

"ABOVE AND BEYOND - HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
RETREAT OUTLINE

DAY I. (Evening)

Registration/ Group Mixer Activity and getting settled

Gathering Music

Opening Devotions

STUDY SESSION 1 - "Hearing God's Call in JONAH"

Evening Vespers

Fellowship Time - Activities, video, and "Jonah-bait" snacks

Video suggestions: "JONAH -Veggie Tales"; "Jacob's Ladder-Vol. 2: Naomi, Ruth &Boaz"

DAY II.

Morning Walk, if appropriate for the location, enjoying God's creation

Morning Prayers

Breakfast

Gathering Music

STUDY SESSION 2 - "Hearing God's Call in JONAH and RUTH"

Other -- Group business meeting, as needed, reports, etc., and/or

Free time (completing mandela placemat design activity)

Lunch

Gathering Music

STUDY SESSION 3 - "Hearing God's Call in RUTH"

Tea Time Together

"Above and Beyond" - Women's Health Session

Suggestion would be for a presentation about women's health issues,  
stress management, relaxation techniques, health & humor, etc.

Free time

Supper

Gathering Music

STUDY SESSION 4 - "Hearing God's Call and Making Connections"

Evening Vespers

Beach Party Fellowship - Activities, skits, talent sharing, video and/or "Jonah-bait" snacks

Video suggestions: "Evan Almighty"; "Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants"

DAY III. (Morning)

Morning Walk

Morning Prayers

Breakfast

Time for cleaning and packing and/or Baking Bread Together (for communion)

Gathering Music

Talk About TAPESTRY - Share an overview of the Tapestry Bible study materials and/or  
share a presentation of Lesson 1 together/small groups

TAPESTRY Weaving

Installation Service, if appropriate

Sharing appreciation

WORSHIP and COMMUNION SERVICE

Lunch and/or Departures

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PREPARING THE SPACE

Round table for worship center placed in middle of the discussion space. If possible, enough round tables and chairs for those participating to surround the worship center table in a semi-circle, with a piano and podium/microphone at the front and some activity tables in the back.

WORSHIP CENTER:

1st Staging (opening sessions) - "JONAH"

Various fabric cloth coverings on the table, using upturned boxes of various sizes in the center to give a variety of levels under the cloth coverings; cloths in shades of blue of various textures, soft prints and solids; center cross and/or floral arrangement (greenery, various white and yellow flowers, and wheat, silk or real), open Bible, candles/candleholders (three for Trinity or any odd number, in various small candleholders with multi-colored votive candles or all white), a large fish sculpture (ceramic, metal, garden, etc.), and scattered construction paper small cutouts of feet to appear as walking footprints away from the cross and Bible. (Make own mini-footprints or find at a school supply store.)

2nd Staging - "RUTH" sessions

Recover (add on top of existing) approximately half of the table with various gold and brown fabrics (wheat print perhaps for one); replace the fish sculpture with something to represent Ruth and/or Naomi and Orpah (women figurines, etc.); add a pair of thongs or sandals, sprays or grains of wheat, barley, etc., and a tea cup. May also display art print copy of "The Gleaners" and/or similar prints of grain-gatherers of other cultures (Native American, etc.)

3rd Staging - "JONAH and RUTH" WORSHIP

Keep the multi fabric cloths, cross/floral, and candles (and other items as there is room without looking cluttered); add offering basket, if desired; small bowl of water; and communion elements.

IN THE BELLY MEDITATION AREA:

If there is adequate room, a meditation space could be set up in a corner of the meeting space using a small tent or canopy to represent being inside the whale. This should be available any time during the retreat for individual quiet meditation/prayer time. (Explain early in Retreat.)

Possible interior decorations would include: large pillows; soft, fuzzy blanket throw; small rock/water fountain filled with (or in bowl) blue iridescent flat craft marbles (each guest to take one as a remembrance of her Jonah prayer time); scattered tent cards with statements and questions to ponder.

Meditation cards:

Where in my life story have I felt like Jonah?

When have I acted like Jonah?

Is there a person, place or situation like Nineveh in my life?

Thank you, God, for helping me through the storms in my life.

God, are you calling me in some way?

What does God expect of me? What do I expect of God?

Dear God, Please grant your guidance when I try to be in control, am too stubborn or selfish, or fail to listen.

God used an imperfect and reluctant Jonah. How can I let God use me?

#### ACTIVITY TABLES:

At first, these may be used for registration with necessary paperwork and nametags (rectangular with fish, footprint or Jesus-fish sticker or stamp or similar-shaped tags).

Include a "Find Me" graph sheet (brief statements in a list or each in a square with room for someone's signature; only one signature per person on any one sheet); to be completed as a get-acquainted mixer. (see sample - appendix)

Also display a large U.S. map, with dot stickers and markers. Have women place a sticker where they were born and draw a line from that spot to places where they have lived to where they currently reside or attend church.

Later, these tables will hold Mandela-making materials (white construction paper, template for large circle, crayons, markers and stamping materials, etc.). Each woman will be encouraged to use free time to create a personal Mandela design for Jonah and Ruth (show those in Tapestry study materials early in the retreat) in the center of their "placemat" (full rectangular sheet of construction paper). These need to be completed before mid-afternoon of Day II.

Tables may also be used to put together 500/1000 piece puzzles during free time (choose puzzles of beach or water scenes, farming, tea cups, etc.) or other mission or craft projects.

#### OTHER ITEMS:

Music folders and/or TNCH hymnals; CD player; TV and DVD player;  
newsprint, markers and masking tape;

parchment paper strips and permanent fine-line black marker;

tea bags (regular, flavored and/or decaffeinated)

("Scripture Tea Bags" may be located at local Christian bookstore or may be ordered: Scripture Tea, Inc., P.O. Box 195524, Winter Springs, FL 32719);

unbaked crescent roll packages (one roll and tea bag per person);

beach party decorations, small blow-up wading pool, etc;

skein of yarn (multi blue/green/brown preferred);

offering basket, small bowl and communion elements.

#### FOOD Suggestions:

Fish-shaped cheese crackers; barley soup; roasted barley or corn nuts;

fish; seafood; ingredients to make soft pretzels or bread/bread-machine bread (made on-site).

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GATHERING MUSIC SUGGESTIONS

DAY I. (JONAH)

"I've Got Peace Like A River"

"JOYS ARE FLOWING LIKE A RIVER" - TNCH 284

"Jonah and the Whale" (Arranged by R.E.W.)

"LOVE DIVINE, ALL LOVES EXCELLING" - TNCH 43 (vs 1, 3)

"THIS IS THE DAY OF NEW BEGINNINGS" - TNCH 417 (vs 1, 3, 4)

"You Are Here" (Chalice Praise #53)

"Welcome into This Place" (Chalice Praise #54)

"IN SOLITUDE" - TNCH 521 (vs 1, 2, 4)

"AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND" - TNCH 547 (VS 1, 2, 3)

DAY II. (CALL)

"Jonah" (E.J. Bash, 1964, American Lutheran Church in Songs for Today)

"Step by Step" (Chalice Praise #14)

"THIS IS THE DAY" - TNCH 84

"BLESSED ASSURANCE" - TNCH 473

"Shine, Jesus, Shine" (Chalice Praise #39)

"HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION" - TNCH 407 (vs 1, 2, 3)

"SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD" - TNCH 283

"Here I Am, Lord" (Chalice Hymnal No. 452)

"I WILL TRUST IN THE LORD" - TNCH 416

DAY II. (RUTH)

"Mine Is the Church" (MIX in '06)

"Catch A Dream" (MIX in '06)

TNCH 501 - "WE ARE SHARING RUTH'S CIRCLE" (new words)

1) We are sharing Ruth's circle..

2) Here we seek and find our story...

5) On and on the circle's growing...

"GOD IS HERE!" - TNCH 70 (vs 1, 4)

"YOU ARE SALT FOR THE EARTH, O PEOPLE" - TNCH 181

"GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS" - TNCH 423

DAY II. (CONNECTIONS)

"Let It Shine!" (General Synod praise song by Jim Ahrend)

"You Are" (General Synod contest winner by Mark C. Unbehagen)

"I Will Pour Out My Spirit" (MIX in '06)  
"Draw the Circle Wide" (MIX in '06)  
"IN CHRIST THERE IS NO EAST OR WEST" -TNCH 395  
"O GOD IN WHOM ALL LIFE BELONGS" -TNCH 401  
"JESU, JESU" - TNCH 401 (vs 1, 2, 3, 4)  
"WE ARE YOUR PEOPLE" -TNCH 309

DAY III. (MORNING)

"I WOKE UP THIS MORNING" -TNCH 85  
"O GRANT US, GOD, A LITTLE SPACE" -TNCH 516  
"MY LIFE FLOWS ON IN ENDLESS SONG" -TNCH 476 (vs 1, 2, 4)  
"JESUS TOOK THE BREAD" -TNCH 343 (vs 1, 4)  
'GLORY, GLORY, HALLELUJAH" -TNCH 2  
(Check to see that all are familiar with the Worship service hymns.)

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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DAY I: OPENING DEVOTIONS

Call to Worship: (From PSALM 48)

"Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised...  
We ponder your steadfast love, O God...  
Your name, O God, like your praise,  
reaches to the ends of the earth...  
Tell the next generation that this is God,  
our God forever and ever.... our guide forever."

What have we learned in these few verses? ...

"God is to be praised," sure; we can usually do that, unless we are totally angry at God about something. We sing God's praise, pray God's praise, and share in worship God's praise. How do we live God's praise?

"We ponder your steadfast love..." So true, especially that "ponder"-part.

We are faithful and fearful, adoring and angry, sincere and selfish, admiring and apathetic, true and troublesome, humble and horrific, caring and callous, patient and petty, impassioned and impossible, trusting and tempestuous, pious and perverse, understanding and ugly, unrighteous and unforgiving. How in the world do we deserve God's "steadfast love"?

"Tell the next generation that this is God...our guide forever." Ooops! That sounds a bit difficult.

"Tell" others?!?! Pass on our faith? Follow God's guidance?

"To the ends of the earth" - Are we supposed to answer such a call?

What is our call? Do we know our purpose? Does our call change as we mature in age and in faith? Do we understand how huge or how seemingly small a call can be? Do we really listen for God to guide us?

JONAH tried to run away from God's call. Do we do the same? Do we need to be "cast up on the shore" to get our feet and heart headed in God's direction for us?

Perhaps this retreat time away from the pulls of normal life will help us find some time to ponder these questions and prayerfully find some answers or possibilities about our current call. We will ponder the Biblical stories of Jonah and Ruth, an interesting combination... Their calls were different, and their responses were also; none "perfect" either.

We will sing and study and share together, but there will also be time to be alone in our thoughts and prayers. Take that time and honor that time for each other. This retreat is about building relationships within this community and beyond and about continuing our relationship with God.

