



**Dreams & Visions,
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...the Steady Stuff of Love**

Lenten Study 2011 - for the Diocese of Moosonee

By The Rev. Deborah Lonergan-Freake

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Introduction

This study was prepared for the Diocese of Moosonee as it entered into a The Vision Quest.. The title of this Lenten Study comes to us from the mouth of St. Peter's wife in the play *All That I Am*, by Irene Mahoney. It is a play about vision, lack of vision and a great deal of struggle and love. (pg 8)

Vision Quest:

What is a Vision Quest? In many First Nations cultures individuals return to nature to seek and connect with the Spirit. They seek personal and spiritual guidance for their lives as well as answers to problems from the Spirit and from the Creator. Vision Quests are a time when seekers leave behind everyday life, allowing their physical and spiritual centers to become open to communion with the Great Spirit; they are times of rebirth into the common life of the world.

A Vision Quest is about much more than just a necessary response to a difficult financial picture. It is about seeking spiritual guidance for a new path, a new way of being as the People of God in the Diocese of Moosonee. It is about leaving behind our known way - the way it's always been - the way we are accustomed to being Church. It is about allowing our physical and spiritual centers to be molded and shaped like clay in the Creator's hands. Its about praying for wisdom and guidance until *God's dream* for us today and into the future becomes *our dream* - in complete oneness, complete communion Of course, during the Vision Quest process, we hope for answers to our challenges and problems and we also pray that this will be a time of rebirth for us.

Dreams and Visions:

For the purposes of this Study:

- a *Dream* is a sequence of images, sensations, ideas and emotions, including hopes or aspirations, and is also the action of bringing forth or conceiving ideas which, if acted upon, will bring about practical, visible and concrete results;
- a *Vision* is a creative and prophetic means of bringing to birth in concrete, practical ways the ideas and aspirations brought forward in dreams; visioning involves a mystical experience of seeing as if with the eyes of the Spirit. A vision in this sense is not just the passive idea of predicting the future; it is an active means of creating the future one sees or envisions with the Spirit.

There are many examples of dreams and visions in our Scriptures. For example: Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17 both say, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." (NRSV)

The invitation to dream a new dream for our Church is about participating, not just observing. We are journeying with God. We are being called to co-create; to participate in creating with God a new way of being Church. None of us has all the answers, but together we can pull together the bits and pieces of the dream that each of us is given and the whole will be a beautiful new path for all of us. This process is like many people bringing together their scraps of cloth to sew together a lovely new quilt. We must take care to dream with God's guidance, not just do this work on our own. By meeting together to pray and seek God's

guidance for our new dream, our new vision, we will be strengthened by the wisdom given to each one. “We are parts of a whole, much greater than the sum of its parts, and yet within each part we are interconnected with the whole”. (Diarmuid O’Murchu)

Together let us explore Bishop Tom’s question: “*What does God have in mind for us?*”

Note:

There are several short readings and numerous questions for discussion in each Study session. Some or all may be used, depending upon the group. Unless otherwise stated, Biblical passages are from the NRSV. Meeting in a circle, with a focus table at the center, is suggested as a means of promoting communication. In many First Nations cultures, the talking circle is a common tool. By passing a talking stone or feather from person to person, everyone has opportunity to speak, after which if someone has an additional comment he or she may pick up the stone or feather once again. Rather than extraverts jumping into the conversation multiple times, making it a challenge for introverts to speak, the talking circle allows for respectful and attentive listening as each person speaks in turn. Your group may wish to try this method.

Week 1

Acknowledging: Naming our Losses

Setting: If possible meet in a circle with a small table in the center, covered in a dark purple or other dark cloth. Place dry twigs or dried brown plants on the table.

Presence: In your circle, invite participants to sit with their feet flat on the floor, hands palms up on their laps and breath deeply as they quietly repeat the following phrase several times, breathing deeply and allowing themselves to be aware of God's Spirit in the midst of the circle.

breathing in: May God's Spirit

breathing out: Guide our Journey.

Opening Prayer:

God of life, we begin this evening asking for your presence with us. Guide our discussions and help each of us express openly and honestly our feelings, disappointments and concerns. We acknowledge that our Church's present circumstances fill us with some confusion and questioning. In the dryness of this time, bring us healing, hope and comfort. It is hard for us to imagine change in this sacred area of our lives. Help us, O Creator, as we gather, to remember the words of Jesus: "Do not be afraid." "Peace be with you." Amen.

