

# A Framework for Reconnection

An Eco-spiritual Retreat Template for Stewardship  
and Reconnection with God, self, others,  
and all of Creation

Created for use by faith communities by Diana Brushey  
for Faith & the Common Good & Greening Sacred Spaces  
with support from the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa



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## Introduction

This is a retreat template for Stewardship and Reconnection: with God, self, others, and all of Creation. It is designed for use by ecumenical faith communities, and was piloted by an Anglican-led group on an eco-spiritual retreat to Costa Rica in 2016. Several modules were tested by a United Church group on a local retreat near Ottawa.

This template is for groups wishing to explore Christian connections to ecology. It is suitable for groups of approximately 8 - 20 participants attending multi-day reflective spiritual retreats with elements of ecological immersion.

You do not need to travel far nor must you be in a remote location!

You need only to have access to greenspace and trails, and some planned excursions to natural areas. You are encouraged to select outings appropriate to the terrain of your area and the abilities of your participants. The template activities will assist you in setting up and reflecting on outings. It assumes a minimum of one group outing per day plus opportunities for individual greenspace enjoyment each morning and afternoon/evening.

The template has modular sections. You can choose how to use it:

- in weekend (2 night/3 day) retreats,
- in a series of one-day or evening meetings,
- as daily sessions of a longer (week or 10-day) retreat,
- with one theme as a starting point for a month-long or Lenten learning focus

Feedback from pilot groups suggest selecting one module for a weekend retreat, two or three modules for an extended week-long retreat, or focusing on one theme for a month-long series (eg. Lenten learning) focus.

This Framework for Reconnection includes facilitator's suggestions and activity outlines for reconnecting participants with their inner faith, with community (ecological/social/spiritual), and with the earth. Through your planned excursions and our suggested activities and reflections, participants will experience a mix of structured and unstructured time. This can include guided discussions, group activities on eco-spirituality, and a framework for individual spiritual reflection and meditation.

**The goal is to return with a renewed sense of connection and spiritual call for stewardship of all Creation.**

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*\* Throughout this work the word Creation has been capitalized as an expression of respect for the sacredness of God's world.*

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## Background Information

This template was inspired by and developed for a pilot project envisioned and experienced by an eco-spiritual retreat group who traveled to Costa Rica in 2016, led by Rev. Jason Pollick of the Anglican Parish of Glengarry. The intergenerational group included Anglican and United Church clergy and laypersons. Rev. Pollick had the vision for traveling to and learning from Costa Rican environmental initiatives and faith communities, to facilitate faith-based, outdoor explorations in an eco-spiritual retreat at a remote eco-centre in the rich biodiverse setting of the Osa Peninsula.

The group met in advance to learn about their destination, prior to travelling to San Jose and then on to the Osa Peninsula. Travel plans were facilitated by a tour guide and retreat host who planned excursions such as garden and food production sustainability tours, kayak tours, and hikes through diverse habitats. Each day was planned with a spiritual reflection and introduction of an ecological and theological concept to keep in mind prior to going out in nature. Comments printed in purple are specific to the Costa Rican group, included here as a sample for customizing one's retreat or for anyone traveling to the same or similar region.

Costa Rica was selected by the group for several reasons: the incredible biodiversity and rich natural habitat, featuring rainforest, bird sanctuaries, animal refuges, migratory paths, and fresh- and salt-water excursion options. The region also has many examples of sustainability success stories with sanctuaries, conservation programs, and organic options, as well as cautionary tales from invasive species, monoculture, and pressures of globalization upon delicate ecosystems. Despite the rainforest locale for this pilot group, the template is designed for use in any area at home or abroad with access to greenspace - no long-distance travel is required.

The goal for the curriculum template was to provide jumping-off points for discussion and reflection throughout the Costa Rican retreat, and to create a resource which can be used by other faith communities wishing to do eco-spiritual retreats at home or abroad. As part of the collaborative planning process, Rev. Pollick and the curriculum developer met to shape the vision and tone for materials. We felt that the need to balance information about the serious challenges facing the environment, while ensuring the experience was positive, proactive, and spiritually renewing.

We agreed that curriculum content should include some cautionary tales and calls to awakening and action to instill motivation for behavioural change. We wish for participants to find the overall journey to be a positive spiritual experience, encouraging you to make positive changes and bring them back with you.

As you read this document and/or set out on your own eco-spiritual retreat, we pray that you may find inspiration and useful ideas for reconnecting with God, yourself, Creation\*, and one other.

Thanks to Rev. Jason Pollick for the inspiration and vision, to Faith & the Common Good for contracting this work, and to the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa for funding this retreat template development and supporting the pilot project. Thanks also to Tucker House Renewal Centre in Ottawa for hosting a local test-run of several curriculum modules and to the Ecological Christianity Circle of Kitchissippi United Church for feedback and support.

I feel blessed by the opportunity to do good work in God's good world.

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## This template contains:

- Preparation and materials notes for facilitator - preparing your 'toolbox'
- Preparation and invitational materials for participants – intentional gathering
- Greeting and Greening ideas for gathering in a new space
- Opening meditations: for opening of the space, the opening of our hearts and our minds
- Reconnection activities for each day, using the senses, spiritual passages, and songs
- Evening stars: Poetry and parables for inspiration, and time to share stories
- The Heart of the Matter: options for deepening discussion topics
- Connecting stewardship of Creation: stewardship of people (spirit and social justice), resources (ecology), and self (self-care)
- Internal/external: engaging introverts and extroverts using indoor and outdoor spaces
- Going back, going forth: enduring connections as you return



## Facilitator's Guide

### Shaping your vision

As you plan a retreat, you may be in consultation with members of a particular circle, committee, or other group. In conversation or on your own, consider what you and your participants hope to come away with. State this when you gather and hold it in mind in discussion and reflections.

Here are some suggestions for opening questions to help determine where your group is at, how deep you wish to go, and what speaks to you the most:

#### Stewardship

- What is the meaning of (ecological) stewardship?
- How does development adversely or positively affect stewardship?
- What are our responsibilities toward Creation?
- What is rewarding about stewardship? What is challenging?

#### Connections

- How do we build and rebuild community (both natural and human)?
- How do we currently understand and explore biodiversity?
- What is our current commitment to respecting diversity and biodiversity?
- Where is our role or place in the incredible interconnected systems of life?
- Where are we called to be or do in relation to these systems?

#### Renewal

- What do we mean by renewal - of the earth, of ourselves, of our spirit?
- How does it feel to be renewed - before, in the process, and after?
- What are the processes of renewal? (Is it ongoing or episodic? Does it come from without or within?)
- What do we release, and what do we receive as we are renewed?

You may wish to come back to these questions after your retreat to see what has shifted, and what has remained the same.

Ask yourself and your planning group, if applicable: what is our intent and purpose for this retreat?

How does this connect to our faith, support our course of study, or fulfill a need we have identified?

Do we wish this experience to help us answer a question or to ask one?

## Facilitator's Guide

### Sharing your vision

Once you have a sense of what you will focus on, and why, share your vision to encourage participation and gather support. This may be a simple statement such as:

**"We seek to worship together in nature, learning about and recognizing the wonder of God's Creation through activities and reflections to deepen our faith and stewardship commitment."**

### Sample vision for an eco-spiritual retreat

*This trip is predicated on the belief that the planet is God's Creation, and that we as Christians are part of this Creation. Furthermore, we believe that God has left us as Stewards of Creation, and as such, it is our fundamental responsibility to protect and preserve it.*

*The goal of the trip is to learn about the fragile biological diversity and ecosystems in Costa Rica, to learn how the government is responding to the climate and environmental issues in the country, and to learn how the church is living out its call to protect God's creation.*

*The hope is that the Costa Rican awareness of and concern for the environment is something that will deeply impress itself upon the travelers. Furthermore, through the use of Bible studies and spiritual reflections that will be developed over the next year, I hope that the travelers will come away with a deep understanding of ourselves as part of Creation and Stewards of Creation with a responsibility to God, to our fellow beings and all of Creation.*

*The journey will have two principal foci:*

- *The first will be to fellowship and share Communion with a host church in the Costa Rican capital of San Jose, where we are hoping we can arrange to hear from key resource people in the church about their sense of Stewardship and how they live that out. I foresee this part of the trip taking about 1-2 days.*
- *The second will be to spend time at an eco-lodge located on the Osa Peninsula, just outside of Corcovado National Park, an ideal location from which to launch a number of excursions into the surrounding wilderness where a number of preservation efforts are ongoing. This is where we will spend the bulk of our time, approximately 6-7 days.*

— As stated by Rev. Jason Pollick, 2015

## Planning and Preparation

### Managing Expectations

In advance of your retreat, encourage participants to do and share a brief self-exercise about intentions and hopes:

- What do they need to finish or release to be fully present and benefit from the time?
- What support or information do they need from you or the retreat host?
- What hopes, concerns, or expectations do they have of themselves, of you, of the retreat?
- What are your intentions and hopes as facilitator?
- What do you need - from self or others - in order to do your best and to support the learning journey?
- Do you envision yourself as leading or directing the retreat (apart from) the participants, or as facilitating alongside the other participants?
- What accommodation of needs (not just room but meals, medical needs, logistics and safety for travel) do participants require and request, and how might these impact or adjust program planning?
- Who is understood to be responsible for meeting these needs (host/retreat owner, travel agent, facilitator, individual participants, etc.).
- What supportive roles might you ask participants to play to assist in co-facilitating your retreat?

These assessments can be done formally, through a journal or form and reporting back, or informally, simply posing some questions for people to reflect upon and respond to if they so wish.

### Covenanting

If you are able to meet in advance of your retreat, consider creating a group covenant about the intentions for the retreat, and offer the opportunity for participants to covenant with another to help work through any concerns and/or to support one another's learning. This may be done in different ways, depending upon your plans and participants.

For some groups, excursions and accessibility might come up as good topics for covenanting. For other groups, it may be important to address emotional or spiritual concerns that could surface during a retreat. Covenanting in advance can help to set up a safe space for participants, or simply to help build a feeling of family and trust. This can be done as for the full group, with a "buddy system", or as a mix of both. Requesting retreat partners to actively check in with one another can help reinforce and deepen learning in retreat reflections, and person-to-person learning can be a powerful change agent.

## Planning and Preparation

### Covenanting (continued)

Some suggestions:

For longer retreats, you may wish to covenant to share, if comfortable, with a facilitator or retreat partner if a particular activity (either the action or the anticipation) causes anxiety or difficulty. The participant is under no obligation to disclose why, simply to alert a supportive person that he/she could use some extra support. If a reason is disclosed, facilitators and group members should be prepared to respect this sharing and keep it confidential.

This could be for health reasons (e.g., a participant is uncertain if he/she will be able to keep pace with leaders of a hike, or a participant is affected by scents but is hesitant to speak up about environmental sensitivities), for emotional reasons (e.g., a participant may need trigger warnings for discussions of particular topics, or is in an emotional space following a loss), or other conditions or circumstances (e.g., a participant with autism may feel disoriented during loud conversations in echoey spaces, or an introvert may need some “down time” to process learning prior to the next group activity).

Covenanting in this manner allows each person to have an advocate and ally to help make the retreat experience one in which they can participate with positivity. You can also ask that participants actively check in with one another, which can be a help for safety on prolonged excursions.

This also promotes a person-to-person learning relationship, as each is in a position of advocating for and supporting the learning and participation of another, as well as receiving this support and encouragement. If you choose to covenant, do so in a way that is comfortable for all and not forced.

### Vulnerable Populations

A note about travelling or working with vulnerable populations:

A vulnerable person may be a child or youth, a person with a disability, or any person whose condition or circumstance causes them to be dependent upon someone else (e.g. for their care, health, safety, finances), or is otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by a person in a position of authority or trust relative to them.

If your retreat will include participants who may be considered to be vulnerable persons, it is important that facilitators and leaders be properly screened and familiar with abuse awareness and prevention training. All parental or guardian permissions should be obtained, including emergency contacts and planning, with adequate supervision arranged and behaviour expectations understood and upheld by all parties. This may be added to a group or individual covenanting plan.

## Planning and Preparation

### Territorial Acknowledgement and Opening Ceremony

When planning for the initial opening or welcome at your retreat, give some thought to inviting a local host to participate in this welcome, with special consideration to inviting an aboriginal Elder or indigenous person from the community or territory you will be visiting. Research in advance or ask a regional cultural centre for information on who to invite and also how to properly acknowledge the traditional territory upon which you will gather.

Ask in advance about any protocols for ceremony and plan culturally appropriate expressions of thanks and welcome. Clarify if photography is allowed during teachings or ceremony.

### Building Your Toolkit

As a facilitator, what might you need to prepare for each participant, for yourself, and/or for shared facilitation? Some suggestions:

#### Timekeeping:

If you plan to have formal learning sessions, you may wish to include an agreement for timekeeping. Participants can assist with timekeeping and transition to ensure that everyone gets to participate in all planned activities. Alternatively, you may ask your group for direction; if a discussion is fruitful, the group can decide together whether to extend an activity or “pause” the discussion until another time.

#### Transitions:

For reflective sessions, select sensory cues for transition times that refocus attention without being jolting. This might be chimes or a gentle bell, lighting of incense, a recorded sound of nature or birdsong, or a piece of music.

Aim to accompany transition times with physical motion: stretch, do yoga, or dance. When possible, move to another space or physically cross a threshold to link physical transition with mental transition of topics. Consider singing, passing the peace, or laughter yoga as ways to change activities in a spiritual and uplifting manner.

#### Scheduling:

You might prepare a schedule, or have participants help develop it. Aim for a mix of high-energy and low-energy, self-directed and group activities. Alternating facilitator-directed and group- or participant-led activities gives everyone the chance to give and receive wisdom, learn together, and have ownership over their learning.

Consider the needs of extroverts and introverts, allowing sufficient spaces for both social time and quiet time to enhance learning, spiritual growth, and connection. In this retreat template, you will be asked to build in opportunities for participants to go to their “sit-spots” - anchor points outdoors in nature - several times a day, for short or long periods.

## Building Your Toolkit

### Evening sharing:

Prepare for shared inspiration times: if you wish, invite each participant to bring a reflection or inspiration to share at the retreat. Encourage different types of inspiration - a photo, poem, song, memory, prayer, or physical item.

### Outdoor Activity:

Be sure to have an outdoor and experiential learning component in every session, regardless of weather, and include everyone in planning for this (outdoor gear, dry clothing, warm/cool drinks, etc.) Invite participants to overlook the potential discomfort and instead embrace the thrill and sensory input!

In your planning and communication, ask people to recall or imagine:

- playing in a downpour of rain
- wading in a stream (and getting one's feet wet)
- being scratched by raspberry canes in order to taste tangy wild berries
- perspiring on a hike to reach the summit
- lying in the snow, looking up at the clouds, and getting snowflakes down one's collar or cuffs

Remind everyone that these experiences delight and stimulate children's spontaneous learning and can also reawaken our sense of joy, of connection, of communion with God, with our spirit and senses, and with nature! Encourage everyone to embrace opportunities for outdoor experiences.

Of course, be prepared with towels, dry clothes, bandaids, extra water bottles, a change of footwear, a fire in the woodstove, or whatever is needed for health and comfort.

Outdoor excursions may take more time than expected, so build time buffers around this so that you don't need to cut an excursion short - being outdoors together or alone is very valuable.

### Practical tools:

Depending upon the location, duration, and goals of your retreat, you may wish to line up materials for presenting and documenting discussions.

For all groups: this retreat template recommends the use of sit-spots outside in nature; simple places each participant can go at least once per session to observe, ponder, pray, and be. Nothing is needed for this practice, but you may provide or ask participants to bring thin pillows, squares of oilcloth, or a jacket or hat to sit on if the ground is wet.

For all groups: a paper notepad or journal is recommended for each participant and facilitator.

For all groups: each module is based on scriptural stories or ideas from both the Old and New Testament. You will need to be able to read certain passages or parables for each module. Decide whether you will bring Bibles, print out passages, or use online versions. Ideally participants will each have access to a Bible. A variety of versions and types of Bibles (NIV, King James, study Bibles with different annotations, etc.) can help open up the text.

