Vision Statement line one**

*Through Scripture, Jesus calls us to live as courageous disciples by word and action:*

## **Descriptive paragraph**

**We are a people born out of Bible study**, taking the Word of God seriously and using it as a lens by which we evaluate our current practice of faith and behavior. We are called to be radical in extending the mission that Jesus began. Doing so puts the church out of step with the world, yet in continuity with Jesus' teaching. Jesus demonstrates God's radical love and grace for us, and calls us to love others as God loves us.

## **Discussion**

1. How do you or your congregation make decisions?
2. In what circumstances do you use the Bible as a lens by which to evaluate your behavior?
3. Describe a time when your engagement with Scripture caused you to view another person, an issue, or a challenge differently.
4. What does the phrase, "radical discipleship" mean to you?
5. When was the last time you were criticized for advocating a position or taking an action that you felt was necessary in order to be consistent with your understanding of your faith?
6. In what ways do you demonstrate God's radical love and grace for others?
7. Share a time when you offered grace to someone. In retrospect, was it the right choice? Why or why not?
8. How do you balance grace and judgment as a child of a grace-filled God?

## **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Luke 4:14-30, and consider what you hear God calling you to do. What questions do you have of the text? What isn't clear to you? How did the Scripture text challenge you? How did the Scripture text inspire you?



### **Vision Statement line one**

*Through Scripture, Jesus calls us to live as courageous disciples by word and action:*

### **Descriptive paragraph**

**We must strive to be faithful in both word and action.** We are called to speak and act in ways that manifest God's reconciling love. We acknowledge both are expressed differently in each of us.

### **Discussion**

1. Does your discipleship more often take the form of words or actions? What are the obstacles keeping you from being effective in each of those realms? Do you want to overcome those obstacles?
2. How would your life be different if you were more effective in sharing Christ with either words or actions? What would your friends think?

### **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read John 20: 19-31 and consider what you hear God calling you to do. What questions do you have of the text? What isn't clear to you? How did this Scripture text challenge you? How did the Scripture text inspire you?

**Next Session:** Agree to read and reflect on the second line of the vision statement before the next meeting.

**Close with prayer for discernment.**



## Session 2

**Read the vision statement out loud. Consider the second line of the statement:**

### **Vision Statement line two**

*To surrender ourselves to God,*

### **Vision Statement description**

**Surrendering ourselves to God means we trust God.** Led by the Spirit, we are called to count the cost of discipleship, relinquishing the need for power and control. By doing so, we are empowered beyond ourselves. By surrendering to God's love, we are set apart as recipients and messengers of God's love, holiness and grace.

### **Discussion**

1. What are your reactions to the descriptive paragraph?
2. In what way have you surrendered yourself to God?
3. What motivates you to surrender yourself to God?
4. What are the problems associated with the concept of "surrender"?
5. Do you view "surrender" as a positive or negative position? Is your view different when it's God to whom you are surrendering? If so, in what way?
6. How do we count the cost of discipleship?
7. When in your life have you had to count the cost of discipleship in order to be faithful? Was the cost worth it?
8. What does "surrender to God's love" look like for you?
9. What are the ways in which you are both a recipient and a messenger of God's love, holiness and grace?

### **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Psalm 146 and consider what you hear God calling you to do. What message is God giving to our community through this text?



## **Vision Statement line two**

*To surrender ourselves to God,*

## **Vision Statement description**

**In a world of anxiety and fear, we trust** God's ability to transform us. Relying on God rather than our own ability, we pursue another way of living. As we practice continued openness to God's activity, we engage the world of mystery and hope that is the kingdom of God.

## **Discussion**

1. How do anxiety and fear keep you from trusting God's ability to transform you?
2. Consider a time when you relied more heavily on your own abilities rather than on God. How would you define the kingdom of God?
3. What elements of mystery are there within the kingdom of God? What elements of hope?
4. How content are you to live within the mystery of God?
5. Do you have a need to have all your questions answered about God, or are you open to the idea that some questions may be unanswerable?
6. How do you practice openness to the activity of God?

## **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Matthew 6:25-34 and consider what you hear God calling you to do. Were you challenged by this text? How? What questions do you have of the Scripture text? What isn't clear to you? How do you see this Scripture relating to the vision statement description?



