

LITURGY,
MUSIC,
PREACHING,
AND THE ARTS

Call to Worship



Volume 57.2
Beyond the Walls

Explore New Adult Choral for Fall and Christmas 2023!



CELEBRATING
GRACE



(877) 550-7707

www.celebrating-grace.com

Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Volume 57.2
Beyond the Walls



Published by the Office of Theology and Worship
of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
The official journal of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians

Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music* (1971–2000) and *Reformed Liturgics* (1963–69), *Call to Worship* seeks to further the church's commitment to theological integrity, corporate worship, and excellence in music, preaching, and other liturgical art forms.

Editor: Sally Ann McKinsey

Theology, Formation, and Evangelism
Ray G. Jones III, Director
Rev. Carlton David Johnson, Associate Director

Address editorial and advertising correspondence, materials for review, and unsolicited manuscripts to:
Sally Ann McKinsey
Editor, *Call to Worship*
Phone: (803) 640-5525
E-mail: sallyann.mckinsey@pcusa.org

Send change of address and subscription requests by phone or email to:
Presbyterian Publishing Corporation
(800) 533-4371; customer_service@presbypub.com
or subscribe online: pcusastore.com
(search for *Call to Worship*)

PAM members should submit change of address via:
E-mail: pam@pcusa.org
Phone: (888) 728-7228, ext. 5288

PDS# 21162-23-002

© 2023 Office of Theology and Worship
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

All rights reserved. Brief portions of this publication may be used without permission for one-time use for worship or educational purposes, or as part of an order of service for use by a congregation. Any other use of material in this publication requires permission in writing from the publisher. For permission information, contact Sally Ann McKinsey, (803) 640-5525, sallyann.mckinsey@pcusa.org.

Every effort has been made to trace copyrights on the materials included in this journal. If any copyrighted material has nevertheless been included without permission and due acknowledgment, proper credit will be inserted in the next issue and in future printings of this issue after notice has been received.

Art appearing on pages vi, 10, 34, 49, 60, 65, 68, 75, and 78 of this publication is by artist Nicole Salimbene (www.nicolesalimbene.com). Used with permission with all rights reserved.

Front cover: Nicole Salimbene, *Contemplating Water*. Used with permission; also found on page 10.

Back cover: Poor People's Campaign co-chair the Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis (left) leads a protest with the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins of the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness (immediately left of her) and others in Washington, D.C. (Photo courtesy of the Office of Public Witness)

Indexed with abstract in Religion Index One: Periodicals, American Theological Library Association; available online through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Services) and DIALOG; by Music Article Guide and by Religious and Theological Abstracts. This publication is available in microfilm from ProQuest.

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, a product of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Drive, Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606; e-mail: atla@atla.com; online at atla.com.

Presbyterian Association of Musicians
PAM National Office
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202-1396
Phone: (502) 569-5288
Fax: (502) 569-8465
Web: presbysmusic.org

Kelly Abraham, Executive Director
kelly.abraham@pcusa.org
Lisa Myers, Event Coordinator
Bill Davis, Development Manager
Jackson Campbell, Communications Specialist
Sandra McDonald, Grants Specialist
Abigail Lutz, Young Adult Volunteer

PAM Executive Board 2023-24

Mark Kemp, President	Emily Floyd, President-elect
Elizabeth Parler, Secretary	Eric Vandermeijden, Treasurer
Kimber-lee Adams	Colleen Chinen
Mitchell Crawford	Kaitlyn Davros
Brian Lew	Adam Ward

Call to Worship

Beyond the Walls

Volume 57.2

Contents

Introduction	v
<i>Sally Ann McKinsey</i>	

Feature Articles

Worship as Protest; Protest as Worship	2
<i>Jimmie Hawkins</i>	

Toward a Liturgy of the Wild	11
<i>Victoria Looz</i>	

Building a House with Song	17
<i>Dónal P. Noonan</i>	

Make No Thing Happen: Making Liturgy through Poetry	21
<i>Andrew Taylor-Troutman</i>	

Attention Is the Beginning of Devotion: Museums and Liturgical Space in the Digital Age	26
<i>Hannah McKnight</i>	

The Work of Our Hands: The Hue of the Sacred Meets the Tangible: Site Specific Art and Transcendence	35
<i>Olga Lah</i>	

Somebody Is Listening: Music as a Gesture to God of Rest and Repentance	43
<i>Julian Davis Reid</i>	

Spiritual Formation in Choir Rehearsals	50
<i>Michael Waschevski</i>	

Gathering among Fairy Lights and Other Hallowed Honors: A Conversation with Michael McLaughlin	54
<i>Michael McLaughlin and Sally Ann McKinsey</i>	

Ideas

- A Litany for the Blessing of the Animals 59
Lindy Vogado
- Celebration of Communion outside of the Sanctuary 61
Marilyn McKelvey Tucker-Marek

Columns

- On Liturgy: Seeing Life through the Eyes of Liturgy..... 67
Derrick McQueen
- On Music: Wood and Wind: Worshipful Music Welcoming All God's Children..... 69
Amy Cerniglia
- On Preaching: Worship and Preaching outside the Sanctuary Walls through Digital Mediations... 71
Lis Valle-Ruiz
- On the Arts: The Liturgical Logic in the Art of Theaster Gates 73
Maria Fee

Book Reviews

- Silence in the Playroom: Two Children's Book Reviews 77
Luli and the Language of Tea, Andrea Wang
Quiet Time with My Seeya, Dinalie Dabarera
Reviews by Miriam Moore-Keish

About the Art throughout the Issue

As a visual/installation artist working at the intersection of poetics, psychology, environmentalism, and contemplative practice, Nicole Salimbene aims to provoke self-inquiry and relationality toward deeper understandings of a shared spiritual ecology in her art. Nicole invites viewers to enter contemplative spaces and to engage questions that arise from the wrestling of internal and external worlds. Her inquiry-based work has asked participants to sit, to settle into themselves, and to reflect on matters of the heart, spirit, and nature. She is interested in the questions that arise in the spaces between being, making, and transforming: How does devotion instigate change? How do we mend or make reparations? What is the role of empathy in art making? How do we cross the bridges between ourselves and within ourselves, between the seen and the unseen? What awareness grows as we understand how we are holding and beholding our animate world?

Introduction

Sally Ann McKinsey

At almost every entrance to a church building, wayfinding signs point to “The Sanctuary.” This is appropriate, of course, because the specific location of this room in the building matters. The four walls of the sanctuary hold and define the movements of the congregation within them as holy, physically set apart from normal comings and goings, sacred. The explorations found in this journal through the years have often carried with them an assumption that we are talking about what happens in *The Sanctuary*, the space for worship in our church buildings.

But what about liturgy that happens in *sanctuaries*, places of holy experience outside of the place many have come to expect as locations for worship? Where else can we recognize whispers (both great and small) of the patterns and language we learn when we gather in the sanctuary on Sundays? For we also gather among the oaks, under fairy lights, up and down city streets, in choir rooms and amphitheaters, online, in galleries, studios, and libraries. In these places, too, we may listen and tell, repeat familiar refrains, and bask in mystery.

What blessings and charges do we receive or offer outside the four walls of the sanctuary? What does it mean to gather, to listen and proclaim, to praise and lament, and to give and receive? The articles in this issue explore what happens in spaces set apart from our culminating weekly pattern, on the other side of the boundaries we may draw around what we consider worship. The conversations found here wonder what these occasions can teach us about what it means to be oriented toward God in our midst. They cause us to step outside the church doors and come close to a definition of liturgy that may be more malleable than we have known before. It is a definition of liturgy that may help form and transform the way we think about the Lord's Day as we traverse increasingly permeable membranes between sacred and secular, religious and not religious.

I am grateful for the conversation partners in this issue who have shared their writing, research,

and expertise. Jimmie Hawkins writes about the relationship between worship and protest from the history of civil rights advocacy to contemporary work for justice and peace, and Victoria Looz outlines the theology that led her to explore worship immersed in the natural world. Andrew Taylor-Troutman reflects on the connections between poetry, liturgy, and pastoral presence as he shares his experience leading a poetry reading group, and Michael Waschevski invites us to consider the choir rehearsal space as a context for worship and spiritual formation. Dónal Noonan's reflection about his experience leading the Homeward Choir of Atlanta also considers what happens when music and community life meet, asking questions about what it means to find shelter in song while advocating together for just housing and social repair. A conversation with Michael McLaughlin uncovers the sacred invitations pastors often receive to be part of people's lives in unique moments of joy and sorrow.

The arts play a vital role in the conversation about liturgy outside the walls of the sanctuary, for, of course, the music and art we participate in on Sunday morning is always in relationship with music and art in other cultural contexts. Hannah McKnight's investigation of cultural liturgies in museums gives space to consider art galleries as institutions parallel to churches. Her analysis of the social and devotional role museums play in community life holds valuable implications for worship as well and helps build a broad definition of liturgy from a new perspective. Julian Davis Reid outlines a theology of jazz, analyzing the event of a music performance as an invitation to experience the mystery of the divine in contexts outside of Lord's Day worship. The Work of Our Hands section in this edition features the work and writing of artist Olga Lah, whose practice teaches us valuable lessons about site specificity that are relevant for leading worship as well. Columnists for this volume are Maria Fee, Amy Cerniglia, Lis Valle-Ruiz, and

Derrick McQueen, each of whom engages this issue's theme from their respective disciplines. Miriam Moore-Keish reviews two children's books with a keen sense for the role that children's literature can serve in corporate worship and sermon preparation.

As the church continues to discern its place in a rapidly changing world, listening for God, seeking purpose, and making meaning, what can we learn from the experiences in all the sanctuaries among the oaks, under fairy lights, up and down city streets, in choir rooms and amphitheatres, online,

and in galleries? Authors in this issue bring an abundance of apt and diverse language to describe liturgies "out in the world." Some call them cultural liturgies, whispers from the Divine, or hallowed honors. However you define worship outside of the church walls, I hope you enjoy asking these questions in your own context and from your own experience.

—Sally Ann McKinsey,
Editor



Contemplating Water, 2015.

Nicole Salimbene

Installation view at the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, Washington, DC.

Test-tubes, water, wood, meditation cushions. 7 ft. x 15 in. x 3 in.

Despite sitting in busy spaces such as the National Arboretum on a Sunday afternoon, the center of an art exhibition on opening night, or the Reflection Pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial, participants were able to focus their minds and to engage in far-ranging reflections on their relationship to water and water issues around the world.