Share poem:

"JONAH-TIMES"

by Jo Ann Chance (Appendix)

PRAYER:

O God of Grace and Wonder, may we come to you in prayerful praise. We give you thanks for the blessings you have bestowed upon us and for the guidance you offer us as we continue on our life's journey. Help us during this time together that we might become better connected with each other, with our sisters and brothers in this world around us, with our Biblical sisters and brothers whose stories have much to teach us, and most importantly, with you. May your Word and your Holy Spirit touch us, comfort us, challenge and guide us. We pray in Christ's holy name. Amen.

SONG: "JONAH AND THE WHALE"

Wouldn't it be interesting to have a little talk with JONAH to see what we really do know about him.....

RETREAT PLAYERS: "JONAH: AN INTERVIEW"

Adapted from script by Hugh Wreisner  
(Appendix)

## JONAH -TIMES

by Jo Ann Chance c 1/2006

Ever feel like hiding?  
Staying lost where no one can find you?  
Being too far away for phone calls, letters or doorbells?  
Hiding from the world that is wildly spinning by?

These are Jonah-times.....  
Hiding in that big belly!  
Jonah tried to escape from certain calls--  
Calls from God-- but he should not have tried.

God swooped Jonah up in that big whale;  
It was a holy "time-out" for some special thinking time.  
That's usually what we need, too;  
Time to get away and remember God.

After some quiet aloneness, meditation and prayer...  
We find our Jonah-time brings refreshment and reassurance,  
Allowing the love of God to soak into our very being,  
And again finding our sense of calling, service and need to care.

RETREAT SCRIPT: "AN INTERVIEW WITH JONAH"  
(Adaptation of "Jonah: An Interview" by Hugh Wreisner)  
by Jo Ann Chance

(Props for news reporters: "press" hats or badges and clipboards. Jonah with draping of lightweight fabric from shoulder to shoulder looped across the front, with sandals or thongs.)

Reporter #1: Folks, we are very privileged today to have with us one of the 12 Minor Prophets, JONAH; famous for his journey across the seas in the belly of a whale.

Reporter #2: Welcome! We have read the Book of JONAH in preparation for your visit. You have done many things, but most people think of you as the guy who lived in a fish's belly. Are you pleased or embarrassed about your reputation that proceeds you, so to speak?

JONAH: Well, I am not offended, but I am a bit disappointed that of all the things I did, the big fish is the thing most people seem to remember about me.

Reporter #1: So you were involved with some serious sacred assignments...

Reporter #2: Perhaps we should ask you a few questions about the real message you wish to share. How did you decide to become a prophet, for instance?

JONAH: Oh, my goodness! I did not decide! God does the picking. God told me one day, "Go to Nineveh and tell them that their wickedness is known to me."

Reporter #1: Oooh, this is sounding interesting! What kind of "wickedness"????

JONAH: The usual crimes and corruption, cruelty, stealing, murder, rape, wealthy people taking advantage of the poor, and people cheating on other people...

Reporter #2: What are you really trying to say, JONAH?

JONAH: Well... that Nineveh was NASTY.

Reporter #1: Hmmmm. And how did you feel about God picking you out to help change all that? Were you pleased and honored?

JONAH: Huh! I should say not! I didn't want to go! Can you imagine going that far to tell the king and people, "God sent me to tell you that you have 40 days to clean up your act before God destroys all of Nineveh"?

Reporter #2: And how big was this Nineveh place?

JONAH: Well, it would take three days to walk across it.... or at least, it was a pretty big city full of strange, scary, nasty people.

Reporter #1: So you were intimidated about the assignment?

Reporter #2: Were you scared or were you angry or both?

JONAH: Probably both... I'm just a nobody and God wanted me to do all that?! God said Nineveh would be destroyed unless they repented, but I wasn't sure I wanted them to repent and I wasn't sure whether God would really destroy them if they didn't. And I didn't want to be the one to take care

of this task.

Reporter #1: So your solution was to run away from God?

JONAH: Yes. I wasn't really thinking, I guess. I ran and just wanted to escape the whole situation. I traveled down to Joppa and looked for passage on a ship, and there was one going to Tarshish. It seemed far enough away, so I got a ticket and sailed away.

Reporter #2: But there was trouble, trouble, trouble right away..... right?

JONAH: Amen! A weird storm that was terribly violent and dangerous came up. I was sleeping down below. There were huge waves, and things were crashing around inside. The crew was terrified. They had already thrown cargo overboard to lighten the ship, hoping that would help, and they were praying.

Reporter #1: Praying to Yahweh?

JONAH: No, to their own gods. But the storm was getting worse, and they came down to find me.

Reporter #2: So they woke you... How in the world were you asleep?

JONAH: Well, I was tired and full and a bit hung over after staying up so late talking with a few of them about all my troubles.

Reporter #1: So you had told them you were running away from Yahweh?

JONAH: I think so... at least part of the story. I know I had mentioned that I was Hebrew and that I worshipped Yahweh, the God of heaven and earth and sea.

Reporter #2: Enough of that. Our listeners want to know what happened next on the ship???

JONAH: Well, they had been praying to no avail, and the storm got worse. So they thought maybe Yahweh could help. So I prayed, too, but nothing happened. Then they decided to draw straws to see who was the one causing all the trouble.

Reporter #1: And you got the short straw?! And then they threw you overboard.

JONAH: Actually, not quite that fast. I was the one who told them that they needed to throw me overboard in order to calm the seas and save themselves.

Reporter#2: And they agreed to do this?

JONAH: They first tried getting nearer the shore to get me off safely, but the waves were just too treacherous. So they all prayed to Yahweh, in hopes that they were doing the right thing, and then they threw me overboard.

Reporter #1: And did the storm become calm after you were off the ship?

JONAH: Yes, very quickly. That was proof to them of Yahweh's power!

Reporter #2: And did you try to swim to shore?

JONAH: I was too far from shore to make it. Things happened quickly. I was swimming, treading water, and praying. God sent a "great fish" which saved me.

Reporter #1: God sent the whale to swallow you and cast you up safe on the shore after three days and three nights.... according to the text we read.

JONAH: Well, I was scared to death....and I know I suddenly felt safe and alone, and I began to pray. I was in danger of dying, and then after a time, I ended up safe on the beach. That's the main point..... I caused the danger I was in, but God took care of me and saved me.

Reporter #2: So, when you got on shore, in that stinky puddle of slime.... Yuck! I'm grossing myself out! ( getting queasy...) So, anyway, what happened next?

JONAH: God spoke to me again.

Reporter #1: And what did God say?

JONAH: Same thing: "Go to Nineveh and preach to them as I told you."

Reporter #1: The same message? The same command from God?

And yet this time you responded instead of running away.

JONAH: Yes, I had had enough of that! I figured I should trust God and do what God said.

Reporter #2: So you headed to Nineveh and preached God's message to the people there. What can you tell us about this part of your journey?

JONAH: I got to Nineveh and walked through the gates and started to preach the message. It was a very large city with lots of people who would actually stop and listen. Because of those little crowds that gathered, there were soon some officials from the king who came to see me.

Reporter #1: That was no doubt troubling to you. What happened next?

JONAH: I was scared, but all that happened was the chance for a private audience with the king.

Reporter #2: And how did this king react to your message from God?

JONAH: We talked. God gave me the words to say. The king listened. And then after summoning many of his officials and servants, the king stripped off all his royal garments and robe and wrapped himself in coarse, cheap sackcloth.

Reporter #1: The clothes of mourning and repentance?

JONAH: Yes. And he sprinkled a handful of ashes from the fireplace over his head. Then he gave a proclamation for every person in Nineveh, even the children, to put on sackcloth, to fast, to stop doing all wrong, and to pray.

Reporter #2: What an amazing outcome?

JONAH: But, it happened. Even the animals were supposed to fast. It was remarkable. The people followed the king's lead, and they began to pray to Yahweh.

Reporter #1: But your reaction perplexes us. Can you explain?

JONAH: I was furious. They were terrible people, and they deserved God's wrath. What I really wanted was to climb a hill and watch the city get destroyed.

Reporter #2: But we have no coverage showing that such a thing happened.

JONAH: Right! They all repented. They turned to God. I was left out in the hot sun waiting for the fireworks, and nothing happened. I was peeved!

Reporter #1: In the Book, it states that you were so overcome that you begged God to die. But you are here, so God did not answer your prayer.

JONAH: Ha! I guess you are right! God let me wallow in my self-righteousness for awhile and just waited for me to figure it all out.

Reporter #2: What did God say to you?

JONAH: "Can't I feel sorry for all these thousands of people who do not know their left hand from their right? Can't I feel sorry for these people and also for the animals?"

Reporter #1: So what is the message you have learned from God?

JONAH: God cares about all the little things in special ways. God loves the small, the helpless, the poor, the lost. God just asks that we love God back and that we love each other.

Reporter #2: What about your anger?

JONAH: I'm still working on that..... but I know I love God and God loves me.

Reporter #1: Thank you, JONAH, for sharing with us.

Reporter #2: That wraps up this segment for our audience. Have a good day!

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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DAY I - STUDY SESSION 1 -- "Hearing God's Call in JONAH"

Acknowledge the skit, "JONAH: AN INTERVIEW," and share reflections.

JONAH's story is a reminder that no one escapes God or themselves. The story also celebrates the ability to grow from one's mistakes and God's forgiveness and grace.

Jonah was given several chances to follow God's directions.

The following are suggestions for this time of exploration of the Book of JONAH.

Use, change, skip or combine as best fits the needs of the particular group gathered.

\*Share the story of Jonah as found in various Children's Bibles, children's storybooks about Jonah and perhaps the Jewish midrash story of Jonah that is read at Yom Kippur.

(The Family Treasury of Jewish Holidays by Malka Drucker)

Jonah is read on the most holy day of the year, Yom Kippur, the "Day of Atonement." On this day, Jews seek forgiveness from God and from people they may have hurt.

Compare and contrast the stories and perspectives they each share.

How might we better focus on the forgiveness aspect of the Book of Jonah in our study and practice of its message?

\*In the children's story, Pinocchio, Geppetto's boat is in a storm, and then he is swallowed by a whale. Any other similarities to Jonah? connections?

\*JONAH can easily be divided into three main segments.

Beginning - When God called Jonah and his initial flight (1:1-17);

Middle - When Jonah re-thought his plan and went to Nineveh (2:1 - 3:10);

Last - When Jonah got angry with God and their conversation (4:1-11).

Divide into three groups with each assigned a segment. Look for call and response, surprises found, and relationships to other Biblical passages.

Perhaps use newsprint for recording key points to be shared with the entire group.

Each group could be asked to share their part of the story in cartoon drawings; then tape together into a full comic book story when completed.

\* Distribute the "JONAH and JESUS Connections" worksheet (see attachments).

Ask that everyone do the reading and answer the questions during a period of time; then come back together to discuss and share.

