

Holy Trinity Sabbatical Narrative

Part A: Program Rationale and Design

1. Rationale for engaging in the program:

When I came into the country and saw that I had all time in my own hands, having devoted it wholly to the study of Felicity, I knew not where to begin or end; nor what objects to choose, upon which most profitably I might fix my contemplation. I saw myself like some traveler, that had destined his life to journeys, and was resolved to spend his days in visiting strange places: who might wander in vain, unless his undertakings were guided by some certain rule, and that innumerable millions of objects were presented before me, unto any of which I might take my journey. Fain would I have visited them all, but that was impossible. What then should I do? Even imitate a traveler, who because he cannot visit all coasts, wildernesses, sandy deserts, seas, hills, springs and mountains, chooses the most populous and flourishing cities, where he might see the fairest prospects, wonders, and rarities, and be entertained with greatest courtesy: and where indeed he might most benefit himself with knowledge, profit and delight: leaving the rest, even the naked and empty places unseen. For which cause I made it my prayer to God Almighty that He, whose eyes are open upon all things, would guide me to the fairest and divinest. - Thomas Traherne, Centuries 3.52

In teaching us a new visual code, photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe. They are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing. – Susan Sontag, On Photography

The first quote above by the great Anglican spiritual writer, Thomas Traherne is a great entry point into the rationale behind the form that this sabbatical proposal has taken. First of all, the quote comes from his most famous work called by the name “Centuries”. In the ascetic and spiritual tradition, this form of writing (first developed in the 4th century) was a way to explore various concepts and practices related to the spiritual journey, and to do that in 100 separate but related short statements/paragraphs. This form of spiritual reflection gave me the idea to attempt this, not simply with words, but also with corresponding pictures—100 pictures to correspond to the proposed 100-day sabbatical renewal time period. Of course I will be taking far more than 100 pictures, but as a way of summing up the journey, I plan to choose one picture from each day and create a “Century of Images”. I also plan to write a corresponding entry for each image I

choose. For as the great photographer Dorothea Lange reminds us, *All photographs...can be fortified by words*. This thought began to excite me, especially because I have probably taken less than 100 pictures in my entire life! The thought of learning a new skill, of being initiated into a new art form thrills me! So, I included a few photography classes as preparation for this sabbatical journey as well as positioned the learning of new skills at the center of what I am asking the congregation to join me in while I'm away---learn a new skill, take a class, do something you have never done before, open yourself to new people, places and things—choose at least one thing to help you engage the world in a completely new way. But why? Why photography? Why spend my sabbatical time learning and developing a new skill—the skill of taking pictures. Fundamentally, because I want to see things more truly, more lovingly, more patiently---I want to alter my awareness of that which is around me, and I believe that learning how to see the world through the frame of a camera and all the variables that are at play, can be an aid in that endeavor. Vision is at the heart of our faith---in fact, it is that to which our faith is leading us—faith guides us until we have eyes to see! The second quote above by Susan Sontag highlights perfectly the way in which photography can aid in just this effort. As she says, pictures are “a grammar” and “an ethics of seeing”. It is into this adventure of encountering God’s world in new ways that I am inviting our congregation to join me. To join me in learning a new skill so as to expand our capacities of perception and to deepen our appreciation for the Wonder in which we live and move and have our being.

2. Narrative description of activities and timeline

Motorcycle

I am proposing that this sabbatical season of renewal take place between mid-June and mid-October 2024 and that it will last 100 days to correspond to the framework of a Century of Images described above. These 100 days are structured not only around the taking of photographs but also the places I wish to go *in order to* take those pictures. As I mentioned before, learning a new skill is central to this time of renewal, and this is a practice I have engaged in before. 3 years ago, I fulfilled a desire I have carried with me my entire adult life, to learn to ride a motorcycle. And for the last three years, I have been doing just that! With that in mind, the plan is to travel on the motorcycle to all the places I will go. The entire trip takes me from Denver to Winnipeg to Toronto and Quebec and down into New England and down the entire Eastern Sea board and then back home from Florida. It's a nearly 8000 mile trip! This requires physical endurance, provides hours and hours of solitude and immeasurable amounts of joy in seeing the beauty from a bike. Riding in solitude enjoying the beauty of God's good creation will be a daily discipline.

Canada

I have never been to Canada in my life. This part of the trip captures for me the need I have to feel as though I am "leaving home". For me, the "leaving" is central to the project of opening my vision to new things. And I love the feeling captured in the words of the ancient Odysseus, "I long—I pine...to travel home and see the dawn of my return". To desire home is a wonderful desire to cultivate!

Sites to Visit

The first leg of this trip will take me through Wyoming and the Dakotas up to Winnipeg. I will be riding through several Indigenous Reservations at which I will be stopping at historically important sites as well as some more recently relevant like Standing Rock. In Winnipeg and the

other Canadian metropolises: Toronto, Montreal and Quebec, I will be visiting the Anglican Cathedrals as well. As I make my way south into New England, I plan to visit Yale and Princeton as well as many of the key sites in our colonial history: Boston Harbor, Philadelphia, Gettysburg and Washington D.C. As I continue south down the coast, the plan is to stop at some of the light houses that dot the coastline as well as some important locations like Kitty Hawk. I do not want to plan so much that there is no room left for the spontaneous and unexpected, so the plan is also to allow myself the ability to stop and see people, places and things that I discover on the journey.

Rest/Reading/Contemplation

Though I am travelling 8000 miles on a motorcycle, taking pictures every day, stopping at holy sites: indigenous and colonial, reading, rest and contemplation will be the heartbeat of this trip. In one very real sense, all of this is Rest for me: a rest from my normal routines and responsibilities. But it is also a Rest *into* new routines and responsibilities. Reading, writing and contemplation have been my daily diet for at least two decades now. This will not change. The time in FL, at the end of the trip, the last month or so, will be enjoyed in one location, on the beach. Here, I plan to slow it all down, reflect on all that I had seen and heard and experienced on the ride. This is where I want to sleep, and rest and walk and read and think...and be. This will (I hope) provide a peaceful place from which to return to my life in CO and that it entails.

Why this is the right time

Back in March 2020, the very week we received the news of the quarantine, my ex-wife filed papers for a divorce. Like many, we had spent years in marriage counseling and the church knew of and supported us working on our marriage. It was devastating—not unexpected, but devastating nonetheless. I spent the next 5 months preparing the house to sell—the house we had lived in for 17 years and raised our 3 children. It was the most difficult year of my life. COVID and

divorce marked 2020 for myself and our church. And then at the beginning of 2021, after a 3 year search, we found a building to purchase—our first! Holy Trinity Anglican Church and I have been through a lot together and these two key events--my divorce and our first building—provide the seemingly perfect context in which to reboot and refresh for the next leg of our journey together. May we see together with new eyes!