Call to Worship

Feature Articles

Worship as Protest; Protest as Worship

Jimmie Hawkins

Christian worship stands at the heart of church life. It is the public veneration of God through proclamation of the gospel of Christ Jesus. Its declared mission is to spread the Christian faith to the ends of the earth in fulfillment of Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between worship and public protest. Two sections explore the recent evolution of Christian theology from a mission of evangelism to ecclesial advocacy. The first details the evolution of worship from Sunday proclamation to an embrace of protest as a spiritual discipline. The second section categorizes the church's levels of activism.

From Evangelism to Protest

The church is currently engaged in a reevaluation of what it means to worship God in relation to its traditional mission. Worship and protest share an interlocking relationship as the church's prophetic voice becomes indistinguishable from community activism. Jesus has always been priest, prophet, and king. But his identity as prophet has rarely maintained equal status. Historically, service in the form of charity manifested the church's mission to help the poor. But it has rarely translated into a call for justice advocacy to confront the sins of systemic and structural injustice. This failure became problematic because regardless of how much help was provided, charity was inadequate to meet the totality of human need as systems prevented persons from full utilization of communal resources. Today more and more Christians have turned to advocacy to fulfill Christian mission. They are motivated by their faith

in a God of justice who demands service to those labeled by Jesus as the "least of these."

Theologians have long affirmed a connection between faith and justice advocacy, even as it relates to protest. The Latin word *protestar* means "to declare a public testimony, to bear witness." Johan Cilliers defined worship as a form of protest. Nico Koopman, a public theology scholar, proposed a linguistic link between worship and protest. Jürgen Moltmann affirmed that all "Christian theology is public theology, for it is the theology of the kingdom of God. . . . [I]t must engage with the political, cultural, educational, economic, and ecological spheres of life, not just with the private and ecclesial spheres."¹ Theologian Shirley C. Guthrie in *Christian Doctrine* connected the faith of a Christian with awareness that others lack the benefits they enjoy.

Truly spiritual people] are recognized not just by how much they pray but by how much they pray for the world. They are recognized not just by how much they 'praise the Lord' for what 'the Lord has done for me' but by how sensitive their praise makes them to the needs and hurts of other people and the protection of the natural environment in which they live. They are recognized not just by how much they read the Bible, but by how their Bible reading influences their business practices, political commitments, and social relationships.²

A reexamination of justice-oriented Scriptures concentrating on the prophets and the teachings of Jesus have helped redefined the mission of today's church. Dean Tanya Smith Brice of Benedict College

Jimmie Hawkins is the advocacy director for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for two offices, the Washington Office of Public Witness and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations.

commented, “I think that Christians should . . . use the words of the prophets, from our sacred biblical texts, as support for what we do, as our voice against injustice.”³ Jesus announced in his first public sermon his call to proclaim God’s good news for the poor (Luke 4:18). He criticized religious leaders for failing to realize that custom was of secondary importance to God; justice was the weightier matter (Matt. 23:23). Fan favorite texts are Matthew 25 and James 2, which assure us that faith must be accompanied by works. Welcome for undocumented migrants is grounded in the call to “treat the alien among you as native born” (Lev. 19:34) and to “show hospitality to strangers” (Heb. 13:2). The prophet Micah (6:6–8) answered the question “What does the Lord require of you?” with “justice, kindness, and humility.” Isaiah 58 illustrates the ire of a God who warns any who hypocritically claim to worship God yet who neglect the poor.

For many, being a Christian involves societal engagement. Over the centuries mission has evolved from charity to advocacy to protest. Today we observe an interconnectedness between faith and protest so intimate that each has entered the other’s sphere. Worship extends beyond the church sanctuary as protest utilizes many of the elements of Christian worship. Pastor Amy Yoder McGloughlin observed,

Worship is more than the gathered community engaged in liturgy in a house of worship. It is not bound by a worship order, perfect words, or carefully orchestrated singing. . . . Liturgy flows through the chants and rallying songs. . . . Worship is in the streets, walking in solidarity, crying out for liberation, praying with our feet. . . . And in the chaos of protest, God is present⁴

Actions are interchangeable with noticeable similarities between what occurs during Sunday morning services and protest rallies. The assembled crowd becomes a congregation gathered in the presence of a just God, and city streets are transformed into sanctuaries. Leaders use laments, calls for repentance, and speeches that become sermons in everything but name. Call and response is exchanged with street protesters as if they were in church pews. In church and on the streets, prayers plea for the eradication of racism, homophobia, poverty, and militarism. Litanies endorse the necessity of healthcare, gun safety, voting rights, and a living

wage. Sunday services demand justice with similar language heard in rallies. First Presbyterian Church, Durham, North Carolina, printed in its bulletin this Affirmation of Faith: “I believe in Jesus Christ, who came to heal us, and to free us from all forms of oppression. I believe in the community of faith which is called to be at the service of all people.” Marching has long been associated with praying. Martin Luther King Jr. called Rabbi Abraham Joshua Herschel “his rabbi” due to his ardent support of the Civil Rights Movement, marching arm in arm with King. Upon returning to his synagogue from Alabama in 1965, Herschel was asked if he took time to pray while down South. He responded, “I prayed with my feet.”⁵

The Black church has a long history of conflating worship and protest. Not only are Blacks exposed to the insertion of justice advocacy in worship, but many affirm its appropriateness. Pew Research revealed that 62 percent of Black Americans state a preference for churches to address social justice issues from the pulpit, and 23 percent labeled it as “essential.” Only 38 percent of whites agree that the church should address issues of justice, with as many as 42 percent disagreeing. Only 8 percent see it as “essential.” Almost half (53 percent) of Hispanics think that the church should speak to issues in the community.⁶ Rev. Shannon Craigo-Snell remarked of a worship service at a Black church, “That worship service was a Black Lives Matter protest.”⁷

Music serves as a connector between worship and protest as much of the music of the Civil Rights Movement came out of the Black church. The hymn “I’ll Overcome Someday” morphed into “We Shall Overcome.” The *Washington Informer* reported

African American spirituals, gospel, and folk music all played an important role in the Civil Rights Movement . . . to motivate them through long marches, for psychological strength against harassment and brutality, and sometimes to simply pass the time when waiting for something to happen.⁸

Mahalia Jackson described how singing inspired protesters.

Now all through the South the Negroes are singing. They sang while they were put in jail by the hundreds and sometimes the power of their music was so great that the white guards began singing right along with them.

They sing in churches and in mass meetings while deputies and sheriffs go around taking names and white gangs burn up their cars.⁹

Categories of Protest

Five categories of Christian activism provide a history of participation in protest. They are Otherworldly Protest, Law-and-Order Protest, Worship Protest, Pious Protest, and Prophetic Protest. The Christian faith evolved from rejecting to embracing protest. Otherworldly and law and order Christians initially resisted, insisting that the church was a spiritual institution that abstained from worldly protest. Worship, pious, and prophetic worship describe the roles Christian activists have played increasingly becoming more active in protest.

Otherworldly Protest. For centuries the Christian church resisted the adoption of an ideology that compelled Christians to participate in outward societal protest through actions or doctrine. The world's transformation into a just community was not in the purview of a church aligned with a purely spiritual mission, to claim the world for Christ Jesus. Social reform would be achieved by individual regeneration due to evangelistic missions that led to individual conversion. Its protest against injustice was through the redemption of individuals who would live just lives. Injustice must be expected in an evil, sinful world, and the path to a just society was by the destruction of one's sinful nature. But many would admit that sin was an impossibility for human will to overcome. God will establish God's justice at the eschatological day of judgment when God restores creation to its original state of paradise. Ronald White and Howard Hopkins in *The Social Gospel* wrote of the dominancy of this teaching prior to the Social Gospel Movement.

[Before 1842] the evangelists' preoccupation with personal religious experience could nurture an exclusively spiritual faith. Their chief concern was to prepare people for another world, and their most earnest prayer was for a miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit which would break the shackles of human sin. Opposition to social evil was often only an occasional skirmish in their war on personal wickedness. Charles G Finley, though always an abolitionist, believed his first work was to save souls [and] not free slaves.¹⁰

It must be noted that not every endorser of otherworldly protest was impotent. Slave preachers often had visions of heaven that motivated them to act within their lifetime. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya wrote of the otherworldly visions of slave preachers and abolitionists that resulted in insurrectionist revolts to abolish slavery.

[T]he otherworldly orientation of mysticism, accompanied by apocalyptic vision and eschatological beliefs, can have profound revolutionary this-worldly effects. The mystical prophets such as Nat Turner and John Brown foresaw in their apocalyptic visions that the system of slavery could only be overturned by violent means. . . . The Old Testament narratives of Exodus and the prophets and the New Testament apocalypse were for them compelling signals of God's concern for their freedom.¹¹

Divergent voices objected to this interpretation of the church's mission as purely otherworldly. Presbyterian scholar Ernest Trice Thompson wrote of Presbyterians, "It was perhaps unfortunate that the churches with the best trained ministry were the least able to meet the needs of the common man. The Methodist congregations included the underprivileged, the uneducated, and uncultured, to whom the Presbyterian minister made little or no appeal." He concluded, however, "The church must also be concerned with an increased community outreach. In addition, its own welfare is bound up with the welfare of the community. It should, therefore, emphasize the need for a better social and economic life for the community. . . ."¹² Martin Luther King Jr., in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," bemoaned,

In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churches stand on the sideline and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, 'Those are social issues with which the Gospel has no real concern,' and I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely other-worldly religion which made a strange distinction between body and soul, the sacred and the secular.¹³

Law-and-Order Protest. For centuries denominations, influential congregations, and theologians were reluctant to challenge injustices in society from a scriptural mandate to obey governing authorities.¹⁴ Mainline denominations rejected a call to advocacy and prohibited protest against earthly powers and principalities. Church leadership endorsed as biblical the authority of governments, entrepreneurs, and political leaders to be obeyed. Christians must maintain a separation of church and state and obey all human laws that were given by God. Rather than confront members, political authorities, family, or friends, they acquiesced and were silent in the face of discrimination. Many endorsed white supremacy and wrote thesis and doctrinal statements in support of slavery, xenophobia, and misogyny.

Law and order adherents have a desire for systemic change, but by working within the system. Black Baptists underwent a tumultuous breakup when Martin Luther King Jr. split from the National Baptist Convention (NBC) to establish the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) in 1961. He took over half a million members with him. The fraction centered around the tactics of protest as NBC promoted education and job training over marching. NBC president Joseph H. Jackson affirmed the legitimacy of protest but stressed that advancement must also be sought from working within the system.