\*Table Talk - JONAH lends itself to many discussion questions, which can be asked of the whole group or, better yet, shared in small "table talk" groups who share responses with each other around the table. Selections may be made from the following:

When Jonah tried to escape to Tarshish, was he confused? afraid? angry? disobedient?  
When you were a child, did you ever want to run away? Did you try?  
As an adult, have you wished to run away? - where would you go? what would you do?  
Have you ever tried to run away from God? Why? What happened?  
Read: 2 Thess. 2:16-17; Romans 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 1:3-4 How would these have been helpful  
to Jonah? How have these been helpful to you?  
Jonah was protected by God in the belly of the fish until Jonah could hear God's call. What  
or where has been your whale?  
Did you notice that, after Jonah was spat up upon the shore, God simply repeated the call  
to go to Nineveh. God did not scold Jonah but gave him another chance. Have you  
experienced another chance from God?  
Read: 1 John 1:7-9. How does God forgive? Do you think Jonah "walked in the light" after  
he left the whale? Had he done what the scripture asks?  
Statement: God saved Jonah and baptized him in a pool of fish vomit... Comments?  
No matter where Jonah went in the story, he could never get away from God. Is that why  
he remained angry throughout the story? When was he the most angry? Why?  
When we try to control things, we are guilty of being Jonahs. Do we sulk when things do  
not go our way? Do we wait to see what God's greater plan might be?  
Where is Nineveh in today's world?  
How might we be used by God to help fight injustice in our world? Can we be a Jonah in the  
world helping to bring about change? To what are you leaning in terms of justice?  
What was Jonah expecting God to do with Nineveh? Did God have a change of mind?  
What were the surprises in Jonah? -the humor? -the satire?  
When Jonah indicated that Ninevites did not deserve God's love and grace, he was  
demonstrating prejudice. Where are your prejudices? Where might it be difficult for you  
to take a message from God today?  
Were there happy endings in Jonah? Where or for whom?

\* James S. Ackerman wrote: "Although Jonah is a caricature of the biblical prophet, the story  
also depicts him as a man of faith who, like Job, is struggling to make sense of God's actions.  
Whereas Job is angry over undeserved suffering, Jonah's problem is undeserved forgiveness. In  
his anger he seeks out shelters to retreat from the world and his calling. The story ends with a  
question from God addressed to Jonah, placing readers in Jonah's shoes and asking us to work  
out appropriate resolutions to the issues raised in the story."  
If we were Jonah, how would we respond to the ending of these scriptures? (Jonah 4:10-11)

\* In the Belly... Explain again the "In the Belly Meditation Area" that everyone is invited to  
experience while at the retreat. Then ask that the group to share in a guided meditation after  
which each is to remain in silence for about 10-15 minutes, staying where they are or leaving and  
finding another place to pray and reflect and ponder the call that God may be trying to place on  
their heart... and continue meditating until they hear the gathering music which is the clue to  
return to this space.  
Close your eyes and just imagine... You are in total darkness...no light...no one else there...  
sitting in an unfamiliar place... soft, damp, spongy...with strange sounds in the quiet like water  
gurgling in a very small stream... moist and humid...and then it makes sense... you are inside the

huge fish! Was the storm over? Were the sailors safe? Would anyone know I am here or do they think I am drowned? ... I am here because of my own foolishness... God made one request and I found it to be impossible... I detest Nineveh! Why would God ask me to go there? I am so angry about God's plan, and I do not want to have any part of it. But.. I almost caused that ship to sink... I nearly drowned. Did I drown? ...All I know is that I am here, here in the middle of nowhere..... What do you want of me, God? I am here, alone... and I know that I must listen, listen to you.... What do you want of me?

Am I totally alone now, as I thought I wanted? Or are you with me, God, in this darkness? ... What is it that you wish me to do?.... What is the message you want me to hear?....

JONAH RETREAT Worksheet:

JONAH and JESUS Connections

READ: Matthew 12: 38-41; Luke 11: 29-32

- 1) To whom was Jesus speaking?
- 2) What was Jesus saying about Jonah? -about the Ninevites?
- 3) What was Jesus saying about himself?

READ: Jonah 1: 1-3, 17 and 3: 1-3; Matthew 16: 21-28; Luke 9: 22-27

- 4) What was Jonah's journey to be?
- 5) What was the journey for Jesus?

READ: Jonah 3;4; Matthew 22: 34-40, 25: 31-46; Luke 10: 25-28

- 6) What was the message Jonah was to share?
- 7) what was Christ's message?

READ: Jonah 3: 5-10; Jonah 4; Luke 6: 37

- 8) What was the result of Jonah's actions?
- 9) What was the result for Jesus?
- 10) What do the story of Jonah and the life, ministry and death of Jesus teach us about grace?

Write a prayer of reflection.....

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RETREAT

DAY I: EVENING VESPERS

Gathering Music....

(Piano music to signal the return of the group)

SONG: "Search Me, O God" or

"GIVE ME A CLEAN HEART" - TNCH 188

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 139 (NRSV)

(Have three women read this Psalm as a choral reading,  
each reading a full sentence in turn and continuing until the end.)

MEDITATION:

We will listen to a taped song in a spirit of prayer.

The song, which may seem odd in this setting, lets us know that we should follow our heart when we feel that we are being called, even when life makes that a difficult path.

The music will be followed by a few moments of silent prayer and then a closing prayer will be shared.

Martina McBride's - "ANYWAY"

Silent Prayer.....

PRAYER:

O God of Love, you have searched us, known us, formed and guided us. You give us strength and courage when we turn our hearts to you. We cannot flee from your presence, but we often try. Forgive us and grant us your grace. When we try to follow your call, be with us. Give us the courage and patience we need to "do it anyway." Help us remain faithful and steadfast in the love you share with us always. Let us be light in the darkness. Lead us in the way everlasting. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

"Above and Beyond: Hearing God's Call in JONAH and RUTH"  
RETREAT

DAY II: MORNING PRAYERS

SONG: "I'M SO GLAD" TNCH 474 (with words by Jo Ann Chance)

I'm so glad... God loves you and me (3X)  
Singing glory, hallelujah, God loves you and me.

The whale had him bound.... then God saved Jonah. (3X)  
Singing glory, hallelujah, God saved Jonah.

When we are alone... God will lift us up (3X)  
Singing glory, hallelujah, God will lift us up!

Opening: "LISTEN"  
by Jo Ann Chance

Deep inside and all around -  
Listen... listen... listen...

Deep inside and all around -  
We listen for God's call.

Jonah heard God's call to serve,  
But at first, he ran away...

We, too, might feel afraid,  
But God will be with us every day.

So, deep inside and all around -  
Listen... listen... listen...

MEDITATION: "THE BOOK OF JOHANNA (JONAH, Modernized)  
by Jo Ann Chance

CLOSING PRAYER - Repeat the Opening words, speaking as a choral reading,  
reading one phrase at a time with the group repeating them.

Silent Prayer.....

AMEN.

(Share a spoken or sung "Grace" for the meal before dismissing for breakfast.)

THE BOOK OF JOHANNA (JONAH, Modernized)

by Jo Ann Chance 6/2007

## Chapter 1

God spoke to Johanna in her dreams several nights in a row. God asked her to go to Nineveh City, a large metropolis four or five hours drive from her small town, to persuade the city leaders and ministerial alliance to stop their wicked ways. But Johanna refused to be persuaded by God's message, which was a bit scary, passing it off as just her imagination.

To get away and stop the strange dreams and messages from happening again, Johanna made a trip to the nearby city of Joppason for some serious shopping. She found a large shopping mall with many nice stores, including one with a huge cosmetics department.

Johanna busied herself with getting several make-up consultations until several of the clerks who had helped her began visiting with her as a group. They were curious about why she was spending so much time in their department.

Johanna told them about her strange dreams and her need to get away for awhile. They seemed genuinely concerned and offered some suggestions. Soon the supervisor for the cosmetic department began coming by with disgruntled looks. The clerks were beginning to feel that trouble with their jobs was brewing, and they asked Johanna to leave, letting her know that they had tasks to complete before the store closed soon.

Not wanting to draw more attention to herself from the supervisor, Johanna opted to follow their suggestion and use the elevator to leave that area of the store. However, for some strange reason, the elevator malfunctioned and, after a bumpy ride, it opened at the storage basement level. Johanna hit several buttons with nothing happening and then stumbled out, a bit nauseated. Johanna was so queasy, she quickly found a nearby packing blanket and curled up on it for a short nap.

When Johanna awoke, she was alone in the large, dark storage area in the basement. The elevator, with door now closed, did not respond when Johanna pushed the button. No one could hear her if she blubbered or screamed for help. Johanna was stuck there for three days and three nights.

## Chapter 2

Johanna, frightened and lonely, prayed to God. She said:

"When I was scared, I called out to God, and God answered me.

God listened to my cry.

God dumped me into the empty, lonely basement of the store within the once bustling shopping mall, and the darkness and silence overwhelmed me.

I said, 'I have been left by myself,  
but I will begin to pray for my safety.

This is worse than any dream or nightmare!

No one but you, O God, know that I am left here.

I am praying to you, God, that I might escape from this tomb.

Here am I, after thinking only of material things and my love of shopping  
and succumbing to my vanity with all those cosmetics.

But I cannot hide from you, God...

What an awesome God you are!

I really need to praise your name  
in both word and deed!

I will try to be less frivolous and much more faithful!"

And at that very moment, the doors of the elevator opened!

### Chapter 3

When Johanna had gotten her bearings again in the parking lot,  
God spoke to Johanna for a second time.

"Go to Nineveh City and tell them the message I give you."

This time Johanna filled the car up with gas and headed for  
Nineveh City as God had directed. She was a bit ruffled  
and did not have the new make-up she wanted, but she did the job.  
It took three days to get all of the necessary red tape completed and  
meet with the various city and church officials. Johanna told them,  
"You have forty more days to clean up your act or Nineveh City  
will be destroyed by God."

The ministerial alliance believed God's prediction, and they started  
prayer chains and all sorts of communications within their various  
churches. They told their people to fast and pray, to quit partying,  
gambling, drinking and running around so much and to pay more  
attention to their faith, church participation and support, and their  
homes, families and pets.

When the news reached the mayor and other city officials, the  
mayor issued a similar proclamation that would go into immediate effect  
across the whole of Nineveh City. Law enforcement officers were  
to begin patrolling in double shifts to bring an end to crime, gang  
activity and all violence. They wanted God to see that their evil ways  
and violent behavior were diminishing quickly.

When God saw what the church and city leaders were trying to accomplish, God had compassion on them and forgot about the threat of destruction.

#### Chapter 4

But Johanna just could not help herself and was completely absorbed in anger and swallowed up in dismay.

With a petulant toss of her head, she shouted to God,  
"What the heck? Do you really believe those idiots? I knew from the beginning -- way back in those dreams I didn't think were really happening -- that this city is hopeless! You are a gracious and compassionate, God, but gee whiz... Get me out of here!"

But God replied, "Do you really think you have the right to be griping? What's with the anger?"

Johanna went back to her car and just sat and pouted.  
Got made a small tree nearby suddenly begin to grow and grow until it completely shaded Johanna in her car so that she would not completely melt. Johanna fell asleep, and in the morning the sun rose beautifully. But soon a harsh, dry wind began to blow and the sun blazed with unbearable heat because the tree that had provided shade had withered away mysteriously.

Johanna said, "What is going on? This is such a scorcher!  
I don't think I can survive this heat stroke!"

God said to Johanna, "Do you have the right to be mad at the tree that now cannot keep you cool?"