## Building Your Toolkit

### Practical Tools (continued)

Because the theme of this retreat template is stewardship and reconnection, you may opt to avoid all use of electronic devices. This retreat template does not require or assume that you will have access to electronic devices (in fact we suggest you “unplug” for the retreat!), but if you plan to use these, here are some suggestions:

For groups wishing to use multimedia tools or document learning:

- Consider using a portable or online timer that can be set to silent/vibrate or a less intrusive noise (cellphone, kitchen timer, etc.) for example, <http://timer.onlineclock.net/> allows you to choose a background sound and birdsong.
- A simple speaker system and smartphone, USB key or cued music files make it easier than ever to share music clips for learning, transition, or practice. Consider whether you will need internet access or if it is best to use a USB key.
- Digital projectors are available in many retreat centres, but if you wish to share photos, videos, slides, etc using a laptop and projector, confirm in advance that the projector will work with your system, and that adaptors and connectors are available (especially for Mac computers). You may wish to have backup website links in case any planned videos don't load automatically.
- If you wish to have your group use online tools or apps to support learning, consider those developed by NatureWatch and NatureCanada's NatureHood, to record sightings of different species in their YardMap project or NatureWatch programs.
- Photos can be a great way to document and share; if people will be bringing a camera or photo-capable phone, be certain that any needed permissions are in place before photos are taken or shared, particularly if children or vulnerable persons are present. Encourage everyone to be respectful of each other, taking care that photography doesn't distract or deter from one's own or another's contemplation or appreciation of nature, and to be particularly respectful of any boundaries on photographing spiritual or indigenous rituals or sacred spaces.

For any “unplugged” group preferring to use basic tools for learning and sharing:

- Big post-it notes or chart paper are often useful; consider bringing painter's tape to ensure anything you put up can be removed without damage. When choosing markers, opt for ones that are unscented and non-toxic.
- Simple clipboards can be made by cutting pieces of re-used heavy cardboard and attaching binder clips. A good pair of scissors, a stack of blank or one-sided paper, and reliable pens or simple pencils are always good to have on hand.
- A large ball of yarn or twine, and a simple bean bag or tossable beach ball can help with multiple activities and get-to-know-you games.

## Making the connection: travel and stewardship

The opportunity to travel is something most of us take for granted. We live in a time when travel is usually relatively fast, comfortable, and accessible to most in the western world. However, most forms of transportation contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions through vehicle production, fuel extraction, refining, transportation, and of course fossil fuel combustion in vehicle engines. Human transportation systems also lead to habitat destruction and/or fragmentation, severely disrupting wildlife corridors and migratory routes, on land, sea, and in the air.

Many forms of transportation further impact wild populations through air and noise pollution, habitat destruction for fuel extraction, and collisions with animals as they swim, walk, or fly. Although we cannot avoid all damage caused by transportation, we can be mindful of this impact and try to mitigate it in our daily lives and in our travels for work, play, and retreats.

Knowing this, here are some recommendations to take stewardship seriously for your retreat journey:

Travel arrangements from and within Canada, and excursions

- Use a carbon calculator to understand the environmental cost of your journey; be aware of it, and work together to offset it.
- Consider carbon offset options that may benefit the community you are visiting, or select from an accredited carbon offset program. The David Suzuki Foundation and The Pembina Institute offer a guidebook for evaluating carbon offset programs:  
<http://www.pembina.org/reports/offset-purchase-guide-v3.pdf>
- Air travel contributes highly to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. If traveling by air, what are your options for carbon offsets?
- Short haul or connecting flights are less efficient than longer or international flights. Encourage all participants to take the train or bus if possible rather than a short haul flight.
- *A suggestion for donations as offsets by the Costa Rica group:* <http://osaconservation.org/>
- If travelling by boat or ship, look into the practices of fuelling, waste treatment/disposal, and bilgewater. When wastewater or garbage is released into rivers and oceans, it pollutes natural habitat and can also allow invasive species to hitch-hike into new waterways. Smaller boats with two-stroke motors can release significant quantities of oil and gas into lakes.
- Travel by rail or bus can be more expensive and less convenient than by car, but is more energy efficient and can also foster a sense of community for groups travelling together. Consider fundraising together to offset or share the cost of upgrading your travel type to make it accessible to all participants.
- If travelling out of town, consider carpooling and/or renting a more efficient vehicle in which to travel. In Ottawa, VRTUcar members can rent more efficient vehicle types, including for out-of-town trips.
- Try non-polluting active transportation: cycling, canoeing, kayaking, horseback-riding, or hiking.
- Learn about invasive species and take care not to inadvertently bring problematic insects, plants, seeds, etc., into or out of an ecosystem. This is of particular importance in overseas travel, but also applies within a province; for example, several municipalities in Ontario are under quarantine for firewood transportation, to avoid spreading Emerald Ash Borer. Likewise, invasive pests can piggyback on ornamental plants, fruits, and bait fish.
- In excursions, follow the guidelines of “leave no trace”, “pack it in, pack it out”, and “take nothing but photos”. Staying on marked trails is safer for you and for the species and habitat around you.

## The Journey, and the Journal — Engaging in Advance and En Route

Ideas for discussion and activities in advance:

### Seasonal writing and discussion prompts

#### For Participants

If possible, begin preparing yourself and your senses at least one season prior to your retreat. You may wish to purchase or create a Journey Journal, to begin noting down what you are looking forward to, what you learn in advance, what you discover at your retreat, and what new knowledge and commitment or old wisdom and purpose you bring back.

Be gentle - this need not be an additional task for busy days, but rather a respite and reflection to build toward something beautiful.

#### For Facilitator: here are ideas to share

In **spring**, notice what is new to you and to the earth.

- What anxiety or anticipation do you feel as the earth awakens? Why?
- What memories come to light as the snow melts and the soil thaws?
- What new energy do you feel as the first buds appear and birdsong greets the early rain?
- What do you imagine will be new to you in your retreat, be it near or far?
- What might this retreat reawaken in you? How will it feel?
- What examples of trust and hope do you see in communities of nature as they celebrate spring?
- Upon what and whom do these nature communities depend? What and whom do you depend on?

In **summer**, if you travel with (or without) family, take note of how you plan:

- Where are you going? Why?
- What are your hopes?
- What is exciting as you anticipate the journey?
- What challenges do you face?
- In your travels, take note of how your activity and spirit changes in this climate, this culture, this pace of life. What do you expect will be the same or different in the time and place of your retreat?
- What will be different or similar about how you planned for your summer trip and how you will plan for your retreat? Why?
- If you are not travelling in summer, focus instead on questions and thoughts about community and play, what makes you feel vibrant and alive, and what new experiences you seek.

## The Journey, and the Journal — Engaging in Advance and En Route

### Ideas for discussion and activities in advance (continued)

In **fall**, consider holding an evening discussion session with your group about your hopes and expectations for the trip.

- Autumn is a time of change, of loss, and of the beauty of letting go. It is a time of trust, a time of sharing, and a time of plenty, a chance for humans and nature to prepare ourselves and our communities for challenges ahead. How do these autumn themes relate to your upcoming retreat?
- What might you release or let go of, and what beauty might you find in doing so?
- What opportunities might there be for trust, for sharing? What will be plentiful?
- What spiritual growth do you hope to have?
- What behaviours do you think might change or need to change based on your learning?
- As the earth around you prepares itself for winter, what mental, physical, and spiritual preparation do you wish to make for your journey?

In **winter**, the Christian community commemorates the Nativity story and travel of the Holy family.

As you undertake your own seasonal preparations or travels, consider the Nativity and/or another scriptural story of a journey. You may find other examples that speak to unexpected circumstances, difficulties, disbelief, or rushing: the annunciation of an unexpected, holy baby; leaving a homeland because of famine or persecution; heavenly revelation urging someone onward or a change in course.

- What preparations were made (or not), and why? Who were the messengers encouraging and guiding the journey?
- What fears, difficulties, and need did the travellers face or encounter? What human, natural, or heavenly support did they find to help them on their journey?
- Who challenged the travellers on their journey? Why?
- How does this story speak to your faith, to social justice in our global community, to our environment?
- What engages your spirit and your senses at this time of year? Why?
- How may we be mindful of our privilege in journeying today, appreciating our ability to prepare, receive guidance, find resources, direction, and support as we travel?
- How can we ensure that our travel is respectful and supportive of those human and nature communities whose territories we travel through or visit?

When you return, you may wish to send out questions for the appropriate season, or invite participants to revisit their answers at the same time next year.

## The Journey, and the Journal — Engaging in Advance and En Route

### Journey Journal: Select a “fellow traveler” in advance

**Together as a group, or individually,** as you lead up to your retreat, research a comparable journey in nature, such as that of a bird, fish, mammal, or insect in its regular routine or seasonal migration. The goal is to identify a “fellow traveler” in nature that you can keep in mind during your own travels.

You might choose to use:

- the criteria of **geography**, finding something that lives and travels in the same territory as your travels, or
- the criteria of **timeline**, choosing something that will be migrating or travelling at the same time as your retreat, or
- the criteria of **distance**, identifying a species that traverses the same distance that your journey will take, even if it lives across the planet.

You can consider species that travel

- by **air**: geese, orioles, bats, monarchs, bees, or even seeds;
- by **land**: caribou, snakes, wolves, giraffe, hares, monkeys, ants, raccoons;
- by **water**: salmon, smelts, whales, beavers, jellyfish, plankton, sea turtles;
- or those that live and move in different elements: loons, turtles, toads, ducks, penguins.

You can find information through a nature website or book, or find an actual animal such as one tagged by researchers (turtles, birds, even insects and mammals sometimes have tags and sightings on nature sites).

Take time one evening or afternoon to learn about your identified species: its habitat, how it lives, why it travels, and the challenges it faces. When you leave for your retreat, keep your “fellow traveler” in mind. Pray for this traveler and its species, and hold its travels and the preservation of its kind in your heart and prayers. Take time to imagine what brings it joy and safety and what causes it stress and struggle on its own journey. Consider printing or drawing a picture of this animal to bring with you as a reminder that it is travelling too.

Remember this fellow traveler as one of God’s own creations, with a home, a motivation, and a destination.

#### Fellow Traveler Ideas:

- [Northern right whale](#)
- [Emperor penguin](#)
- [Monarch butterfly](#)
- [Ruby-throated hummingbird](#)
- [Scarlet tanager](#)
- [Arctic Tern](#)
- [Leatherback sea turtle](#)
- [Caribou](#)
- [Salmon](#)
- [Wildebeest](#)
- [Sandhill crane](#)
- [European white stork](#)
- [Australian red crab](#)
- [Zebra](#)
- [Elephant seal](#)
- [Humpback whale](#)
- [Golden jellyfish](#)
- [Many species of bats](#)

## The Journey, and the Journal — Engaging in Advance and En Route

### Journey Journal: Select a “fellow traveler” in advance (continued)

Give reminders of the request to identify and learn about a “fellow traveller” in nature in advance of the retreat. As facilitator, you might also research historic human journeys to or from the place of your retreat, so that you may share this information with participants on the return journey.

#### Sample Fellow Traveler Suggestions for Costa Rica Group in Osa Peninsula

Several of the suggested animals migrate as far as you will travel on this trip, and/or at similar times of year. Monarch butterflies, ruby-throated hummingbirds, and wildebeests are travelling in February. Scarlet tanagers and leatherback turtles travel to Costa Rica. Other species to watch for and pray for on your trip:

Many birds spend time in both Canada and Costa Rica\*\*, such as ducks, warblers, vireos, tanagers, shorebirds, herons, hawks, falcons, and songbirds, including:

- [Baltimore orioles](#) - this link gives information about their travels, the richness of migration and how it adds to biodiversity, and inspiration for journaling.
- [Bullock’s orioles](#)—this one headed east instead of south and was found in Ottawa
- [Great Blue Herons](#)
- [Swainson’s Thrush](#)—from Alberta and BC to the Osa Peninsula

Birds that head north to Costa Rica from South America in winter\*\*:

- swallows, vireos, flycatchers, kites

Other migrant birds that nest in Costa Rica during October - April\*\*:

- dove, red-tailed hawk, turkey vulture, common nighthawk, some egrets, green heron, Little Blue heron,

Those that go further, from South America to Canada and pass through Costa Rica en route\*\*:

- purple martins, barn swallows, dickcissels, bobolinks, scarlet tanagers, Eastern kingbirds, cerulean warblers, Swainson's hawks, Swainson's thrushes, blackpoll warblers, shorebirds

Others that winter in Costa Rica\*\*:

- broad-winged hawks, peregrine falcons, osprey, other shorebirds

Those whose species can live in many climates, and which can be found year-round in both Costa Rica as well as Canada\*\*:

- Red-Winged blackbird, dipper, Eastern meadowlark

Of course, the rich biodiversity of Costa Rica gives habitat to an incredible variety of non-migratory species as well. For the purposes of this prayer and journaling exercise you are asked to focus on a migratory species, but during your retreat you are also encouraged to learn about and pray for the many local Costa Rican species, including those that migrate vertically; that is, which travel through different elevations of middle and high forest canopy.

\*\*source: [Birds of Costa Rica: a Field Guide](#) and [Field Guide to the Wildlife of Costa Rica](#)

## Journey Journal: Select a “fellow traveler” in advance (continued)

### Sample Fellow Traveler Suggestions for Costa Rica Group in Osa Peninsula

Other resources to look at for your trip to Costa Rica:

- <http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/home> - learning about neotropical species
- [www.borealbirds.org](http://www.borealbirds.org) - the connection between our Boreal forest and neotropical forests for migratory songbirds, and [tracking them](#); how [tar sands development](#) affects them
- Initiatives to [conserve the Osa Peninsula](#) rainforest and protect migratory songbirds
- Highlighted [Canadian migratory birds](#)

## Journey Journal: Stewardship in Your Travels

**Facilitator:** Prepare journal question(s) for participants to evaluate their travel methods.

Suggested focus questions:

- *Knowing that we are travelling for an eco-spiritual stewardship retreat purpose, what can we do to improve the ecological and social impact of our journey?*

Suggestions:

carbon offset, drive/bus/train to airport, ensure that souvenirs provide fair wages and respect culture, be mindful of waste generation and resource use (food/fuel/water, especially if guests of those who may have less to spare).

## Journey Journal: the circumstances of the journey (social justice, privilege, and spirit)

**Facilitator:** If you wish, prepare reflections and prompts for participants to consider their feelings about travel, the circumstances under which they travel (freely, for pleasure, knowing they can return, likely without being challenged or detained at borders), and considering circumstances under which others travel / have historically travelled/ will travel in future):

- As you journey, take a moment to connect with yourself to record some reflections about the circumstances under which you travel. How do you imagine you will be received upon your arrival, and upon your return?
- Consider stories of the journeys of others, perhaps as recorded in scripture (Exodus, Bethlehem, Road to Damascus) or perhaps stories you hear in news reports of journeys today or historically (refugees seeking asylum by boat, those in or helping with the underground railroad, or those traveling against their will in human trafficking). How does your experience of travel compare in motivation, method, safety, and emotion?

## Journey Journal: the circumstances of the journey (continued)

Exodus tells us of the trials and trust of a people wandering in the desert, homeless, chased and unwelcomed, experiencing human doubt and despair and asked to keep believing - for years. Current day migrants and refugees often cross seas on perilous journeys by boat or pay extortion fees to cross borders into countries that may not welcome them, holding hope and faith in desperation.

Past migrants to other countries, including those to Canada, started over in a new land, sometimes with resources and support and sometimes with just the labour of their hands and hope in their hearts; not all were welcomed. And sometimes - even often - past waves of government-sponsored immigration were designed to intentionally displace indigenous peoples, who themselves had to leave traditional lands.

Many government and NGO agencies expect to see increased human migration in future years both because of increased opportunity but also because of environmental, social, and political upheaval.

- As you consider these human journeys, what connects you to these people and their stories; where do you feel community, and in what do you feel separation?
- What sense of certainty or uncertainty do you feel around your own journey (physical or spiritual), and where do you place your hope and faith as you journey?