The National Baptist Convention is by origin, structure, and mission, a strictly religious body; but it is a religious body with concerns that relate it to human suffering, human needs, and human aspirations. Therefore, it is by nature related to the civil rights struggle. . . . Protest has its place in our racial struggle, but we must go from protest to production.¹⁵

Others oppose unwavering support of state actions that are in direct conflict with obedience to the Word of God and God's will for humanity. In Nazi Germany churches complied with an endorsement of the nationalist policies of the Third Reich. Nazi flags were placed in sanctuaries as ministers preached sermons declaring divine sanction for the actions of the regime. Despite societal pressure, Confessing Churches refused to endorse the racist doctrines promoted by the government. The 1934 Barmen Declaration declared,

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him. . . . We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the State should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfil the vocation of the Church as well. We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the Church should and could take on the nature, tasks and dignity which belong to the State and thus become itself an organ of the State.¹⁶

The South African Dutch Reformed Church was firm in its theological support of the racial segregation policy of apartheid. It did not reverse course until the late 1980s when it offered an apology for past legitimization of racial discrimination. In 1986, Church moderator Nelus van Rensburg acknowledged the church's role in maintaining the system and pledged to help to restructure the nation. "We were very much complicit in propping up Apartheid. We provided the theological base for Apartheid."¹⁷

Worship Protest. A more modern interpretation defines the act of worship itself as protest. This ideology stresses that God's justice is best sought within the confines of the church, not on city streets. Christians are called to resist evil, but it can only be done faithfully during a worship service. The fact that Jesus is Lord empowers the church as the funneling channel to beseech God's intervention. Brian Owens, a member of Ferguson Heights Church of Christ, told the *Christian Chronicle*,

Worship is our protest. . . . We are not surprised by the lawlessness of man, the arrogance of politics, the irresponsibility of the media, the dishonesty of religious leaders, the false teaching of self-proclaimed modern prophets or the inability of government to bring justice, fairness, equality, and peace to this world. Because, after all, it's the same system that crucified the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. . . . When the church gathers on Sunday morning, what we have is a protest meeting, a gathering of those who simply will not put up with the arrogant claims of the world anymore. . . . Make no mistake: praise is protest. If it is not protest, it is not praise.¹⁸

Bishop Amos, while outraged at the George Floyd murder, maintains that true protest only occurs on Sunday morning. “God calls His people to stand for justice. One of the strongest weapons in that fight is worship. Our worship could be our protest.”¹⁹ Adam Kurihara wrote in *Seedbed* that marches are fine and other aspects of protest can be quite powerful, but Christians must never forget that God is active in and through the church. The most effective way to bring about change is before the throne of the creator of heaven and earth.

Let’s remember what worship is. Worship is not just singing songs and hearing sermons, though those are the forms our worship often takes. Worship is not just praying together or receiving communion, though these forms are good and remind us of our union with each other and with Christ. Worship is ultimately a protest against evil, sin, and death. When we worship, we bring our weary, desperate souls together in solidarity as we long for justice, peace, and life. It is a protest infinitely more important than any earthly cause, because, while we don’t know the timing, we do know the outcome. God has told us.²⁰

Pious Protest. Activist Christians who participate in protest according to a strict interpretation of Scripture (biblical literacy) and dogmatic church teachings fall into this category. Protest is done in support of politically conservative issues, primarily abortion, homosexuality, and recently, religious freedom. Christian progressives and secular nonprofits are criticized for being on the misguided path of wokeness and are more akin to secular humanists than people of faith. Adherents find great appeal in Christian nationalism and white Christian Nationalism, approving of its definition that America is a Christian nation governed by Christian principles. A major element in its mission is the erasure of the doctrine of separation of church and state.²¹ American exceptionalism is upheld at rallies and in speeches and statements. America is favored by God but has lost its way. Almost any action is permissible to bring the country back into a right relationship with God—for some, even violence. At the January 6 Capitol insurrection men carried crosses, Bibles, and signs reading “Jesus Saves.” A line was formed as rioters pressed their foreheads to a giant cross to pray as others laid hands

on them as they did so. A woman holding a portrait of a white Jesus wearing a MAGA hat paraded the grounds.²² *Sojourners Magazine* critiqued Christian Nationalism: “These events work to further a white supremacist evangelical theology, which emphasizes individualism, claims a monopoly on morality, and demonizes those who oppose it. White supremacist evangelical theology is concerned with maintaining white power and privilege.”²³

Protest rallies voiced approval of the Supreme Court ruling in *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* as a victory for God and religious freedom. The ruling favored Jack Phillips, a Christian business owner who refused service to a gay couple that wanted him to bake a wedding cake for their same-sex ceremony. He stated before the decision, “I’m being forced to use my creativity, my talents, and my art for an event—a significant religious event—that violates my religious faith. . . . Because of my faith, I believe the Bible teaches clearly that it’s a man and a woman.”²⁴

During the COVID-19 pandemic Rev. Sean Feucht traveled the country protesting the nationwide shutdown of houses of worship by organizing “worship protests.”²⁵ He criticized Black Lives Matter as “violent, destructive, and in opposition to Christianity.” He claimed that his events produced “genuine racial reconciliation.” He complained in *The Federalist*, “While followers of Jesus are being told we cannot worship in public spaces, violent, paid rioters are taking over our streets and being given license to occupy and destroy entire sections of our cities. Churches are being covered in graffiti and even burned while civic leaders call for defunding the police.” In December 2019, he and other leaders went to the White House where he prayed for Donald Trump. He tweeted, “When the President of the United States invites you inside the White House to worship and pray, YOU DO IT.”²⁶

Prophetic Protest. Christian activists link protest with discipleship and utilize Scripture as justification for support of progressive policies. The God of the Bible calls the church to speak a prophetic word to the world and calls Christians to God’s work of liberation. The Word must be expressed well beyond the church and cannot be contained within traditional worship spaces. It must be applied in the communities where lives are being disrupted by injustice, violence, and discrimination. Quaker abolitionist activism dates back to the 1600s and continued till the institution was eliminated. There

was a total commitment to ending slavery. In 1776 leadership prohibited slaveholding by members. After the country gained its independence, Quakers lobbied Congress with petitions to outlaw slavery throughout the new nation in 1790. They were conductors in the Underground Railroad, transported the enslaved, and hid runaways in their homes and churches. According to PBS, "As a primary Quaker belief is that all human beings are equal and worthy of respect, the fight for human rights has also extended to many other areas of society."²⁷

The Black church's early existence was one of duality as faith and activism were two sides of the same coin. It ambidextrously showcased a docile facial appearance that masqueraded a rebellious spirit.

The Black church's early existence was one of duality as faith and activism were two sides of the same coin. It ambidextrously showcased a docile facial appearance that masqueraded a rebellious spirit. While outwardly worshipping a God of unconditional love, it embraced a theology of rebellion. The enslaved worshipped in an "invisible institution" where churches served as worship locations and provided sanctuary for runaways. Spirituals communicated lyrics of faith and coded communiques for the ears of the enslaved. Slave preachers carried two sermons: a submissive message for whites and one of equality for Blacks. Secretly they proclaimed that the same God who delivered the Hebrew slaves would set them free. Frederick Douglass was a lay preacher and abolitionist. He utilized Scripture, music, and sermon utterances in his speeches. Whether he spoke on Sunday morning or gave a public presentation, his messages were filled with biblical justifications for his abolitionist messages. His biographer, David Bright, wrote that one of Douglass's favorite illustrations was his "Slaveholder's Sermon." In it he mocked a Methodist minister who preached to convince the enslaved of the scriptural mandate of obedience. Crowds would shout for the story in which he used irony to illustrate the hypocrisy of slavery.

In America Bibles and slaveholders go hand in hand. The church and the slave prison stand together, and while you hear the chanting of psalms in one, you hear the clanking of chains in the other. The man who wields the cowhide during the week, fills the pulpit on Sunday. . . . The man who whipped me in the week used to . . . show me the way of life on the Sabbath.²⁸

Black ministers serve as leaders of congregations and at the same time as justice activists. In their minds, there is absolutely no distinction, as both roles are in service to God and community. Even today, across America local NAACP leaders are clergy from community congregations. Rev. Michael Thurman declared in an interview for PBS's *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly* that being a pastor was equivalent to being a civil rights leader.²⁹ He believes that Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was a pastor for Ebenezer and also for the nation. The church instilled in him the "knowledge that God was a God of justice, God was a God of mercy." A Black Lives Matter sign was ripped from the marquee of Metropolitan AME Church during the Epiphany riot at the Capitol on January 6. The church's pastor, Rev. William H. Lamar IV, commented on Twitter, "We have not been distracted by signs, sounds or fury for nearly two centuries. . . . We worship. We liberate. We serve."

Black church theology impacted religious institutions globally. The fever spread to white denominations as congregations expressed faith in a liberating God and directed members towards advocacy. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has adopted Matthew 25 as a mission statement and posted a Black Lives Matter banner on its headquarters. Its webpage publicizes its advocacy ministries: the Washington Office of Public Witness, the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, and the Advocacy Committee on Social Witness Policy.³⁰ The United Church of Christ asked the question, "Why should I care about advocacy?" It answered, "In the challenges before us today, we, as people of faith, can hear the echoes of prophets and believers who, throughout history, lifted up a vision of right relationship within human community and with God. . . . In the prophetic tradition, justice in human community is inextricably linked to being in right relationship with God."³¹ The United Methodist Church posted, "The United Methodist Church has a long history of advocating for

social justice. . . . The early Methodists expressed their opposition to societal ills such as slavery, smuggling, inhumane prison conditions, alcohol abuse, and child labor. Today United Methodists work, march and pray for racial justice, environmental care, and fair treatment for everyone.”³² The African Methodist Episcopal Church has a web page entitled “Healthcare in the Pulpit.”³³

Many of the protest movements in the twenty-first century are associated with faith-based organizations.

Many of the protest movements in the twenty-first century are associated with faith-based organizations. *The Moral Monday Movement* was started in North Carolina between 2013 and 2016. Its successor movement, the *Poor People’s Campaign*, continued a nationwide effort and was coordinated by Bishop William Barber II and the Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis. In support of voting rights, faith-based protesters held *Election Day Communion Services* in support of the right to vote. Christians gather together around the bread and cup to proclaim we are still one body. It’s worship as protest. The *Border Church* conducts communion services on the United States and Mexican border with migrants. The *New Sanctuary Movement* provides safe haven for undocumented immigrants to protest the maltreatment of those seeking a better life. Other contemporary movements did not originate from faith-based organizations even though some founding members were people of faith. The youth-led *March for Our Lives* and *Sandy Hook Families* address gun violence and its prevention.