Johanna answered, "Well, duh!!!!!! For sure! I'm about to die!"

But God then said, "Johanna, you now have such concern for the tree that has changed its size and purpose and way of living; but you did not water it or tend it or make it grow.  
Now think about Nineveh City with all its many inhabitants. They have failed to know what is right and wrong, and the people have been lost. Don't you think that I should be concerned about them?"

## "ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"

### RETREAT

#### DAY II. STUDY SESSION 2 - "Hearing God's CALL..."

JONAH is a story full of God's grace, but it is also full of Jonah's reluctance to listen, hear, accept or respond to God's call. JOHANNA had similar problems... but are they really so different from ourselves?

Suppose you are at a family reunion and you hear a mom call her pre-teen child with the words, "----, I need you," would you see the youth scurrying quickly to her mom?

Suppose you are at a conference meeting at your place of employment and the assistant to the boss says, "I need a volunteer," would you raise your hand immediately?

Both the child and employee probably can figure out that there is some big job to do, and we can also assume there are many thoughts floating across their minds before either respond favorably to the request.

What if the one calling is God? Do you meet the news with the enthusiasm of a young child eager to go play a new game? Or do you respond with the reluctance of the pre-teen who is not sure about the work involved in an assigned task? It is often a natural response to feel hesitant about responding to God's call because those tasks can sometimes be difficult.

Sarah laughed when she and Abraham thought they were too old. Jeremiah thought he was too young. Moses felt inadequate in speech. It took Esther awhile to realize that her call was for "such a time as this." And Jonah ran away.

Then, after floundering around and nearly drowning in the un-ordered chaos of the sea, from the dark and dank blubbery belly of the large fish, Jonah found time to meditate and pray.

PSALM 42: 7-8 (NIV)

"Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

By day the Lord directs his love  
at night his song is with me--  
a prayer to the God of my life."

PSALM 130: 1

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord..."

JONAH 2: 7b, 9

"...my prayer came to you, into your holy temple...  
But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you;  
what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!"

When the prophet was propelled in a pool of fish vomit upon the shore, there was no doubt still some fear, anger, uneasiness and rebelliousness, a true mixture of emotions. Yet, there was also a change of heart and a willingness, though reluctantly in its mission, to serve the call to which God had summoned Jonah. Jonah finally figured out that he had a call to follow.

Did "JOHANNA" figure out her call?  
Was it easier or harder to relate to that "version" of the story?  
What questions or comments or emotions did it invoke?

Share: "TABLE IT!" - poem by Connie Krueger of Winter, Wisconsin.  
(At the Table: A Collection of Creative Works, ELCA, 1998)

Being called by God can sometimes mean doing something difficult, but sometimes we are called to do something that is simple yet very meaningful. We may be called to proclaim our faith in scary situations or just simply with the stranger who moved in next door.

Last evening we listened to the song, "Anyway." Even when we think we have figured out a call, things may or may not go easily for us. But that is when prayer and faith and our trust in God keep us going on that path..... trying to do God's will, to make a difference, the best way we can.

On each table you will find a sheet with some statements and questions.  
Let us be in a time of quiet reflection while everyone works through this exercise...

(see appendix - ABOUT CALL)

Now on each table you will find fine-line markers and strips of parchment paper. Continuing in our quiet time, I would now ask each of you to please write what you have prayerfully decided is the CALL that you need to follow at this time on one of the strips of paper and sign your name to it as a pledge.

These will be gathered in a basket for a later activity, but they will not be read aloud.  
(Time given and then strips gathered up.)

(Use as a stand up and/or stretch break, singing...)

SONG: "OVER MY HEAD" - TNCH 514

Fiona King is an artist and illustrator who lives in CA. She is the artist for the beautiful artwork found in this year's Tapestry: "Above and Beyond: Hearing God's Call in Jonah and Ruth."

The cover design is called a "mandala." Mandala is Sanskrit for "whole world" or "healing circle." They are found in Eastern and Western religious traditions. The circle is accepted as a Christian symbol of eternity or our everlasting God.

According to an internet source, the mandala can also be found in the halo that surrounds the head of Christ and the saints in Christian art. The labyrinth is also considered by some to be another example of a mandala which represents a journey from the outer world to the inner sacred center where the Divine is found.

Looking at the cover, the theme of the study is illustrated in a beautiful mandala. The wheat is for Ruth; the water and fish for Jonah. The tree represents the Jesse tree, the bloodline leading to Jesus. In the center is the sun, representing God.

(Look also at the illustrations for each of the lessons within this edition. Share from page 3 the information about each.)

#### ACTIVITY: MANDALA PLACEMATS

Explain the art activity of creating one's own mandala for the theme of the retreat in the center of a sheet of white construction paper, which will also serve as a place mat for the afternoon's "Tea Time Together."

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
RETREAT

POEM: "Table It!" by Connie Krueger of Winter, Wisconsin  
At the Table: A Collection of Creative Works  
Women of the ELCA, 1998

They're calling out for teachers for our Sunday school this year.  
I feel your Spirit calling me, but I don't want to hear.  
My days are full and busy; I don't need another job.  
'Twould overflow my life and all my free time it would rob.  
And so, I think I'll "table it" 'til yet another time...  
Maybe next year, or the next, or sometime down the line.

Fall Bazaar needs waitresses, and it's my turn, I fear.  
I feel your Spirit calling me, but I don't want to hear.  
Surely there are others who will come and fill right in.  
And besides, it's Saturday... my day to weave and spin.  
And so, I think I'll "table it" 'til yet another time...  
Maybe next year, or the next, or sometime down the line.

My neighbor's ill and feeling blue, in need of love and cheer.  
I feel your Spirit calling me, but I don't want to hear.  
Perhaps I'll go another time, I've days and weeks galore,  
But first I'll clean the oven up and scrub the kitchen floor.  
And so, I think I'll "table it" 'til yet another time...  
Maybe next week, or the next, or sometime down the line.

On Thursday there's a study group. They've asked if I'll appear.  
I feel your Spirit calling me, but I don't want to hear.  
I cannot find Philippians. My reading isn't fast.  
I'll read the Bible on my own. I do not need a class.  
And so, I think I'll "table it" 'til yet another time...  
Maybe next year, or the next, or sometime down the line.

But each time that I "table it," I feel your presence near.  
I feel your Spirit calling me. So help me now to hear...  
To put aside my selfishness and see my sister's need;  
To show your love in what I say, and in my ev'ry deed.  
I fail you and I falter, Lord, and yet you've set me free.  
I know you will forgive it all and never "table" me.

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
RETREAT  
Personal Meditation Exercise

ABOUT CALL...

Hearing God's call can involve a variety of responses..... from making a personal commitment to Christ and giving one's life to God to promising to be more accepting of others or deciding to engage in further study through classes or seminary training.

There are many instances in the Bible of women who were called in specific ways.

Judges 4:4 -- Deborah was a prophet and judge;

Exodus 15:20 - Miriam was a prophet;

Romans 16:1 - Phoebe was a deacon;

and Jonah and Ruth had their own forms of call.

God used an imperfect and reluctant Jonah to carry God's message to the people of Nineveh. Even with his bad attitude and anger, Jonah became a prophet! Ruth was a foreigner in a strange country, but through her faithful life, she provided a link in the lineage of Jesus.

We often assume that we are not worthy of being used by God. We see others' talents and abilities far easier than we accept our own gifts. But God can and does work through us and others like us.

Romans 12: 3 -- "...Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,  
but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in  
accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

So, we are not to think too highly of ourselves. But, are we also not to think more lowly of ourselves? We cannot focus only on our shortcomings and faults. We need to avoid using them as an excuse for not listening for or attempting God's call. God can help us work through our imperfections!

Everyone must meditate, pray and listen throughout our lives for a sense of direction from God. Just finding some time of silence, prayer and meditation is often a difficult prerequisite to our listening. But we must in order to let our still speaking God reach us.

Sometimes "doors open" in mysterious and marvelous ways that lead us on a path that seems to be following a call from God.

Have you experienced an urging in your life or in your mind that might be a "call"? Have doors opened for you or your family, with certain things just falling into place that seem to be God-driven?

Meditate on these thoughts:

Are there things that I feel I am being called to say?

-at church    -at home    -with certain friends or family?

What am I called to do?

-within the church    -within my family    -within God's world?

Are there passions about life, justice issues in the world, causes that need support that are calling me to serve?

Who does God want me to be?

Continue in this time of quiet meditation to open your heart to God and listen, listen, listen.....

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
RETREAT

DAY II. - STUDY SESSION 3 - Hearing God's Call in RUTH"

Read the children's book, Are You My Mother? by Phillip Eastman.

Discuss how the story relates to the group's remembrances of the Book of RUTH.

Have each table group look at one chapter of RUTH quickly to find any key points that have been forgotten.

Ruth, like the little bird, was searching for her identity and also wanted to find community. We all seek connections, a circle of friends, that reaffirm our worth, self-reliance and power.

How can you celebrate the Ruths in your life?

How many times do we or do we know of people who have low self-esteem, do not know what their spiritual gifts may be, are unfocussed, and/or are stuck in the wrong ministries?

According to Linda H. Hollies, there are five statements (responses to people who try to "guide" us in our directed paths) that everyone needs to use at appropriate times while on life's spiritual journey: yes; no; I resent that; I don't appreciate that; and I don't know.

How can you be a Ruth for someone else?

Ruth gave her mother-in-law, Naomi, a short yet beautiful and clear answer (that is often used in commitment/wedding services). She was in a tough situation with no family in Bethlehem, but she was finding her inner strength and survival instincts. Naomi was also desperate as she left her dead family's home of ten years, with her own lack of self-esteem, and she named herself Mara, meaning "bitter." Ruth seemed determined that something better was ahead as she shared, "Your people will be my people."

Discuss the map activity shared during registration.

Were there differences in the places you lived in terms of feeling comfortable? welcomed? "different"? Did you feel like a foreigner? Were there instances when you were living a cross-cultural experience? Were there times when you wished to go back to a former place? How welcoming did you find the churches where you lived?

Did you feel like Naomi, Ruth and/or Orpah?

Perhaps you quickly learned, as Ruth must have learned eventually, that one can be at home wherever God is. We are each a child of God and are a part of God's family wherever we live or whatever our life's situation happens to be.

Who are the foreigners in your community?  
How can you show them the love that God has for everyone?

A Hallmark card by Maya Angelou states: "I can be changed by what happens to me. I refuse to be reduced by it." And inside: "In the face of such uncertainty, believe in these two things -- you are stronger than you think, and you are not alone."  
That is wonderful advice when we feel uncertain about following a call from God!

Name meanings are interesting in this story.  
Mahlon - "sickly"; Chilion - "little" or "aching"; Elimelech - "my God is king"; Naomi - "delightful" or "pleasant"; Orpah - "double-minded," "back of neck" or "turning back"; Ruth - "refreshment"; Boaz - "redeemer"; Obed - "server."

(Could do a quick quiz to match meanings and the names on a sheet of newsprint.)

Each table might choose a different name for the creation of an acrostic poem. Time given; creations shared.