## **Vision Statement line two**

*To surrender ourselves to God,*

## **Vision Statement description**

**We surrender ourselves to God** knowing that this requires confession and repentance, both individually and corporately. We acknowledge our need for God, accepting the grace of God and living out of it. We expect God to work in ways beyond our attempts to limit the presence and work of God.

## **Discussion**

1. What part do confession and repentance play in your relationship with God?
2. Does confession draw you closer to or push you further away from God? In what way?
3. Is confession purely a private matter, or can congregations, groups and institutions benefit from confession? If so, what form would that take?
4. In what ways do you find yourself setting limits on the presence and work of God?
5. How can you or your congregation foster an attitude of expectation regarding God's presence?

## **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Luke 5:1-11 and consider what you hear God calling you to do. What message is God giving to our community through this text?

**Next Session:** Agree to read and reflect on line three of the vision statement before the next meeting.

**Close with prayer for discernment.**



## Session 3

**Read the vision statement out loud. Consider the third line of the statement:**

### **Vision Statement line three**

*To embrace one another*

### **Vision Statement Description**

**Embraced by God's love, we acquire a new identity,** formed in us as we find our story in the midst of God's story. As a result of this new identity, we are called to love one another as God has loved us, unconditionally, full of grace. We must forgive one another as Christ forgave us.

### **Discussion**

1. What does it mean to be embraced by God's love?
2. What is this new identity that is formed as we find our story in the midst of God's story?
3. How much of a role does God's love for you play in your embracing of another?
4. What does embracing one another look like in your congregation? In your life?
5. What keeps you from loving unconditionally and grace-fully?
6. How does forgiveness connect with embracing one another?

### **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Genesis 50:15-21 and consider what you hear God calling you to do. Were you challenged by this text? How? What questions do you have of the Scripture text? What isn't clear to you? How do you see this Scripture relating to this part of the vision statement?

Read John 15: 1-17 and consider the same questions.



### **Vision Statement line three**

*To embrace one another*

### **Vision Statement Description**

**We recognize the divine gift of unity.** This unity in Jesus Christ, as revealed through Scripture and through our openness to the Holy Spirit, is not of our own making. This unity is not a result of uniformity of belief and practice; rather it is a unity marked by openness and inclusiveness to all people. We find space in the kingdom for one another's gifts, gifts that are being used for the good of the body.

### **Discussion**

1. What is the difference between unity and uniformity?
2. How important is it to you that your brothers and sisters in Christ agree with (a specific) interpretation of Scripture, or one understanding of discipleship? Must this be your way?
3. Is there leeway in your acceptance of differing Christian interpretations and practices within your congregation? If so, how much?
4. Do you expect uniformity among basic understandings of Brethren beliefs and practices within the denomination?
5. At what points do you feel uniformity must exist in order to live in harmony with other Brethren?
6. What are the issues where you feel unity is required within the denomination?
7. Have you ever experienced a situation in the church where you felt your gifts weren't appreciated? How did that make you feel?
8. Have you ever excluded someone because you felt his or her gift wasn't appropriate?
9. Are some people's gifts inappropriate? What is the Scriptural basis for your position?

### **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Romans 12:9-21 and consider what you hear God calling you to do. Were you challenged by this text? How? What questions do you have of the Scripture text? What isn't clear to you? How do you see this Scripture relating to this part of the vision statement?



### **Vision Statement line three**

*To embrace one another*

### **Vision Statement Description**

**In the spirit of Matthew 18**, we are accountable to one another, and we live out the priesthood of all believers, while calling appropriate leadership, recognizing that there are a variety of gifts, that combine for the common good, and collectively build up the body. We pray for one another, advocate justice for one another, bear one another's burdens, build one another up, and listen to one another without judgment.

### **Discussion**

1. How should God's love be expressed through you?
2. What evidence of God's love will others recognize through you?
3. How do we show God's love to people?
4. What does being accountable to one another mean to you?
5. What is your congregation doing to build up the body of Christ?
6. How do you and your congregation pray for one another, bear one another's burdens, and listen without judgment? Give examples.
7. Do you do the same with other churches in your community, with the District, and for the Church of the Brethren as a whole? In what ways?
8. How does your congregation acknowledge the variety of gifts that we all bring?