The relationship between the Christian church and protest is stronger than ever before. There is little question that the church has evolved in its understanding of its mission. There is little debate that the church must play a role in helping others and express concern for the impoverished, refugees, migrants, and children. Jim Wallis, in *The Great Awakening*, wrote of the prophetic activism of denominations and people of color.

Part of the good news is that many evangelical and Pentecostal Christians are leaving the Religious Right while retaining their commitment to live out their faith in the world. . . . Catholics . . . are rediscovering

the depth and breadth of Catholic teachings on social justice and the transforming idea of the common good. . . . [M]ainline Protestant churches . . . discover their mission in the world. [A] new generation of Black pastors . . . want to move beyond merely eulogizing the civil rights movement and make their own history for justice. Similarly, young Latino pastors, many of them Pentecostal, are making the critical connection between evangelism and social justice. New generations of Asian-American Christians are moving beyond the protective conservatism of their parents to a more outward-looking faith directed into their communities. Emerging immigrant churches are rapidly changing the demographics and the perspective of U.S. Christianity. . . . Jewish renewal is under way in many synagogues, where I have found worship as lively as in any church, and where people are rediscovering their own traditions of *shalom* (peace, wholeness, and justice) and *tikkun* (to repair and heal the world).³⁴

Notes

1. Jürgen Moltmann, quoted in Dion Forster, “Worship as ‘Protest’: Johan Cilliers as a Public Theologian?” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 5, no. 2 (2019), http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2413-94672019000200010/.
2. Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 300.
3. Tanya Smith Brice, quoted in Bobby Ross Jr., “Worship Is Our Protest,” *Christian Chronicle* (December 17, 2014), <https://christianchronicle.org/worship-is-our-protest/>.
4. Amy Yoder McGloughlin, “Protest as Worship,” *Anabaptist Witness* 10, no. 1 (April 2023), https://www.anabaptistwitness.org/journal_entry/protest-as-worship/.
5. Michael Schmidt, “Pray With Your Feet During COVID-19 Crisis in New York,” *American Jewish Committee Global Voice* (May 26, 2020), <https://www.ajc.org/news/pray-with-your-feet-during-covid-19-crisis-in-new-york/>.
6. Besheer Mohamed and Kiana Cox, “Before Protests, Black Americans Said Religious Sermons Should Address Race Relations,” Pew Research Center, June 15, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/06/15/before-protests-black-americans-said-sermons-should-address-race-relations/>.

7. Shannon Craigo-Snell, "The Liturgy of a Black Lives Matter Protest," *Christian Century* (June 8, 2020), <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/first-person/liturgy-black-lives-matter-protest/>.
8. Micha Green, "Music and Faith Set the Tone for Black Resistance," *The Washington Informer* (February 22, 2023), <https://www.washingtoninformer.com/music-and-faith-set-the-tone-for-black-resistance/>.
9. Milton C. Sernett, *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 453, 455.
10. Ronald C. White Jr. and Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 7–8.
11. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 203.
12. Ernest Trice Thompson, *The Changing South and the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1950), 24, 25, 84.
13. Martin Luther King Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail," https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf/.
14. Romans 13:1–7; 1 Timothy 2:1–3; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13–17.
15. Milton C. Sernett, ed., *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 424, 429, 428.
16. Brian Kaylor, "Worship Is Protest," *WordWay* (September 9, 2020), <https://wordandway.org/2020/09/09/worship-is-protest/>.
17. Laura Waardenburg, "The Dutch Reformed Church and Its Contribution to Apartheid," *European Academy of Religion and Society* (December 7, 2021), <https://europeanacademyofreligionandsociety.com/news/the-dutch-reformed-church-and-its-contribution-to-apartheid/>.
18. Ross, "Worship Is Our Protest."
19. Ross, "Worship Is Our Protest."
20. Adam Kurihara, "Worship As Protest," *Seedbed* (February 7, 2017), <https://seedbed.com/worship-as-resistance/>.
21. John Blake, "An 'Imposter Christianity' Is Threatening American Democracy," *CNN*, July 24, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/24/us/white-christian-nationalism-blake-cec/index.html/>.
22. *Uncivil Religion*, January 6, 2021, <https://uncivilreligion.org/home/media/maga-jesus/>.
23. Deirdre Jonese Austin, "How One Worship Leader Made Racial Justice Protests about Christian Persecution," *Sojourners Magazine* (October 23, 2020), <https://sojo.net/articles/how-one-worship-leader-made-racial-justice-protests-about-christian-persecution/>.
24. Adam Liptak, "Cake Is His 'Art.' So Can He Deny One to a Gay Couple?" *New York Times*, September 16, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/16/us/supreme-court-baker-same-sex-marriage>.
25. Julia Duin, "This Is All About Jesus': A Christian Rocker's COVID Protest Movement," *Politico Magazine*, October 25, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/10/25/sean-feucht-christian-rocker-covid-protest-movement-431734/>.
26. Austin, "How One Worship Leader."
27. "Quaker Activism," *PBS History Detectives*, <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/quaker-activism/#:~:text=In%201776%2C%20Quakers%20were%20prohibited,many%20other%20areas%20of%20society/>.
28. David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 114, 115.
29. Kim Lawton, "Reverend Michael Thurman," *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, January 13, 2006.
30. Presbyterian Mission Agency, "Advocacy and Social Justice," <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-do/advocacy-social-justice/>.
31. United Church of Christ, "Advocacy Basics: What Is Advocacy?" https://www.ucc.org/justice_advocacy-basics/#:~:text=Generally%2C%20advocacy%20is%20standing%20with,participating%20in%20nonviolent%20direct%20actions/.
32. United Methodist Church, "Advocating for Justice," <https://www.umc.org/en/how-we-serve/advocating-for-justice/>.
33. African Methodist Church, "Healthcare in the Pulpit," <https://www.ame-church.com/healthcare/>.
34. Jim Wallis, *The Great Awakening* (New York: HarperCollins Books, 2008), 14–16.



Contemplating Water, 2015.
Nicole Salimbene

Installation view at the National Arboretum, Washington, DC.
Test-tubes, water, wood, meditation cushions. 7 ft. x 15 in. x 3 in.

Contemplating Water is an interactive installation inviting viewers to participate in a sitting meditation, with the intention of reflecting on one's relationship to water. What are the personal, political, historical, or sacred relationships held with water? The embodied act of witnessing and participating in a contemplative practice created a public and private dialogue.

Toward a Liturgy of the Wild

Victoria Loorz

The divine communicates to us primarily through the language of the natural world. Not to hear the natural world is not to hear the divine.

—Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*

The Conversation: Ojai Church of the Wild was the name of the first wild church I started along with a small group of brave souls who were tired of defining church by a building where we meet. After twenty years as a pastor of traditional indoor churches, I had walked out of the chapel doors and into the sanctuary of the oak trees, leading my community in a worship that might reconnect us with the living world as sacred. I wanted to see if we could put the eco-theological work of Thomas Berry into practice as a worship community and remember how to listen directly to God through the language of the natural world.

I was longing for church to be a place where Mystery is experienced, not explained. Moving church outside under the branches of a giant oak tree and listening for the whispers of the Sacred in the wind through the calls of crows and mockingbirds and in the buzz of gnats offered a pathway to deeper connection with God and with our place. We met under an oak tree near the river's dry wash on land that had been cherished and cared for by Chumash people for more than ten thousand years. It was Advent 2015, and the group of about twenty-five of us ventured into *terra incognita*, unknown territory, with a sense of adventure.

Under the shade of a giant live oak tree, we complete a circle and build a little altar with a cloth I made, along with leaves, stones, and sticks we collect nearby. I set out a glass jar of communion juice made from the wild blackberries and apples someone

brought from their backyard tree. The children and teens scramble into the arms of the ancient tree through her ladder of branches. They listen with intermittent giggles from above as we begin the service with silence, listening to the beings who worship daily in this place, a simple invocation that acknowledges with gratitude the ancient native peoples who have tended this land for generations, the sacred presence of the trees and the creatures who invite us into worship with them. We end the prayer this way:

In learning to honor the holiness in the others who are not human, may we learn to honor the sacred within ourselves and in all peoples. May we honor one another and honor life itself and sacred Mystery, Christ within all things, holding us all together, Amen.

We create spiritual practices that encourage us to re-member ourselves back into our home terrain as full participants in an interconnected web of aliveness. Reading from the "first book of God"—which is what the ancients called nature—the liturgies include not just the humans and a disembodied God but focus on the incarnated Christ, alive in and between all beings in this particular place, honoring those particular beings themselves.

The core of the service is a forty-five minute time of wandering outside of the circle to contemplatively listen for the voice of the sacred in the sermons of the blue jays and gnats and falling leaves. Then we reconvene to share our experiences and insights, listening reverently to one another. **The word of the Lord, Amen.**

Victoria Loorz is a wild church pastor and eco-spiritual director and the author of *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred*. She is the founder/director of the Center for Wild Spirituality and a co-founder of the Wild Church Network.

At first, I was a little uncomfortable. Was I stepping over a line into heresy and just making things up? Within a few months after starting Ojai Church of the Wild, though, I began to meet dozens of other pastors across the continent who were also leaving buildings to develop spiritual practices that would restore sacred relationship with the natural world. Eventually, after more and more spiritual leaders were joining our monthly calls, we recognized that we were part of something much larger than us, that we were responding to a call from Spirit—and Earth herself—to midwife an essential reconnection, performing a role of *religios*¹ with creation.

We called ourselves the Wild Church Network, and now there are hundreds of little church plants growing on the edges of multiple denominations. These wild church leaders are creating a path for the rest of the church to develop liturgies and worship patterns that restore kindred and sacred intimacy with the rest of the alive and sacred world.

Church of the Wild is not a new, trendy form of church for people who shop at REI and backpack through the Pacific Crest Trail. It's not just for people who want to avoid buildings. It isn't even a sneaky way to get religious people to care about climate change. When gathering outside buildings—in parks and on the wild edges of town—nature becomes more than a lovely background for the more reverent acts of church. Rather, the landscape and creatures of our home places are the preachers, the co-congregants, the choir, and the sacred stories themselves.

It is a movement (dare I call it a reformation?) led by an unlikely group of nearly two hundred liturgists, pastors, and spiritual leaders from multiple denominations who are taking seriously the call from Spirit and from Earth to restore a dangerous fissure. Spirituality and nature are not separate.