Share poem: "NAOMI" by Jo Ann Chance.

Discuss the practice of "gleaning"  
Refer to the prints on the worship table.  
("The Gleaners" by Jean-Francois Millet, 1857; "Corn Woman" by R. C. Gorman, 1931-2005, acclaimed Navajo artist.)  
Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19  
Old Testament law determined that landowners were instructed not to reap completely the corners of their fields, leaving the gleanings for the strangers and the poor. It was understood to be an act of grace freely given, and those who received assistance from gleaning were to do so with an humble spirit and grateful heart.

Share poem: "RUTH" by Jo Ann Chance.

DIGGING DEEPER (for more in-depth study and discussion)...

ORPAH:

According to an article in The Woman's Study Bible (NKJV), ORPAH was referred to as "the daughter-in-law with a wavering faith." It stated: "Orpah was not a bad woman and, in fact, showed deep affection for the mother of her deceased husband Chilion. However, although Orpah loved and respected her mother-in-law Naomi, she did not have the depth of loyalty and spirit of selflessness for a permanent lifestyle commitment to Naomi and the God of Israel. Naomi's persuasive words painted a vivid picture of the uncertainties to come, and Orpah seemingly turned her thoughts to her own devices for happiness. With her return to Moab, she vanished from the pages of biblical history."

Comments... Is this the general belief we have about Orpah?

In an internet resource ([myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com)), it was shared that there is rabbinic imagination that "makes Orpah the ancestor of Goliath who will meet Ruth's descendant, David, in a final confrontation of these branches of the family." It also states: "Ruth remains with Naomi, while the realistic Orpah accepts Naomi's reasoning that the daughters-in-law need not become refugees in turn."

Was Orpah daring to have married a Jewish man, the son of Elimelech? Was she less visionary than Ruth because she chose to return to her mother's land and beliefs? Should she be considered less virtuous than Ruth?

Regina Schwartz, author of The Curse of Cain, has written that "the themes of covenant, chosen people and promised land have been used repeatedly by the Christian West to justify the colonization of non-Christians and the annihilation of Native peoples of the Americas."

Laura Donaldson, author of "The Sign of Orpah," relates Ruth (and Rahab) as "the Israelite versions of Pocahontas in Native history." In Kwok Pui-lan's text, Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology, she writes: "In what Cherokee scholar Rayna Green has termed the 'Pocahontas Perplex,' the beloved daughter of Powhatan saves and falls in love with John Smith, the white colonist in Jamestown, Virginia, thus enabling the settlement of the English pilgrims. The mythology of Pocahontas prescribes that a 'good Indian woman' is one who loves and aids white men, while turning her back on her own people and wisdom tradition. In the biblical stories. Boaz stand(s) in for John Smith, and the loyalty of Ruth, the good Moabite, is praised by generations of biblical scholars, while Orpah is scorned as the bad Moabite." (p 118)

Donaldson "lifts up the voices that are marginalized in the text and in the history of interpretation. Orpah, who returns to her mother's house, becomes...the story's central character, for ORPAH does not abandon her mother's house and thus becomes a sign of hope for Native women.... Donaldson questions the premature narrative foreclosure, or violence, done to the figure Orpah... She demonstrates that Native people must take responsibility for their own reading and interface the biblical text with their own history and struggles...conferring positive value to a figure that has

been censored in traditional interpretations...the meaning of the text can be determined only with reference to specific cultural and historical contexts." (p 119)

Schwartz and Donaldson challenge all of us to read the Bible "not from the cozy 'home' of traditional Jewish or Christian interpretations but from the experiences of those whose lives have been marginalized and oppressed by the Bible." (p 121)

Native people consider ORPAH as the more virtuous woman rather than Ruth.  
Comments... How would you interpret Orpah's call?

Share poem: "ORPAH" by Jo Ann Chance

DIGGING DEEPER...

NAOMI, RUTH and BOAZ:

In the Jewish tradition, the Book of RUTH is read during Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks in May, which is connected with the acceptance of the Torah by the children of Israel. During the harvest of late spring crops, the festival is a reminder of the covenantal relationship with God and also that God proclaimed that all were to be merciful to the stranger, orphan and widow.

"*Hesed*," or steadfast love, and loyalty are important themes. Naomi and Ruth embody marginalized qualities as well as strong loyalty to one another. Boaz is the protector who takes care of Ruth when she gleans in his field, and he agrees to marry Ruth, even though she belongs to a foreign tribe considered an enemy.

According to an internet resource ([myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com)), Ruth's loyalty to Naomi was put to the test as she went out to glean in strange fields. In the field of Boaz, several patterns converged as Naomi developed a plan to obligate the kinsman's support; Ruth soon had some ideas of her own; and Boaz moved from correctness and minimal courtesy to the granting of special privileges.

When the barley harvest came to an end, Naomi instructed Ruth in the new plan that involved spending the night on the threshing floor. Ruth's preparations for the night were of ceremonial significance, even as preparations of marriage. It is debated whether or not the marriage was consummated on that night, but it is clear that the consummation took place after the marriage (4:13) and was blessed by God with the son, Obed.

This source states: "The whole thrust of the narrative, of Boaz as 'the redeemer,' of Obed declared to be the son of Naomi, would lose its point had the relationship between Ruth and Boaz been other than a proper marriage between equals. The court scene, between Boaz and the other unnamed claimant, establishes this as it resolves the underlying patterns with a happy ending. And time and history place another dimension into this pattern: the covenant of love between Boaz and Ruth reminded the people Israel, in times of exile and need, that a similar covenant exists and continues between Israel and God."

However, Susan Reimer Torn, author of an essay, "Ruth Reconsidered," suggests that Ruth preserved the ancient matriarchal tradition "in which powerful women forge their own identity and take initiative." Marcella Althaus-Reid, who wrote "On Wearing Skirts...", feels that "the foreign woman's sexuality has been appropriated figuratively both in the texts and in economic and political systems that treat her body as commodity or instrument. Here, Ruth's sexuality is not a private matter but is intimately related to finding security and a means of survival for her and Naomi, as well as to the preservation of family land and property."

Scholars differ in their interpretation of the unconventional action of Ruth at the threshing floor because, according to Kwok Pui-lan, an Asian theologian and author of Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology, "Ruth's behavior presses against what white, middle-class people considered as female decency." Torn suggests that "there is no reason why women cannot take matters in their own hands, even steering their male protagonists toward their chosen course of action."

As shared in the text, Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics - An African Perspective by Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, Western women critique the cultures of ancient Palestine in terms of the patriarchal society which existed. We think of the Bible as "past tense" in many ways, while yet providing important lessons for today. However, "Africans read Ruth through their cultural lenses in the context where famine, refugee status, tribal/ethnic loyalties, levirate marriages and polygamy are not ancient biblical practices but today's normal realities.... They pronounce all cultural practices in Ruth as normal and good and recommend them for emulation by African women... Thus, the book of Ruth for African (male) theologians...a perfect enhancement of the theology of inculturation...puts no responsibility on males, but underscores the fact that women ought to be good." (p 36)

African women theologians, however, question whether Ruth and Naomi are liberated women or simply victims of culture. They ask: "Was the move by Naomi to return to Bethlehem liberating? Whom does it liberate and why? Did the women really have the open choices that they are credited with? ...African women want to know what life was like for Naomi, Ruth or Orpah as women in their times. Since the Bible records so little about men's treatment of women, African women wonder if home was 'safe' for them, as they relate the Bible story to the questions of spousal and domestic violence that many women today know first-hand.... (RUTH 3:11) Does this necessarily say that Ruth and Boaz lived happily thereafter? ..Is the birth of sons the reason upon which women's worth is to be culturally applauded?" (p 37)

Since African families often marry their young girls to old men, there are also questions concerning the age difference in the marriage between Boaz and Ruth. There are issues of concern related to child marriages and sexual abuse of women by men in power.

Share: "Reading the Bible as 'Own Text' - From an African Perspective" (appendix)

Comments....

(Use Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics - Chapter Four, as needed, for further reference.)

## NAOMI

by Jo Ann Chance 6/2007

Naomi's lamenting,  
Consumed the displaced, childless widow;  
The bitterness within "Mara."  
Can we not understand?  
Life had brought raw, hurtful pain.

Naomi's sharing  
Found comfort and healing.  
A circle of community was built  
When self-reliance and power was again sensed  
And security in our faithful God gained.

Naomi's scheming  
Helped direct Ruth's path toward promise  
And bitterness was redeemed,  
Changed to joy with grandchild's birth--  
Pleasantness and hope lived again!

## RUTH

by Jo Ann Chance 6/2007

In Judah, rugged, semi-arid land,  
fertile soil for barley and then wheat grains to harvest;  
with grapes, olives and figs as well,

RUTH, Moabite woman, with supposed history of enticement and  
seduction,  
not trusted, disliked foreigner,  
now living on Israelite soil.

Childless widow, without family or living means,  
dependent upon mother-in-law's ties and others' charity;  
thankfully, Mosaic law allowed for gleaning.

Hard labor, gathering grain,  
from which flour was stone ground and bread baked;  
sustenance for living.

Stooping in the hot sun,  
bent over, destitute, laboring woman,  
soon befriended by Boaz, Naomi's kinsman.

With levirate marriage practices prevailing  
and fortunate timing at hand,  
Ruth was encouraged to follow Naomi's plan.

Men, threshing and winnowing grain and chaff;  
followed by women, sifting and storing;  
then came singing, feasting and drinking, the harvest celebration.

Finding the place at nightfall where Boaz slept  
and slipping under his blanket to lie at his feet,  
Ruth was appealing to him to become her "go-el" for protection.

With another as first kinsman, there was a delay.  
Boaz presented a possible arrangement  
but the kinsman balked and a substitute transaction prevailed.

Property was transferred and an inheritance confirmed,  
with the widow, an extra troublesome condition;  
and Boaz and Ruth's future blessed with a gestured sandal.

Ruth, at fall's harvest, the devoted wife to Boaz,  
remained faithful to Naomi as well;  
and when son, Obed, was born, they both named him.

Ruth, foreigner accepted, admired and honored,  
helped birth the tree of Jesse, father of King David,  
with lineage continuing to Jesus Christ, a Divine plan.

Ruth, Moabite woman, adopted Israelite,  
welcomed into Boaz' heart through Eucharistic barley meal  
and betrothed with shared cloak, land rights and levirate obligation.

Ruth, blessed by God;  
grew from weakness into independence and strength;  
woman of love, loyalty, devotion and redemption.

## ORPAH

by Jo Ann Chance 6/2007

ORPAH,  
Often ignored,  
What was in your heart?  
Were you perhaps the stronger one  
Who also deemed family the greater tie?  
Were kinship and home  
The call you were compelled to follow?  
Moabite heritage,  
Foreign and misinterpreted by others,  
Perhaps felt purer than that offered and tried.  
Unwilling to turn your back on your own people;  
Determined to return to your own wisdom tradition.  
Otherness rejected;  
Violence of exclusion avoided.  
Loyalty to your own mother chosen.  
How can we judge choices made?  
Whose authority in the wider context  
Of race, class, culture or colonialism  
Can we claim?  
ORPAH,  
Often ignored,

We know, remember and honor, too,  
Your name.