## Journey Journal: A (migratory) bird's-eye view of the earth

**Facilitator:** Invite participants to journal their observations, emotions, and thoughts as they travel: for example, landscapes, view above the clouds if flying, climate and weather, human-inhabited and remote areas they pass over or through, patterns of agriculture and urban development, energy use they see (e.g., lights if travelling overnight, or energy infrastructure in the day), any human or natural borders being crossed. Focus on agricultural patterns (visible or lacking). If your group is travelling together and has opportunity to do so, you may wish to lead discussions together as you travel.

### Participants:

The following journal prompts are meant to provide ideas and inspiration for reflection. You may wish to choose a few from each section.

The **spirit prompts** are simple, introspective questions.

The **human community** prompts hope to evoke a new perspective of community.

The **earth community** prompts aim to use naturalist nudges to inspire curiosity and wonder at the science and spirit of the interconnected earth.

You are encouraged to keep these prompts and reflections in mind during outings and excursions at your destination as well as traveling to and from your retreat.

## **Journey Journal: A (migratory) bird's-eye view of the earth**

Suggested prompts for reflection, discussion, and/or journaling as you travel:

### **Reflect and connect with yourself and your spirit:**

- As you journey, what do you notice as you travel?
- In what ways are you more or less attentive to your surroundings, your thoughts, and/or those around you when journeying?
- If travelling by air:
  - Do you feel more or less connected to yourself when high above the earth? Why?
  - Do you feel more or less connected to nature when high above the earth? Why?
  - Do you feel more or less connected to God when high above the earth? Why?
- If travelling by land or water, do you feel more or less connected to self/earth/God when you are in a state of transition and journey? Why?
- What spirit stories come to the surface as you travel, be they scriptural, poetic, inner dialogue, or other?
- What is spirit drawing your attention towards?
- What are you leaving behind as you travel, and why? How does this feel?
- If you are praying or worshipping as you travel, what changes or remains the same as you pray or worship in different places or with different people? Why?

### **Reflect and connect with the human community:**

**If travelling with others you do not know, share the journey;** converse with other travelers about their journey(s).

- What do you have in common (reasons for travelling, past experiences, hopes), or what have you learned that was new?

**If travelling with family or friends, you are invited to pass on stories** of how your family came to live where they do, or other travel stories, such as reminiscing about family trips.

- What are your journeys? What are your stories?

**If travelling alone, notice the patterns of human community** evident or absent around you.

Take the time to observe what you can of the pace of life, urban or rural, and patterns of development - agricultural or institutional, residential or commercial. Look for how people are interacting or not with one another, how they depend on each other for services, safety, and community.

- In what way do you feel connected to the people you see as you travel? What about those you don't see, who paved the roads, charted the course, delivered the supplies to this area?

## Journey Journal: Reflect and connect with the human community: (continued)

As we travel, whether from one neighbourhood to another, one city to another, or one country to another, we cross borders and boundaries, artificial and natural, moving across territories and habitats. **In your journey, pay attention to changes in the landscape** and to natural and human borders, whether obvious or subtle. They may be human-focused or created, such as political or territorial divides. These may be evident in signage or infrastructure changes, or in patterns of energy use/grids, customs, or even chains of stores in different communities.

- How does this crossing of human borders affect you, perhaps through cultural differences, consumer options, navigating unfamiliar regions, or religious practices?

Perhaps this journey evokes memories of past travels, different experiences, practicing another language, or encountering discomfort.

- If you look within, what internal borders or boundaries are you crossing as you travel?

**Consider also any traditional territories you may be crossing**, of historic Indigenous peoples or current Aboriginal populations.

- What do you know of these territories? Are they linked to natural borders?
- How do they relate to current political boundaries? Why?
- What do you know of any treaties for these territories? Were/are these treaties honoured?
- How can you show respect for the people and the territories in your travel and retreat?

## Reflect and connect with the earth community:

**As you travel, look for the natural boundaries and borders you cross.** These may be natural ones such as waterways, rocky outcrops or mountain ranges (ancient or new), shorelines, or other clear boundaries. Consider what other borders or ranges you traverse; the territories of mammals, fish, birds, insects. Recognize the countless small and large territories you might travel through:

- the relatively smaller ranges of local wildlife active by day or night:  
slugs, cicadas, ants, chipmunks, cardinals, skunks, earthworms, bullfrogs, grouse, garter snakes, toads, or sunfish;
- those with relative middle ranges:  
raccoons, weasels, bats, chickadees, snapping turtles, squirrels, large-mouth bass, beavers, dragonflies, foxes, bears;
- those with larger territories:  
deer, caribou, wolves, eels, orioles, honey bees, monarch butterflies, herons, polar bears, trout, turkey vultures.
- How can you respect these species and their territories as you pass?
- How are you or human populations affected by crossing these natural boundaries?
- How does your passing affect the wildlife here, and is it positive or problematic? Do they mark your passing with alarm calls and challenge, camouflage and hiding, or curiosity and investigation?

## Journey Journal: Reflect and connect with the earth community (continued)

**Turn your mind's eye to imagine** how wildlife signify their territorial boundaries to adversaries and allies, such as mice and coyotes laying scent, big-horned sheep butting heads, rabbits chin-rubbing, lynx and bears rubbing or scratching trees, wolves howling, foxes yipping, chorus frogs peeping, cardinals singing, snipe winnowing, or other birds or fish displaying.

- How do these wild species' home ranges and sense of territory correspond with our human sense of home turf, sense of place, or loyalty to group or space?
- In what ways does our connection to place and to each other echo that of our wild relations?
- How are we motivated to announce our connections: out of fear or defense, out of love and attraction, or out of joy and sense of belonging?
- How do our human territories such as international, provincial, or municipal borders affect nature through policies of habitat conservation or exploitation, energy use, agricultural or urban development, claiming water or resource rights or responsibility for managing resources or disasters?

**Watch for evidence of historic changes** in landscapes and boundaries - areas of sandy soil from ancient shorelines, clay from glacial till, rock outcrops along areas of faultlines and other geological processes, rounded stones from prehistoric rivers, hills that were once majestic mountains. The very trees and grasses supported by a soil type can speak to us of past geological processes.

- How do you imagine these boundaries and processes have affected past and present watersheds, wind and precipitation patterns, soil types and flora, habitat and fauna?
- What is your part in the long story of this place?

**Notice the important transition zones** of habitats, where the edges meet and there is a change in forest canopy or ground cover, where meadow meets marsh, limestone alvar meets ash forest, shade meets sunlight, stream bed meets shoreline.

- How have these ecozones and their edges been adapted, changed, removed, or appreciated by humans?
- How do human created/changed borders affect natural borders - modifying or restoring shorelines, changing or protecting wildlife corridors, levelling hills, damming rivers, or reforesting clearcuts?
- What is special about the wild edges of wild spaces?
- What transition zones are important in your own life, as social, familial, spiritual, or physical spheres of your world intersect and spur change, conflict, or compromise?

## Journey Journal: Reflect and connect with the earth community (continued)

As you move from one physical location to another, **remember also the dispersal ranges** of seeds, spores, and pollen of flowers, grasses, trees, and fungi.

- How do these tiny gems of germination inspire your sense of the sacred and rebirth?
- How do seeds on the wind spread the Good News?
- What else is travelling by air, land, or water in this area?

**Reflect upon the migration journeys of people and other species;** how they read the signs that it is time to undertake a journey, under instinct or stress, with hope of finding a partner or reuniting with one, to seek a safe place in which to create a home and raise young, to find resources to support a family, to return to the place of ancestors, alone or with a partner, leading or following a group. Consider how all travellers, human or animal, count upon their own resourcefulness and the resources along the way, seek shelter and refuge, form community, following the paths of others or leaving trails, helping their young, doing their best, needing rest.

- In what ways do you feel kinship with these other travellers?

As you travel, keep your “fellow traveller” in nature in mind (be it a mammal, bird, fish, or other).

- Pray or meditate on the trust and trials of turtles, fish, or songbirds following ancient migration routes with increasing obstacles en route, or their confusion and grief arriving to find their habitat removed.
- Pray or meditate upon their joy in community as they travel and reunite, their relief and rest when they reach protected or restored habitat.
- What spiritual, social, and environmental challenges do we and all of God’s creatures face as we journey together?

Having done these observations of your journey here, what observations and reflections would you like to make on your return journey?

### Sample preparation for the Costa Rica eco-spiritual retreat group:

The Costa Rica group expected to see and stop to discuss examples of past clearcutting practices, where rainforest was removed for short-term beef cattle ranching. This practice was and is very detrimental to local ecology and is not successful agriculturally. It is usually for sending beef overseas for cheap meat imports to North America. However, in this year-long growing climate, the biomass is all in the trees, meaning that the soil itself is not very fertile. Removing rainforest creates poor grazing and leads to quick erosion because of loss of tree roots. Some landslides may be visible as a result. It is a clear example of ecological and social injustice.

## Journey Journal: Reflect and connect with the earth community (continued)

### Sample travel prompts and questions for Costa Rica eco-spiritual retreat group:

- What do you notice from the air? Look for agricultural patterns, intact or clearcut forest, urban development, waterways, cloud cover, mountain ranges. What looks different from the sky above Canada, during any connecting flights, and in Costa Rica?
- How might you capture these impressions? Are there any spirit/human/earth connections you feel?
- If flying at night, what can you see? What patterns of energy use do you see in city and rural lights?
- What are you expecting as you disembark?
- What new sensations do you experience as you arrive?
- What sounds of nature and human activity greet your ears?
- What cadence and melody of language do you hear?
- What humidity and pressure do your lungs, ears, skin register?
- What fragrances do you smell?
- What quality of light is around you?
- What do you want to remember about this?
- What experiences mark your transition to this retreat?

### Discussion questions:

- As you pass examples of monoculture and clearcut areas, what do you notice about the biodiversity?
- What are the long-lasting effects to the local people and to the wildlife?
- Who benefited and for how long?
- What unexpected consequences were there?

En route, the group could see small scale coffee plantations which have a distinctive look from the air. Suggested discussion was to link together themes and thoughts sparked by the journal suggestions on migration. Migratory songbirds are often deeply affected by loss of habitat in some Central American areas because of coffee. It naturally grows under shady "mother trees" with biodiverse habitat, but in large plantations there is less shade, less habitat, and many chemicals (fertilizers and pesticides) are used, which dramatically affects migratory songbirds. There is also a social justice issue of subsistence vs cash crop monoculture with overseas owners in some cases, so shade-grown organic fair trade coffee is purportedly of more importance than we might think. The group was invited to learn more first-hand.

### Discussion questions:

- What surprised you about the coffee plantations?
- What differences were there between the plantations and surrounding habitat?
- What impacts are on the wildlife and the people? What are the causes?

## Journey Journal: Reflect and connect (continued)

### Sample travel prompts and questions for Costa Rica eco-spiritual retreat group:

Other planned discussion en route:

There are interconnected issues of soil depletion, international issues, and eco-justice as the first-world has colonized and exploited this region and that the so-called "third-world" is the first to feel the sting of climate change.

Other logistical suggestions for other groups undertaking overseas travel:

- If hosted by a local congregation, consider using some of the "human community" and "spirit community" journal prompts in debriefing after your visit.
- Learn if your retreat centre/host offers species lists of migratory birds or other native animals
- If you know your route, plan some specific stops and sites for learning together. For example, agricultural areas might have examples of monoculture vs polyculture, cash crops vs subsistence or sustainable agricultural operations.

**Facilitator:** after welcoming everyone to your destination, announcing logistics of the stay, and settling in, ensure that you provide some intentional time for participants to reflect back on whichever journal questions you and/or your participants chose to work on.

### Sample Costa Rica group debrief questions:

Debrief about the local congregation in San Jose:

- What commonalities struck you?
- What differences did you notice?
- What connections (causal or other) do you know or imagine between your faith, community, and actions and those worshiping in San Jose? This could be economic, theological, political, environmental, etc.
- What ongoing connections can be nurtured between this congregation and your own?
- What behaviour change was inspired by this visit? Journal this - with an action plan

Debrief about your travels

- Review journaling exercises together

Time to settle in, receive welcome at lodge.

## Greeting and Greening: logistics

**Facilitator:** Some facilitators manage programming as well as retreat logistics; others provide discussion and activity leadership only while a host or team manages the details. Regardless of whether you are leading all or part of this, it will be beneficial for you and your participants to know the following information at the outset:

- Names of hosts, guests, support staff
- Facilities - meeting spaces, resources being used or not used (eg. technology), kitchens and washrooms
- Accommodations (if applicable) – locations, orientation, accessibility as needed,
- Confirming physical, social, spiritual needs
- Allergies or sensitivities (scents, foods, medical conditions) and accommodating these needs
- Exceptionalities or other needs of note (differently abled, learning styles, intro/extrovert)
- Setting the intention right from the start of sufficient outdoor and/or solitary time, and agreements about how to meet these intentions

Come together right from the start to set out how participants and facilitators will identify, articulate, and accommodate needs. This where covenanting with one another comes in if you like, and the option of having participants covenant in pairs to check in with one another about their needs and experiences. This may be as simple as asking participants to check in once daily with one another to ask about their time, or more specific, such as having designated times or questions for check-ins. Facilitators should ensure that they also have a check-in partner. Whatever the option chosen, be sure that it furthers your intentions and enables a positive experience rather than being burdensome.

If the group wishes to formalize such a covenant, suggested wording:

*"We will seek to identify issues affecting our participation, learning, and presence, noticing if they come from within or without. We will articulate our needs to each other in caring and compassionate ways, and address them respectfully together. We will support one another in finding and forming meaningful connections with spirit, each other, and the earth."*

At the outset of your retreat, whether or not you have an Elder or guest present, you may wish to acknowledge the first peoples upon whose traditional territory you gather.

### Welcoming suggestions:

- Opening of the space, hearts, minds: this may be through prayer, a meal, song, or ceremony by a local faith leader or Elder.
- Declaration and exploration of purpose: to explore and form connections with God, with spirit and self in community with one another and with nature.
- Connecting past, present, future: invite each participant to:
  - Share one past reason (person, experience, goal) that motivated them to come
  - Identify (to themselves or the group) what they will need in order to be fully present
  - articulate one future hope for what they will learn and bring with them from this retreat

## Greeting and Greening: logistics — Welcoming suggestions: (continued)

- Introduce or review the elements of this retreat: there will be time and activities designed to learn and reflect, excursions and experiential learning, meditation and prayer, conversations and communion with nature (you may also wish to serve Communion/Eucharist), to disconnect from technology and reconnect with spirit, self, and our human and natural communities, and to raise our awareness and (re)awaken our senses.
- Explore aspects of comfort or discomfort: Be sure to provide social and individual space after the journey to allow everyone to settle in and be ready to be present. If you are planning to “unplug” from technology because of intention or circumstance, this is a good time to remind participants and to explore any sense of anxiety or release about this.
- Undertake a guided tour of the retreat site shortly after your arrival. Be sure to review safety protocols for the site and for the group, including resources and response protocols for incidents such as a medical emergency, fire, flood, extreme weather. Cover awareness and avoidance of any particular hazards in your area (toxic plants, insects, ticks, reptiles, predators, flash flood zones, etc.) and any expectations or need for personal gear on out-trips (eg. bear bells, DEET repellent, Fox 40 whistle, etc). Include clear plans for prevention of and response protocols for a lost person on- or off-site. This must be done prior to having participants find their sit-spots.

**Facilitator:** Introduce the concept of the **sit-spot** as part of your introduction.

- A sit-spot is an outdoor natural space where you go to be present in and attentive to nature. It is a quiet, simple, profound tool for prayer and meditation and for becoming connected to the earth and all life.
- A sit-spot is outdoors and must be easily accessible in different seasons and weather conditions; the goal is to go regularly and often to this spot to experience nature with all of your senses - to listen, look, smell, feel, and possibly even taste the landscape and beauty around you.

**To select a sit-spot,** choose a place that is:

- **accessible:** close enough that you will easily and eagerly be able to go to it frequently, at different times of day.
- **safe:** be aware of steep terrain, overhanging snags or broken branches, poisonous plants or insects, etc.
- **diverse:** while any natural space will provide ample experiential opportunities, edge habitat (where different ecozones meet, like where forest meets field) or places with diverse habitats are ideal for experiencing the many complex and simple interactions of interconnected nature. A lot happens at the edges!
- **private:** allow enough space between yourself and any other people so that you (and the wildlife around you) won't be distracted by the presence of others.
- **a bonus** = an area that is feature-rich: areas with water, with canopy, with old and new growth, with a view, with opportunities for camouflage; all of these will be rich with life once you attune your senses to perceive it. But this is not necessary. Any place that is safe and has nature can be a sit-spot, including in urban centres.