When I first started gathering people together for Church of the Wild services, I honestly didn't expect—but was happy to discover—that the effort to reconnect with the whole holy soil and creatures of our place also restored something of a fissure within our own souls.

The pressure causing this fissure is rooted in a centuries-old false belief system of human dominance, a worldview of separation between humans and other organisms that is opposed to every system of life and has had disastrous consequences. Disconnecting ourselves from a sacred world by imagining that we are more important than everyone

and everything else paves the asphalt road for the increasing climate crises we are experiencing. Diminishing habitats and alarming extinctions of wild creatures highlight the profound ecological consequences. What is less obvious (but equally dangerous) are the psycho-spiritual consequences suffered by our own species. A spirituality rooted in human superiority—like any form of othering and superiority—is nearly as dangerous for the dominant parties as it is for those they other.

What do our souls lose by forgetting that we are part of nature? What is atrophied in our spiritual reality by pretending that we are the only species who really matter to God?

Wild church—a way of approaching church that allures human hearts to reconnect with the rest of the creation—is a pathway to explore these questions by developing spiritual practices, liturgies, and new worship experiences that invite our congregations and our culture to restore sacred relationship with a groaning and glorious planet.

Dominion → Stewardship → Relationship

Thirty years ago, I researched and wrote a comprehensive worship tool kit to encourage churches to “care for creation.” That was the language used to support a shift from a worldview of *dominion over nature* to a more acceptable *stewardship of nature*.

Focused on the impacts of global environmental crises on human communities, particularly those suffering from poverty, the tool kit, called *Let the Earth Be Glad*, was sent to fifty thousand churches. It included all kinds of liturgical and worship resources—from sample sermons, exegetical studies, and scriptural references of nature's revelation of God (Job 12:7, for example: “But ask the animals, and they will teach you; / or speak to the earth, and [it] will teach you”) to projects for kids to learn about Jesus by considering the lilies and frogs. We even included a cassette tape (it was a long time ago!) with nature sounds that churches could play during worship services.

While the language was focused anthropocentrically, honoring the inherent spiritual value of the trees and the creatures of Earth was a politically charged line to walk three decades ago, and it remains so in many contexts today. A whole section of the kit was essentially a polemic: “No, we aren't saying you should worship the creation rather than the Creator. No, this isn't a liberal agenda. No, this isn't pantheism. No no no. Don't you see?

Caring for creation is clearly aligned with our own tradition.” I was determined to help church leaders overcome centuries of cultural and religious bias to bring nature *inside* the worship space to open the hearts of their congregants so they would care about nature *outside* our doors.

I think that the kit contributed to an awakening in the church that welcomed the replacement of a dominator-dominion worldview with a perspective of concern for and stewardship of the planet. Seven years after it was released, the 202nd PC(USA) General Assembly adopted a report called *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice* that called for greater environmental stewardship. Since then, several initiatives, including Presbyterians for Earth Care, support local PC(USA) churches in their efforts to make creation care a central concern of their communities. I am grateful for the earnest efforts of many who have helped us pull away from a theology of dominion and invest in stewardship efforts with serious action.

And now, something more is being asked of us, beyond stewardship and creation care. These terms betray their roots in an anthropocentric hierarchy. As if the species that caused the crises of separation in the first place has the capacity to figure out, much less accomplish, a restoration on our own. What we need can't be legislated or explained or resolved only through reducing waste and getting solar panels on our buildings. What is needed is a shift from *stewardship* into *relationship*.

Beyond caring for creation or stewarding Earth's "resources," what wild church could offer the church at large is an invitation to risk entering into actual, intimate, *I-Thou*, subject-to-subject, reverent relationship with the particular places and beings of the living world. Restoring relationship with a sacred world.

Into the Mountains to Pray

Every time Jesus went to pray, he went to the mountains or the wilderness, or at least the garden. So it makes sense that learning to pray is an important agenda for churches. Centering prayer. Taizé prayer. Silent prayer. Petition prayer. Liturgical prayer. Confession prayer. Prayer-without-ceasing prayer. Prayers of the people prayer. But when was the last time we encouraged people to go to the mountains to do it? Jesus didn't go to the buildings to pray. Jesus went to a mountain—or along the lakeshore, or to the wilderness. Every time.

And he didn't just go *to* the mountains or garden or wilderness to pray. The Greek term is *εἰς*, which is not a locational term. It is a *relational* term meaning "into, penetration, union with." This is a mystical, relational and even erotic preposition suggesting deep connection, a small linking word that takes seriously the call to enter into relationship. For Jesus, his prayer connected him relationally with a particular place. Every Gospel reference of Jesus praying uses this intimate preposition of union and relationship: Jesus went *into* the mountain, the lake, a garden beyond a particular winter stream, the wilderness, and a solitary place to pray. His prayer place was the wilderness, yes. But he went there to enter *into* a union with the sacred, speaking through the wild elements there.

This is precisely why church of the wild is not called church *in* the wild. We aren't just meeting outside *in* a lovely location. When we gather as wild churches—among the cedar trees, oak groves, city parks, or desert shade—we are entering into relationship with our place. We are expanding our experience of prayer, and we are also learning how and why Jesus went into the mountain to do it. There is an unmediated presence of God that can only be experienced outside the human constructs of civilization when we enter into reverent relationship with the natural world.

It's almost as if you can't understand prayer *or* mountains without practicing both together. Church of the Wild is not just about changing the location of prayer as you know it to the outdoors or about doing church the way it has always been done, just outside. It is a reorientation of focus and perspective, a theological shift as much as a physical one.

We aren't used to this kind of intimate relationship with the living world, where the Creator still speaks in the dialect of desert and dandelion and deer. But our spiritual ancestors were intimately familiar with it. This idea of conversation with nature is even embedded in the Hebrew language. I recently learned that the Hebrew word *midbar*, usually translated as "wilderness," is rooted in the verb *dabar*, which means "speaking." *Ba-midbar*, translated in most cases as "the wilderness," also means "the organ which speaks."²

Understanding wilderness and Nature (which includes us) as the organ which speaks in the voices of trees and wind is also an invitation into sacred conversation. To listen to birds is to listen to the whispers of God. It is an invitation into

intimacy, love, kinship. There is something about slowing down to be present in a wildish place for an extended time. First the silence allows you to hear your own voice beneath the chatter of distractions and to-do lists and self-evaluations. Then even that fades, and you can hear the voices of the wind and the rain and the chickadees. Eventually you can hear it: a deeper silence, the invitation to listen to the voice of the sacred, a voice that is deeply your own and also the trees and also God.

Recent science, along with movements such as Japanese forest bathing (*shinrin-yoku*), demonstrates that the act of immersing yourself in a forest, in the desert, or in the grass in your neighborhood park leads to lower blood pressure, calmer nerves, and a more focused mind. It is good that people are waking up to the benefits of connecting with nature for their own health and well-being. But it is more than that. The living world can open us up, making us receptive to a conversation with the Divine that begins by listening.

There is an invitation here to pastors, liturgists, and worship leaders: how can we invite congregations to listen to the land, the waters, and the beings of our places as if they were carriers of the Sacred, just as we think about the human members of nature?

Toward a Liturgy of the Wild

The wild church movement is not really a charge to leave buildings to worship in nature. Rather, it is an offering to the church at large to co-create a new, more compassionate and interconnected story. To do so requires listening and restoring the great conversation.

Whether people recognize it or not, the groaning of a suffering Earth impacts us not only at an increasingly obvious physical level, but also at an emotional and spiritual level. Psychologists have coined a new term, *climate anxiety*, to describe the psychological distress that arises from concerns about the impacts of climate crisis. It is an existential anxiety. Though few are looking to the church to address it, this is more than a psychological problem. It is a spiritual one.

Gus Speth, environmental attorney, naturalist, and founder of the NRDC (National Resources Defense Council), has said,

“I used to think that top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. . . . But I was

wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that.”³

He's right. It is not the scientists or the activists or the politicians who can do that. It is the liturgists, the worship architects, and the spiritual leaders who are uniquely equipped to midwife spiritual transformation. And only spiritual transformation can allow the urgent cultural change needed at this pivotal time on our planet.

Liturgies of the wild are needed to re-member us back into loving relationship with the whole holy world. Wild church isn't just about doing regular church outside, nor is it interested in convincing churches with buildings to abandon them. Liturgies of the wild honor a needed worldview shift of reconnection, which reflects the true meaning of religion.

Liturgy, the structure of public religion and worship, facilitates relationship so that we might commonly remember our original interconnection. Liturgies of the wild invite us to re-member ourselves back into vibrant relationship with God who is both transcendent and also immanent in all of creation. Through the Holy Spirit, we are called to expand our vision of inclusivity and reverence for people who are not like us, for human beings in other countries, from other races, and with other identities. Liturgies of the wild remind us, as well, that there are more than human beings in the world. The beloved community is larger than our species.

Religios: the sacred practices that reconnect us. Humans have created spiritual practices of religion/reconnection for as long as we can measure. We must know deep inside that the journey toward reconnection is essential and difficult. We must know that we need the support of ritual, ceremony, liturgy, and worship to help us remember that we belong to a greater story and to a greater beloved community, especially in times of disconnection.

Liturgies of the wild re-replaces a human power paradigm of kingdom marked by hierarchy, monarchy, and inequality with the power systems of Earth, which can be described as a “kin-dom” of cooperation and kindred reciprocity. Liturgists of the Christ tradition are ones who might have the specific capacity to help transform a worldview of kingdoms and empires into a worldview of kin-dom

and compassion. Where else can a disconnected society find the support to live into a new story of kin-dom through the story of a God who became human, a God who regards all humans, species, and life systems as inherently good and valuable? In the story of Christ we can imagine a kin-dom than where we are called to love neighbors—all neighbors, human and more than human—as ourselves, where we do unto others—all others—as we would have them do unto us.

Samples of Wild Liturgies from Wild Church Leaders

A Call to Worship

We begin in silence,
listening.
Listen to your breath.
Listen to the wind.
We are connected through the breath of God.
Take deep, grateful breaths,
with an awareness that the presence of God
is often described as the *ruach*—the wind,
the breath.
Your own breath is dependent on the breath
of the tree.
Slowly allow yourself to relax into this
welcoming place.
You belong here with this oak tree
and the stones and the flies and scrub jays
and poison oak.
Listen for the water,
arteries of life flowing throughout the planet
mirroring the arteries of blood flowing
through your own body.
You are a welcome part of this ecosystem.
They welcome us because they have not
forgotten
that we are related,
that we come from the same dust
and return to the same dust.
Take another deep breath of gratitude
to acknowledge that our lives
are fully dependent on the healthy
functioning
of this particular bio-system.