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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"Reading the Bible as 'Own Text' - An African Perspective" - RUTH  
(from Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics - An African Perspective  
by Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro Pilgrim Press 2002, p. 41-49)

"There was famine in the land and people had to migrate to look for food. One of the families, which had moved, was made up of Elimelech (the father), Naomi (the mother) and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. They moved from their home in Bethlehem to another place where people called Moabites lived. They were welcomed and given a place to stay and to grow food and settle. They learned the language and customs of the place. They adapted very well and settled, without experiencing any tribal discrimination. Thus, Elimelech and Naomi allowed their sons to marry wives from the tribe of the Moabites...

But tragedy fell. First Elimelech died. Ten years later, both Mahlon and Chilion died, leaving two young widows, Ruth and Orpah. Perhaps Naomi realized that all these deaths had come to them because they had neglected their own customs and adapted foreign customs. She knew that unless she returned to her land, she would be a cause for more trouble. So, she decided to go back to Bethlehem maybe to offer a sacrifice and ask the elders to cleanse the family. It is quite clear that there was a curse on the family, since Naomi never gave birth to any other children while they were in the Moabite country. Also, their sons were married for ten years and they never left any children.

This whole migration was riddled with something evil. Somebody in the family of Elimelech pronounced words of a curse before they left. Maybe the Elimelech family migrated secretly and left others suffering and they did not offer the opportunity of migrating to the others. They left on their own because they had the means and they were being punished for negligence and individualism. Maybe they migrated and did not tell people where they were going and they could have disappeared without paying their debts. If you don't pay what you have borrowed from someone, a curse will follow you wherever you go. Maybe they neglected going back to their home from time to time to pay homage to those who died and the curse of death wreaked revenge on them. Anyway...all these people could not have just died for nothing.

"...The death of Elimelech meant that Naomi had to fend for herself. While her sons were alive, they took up all the responsibilities of negotiating community deals. When they died, Naomi could no longer manage to live in that community as a woman without male relatives. So, she had to decide to move back...Naomi went back because she no longer had any males to support her. It was a cultural dictation and there is no choice in such matters.

"...In Bethlehem, Ruth was obedient to Naomi. She did all the things that Naomi told her to do and that is why she was blessed with a son. By the customs of Naomi's land, Ruth was to be inherited by the next of kin, who happened to be a poor man... It seems as if Boaz tricked the poorer man who was the right one to inherit Ruth. Boaz seems to have been a clever rich man. It is often the case that rich people can get anything. Ruth may have married Boaz because he was rich and would support both Ruth and Naomi. It can also be probable that Ruth, as a foreign woman, would not have been easily accepted in the community if she was not attached to a powerful rich man. Ruth may have been happy to marry Boaz for security, too.

"...How do we explain this text? Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Now listen *my daughter*, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.' (Ruth 2:8) ...Once a grown up calls a young person 'daughter,' a kin's relationship has been established which prohibits sexual relations...

"...Boaz must have been a married man who was either widowed or who lived a polygamous life. Using age, wealth and success as indicators of polygamous men...marrying off young girls from poor families to rich old men is practiced and therefore...not seen as strange...

"...The book of Ruth may not only be about women's happy bonding...it could be about women's lives trapped in cultures..."

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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DAY II. TEA TIME

Preparations:

Someone will need to be designated to take the parchment paper slips from the morning and secretly fold each one into a smaller paper and roll up inside a refrigerated crescent roll. These should be baked just before the "Tea Time"; served and eaten at the appropriate time.

Hot water will also need to be prepared (coffee pots) for making tea.

If possible, colorful tablecloths and/or napkins should be used also.

Women shall be asked to move to the dining or other designated area, using their created mandala-place mats and bringing the tea cup that they brought to Retreat. (Extra cups should be made available for those without.)

Call to Tea Time Fellowship:

"Blessed are you, O God,  
who brings forth the bread of new life  
from the earth.

As you cause bread to rise  
fragrant and warm,  
so you call your people to rise,  
passionate and fire-formed.

Bless to us this life-shaped bread,  
that we may rise  
into the newness of life in you."

-- Jan L. Richardson (Sacred Journeys, p. 194)

PSALM 104: 15 - "...bread to strengthen the human heart."

JOHN 6:33 - "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and  
gives life to the world."

Donna Sinclair, in her book The Spirituality of Bread, says that baking bread "can be called 'spiritual'... (a) word (that) means 'of, from, or relating to God; of, concerned with, or affecting the soul.' Making bread affects my soul. It speaks to me of love and memory and holiness. When my husband took a job that meant he would have to live in another city...my first reaction was to fill the oven with multi-grain loaves...in order to stock the little fridge in his apartment... When our grown-up children come home, a similar frenzy of mixing and kneading precedes their arrival. I make loaves of many kinds... Bread, it appears, speaks its own language: 'I love you. Welcome home. Be well. Be strong. Remember me.' After the children leave, I eat soup and bread for weeks, cherishing the echoes of their presence... Bread is identity. It helps us remember who we are... Baking bread makes me calm, whether it is my English grandmother's scones or my Scottish grandmother's raised white loaves. Because bread is the opposite of fast food. You cannot make bread in ten minutes, and the slow work of kneading and shaping quiets our noisy and over-scheduled lives. Indeed, bread demands peace...(and) also demands justice." (p. 10-13)

Antoine De Saint-Exupery wrote: "We have learned to see in bread an instrument of community between (persons) -- the flavour of bread shared has no equal."

Tea is also a symbol of hospitality in our country and in many other countries and cultures. ... Welcome! Let me fix us a cup of tea! ...Are you troubled? Can we talk? Come have a cup of tea. ...Are you hungry? Are you tired? Are you having trouble sleeping? Come, let's have a cup of tea. ... It's been so long since we've had a nice chat. How about a cup of tea?

"Blessed are you, O God,  
who brings forth the bread (and tea) of hospitality  
from the earth.  
You made us to be companions,  
sharers of bread,  
to gather and to break  
and to be astonished  
by the flavor breaking forth.  
Bless to us  
this prayer-shaped bread, that by its breaking  
we too may gasp  
at your Spirit's breaking forth in us."

-- Jan L. Richardson (Sacred Journeys, p. 194-95)

Tea Time Fellowship:

Share the passing of the (Scripture) tea bags and crescent rolls and the enjoyment of tea and bread. Explain that there is a surprise within the bread...

During the initial time of eating and drinking, table talk should include the sharing of stories about the tea cups that were chosen and brought to Retreat.

Once that initial time of eating, drinking and sharing has concluded, then the signed parchment paper should be used to move around and find "prayer partners" for each person. The shared conversations and perhaps prayers should then be about the "call" that was written and signed on the slips of parchment paper earlier in the day.

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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DAY II. STUDY SESSION 4 - "Hearing GOD'S CALL and Making CONNECTIONS"

"Blessed are you, O God,  
who brings forth the bread of partnership  
from the earth.

This sustains us:

the daily sharing

the companioned breaking

the mutual blessing

the tender feeding.

Partnered with one another

and with you,

we partake of Mystery.

When the way is dangerous,

when our angers rise,

this tastes most sweet.

Bless to us

this companion-created loaf,

that its toughness may yield

your flavor-full joy."

-- Jan L. Richardson, Sacred Journeys, p. 197

SONG: "HUSH!" Words and music by James F. D. Martin, 2007  
(One of the winning songs written for General Synod)

#### Sharing A Personal Call Journey

At this time, a guest or pre-designated participant would be invited to share a personal story of their faith journey and sense of call.

SONG: "HUSH!" (repeated)

#### Making Connections

"Blessed are you, O God,  
who brings forth the bread of transformation  
from the earth.

As the baking of bread  
begins with gathering the wheat,  
so our transformation begins  
with gathering our selves  
with one another  
with prayer.

Elemental offerings,  
we give ourselves to you,  
earth and fire and air and water  
in these flesh and bones.

Shaped by your hand,  
we rise, we glow.

Bless to us this circle-shaped loaf,  
that it may sustain our continual unfolding."

-- Jan L. Richardson, Sacred Journeys, p. 196

Share: "Making Connections...with KENYAN SISTERS" (Appendix)

At this time, there should be a discussion about making broader denominational/  
women's/ global connections.... with understandings gained about various ministries  
and calls and with the promise to continue in prayerful support of these women.

Share: COMMON LOT, Spring 2007 Issue, "Lives & Aspirations of Women and Girls  
Around the World"

Many past issues of COMMON LOT contain more Global Ministries information.

Perhaps your church, Association or Conference has a sister-relationship with a church or group in another country. Information about those relationships and ministries, etc. could be shared and perhaps some sort of mutual project or prayer support could be initiated, especially something that connects the group with women and children there.

Information from Wider Church Ministries/ Global Ministries can be obtained about global partners, missionaries, etc., that our UCC and Disciples support. Try to include information on and addresses for actual women who are serving in Wider Church Ministries/ Global Ministries. Information about countries, ministries, projects and needs could be discussed. Again, perhaps a special prayer or financially supported ministry could be found. Letters and e-mails of support might be shared afterwards.

If there were several women who attended the "MIX in '06" event, they might have information to share about the women who were international guests. Perhaps an international woman actually visited in your area and connections were made with them at that time which could be updated.

If no current connections can be found, perhaps the group would like to make connections with women written about in the "Remembering Her" series of articles written by Barbara Brown Zikmund on the [ucc.org](http://ucc.org) website.

Discussion could include answering the following questions:

What impresses you most about this woman's experiences in ministry?

Can you determine her sense of call and her dreams for further service?

Does anything surprise you about what you have learned?

What kind of support does this person need?

What would be your prayer for her?

How can our group be supportive?

"Connections" - from Chief Seattle, 1854

"All things are connected.

Whatever befalls the earth

Befalls the sons (and daughters) of the earth.

(Humankind) did not weave the web of life.

(We) are each merely a strand in it.

Whatever (we) do to the web,

We do to ourselves."

Prayer:

Great God of compassion and hospitality for all,

help us to be as steadfast in our love and faith as our foremothers,

Ruth and Naomi, taught. Let us not be afraid to welcome the foreigner

into our circle of care and concern. Open our ears and hearts to the needs

of others. Show us where love, hope and faith are needed. And let us be

open to learning much from our sisters and brothers in our mutual sharing.

Grant us your grace and peace and the blessings of transformation as we

share in partnerships with others and in our relationship with you. Amen.

SONG: "Weave"

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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Making Connections... with KENYAN SISTERS

Sharing from The Spirituality of BREAD by Donna Sinclair (p. 94-95):

"...A visiting Kenyan friend - who had earlier hosted me and another woman in her village - reached out her arms to me on arrival in Toronto and shouted, 'My sister, you're so fat!' I did my best imitation of a tranquil face, but Alice could see she had made a social error and was sincerely puzzled. It is a compliment, in the village of Dumbeni, to be considered fat. Nobody is.