When you return from your retreat you will be asked to find sit-spots within 5 minutes of your home and work -anywhere you can view a tree, sky, plants, or an animal or insect regularly.

## Greeting and Greening: logistics

### Welcoming suggestions: (continued)

#### How to be in your sit-spot:

- Regularly, often: Go to your sit-spots at least twice a day while on retreat, even if only for 15 minutes at a time (ideally longer).
- Prepared: find a comfortable place and way to sit; prepare well and settle yourself. This may mean proper outdoor gear, applying sunscreen/insect repellent in advance, a jacket to sit on, hat for shade, etc.
- Unburdened: Avoid bringing anything extra to your sit-spot. Rather than taking photos or journaling, take only your memory, and mind's eye, five senses and spirit. You can journal or draw your experience later. Be in the present and in the place, and open your senses. Release the distracting thoughts of past events or future plans. Focus only on what unfolds around you.
- Respectful: Do not add to or remove anything from your sit-spot; be a passing presence and deep observer, practising "NINA" - non-intrusive nature appreciation.
- Anchored and open: drop anchor and relax. Imagine yourself as a small ship in a light breeze, anchored to a deep point in the land but floating with the wind and water as the gentle currents and warm breeze; subtly move your attention and perspective across the horizon. Feel the slow spin of the earth and your place within it. Look around from this perspective; see and hear and smell and feel.
- When you return from your sit-spot, you can journal or paint, or simply process it. Sometimes it is freeing to not speak for a while. You may have noticed nature on a grand scale of clouds moving, or the tiny forests of lichen and busy insects, or seen a new species, song, or behaviour you had never noticed before. Allow the subtle to delight you.

**Facilitator:** Once your guided tour has been done, any clarifying questions asked and answered, and basic settling-in has been done (meal, room assignments, etc.), set aside time for participants to wander - not too far, within 5 minutes' walk of your site - to select their sit-spot and begin their personal connection with the land you are on.

Further sit-spot resources:

<https://www.pineproject.org/sit-a-thon/how-to-find-a-sit-spot/>

<http://wearewildness.com/5-qualities-perfect-sit-spot/>

## Spirit Studies - Session 1: First Evening / Cosmology and Creation

If your travel time is such that you arrive in the late afternoon or evening, use this as your first module. If your schedule is such that you arrive in the morning, introduce the sit-spot as part of the first daytime module and then return to this module in the evening.

Introduce the concept of a "Sit-spot / anchor point" for each individual to find, this evening or tomorrow. This will be a place you go to anchor yourself quietly in nature and can help support deeper opportunities to pray, meditate, or relax throughout your retreat.

**Facilitator** - setting the scenario

"And God saw that it was good."

- In this module, we focus on the goodness and wholeness of Creation, to position our hearts and minds in the gifts given in Genesis, and to find ourselves in the unfolding, interrelated Holy Family Tree of Life.
- Start with a spirit study, reading the first chapter of Genesis together and pausing for some prompts and meditation.
- The first activity suggestion is a science/cosmic walk together to be in awe and appreciation of the grandeur and glory of the universe. This explores cosmology and ecology as systems designed and developed out of love, the incredible micro and macro processes and time scales of life, geology, and the cosmos. This can be in-depth or brief and basic. Starting points and suggested resources are provided. Please note that some of the narrative in this section greatly paraphrases current scientific understanding of cosmology and the unfolding universe timeline and may not accurately reflect the latest research. We further recognize and respect that faith communities hold differing interpretations of the creation story.
- The outdoor excursion suggestion is star-gazing, something we rarely have time or opportunity to do in most urban centres or busy lives. If skies are overcast you may wish to run all or some elements of this module on a clear night.
- The final activity is a guided meditation connecting with the elements and "days" of Genesis, with spirit and human and earth community, closing with the concept of the seventh day and the Sabbath rest as people depart to sleep.

Music and hymn suggestions, if desired:

- All Things Bright and Beautiful - this speaks of "the music of the spheres" and describes all of the goodness and beauty of Creation
- The Christmas carol "Do You See What I See" could be a prompt for considering stargazing. The "Do you Hear What I Hear" also invites the imagination to open to different senses. This could be used in a youth group setting, pondering or rewriting the song to address Creation elements.

## Spirit Studies - Session 1: First Evening / Cosmology and Creation (continued)

**Facilitator:** Set up a quiet time and space together. This might be indoors, in front of a fire, or outdoors. If using artificial light, use a red filter to preserve night vision and be able to still appreciate the stars.

Spirit Study - Scripture Source: Genesis 1:1 - 2:2

Using at least two different Bible versions, read aloud through the first Creation story in Genesis 1:2-2:2 together. After each verse and "day", pause to read aloud meditation prompts:

- **Genesis 1:1-2** - go back to the beginning. *Why did God create? What deep love inspired the universe story?*
- **Genesis 1:3 - 5** - "...and saw that the light was good." *Pause to imagine supernova-scale creation, taking place right now somewhere in this universe; sense the ongoing expansion of matter and the universe, the power of light. Know that you are connected in kinship with all life that depends on light - with all things green and growing, with basking turtles, with simple plankton and majestic mammals.*
- **Genesis 1:6 - 8** - "Let there be an expanse...". *Waters separate from waters, life-giving and open. The first rains fall. If you are outdoors, pause to take in the enormity of this expanse of sky, the bubble of protective atmosphere around our blue planet. The very first portion of our sacred text acknowledged the waters of the atmosphere and of the earth.*
- **Genesis 1: 9 - 13** - Land and vegetation - "...and God saw that it was good." *Here earth and soil first appear in the story. Primitive fungi and ferns give way to seed-bearing plants and trees bearing fruit, "according to their various kinds." Early life revels in biodiversity!*
- **Genesis 1:14 - 19** - Two great lights appear "...to govern the day and the night." *Imagine this story being told in early communities around a fire, contemplating the mystery of the powerful sun and changeable moon. The verses connect the human experience with the sun, moon and stars, marking the passage of time and the predictability of the seasons. These are the markers by which the lives of trees and flowers, animals and humans are measured and made.*
- **Genesis 1:20 - 23** - The water "teems with living creatures"; birds fly across the expanse of the sky, and God blesses them. *Diverse life fills the air and the waters, every living and moving thing with which the water teems, every winged thing according to its kind. Life moves and thrives, calling and multiplying, welcomed and blessed.*
- **Genesis 1:24 - 25** - *The land produces living creatures, according to their kinds, and God saw that it was good. Reptiles and mammals, large and small, populate the planet. Great diversity continues to expand; all species are seen as good, according to their kind.*
- **Genesis 1:26 - 31** - *Humans are created and blessed and given an important role to play in Creation. All that is green and growing is given to the animals for food; all the seed-bearing plants and trees are given to humans. And God saw that it was good.*
- **Genesis 2:1 - 2** - *The heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array; God blessed the seventh day and rested from the work. In this passage, we, too, are blessed with the permission and encouragement to rest from work completed.*

*Take time to breathe, rest, and relax.*

## Spirit Studies - Session 1: First Evening / Cosmology and Creation (continued)

### Telling the universe story

The story told by science follows similar steps to those laid out in our scripture, some in different order, with timelines on grand-, universe-, God-scale rather than the more relatable days of the human experience. Theories involve the power and brilliance of incredible explosions of matter and energy. The early universe spread out and is still expanding; the power of that initial creation still resonates. Stars formed and exploded, mighty furnace-factories creating and expelling the elements our very bodies are made of; truly we do return to the earth and universe, ashes to ashes, stardust to stardust.

Our own solar system had collisions on a massive scale, but our planet was left with just the right “Goldilocks” conditions for life - not too hot, nor too cold; not too close, not too far from our young sun. Earth’s plentiful liquid water makes it possible to host life, and the strong gravity of our protective “big brother” planet, Jupiter, pulls in most wayward objects, reducing catastrophic impacts. Earth’s iron core helped make a magnetic field to protect against too much cosmic radiation, and sufficient gravity held in the water and early atmosphere. The moon, closer to earth then than it is now, truly did govern great and powerful tides. As the planet cooled, conditions became possible for life; water vapour condensed and fell as rain. Over long timelines, simple life forms arose in the water, eventually leading to multicellular marine organisms.

Early aquatic life transformed the carbon-dioxide rich atmosphere and created the oxygen needed by later forms of life. Crustaceans and mollusks moved in the waters, followed by fish. Green algae was followed by fungi and ferns; insects and sharks evolved, and seed-bearing plants and forests grew on the land. Multitudes of lifeforms burst forth in varieties and populations unseen by human eyes until fossil discoveries in the last two centuries. With the development of human consciousness, language, and civilization, life was able to study itself, forming different community, trying to capture and comprehend the complexity of life, with storytelling and sacred text to pass on memory and meaning, purpose and passion.

Even now with all of our modern knowledge, technology, and opportunity, the timeline and scale of the universe story is so vast, it is nearly beyond our mind’s ability to comprehend - yet still we study, speculate, and search for meaning.

A simple but powerful way to connect science and faith, present and remote past, is to do a Cosmic Walk. In its simplest form, this invites participants to walk individually or in a group along a short path or course with designated places to stop and hear, read, or think about key moments in the universe Creation story. This starts out with the moment of Creation - the sub-atomic energies, Big Bang, or starting point of everything. Each stage marks a time of wonder, based on what we know or theorize about the unfolding of the cosmos: when stars first burned and blew up, igniting and releasing iron and elements, eventually to become part of other stars and planets as gravity fields caused matter to coalesce.

The stops on the Cosmic Walk mark the long (long!) passages of time before life arises, and then the stages of life - when oxygen is first created, when the age of dinosaurs begins, when bees first bless the first pollen-rich flowers. Cosmic Walks can be beautiful, fact-filled and spirit-deep journeys, revealing the countless miraculous processes leading to life as we know it - when the sense of sight first evolved, when humans first stood upright.

## Spirit Studies - Session 1: First Evening / Cosmology and Creation (continued)

### Telling the universe story: Cosmic Walk (continued)

The basic tools needed:

- a length of rope or a path, usually marked out in a spiral or circle
- a script or cue cards
- some preparation time - although a script can be read out, it is more meaningful to have an opportunity for some study and understanding of the timeline. This need not be daunting; a simplified version can be made if need be.
- ways of designating the stations along the Cosmic Walk. For example: cards with descriptors, images illustrating the events (eg. volcanoes, first oceans, first insects), or candles, which can be lit as you come to each station.

Resource Links and Scripts for Leading a Cosmic Walk:

<http://www.ncipl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CosmicWalkComprehensive.pdf>

<http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/cosmic.htm>

<http://www.deeptimejourney.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/CosmicWalk.pdf>

### Outdoor/Experiential Excursion: Stargazing - dark skies learning journey Part 1

If you are fortunate enough to be in an area with dark skies, make sure to set aside time to appreciate them. Even urban area star-gazing is enjoyable, although you will see less detail.

If you are “unplugging” from cellphones and technology intentionally or because you are in a remote area, this is also a good time to debrief about the lack of cellphone signal and letting go of technology as you disconnect from gadgets and connect with the earth.

- What different kind of trust does one return to without the ability to instantly contact someone?
- What different kind of knowledge, memory and learning do you experience without the world at your fingertips in screen form but with the world spread out before you instead?

## Spirit Studies - Session 1: First Evening / Cosmology and Creation (continued)

### Outdoor/Experiential Excursion: Stargazing - dark skies learning journey Part 1 (continued)

Here are some suggestions for planning a stargazing session:

- **Limit lighting:** If you need flashlights to find your way to/from, use red lights instead of white/regular light. This preserves night vision and does not disturb wildlife. Simple red LED bike-lights work well and are inexpensive. Alternatively, put a red plastic film over your flashlight.
- **Bring blankets:** As the earth cools, the ground may become damp from dew. Be prepared with blankets or tarps to lie on the ground and look up.
- **Be supportive:** Many people have a strong fear of the dark, especially in unfamiliar and outdoor areas. Be ready with emotional support, preparation and accommodation for those who experience fear in dark places and/or for whom unlit paths may be an accessibility issue.
- **Consider comfort:** depending on the time of year, insects may be an issue, although they usually subside after dusk. Dress accordingly and use repellent as needed. Also consider options for seating for those with mobility issues or who are not comfortable lying on the ground.
- **Bring binoculars:** When available, telescopes can reveal incredible details such as the rings of Saturn, but you don't need a telescope to appreciate the night sky. When possible, a pair of good binoculars can open up viewing abilities - with strong binoculars you can see lunar craters and even several of the moons of Jupiter.
- **Try simple star charts and print planispheres:** new apps have made old-style star-charts less popular; stargazing apps can be amazing and allow you to easily find and zoom in on planets and identify constellations. But they can also be distracting and lead to looking at a screen rather than the stars. Instead, try using or printing traditional star charts. This teaches traditional star-finding techniques, and if viewed with a red-filter light it preserves night vision for everyone around you. Planispheres let you match up your latitude and time of year for seasonal stars.
  - Here is a link to printing planispheres:  
<https://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/images/education/doc/planisphere-e.pdf>

**Look for satellites and meteor showers:** beautiful as the heavens are, it is always exciting to see the swift lights of satellites or flash of shooting stars. Astronomy websites will offer suggestions for special or seasonal things to look for, such as planetary alignments, comets, times the International Space Station or other satellites pass overhead, meteor showers, even aurora predictions.

**Tell a story.** Do you know how the stars in Orion's belt were important and part of stories in Africa, Asia, and the Americas? Do you know legends about the constellations? Choose one that will be visible where you are and learn the conventional story (perhaps Greek/Roman mythology) and also another traditional story from another culture.

**Imagine the grand scale.** Looking up, imagine the slow spin of galaxies, the intense burn of stars, the nebulas birthing new starlight, the pulsars beaming energy from the remains of supernovas.

The best star-gazing takes time, patience, and proper clothing for comfort. Encourage people to be still long enough to let go of distractions, and quiet enough to focus on the heavens.

## Spirit Studies - Session 1: First Evening / Cosmology and Creation (continued)

### Outdoor/Experiential Excursion: Stargazing - dark skies learning journey Part 1 (continued)

There is a beauty in looking up at the stars, knowing some of the glimmering trails are the very satellites which we now depend on for so much communications. Our ancestors used the stars for navigation and inspiration for community and storytelling, seeing patterns and stories in the sky. We use these new satellite "stars" for GPS navigation and to facilitate our instant communications and storytelling - but our new communications tend to have us look down at a screen, not up at the stars together.

There are so many mind-blowingly beautiful images available now of the universe; printing and bringing even one photo of the so-called "Pillars of Creation" nebula might be good for an inspiration piece to look at once you return inside. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pillars\\_of\\_Creation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pillars_of_Creation)

In some ways, the Hubble telescope offers a new kind of angelic vision of the heavens... and another famous deep sky image illustrates how what looks like empty space is actually \*filled\* with whole galaxies and star-nursery nebulas when Hubble zooms in. These photos can be pondered when you consider that the darkest parts of the sky are still filled with galaxies. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble\\_Deep\\_Field#/media/File:Hubble\\_Deep\\_Field\\_location.gif](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble_Deep_Field#/media/File:Hubble_Deep_Field_location.gif)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble\\_Deep\\_Field#/media/File:HubbleDeepField.800px.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble_Deep_Field#/media/File:HubbleDeepField.800px.jpg)

#### Other resources:

<http://earthsky.org/space/darkness-is-disappearing>

<https://spotthestation.nasa.gov/sightings/>

<http://www.aurora-service.org/aurora-forecast/>

#### Sample stargazing suggestions for the Costa Rica group:

- *Ask one participant to take the lead in advance to research several constellations that are visible closer to the equator.*
- *Ask people to plan to stargaze in the Canadian skies the week before going, just to enhance their curiosity and excitement of new constellations visible or not visible at different latitudes.*
- *Upon arrival in Costa Rica, try to find an area with relatively good visibility of at least part of the horizon (this may be difficult with tree cover).*

## Spirit Studies - Session 1: First Evening / Cosmology and Creation (continued)

### Dark skies learning journey part 2 - the earth connection: Do you hear what I hear?

Take a few moments to walk together in the dark.