Opening Reflection:

Perhaps it is fair to say that on difficult days, we have eyes only for our difficulties and problems. On easy days we seem to have no eyes at all, going mindlessly along without focusing. Ungratefully we tend to take whatever good comes our way for granted, hardly noticing it, as if we are entitled to endless good.. Yet we complain at the smallest inconvenience, loss or problem. We miss innumerable opportunities for grateful joy by focusing on our difficulties. But when larger problems and losses cross our paths, it can be nearly impossible to focus on our joys and gratitude without first acknowledging and naming our losses and troubles.

Now I say to you in conclusion, life is hard, at times as hard as crucible steel. It has its bleak and difficult moments. Like the ever-flowing waters of the river, life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood. Like the ever-changing cycle of the seasons, life has the soothing warmth of its summers and the piercing chill of its winters. But if one will hold on, [we] will discover that God walks with [us], and that God is able to lift [us] from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace. (*Eulogy for the martyred children by Martin Luther King, jr., 1963*)

Perhaps we might look at our current situation in the Diocese of Moosonee as a time of winter, a time when there are cold winds and snows of realities beyond our control; a time to reflect, to pull our warm blankets around us to protect what is most precious, to explore and name what is most precious to us; and to prepare for the next season - spring, which brings new growth, new energy and possibilities. But before we can journey into spring, we must experience this wintertime and acknowledge the losses and dryness it brings to us. "Winter is a lesson about the fine art of loss and growth. Its lesson is clear; there is only one way out of struggle and that is by going into its darkness, waiting for the light, and being open to new growth." (*Joan Chittister*)

In our lives each of us experiences those *winter periods*, those times of waiting and wondering, times when we are unsure where we are to go or how we are to move forward, when darkness seems to cover us and the light of hope is dim or lost. It is in being with these moments and honoring their gifts that we can move on to the spring time of hope. Lent is a time to recall the priority of God in our lives. We come from and go to God, our Creator. God, the Spirit, is our companion on this journey through life. Our Christian faith, practiced in the context of the Church, is focused on living faith, seeking God's place in our lives. Amidst our

Lenten practices of fasting and other disciplines, Lent reminds us to be attentive to new life, to deepening faith and growth. Even in the midst of grief, life continues to burst forth.

Readings:

What does God have in mind for us?

The hard reality is that due to circumstances beyond our control, life as we know it in the Church must change. What are the circumstances that will prompt and require change in your Church or Parish?

Soul pain is the experience of an individual who has become disconnected and alienated from the deepest and most fundamental aspects of himself or herself. (*Michael Kearney, MD - Mortally Wounded: Stories of Soul Pain, Death and Healing 1997, pg 63, New York: Touchstone*)

Psalm 137:1- 4:

By the rivers of Babylon - there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows, there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?

II Corinthians 4: 16-18:

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Luke 4:1-13:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Sharing: (You may discuss some or all of the following questions or discuss concerns or questions which are raised in your group. As you discuss, be aware that there are no firm answers, just the bringing forth of ideas.)

- Was there a particular word or phrase in the Reflection or in any of the Readings, that stood out to you or that brought any memory or feeling to mind?
- Do you remember a time when you were faced with a major loss or change in your life? What was that loss and how did you feel when it happen? How has the loss changed you and how have you

adapted?

- What, if any, are the thoughts or questions that bring concern, fear or take away peace in regard to the future of your parish or Church and the Diocese?
- If there are changes in the Church, what would you fear losing?
- What excites you about changes? What changes would you hope will happen?
- Sometimes we are a little bit like the people of God in Psalm 137 who found themselves captive in a strange land. They longed for their homeland, as many of us may long to cling to the traditional ways of our Church. Perhaps we can ask ourselves their question: How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? What does God have in mind for us?

To close the discussion:

As your discussion draws to an end, be aware that some of you may be feeling a little sad, a little fearful of the future, a little apprehensive. That is OK. This time has been about acknowledging and naming the losses we may experience. All of us who live in the North know that we must respect winter and all the challenges it brings to us. Over the course of the next few weeks of our Lenten Study, we will be seeking and exploring with courage, new paths, new dreams and visions... we will be looking for hope in the midst of the harsh realities.... like looking for signs of spring in the bleakness of winter.