"The women of rural Kenya carry water in 20-litre buckets on their heads for long distances. They walk for miles to gather firewood. They hoe and plant and weed and look after children and bend at the waist to wash dishes in basins on the ground. When all that is done, they make *ugali*, which is maize pounded into flour and cooked and stirred over an open fire until it is so firm you can slice it. The women made thick, tough, delicious chicken stew in our honour in Dumbeni, and we dipped it up with chunks of *ugali* and found that nothing had ever tasted better in the world.

"Eating food - such as *ugali*, the bread of Kenya - that friends have made for you is a humbling pleasure. Perhaps they would say the making made them happy too. That's how it seemed, at least - a great and generous pleasure that they were glad to share.

"When many of us women in North America have the luxury of living deeply in our heads, tapping computer keys for a living, the taste of fresh bread gives balance to our lives. When we make it ourselves, we begin to understand that it is very precious. Once in a while, we could simply allow the wisdom of our hands to push and pull the dough until the mind is rested, and the body is tired from generous work that others will enjoy."

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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DAY II. EVENING VESPERS

Gathering Music...

(Piano music to signal the return of the group)

SONG: "Give Me Oil in My Lamp"

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12: 1-2

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect."

MEDITATION:

Here is a list from the internet:

The greatest joy -- giving;  
the most useless activity -- worry;  
the ugliest trait -- selfishness;  
the most endangered species -- dedicated leaders;  
the greatest problem -- fear;  
the most effective medicine -- peace of mind;  
the most crippling -- excuses;  
the most powerful force in life -- love;  
the most dangerous -- gossip;  
the worst thing to lose -- hope;  
the deadliest weapon -- the tongue;  
the most powerful 2 words -- "I can!";  
the greatest asset -- faith;  
the most worthless emotion -- self-pity;  
the most prized possession -- integrity;  
the most beautiful attire -- a smile;  
the most powerful channel of communication -- prayer;  
the most contagious spirit -- enthusiasm;  
the most satisfying work -- helping others;  
the most important thing in life -- GOD!"

PRAYER SONG:

Please be in the spirit of prayer as we listen to this song, followed by a few moments of silent prayer and then a closing prayer.

John Michael Montgomery's - "LIFE'S A DANCE"

(skip verse one and begin with the chorus)

Silent Prayer...

PRAYER:

"O God Eternal, good beyond all that is good, fair beyond all that is fair,  
in whom is calmness and peace:

reconcile the differences which divide us from one another and  
bring us back into the unity of love which may bear some likeness  
to your divine nature.

Grant that we may be spiritually one,  
both within ourselves and with one another,  
through the grace, mercy and tenderness  
of your Son, Jesus Christ." (--an Orthodox prayer)

Give us the courage to continue following the call and mission  
you place on our hearts and help us to continue  
learning that life is a dance you learn as you go  
with you, O God, beside us.

Amen.

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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DAY III. MORNING PRAYERS

SONG: "SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD" TNCH 283

Opening: Legend of the Cherokee Indian Boy's Rite of Passage  
(internet story)

The boy's father takes him into the forest, blindfolded, and leaves him.

He is required to sit on a stump the whole night and not take off the blindfold until the rays of the sun shine through it.

The boy is all by himself. He cannot cry out for help from anyone.

Once he survives the night, he is considered a MAN. He cannot tell the other boys of this experience. Each boy must come into his own manhood.

The boy was terrified. He could hear all kinds of noise. Beasts were all around him; maybe even some human would hurt him.

The wind blew hard at the grass and it felt as if it shook his stump.

But he sat stoically, never removing the blindfold. It was the only way he could become a man.

Finally, after a horrific night, the sounds of the night disappeared. He could feel the warmth of the sun. He removed his blindfold.

It was then that he saw his father, sitting on another stump near him, on watch the entire night...

We are never alone. Even when we do not know it, God is protecting us.

MEDITATION: On Prayer

God is sitting on the stump by us... God is sitting in the belly with us... God is working by us in the gleaning field... God is only a prayer away...

Linda H. Hollies, in her book about Ruth and Naomi, [On Their Way to Wonderful](#), shares:

"In prayer we come to God. In prayer we seek an audience with the Divine. In prayer we talk. But in prayer we also need to learn to listen.

"Prayer begins with praise and worship of the Almighty. Then prayer immediately moves into confession of our sin. How dare we presume to come before a holy God with junk, garbage, and ugliness in us? Confession opens the way for us to have an audience with the Sovereign.

"After confession, we can offer our thanks for all that has been done already. Before we beg, let's try a bit of thanksgiving. Then, we can move into intercession for others, learning how to be constant as we stand before the throne with another's need in mind.

"We are admonished to pray for leaders all over the world. We are commissioned to pray for brothers and sisters on the journey. We are agents of prayer for those who don't know God in the pardon of their sin...

"Prayer is more than words. Prayer is sitting in quiet meditation.  
"Prayer is lighting a candle and allowing the smoke to speak for you.  
"Prayer is the tears that run down your face as words can't express your feelings.  
"Prayer is reading the Word and allowing it to say what you can't articulate.  
"Prayer is sitting quietly, singing, humming, and moaning songs.  
"Prayer is admiring God's handiwork in nature, listening to the running water, and communing in your heart without words.  
"Prayer is committing our will to the way of God. Prayer is surrender.  
"Prayer is agreement that God really does know best and does have a better idea...  
"Prayer is allowing the will of God to become our will..  
"Prayer is our way of living on a day-by-day, consistent, and constant manner...  
"The same God who loved us so much that Jesus came, suffered, bled, died, and rose again, is the same God who will lead us when we stop trying to dictate our direction and simply learn how to trust and to obey.  
"Look unto God, anticipating the new thing that is being created all around us. Can you see it? Can you sense it? Can you discern what God is requiring of you?  
"Be still for a moment and listen with your whole heart..." (p. 56-58)

PRAYER      Guided Meditation... (from PUSH IT Vol. 4, p. 69, by Rev. Sid Fowler)

Please join me in a time of prayerful meditation.....  
Sit quietly.....  
Imagine God's compassion and grace surrounding you.....  
Imagine what it feels like to be held gently in that compassion, to be supported by it, to be healed by it..  
Imagine God's compassion surrounding the whole world...  
Imagine how limitless, how powerful, how healing that compassion for the world can be...  
Ask silently for God to stay with you, surrounding you with the power and strength of compassion and grace, as you continue this day and as you return to your home, your community and your world.....  
Continue with your own prayer to God.....

Silent Prayer...

After a few minutes, begin softly singing "SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD"  
and let the group slowly join you as you repeat it twice.

Amen.

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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DAY III. TAPESTRY WEAVING Activity

Prior to this morning's "GATHERING MUSIC" time, remove the round study tables except for the worship center table and place the chairs in a large circle.

For this activity, the worship center table will need to be moved towards the front so that there is ample floor space for those sitting in the large circle which will need to be loosely closed across the front also.

After the singing, bring the skein of yarn, join the circle and share the following:

This yarn will represent our connections with the stories of JONAH and RUTH and our connections with one another...

Threads of God's salvation are woven throughout the story of JONAH. These connections or threads have revealed a picture of God's mercy, justice, will and grace.

Threads of God's nurturing love are woven throughout the story of RUTH and NAOMI. These connections or threads have revealed a picture of God's faithfulness, love, compassion and hope.

In a brief response as the yarn is tossed from person to person in the circle, crossing it at different angles, we will each share how we have felt a connection during our time together with the stories of JONAH or RUTH or NAOMI or ORPAH...

When the yarn is tossed to you, please hold it as you share about the connection you have felt; then hold on to a bit of the yarn with one hand and with the other, toss the skein to someone else in the circle.

Tapestry weaving and sharing.....

PRAYER:

God of Grace and God of Compassion and Redemption,  
we thank you for this time of sharing together as women, woven together while  
on our journeys of faith, as sisters to each other and to Jonah, Naomi, Orpah and Ruth.  
We have sought your wisdom through our studies, prayers and meditations, both in community  
and in the quiet places of our hearts. We praise you for your tender care.  
Help us trust that wherever we are, you are present with us. Help us better understand  
the great web of human relationships that bounds us to one another here and with others in your  
world. Weave us into your grand tapestry of faithful disciples. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SONG: "WEAVE"

If possible, have the group gently carry the yarn weaving and place it over the worship center table which can then be placed back into the center of the circle of chairs.

Re-arrange the table items as needed.

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"

INSTALLATION SERVICE

Preparations: Add to existing worship center (cloth, open Bible, and lit candle, minimum) enough small, colorful jarred candles for out-going and new officers and a small basket filled with a gift bag for each new officers. Each bag should be a clear cellophane or plastic sack tied with a pretty ribbon with a packet of yeast, salt and sugar and a tea bag enclosed.  
(Scripture Tea Bags can be purchased from local Christian bookstore or ordered from: Scripture Tea, Inc., P.O. Box 195524, Winter Springs, FL 32719, if desired.)  
For prepared printed materials (song words, litany, prayer, etc.), please include the graphic from Lesson 7 - "Above and Beyond" Bible study.

SONG: "Sois la Semilla - YOU ARE THE SEED" - TNCH 528, verse 1

SCRIPTURE: RUTH 1: 16 - 19a

Leader: But Ruth said,

Left side: "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you!

Right side: "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

Left side: "Where you die, I will die -- there will I be buried.

Right side: "May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well,  
if even death parts me from you!"

Leader: When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her,  
she said no more to her.

ALL: So the two of them went on until they came to *Bethlehem*  
(which means *House of Bread*).

MEDITATION: "Above and Beyond..."  
by Jo Ann Chance

Sharing from a beautiful prayer poem by Jan L. Richardson in her book, Sacred Journeys:

"Blessed are you, O God,  
who brings forth the bread of faith from the earth.  
Like the yeast by which a bakerwoman leavens the whole loaf,  
our companionship with you passes down from generation to generation.  
Like bread shaped beneath a grandmother's palm  
you sustain us, filling and strong;  
like a loaf broken by a mother's familiar hand,  
you nourish us, tender and warm..." (p. 195)

Naomi and her foreign daughter-in-law, Ruth, were returning to Naomi's homeland, her place of origin, familiar ground, and hopefully a greater sense of security. Ruth was willing to place her trust, her sense of ethnicity and culture and new faith in Naomi and her God. Together they continued on their hard journey. They relied on each other for strength and support. Ruth had declared her love and loyalty. God's steadfast love was with them as well.

Those who have served as leaders this past year have declared their love and loyalty by their service. We want to share our thanks and appreciation for your leadership. May your love and faith be sustained as you continue to let your light shine in service to God.

(Recognize the past officers and present each with the gift of a candle.)

There are also those among us who have agreed to serve in new leadership capacities this coming year. May you serve God, each other and us with the love and loyalty of Naomi and Ruth. We do not ask that you "go" and "lodge" literally with each other, but that you support each other as you use your own gifts in the tasks before you. We do not ask that you "die" and "be buried" in these capacities of service; how dreadful! But we do want you to take care of yourselves - your physical, mental and spiritual health - while you perform the tasks needed. Do not "turn back from" but rely upon, support, and nurture each other, your sisters in Christ.

Think of yourselves as the "bread of faith" that God has created in you.

In preparation for your service, a few things will occur.