### **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Ephesians 4:25-5:20 and Colossians 3:11-17. What do you hear God calling you to do? What do these texts say about how your congregation is expected to behave? What message is God giving to our community through these Scripture texts?

**Next Session:** Agree to read and reflect on line four of the vision statement before the next meeting.

**Close with prayer for discernment.**

## Session 4

**Read the entire vision statement out loud.** Then **consider** the **fourth** line of the statement:

### **Vision Statement line four**

*To express God's love for all creation.*

### **Vision Statement description**

**God loves the whole world.** Jesus came into the world to save it, not to condemn it. God expresses love even to those who are antagonistic to God. Jesus' prayer in John 17 expresses his desire that the world might know that God has sent him. God expresses love for all people, as well as the rest of creation.

### **Discussion**

1. What is meant by creation? When you hear the term creation, what does it include?
2. How is God's love for creation manifested?
3. Do you think God "loves" creation? If so, what part of it and in what ways?
4. What is our role in extending God's love toward creation?
5. Do you or your congregation have an emphasis on creation care? If so, does it involve "winning souls to Christ" **and/or** caring for the physical, earthly creation?
6. What role does the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) play in your efforts to express God's reconciling love?
7. How are we to imitate God's love for creation? Name some specific actions that you take to express this love.

### **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Genesis 1:24-31 and Psalm 36:5-6. Consider what you hear God calling you to do. Were you challenged by these texts? How? What questions do you have of these Scripture texts? What isn't clear to you?

How do you see these Scripture passages relating to this part of the vision statement? What message is God giving to our community through these Scripture texts?



## **Vision Statement line four**

*To express God's love for all creation.*

### **Vision Statement description**

**The commands for us to love** are based on who God is and who God loves. Service, peacemaking, evangelism, and care for creation are some ways we express God's love. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) speaks of making disciples and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 -7) gives practical guidance for loving one another, two inseparable dimensions of expressing God's love. The messages of the prophets are filled with images of re-creation, the hope that the world will be transformed.

### **Discussion**

1. How do you practice service, peacemaking, evangelism, and care for creation?
2. How are those practiced in a way that expresses God's love? What distinguishes those practices from a more secular approach?
3. Do you agree that the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) are inseparable dimensions of expressing God's love? Why or why not? Are both practiced in your life? Are both practiced in the life of your congregation?

### **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read John 3:16-17 and consider what you hear God calling you to do. Were you challenged by this text? How? What questions do you have of the Scripture text? What isn't clear to you? How do you see this Scripture passage relating to this part of the vision statement? What message is God giving to our community through this Scripture text?



## **Vision Statement line four**

*To express God's love for all creation.*

### **Vision Statement description**

**We confess our struggle with our place of privilege** and with the responsibility to express God's love for the whole world. We struggle with the complexities of our culture as they are manifest in political, social, economic, and religious systems. In the midst of this struggle we must depend upon God's love and grace, as we boldly live into God's vision of peace and shalom, whether globally or in our own homes and neighborhoods . Having surrendered to God and embraced one another, we are free to express God's love for all creation.

### **Discussion**

1. Do you agree that most of us occupy a "place of privilege"? What does that phrase mean to you?
2. What parts of the "complexities of our culture" get in the way of expressing God's love for the whole world?
3. What can you do to work with the political, social, economic, and religious systems in order to be faithful to your calling? Is it possible to work independently of those systems?
4. Is it easier to "boldly live into God's vision of peace and shalom" globally, or in our own homes and neighborhoods? What factors complicate either arena? What factors facilitate living boldly in either arena?
5. How does surrendering to God and embracing one another free us to express God's love for all creation? What are some specific steps you or your congregation can take to express God's love for all creation, including the people that God has created?
6. Where we spend our money often shows our priorities. Jesus said, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21) Evaluate how your personal budget and the financial practices of your congregation coincide with this vision statement.

### **Engage the Biblical texts**

Read Romans 8:18-25 and Revelation 21:1-5 and consider what you hear God calling you to do. Were you challenged by these texts? How? What questions do you have of these Scripture texts? What isn't clear to you?

How do you see these Scripture passages relating to this part of the vision statement? What message is God giving to our community through these Scripture texts?



**Reread** the entire Vision Statement as you close this session. Reflect on the study sessions and what you have learned.