Closing Prayer:

God, our Creator, Jesus our Saviour, Spirit who walks with us, You who are mystery, reveal to us your dream for our Church. Help us recognize the new ways in which you are leading us; give us the courage to be open to new expressions of faith, eyes to see our new vision. We remember the pain and suffering of Jesus' death on the cross and the new life it brought through His Easter resurrection. In the midst of our apprehensions, losses and pain, Jesus' suffering reveals your love and gives us courage to seek hope. Crucified and Risen God be with us in this journey, this Vision Quest. Help us to embrace with gratitude the transforming realities we face with freedom, joy and praise to you everlasting. God. God of hope, give us courage. Amen.

Sending Out:

Having acknowledged and named our losses and sadness, in the weeks ahead we will turn our attention to seizing God's time for growth. We will take an honest and spiritual look at our situation, and ask how the Church needs to adapt its ministry and mission in order to meet people where we are, here and now. May the God of Hope, give us courage.

Week 2

Letting Go

Setting: If possible meet in a circle with a small table in the center, covered in a dark purple or other dark cloth. On the table place a symbol of the past (something that was once good, but is now spent, used up), for example: a worn, chipped or broken cup or plate, a candle stub, an old or broken trap.

Presence: In your circle, invite participants to sit with their feet flat on the floor, hands palms up on their laps and breath deeply as they quietly repeat the following phrase several times, breathing deeply and allowing themselves to be aware of God's Spirit in the midst of the circle.

breathing in: May God's Spirit

breathing out: Guide our Journey.

Opening Prayer:

Come Spirit of God, breath of God, be in our midst as we tell our stories. All growth requires some letting go and openness to the mystery of what can be. But change is hard, letting go is difficult. Creator God shape within us the desire to embrace newness and let go of the things of the past and of the present which hold us back, which are too heavy to carry into the future. Spirit of God, wrap us in your love that we will feel your guidance and love as we set our hearts and minds to dream with you the future. Amen.

Opening Reflection:

In the early 1970's, the Cree people of the communities on the East Coast of James Bay were faced with a new and unknown reality: the Hydro Quebec La Grande Project. Many members participating in this Study will remember those chaotic times - the worry and concern of families losing their traditional hunting and trapping grounds; the grief and sadness of placing small metal crosses in family burial grounds prior to those sacred lands being flooded by the waters of the great northern rivers. It was a time of unimaginable change: a time of holding onto what was absolutely essential, while letting go of other things which up until that time, had seemed indispensable, but turned out to be adaptable. Looking back now, it was also a time of new beginnings, of visioning a future firmly built on the traditions of the past, but embracing the new opportunities of the future. There was change, pain, loss, and lots of letting go but with tenacity and perseverance the People (Eeyou), the Cree First Nation, have moved into the present with a new vision of the future. Built on tradition, the present is strong and the future holds great promise. (See the National Film Board's *Flooding Job's Garden* or the book *Strangers Devour the Land*, both by Boyce Richardson)

Letting go of the past makes room to concentrate on the present and future. It doesn't mean that the past was bad, only that it's over, finished. Last time we met, we acknowledged and named some of our losses as we began the process of looking at the new reality of our Church. We will examine and explore some of the practices and ways of doing things which have been traditional in our parishes and Diocese over the past century or more. Throughout life, we are challenged to let go and move on. The Cree Walking Out Ceremony marks such an occasion of letting go. During the ceremony, for the first time two-year-olds, no longer considered babies, are allowed to walk around outside the meechwap. The ceremony marks an important stage in life. For the parents there is letting go involved as they acknowledge that their child is no longer a baby but a toddler, growing toward adulthood. There is both joy and sadness.

In our Christian life as both individuals and as the whole People of God, there are passages and stages of growth as well. During this Lenten Study we are striving to focus our thoughts and our prayers on being open to how God's Spirit is calling us to grow and change, and in the process, there will be letting go. There will be both joy and sadness. Change can be filled with hope and joy, but it can also be hard and pain-filled. Sometimes we want to hang onto what is familiar, known and comfortable even when faced with the reality

that we cannot. Our task is great, but who among us would want our Diocese, our Church, to suffer the fate which W.H. Auden spoke of in the following quote: “We would rather be ruined than changed: we would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the moment and let our illusions die.” (*W.H. Auden as quoted by James Hollis, 1998 - The Eden Project: In Search of the Magical Other, p 130, Toronto: Inner City Books*)

There is a traditional ritual amongst some American First Nations for releasing feelings. A person wishing to release or let go of certain feelings journeys into the woods. There, he or she digs a hole in the ground near a tree or bush and pours all the feelings to be let go into the hole; then the hole is covered. The person then thanks the tree for listening and witnessing the letting go, and Mother Earth for receiving the grief, sadness, or anger or other feelings released.