Hopefully the pans will be well-greased and floured by our prayerful support of you, so that this will not be a sticky venture.

The oven will be heated, at times hotter than you wish perhaps, so stay focused and as stress-free as humanly possible.

Your ingredients are many.

Eggs remind us of new life, so remember that thinking, "we have always done it that way before," is often deadly; new ideas keep you and us fresh and alive in our service to others.

Oil...ooh! that sounds so fattening! But oil helps make the bread soft and tender and held together, and we need all of that to be present in our worship and work.

Warm water and/or milk helps the ingredients mix together and also creates steam during the baking; a little steam or friction means you are alive and thinking and growing and willing to face challenges. Just remember the milk of human kindness...

Extract, now and then, adds a bit of zip to the mix; keep your creative mind ready and share your flavorful gifts.

The dry ingredients should never get too old and dry, or they become stale, heavy, burdensome and cranky; they need to be fresh as well!

Flour grounds us all in the faith; be sifted with honesty, grace and dependability as you work in Christ's service.

Salt is a flavorful seasoning and preservative; as salt of the earth, use your savourous qualities to help heal wounds and provide hope to those in despair.

Yeast is the leavening which causes the dough to rise; yeast or leaven is necessary to enhance positive influences. Each particle that touches each other particle changes each into its own nature, diffusing power throughout the whole batch. Use the penetrating and diffusing power of the Gospel message as you work, helping others rise to their full potential as gifted and blessed Christians.

Sugar.....ah, sugar! This tasty ingredient is the catalyst for the yeast or leaven; let it sweeten the loaf, affirming and empowering you and those you serve as you share your gifts.

Sometimes herbs or seeds, such as poppy, caraway or sesame, are added; let your hearts plant seeds of encouragement, faith, love, hope and new life in others.

Now you shall be kneaded and shaped for baking. Remember those who have helped shape your lives, taught you wisely and mentored you as you have traveled on your faith journey.

Others "knead" you as mentors, also.

To serve with the warm bread of faith, one needs a friendly cup of tea. Hospitality must always be shared with those already within the group and with those who may feel like the foreigner. Be mindful to bless others with the love and welcoming trust of Naomi and Ruth.

(Ask the new officers to come forward and be recognized each by name and office. Then, asking them as one body, continue.)

Do you accept the office to which you have been called?

If so, answer: "Yes, with the help of God."

Do you, this community of sisters, pledge your support and appreciation for these new officers?

If so, answer: "With God's help, we will serve together."

UNISON PRAYER:

Gracious God, We give thanks for our sisters who have been called to serve in this special ministry. We give thanks for the gifts we each hold and share with one another and use to further your mission and ministry in the world. May we be brought forth as the warm and flavorful bread of faith that you, O God, have planned. May we nurture each other in your service and remember that we are always held tenderly in our God's loving hands. Amen.

(Share with the new officers their gift bags of ingredient-and-hospitality reminders and candles, reminders to let their light also shine.)

SONG: "Sois la Semilla - YOU ARE THE SEED" - TNCH 528, verse 3

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
REATREAT

CLOSING WORSHIP AND COMMUNION SERVICE

Prelude

\*HYMN OF PRAISE "CALLED AS PARTNERS IN CHRIST'S SERVICE" - TNCH 495

\*CALL TO CELEBRATION (from PSALM 95 and PSALM 51)

Leader: O come, let us sing to our God; let us make a joyful noise  
to the rock of our salvation!

ALL: WE COME, O GOD, INTO YOUR PRESENCE WITH THANKSGIVING.

Leader: Bow down and worship the Lord our Creator! Listen to God's voice today!

ALL: YOU ARE SO GREAT, O GOD; WE GIVE YOU PRAISE AND GLORY.

Leader: Create in us a clean heart, O God. Restore to us the joy of your  
salvation and sustain in us a willing spirit.

ALL: HAVE MERCY ON US, O GOD. HELP US TO SPEAK AND GIVE  
YOU PRAISE.

\*INVOCATION (Unison)

GRACIOUS GOD, YOU HAVE BROUGHT US FORTH AND BREATHED INTO US THE  
BREATH OF LIFE. WE KNOW THAT WE DO NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE BUT BY EVERY  
WORD THAT COMES FROM YOU. FEED OUR DEEP HUNGERS WITH THE LIVING BREAD  
THAT YOU GIVE US IN JESUS CHRIST. MAKE US A JOYFUL COMMUNITY OF YOUR  
PEOPLE TO GIVE YOU ALL PRAISE AND HONOR. THIS WE PRAY IN THE NAME OF THE  
ONE WHO TAUGHT US TO PRAY SAYING...

\*LORD'S PRAYER

\*HYMN OF RESPONSE "PRAISE TO GOD" --TNCH 5 (verses 1, 2)

LITANY OF CONFESSION, AFFIRMATION AND CALL

(From "Liturgy of Hope," NCCC, USA p. 35, Women's Prayer Services)

Leader: Keeper and Companion of us all, forgive us.

You call us, like Eve, to co-create new worlds;

But we turn away and backslide into the comfortable or the certain.

ALL: YOU CALL US, LIKE MIRIAM, TO MARCH FOR FREEDOM;

BUT WE TURN AWAY AND GLORY IN HOW FAR WE HAVE COME,  
FORGETTING HOW FAR WE HAVE TO GO.

Leader: You call us, like Huldah, to do justice and love mercy;

But we turn away and practice our passivity, purity and piety  
in domestic spheres.

ALL: YOU CALL US, LIKE DEBORAH, TO JUDGE OUR WORLD,  
TO MAKE DECISIONS AND OFFER COUNSEL;

BUT WE TURN AWAY AND APOLOGIZE FOR OUR ANGER  
AND COMPROMISE OUR POSITIONS.

Leader: You call us, like Mary, to be faithful bearers of your word;  
But we turn away and strive to become perfectionists.

ALL: YOU CALL US, LIKE NAOMI AND RUTH, TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER;  
BUT WE TURN AWAY AND COMPETE, TAKING VENGEANCE  
ON THOSE MOST LIKE OURSELVES...

Leader: Merciful Healer, we do not claim our gifts. We do not face up to  
your call. We do not appreciate your partnership in creating a new  
community and a new world. Today we repent.

ALL: WE TURN FROM OUR OLD WAYS AND COMMIT OURSELVES  
TO NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR HOLDING ON AND TO  
NEW VISIONS FOR A DIFFERENT HEAVEN AND EARTH.

Leader: Through Jesus Christ we have obtained the grace given to Jonah and  
the redemption found by Naomi and Ruth;

ALL: AND WE REJOICE IN OUR HOPE OF SHARING THE GLORY OF GOD.  
AMEN.

RESPONSE "GLORIA, GLORIA" -TNCH 756

PASSING THE PEACE

SONG OF PRAYER "YOU ARE" (Words and Music by Mark C. Unbehagen)  
(Refrain, vs 1, Refrain, vs 2 & 3, Refrain, vs 4 & 5, Refrain)

MORNING PRAYERS

PRAYER RESPONSE "FOR THE FRUIT OF ALL CREATION" -TNCH 425

SCRIPTURES

JONAH 2: 1-2 -- "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish,  
saying, "I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me... "

I PETER 2: 9 -- "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's  
own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who  
called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

I PETER 3: 8-9 -- "...have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender  
heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse;  
but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were  
called -- that you might inherit a blessing."

I PETER 5: 6 - 10 -- "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,  
so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him,  
because God cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert...(Be)

steadfast in your faith...and after...a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you."

MESSAGE "Above and Beyond: Hearing God's Call"

RESPONSE IN PRAYER

Leader: Blessed are you, O God of love, challenge and call;

ALL: WE SEEK THE NOURISHMENT OF BREAD, THE BREAD OF LIFE.

Leader: We seek the full flavor of faithfulness and the sweetness of your grace that we might serve in your name as salt of the earth.

ALL: WE BREAK BREAD AND DRINK OF THE CUP;

Leader: We ask your blessing in the anointment of your Living Water

ALL: WHICH GIVES US STRENGTH TO LISTEN, TO JOURNEY,  
TO SHARE OUR GIFTS, AND TO DANCE THE CALL YOU  
PLACE ON OUR HEARTS.

ANOINTING WITH LIVING WATER

(Pass the bowl of water, anointing the person to your right with the words, "*May you be blessed in your call by Christ's Living Water.*")

SPECIAL MUSIC ("Whither Thou Goest"; "Entreat Me Not to Leave Thee")

RESPONSE IN GIVING

OFFERING

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Creator God, We ask your blessing upon us and these our gifts and offerings. May we and they be used to further your realm on earth, providing healing, help and hope to your people. Amen.

SHARING IN CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

"At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over." (RUTH 2:14)

"Jesus said... 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'" (JOHN 6:35)

Let us gather at the table of God's extravagant welcome, the table of remembrance, the table spread with bread and wine for you and for me, that we might know that our crucified and risen Savior has come to us, shared our common lot and invited us here.

COMMUNION HYMN "I COME WITH JOY" - TNCH 349

PRAYER

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (Unison)

BOUNTIFUL GOD, WE GIVE YOU THANKS THAT YOU HAVE REFRESHED  
US AT YOUR TABLE. STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH, INCREASE OUR LOVE  
FOR ONE ANOTHER, AND SEND US FORTH INTO THE WORLD WITH COURAGE  
AND IN PEACE, REJOICING IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND  
FOLLOWING THE CALL THAT WE HEAR FOR OUR LIVES, TO BE LIVED  
IN YOUR SERVICE. AMEN.

\*HYMN OF RESPONSE TO OUR CALL "SENT FORTH BY GOD'S BLESSING"  
- TNCH 76

\*BENEDICTION

"May you be blessed by the Lord...Do not be afraid..." (RUTH 3:10-11)  
to go above and beyond the call. Go in peace.

“ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD’S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH”  
RETREAT  
GROUP MIXER ACTIVITY

Find different persons who can add their signatures to your sheet for these statements, qualities, etc. Only one signature per person on any one sheet! Happy chatting! : )

1. Play a musical instrument .....
2. Walk, jog or run regularly .....
3. Know how to drive a stick shift .....
4. Have lived in more than 2 states .....
5. Have lived in more than 3 towns in same state .....
6. Have worked in soup kitchen, pantry, etc. ....
7. Love to garden .....
8. Was born in the South .....
9. Love the beach .....
10. Italian food is a favorite .....
11. Live or have lived on a farm or ranch .....
12. Bake bread frequently .....
13. Do cross-stitch, embroidery, needlework, etc. ....
14. Have 4 or more grandchildren .....
15. Love to read, read, read .....
16. Sing in choir/ musical group .....
17. Have been a treasurer of a group .....
18. Like to take notes, write minutes, etc. ....
19. Am a single woman .....
20. Like to “go fishin’ sometimes .....
21. Enjoy playing cards, games .....
22. Hold a women’s fellowship office .....
23. Have attended General Synod .....
24. Love the mountains .....
25. An Honored Lay Woman, national .....

"ABOVE AND BEYOND: HEARING GOD'S CALL IN JONAH AND RUTH"  
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