**Question 1: Why are you interested in this position?**

I have walked the journey with many of our brothers and sisters here in the Diocese of Northern Michigan. It is a walk full of joy and pain. It is a walk full of hope and for me, a journey that has been life giving.

I have to admit that my decision to place my name in to be discerned for the position of Bishop/Ministry developer has been a difficult one. This has not come easy. In fact, I have been struggling for the past year as people in this diocese and beyond have asked me to consider the possibility of having my name come forward. Several bishops have encouraged me to do the same.

I love this diocese and I believe the ministry we share has given me hope but most important it has given me life as we all are called to live out the Gospel and to live out our Baptismal ministry here in this time and place.

What interests me in this position is the style of leadership that we experience here in the diocese. Our leadership is shared and because of it I believe the role of the Bishop will be humane. Our Episcopal Ministry Support Team is already functioning and I see great possibilities for the future of this diocese. We are collaborators in ministry as the first disciples were and because of this collaboration we will see new and exciting happenings as we take our message of inclusivity into our neighborhoods, small towns and cities. It is imperative that this be our message because it is the message of the Gospel. Our Baptismal Covenant calls us to “respect the dignity of every human being” and I believe this message needs to be heard and shared here in the Upper Peninsula as well as with the wider church and the world beyond. If our message continues to be consistent, I believe we will see fruits of this Gospel message shared by our congregations and diocese with a world in need of this healing.

I know that “shared ministry” can be messy. But when hasn’t ministry been messy? We are a community of faithful people living out our Baptismal ministry. Our lives here have changed and will continue to change and evolve beyond our understanding and expectations.

I know the role of the Bishop will be a role that will need to be lived into as we all experience it in a different way. The Bishop will also be a ministry developer and that means the Bishop will be grounded in the diocese. How exciting to have a Bishop that will live and move and have his or her being grounded in shared ministry in a diocese that supports Baptismal ministry. I cannot imagine any other and that is why being a baptized member in this diocese gives me hope and life. I do know that the Bishop will have canonical expectations here in the diocese and beyond and there will be instances that the “buck will have to stop at *the Bishop’s door.*” But I do know that in this diocese we support each other and that includes the person who is chosen to take on the role of Bishop. I cannot imagine anything more exciting then to live out one’s life with the people one cares about and loves while living the Gospel as best we can and sharing it with others.
Question 2: Give examples of your experience with the concept of mutual ministry or give examples of your experience in small or rural congregations. What skills or gifts do you bring to the ministry team?

I believe the following will speak to this topic. I wrote this as a way to prepare myself for the visitor’s weekend that took place in the Diocese of Northern Michigan in May of this year.

I came to this diocese about 20 years ago. Before that time I was a Rector of a congregation in Oklahoma and I served in a Regional cluster arrangement.

As Rector in the congregation in Oklahoma I was immersed in a priest-centered model as was the norm. Ministry was focused on the person in charge and that was ME! I had a finger on the pulse of the congregation. I knew everything that was going on in terms of the life and mission of that congregation. The expectation was that I would do the ministry in that congregation.

When I arrived in the Upper Peninsula I was a companion to four congregations: Manistique, Nahma, Wilson and Gladstone where I shared the ministry. What a difference! Charlie Piper of Iron Mountain was Rector of Holy Trinity and Ministry Developer to Grace Church, Menominee. Tom Lippart was Rector of St. Stephen’s and Ministry Developer of Grace Church, Menominee. These partnership’s have changed as you can imagine over the past 20 years and is changing as we speak.

Today I work with seven congregations and travel to the Eastern Region and other places in the diocese on occasion to offer support and consultation as needed. I just completed a discernment process at St. James in the Soo. Today, Tom Lippart is retired and Charlie Piper is a Ministry Developer along side me in the South Central Region. Charlie is retiring in 2011. I now work in partnership and companionship with all seven congregations of the Region at different levels during this time of transition. This ministry, this church, is alive. It is always morphing, changing into a new and exciting life sustaining and lifegiving organism.

As a ministry developer, I see much of my work and energy spent developing trust and respect. Enabling people (in a good way) to make their own decisions in their life and mission. I give input, sometimes strong input, as congregations struggle to make their own decisions. I am not in charge. I am a companion, a partner with the congregations.

I see myself stretching folks to look at new insights in areas of justice and peace issues, shared ministry, formation, and learning as we continue to evolve in our life together. My role is to engage congregations in ministry and mission. I sit with Covenant groups and Ministry Support Teams and attend as many vestry meetings as I am able. I am in contact with members of each of the congregations on a weekly basis talking with someone from the congregations about preaching, liturgy, learning, better communication, one’s daily ministry, conflicted situations, vestry business and the like.

I see myself as a resource person, teacher, preacher and a person who continues to develop skills for dealing with a variety of congregations and their dynamics. There are times I push people to their limits but in a “gentle way.” There is not always agreement when change is called forth and we struggle and wrestle with it together. A Ministry Developer has to be flexible and I have learned to be “Gumby.” Each congregation is on their own path yet connected to each other as a region and a diocese. Each congregation has their own way of doing things.
and that has to be respected. This doesn’t mean congregations cannot be, or should not be challenged as to how they live out their life and mission.