- Feel the challenges - do you see the path?
- Can your feet find the way when your feet cannot?
- Do you feel safer in community, with one person guiding the way or holding your hand?
- Can you feel your eyes slowly adjusting, taking in more light?
- Did you know that your night vision will continue to improve if you spend several nights back in nature without bright, artificial light?
- Once your eyes have adjusted, how jarring is it if a bright light is re-introduced?
- Is it easier to walk with a light in front or behind?

### Do you see what I see? Migration discussion and learning time

Migration at night is a critical part of the lives and populations of many species. For indigenous peoples, the migration of species was and is a critical part of human lives, following the migration of caribou, knowing when the smelt run, hunting when the geese fly.

Many birds that we know as diurnal (active in the day) are nocturnal migrants. Night provides some protection from predators but also reduced turbulence and less dehydration as they travel long distances. It is possible that some birds in the forest canopy traveled here primarily at night, using stars to guide them. The FLAP (Fatal Light Awareness Program) tells us that human issues like adding skyscrapers with lit windows or spotlights in cities can disorient birds, billions of which perish by hitting them at night. For many species, this is causing tragic and disastrous population declines, adding to the already significant natural challenges migratory species face as they expend energy travelling and have home, migratory, and nesting habitat under threat.

FLAP volunteers report going to the bases of tall, lit buildings and gathering countless stunned and dead birds. They are meant to travel by starlight, in the dark. If you look at a satellite image of the earth at night you will see how our use of energy creates light pollution. The same light that limits our ability to see stars in the city means that wildlife navigation is disrupted, as well as some other natural cycles. We are learning that artificial "blue-spectrum" light at night is harmful to our physiological and psychological health; the same is true for our wild neighbours.

We also know that urban lighting can disorient baby sea turtles, causing hatchlings to travel inland instead of out to sea as they mistake our lights for the reflection of moon and stars on the ocean - a sort of reverse light-house effect. Instead of a beacon of safety, directing their desperate dash to the waves, they follow a willo-the-wisp of electric light, exhausting themselves on the shore, easy prey to hungry predators. There are some suggestions that fish and marine mammal populations are also affected by light pollution as they are attracted to light as well, mistaking artificial lighting for bioluminescent food sources or moonlight.

We can advocate for urban lighting by-laws that reduce light pollution. There is no need for energy-inefficient, over-lit areas; new bulbs with greater efficiency, "warmer" hues, and directional lighting pointing down rather than up are proven to reduce light pollution; policies requiring office towers to turn off lights at night save energy and wildlife. Applying special window films minimizes bird collisions in day and night.

## Spirit Studies - Session 1: First Evening / Cosmology and Creation (continued)

### Dark skies learning journey part 2 - the earth connection: Do you hear what I hear? (continued)

#### Do you hear what I hear?

We don't always know these migrations are taking place, as often these populations travel silently. But we can learn more about migration patterns and support those groups researching and protecting nocturnal migrants. Large migrations show up on radar. Special detection tools such as [bat detectors](#) help locate and identify migratory species, and citizen science projects such as [Batwatch](#) and bird counts can help provide information on flight paths and population changes.

The next time you hear geese calling to one another in the night, pray for all migratory species; turn down the lights, and listen to the geese as they take turns as leader, the first in the V formation forging a path through the air, creating lift for the birds behind. In the words of Pearl Keenan, Tlingit elder, the geese are honking to encourage one another: *"Keep going! You're almost there! You can do it!"*

#### Genesis elements guided meditation

**Facilitator:** Close off the first evening with a calm gathering and decompressing. Take time to let go and open up to instill a sense of groundedness in this place. You may wish to sit in semi-darkness, in a comfortable space and read out the following meditation, or design your own.

Let go of technology

Let go of urban sounds and speeds

Release tension

Release expectations

Just be.

Connect with the elements of the seven stages of Genesis as you breathe deeply:

- Allow your mind to be formless and empty, feel the dark and the deep, feel the spirit hovering over the surface of the waters. Feel the absence of light on your skin. Hear the ocean and the anticipation of newness.
- See and feel the radiant burst of light. The light is good. Let the power and the glory of the good light envelope you.
- Let there be an expanse. Open your mind. Open your heart. Open your lungs, feel them expand as you breathe deeply. Yawn. Relax your diaphragm. Feel the humidity in the air as it comes in and as it goes out of you. Pause and feel the water that connects all life as we know it - water in our bodies, water in the ground, water in the very air we breathe; hydration facilitating oxygen exchange in our lungs. Place your hands on the ground and feel the separation and connections between ground and sky, solid matter and air, and the humid water droplets and elements connecting both. Look and listen and smell the elements of the waters and the sky.

## Spirit Studies - Session 1: First Evening / Cosmology and Creation (continued)

### Genesis elements guided meditation (continued)

- Hear the the waves on the first shorelines, feel the warmth of the shallows of early seas. Hear the wind in the prehistoric forests. See plants and species unknown and foreign, pioneering exploration of the oceans and land. Feel the wind currents and air flow bringing you the scents and fragrances of the earth. Smell the living earth in trees and soil, the regeneration potential in autumn leaves and spring mud.
- See the silver stars and glowing moon, sparkling and luminous, guiding ancestral peoples, governing the tides and rhythms of waters and natural cycles, shining wayposts for migrating turtles, birds, and marine life. Feel the cool clear light of night and how it pulls us together in community during the darkness, inspiring poem and song, spurring the howl and the hunt with illumination for wolves and human hunters. Experience the darkness of sky on a moonless night - look inward in the dark and feel your pupils dilate to let in each glimmer of light. Pause here - stay in the dark...
- ... Acknowledge the darkness; the peace and the peril, the fear of what unknown eyes see you in the dark, and also find comfort in the cloak of darkness. Pause in the dark night of the soul, the moment of doubt, somewhere we don't want to be, but the place we need to be - perhaps a valid, beautiful, bittersweet part of the journey. Recall to yourself the trust and truth that the dark will give way to the light, that night will welcome daybreak. Now feel sunlight, warm on your skin, golden light flooding your physical and psychological self with goodness like a warm sunbeam in deep winter. Feel your body literally strengthened, as you form vitamin D with the sunlight on your skin. Breathe in and let your nose tell you - what time of day or night is it? Can you smell the season of the year? What hints of scent come by wind, water, light, and warmth?
- See life arise in warm waters, a sludgy miracle in gooey pools and deep ocean vents. Feel how minute lifeforms eagerly use the sun and the water and turn carbon dioxide into oxygen. Thank these tiny terraformers as you breathe in and out the atmosphere they developed so long ago. Hear the flap of wings and see the flash of fins as early life takes to the air and moves through the waters. Feel the soft, smooth cartilage, hard crustacean shell and exoskeleton, leathery scale and feathery wing as life tries on all manner of costumed display, protective armour, and transportation option.
- Hear the squawk and song, hum and hiss, roar and rattle of the many species, each according to their kind. Hear the holy cacophony and sacred symphony of biodiversity, quiet or orchestral. Think on the animals you have loved - the pets, the wild birds, the wild animals you loved to read stories about, the ones your children played with, the farm animals your grandparents grew up with. Reach out and hold onto the connection we each feel to the wild and domestic lives that move with us on the face of the earth.
- Allow your senses to fill up with the sights, sounds, smells of the evening, noticing the wind and wildlife, flora and fauna, stillness and sound, finding our place in all of this, with all species. Feel the blessing descending on the human species as our very Creator sees the divine spark within us. Extend the blessing given to us and share it with all the vast array of life and the earth. Consider the strength and curiosity inherent in the human spirit, that our kind, without feather or scale, wing or fin, can find a home on earth.
- Let your spirit sit in the goodness of this original Creation, in wholeness and in harmony with all life. Be assured and secure, settled and safe, knowing you too are part of this perfect Creation, which God made, and God saw that it was good.
- Feel the joy of the culmination of Creation; let your soul sing out the good news that "the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array".
- *Stay here in the spirit of the seventh day, in holy rest and sabbath this evening.*

## Spirit Studies - Day Session 2 - Welcome (Back) to the Garden

### Food and Free Will, Seeds and Salvation (*"With great power comes great responsibility"*)

#### Setting the Scenario

#### Facilitator

This module is suggested for a daytime session, either morning or late afternoon. Ideally you will have access to a garden. The suggestion is to do a garden tour and to pair the spirit study with an opportunity for "food and faith" conversations and activities, such as a seed-saving workshop, gardening work, or guest presentation in order to learn about the ecology of food.

"...placed in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it"

- This module has several themes: choice and consequence, and seeds and soil as powerful symbols and elements of spiritual, social, and ecological health.
- The module begins with spirit studies from Genesis and from Matthew. Both Old Testament and New Testament selections refer to seeds and soil in story and parable, illustrating elements of humanity, divinity, and hope. There are many views on the Genesis story in particular; Christian communities hold disparate liberal or literal understandings of it as reality or metaphor. Rather than engaging with traditional understandings of these texts, this retreat template will invite you to explore these stories with a new lens and consideration of how we can view free will, food, and faith together.
- The first, or primary, scripture source is, appropriately enough, Genesis. This will set the stage for the day. Additional New Testament spirit study questions will be given as prompts for bringing spirit into the day's activities and excursions.
- The excursion or experiential learning is open in this module, but suggestions will be offered for types of outings or activities as well as prompts for prayer and pondering.
- The ecological focus is extended with conversation questions and learning opportunities on past and present agricultural practices, their impact on human and natural communities, and opportunities for awareness and action.

Remember to build in sit-spot time and opportunities to work together, gardening, sowing, or other activities, as well as time to pray or meditate individually in or near a garden or growing space.

Hymns and resource suggestions:

- Now Is The Cool of The Day - a song by Jean Ritchie. This feels like an environmental hymn; it is beautiful and melodic, prayerful and profound. I recommend the version sung by [kith & kin](#)
- In the Bulb there is a Flower - Voices United Hymnbook #703
- Garden Song "Inch by Inch" - David Mallett
- [Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front](#) - poem by Wendell Berry

**Facilitator** - Find a place to gather for the spirit study; ideally a place with bright natural light and either outside in or near a garden or with a view to the outdoors.

## Spirit Studies - Day Session 2 - Welcome (Back) to the Garden

### Food and Free Will, Seeds and Salvation (*"With great power comes great responsibility"*)

#### Spirit Study - Primary Scripture Source: Genesis 2:4 - 3:24, Creation and Exile

- Recall to one another the sense of being "in the garden" - the perfect Creation. As you come together, welcome each other back to Eden. How does it feel? What does Eden mean to you? In what way is the natural world and wildlife still in an Eden state? How do you feel about the human relationship with "paradise"?
- Using at least two different Bible versions, read through the second Creation story together. Notice the similarities and the differences in this and in the earlier account; while the first account focuses on the Creator and the many elements of Creation, this account focuses more on the human experience and encounters with the earth and the Creator. The first creatures, including humans, are described as having been formed from the dust of the ground; from the beginning there is an established relationship to the living earth, with the breath of life from the spirit of God.

As you read together, here are some points for reflection and discussion:

- Here God is a gardener, planting and forming, and as God makes humans in the divine image, God creates other gardeners. Humans are placed in the garden: "to work it and take care of it". As in the first Genesis account, we are given the special role and responsibility as caretakers and cultivators. We work together as companions, in community.
- *Hold your thoughts and prayers here, in this space of Eden.*
- *Who are your companions in the cultivation of this good earth?*
- *In what way does your soul feel the pull to be caretaker and steward of Creation?*
- In the Genesis story, new humanity is gifted free will; choice and consequence. The paradise paradox of knowingly making the wrong choice and selecting the tree of knowledge of good and evil has long been understood as underpinning the concept of original sin. But for the purposes of this eco-spiritual retreat, instead consider this story in terms of understanding and obligation.
- In the Genesis story, humans are painted as innocent (albeit for a short time), yet even so, God brooks no excuses as each tries to lay blame elsewhere: each is held accountable, regardless of reason. As soon as humans choose and have knowledge, their awakened awareness of right and wrong means they are immediately accountable for their choices and actions. In the story, they are exiled from Eden, literally and figuratively, having lost both the sheltered paradise and state of grace and innocence that the other species retain. They are perfectly human, human and imperfect, as are we.

## Spirit Studies - Day Session 2 - Welcome (Back) to the Garden (continued)

### Food and Free Will, Seeds and Salvation (*"With great power comes great responsibility"*)

#### Spirit Study - Primary Scripture Source: Genesis 2:4 - 3:24, Creation and Exile

- *The case could be made that humans have since had many opportunities to taste of the tree of knowledge; we have the capacity for research and understanding, scientific method with predictions and processes to learn and confirm information. While we arguably should always have "known better" in terms of resource depletion, pollution, and exploitation, now more than ever we **truly** have the knowledge of good and evil. Yet still we ignore this at our peril, choosing paths out of paradise - worse still, continually destroying paradise in the process.*
- *If, indeed, we are still in Eden, if we can see nature in its perfect beauty of complex and simple interconnections, what different choices can we make?*
- *If we were to return to the proverbial paradise, set back down in the Genesis garden, what lessons would we have learned, as individuals and as a human community?*
- *What would cause us to be kicked out of the garden today? Would we be?*
- *As climate change threatens and we overstep the target 350 parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, are we (re)creating the flaming sword marking the point of no return?*
- *What free will decisions do we make each day to hasten or reverse this course?*
- *What rings true about this story?*

The characters of Adam and Eve move from a state of grace to a sense of guilt, shown by their covering of themselves and hiding from the Creator, where previously they had no barriers or boundaries, and by their blaming of The Other. Still today we use this as a test of guilt - did you know or ought you have known better? A marker in the story is that the humans felt shame; human consciousness is linked to self-consciousness. What is missing are the next steps in right relations; in this Old Testament story, there is no evidence of repentance, and the action is met with retribution, not redemption.

- *Think on the New Testament answers to the story; that we can only be saved through Christ, through love, through faith in God, yet we must also live out our faith.*
- *What different Eden tale might be told if the actions had moved through recognition of wrong, expression of remorse, actions to right the wrongdoing, and reconciliation?*
- *Can we say we hold true belief in divine love, faith in the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer; can we do our best as caretakers to help the processes of creation, redemption, and sustainability of the natural and human communities?*
- *In doing so, can we hope to return to the Eden state of being one community of earth, a part of, not apart from, Creation and the Creator?*

## Spirit Studies - Day Session 2 - Welcome (Back) to the Garden (continued)

### Food and Free Will, Seeds and Salvation (*"With great power comes great responsibility"*)

Scripture source: Matthew 13:1 - 23 / Mark 4:1-25 / Luke 8:4-18 - Parable of the Four Soils, the Sower and the Seeds

- A parable to ponder and hold in your heart during this day.
- Christ told the gathered crowds a parable of a farmer who went out to sow seed. The seed fell on diverse soil; some on a path, where it was eaten by birds; some on rocky places, where it quickly grew but withered without deep roots. Some fell among thorns where it was choked out. Yet some fell on good soil, where it produced a great crop.
- *What messages are we are hearing but not understanding?*
- *When are we hearing with joy, but forgetting or resisting letting the good, important message take hold when something threatens our comfort, convenience, or security?*
- *What do we let cause our learning to wither, without behaviour change or steadfast belief?*
- *What worries or distractions do we permit to interfere with what we know we need to do?*
- *How can we cultivate good soil in our souls, to be fruitful and spread what is good?*
- *How can we apply these questions not only to spirit, but also to our relationship with each other and our environment?*

Scripture Source: Mark 4: 26-29 - Parable of the Growing Seed/ "The Kingdom of God is like this: A man scatters seed on the ground"

- A parable to ponder and hold in your heart during this day.
- This parable speaks of the continued growth of the seed and the kingdom. The farmer is aware of but does not understand the holy mystery of the growing grain. He does toil to plant, but the work of God and the earth does the rest, regardless of the farmer's efforts.
- *What holy mystery is in genes, genesis, germination?*
- *What processes of spirit and nature have we forgotten, taken for granted?*
- *What unintentional seeds have we planted through negligence, apathy, greed, or pride, affecting the earth and our neighbours?*
- *How can we be co-creators with God, planting peace, hope, and justice through our everyday actions?*

## Spirit Studies - Day Session 2 - Welcome (Back) to the Garden (continued)

### Food and Free Will, Seeds and Salvation (*"With great power comes great responsibility"*)

#### Ecological learning points:

**Facilitator:** These might be developed through discussion groups or presentations, or as part of excursions and experiential learning activities you have planned.