Readings:

Our being, our substance, must be porous in order for the Mystery to enter, to penetrate. That is the crux of the matter. It is not enough simply to be immersed in...life. We must let ourselves be plowed so that the furrows of our person become deeper and deeper, so that our earth becomes softer and softer. This is something our being craves, but this plowing is kenosis [emptying, the death which must precede new life, rebirth] and kenosis is not easy. In the measure that our being becomes porous - open, grace can penetrate us. Depth is possible. Transformation is possible. Thus an ever deepening penetration by the Mystery can fill us with spiritual being.” (Jean-Marie Howe, *Cistercian Monastic Life/Vows: A Vision*, p. 367)

“Change means movement. Movement means friction. (*Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, 1971 as quoted by Joan Chittister, 2003 p 21 Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope, Ottawa, Novalis*)

Luke 9:57-62:

As they were going along the road, someone said to him [Jesus], “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Genesis 19: 14a, 24-26:

So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up, get out of this place; for the Lord is about to destroy the city. "Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Luke 17:26-33:

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulphur from heaven and destroyed all of them - it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it.

Sharing: (You may discuss some or all of the following questions or discuss concerns or questions which are raised in your group. As you discuss, be aware that there are no firm answers, just the bringing forth of ideas.)

- In the course of your life, what have you let go of? What was it like? How did you feel? Did you choose to let go or was letting go thrust upon you? This doesn't need to be a only a serious discussion - have fun with this question - think of things like transistor radios, 8 track tapes or traditional styles of traps. Think of things which were normal in your youth that your children and grandchildren don't even know existed. If our Church still has only the tools and practices of our youth, how will a baby born today understand our Anglican faith?
- The people of James Bay have adapted to the circumstances in which they found themselves in the early 1970's, our Church is constantly faced with changes from which we cannot escape, and must face. Our Anglican Church has a long history and tradition. We too must adapt. What are the transistor radios and 8 track tapes and old style traps in our Church life?
- In contemplating *letting go* of some current practices - how we worship, who leads worship, how we use buildings, for you personally and then as a group: What seems essential? What might be adapted? What is dispensable or can be let go? If we want to be porous - ready and able to absorb whatever new the Spirit has for us, of what do we need to empty ourselves?
- Many First Nations' people possess or carry a medicine bag, a spiritual symbol and tool, containing items of spiritual, sacred or significant meaning for the person. If you were making a medicine bag for the Anglican Church in our Diocese, what would you put in it?
- In the readings from Genesis and Luke, there was a clear message about not looking back at the past. How do you see our Church, Parish or Diocese called to put our hands to the plow and not look back, but to move forward?
- Lot and his family were found worthy of saving from destruction - how hard it must have been for them to leave their home. Lot's wife must have been feeling the pain of the loss of her home and the fear of the unknown into which she was fleeing. Yet, in just the small, understandable act of looking back, she was frozen in time in a pillar of salt. What lessons are there in her experience for us today?

To Close the Discussion:

Jesus told those who wanted to follow him, don't look back...press forward. In our parish and personally, we want to follow Jesus...but it's hard not to look back. But, we must learn to let go of the things of the past that no longer nourish us or that are holding us down, like stones around our feet. Looking back and trying to bring everything that is past into the future prevents us from growing and following the Spirit, who calls us to new growth. Let us ponder the question: why would we want to look back, when God promises to journey forward with us?

Closing Prayer:

Creating Spirit, we give you thanks for your presence with us as we ponder our future. We thank you for what has been good in the past and ask you to bless us with courage and hope as we discover with you our new path. May we always be open and responsive to you, our God, the breath of life and to your infinite love and grace. Amen.

Sending Out:

Coming together, sharing ideas, fears and other emotions, our hopes and our desires is important in our Christian journeys. God is at work and present in us. Remember God's presence and be always grateful!