Victoria Loorz, *Church of the Wild:
How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred*
(Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2021), p. 221.

A Wild Invocation

We gather together in this wild cathedral
where there are no walls or windows
to separate us
from the land on which
trees breathe and plants transform
the sunlight
where the spirited elements dance and desire,
tousle our hair
and play on our skin,
where everlasting cycles of birth and death,
and birth again,
are engraved in the seasons'
turnings.
With abundant gratitude and openness,
quieted hearts and wandering souls,
we pay attention
as our senses reveal their ancient knowing,
and call this
sacred.

Mary Abma, Wild Edge Offerings, leader of
Sarnia Wild Church, maryabma.com.
Used with permission.

A Wild Communion Liturgy

*(Place bread and wine on your altar, which could
be the earth, a stump, or a rock.)*

From before time, God made ready the
creation. The Divine Spirit moved over the
deep and brought all things into being: sun,
moon, and stars; earth, winds, and waters;
rock, fire, and every living thing.

Today we join with all the earth and heavens
in a chorus of praise that rings through
eternity. We remember our oneness with all
that exists and all that has life, and that it is a
joyful thing to be in God's presence with each
other, with this land, and with all creation.

This meal we are about to share is a miracle
and a mystery—a gift of earth, water, wind,
and fire, and of seeds buried in the earth and
cracked open. This bread and this juice, with
their many meanings, are gifts of life to the
living.

For followers of Jesus, these gifts assume
particular meaning. Jesus broke bread with

outcasts, healed the sick, and proclaimed good news to the poor. He yearned to draw all of the world into the heart of God.

When Jesus' life was nearing its end, Jesus was eating supper with his friends. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and shared it saying, "Take, eat: This is my body, offered to heal the whole world. Whenever you eat it, remember me."

(Break bread.)

And as supper was ending, Jesus took a cup of wine. Again he gave thanks and offered it to his friends saying, "Drink this, all of you: This is the cup of the new covenant—a promise of eternal love poured out for you and for all beings. Whenever you drink it, remember this."

(Pour cup.)

Here, with the Earth as our altar, we savour God with all of our senses. As we eat and drink together we get to taste, smell, and touch the sacred. We are reminded that we are one with God, with each other, and with all creation. Before we eat and drink, let's pray:

Divine Love, pour out your Spirit upon these gifts. Fill us with your breath, O God, opening our eyes and renewing us in your love. Send your Spirit over this land and over the whole earth, making everything a new creation. Amen.

(Hold a piece of bread and cup of juice.)

These are the gifts of God for all the creatures of God.

Remembering that Jesus came to renew us and the whole world, we will offer the first piece of bread and the last drops of juice to the earth.

(Place the piece of bread on the earth.)

Come, eat and drink, one and all, whoever hungers and thirsts for renewal. All are welcome.

(Invite people forward to receive a piece of bread and a cup of juice. Ask someone to help with serving the bread and/or cup.)

(After all have been served, pour some juice onto the earth.)

Our God of abundance has fed us with the bread of life and the cup of love. With deep appreciation and thanks for the communion we share with each other and with the earth, we pray:

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Life-giver, Pain-bearer, source of all that is and ever shall be, you have showered us with abundance. With the food we need for today, feed us.

For the hurt we cause, forgive us.
As we lose our way, restore us.
Enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living creatures,
all part of the family of God.
Tune our hearts to live in harmony with Christ, with the Earth,
with all creatures,
and with our human neighbours too.
Now and forever.
Amen.

Wendy Janzen, Burning Bush Forest Church in Kitchner, Ontario, copyright: Creative Commons.

Notes

1. The Latin etymology of *religion* can be understood as *re-ligios*: *re* meaning "again," *ligios* meaning "connection" (like ligament). Religion has always performed an essential societal role of re-connecting humans back into relationship with God, with one another, with the land.
2. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: "midbar" מִדְבָּר. Noun Masculine. Definition: mouth. 1. mouth, the organ of speech. 2. wilderness."
3. Gus Speth, quoted in Monty Don, "Religion and Nature," in *Shared Planet*, October 1, 2013, BBC Radio 4, MP3 audio, 0:41, <https://tinyurl.com/2nwahwse>.

Building a House with Song

Dónal P. Noonan

Let us build a house where love can dwell, and all can safely live.” The opening lines of Marty Haugen’s fantastic hymn “All Are Welcome” lays out the foundation of what we as Christians are called to do when building the church of God. In our music we sing songs of welcome, we sing songs of feeding the poor, and we sing about embracing those who are different from us and those who walk a path that is alien to our own.

It’s easy to stand in church and sing about such things, finish the service, battle the parking lot, and head to brunch. What happens when we are called to put these words into action? What would it look like if we did build a house where love can dwell—where everyone can come in, hang out, find a place where they belong, and find commonality and community with the person journeying beside them? Am I describing utopia? Am I describing church? Or am I just describing an idea of church that is far flung from our lived reality? Enough with the questions. I’ll graduate to bold statements. If we sing about it, then we need to figure out how to live it.

In 2012, I accepted the position of director of music ministries at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Atlanta. Before my move to Atlanta, I spent ten years in the Tampa Bay area of Florida where I had moved from my homeland of Ireland. Homelessness was never a part of my world. I grew up in a small town of seven thousand people just outside Dublin; and when I immigrated, I moved to an island in the Gulf of Mexico to teach and work at a school and church where silver spoons were plentiful. Of course, just because I was not aware of it does not mean that homelessness did not exist there. Many people were living below the poverty line, but the poor and the privileged didn’t

share the same spaces. When I arrived on Capitol Hill in downtown Atlanta nearly a decade later, a new reality was waiting for me. On one of my first days on the job, I met a person who was sleeping in the doorway of the church office. I was a little perplexed and disoriented, not knowing what to do, so I went with the “Excuse me please” approach. The person was having none of it. They didn’t move an inch, remaining in the doorway with their blanket over their head and body. I tried a few more times to rouse them, but my inquiries were ignored until finally I heard a voice say, “Just step over me” with a lovely expletive to accompany the instruction. I did as I was told, entered the building, and walked into my office. I sat behind my desk for a minute and felt the experience wash over me. It didn’t sit well at all. What had just happened bothered me, not just in my head but in my heart and in my soul too. The weight of this experience grew heavier and heavier as the days and weeks went on. I spoke about the incident with a dear friend who has since passed away, the formidable Katie Bashor, who was the director of the Central Night Shelter (a joint ministry between Central Presbyterian Church in downtown Atlanta and the Catholic Shrine). When I told Katie what had happened, she laughed and, without missing a beat, said, “I don’t blame him. I hate getting out of bed some mornings too.” Her analysis was so real and steeped in her more than twenty years of compassion and ministry on the streets of Atlanta. I realized that I was now part of a community of people who were there long before I was. I had entered a community that had established a way of life and, as an outsider, I needed to learn, adapt, and become a part of this community. I needed to contribute in the context I was suddenly immersed

Dónal Noonan, originally from Ireland, is the music minister at the Catholic Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Atlanta, the archdiocesan choir director for the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, the president of the National Alliance for Music in Vulnerable Communities (www.NAMVC.org), and the executive director of the Atlanta Homeward Choir.

“Homeless is what we are—not who we are. We are homeless now,
but we will not be homeless in six months or even a year.”

in. I only knew one thing, and that was music. I was going to start a choir.

Later that year, the Atlanta Homeward Choir was born. We started the first rehearsal with twenty-seven men, all residents of the Central Night Shelter. I had taken great care to make sure all my ducks were in a row; the music was picked and purchased, the name tags printed, and I had a binder with a fantastic cover on it that read “The Atlanta Homeless Choir,” complete with colored dividers—I was ready to go.

We sang “Amazing Grace” to start the rehearsal. It sounded terrible, but it was a start. During the song, I noticed one of the men looking at my binder, tilting his head to read the cover and then making a face that could only be described as “ugh.” I clocked this reaction and saved it for later. At a stopping point in the rehearsal I asked the men to have a conversation with me about our name. The same guy spoke and said, “Homeless is what we are—not who we are. We are homeless now, but we will not be homeless in six months or even a year.” This powerful statement showed me for the first time the humanity of those living in homeless situations, which I would continue to learn about and prioritize above all things. To this day I thank God for that. The conversation continued within the group, and we decided that we wanted to name ourselves something that we aspired to, something positive and something with a forward-moving motion. We found that the word “homeward” met all of these requirements and dreams, and thus the Atlanta Homeward Choir became our name and mission.

Over the next few years, the Spirit was moving. We gradually found our groove, and like many who are looking for guidance, we were presented with multiple directions. In 2015, we received notice that at the request of Congressman John Lewis’s office, we were invited to sing at the White House during the holiday season. The news of a choir made up of men living in homelessness spread across the country and even around the world. The national news broadcaster of Ireland sent a journalist from Washington, DC, to interview the choir and me in Atlanta. The BBC sent a reporter from their affiliate in Atlanta who, upon meeting me, said, “The BBC told me I had to come to this concert, but I don’t know why I’m here. Who are you?” I remember

laughing and saying, “I’m no one and I don’t know either.” To this day, I still don’t see why this was such a big deal. Why wouldn’t a group of men who happened to be unhoused be invited to sing at the White House? Why is a group like this an exception in the choral world instead of a rule or the norm? Here I go with the questions again—allow me one more. As music ministers, organists, accompanists, composers, choral ensembles, and so forth, why have we not been creating space in our worship for the “All” whom we sing and pray about in the words of “All Are Welcome”?

For many years we have seen the power
of song move people to create change
in their world. We have seen music
help people to survive or tolerate an
intolerable world, and we have seen
music cross the divides of time, space,
and geography.

For many years we have seen the power of song move people to create change in their world. We have seen music help people to survive or tolerate an intolerable world, and we have seen music cross the divides of time, space, and geography. The repertoires in many of our choral libraries come from many cultures. There has been very interesting and important conversation over the last number of years over the legitimacy of an Anglocentric congregation singing such spectacular hymns and spirituals as “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,” “Fix Me, Jesus,” “Steal Away,” or “I’m So Glad.” This list could go on and on. The conversation has centered around the question, “Is singing songs from cultures other than your own appropriation or appreciation?”