Our food choices matter. As consumers - both in the "digestion" and "purchasing" sense - we have a great deal of power in shaping the food economy, which is inextricably linked to the health of our families, our local and global neighbours, and the health of the earth. Palm oil is an example of a crop which is found in nearly 50% of our everyday products and which is particularly linked to habitat destruction and endangered species, animal cruelty, and indigenous rights abuses - and in its processed form it is not even particularly healthy for consumers! So how did we get here, and what are good options for improving food systems and food choices?

Some species that were traditionally an important, even sacred crop, have become more detrimental. Many believe that monoculture plantations of crops such as corn, coffee, or even cotton have begun to cause great harm to nature and even human health. Many agricultural advances benefit us all, but some practices reduce nutrient value, require unsustainable and/or toxic chemical fertilizers and pesticides, compromise biodiversity and ultimately resistance to drought or blight, impact wildlife habitat. They can push out crops which could feed local people healthily in favour of providing fuel or cheap (often inhumanely produced) meat to wealthier markets. Ironically and tragically, the availability of cheaply produced, calorie-rich but nutrient-poor food has concurrently meant malnourishment of low-income populations both in developing countries, who can no longer afford traditional foodstuffs when cash crops dominate, as well as in developed countries flooded with unhealthy fast-food and junk-food options that are often more affordable than basic fresh food items. We continue to have food injustice and inequity, in a world that has more food than ever.

Food growing practices affect wildlife when habitat is modified. For example, coffee naturally grows under the shady canopies of rainforest areas that are key habitat for migratory songbirds. When larger plantations of coffee are developed, songbird habitat is devastated - and more chemicals are required to produce coffee in monoculture plantations. Corn grows well when planted as part of the "three sisters" traditional companion gardening method common to the Iroquois Confederacy and other First Nations; when grown with winter squash and climbing beans, these companion plants provide each other with support, pest reduction and moisture control through shading, as well as keeping the soil healthy through nitrogen fixation. The three foodstuffs also provide a balanced diet. Monoculture fields of the same crops, while more efficient for harvesting on an industrial scale, often require additional inputs. Another concern is that monoculture leads to a loss of genetic diversity, which is important in disease resistance and resilience to changing climate. Some studies suggest that crops in developed countries may actually be more vulnerable to climate change than those in places which have not adopted widespread industrial farming practices, because traditional crops that are regionally well-adapted and cultivated over generations maintain genes more able to handle variability in conditions. Our food crops depend more now upon a reduced number of dominant crops, and a handful of commercial seed varieties - nearly all of them imported from the US - compared to the hundreds and thousands of varieties grown and exchanged by small farmers just a few generations ago.

## Spirit Studies - Day Session 2 - Welcome (Back) to the Garden (continued)

### Food and Free Will, Seeds and Salvation (*"With great power comes great responsibility"*)

#### Ecological learning points: (continued)

The carbon footprint of our food is generally underestimated. Conventional farming practices depend upon the availability of oil for production and running of industrial farm equipment. Packaging and processing of convenience foods and, increasingly, even staple food items is heavily dependent upon fossil fuels for the factories processing items and for plastic packaging of much of what is in our grocery stores. Transportation of food across long distances uses an incredible amount of fossil fuels as well as nutrient loss, as we are accustomed to regular availability of an incredible range of food products in any season. We think nothing of having fresh spinach, tomatoes, and other greens mid-winter, or imported grains, packaged foods, and specialty items that our great-grandparents would have considered out of reach or a once-a-year decadence. Growing and shipping out-of-season foods requires additional energy inputs to heat greenhouses and then keep produce cool en route. The inefficiencies and waste inherent in our current systems is staggering, particularly once one factors in the astonishing portions of food that are discarded; the [David Suzuki Foundation estimates](#) that close to one half all food produced worldwide is wasted through processing, picky consumers, poor meal planning, and other factors.

#### Suggested excursions or experiential learning:

##### Seed-saving workshop

A modern midrashic story depicts Naamah, Noah's wife, as being tasked by God to gather the great diversity of seeds to bring onto the ark; as Noah gathers the animals, Naamah preserves the seeds. Seed-saving is an ancient art and increasingly we are learning how important it is. Learn about heirloom and heritage seeds and the resurgence - and urgency - of preserving and planting diverse traditional varieties. Heirloom seeds often produce vegetables and fruits with higher nutrient contents; the natural defences of organically-grown heirloom varieties are believed to produce more phytochemicals which contribute to human health. Seed-saving practices support natural processes such as protecting pollinators, and are of vital importance in developing nations to ensure that subsistence farmers have ownership of and ability to freely save and trade seeds. Seeds are an inheritance and an investment in the future.

Sources: [Seeds of the future](#), [Noah's Wife, the Story of Naamah](#)

**Agricultural tours** - if possible, plan an outing to learn about (hopefully) sustainable agricultural practices in the retreat region. Start by remembering the agricultural patterns you noticed in your trip to this place, and consider how agriculture has affected nature, and vice versa.

- What grows here naturally, and what has been introduced? Have native species been explored for foraging, heritage or heirloom crops that are well-adapted to the region? Or have introduced cash crops pushed out traditional local varieties?
- How is the soil maintained and the crops fertilized - if through chemical means, ask questions about how the farmer avoids causing dependence and weaker crops. Or is the soil managed through green manure cover crops or companion planting? Is the soil given a sabbath, to rest and be fallow?

## Spirit Studies - Day Session 2 - Welcome (Back) to the Garden (continued)

### Food and Free Will, Seeds and Salvation (*"With great power comes great responsibility"*)

#### Agricultural tours (continued)

- How is the community of the earth respected in the gardening? With companion crops and polyculture, with hedgerows and habitat for wild species, by encouraging helper insects and microbes in pest management?
- How is the human community respected? With fair wages and reasonable working conditions by adults (no child labour), with safety in mind, avoiding pesticide exposure? With common ownership and a priority on family-owned and operated farms, or is it foreign-owned? With a focus on healthy, nutrient-rich foodstuffs that will benefit local families, or is it solely for export, priced out of reach of locals, or grown only for fuel or consumption by meat animals?
- How is the sacredness of water respected? With rain-water capturing, drought-resistant landscaping or growing practices, mulching and low-till options, careful avoidance of fertilizer or pesticide run-off? Are the plant varieties selected for and adapted to the regional conditions, including rainfall, temperature, soil type, etc or is heavy watering and additives required?

#### Additional activity suggestions:

##### **Meal investigation:** 5N's of planet-friendly, people-friendly eating:

- Is your fruit or vegetable **Natural**? This means no or few additives and is close to its original state when it was growing or picked. Avoid highly processed foods as these are less healthy for us and take more energy to produce. Be aware as well of which crops are organic and which may have high pesticide residue.
- Is it **Now** in season? This means it is or can be grown where you are, right now such as strawberries in Ontario in June, or is in its natural season and climate from elsewhere, such as a clementine at Christmas. Avoid out-of-season products as they require far more fossil fuel energy to produce and transport (often with refrigeration) and have lower nutrient values. Aim to become more in tune with the natural growing season and celebrate seasonal produce.
- Is it **Nearby**? This means it is locally grown, such as apples/onions/maple syrup etc; avoid unnecessary imports such as apples from New Zealand, garlic from China, etc., especially when local or regional varieties are available. Sometimes this means buying and storing in advance. Local apples store well for long times under the right conditions. Sometimes it means doing without, or treating an imported variety, like a pineapple, as a treat.
- Is It **Naked**? This means no unnecessary packaging. Many foods grow their own wrappers - corn, oranges, watermelon, bananas. When we add plastic and other packaging we add to the wasted energy and physical waste in the food production system.
- Is it **Nutritious**? This means it has high levels of things that are good for human health, with vitamins, amino acids, and healthy oils. Fresh, locally grown produce naturally has higher levels of nutrients.
- Also keep in mind: **No/less meat** - eating lower on the food chain is healthier for people and the planet. Meat not only raises concerns about humane treatment of animals, but also climate change. Meat production, particularly in the industrialized food system, produces extremely high levels of greenhouse gases, is an inefficient use of grain (which also leads to health issues, antibiotic use, and other problems when corn is fed to cattle), and huge amounts of wastewater and water use.

## Spirit Studies - Day Session 2 - Welcome (Back) to the Garden (continued)

### Food and Free Will, Seeds and Salvation (*"With great power comes great responsibility"*)

#### Additional activity suggestions:

Local foods aren't *necessarily* organic, or vice versa. Both can be a tool for evaluating and making good food choices. Locally grown foodstuffs that are not organic may still be lower in pesticides than those grown overseas, depending on the laws of the producing countries. Organic foods are healthier for the entire eco-system, and generally healthier for both producer and consumer - but sometimes have high carbon costs for transportation, or displace local growers. Fair trade certification shows that the grower receives a reasonable portion of the income from the food sale.

#### **Food justice and food mapping activity**

An activity considering the food production system of bananas and how it relates to producer, consumer, and middle agents in the conventional and organic growing systems.  
[http://usc-canada.org/UserFiles/File/USC\\_banana\\_web\\_final.pdf](http://usc-canada.org/UserFiles/File/USC_banana_web_final.pdf)

#### **Seed dispersal activities and reflections**

This can be done with simple tools, or none.

- With an old sheet, walk and gently trail the sheet behind or alongside you; see the hitchhiking plant varieties and how they share their seeds
- Old black socks, turned inside out and worn over one's shoes during a walk will show you what seed forms have attached to you, such as burrs and avans (fluffy seeds)
- Be aware of and reflect on the seed dispersal mechanisms alive and active in the human and wild communities:
  - birds and animals carrying burrs on their fur and feathers
  - birds and animals ingesting and excreting seeds in new places
  - insects, birds, and animals moving seeds and bulbs from place to place (ants plant trilliums, squirrels plant trees, jays and chickadees cache flower seeds)
  - dandelion and milkweed seeds floating on the breeze
  - hollow seedpods drifting in water, carrying species to new areas along river and ocean

#### **Food for thought and seeds of hope:**

**Seeds carry within them the hope and miracle of resurrection.** The inert, seemingly-dead seed carries within it all that is needed to restart a species, given only the right conditions of soil, water, sun, and air. The question: "how many seeds are in an apple?" takes on a larger meaning when reversed: "how many apples are in a seed?". Like the parable of the mustard seed, God's kingdom surprises and delights, expanding beyond our dreams, fulfilling our hopes. God's love envelopes and protects us, as the branches of the mustard plant in the parable provide shade and shelter for the birds of the air.

As we ponder seeds, plants, and the beauty of the garden we have been gifted with, let the lightness and beauty of the butterfly and the fragrance and colour of the blossom speak to us of passing the peace as pollinator and flower each exchange their gift. Even the very elements of Eucharist recall to us the source of Love, expressed in Christ, and coming from the seeds of the grain and the grape. When we partake of Communion, truly we partake of communion with spirit, with the work of the ones who planted and harvested, and with the gifts of the earth. **In your sit-spot, you may wish to tune your vision to see all that around you which came from a seed.**

## Spirit Studies - Day Session 2 - Welcome (Back) to the Garden (continued)

Food and Free Will, Seeds and Salvation (*"With great power comes great responsibility"*)

### Additional activity suggestions:

#### Sample food discussion points for Costa Rica Group:

Food-related issues that can be further explored in this region:

- species introduced by nature (floatation, wind/water current seed dispersal)
- species introduced by humans - invasive species disrupting local habitat and competing with native species
- monoculture and impacts on habitat and social justice
- evidence of clear-cutting of rainforest for beef production; disastrous not only because of the rainforest destruction and loss of biodiversity and habitat, but also unsuccessful, because the biomass was all in the tree canopy, not in the ground. The social justice aspects of beef bound for North Americans, plus factoring the ethics of the cattle production, and carbon costs of transportation by rail and plane
- Food and cash crops and some technically nuisance species, like bananas, which are not native but have taken over and turned into a cash crop. Bamboo is an ambiguous, nuisance species, but can also be used as a renewable construction material
- Focusing on the local food possible in this region; fruits, vegetables, seafood, spices
- Turning discussion back to what we can grow in the Ottawa / Canadian regions we come from - we can actually support ourselves quite well if we reverse trends and move back to local production rather than paving over the most arable lands, look to local species of fruit and nut-bearing trees, support local producers, begin backyard gardening, and advocate for local food hubs

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

### Setting the Scenario

#### Facilitator:

This module is designed to be used on a day when you have an outdoor excursion planned which will allow you to visit at least one and ideally multiple habitats and view or interact with wildlife. This could be through a guided hike, visiting a wildlife sanctuary or other place with wildlife corridors. You might also consider visiting a space where an extreme weather event has had an impact, or a fragile ecosystem. Be sure to plan for respect for the habitat, approaching the excursion as a guest in a sacred space.

If you are also having guest speakers on this day, consider inviting someone who can speak to endangered species preservation or re-introduction, injured wildlife rehabilitation, etc. Other topics that would relate well are those of extreme weather preparedness and mitigation.

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

### Setting the Scenario (continued)

#### Texts and Resources

Genesis 9:16 When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on earth.”

- In this module, we focus on the covenant established between God and all life on earth, and the expression of the importance of preservation of species. A holy family is chosen for the important task of gathering and preserving representatives of the diversity of life; we are by extension part of this family.
- Start with a spirit study of the story of Noah’s Ark. As with other Biblical stories, there are diverse views on how the book of Genesis is to be understood; with a literal or with a liberal interpretation. For this retreat template, you are invited to focus on the large-picture lessons offered by the Noah’s Ark story and extend the learning to our roles and responsibilities in an ecological context as people of the covenant between Creator and Creation.
- The activity suggestions relate to learning about, appreciating, and preserving biodiversity.
- Excursion suggestions extend opportunities to study and discover diverse wildlife in the area of your retreat site.
- Ecological learning points suggested through deeper discussion topics include climate change and extreme weather events, humans as agents of positive or negative change, and biodiversity and interconnectedness of species.
- Remember to build in sit-spot reflection opportunities, as well for social and solitary times and activities.

#### Hymns and Resources Suggestions:

- [The Starfish Story by Loren Eisley](#)
- All Things Bright and Beautiful
- [Birdfoot’s Grandpa - Joseph Bruchac](#)

**Facilitator:** Find a place to gather the group, ideally outside or a view of the outdoors, where sounds of nature can be heard.