Week 3

Circles of Love, Circles of Life

Setting: If possible meet in a circle with a small table in the center, covered in a white or light cloth. On the table place circles... perhaps a medicine wheel, a labyrinth, a picture of the sun, moon or a globe or a Celtic cross.

Presence: In your circle, invite participants to sit with their feet flat on the floor, hands palms up on their laps and breath deeply as they quietly repeat the following phrase several times, breathing deeply and allowing themselves to be aware of God's Spirit in the midst of the circle.

breathing in: May God's Spirit

breathing out: Guide our Journey.

Opening Prayer:

Come, Spirit: you are the reason this gathering is a holy place. We gather on holy ground as holy people. Come Spirit, renew our hearts, open our eyes to renewal in the structures of your Church. Give us a spirit of openness to new and initiative ways of journeying with you our Creator. Help us to see that the changes and renewal to which you are calling us are part of our circle of life as a Church. Come, Spirit, Come! Amen.

Opening Reflection:

"Deep within the human mind, there is a fascination with the circle because it satisfies some longing within us. It is one of the most universal and ancient shapes in the universe. Reality often seems to express itself in this form. The earth is a circle; and even time itself seems to have a circular nature...The year is a circle. The circle of time is never broken. The circle brings perspective to the process..." (*John O'Donohue from Anam Cara, page 162-3*)

We are all part of the cycle of life. From the moment that we are born, or even before, until the time of our death. There is a rhythm of life: light and darkness, winter and summer, comings and goings, seasons and cycles, ebbs and flows. Life continues in its patterns. We can embrace it, look forward to its newness each day or stubbornly try to hold onto the present, which tomorrow will be the past.

Circles like the medicine wheel have four sections. As we grow, we change like the seasons, passing through the sections of the circle, learning from each one and moving on. The circle can represent life: childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. It can represent the seasons: spring, summer, fall and winter. Every circle has a center point, a dot at its core, from which it emanates, ripples out and spreads into that which we call a circle. At the center of the circle, is the place of beginning, the place of love and promise. There we touch the Spirit.

Readings:

Have Hope

Hope is miles apart from both pessimism and optimism. Because hope deals with reality and because surprise is essential to reality, hope is openness to that surprise. In the full religious sense, hope is not necessarily optimism, or the conviction that everything will turn out fine. Despair, not hopelessness, is the opposite of hope, and hope thrives in the midst of hopelessness when it will not give in to despair. When a situation appears hopeless, there is always room for surprise. To have hope is not to seek the surprise of a Hollywood happy ending, which is unrealistic optimism. To have hope is to remain open to the possibility of surprise when everything turns out worse than we could ever imagine. Despair assigns reality a deadline, whereas hope knows that there are no deadlines. This is how hope truly thrives in the midst of hopelessness. If we have hope, we create a hopeful reality. (*Br. David Steindl-Rast, gratefulness.org*)

O Lord God, I have no idea where I am going, I do not see the road ahead of me, I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, And the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire to please You. And I know that if I do this You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for You are ever with me, and You will never leave me to make my journey alone. (*Thomas Merton, as quoted by Esther de Waal in A Retreat with Thomas Merton (1992) pp 37-38, MI: Servant Publications, Ann Arbor*)

Genesis 1: 1-3, 26 - 28a

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light..... Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them.

From the Sioux First Nation:

The Sun, the Light of the world, I hear Him coming. I see his face as He comes. He makes the beings on earth happy. And they rejoice. O Wakan-Tanka, I offer to You this world of Light.

John 1: 1-5:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Sharing: (You may discuss some or all of the following questions or discuss concerns or questions which are raised in your group. As you discuss, be aware that there are no firm answers, just the bringing forth of ideas.)

- Imagine a river, the water running between its banks, over the jagged edges of the rocks on its bed. Some rocks are so large that the water must find a path around them, sometimes the ice heaves new stones in the river's path. Yet as the river flows and adapts itself around rocks and bends and drops over rapids and falls, it remains whole. Imagine the Church as a river. What stones are in the Church's path? How can the Church adapt and remain whole?
- Making a land sacred is to sacrifice something to it: giving as much as you receive; naming the land and telling its stories. The land lives - it is like a garden. In a way, our Church is our land, our spiritual home. It has been made sacred by Jesus' sacrifice and His love. It has also been made sacred by the love and labour and sacrifice of our ancestors in faith. How are we prepared to continue to make the Church sacred - even if there are changes ... what will our sacrifices be?
- Often in a dream, the dreamer feels disorientated...uncertain of the path, until something in the dream brings light to it. As we dream a new dream for our us and our Parish and Church, how are you

feeling?

