



The Episcopal Diocese  
of Pennsylvania

# Casting Nets

GOALS, CREATIVITY,  
LISTENING, PLANNING  
AND IMPLEMENTATION

*Just after daybreak,  
Jesus stood on the  
beach; but the disciples  
did not know that it  
was Jesus. Jesus said  
to them, "Children, you  
have no fish, have you?"  
They answered him,  
"No." He said to them,  
"Cast the net to the  
right side of the boat,  
and you will find some."  
So they cast it, and now  
they were not able to  
haul it in because there  
were so many fish.  
John 21: 4-6*



My Siblings in Christ,

***"Cast the net on the right side of the boat..."*** With those words, Jesus challenged the disciples to do something new, something different, something that went against everything they knew and understood as fishermen. They had worked all night and given it their best but caught nothing. But when they trusted Jesus, everything changed.

***Just imagine*** how they must have felt. How their exhaustion and frustration was transformed to wonder, amazement and exhilaration as the net strained against the enormous catch. And it happened, not because of their skill or experience, but because they trusted in Jesus and dared to do something different.

I am writing to call you to something new – something that will ***revitalize our churches, our communities and our diocese.*** This letter is an invitation for you to embark on this spiritual journey with us.

***We stand at a threshold. A new day is dawning.***

Over the past 18 months, we have discovered new and creative ways to worship, pray, connect and serve. Building on that success and momentum, we are excited to introduce the "Casting Nets" initiative.

***Allow yourselves the chance to really dream*** what your church might be if it was not expending so much energy focused on buildings, people and money. How might you break free from how you have always done things and to dare to envision a church that is focused on the life-giving essentials of prayer, community, worship and ministry to and with our neighbors?

We learned during COVID-19 that we can find ways to thrive despite obstacles, and this has opened up tremendous opportunities. Change does not have to take decades. It can come quickly, if we have faith to embrace new possibilities and to focus on what is most essential.



***I am asking you to think as if you are a startup business.***

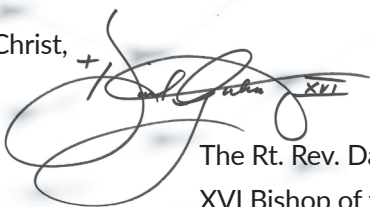
Ask yourselves about goals, creativity, listening, planning and implementation. That's what "Casting Nets" is about. You don't need more money or more people, you don't need the latest theories or programs, all you need is a ***willing heart and a desire for your church to become more the church that God envisions***, as opposed to the church the world says is possible.

There are four parts of this initiative, which can take as little as 10 weeks to accomplish. ***The first phase – Deep Water – is attached to this letter.*** The rest of the phases will be released on a rolling basis. I cannot say exactly where this journey will take you but I can promise that if you dare to "cast your nets" and trust in Jesus, that your church will be changed for the better. Above all, you will not be alone. Your diocesan staff will be here to assist and guide you in this process.

I am entering my sixth year now as your Bishop. Each day, I come to love you more, love the people, love the history, as well as our potential.

***I love our revolutionary spirit.*** It is that spirit that stands at the heart of this project. Let us follow Jesus and those first disciples and "cast nets" on the other side so that together we may transform our churches, our communities and our diocese in his most holy name.

In Christ,



The Rt. Rev. Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez  
XVI Bishop of the Episcopal  
Diocese of Pennsylvania





## Deep Water (Phase 1)

***When it comes to our churches, most of us start by counting and calculating, don't we? Do we have enough?***

*What do we (or some outside experts) think may be possible?*

*Do we have what we need to do to grow the church,  
or even just to keep it open?*

## What if?

## What if we started with a dream instead?

And **what if** that dream was born, not out of necessity, but of purpose?

**What if** when we saw the needs of our community, we didn't jump immediately to thinking about numbers, but instead simply focused on what our faith calls us to do in response?

*We often focus on the “good old days” when the church was full of people. And so we seek to bring people into the building, declaring a welcome for all.*

## What if we shifted the focus?

**What if** we went to them?

We always measure numbers in terms of attendance and budget, but **what if we tracked the impact of our efforts?** We always begin by starting a program and developing a system.

**What if** we started instead with holy action? Then, trusting God and one another, acted in faith as a beautiful idea takes shape around us?

In the scripture above, Jesus challenges the disciples to go out to the deep water before casting their nets. This went against all conventional wisdom. Everyone knew fish were caught in the shallows, not the deep. Yet they had faith. They trusted in Jesus. They challenged their own assumptions and dared to dream of what might be possible if they dared to do things differently.

*“When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”*

## Luke 5:4

## What if?

[illegible]



## Fullfilling God's Purpose

**When it comes to your dream, you already have all that you need to fulfill the purpose that God has for you.**

This is the real miracle at the heart of the feeding of the 5,000. Although no one would have suspected it, the disciples already had all that they needed to feed the people. While it was Jesus who multiplied the loaves and fishes, he still chose to work with and make the most of the gifts the disciples already possessed. Nothing more was required. Through the grace of God, they already had all that they needed!

**As you go out into the deep water and enter this sacred dreaming, know that there is already enough to accomplish what God has in mind for you.**

You are already enough. You have enough time and energy. Your community is strong enough. God is calling you into something new, and God will equip you with all that you need to do that which he has called you to do. For it is not our dream, but God's that we seek to make real. God's dream for you is already a reality. All you need to do is discern it and then venture forward in faith as God works in and through us to make it real.

*"Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets."*

**John 6:11-13**

**Recommended:**

*Please make copies of these next pages for all participants* >>>

## What to Expect

The Dreaming Exercise involves two tours, one of your church campus and one of your community. It is followed by a time of reflection and sharing. It is recommended that you do this exercise with your vestry and any other key leaders from your church.

### Dreaming Exercise

You have enough ... enough people and resources. You have enough time and energy. God has given you all that you need to make your dream for your church a reality.

**NOW, WHAT DO YOU DO? HOW DO YOU CHANGE THE WORLD?  
WHAT IS YOUR DREAM?**

*If you could fix anything, it would be?*

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*If you could help anyone, it would be?*

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*In your dreams, your church looks like?*

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*In your dreams, your community looks like?*

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# Look with Fresh Eyes

***How is Jesus present and active in your church?***

- Gather the clergy and vestry and go everywhere inside and out.
- Look at the light streaming through the windows.
- Touch the stone and feel how strong it is.
- Look up the aisle and consider how many have walked there.
- Allow yourselves to revel in memories of music and midnight mass.
- Let the laughter that has filled the hall fill your heart.
- Where is Jesus in this place?

NOTES | PICTURES | SKETCHES | IDEAS

[illegible]

# Take a Field Trip

## *Where is Jesus in your community?*

Next, the same group should make a similar tour of your community.

- It can be by foot, car or both, depending on your context and physical ability.
- If it is easier, go in small groups.
- Stop and talk to people.
- Go into businesses and shops.
- Open your eyes, ears and hearts so as to take in what life is like for the people who live around your church. As you do, make particular effort to go to the places that may seem strange, different or even frightening.
- Take the time to look and listen for Jesus.
- Don't rush. It may take multiple trips to gain a thorough sense of the totality of your community.
- Ask yourself: Where is Jesus?

## FIELD TRIP PLANNER

DATE

LOCATION (S)

SCHEDULE

CONTACT

NOTES ON FINDINGS