I don’t know *the* answer to this question, but I do know that when I experience the lived music and culture of a people who grew up differently than I did, I “feel the spirit triggered in my soul,” as Monsignor Henry Gracz of the Catholic Shrine here in Atlanta says. Earlier this year, I attended a concert here with singer Callie Day and the

Georgia State University Choral Union, Central Presbyterian Church Chancel Choir, the Catholic Shrine Music Ministry Choir, and the Columbia Theological Seminary Choir. The final piece was “Order My Steps” written by Glenn Burleigh in 1991. To set the scene, I was exhausted the weekend of the concert. My sister was in town from Ireland with her husband and three

children, I was teaching classes all that week, and I had concerts and rehearsals back-to-back leading up to the event. In the church that day, I remember looking for the nearest exit so I could slip out in the most epic Irish goodbye of my life—don’t judge me; we have all done it! But when the music started, I was glued to my seat. I couldn’t and didn’t want to move. I was immediately called to prayer by the spirit and the song in that place.

Around the middle of March every year, to mark St. Patrick’s Day I have my church choir sing Shaun Davey’s “The Deer’s Cry.” It is a beautiful rendition of St. Patrick’s Breastplate for solo and SATB choir put to music by Davey in 1990. If you don’t know it, I highly recommend a listen. Every time this American choir sings this Irish piece, people are moved to prayer. I look at the faces of the people in the congregation, some with their eyes closed, others glued to the singers, and others fixed on the cross, and I know that it is vital that we (1) keep these genres of music alive in our sacred halls and pass them down to the next generation as the precious gems they are, and (2) like Burleigh and Davey, continue writing and programming with influences from many styles so the people of God hear and see themselves in worship and find multiple paths to prayer. There needs to be room within and outside the walls of worship for all genres. Like the diverse faces and hearts we meet at worship, we must create space for all forms of worship. To center a worship service on a particular genre of worship or music is divisive. Gone are the days of worship

Like the diverse faces and hearts
we meet at worship, we must create
space for all forms of worship.

To center a worship service on a
particular genre of worship or music is
divisive. Gone are the days of worship
compartmentalization—traditional
service at 10:00, contemporary service
at 12:00, for example.

compartmentalization—
traditional service at 10:00,
contemporary service at
12:00, for example. To me
this is like saying, when we
eat dinner on Sunday, “We
will have protein at 3:00,
vegetables at 4:00, and
our mashed potatoes will
be served at 5:00.” What
happens when we put it
all on the same plate? I
know there are people out
there who cannot handle
different foods touching,

and I know there are people out there who don’t like contemporary music or traditional hymnody or chant. But is worship style about what we like? Or is it about being together in the presence of God? If we continue to be divisive and compartmentalize our worship style or genre, how do we learn, grow, and most importantly share our love across contexts?

Catholic music composer and lecturer at Emory University Dr. Antonio Alonso wrote a magnificent setting of text from Matthew 25 called “What You Have Done,” published by GIA Publications. Some years ago the Homeward Choir did a concert with Tony that included this song. At the end of the concert, he shared that he wrote this piece as a teenager and has been singing it for many years. But for the first time, it came from the mouths of those living on the streets and in shelters, those who wondered where their next meal was coming from, and, he said, for the first time he actually heard the words of Matthew on which the text was based. “When I was hungry you fed me. When I was thirsty you gave me to drink. When I was naked you gave me clothes.” The songs we sing can bring Scripture to life outside of what we may call worship when we allow them to, when we let the Spirit move our perceived barriers out of the way. Sacred and holy space could be behind a dumpster, under a bridge, on the back steps of a church, in the alcove of a government building, in the front seat of a car that is parked and filled with all the worldly belongings of a person who can no longer afford rent. It is in those sanctuaries that the music we sing, no matter where

“When I was hungry you fed me. When I was thirsty you gave me to drink.
When I was naked you gave me clothes.”

it comes from, the genre, or who sings it, brings us into the presence of God and sees us home.

The music of worship, that is, the music that I and so many others have found a home in for so many years, started to become a lifeblood for the Atlanta Homeward Choir. I witnessed how the music that we prayed together in church lived beyond the church choir. It moved the soul and propelled the lives of these men beyond a moment within the walls of a building. This music became a place of safety, a refuge from reality, and a vessel for change. By joining this choir, these men learned how to be a part of “something” again—as one singer once put it, “It gave me something to look forward to, coming in and busting my pipes open twice a week.” The men remembered that they were worth so much more than their current situation. It was a powerful and very different choir. It was a choir where the music was secondary; the community of the group was primary. I was in over my head.

I knew how to direct choirs. I knew how to make a group of people sing pretty. I didn't know how to handle the needs of a group of people who came to the door with so little.

I knew how to direct choirs. I knew how to make a group of people sing pretty. I didn't know how to handle the needs of a group of people who came to the door with so little. When my regular church choirs were asked to perform outside of a service, I would normally tell them to “wear all black” or “wear black with a splash of color.” I couldn't do that with this group. They had the clothes on their backs and that was it. Sometimes men came to rehearsal with no shoes or coats because they had been stolen when they fell asleep the night before. I found myself keeping a box in the trunk of my car with boots, sneakers, sweaters, T-shirts, and even underwear in it. I needed help, so I went asking for it. Yet again, I recognized the Spirit among us, bringing together another community of helpers who wanted nothing more than to support the men in the choir. Community was forming wherever I looked. Walls were being taken down and connections were being made.

“Let us build a house where love can dwell, and

all can safely live.” The community that was now the Homeward Choir was building a church within a church. It was creating a space where all can find a place, where all can live, where all can belong, and where all can just be.

Just be—such a simple phrase that means so much to someone who has nowhere to *just be*. As word spread about the choir, we made friends in local organizations that wanted to help the men in the choir. They helped them find homes and jobs. News channels did interviews and stories about the choir. I was unsure about that; was it my place to tell other people's stories? I was unsure until one day my office phone rang and it was the mother of one of the guys in the choir. She saw the story of the choir in Seattle, Washington. She told me that she knew he was in Atlanta, but she had no way of contacting him. She gave me her number and asked me to pass it on to him. At the next rehearsal, I pulled him aside and said “So, your mom called, and she'd like for you to phone home. Here is the number; here is my phone. If you want to use it, you are welcome to it. If not, that's fine too.” Two days later, we put him on a Greyhound bus back to Seattle.

My life took a turn in 2012. I didn't know that meeting another person seeking a night's rest would turn everything upside down and inside out. While we work to eradicate systemic poverty and homelessness, to build a house where all can safely live, we also seek human connection in the midst of the problem of homelessness. I am so grateful for those I have met who are, with me, traveling homeward. Because one person refused to get up out of the doorway and caused me to see in them my neighbor, people have found a community, a home, and a safe place within the music of worship. I will never know who that person was, and I will never be able to hear their story. I wish I could. But they taught me that the call to worship comes in many ways, through many voices, and on many faces, and sometimes it comes accompanied by expletives. I recall hearing it said that when you look into the face of the person beside you, you should see the face of Christ first.

Let us build a house where love can dwell, and all can safely live, find a home, be together, laugh, cry, sing, and see the face of Christ in each other. Amen.

Make No Thing Happen: Making Liturgy through Poetry

Andrew Taylor-Troutman

I once heard Ross Gay, one of my favorite writers, claim, “A poem is a laboratory for our coming together.”

Since the fall of 2021, I have held a poetry discussion group at a local continuing care facility. Monthly participation ranges from one to two dozen people. A few of the attendees are members of the congregation I serve as pastor, but the majority would not consider themselves to be Christians. Everyone loves poetry. I call the group Poetry and You.

The blurb in the facility’s monthly newsletter invites participants “to discuss selected poems for what they say and for what they have to say to you.” This is my playful way of stating what I believe about studying any text—there are words on the page and there are interpretations of them. The magic is their interplay, most often in dialogue with others.

Liturgy often involves words and our experience of those words. It is a communal experience—often defined as “the work of the people.” Liturgy “works” by creating meaning and a sense of the sacred. My experience with Poetry and You has challenged me to think about liturgy beyond the bounds of what we churchgoers may consider sacred space. Words that make meaning and a sense of the sacred, I’ve learned, can be enacted among those who may not choose to participate in an explicitly religious context. As one Poetry and You group member recently said to me, reflecting on the discussion group, “What we do here is my church.”

This essay outlines my four-step approach to poetry discussion with examples from a recent discussion to put flesh on the concepts. I hope to show the paradox of “make no thing happen” as a liturgical enactment of inspiration leading

to creative action—a laboratory for our coming together. Ultimately, the “no thing” happening in liturgy is how a community’s experience of words can invite us to poetically imagine ourselves in contexts outside of Sunday morning and beyond the church walls.

Step 1: I see . . .

The room is arranged with chairs in a circle. The discussion begins by distributing a copy of a poem to each participant, which I will then read out loud. In February 2023, the poem was written by Ross Gay:

Pulled Over in Short Hills, NJ, 8:00 AM¹

It’s the shivering. When rage grows
hot as an army of red ants and forces
the mind to quiet the body, the quakes
emerge, sometimes just the knees,
but, at worst, through the hips, chest, neck
until, like a virus, slipping inside the lungs
and pulse, every ounce of strength tapped
to squeeze words from my taut lips,
his eyes scanning my car’s insides, my eyes,
my license, and as I answer the questions
3, 4, 5 times, my jaw tight as a vice,
his hand massaging the gun butt, I
imagine things I don’t want to
and inside beg this to end
before the shiver catches my
hands, and he sees,
and something happens.

I call this first step “I see,” yet I understand (and enjoy) poetry as an auditory experience. In Gay’s poem, the rhyme “his eyes / my car’s insides” is more easily

Andrew Taylor-Troutman is the pastor of Chapel in the Pines Presbyterian Church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

heard than silently read. When I recite Gay's lines "just the knees, / but, at worst, through the hips, chest, neck," I can feel a "shivering" in my own body. Reading silently presents a temptation to skim the lines. Speaking the words is a way of embodying the text.

I call the first step "I see" in order to keep attention on the text in front of us. Following my reading of the poem, participants often have visible reactions. Smiles of satisfaction. Sighs of appreciation. In this case, I see a lot of brows knit in . . . what exactly? Puzzlement? Concentration?

"It looks to me like many of you are thinking hard about this poem," I begin. "Can you point to a specific place in the poem that draws your attention?"

Participants then re-read specific stanzas, lines, or words that are evocative to them. Most members have participated for months, even years, so the task of staying on the text has grown easier over time. But it is still tempting to jump to interpretation, namely, what this poem means. If someone begins to offer their own words, I gently but decisively direct them back to the text: "What do you see in the poem? Where would you have us look?"