- In the beginning God.... God creating, God blessing, God bringing to birth something new and wonderful. God is still creating, God is still blessing and bringing forth something new and wonderful. How are you experiencing God bringing blessing and creating in you and in our Church at this time?

To close the discussion:

There is a song written by Kathy Sherman, csj, called "Gather the Dreamers". Some of its words, speak to our Study and our task:

Gather the dreamers.... now is the time to give birth to the dream... a new day is dawning. We can make dreams come true if our vision is new. It's a quest that belongs to us all.

Our task is becoming clearer.... we are the dreamers, we are the ones called to dream with God and to allow God to create with us something new and wonderful. We may have no idea where we are going, we may not see the road ahead of us clearly, but if we remain focused, centered on God, God will bless us.

Closing Prayer:

O breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere! Release a space to plant your presence here. Envision your "I Can" now. Embody your desire in every light and form. Grow through us this moment's bread and wisdom. Untie the knots of failure binding us, as we release the strands we hold on others' faults. Help us not forget our Source, yet free us from not being in the Present. From you arises every Vision, Power, and Song from gathering to gathering. Amen (*The Lord's Prayer from world prayers.org*)

Sending out:

The future holds so much promise. May our future actions grow from here!

Week 4

Dreaming a New Dream

Setting: If possible meet in a circle with a small table in the center, covered in a bright cloth. On the table place a bowl of water & scatter some seeds.

Presence: In your circle, invite participants to sit with their feet flat on the floor, hands palms up on their laps and breath deeply as they quietly repeat the following phrase several times, breathing deeply and allowing themselves to be aware of God's Spirit in the midst of the circle.

breathing in: May God's Spirit

breathing out: Guide our Journey.

Opening Prayer:

God of Creation, gift us with a sense of adventure; make us unafraid to take the dangerous curves and risks necessary as we dream anew our journey into the future of our Diocese. As we search for glimpses of truth, we journey together toward new meaning. As we seek newness and clarity out of chaos, may we be constantly aware that we are not alone - that you, our Creator, are with us. Let us be good soil in which to nurture the seeds of a new dream. God of Creation, bless our dreaming. Amen.

Opening Reflection:

Bishop Corston of the Diocese of Moosonee wrote:

I hope we will not throw up our hands and simply give up in facing this reality. Indeed, I hope the situation can help us to come up with answers to the question: "*What does God have in mind for us?*" Because I do believe that this is His Church, and we are His stewards, and He has called all of us to evangelize, educate and minister to one another. We need to take this as an opportunity to examine what we do and why we do it and intentionally commit ourselves to God's mission "to encourage the ministry of all baptized Christians... in strengthening spiritual growth?"

"In the middle of our life's road, I found myself in a dark wood, the straight way ahead lost." (from the opening lines of Dante's *Divine Comedy*) The darkness of faith has been described as living between dreams. Perhaps this is the place in which some of us now find ourselves. And if we are between dreams, "Perhaps it's time to dream another dream" as Simon Peter's wife says in the play *All That I Am* by Irene Mahoney. (pg 40)

In the course of life and faith, we are often converted not by sermons but by circumstances. So we need not waste time worrying that we might have entered into our Vision Quest more out of necessity, than some high spiritual purpose. God can always use our circumstances to move us along in our journey with God and to God. Only God can lead us into a new dream that is *God's dream for us*. One of the hardest parts of the journey toward a new dream is realizing that we have to give up the need to control where we are going, stop looking back, and let God lead and guide us. God invites us to listen for that guidance with the ears of the heart, the ears of faith.

Readings:

Martin Luther King was a black pastor growing up under severe racism in America. On August 28, 1963, he led a march in Washington, D.C. and gave one of the greatest speeches ever in human history. Reverend King said,

I have a dream that one day, my four little children will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character!

Racism policies in America started to change. Dr. King's vision has become a reality and continues to shape America.

