

**To the Parish of St. Augustine of Canterbury, Diocese of Edmonton, Alberta.**

*All Saints 2019*

Dear friends,

I am writing to inform you that I have been approved by our bishop for sabbatical time in this upcoming 2020 year. I will be on sabbatical a week or so after our Easter celebration through till July, and taking family vacation after that. Clergy are eligible every 7 years to apply for this program which is both a resting time and a learning time. I am attaching the proposal that I brought to bishop Jane so you can see what I will be up to and especially the “why now” section at the beginning.

For the sake of clarity I will add to the proposal the following questions and answers:

- *Is this a transition out of St. Augustines?*
  - No. I am not actively discerning to move on from St. Augustine’s – I feel we are a good fit for the time being! I actually believe that taking a sabbatical break is a very mutually beneficial thing for both clergy and parish!
- *What is the financial impact to the parish?*
  - Our diocesan sabbatical program is set up to keep the finances “business as usual.” Parish funds are used for only 75% of my income during sabbatical, and diocesan funds are used for the other 25%. This leaves funds for a ¼ time position within the parish – roughly equivalent to paying clergy for Sunday coverage according to diocesan schedules.
- *Who will be filling in the things that you do at St. Augustine’s?*
  - Often what happens is there is a retired priest or theological student who is chosen (by parish and bishop together) to cover Sundays. However, I am really open, and I think bishop Jane would be too, if there was a creative way we saw of taking this time not as just “maintaining” or holding space, but taking it as a chance for growth! What gifts and skills do you think we need in such a person? What activities do you hope could happen? Please let me know if you have ideas!  
Whoever ends up coming, it will be high on my priority list to make it as smooth a transition as possible.
- *Are you going away somewhere?*
  - Not exactly, the work I will be doing is local, and it will be mostly day trips. I intend to include some learning within the sabbatical and may go away for some of that.
- *Will Megan be off during this time?*
  - No, our music director will remain as she is!
- Your proposal includes some implications for parish life, will this be coming back to St. Augustine’s?
  - The sabbatical work will be a research phase of learning and opening a conversation on these topics. It is a very different conversation about how my learnings will be implemented and shared in the parish. It will be something we do together.

Since we are still in early reflection on this, I would really value hearing any further questions, concerns, thoughts, and feelings that might rise up for you.

JONATHAN +

# Sabbatical Proposal For 2020

Rev. Jonathan Crane, St Augustine of Canterbury, Edmonton

## Sabbatical Leave Dates

- Sabbatical leave: Monday April 20<sup>th</sup> – Sunday July 12<sup>th</sup> (12 weeks total beginning from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday after Easter)
- Annual Summer Vacation: July 13<sup>th</sup> – August 9<sup>th</sup> (4 weeks)

## Why now?

- 2020 is the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. I feel it is healthy, on some rhythm, to step back from the business of parish ministry to allow a different kind of prayerful reflection on the ordained life and on the life of the church.
- I am 6 years at St. Augustine's. We are relatively stable and in a pattern of parish life that I feel able to step away from for a time with confidence that it would not put undue pressure on the parish system.
- There is a kind of higher-level reflection that is difficult to attain while in the midst of full-time work. A sabbatical would allow space to focus in on a salient topic for deeper reflection and learning in ministry.

## Proposed Study Topic

### Big-Picture Question

Across our Nation and Canadian Church, there are two big issues that mark political and theological debates alike: Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and the Environmental Crisis. Both are a crisis of how we live well on the land. The church is in the midst of this debate and I would like to reflect on how the question of living well on the land relates to a “regular” Anglican parish in a suburban context.

I will begin by briefly telling some of my story with both of these before I narrow the question and apply it to ministry in a parish context.

### Aboriginal

In seminary, I traveled with a mission group up to the Northern Cree community of Chisasibi. It was my first exposure to a healthy aboriginal community blended with the life of the Anglican church. The church was central to the community (90+ kids in confirmation), and so were the traditional ways of hunting and ancient indigenous rites of passage. It was my first experience of seeing the life of the church enculturated reasonably well within a traditional aboriginal context.

Also during seminary, I traveled to visit my parents who were then living in Rotorua, New Zealand – one of the Maori centers of the country. We visited their local Anglican church and discovered an English-style church building completely adorned inside with Maori symbols and art. The one I remember was a diamond design that symbolized the flounder. There is a Maori saying that the flounder never returns to the same place twice, and so, they understand, the Christian life – we never go back to our old ways,

we always go forward. For me it was a rich example of how indigenous spirituality could, very healthily and attractively, express the truths of the Gospel. I noticed upon returning to Canada how few examples we had of this. I appreciate here Ven. Travis Enright's work to explore Anglican worship within a Cree imagination.

