

For the 2023 Essay question, we are inspired by what the Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers asked us at the beginning of a SIM Board retreat last year,

"What is Beloved Community? What does it look like to you?"

A more direct question for our applicants is: How would you, in your anticipated ministry, facilitate and encourage Beloved Community in your context of ministry?

To assist your answering this question, we are proposing you undertake a visioning exercise derived from the discernment practices that Dr. Courtney Cowart and Jim Goodmann have been developing and working with for more than a decade. The exercise we refer to as *A Walk into the Future*.

For this exercise, we suggest you have some things ready to work with after you have engaged the visioning exercise:

A journal and pen

Post-its (preferably green)

Sharpie pen (black)

This exercise involves some bodily movement, so we advise you to find for yourself a comfortable place, one that allows you to take a step or two forward and to turn around completely. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, in and out. Free your mind of worries and concerns, even let the excitement and enthusiasm still for a while. You are opening your mind and will, and journeying down from your head to your heart.

"Imagine yourself on the threshold of the future you envision for the church as beloved community, where new forms of leadership are emerging and being honored - all are behind the door to that future...

You wonder what's there...

You then reach out and turn the handle of the door and opening it you pause a few moments. Then you walk through, you step into the future you envision...

Turn yourself 360 degrees in that new space, the space you call beloved community and observe what is there and who is there...

What are you seeing? Who is there? What are people doing?

How are they relating to one another?

What are the sounds of this community? what are the images that emerge for you in that space?

What are you doing in that future, that space of beloved community? Who are your people, your partners in ministry?

What are you saying to each other; what are you doing together? Savor this vision and write about all you are seeing. How does it *feel*?
THEN...

From that future place, look back across the threshold to the present and observe yourself and others just beyond that threshold. What advice or encouragement do you give to yourself and others in the present to move toward the future, toward the beloved community you are experiencing?

AND as you imagine yourself a co-participant in this church of the future, would you invite a close friend or loved one to be a participant? What would it need to be an hospitable and trusting space?

Finally, What would you need from the church in order for that vision to flourish and for you to be effective in your ministry with others?

After you have undertaken this exercise

- do some journaling about what you saw
- take some post its and write on them words or phrases that occur to you as descriptive of the future you envision; post them on a wall or window in your home – or make a wordle; let them have their impact as you move back and forth pondering these images.
- Beyond the use of words, it might help even to do a visual image on sketch paper or newsprint of what you saw.
- Write about what you foresaw and felt in an essay of no more than 1500 words.