Life is a series of lessons, some of them obvious, some of them not. (*Joan Chittister, 2003 p 21 Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope, Ottawa, Novalis*)

“The cosmos dreams in me while I wait in stillness, ready to lean a little further into the heart of the Holy”.
Joyce Rupp, 2001

Amos 9:11, 14-15:

In the future, I will rebuild David's fallen kingdom. I will build it from its ruins and set it up again, just as it used to be. I'll make Israel prosper again. You will rebuild your towns and live in them. You will drink wine from your own vineyards and eat the fruit you grow. I'll plant your roots deep in the land I have given you, and you won't ever be uprooted again. I, the LORD God, have spoken! (Today's Contemporary English Version)

Mark 2: 21-22:

"No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

Luke 4:17-19:

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Sharing: (You may discuss some or all of the following questions or discuss concerns or questions which are raised in your group. As you discuss, be aware that there are no firm answers, just the bringing forth of ideas.)

- Dreams are made of hope and vision. The passage from Amos speaks of God's promise to his people living in exile. What are God's promises to us?
- We believe that the Church is the People of God. People grow and change, they do not stay the same. When we are young, we dream about our future: what will we do, will we get married, where will we go... ? As we age, our dreams and goals change with us. The People of God need a dream for the future - a future which is evolving, growing and changing. What is the "new wine" or the new dream which we can put in the new wine skins of our Church?
- The passage from Luke 4 reminds us not only of Jesus' mission and ministry but of our own. How has the Church proclaimed the good news in the past and now? Can you envision new ways this could be done? How?
- Doctors and fitness instructors tell us that to be strong and healthy, we have to use our muscles and exercise our hearts. The Church also has to use all its parts to be strong and healthy. What is un-lived in our Church today? Where do you see potential?
- C.S. Lewis said: "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream". What dream emerges in you when you hear terms such as: *Shared Ministries, Local Leadership, Anglican Mission?*

To Close the Discussion:

The seeds of our Church's dream are in each of us. They have been nurtured by those who have shared faith with us. Remember who taught you about God. Remember how your faith has developed. Each of us is the good soil of today's Church - the good soil into which seeds of faith have been planted. As we continue this Study, seeking our new dream, our new vision, let us imagine the seeds of new growth sprouting in each of us. And let us give thanks to God for hope.

Closing Prayer:

May we give our seed room to breathe and expand. May our anticipated dream find a voice and a home in our sharing. May hope move freely through our hearts, gifting our spirits with enthusiasm and joy. May we walk through this time of challenge with a sense of purpose, undaunted by fear. May we never lose confidence in our ability to grow as God already dreams for us. Amen.

Sending Out:

May we feel the warmth of God's love nurturing and encouraging our emerging dream, helping it grow; just as the sun draws tiny sprouts to poke their heads through the earth. May we embrace with joy and enthusiasm all that is before us.

Week 5

Visioning a New Future

Setting: If possible meet in a circle with a small table in the center, covered in a bright multi-coloured cloth or something metallic. On the table place a single lit candle.

Presence: In your circle, invite participants to sit with their feet flat on the floor, hands palms up on their laps and breath deeply as they quietly repeat the following phrase several times, breathing deeply and allowing themselves to be aware of God's Spirit in the midst of the circle.

breathing in: May God's Spirit

breathing out: Guide our Journey.

Opening Prayer:

Spirit of Creation, you hover over the earth with the breath of newness and call us to receive the gifts of all creation, the gifts of a new vision, of beauty and joy. Renew our hearts as we commit ourselves to discover and live your vision for us. We praise you for sustaining us and inviting us to follow the vision which is enfolding for us. We give thanks for the sharing and the wisdom of the last few weeks of this Lenten journey. Enrich us so that we may share your joy with others. Amen.

Opening Reflection:

How do we know when we are seeking God's vision and not merely our own? When we pray and seek God's vision, God will find us and we will experience unexpected awareness or clearer vision, a heart-felt sense of God's presence, an awareness of the stirring of the Spirit within us. In this Lenten Study, we have come together to seek God's guidance, to be filled with holy wisdom. We desire openness to God's leading and guidance and God will answer our prayers and give us what we *need*, not necessarily what we want. "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'" (C. S. Lewis) We pray that as our Vision Quest continues, we say: Thy will be done.