1. What do you see God doing in the world, within the Church of the Brethren and through our life together?
2. Where have you personally been affirmed?
3. How have you been challenged?
4. What action steps are you considering or already taking in response to this vision?
5. What hopes and expectations do you hold for yourself, your congregation and/or agency, and the Church of the Brethren?
6. How will you serve and lead in pursuing those hopes and achieving those expectations?

**Conclude this study** with additional prayer for discernment.



# Implementation Suggestions

The following ideas for implementation are offered as suggestions and examples of how the Vision Statement might be engaged intentionally and purposefully. They are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather provocative in encouraging one another to live into and out of this common vision.

## **Standing Committee**

1. Determine a working model and organizational structure for promoting engagement with the vision statement
2. Review and revise the statement and accompanying documents to achieve ownership
3. Determine steps to present the vision statement to the Annual Conference
4. Consider forms of accountability for engaging the vision statement with the various partners within the Church of the Brethren
5. Develop processes for receiving feedback about the vision statement and its implementation from agencies, districts, congregations, and individuals
6. Participate together in a study process on the vision statement

## **Denominational Agencies**

1. Place the vision statement in dialog with current and emerging guiding documents and strategic commitments for your respective agency
2. Develop strategies for aligning guiding documents and strategic commitments with the denominational vision
3. Participate together in a study process on the vision statement
4. Provide feedback to the Standing Committee about their interaction with the vision statement

## **Districts**

1. Place the vision statement in dialog with current and emerging guiding documents and strategic commitments from each district
2. Develop strategies for aligning guiding documents and strategic commitments with the denominational vision
3. Participate together in a study process on the vision statement
4. Promote consideration of and engagement with the vision statement among congregations
5. Provide feedback to the Standing Committee about their interaction with the vision statement

## **Congregations**

1. Participate together in study of the vision statement (suggestions might include existing Bible study groups, Sunday school classes, small groups, board/committees/team leadership groups, intergenerational)
2. Promote consideration of and engagement with the vision statement among church members
3. Consider the vision statement as it relates to your congregation's vision and priorities
4. Actively align the congregation's vision, mission and priorities with the denominational vision
5. Provide feedback to the Standing Committee about your interaction with the vision statement

## **Individuals**

1. Use the vision statement and accompanying study materials as part of your regular devotional practices
2. Participate in your congregation's study of the vision statement
3. Consider how the vision statement relates to your personal mission and vocation commitments
4. Develop patterns of personal discipleship that align with the denominational vision
5. Provide feedback to the Standing Committee about your interaction with the vision statement



# Expanded Scriptural References

## ***Through Scripture, Jesus calls us***

- Genesis 12:1-3 (call of Abraham)  
Exodus 3:1-15 (call of Moses)  
Exodus 19:1-6 (Israel is called as a “priestly kingdom and a holy nation”)  
Judges 6:11-7:23 (call of Gideon)  
1 Samuel 3:1-21 (call of Samuel)  
Isaiah 6:1-13 (call of Isaiah)  
Jeremiah 1:4-10; 20:7-18 (call of Jeremiah; “fire shut up in my bones”)  
Jonah (call and mission of Jonah)  
Matthew 4:18-22 (Jesus calls the fishermen)  
Matthew 8:18-22 // Luke 9:57-62 (people who reject call giving excuses)  
Matthew 9:9-13 // Luke 5:27-32 (Jesus calls Matthew/Levi)  
Matthew 10:5-23 // Mark 6:7-13 // Luke 9:1-6 (mission of the Twelve)  
Matthew 28:18-20 // Mark 16:14-18 (Great Commission)  
Luke 4:14-30 (Jesus’ first sermon from Isaiah 61:1-3, which describes his mission and that of the church)  
Luke 10:1-24 (mission of the Seventy)  
Luke 19:1-10 (Jesus and Zacchaeus)  
John 1:35-51 (Jesus calls Philip and Nathaniel, and Peter and Andrew)  
John 4:1-42 (Jesus and the Samaritan woman)  
John 15:1-17 (if you love me, keep my commandments)  
John 20:19-31 (Jesus sends disciples with the Spirit; key “missional” text)  
Romans 8:28-30 (God calls us and we are to be conformed to the image of the Son)  
Romans 11:28-32 (the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable; and God may be merciful to all)  
1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 (consider your own call and the wisdom of God)  
2 Timothy 3:14-17 (inspiration and usefulness of Scripture, which equips us for every good work)  
2 Peter 1:3-11 (God’s divine power and our calling as we “participate in the divine nature”)