Now this doesn’t mean that I am not challenged by the people I live with, because I am. There are times that people challenge me and call me on the carpet. Isn’t that wonderful? This is how we live together as we are companions together in this time and place!

Today, I partner with five covenant groups that are currently in formation, and five ministry support teams engaged in the life and ministry of their community and involved in ongoing learning. Some of the congregations are in their fourth generation Covenant Groups/Ministry Support Teams. Charlie is currently working with the covenant groups and ministry support teams in Iron Mountain and Menominee as we continue to transition.

In my role, I have worked closely with and continue to support ongoing initiatives such as Medical Access Coalition that is providing medical care to those who fall between the cracks. The Loan Closet in one community loans out wheel chairs, walkers, shower chairs, and other durable medical equipment to people in need and has applied for Jubilee Ministry status. Two communities provide a hot meal to students and anyone who shows up at Bay College. The numbers fed have climbed to 80-100 people on occasion. There is ongoing preparation and service of food for the Saturday luncheons served at the Salvation Army Facility to those who live on the fringe of our society. Work with youth, has come in many forms ranging from downright fun to encouraging and assisting them in creating U2charists which have been shared across the Diocese. Support has been provided as a community initiated the After School Program and the Reading Buddies in the local schools. Support for work in Haiti, the Alliance Against Violence and Abuse (women’s shelter) is ongoing and the list grows as people in the Region expand their work for justice and peace in their communities and beyond.

As a Ministry Developer I see myself as a link between the diocese and the congregations I companion with in the South Central Region and beyond. Communication is vital and relationships are extremely important in the type of ministry we do here in the Upper Peninsula.

As a member of the Episcopal Ministry Support Team we meet monthly face-to-face as we share apostolic ministry. At other times we meet by phone or email to support the life and mission of this diocese.

On a personal level I have found freedom. I experience my work as life giving. It is energizing. At times, I find I am stretching myself too far, however, I am blessed by others who care enough to call me back to reality. I have many colleagues and friends in this shared ministry and they are spread across the Upper Peninsula in this the Diocese of Northern Michigan. This is an awesome way of living and being church. For me it has been and continues to be life giving. I love what I do and am thankful that God has placed me here.
Question 3: What skills or gifts do you bring to the Team?

It is my hope by reading the above synopsis that the search committee may get a sense of what skills and gifts I would bring to a Team. Below are a few more reflections:

I find myself being flexible as I work with different teams in the Region and Diocese. I do well with group dynamics and can move in and out of different situations easily. As part of a team, I believe collaboration is essential to do the work that I am called to do in a team setting. I am a good listener. My gift is one of being a “catalyst” in making things happen. I am a relational person and that is part of my make-up as I work in a team setting. I work hard to be honest and direct in a “gentle way.” I do have gifts of conflict mediation in working with groups. I will challenge the group to see things from a different perspective, stretching our vision. I expect to be challenged by others as well. I believe in consensus building while working within a team. Coming to consensus is hard work and it is messy at times. But it is essential in making things happen as we do ministry and mission here in the Diocese of Northern Michigan.

Question 4: What areas of weakness or challenges have you identified in yourself?

I want to say upfront that many on the search team already know me and you know many of the challenges that I face as a person. For me, I think the main challenge is my inclination to react to situations immediately. I want to “fix things.” It is part of my personality so I am constantly working on myself to take the time to listen and hear and get a larger picture of any situation that arises and needs to be addressed. I process things “out loud” as well as internally so I am grateful to be part of a team to reflect on issues that come forward and gather input before making a decision. I rarely will make an important decision without input from others. It is not who I am. This does not mean that I cannot make a decision by myself, but when I do make a decision I want to make sure I have all the facts before me.

I also put in long hours and need to be more attentive to my own time for relaxation. It is a priority that I place before me and I have a wife and others in the communities with whom I partner that hold me accountable. We all have busy lives and I think it is a challenge that we all face as we live out our daily lives.

I think for the most part my wife, Sue holds me accountable for areas that I need to work on. She keeps me humble and brings me back to reality when I get too “far out there.” She also supports and encourages me to do those things that give me life.

I do want to mention that the Enneagram has been a source of spiritual and mental health for me. It has made me more self aware of who I am in relation to others, how I function as a person and where the challenges are in my life. It has been life giving to face those challenges. It is not always easy to face myself in who I am as a person. I still find myself discovering things which influence my behavior both positively and negatively. But I work on those challenges as best as I can as a person. I can say without hesitation that I have become more “settled” in my life. That may be my age. But I think it has to do with others who have been honest with me about my personality. I am thankful for this because I don’t think that this honesty would have happened in any other place other then a place where there is an environment of trust, respect and love. One of the blessings of this diocese, this environment of trust, respect and love allows for and supports this kind of introspection and ongoing self work.