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

Spirit Study: Scripture Source - Genesis 6:1 - 9:17

- Using at least two Bible versions, read through the story of Noah's Ark together, pausing for reflection and discussion. Together, hear the Ark as a story of natural disaster, human and ecological resilience following an ecological disaster. Consider the following:
- The story is set within the nearly-perfect Creation; humans are no longer considered to be in paradise, but the tale still suggests an earth mostly untouched by human activity. At the outset of the story, it describes an increase in human population. We know that this usually coincides with competition for resources, territory, and social power and authority. It is at this point that we are told God takes note of the ill-will and inappropriate motivations of the humans God has created; it grieves the Creator that the world is filled with violence because of them.
- *Pause to consider the demands we now place on the earth and on one another; our human population has risen beyond any previous measure, projected to reach 8 billion by 2020.*
- *How shall we address the tensions brought on by population increase and resource inequity?*
  
- The astonishing announcement is made that God, sorrowing for the evil in the world, has chosen to send a devastating flood to wipe clean all of Creation, destroying life in the process. This seems to contradict the joy expressed by God in seeing Creation as good, and is hard to reconcile with the salvation sent through the new Covenant and love of God through Christ. Yet we are left to struggle with this text - that because of evil acts by humans, all of Creation shall suffer. How can we understand such a thing?
- *In times of great disaster, we ask "why?" We struggle to understand why us, why now, what cause - when there are no good answers, no good reasons for bad things that happens. We know God as a God of love, creating out of joy, redeeming out of compassion. It is a terrible thing when unforeseeable and unpreventable disasters happen, and understandable when, in our grief, ignorance, or disbelief we seek to attribute supernatural motivations, such as angry spirits in volcanoes, wind, or wave. We know that there are natural processes that do lead to regional and even world-wide extinction-level events; it makes sense that humans looked for reasons for the deluge. Yet it is a truly ugly thing that even now, with our understanding of plate tectonics, when natural disasters strike, there are some who blame others - as in the case of the terrible earthquake in Nepal - proclaiming that those of different religious beliefs, practices, or freedoms have incurred the wrath of God, that God wishes harm to us or others.*
- *Rejecting this, we shall focus on the mercy of the flood warning, the call to action, and the response of Noah in preserving life.*
  
- Noah and his family are seen to be righteous, and as such are given what seems to be an impossible task: to preserve representatives of each species on earth. The story highlights the need to cherish biodiversity, as God expressly states that Noah is to gather the pairs to keep their various kinds alive -- all creatures with the breath of life within them.
- *Indigenous peoples have traditional knowledge of the interconnectedness of species, which we are re-learning and only beginning to understand through studies of ecology. When one population or species is threatened, it affects the balance of the entire ecosystem. It is a true loss and tragedy for all of Creation if a species becomes extinct.*
- *Even in a tale where God is said to have despaired of Creation and wished to restart it, why did God seek to preserve diversity and life?*

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

Spirit Study: Scripture Source - Genesis 6:1 - 9:17 (continued)

- Noah's family undertook this task; they were resourceful and faithful in time of trial. While children delight in imagining an ark full of animals -- a mobile zoo -- adults imagine the work involved in this Herculean endeavour; building, feeding, cleaning. Recountings of the story imagine the pressure to complete and also social pressure from those who do not believe the truth of the impending flood (let alone the practical concerns of collecting species).
- *Follow this motif of humans tasked with preserving all for the goodness of God and Creation.*
- *How can we hear this as a cautionary tale for those not heeding warnings of climate change?*
- *How can we identify with and take inspiration from the character of Noah, recognizing the need to get to work for God in preserving biodiversity, even in the face of derision and disbelief from those who refuse to acknowledge the reality and threat of climate change?*
  
- The family held out hope, through troubling circumstance, forming community in turbulent times. What transpires throughout is a story of resilience over the course of a significant period of time in the lives of the characters. The release of the raven and the dove reflect hope for a change, for more favourable conditions. Patience and endurance are required.
- *What hope do we hold out for improved circumstance for ourselves, communities, the earth?*
- *What signs are we seeing of a new willingness to take action?*
- *How do we react to the raven's message of unchanging, dark times?*
- *How do we bring about and react to the dove's announcement of a time for new beginnings, new effort, and action after stagnation?*
  
- As the wind moves over the waters, the floodwaters recede. We can imagine a new perspective seen from the mountain – of devastation, destruction, and death, yet also new life, green and growing, as in the olive leaf in the dove's beak. While courage was needed to build the ark, courage was needed to disembark, go forth, and begin again.
- *What shift in perspective do we feel or will we need?*
- *What events – good or bad – will need to take place in order for us to have a new vision?*
- *How will we go forth from this place, ready for change?*
  
- As the family left the ark that had sheltered them in the storm, they would have needed to remember and learn skills to survive; they may have grieved what was known, loved, and lost from the antediluvian times. And yet, they went out in thanksgiving.
- *What skills are we remembering and relearning as we consider a transition time, living as we do in peak oil production?*
- *What is at stake? What might we lose? What might we gain?*
- *How can we approach these challenges in thanksgiving?*
  
- In the story, the covenant is shown by the symbol of the rainbow, God's promise that God will never again send a flood to destroy all life. The covenant is made not just with the patriarch Noah, not just with a chosen people, not just with humans, but between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth. If the covenant is between Creator and Creation, surely this speaks to God highly valuing life in all its diverse and splendid forms.
- *What prayer, thought, word and action can we hold to in order to respect the value our Creator places on every living thing?*
- *How shall we endeavor to hold Creation in such high regard?*

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

Spirit Study: Scripture Source - Genesis 6:1 - 9:17 (continued)

- After the flood, God tells Noah that animals will now feel dread of human-kind; the harmony of Eden has not carried forth after the great deluge, a disaster brought on in this story by the evil of mankind. After the flood, animals are now given into the care of Noah but also for food. Noah sacrificed some animals on an altar, to give thanks after coming through peril.
- *What dread do animals feel of humans now, as we encroach further on their habitat, exploit them for food in factory farming entirely removing them from their natural lives and comforts, and bringing on further destruction through devastating the earth?*
- *On what altar do we sacrifice them today? Are we motivated and mindful of thanksgiving, as Noah was, expressing grace and appreciation to our Creator and to the animals whose lives nourish our own? Or are our motivators greed, convenience, apathy, likened more to those of the pre-flood populace?*
- *What sea change of compassion can we express to the other creatures of the covenant?*
- God is clear that the covenant is with Noah and all things living and breathing on the earth ; this includes humans, as living beings on the planet, but also as God speaks to Noah, saying that the covenant starts with Noah and will continue through his family. As inheritors of this story, we are the inheritors of Noah's charge of caretaking and preservation; we are covenant people. Covenants are not one-way. They are between two parties, an agreement and a trust.
- *How do we live out this role as people of a covenant between Creator and Creation? Now, as we approach a precipice of the sixth known great extinction - one in fact **brought on by us** - how must we take up the challenge to preserve all species in the face of great disaster?*

### Ecological Discussion: Troubled Waters

God promises to never again destroy all life on earth "as long as the earth endures" . . . but what about humans as the threat? The reassurance of the rainbow does not speak for the *human species* enacting global-scale violence or bringing about conditions for catastrophic climate change. Although there is evidence that some earlier peoples influenced severe population declines of certain species in specific areas (Easter Island, possibly mammoth hunting in Arctic - though other stressors were on mammoths) not until the industrial age have humans had the capacity - or motivation - to rapidly exterminate an entire species. Despite the story that the Great Flood was a response to the evil of mankind, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was unimaginable that humans would literally be capable of instigating natural disasters or altering global climate.

- *What would it take for you to believe that climate change is real, and influenced by humans, including you?*
- *What will it take for you to believe you are part of the problem, and of the solution?*

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

### Ecological Discussion: Troubled Waters (continued)

The story of Noah's Ark is situated in an extreme climate event – a natural disaster purportedly on a global scale. Currently human actions *are* increasing natural disasters. While catastrophic natural events certainly can and do take place (pacific rim, monsoon season, tornado alley, major faultlines), many widescale types of devastation are now being precipitated by human actions. Climate change increases extreme weather events; increased flooding along coastlines is linked with rising sea levels and intensification of coastal development; coral reef collapse and ocean acidification are critical issues; oil extraction and transportation and massive spills pollute on a large scale. The possibility of war through chemical or nuclear attacks, or more probable, from resource competition and drought would cause widespread devastation. Even earthquakes, long seen as unpredictable and unpreventable, are now being brought on by fracking for natural gas.

It has only been in the last few decades that, for the first time, humans as a species have developed the power to alter the earth on a systems-wide scale. Never before have our choices and actions literally had the potential to instigate natural disasters: so-called "Acts of God" are now edging towards becoming "Acts of Humankind". Such massive problems seem insurmountable – how to stop a flood, an earthquake, a hurricane? – but we know that cause and effect means we can have an equal hand in halting detrimental impacts on the environment. We know that moving from fossil fuels will mean not only less greenhouse gas production, but likely also less water pollution and contamination, less habitat destruction, less particulate matter and air pollution.

We have made changes before; acid rain was slowed and halted by concerted political, commercial, and social effort. We like to believe in massive solutions for massive problems, and then deeming them as requiring impossible or near-divine intervention. But the truth, as always, lies somewhere in between. Motivating international coalitions to take action on climate and ocean change is daunting, particularly if set against other priorities such as public health, economic development, and food security - but climate stabilization and protection can support these and other millennium development goals. And in the end, every individual counts. The Pacific gyre of trash – a massive floating island of plastic waste – is indeed made up of contributions of waste from many nations, on a large scale. But each piece of the gyre is one product, from one person, from one choice.

It may be a challenging time to be alive, but also a time with great potential.

*Knowing that climate change is linked to food insecurity, water pollution and desertification, political tensions, and more, what choices and changes are you willing to commit to, personally and as a group, to take on what may be the biggest issue we will ever face?*

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

### The Heart of the Matter: difficult questions and deepening discussion topics

These are options for further conversation and controversy if your group wishes to go deeper.

- Discuss the implications when faith groups imply that natural disasters are caused by human sin, and/or the belief that praying or conversion can mitigate disasters. For example, following the Nepalese earthquake, some Christian groups put forth the suggestion that the event came about because of the sinful traditional worship of a mountain, or other (non Judeo-Christian) beliefs.
  - How is this ever helpful? As Christians, how can we stand up against such harmful claims and assert that there is no causal link between religious belief or practice and horrific events? How, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is this still being espoused?
  - How shall we announce that tragedies are not condemnation by a God of hate?
  - In the aftermath, how do we help without suggesting that survivors were blessed and saved but victims somehow were not worth God's help?
  - How do we change the messaging?
- Being certain that true natural disasters are not punishment for sin in the old sense, how do we still help draw the connection between human activity and climate change, moving from a simplistic, punitive viewpoint of taboo behaviours resulting in divine retribution and instead advancing the scientific consensus that specific human industry can and does contribute to climate alteration which then leads to general increase in extreme weather events.
- When we read the story of Noah, we must realize that today, an alarming number of species have no space on the ark. We're in the next extinction event, the first one ever influenced by us. And yet, some faith groups ignore the condition of the Creation gifted to us to steward, instead holding that matters of the spirit are separate from the conditions of the earth. Some say that revelations or prophesy mandate that climate disasters will occur, making climate change inevitable, not actionable, or even positive evidence of the advancement of God's kingdom.
- How can we show that care for the kingdom of earth is linked to care for the spirit (on earth as it is in heaven?)

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

### Excursion

Recommended excursion: a hike through a forest. Forests are the lungs of the earth and provide refuge and habitat for many species. Whether tropical or temperate, rainforest or boreal, old growth, second growth, or sustainably managed, forest walks are good for our physical, spiritual, and emotional health.

Alternative outings: look for edge habitat or wetland, places where there is a high biodiversity. This could be old-growth healthy habitat, intact and whole, recently protected habitat, recovering from human activity, or you could visit an area of recent development to view how this has changed the wildlife populations and corridors.

If this is your first major outing, review the logistics and preparation:

- Physical preparation: safety check ins, proper gear, hydration, plan for emergencies or lost participant, checking weather for wind, heat, cold, etc., insect repellent as needed, tick checks after returning. Choose what to bring (binoculars, field guide, walking stick)
  - Social preparation: Identify a partner for the walk; you may wish to choose someone with a similar introvert/extrovert personality to walk quietly or engage in conversation, to stroll slowly or to exercise. Check in with them at the outset, midpoint, and return.
  - Spiritual preparation: sense the threshold as you cross into the wild. What do you want to bring with you? What do you want to leave behind? Whose space are you entering?
  - You may wish to consider some of the journey journal prompts before or after your outing.
- Consider how you are affected by crossing the often invisible boundaries and territories of nature; for example, how the wetlands around you are shaped by the presence of beavers, how the populations of wildflowers or cultivated fruits and vegetables are visited by local pollinators, how wild berries and seeds are dispersed by birds and animals living here. If you see deer trails and corridors in the snow, how has their passing and presence affected other species here? If you are enjoying the sound of birdsong, listen to what they tell each other as they forage, as they mark your passing; some species understand each other's sounds. Just as humans have different regional dialects, so do birds (and whales). Different populations will have slightly different calls.

#### Sample excursion planning and questions for Costa Rica group:

The local guides and hosts advise all participants to prepare for heat and humidity with appropriate footwear, hydration, sun protection, and also insect repellent. Quick-drying footwear is important. As the lodge is in a remote area, basic first aid equipment will be carried.

- Can you hear or see any familiar overwintering birds?

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

### Guided meditation:

If time allows and the opportunity presents itself, try a guided meditation while in the forest:

Allow the lungs of the world to fill your lungs; breathe deeply, note the subtle change in scent in areas of different ground cover.

Note how the forest smells at this time, at this level of humidity, in this season.

Breathe out into the forest, breathe in the oxygen it offers; feel the exchange of air and water.

Feel the deep root systems holding the soil, the strength of the trees lifting water from the earth up to the leaves, the energy of sunlight transformed to sunlight.

If there is sun, look up to the dappling light through leaves.

If there is rain, hear how it falls in gentle leaf-steps to the ground.

As you hear the sounds of life around you, reach out with your mind's eye to connect – to the ant, busy with its work, to the squirrel, holding the texture of treebark as it climbs.

Take time now, to just listen.

Listen to what you can hear – blue jays or howler monkeys, rustling leaves or leafcutter ants.

Listen and to what you **can't** hear – lichen growing, snails crawling, humus forming.

### Suggested questions and themes for guest speakers and/or discussion:

- What would an ecological disaster do here? At home? What are we doing about it? Is our action or inaction helping or harming?
- What are the local threats to biodiversity? (invasive species, development, local resource extraction, habitat fragmentation or degradation, lack of proper waste management practices, water/soil/air pollution).
- What are the international threats to biodiversity? (resource extraction, external nations' waste management practices - dumping plastics, sending e-waste to other nations, international companies, climate change and large scale pollution).
- What opportunities for action and best practices are in place and acted on? What other opportunities for action are there?
- What detrimental practices are still taking place, and why?
- What are examples of local and community action, and how do international actions help or hinder?
- How do our personal choices affect people here?
- Costa Rica group examples: this could be the coffee we purchase, the gas we buy, Canadian resources, types of tourism, everyday food items, oil extraction, etc.

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

### Suggested questions and themes for guest speakers and/or discussion: (continued)

- How do local choices affect us and the earth?
- Costa Rica examples: songbirds, preservation of natural resources, air quality, ocean and wind patterns, or preserving species we don't ever see in our region, like loggerhead - turtles.
- What are the local connections between flooding and drought or other issues - erosion, salinization, deforestation, desertification. Water is life; too much water, or not enough, threatens habitat. What water issues are being noticed and dealt with here?
- Costa Rica group: There is an issue of coastline erosion, which affects horseshoe crabs and sea turtles in this area. Horseshoe crabs, an ancient species, need to come to shore for their lifecycle; and their unique blood is harvested carefully and used in special medical tests. As coastlines are eroded by changes in sea level and encroached on by development, this threatens one of the oldest, most resilient species alive - as well as our own health.

### Additional activity suggestions

#### Web of Life

- Web of Life (tools needed - ball of string, circle of people, cards representing species).
- <http://dnr.wi.gov/eek/teacher/invasivesguide/Web%20of%20Life.pdf>
- Although designed for children, it can be done and adapted for use with adults in different ways.

#### Mini bioblitz

- Mini bioblitz: list (name, describe, or draw) all of the species you can find in a given area. This could be individually, in a one square meter area, or in a larger area. The biodiversity you find will surprise you!
- Learn about any local natural disasters. What happened? When and why?

### Costa Rican Connections:

This is an interesting initiative that the group may want to learn about and support: <http://osaconservation.org/projects/habitat/osa-ears/>

- And another conservation group with a Costa Rican connection: <http://www.amphibianark.org/>
- The group may have the chance to hear from an on-site marine biologist, Phoebe Edge, who gives an excellent turtle talk on the importance of the turtles in the area, conservation efforts and superstitions that lead to poaching of turtle eggs. This fits in with protecting diversity and the cultural drive to extinction of some species like aye-ayes in Madagascar (believed to be evil spirits and killed) and rhinos for horns (the last male northern white rhino is under armed guard; his horn has been removed to deter poaching - how heart-wrenching is that?)