It is said that there are five types of people in the world:

- Those with **no vision**. Living out of boredom, frustration and regrets who will look back on *what-if's*.
- Those with **low vision**. Afraid to step out in faith and believe God has a great dream.
- Those with **wrong vision**. Be sure to follow God's dream, don't make it up yourself.
- Those with **vague vision**. Wanting something great, but just floating aimlessly, without God's direction.
- Those with **God's vision**. Living out God's vision, means experiencing the most exciting and meaningful life possible!

And living God's Vision is the life offered to each of us when we are baptized and promise to:

- continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers;
- persevere in resisting evil and, whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord;
- proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ;
- seek and serve Christ in all persons, and love our neighbours as ourselves; and
- strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

(BAS paraphrased)

What amazing things does the future hold for us if we, God's people living out our baptism covenant, are following God's vision!?

Readings:

"Hear my words: When there are prophets among you, I the Lord make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams". (Numbers 12:6)

"Where there is no vision, the people perish". (Proverbs 29:18 King James Version)

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord." So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.

Matthew 6:28-29:

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Sharing: (You may discuss some or all of the following questions or discuss concerns or questions which are raised in your group. As you discuss, be aware that there are no firm answers, just the bringing forth of ideas.)

- Can these bones live? Our Church is facing great challenge. We are like the dry bones - tired and spent, but we want to hear the word of the Lord. We have God's Spirit within us, but we must learn to live in a changed and new way. How does the passage from Ezekiel speak to you? Does it give you hope?
- In many places baptism has become little more than a ritual of passage. Promises are made without much thought or commitment. How might a new vision include young families? How can the message of the Gospel be taken to those beyond the doors of our buildings? What changes are we willing to make to continue Jesus' mission: "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"? (Luke 4:17-19)
- "Where there is no vision, the people perish". Are you willing to continue to pray for openness to God's new dream and new vision for us and for our Church and to do all you can to accept the changes

and new ways of being Church and help others do so too?

- We end, as we began, with the question: “*What does God have in mind for us?*”

Closing Ritual and Prayer:

Dreams and Visions, Dreams and Visions... the Steady Stuff of Love. During this Lenten Study we have prayed and shared, exploring our relationship with God and with our Church. We have opened ourselves to God’s wisdom, love and guidance in a deeper way and we have sought a new Dream and a new Vision. The process is on-going. It is not finished but we are thankful for it. Let us now enter into pray once again as we draw this Study to a close.

The Flame

All things came into being through him, and without him not one things came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. John 1:3

I invite you to focus your attention on the light - the flame.

Let the flame evoke within us the memory of the primordial creation, billions of years ago when our universe was born. God’s Word was spoken there and You and I were being loved there.

Let the flame evoke within us the memory of the intense heat of a star, exploding, giving birth to our sun and from the scraps of that birth, our beautiful blue-green earth. You and I were being loved there.

Let the flame evoke within us the memory of Earth... a lava-like fiery ball in the sky, which in time formed a crust on which we stand today. You and I were being loved there.

Let the flame evoke within us the memory of the earliest humans, who sat gazing into their life sustaining fires, while shadows danced on cave walls. You and I were being loved there.

Let the flame evoke within us the memory of that burning bush before which Moses stood barefoot and shaking, experiencing the Divine. You and I were being loved there.

Let the flame evoke within us the memory of those fires on the hillsides and lake sides of Galilee, around which the rabbi Jesus sat instructing his disciples. You and I were being loved there.

Let the flame evoke within us the memory of our parents and grandparents and other family and ancestors who sat before their fireplaces, lanterns and candles and dreamed great dreams for their children. You and I were being loved there.

Let the flame make us aware of the fire that burns deep within us, a fire that embraces us with all our successes and failures, hopes and fears, joys and anxieties, good moments and not-so good ones. Divine Love invites us to move confidently and creatively into our unimaginable future....

Adapted from Flame Meditation The Divine Dynamic, by John Surette, sj (pg 140 ff)

Sending Out:

In each of us the Spirit dwells. May our quest for a new vision ignite the fire of baptism that smolders in each of our souls. We are created in the image of God. We are loved beyond measure. Imagine the church on fire with the power of the Spirit. Imagine the explosion of peace and joy that could be ours. This is our potential and our true calling. May we leave this place rejoicing that the Divine Light has come to us to carry into our future with joy and thanksgiving.