## ***To live as courageous disciples by word and action:***

- Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (the word commanded is “not too hard for you, nor is it too far away” but is “in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe”)  
Psalm 71:12-19, 22-23 (I will proclaim God’s wondrous deeds)  
Psalm 89:1-2 (I will proclaim God’s faithfulness, steadfast love; good as a liturgy)  
Psalm 145 (I will proclaim God’s goodness and the character and actions of God)  
Daniel 3:16-18 (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: “we will not serve your gods, even if God does not deliver us”)  
Matthew 5:3-11 (Beatitudes)  
Matthew 6:25-34 // Luke 12: 22-34 (take no thought for your life, but depend on God’s provision)

Matthew 7:15-20 // Luke 6:43-45 (you will know true and false prophets by their fruits)  
Matthew 19:16-30 // Mark 10:17-31 // Luke 18:18-30 (rich young ruler)  
John 14:11-14 (those who believe will do what Jesus did and will do greater works)  
John 20:19-23 (Jesus gives peace to the disciples who are being sent out)  
Romans 10:5-17 (confess and believe and you will be saved; necessity of proclaiming the good news)  
2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (we are a new creation, with a ministry of reconciliation, to be ambassadors for Christ, so that we can all be reconciled to God)  
Colossians 3:17 (in word and deed, do everything in name of Jesus for glory of God)  
2 Timothy 4:1-5 (proclaim the message in good and difficult times)  
James 1:22-27 (true religion is care for widow and orphans and living in holiness)  
James 2:14-26 (faith without works is dead)  
1 Peter 2:9-10 (proclaim God's mighty acts)  
1 Peter 2:11-12 (abstain from desires of flesh, conduct yourselves honorably, do honorable deeds so that God may be glorified)  
1 Peter 3:13-17 (always be ready to talk about the hope that is in you)

***To surrender ourselves to God,***

Psalms 20:6-9 (do not trust in military power, but trust in God)  
Psalm 37 (those who trust in God will never be forsaken)  
Psalm 146 (do not trust in humans, but in God who protects those on the margins)  
Isaiah 30:15-18 (trust and rest are salvation, depending on military power is foolish, so wait for God; compare Isaiah 31:1-3)  
Isaiah 40:27-31 (God strengthens the powerless and renews the strength of those who wait)  
Matthew 6:25-34 // Luke 12: 22-34 (take no thought for your life, but depend on God's provision)  
Matthew 10:34-39 (take up your cross and follow me)  
Matthew 16:24-28 // Mark 8:34-9:1 // Luke 9:23-27 (take up your cross and follow me)  
Matthew 16:13-23 (Jesus' question: "who do you say that I am?")  
Mark 1:14-15 (repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand)  
Luke 5:1-11 (Peter's call, moving out into deep water and casting nets again)  
Acts 2:37-42 (Pentecost, repent and be baptized, teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers)  
Acts 16:25-34 (Philippian jailer: believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved)  
1 Peter 5:7 (cast all your cares on God, who cares for you)