Later, while serving at Holy Trinity, I travelled with a small group of youth to attend the National CLAY event where Bishop Mark Macdonald was speaking about "the Spirituality of the Land." He began by expressing belief that our prayers ought not to be shaped only by historical lineage, but also by the local "Spirituality of the Land." He noticed how the history of mission in Canada has largely, across denominations, been about importing foreign shapes of prayer. Church buildings and practices tend to reflect the local spirituality of Germany, or England, or Norway more than the Canadian Plains. He was gently challenging this practice and inviting us to consider what a local expression of Christian spirituality would look like. What does a local expression of prayer look like? How might the English tradition of prayer be appropriately blended with the ancient local traditions of prayer as well as those of our current practices on this land.

### Environmental Crisis

My mother was a research biologist in Edmonton. She had grown up with parents, my grandparents, who held three lots in Calgary near the Bow river – and more than one full lot was turned into an urban garden and greenhouse. My mother grew up with an interest in the natural world from the garden, and also from the family's other activities of berry picking and hiking. I grew up with some of the same gardening on our lot as well as my mother's frequent scientific collecting trips to various forests for the tree diseases she studied.

As our current environmental crisis became more clear, and as I forged out on my own, Megan and I began shaping some similar habits in our life, and I would say, going even further than our parents. Two things have shaped our current practice more than any other:

- An orientation for overseas ministry with Rev. Jonathan Schmidt in Toronto was really influential for us by helping us understand the global impact of our decisions and lifestyle. Jonathan and his family live very simply, without a car, on a single income on account of poverty in the world. His life and teaching impacted us deeply
- Wendell Berry – farmer, author, and activist – has also become a connecting point for the question of living well on the land for Megan and I. In both his fiction and non-fiction, Berry is persuasively able to connect many of our current social and environmental issues to a more basic problem of disconnection from the land and human community. For me, he holds the whole thing together – the spiritual (he is a Christian), the environmental, and the communal. This includes for him a real engagement with traditional peoples of his land. His main theme is also shared by aboriginal voices – "what we do to the web of life, we do to ourselves."

### Narrowed focus

This is a very broad topic. For the work of a sabbatical, I would like to develop a vision for:

*How one largely white middle-class Anglican parish church might, not only acknowledge ecological and aboriginal connection but healthily integrate a holistic practice of praying and functioning with the land and the people of this land. This would include reflection on liturgy, church governance structures, leadership, and outreach activities.*

## Process of Study

A series of interviews as an integrative project.

People to interview:

- Local individuals who are actively seeking a deeper connection with land within and outside of the church including specifically aboriginal voices.
- Local Christians, church leaders, and other leaders who are seeking to create ecologically integrated and responsive organizations
- List of 8-10 people TBD

Broad questions to address

1. How did you personally come to value a connection to the land. What does that mean to you now?
  - *Goal: to determine what factors have helped people deepen connection to the land.*
2. Beyond individual response, how does your organization foster a richer sense of connection to the land you occupy?
  - *Goal: to gain a sense of the breadth of responses to this question*
3. For churches, how does the ecological crisis / aboriginal reconciliation change how you pray?
  - *Goal: to gain a sense of the breadth of responses to liturgical transformation.*
4. What are the next steps your organization hopes to make to deepen your connection to the land.
  - *Goal: to gain a sense of where this conversation needs to go next.*

## Reporting

While this topic could be presented in a number of ways, I am drawn to producing a series of podcasts on this topic. The medium itself presents the idea that this is an ongoing conversation critical for our attention as the church, even though the answers might not be fully formed. It would also allow hearing the actual voices of those interviewed rather than a summary of my own. Podcasts can also be easily shared.

## Benefits to the diocese and local parish

I believe these are some of our biggest questions as a church in this generation. I do not think they have easy answers, but require our attention, conversation, and reflection. I believe that in pursuing a parish response to these questions we become more faithful and fulfilled as congregations. The five-fold matrix may help here:

- As Apostles these questions hold implications for how we structure our churches, what activities we pursue, and how we reflect the sustainability and cyclical patterns of nature within our organizations
- As Prophets we hear the call of God to be faithful with what we have been given. Bishop Mark MacDonald pointed out that John 3:16 evokes the sense that “God so loved the LAND...”. Our care of the land we occupy is an expression of our thankfulness to God for God’s love.

- As Evangelists we know that many in our communities will not give the church a second look if we are not doing actively bettering the world. In a time when the church is seen by outsiders as disconnected and irrelevant, our concrete actions begin to mean much.
- As Shepherds, I am interested that Jesus so often uses agricultural images to explain spiritual growth in God's kingdom. I believe there will be some helpful reflection, using ecological images of our own to express how we care for people in the parish.
- As Teachers, there is a great opportunity to further the knowledge of our congregations on how we respond as a church to these Great Questions of our generation. An ecological reading of the scriptures is helpful to broaden our sense of God's redeeming work in the world.

*Approved by Bishop Jane Alexander.*

*Funding confirmed October 2019 for sabbatical 2020.*