In the heart of Africa there lived a precious little girl named Ianu. Ianu loved life and life appeared to love her as well. She displayed the countenance of one who wonders, but is not skeptical; dreams but does not fabricate; and laughs but never sneers.

On this new day Ianu watched her father as he hunted for their dinner. She noticed his stealth and grace as he approached a herd of antelope. Having speared his prey, her father knelt and prayed for its spirit before skinning it. He told Ianu, “God provides the antelope for our dinner, and tonight the antelope will dine with God.”

Back at home she helped her mother who was making a basket. Carefully she wove each reed so that the basket was not just a container, but also a seamless circle of recurring patterns which told a story. Her mother explained, “Weaving a basket is hard work, but the story gives the basket life, and makes it more than just a container. So, the work does not seem burdensome.”

Later that day Ianu visited the village high priest who was grinding berries in a small bowl. “Are you preparing dinner?” questioned the naive child. “No, I am grinding these dried berries to mix with roots and water in order to have paint to color our faces for a ceremony we will be having soon. Berries, like many other gifts from nature, serve us in several ways.”
That night, as the village settled in for gentle conversation around a communal fire, the elders heard a strange noise. They followed the sound through the thicket to the edge of a clearing. Uncertain of the source of the strange sound, they approached the clearing in silence.

What they beheld made them stop in awe. Close to a small fire, Ianu was dancing around the skull of the antelope. The skull lay in one of her mother’s baskets and the pattern of the basket was replicated on Ianu’s legs and arms and face and also on the head of the animal.

After watching the small child dance for a while, the chief of the tribe asked, “Who taught this child to dance?” At first no one responded. Then her father said, “I taught her about the spirit of the antelope.” And her mother said, “It was I who spoke to her of the story baskets.” And lastly, the high priest acknowledged his instruction about the berries. “But,” the father asserted, “We still have not found the person who taught my daughter to dance.”

The wise chief smiled before congratulating his people. “As legend foretold, it has taken our whole village to educate this child. Each of you has been a muse, teaching her an important lesson about life. One of you taught her to respect God’s life in all of creation; another to find meaning in the story of her life; and yet another to seek and celebrate life’s mysteries. To these teachings the child has brought the inner rhythms of her own soul and she has found that dancing will always be her way of exalting the gift of life.”

It Follows: Now and then, it takes a child to teach a whole village.

Ianu’s father taught her to reverence with gratitude the antelope when he said, “God provides the antelope for our dinner, and tonight the antelope will dine with God.” Greek theologians in the early Church described the dynamic in the Trinity as dancing—saying that God’s love is so full that it can't stay still. Some of these Fathers of the
Church even said that God's love was so great that it had to break forth. Creation itself, they say, is nothing but God's love looking for more things to love. God wanted to come down and swoop up all of creation into the dance of love. And that's why God became one of us.

The Greek fathers tell us that the Trinity's dance of love became a dance between the human and the divine in Jesus. Through Jesus that dance is extended to all of us! We are invited to dance a love song.

We have the opportunity to share fully in the dance of the Trinity. Just as the antelope becomes our dinner and the antelope dines with God, in Eucharist we eat of the Body of Christ, who also dines with God. As accompany your students in discovering, naming and honoring the presence of God in their lives, you will be teaching them to dance this love song with God.

Ianu's mother showed her how to find meaning by weaving her story into the seamless circle of life stories. American dancer and choreographer, Jaques D'ambroise: "Dance is your pulse, your heartbeat, your breathing. It's the rhythm of your life." You will help your students discover meaning in their lives by showing them the recurring patterns of faith in their stories. By helping them to find lasting meaning, you will teach them to dance the rhythm of their lives from deep within themselves.

American modern dance pioneer, Ruth St. Denis: "I see dance being used as communication between body and soul, to express what is too deep for words." As you help your students weave their faith stories into the seamless circle of life stories, they will communicate with the mysteries of God that are too deep for words. And in doing so, you will be teaching them to dance between heaven and earth. In the Old Testament, Zephaniah 3:17 says, "God will rejoice over you with singing."
The Hebrew word joy in this passage literally means "to become excited to the point of dancing in a whirlwind." A more literal translation of this passage is, “God danced because of you.” Your stories will intertwine with your students as you accompany them this year. They will experience God’s loving presence through you, and I hope you will also experience God through them - a God who dances for joy because of each one of you.

The village high priest taught Ianu how to celebrate the mystery of God. Spiritual writer, Joyce Rupp: “Prayer is a time to dance with our Divine Partner, to let God take the lead, and to enjoy the true delight and source of life that God is for us.” As you accompany your students into a prayerful relationship with God, and as you teach them to trust and delight in the mystery of God – you will teach them to dance with the source of life.

Accompanying students on their faith journeys, and being a part of the dance of Catechesis is risky. This year in particular we are choreographing the dance even as we are trying to dance it. And it could very well change direction instantly. It is highly likely, that some of our fears of slipping or falling flat will actually play out. And then again, maybe some of our anxieties are unfounded. It is also possible that there is a list of things that will happen that we don’t even realize we need to be worried about. There is so much uncertainty in our lives today.

Surrendering to God’s invitation to dance as a catechist makes you very vulnerable. It will be very rare, if we don’t have a student who will test our leadership and our patience. Students have a sixth sense about our authenticity, and they are judging our words by how we live them. Students need us to be totally open to their questions, even as too many of their questions don’t have answers. They are also skilled at asking the very questions that we are wrestling with the most. The most dangerous aspect of this is
that with all of their testing and questioning, they crawl into a special place in our hearts and we find ourselves connecting with them on a very intimate level. The risk of letting God take the lead, is that God often sets a very fast pace with very intricate dance steps.

The older I get the more I realize that God must have a good laugh at our attempts at organization and structure. Too often God seems to send people to us at the messiest times in their lives, and at the most inconvenient times in ours. There are usually more exceptions to the rule, than people who fit our norms. One of the most valuable pieces of advice that I got in my early days of ministry was, “The only certain thing about ministry is that it will change.”

Sometimes, I think God sees us trying to juggle all the pieces on our own, or trying to figure out the next logical step, and purposely picks us up and twirls us in a new direction. It often seems like God plans spills and collisions on the dance floor just to keep us flexible, creative, and aware. It certainly feels like that this year.

**DANCING WITH GOD**

*When I meditated on the word Guidance,*

I kept seeing "dance" at the end of the word. I remember reading that doing God's will is a lot like dancing. *When two people try to lead, nothing feels right. The movement doesn't flow with the music, and everything is quite uncomfortable and jerky.*

*When one person realizes that, and lets the other lead,*

both bodies begin to flow with the music.
It's as if two become one body, moving beautifully.

The dance takes surrender, willingness,
and attentiveness from one person
and gentle guidance and skill from the other.

My eyes drew back to the word Guidance.

When I saw "G: I thought of God, followed by "u" and "i".

"God, "u" and "i" dance."

God, you, and I dance.

As I lowered my head, I became willing to trust
that I would get guidance about my life.

Once again, I became willing to let God lead.

Let us pray:

Lord of the Dance, we give you thanks for the opportunity to dance with the stars this year; to create new songs with them composed of both laughter and tears; and to teach each other about your dance of love.

Blessed by this experience, may we be more flexible in our expectations; more trusting of your creative energy; and more attuned to the wonder of your Spirit. We ask this in the name of the Trinity, who dances a love song forever and ever.

Amen.