**To embrace one another,**

- Genesis 50:15-21 (Joseph will not be “in the place of God” so he and his brothers are reconciled, as God “intended good” when the brothers intended harm)
- Isaiah 58:1-14 (true fasting is to “loose the bonds of injustice” and care for those in need)
- Amos 1:1-2:3 (nations are guilty for “crimes against humanity,” especially during war and condemned)
- Amos 2:4-16 (Israel and Judah are guilty of violating Torah and for various forms of injustice and abuse, and condemned)
- Micah 6:6-8 (God requires justice, steadfast love, and humility)
- Zechariah 7:8-14 (showing mercy and caring for those on margins; if not, God will not listen)
- Zechariah 8:16-17 (proper actions toward one another)
- Matthew 5:6 (Blessed are the merciful)
- Matthew 5:9 (Blessed are the peacemakers)
- Matthew 7:1-5 // Luke 6:37-42 (judge not, lest you be judged; remove the log from your eye first and then assist your brother and sister)
- Matthew 18:15-20 (dealing with conflict in the church)
- Matthew 18:21-35 (extreme forgiveness as church practice)
- Matthew 25:31-46 (the “sheep” are the ones who care for those in need)
- John 15:1-17 (love one another as I have loved you)
- John 17:20-26 (Jesus’ prayer for his followers to be in unity)
- Acts 2:42-47 (disciples united together in teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayers, sharing with one another, as there was need)
- Acts 4:32-37 (unity of disciples and sharing of goods, as there was need)
- Romans 12:9-21 (ethics for Christians; live in harmony and peace as much as it depends on you, outdo one another in showing honor)
- Romans 14:1-23 (judging other Christians and being judged by God, not allowing stumbling blocks, pursuing what makes for “peace and mutual upbuilding”)
- Romans 15:5-7 (may God grant harmony, and thus glorify God)
- 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 (spiritual gifts, unity, living together as the Body of Christ)
- Galatians 5:13-15 (called to freedom, to be slaves to one another; the whole law is summed up as “loving your neighbor as yourself”)
- Galatians 5:16-25 (works of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit and living properly with each other)
- Ephesians 4:1-6 (called to a worthy life, in humility and bearing one another, “maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”)
- Ephesians 4:25-5:20 (behaving properly with one another; imitate God [only time in NT we are explicitly told to do so!] who forgives us, we should live in love)
- Colossians 3:11-17 (called into one body, to live in peace, bearing one another and forgiving one another)
- Titus 3:1-11 (be respectful and avoid those who promote divisions)
- Hebrews 3:12-14 (exhort one another daily to avoid the deceitfulness of sin)
- Hebrews 10:24-25 (provoke one another to good deeds encouraging one another as you meet together)



- James 5:13-20 (pray for one another, call for elders for healing, confess sins to one another, strive to “bring back a sinner from wandering”)
- 1 Peter 4:7-11 (love covers a multitude of sins, serve one another with your gifts, and “whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God”)
- 1 John 3:11-24 (love not in word and speech, but truth and action)
- 1 John 4:7-21 (love one another because love is from God who sent Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for us)

**To express God’s love for all creation**

- Genesis 1:24-31 (God creates humans in the image of God on sixth day, and charging humanity with responsibility for creation)
- Genesis 2:4-9; 3:22-23 (God creates humans from the earth and sends them to work the ground outside the Garden)
- Leviticus 18:24-30 (failure to keep commandments will result in land “vomiting” people out)
- Leviticus 25:1-7 (sabbatical year for the land commanded by God)
- Leviticus 25:8-24 (year of Jubilee for the land and for forgiveness of debts and returning of property, for the “redemption of the land” since the land belongs to God)
- Leviticus 26:27-45 (future exile will allow the land to enjoy its Sabbaths; compare 2 Chronicles 36:20-21)
- Deuteronomy 23:19-20 (during a siege, Israel is not to cut down the fruit trees)
- Deuteronomy 24:17-18 (Israel is to defend and bring justice for those on the margins of society)
- Psalm 36:5-6 (God, who shows steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness and justice, saves animals and humans)
- Psalm 68:5-6 (God protects those on the margins of society)
- Isaiah 11:1-9 (the “stump of Jesse” will judge and animals will live in peace, there will be no more destruction as the knowledge of God fills the earth)
- Isaiah 65:17-25 (God will create new heavens and a new earth that will result in peace for animals and for the nations)
- Hosea 4:1-3 (humans have polluted the land, causing the death of animals, birds, and fish, and God is not pleased)
- John 3:16-17 (God loved the world, and sent the Son to save it and not to condemn it)
- Romans 8:18-25 (all creation is groaning and waiting for its freedom and no more decay when “adoption, the redemption of our bodies” finally happens)
- 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (we are a new creation, with a ministry of reconciliation, to be ambassadors for Christ, so that we can all be reconciled to God)
- Ephesians 1:3-14 (Christ will “gather up all things in heaven and earth” in the fullness of time, including those who are marked by the seal of the Spirit)
- Colossians 1:15-20 (Christ is firstborn of all creation, through whom all things will be reconciled to God, making peace through the blood of the cross)
- James 1:27 (command to care for those on the margins of society)
- 2 Peter 3:8-13 (we wait for a new heavens and new earth at the coming of Christ)
- 1 John 4:7-21 (God loves us)
- Revelation 21:1-5 (all things will be made new, and God will dwell with humanity)