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

### Evening reflections

#### Sounds - connect to a sound that quiets and calms you

- bring to mind a sound of nature from home, perhaps from your childhood, something that reassures or replenishes you:
  - cardinal song
  - robins heralding spring
  - peepers
  - loon calls
  - silent hush of snow on snow
  - thunderstorm
  - wind in trees
  - cicadas in August
  - crunchy leaves
  - waves on shore
  - do you still hear these sounds in your daily life?
  - do your children?
  - will your grandchildren?
  - what do these sounds do for your soul?
  - what can you do to keep the sounds alive and present, for future children, for your soul?
  - what new sounds did you hear today that you want to hold in memory, to bring home with you to replenish or renew you?

#### Spirit connection:

- We are told that God loves and cares for all, even the lost ones. As we err, sin, run or hide from God, God waits, seeks, rejoices when we return. All are loved; each is precious.
- How does this speak to us of God's love for species on the brink of extinction, at risk of being lost forever?
- How might the parable of the Lost Sheep speak to us of the preciousness of the Hooded Grebe, Black Rhinoceros, or "Toughie", the last known Rabbs' fringe-limbed tree frog?
- What rejoicing might there be in heaven and earth if we can seek and save a species at risk?

In the end, the story of the ark is a story of hope. The sacred diversity of life comes through the marvellous process of evolution, the inspired joy of all things living to live and thrive, adapt and change. The geological timescale shows both episodes of rapid and incredible diversification of species as well as several extinction level events - yet life has continued. We must take action, but also hope and trust in God, in each other, and in the potential for the earth to heal itself- with our help. Periods of destruction can and are followed by new bursts of life - but not without cost and loss. The ark is a story of human strength and struggle, and an epic tale of the power of one individual or family to make a real difference. We can read in it the blessing of ecological resilience and The possibility of new beginnings, even in - especially in - impossible times. We can have faith in resurrection and renewal.

- *How will you be a "voice crying out in the wilderness" to prepare the way for respect for all Creation?*

## Spirit Studies - Day/Session 3 - Building the Ark, Preserving Biodiversity

### Evening Star – poetry and parables; inspiration for living with integrity

For longer retreats, after a day where you have done physical activity or hands-on learning, offer an opportunity for philosophical inspiration and to share what inspires you. Participants were asked at the outset to consider what inspires them in this world – this is a chance to share.

Share parables, poems, stories or songs that help you shine your light. If on a full weekend (2 night 3 day retreat) this should be night 2. If a longer series of meetings or longer retreat, ideally the mid-point or second-last night there – when you have a sense of trust and openness and can use some relaxation after physical effort. Here are some ideas:

- A reading from a poem
- Share a musical selection
- Reading from a theological work / essay or treatise, ancient or contemporary – Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Berry, Madeleine L'Engle.
- Share passages or prayers from the Bible or another religious text
- Spoken word piece
- If using multi-media, video clips
- Photos or art to reflect on

If someone is not sure what to contribute or is not comfortable doing so, there should be no pressure. Alternative group conversation points: consider the old art of writing home – what would you tell someone about what you see, experience? If you were to skype, blog or do a photo journal, what would you show?

### Ending on the positive:

- Everyone has a role to play in proactive planning and responding to disaster. The ones who show leadership may surprise you; the ones you expect to lead may disappoint. If we each do the best we can, we will have an impact and inspire others to do the same. Read or show the [Parable of the rainforest – and the hummingbird.](#)
- Children who have heard this story told often ask why the big animals didn't help. Youth are usually inspired to take action. Adults occasionally write the hummingbird's action off as futile; seniors sometimes laugh at the cute story. What is your reaction? Why?
- There are similar stories from many cultures and traditions, including a Buddhist version. The hummingbird story was one told by a youth from Peru to a youth group learning about international development and youth work at a Pueblito conference. In your retreat setting, who are the indigenous peoples? Who were the first peoples in this land? What are their stories of inspiration, empowerment, and action?

### Sources for the story:

<http://www.upworthy.com/in-this-charming-short-story-a-hummingbird-explains-why-we-have-to-at-least-try>

Flight of the Hummingbird: a Parable for the Environment. Retold and illustrated with Haida art.  
[http://greystonebooks.com/book\\_details.php?isbn\\_upc=9781553653721](http://greystonebooks.com/book_details.php?isbn_upc=9781553653721)

<http://www.pachamama.org/blog/i-will-be-a-hummingbird-the-inspiration-of-one>

Animated video narrated by Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGMW6YWjMxw>

## Journey Home: Embarking - Weaving the Web

**Facilitator:** As your group plans to return home, it is important to help turn learning into action. The framework for this curriculum has focused on disconnecting from current troubles, distractions, and technology and reconnecting with self, spirit, and community - with all of Creation. The following suggestions will assist your group in taking their learning, remembering it, and transforming it into word and deed with head, heart, and hands.

Remind participants of your goals for the retreat: to explore, form, and strengthen positive connections with the best of self, spirituality, God, and earth, retreating from and returning to our communities with a renewed sense of purpose, connection, and potential.

Now is the time for us to move forth and connect others, informed and inspired by past, present, and future, with open hearts, minds, and senses. We bring with us a commitment to wise action for ecological stewardship of God's Creation.

*What do you take with you as you leave this space?*

*What purpose and plan, learning and love do you mindfully and joyfully bring back?*

*What do you leave behind as you begin your journey home?*

*What old ways of thinking and acting do you intentionally and willingly release?*

### Activities:

#### Web of life activity:

This simple activity helps us to make connections, with our minds and also physically, with a large "web" visual. You need only a ball/skein of yarn, some paper and pens, and tape or clothespins. As a closing exercise, you could use a version that speaks not about the interconnectedness of species but instead, a metaphor of weaving a support network for change.

- Support web for self: We cannot love our neighbour as ourself without practising loving-kindness for ourselves. **What is your web of self-care?**
- the group stands in a circle, facing inward, with space between each person
- the facilitator holds the end of the yarn, and then unravels a length of yarn, passing the skein of yarn to a person across from them. The person who receives the skein holds onto the string in one hand and the rest of the yarn in another
- the two people who are connected by the yarn must brainstorm together and tell the group one thing that they have in common and/or a change they wish to make: eg. "we both work in the education field / we can both support outdoor learning; we both want to change procurement practices at our work / we both want to use our cars less".
- the person holding the skein now unravels some more yarn, passing it to another person - but holding onto the string, so that you begin to create a web of yarn in the middle of the group
- continue passing the yarn and making connections until you have a web; each person may have the yarn passed to them multiple times, so long as everyone has a turn and is included
- this is your support network, who will help you and whom you will help mobilize and remain committed for wise action on ecological stewardship and sustainability
- *as an alternative, you can share something about your experience and learning while on retreat as you pass the yarn - the person you pass it to can reflect back your learning or offer support for your new commitment*

## Journey Home: Embarking - Weaving the Web

### Activities:

Blessed be the tie that binds - closing service

A traditional hymn says: Blessed be the tie that binds

In a few moments of silence, consider the ties that bind you. Consider what you intentionally disconnected from when coming to this retreat - perhaps cellphones, perhaps comfort and convenience, perhaps ignorance or avoidance of learning about stewardship.

- *What ties bind us, and to whom? to God? to commerce? to nature? to our own needs?*
- *What ties are binding us in unfruitful ways?*
- *Which connections do we wish to deepen?*
- *Are there strings we need to cut?*

Together, share some of your thoughts on these questions.

- What threads of life are you looking forward to picking up again when you return home - the routine of family, gatherings with friends, meaningful work?
- What chains are you ready to break that have been holding you back and holding you down - guilt or shame that corrodes, anxiety or perfectionism, fear of change?
- What new learning and calling is tugging on your soul, asking you to move in a new direction - a simple shift in everyday living, a major change of lifestyle, an investment of time/training/finances in sustainability?

Looking around the circle, consider how you will remain connected with this small community with whom you have learned and grown, and how you will support one another.

- *How will you connect again? When? Make a plan.*
- *What help you will request in order to make the changes you have identified?*
- *What will it feel like to receive that support?*
- *What help you will offer to the others in your group to help them make the changes they have identified?*
- *What will it feel like to give that support?*

Hymn: [Blest Be the Tie That Binds](#)

Some churches use new lyrics for this melody as part of a parting hymn:

Until we meet again / walk gently in God's way /  
Dwell in the hollow of God's hand / Rejoice and serve and pray

## Journey Home: Embarking - Weaving the Web (continued)

### Reconnection prompts to bring back home

Make a calendar for returning home, with prompts to yourself to remember what you learned and to continuously reconnect with self, spirit, others, and the earth. Include sit-spot reminders for yourself - find a place near your home and near your work! For example:

- On the first Monday of the month, reconnect with a memory of your retreat – return to that space and the best learning you felt.
- On the second Sunday of the month, reconnect with spirit
  - Find a prayer, parable, passage, or Psalm that speaks to your soul and re-energizes you
  - Participate in worship service, whether traditional or alternative, such as an Aboriginal healing ceremony, mindfulness session, or service at another denomination
- On the third Saturday of the month, reconnect socially:
  - Reach out to someone with whom you have lost touch,
  - Introduce yourself to a local neighbour you have never met
- On the last Friday of the month, reconnect with nature:
  - make time to stand or sit in the sun, appreciating natural light
  - open a window, feel the natural temperature and fresh air
  - choose an activity and food representing the season; if possible, harvest or grow it yourself
- Be sure to practice your sit-spot observations!

### Journey Journal: The way home

#### Facilitator:

For the journey home, invite your participants to return to the Journey Journal. Ask them to review the questions and answers they gave on the way there, and see what has changed.

Give reminders of the request to identify and learn about a “fellow traveler” in nature in advance of the retreat. and to consider this fellow traveler in a new light on your return. Allow the “fellow traveler” to guide your thoughts and guide you home. As facilitator, you might also present information about historic human journeys to or from the place of your retreat, so that you may share this information with participants on the return journey, and then connect back to social justice issues of current human migrations and climate change refugees.

Some suggestions to start:

- What peoples have lived and traveled within this region historically? (e.g. First Nations hunters, early settlers, subsistence farmers, coastal fishers, traders or merchants).
- What were common methods of travel? (e.g. walking, dugout canoe, horse-and-buggy, steamship)
- What would have motivated them to make a similar journey to ours? (e.g. marriage, trade, blight or drought, war or conflict, land grant, displacement)
- Would it have been a return trip or a move to a destination?
- What challenges might they have faced in their travel? Has this changed?
- What faith, sense of community, connection to nature, or inner strength likely helped them?
- What connections do we have, in spirit, circumstance, or otherwise, to these people?

## Journey Home: Embarking - Weaving the Web (continued)

### Journey Journal: The way home (continued)

As you consider the likely circumstances of past peoples in this place, reflect on today's circumstances for any Indigenous people from this area. What has or has not changed?

*What type of human migrations do we foresee for this place - in a world of climate change, or in a world where we have advanced sustainable practices?*

### Upon your return

Seek feedback from participants in your group about both content and logistics to learn what was most meaningful, and what was helpful in their experience.

Send prompts to reconnect, to be accountable to one another for any pledges you made for behavioural change in earth stewardship.

Follow-up on a schedule that you created together in your last session. You may wish to send something by email, by mail, or set up an in-person or online meeting.

**Below:** Here is a sample follow-up: an autumn reminder six months after a spring session. In this case participants had written blessings for each other and a pledge to themselves at their retreat; something they would do whenever they saw a rainbow. These were written down and gathered by the facilitator, who then mailed them out with a note and a photo six months later.

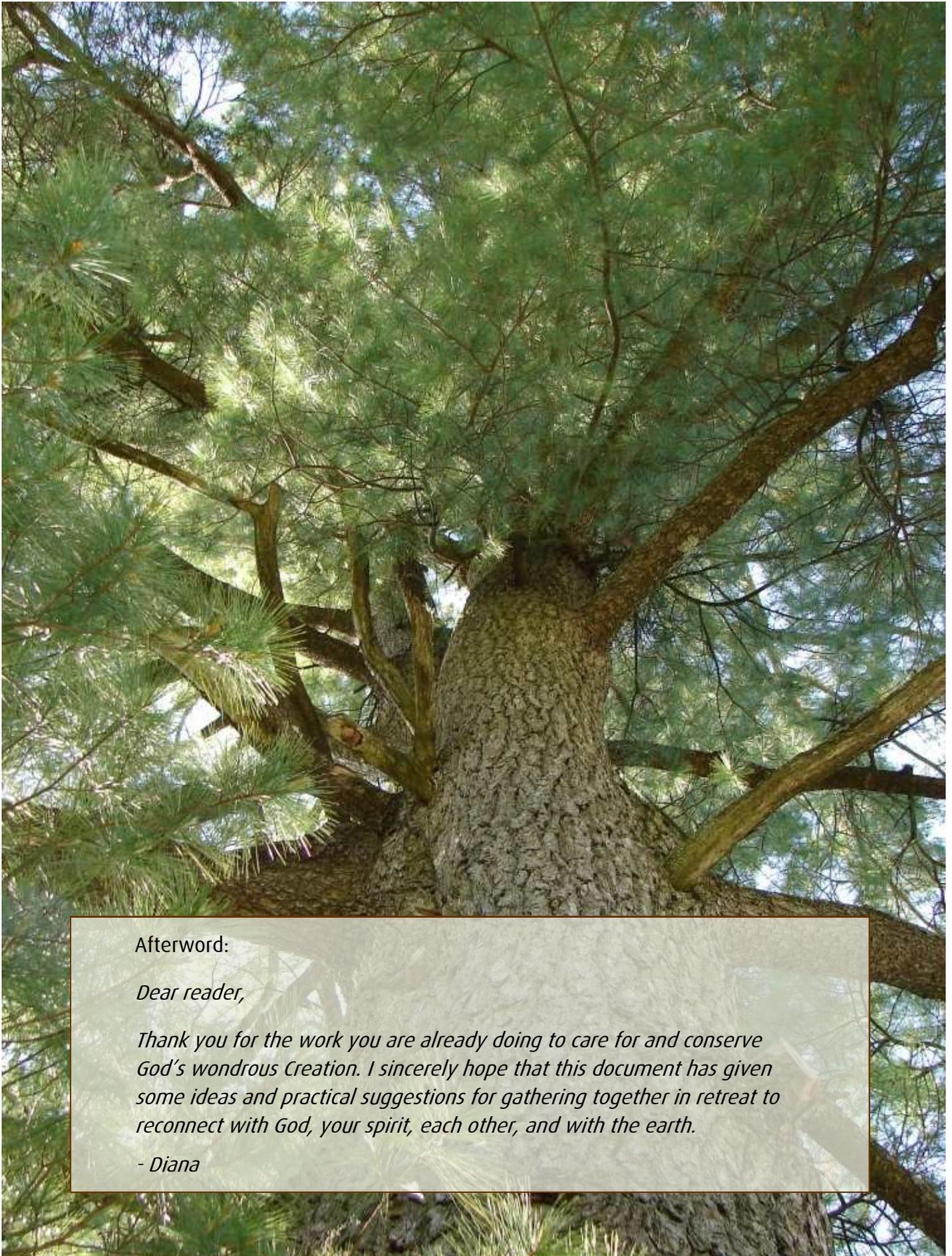
*Dear friends,*

*In this Season of Creation and at a time of giving thanks and praise, I invite you to reflect back upon your time in retreat this past spring. Breathe deeply, and take in the differences in all the sensory wonders from spring's emergent, new life, and autumn's sun-drenched, golden celebration. Remember the spring crocus and look for the autumn aster, and marvel in their delicate and resilient beauty at the frosty bookends of the growing season.*

*Smell the autumn air, tinged with woodsmoke and fallen leaf. Feel the late season sun that lights the harvest, remembering the miracle of sleeping seeds planted in spring. Hear the birdcall and recall your fellow traveler, be it migrating goose or hibernating turtle, swimming whale or sleepy bee. Say a prayer of blessing as they journey onward in this season of change.*

*Remember your pledge to yourself of what you wished to remember, meditate, pray on, or appreciate whenever you see a rainbow... and enjoy the blessing offered to you by a friend.*

*In gratitude, Diana*



Afterword:

*Dear reader,*

*Thank you for the work you are already doing to care for and conserve God's wondrous Creation. I sincerely hope that this document has given some ideas and practical suggestions for gathering together in retreat to reconnect with God, your spirit, each other, and with the earth.*

*- Diana*