Many of these readers have a familiarity with poetic devices, which aids the goal of focusing on the text. One participant points to Gay's opening comparison: "When rage grows / hot as an army of red ants . . ." Another reader spots the repetition of consonants: "strength tapped / to squeeze words from my taut lips . . ." Literary concepts like simile and alliteration are not merely formal jargon but point to a poet's intention to communicate meaning. The simile in the second line draws a vivid comparison that stays with a reader throughout the poem. The hard consonant sounds give the poem a clipped pace rather than a smooth one when spoken, communicating a tone of stress or anger.

My insistence on a slow, careful reading is out of respect for the poem in front of us and because I think it is increasingly countercultural to give such attention. Many of us may have the experience of being asked through online surveys to rate our consumer experiences at the gas pump, the coffeeshop, or after a recent purchase. Notice the relationship between opinion and commerce; we are constantly asked if we "like" the things that we consume with yes or no questions.

I want to move away from the snap judgements of a consumer mindset. Yes, I like this latte: do I bother to notice the subtle hints of chocolate in the

espresso or the heart-shaped froth of oat milk that adorns the surface? To notice poetic devices is to recognize the flavor of a poem. By slowing down and asking questions, I hope readers will cultivate a relationship with a poem that is more meaningful than an economic transaction.

Liturgy may be understood as rote recitation. Why would worshipers merely want to go through the motions? Perhaps Sunday morning is something to check off on the to-do list or a spiritual form of duty. Maybe people think that if they say words or go to church, then they will somehow be rewarded—the economic transactional mindset creeps into so much of our culture.

I think the arts push us in new directions in which we are less focused on "the results," or what we get from something, and much more on the process—how we feel and think in the moment, including how our minds are changed and our hearts are moved.

"This is an angry poem," someone comments, "but I wonder why."

Step 2: I wonder . . .

The word "wonder" has multiple meanings. It can connote a sense of curiosity. A poem may not reveal its secrets at first, even with a careful reading by a group. By studying it, questions naturally arise. Certain words may be unfamiliar or images seem obscure. We may lack information.

Several participants wonder about the title of Gay's poem, "Pulled Over in Short Hills, NJ, 8:00 AM." What is the significance of the particular place and time? Fortunately, among us is a former resident of New Jersey. "Short Hills is the most affluent part of the whole state," he says, "and probably the whitest, too."

Knowledge of context is helpful. But a word of caution: the goal of wondering is not to "answer" a poem as if it has a static, fixed meaning. From time to time, I remind participants of Billy Collins's poem "Introduction to Poetry." Instead of trying to "tie the poem to a chair with rope / and torture a confession out of it," Collins invites readers to "hold it up to the light / like a color slide / or press an ear against its hive."² That is what I mean by wondering. In the words of another poet, Michael Jon Khandelwal, "Poems . . . come from the astonishing experience of living."³

Whereas the first step of close reading is about compiling individual responses to the poem, the

second step moves toward collaboration. As in the example of the former resident of New Jersey, one among us may have valuable information to share. Wondering is about more than stating facts; it involves curiosity about why those facts matter.

Thinking again about the comparison to liturgy, I find Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann's work to be most helpful in terms of the idea of worship not simply to "posit the idea of God as rationally acceptable" but worship as "the source and the possibility of that knowledge. . . . Thus, the very notion of worship is based on an intuition and experience . . . an 'epiphany' of God, thus the world."⁴ Epiphany, or revelation, may come in the form of a road of Damascus vision, yet in my experience, insight slowly dawns by getting curious, asking questions, and holding conversations.

"Eight o'clock in the morning seems like an innocent time to be driving around," remarks one participant.

"Unless you are 'driving while Black,'" responds another.

"Whoa," someone replies. "I'd have skipped right over that part at the first reading!"

Our questions give way to wonder—those "whoa" or "aha" moments of our collective wonderings.

The first two steps in the process of reading are not completely linear and disconnected, like checking off a to-do list. Wondering about racial dynamics causes readers to dive back into the poem and explore further—notice the poet's "jaw tight as a vice" juxtaposed with the police officer's "hand massaging the gun butt." Conversation recalls the opening simile: "When rage grows / hot as an army of red ants . . ." Now we move beyond the strong figurative language to wonder about the racial dynamic of power to which it points.

Together, the participants next examine the poem's ending—"and something happens." What something? Insight lies within the poem and in our own experiences in the world.

Step 3: We connect . . .

The third step is to link insights and wonderings about the poem to our life experiences, either in the past or present. Since Gay published this poem in 2006, instances of police violence against Black men continue to grow. Many of today's readers may think of the murder of George Floyd in 2020—when "something happens." For this class, which met in February 2023, the death of Tyre Nichols at the

hands of Memphis police is fresh on our minds. A poem can span time and space.

What about a personal connection? How does a room of older, primarily white people relate to the experience of a young Black man?

On a basic level, many participants can relate to red and blue lights flashing in the rearview mirror. One woman confesses she remembers being angry at being pulled over, but only at herself! She knew she was speeding and now she was caught. She would have to pay a fine. This leads to a brief conversation about how a punishment should fit a crime. A ticket for going over the speed limit.

"What about Black people who are shot and killed?"

There is a heavy silence.

Over years of leading discussion groups, whether in the church or classroom, I have tried to temper, if not overcome, my desire to fill the silence by talking. Particularly when silence descends after my question. I often experience an anxiety to ask differently, perhaps in a better way so that someone (please God!) might say something!

But I'm learning to resist speaking too quickly. Participating in silence itself can be an act of collaboration with others. I do not need to control the direction of the discussion. I certainly don't have all the answers. This is one of the important reasons for arranging the room in a circle of chairs as opposed to speaking from a lectern. It likewise signifies the importance of this liturgy as a communal act.

I often think of Quaker practice while leading discussion. Though meetings lack sacraments, Quakers have a beautiful understanding of a liturgy of sacred silence, of holding quiet as a group until someone is moved to speak. Since liturgy is a work of the people, silence can be a part of what we do together. Saint John of the Cross claimed that silence is the first language of God; perhaps the role of silence is too often neglected in our formal Christian liturgies. Maybe "a moment of silence" should be more like several minutes.

I call this third step "We connect" to emphasize the connections made by shifting from first-person singular to plural. Group discussions can lead to discoveries about our lives that we might not have reached in our own wonderings. One participant breaks the silence by pointing to another simile in Gay's poem—"like a virus"—that he feels was "unsettling." Though this poem was written in 2006, he reads the line in light of the recent pandemic,

particularly the fear of COVID that many residents felt before the vaccines.

“I remember what it was like to feel helpless. To feel like you might get killed because of something that was out of your control.” Every head nods in agreement.

Another woman tells a story about an experience of sexism in the workplace. She had walked into a conference room and the boss had made a joke about her appearance. All the men at the table laughed, and she felt like she had to smile.

“But I was shivering with rage,” she says, “just like the first line of the poem.” Several women then tell stories of their own experience with sexism.

I hasten to add that making connections like these does not mean that we can conflate our individual experiences. We cannot discredit or discount the unique role that race, gender, or different social constructions play in the life of an oppressed minority. The idea is to create empathy through an act of poetic imagination.

After an act of police brutality or another form of gun violence, I often hear well-intentioned people claim, “I just can’t imagine their loss.” I think I understand the sentiment. But I would claim the opposite—we should try to imagine. For many years I’ve held onto Naomi Shihab Nye’s poem “No Explosions.” She is the daughter of a Palestinian refugee and claims that, in order to enjoy fireworks, say, on a national holiday, “you would have to have lived a different kind of life.”

I live “a different kind of life” than a Palestinian refugee or a Black person in America. I think Gay’s “Pulled Over in Short Hills, NJ, 8:00 AM” can invite a poetic imagination of a Black man’s experience—the threat of “something happens”—and being here or there at a certain time can be the difference between life and death. For the group reading the poem, empathizing with the poet’s fear and rage becomes the next question: what are we going to do about it?

Step 4: I will carry with me . . .

Throughout the first three steps, participants are free to chime in as they are moved to speak. My role as host of the discussion is to make sure that no one dominates the conversation. I can tell when a quieter member is sitting on the edge of a seat, but I only invite comment. No one is required to share.

The same is true for the last step, though this one provides space for direct and concise response. Making our way around the circle, each person is

invited to state an idea that they will carry with them from our discussion. Some people pass, which is absolutely fine. For those that choose to speak, this sharing can take the form of a line or observation from the poem, an insight from our discussion, or a thought that had been quietly percolating and wasn’t voiced until now.

This sharing creates a spoken liturgy.

When their turn comes, some participants offer what sounds close to a prayer (even if they wouldn’t necessarily use that language). After our discussion of Gay’s poem, we hear hopes for the Black community to stay safe and for police officers not to abuse their power.

We also hear certain participants state their desire for “something to happen” that is not violent but transformative. This, too, is liturgy. It reminds me of the eschatological hope we often name in prayer.

Like the word “wonder,” liturgy carries different meanings. I most often think of liturgy as an act of a prayer or rite in the context of Christian worship. To the ancient Greeks, “liturgy” was a public work performed by an individual or group on behalf of the larger community. It was often a creative act.

In the weeks that have passed since our discussion of Gay’s poem, I have encountered various members of the Poetry and You discussion group in the larger community. Several participated in an ecumenical vigil against gun violence that a colleague and I hosted at the church I serve. Others attended the public reading to mark the sixtieth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” Their participation was welcomed.

I also believe the impact of liturgy can generate individual creativity. One might even be inspired to write a poem!

After leaving the group, I reflected on an experience that I’d had earlier that morning. The result was a poem dedicated to the very special poetry discussion group that I am graced to host.

Like an Angel⁵

After dropping off my kids at school,
I drove back through the neighborhood
and just ahead a student, a girl, coasted
down the steep hill on a skateboard.
She was late, the bell had already rung;
yet, she wore a look of calm
concentration, neither hurried
nor harried in her red Chuck Taylors.
I’m not recommending tardiness,

and don't know if she had a legitimate excuse. Only that the sky was blue, and temperature just perfect, for skating with the wind in your hair, high tops winging through the air.

Make No Thing Happen

I've titled this essay "Make No Thing Happen" out of a reference to a famous poem. Memorializing W. B. Yeats, W. H. Auden wrote, "Poetry makes nothing happen." In his new book, *Inciting Joy*, Ross Gay, who is also an accomplished academic, notes that he has endured countless conferences and forums in which speakers have debated what Auden meant—"hand-wringing conversations about the political utility of poetry."⁶

Was Auden mistaken? Thinking of Martin Luther King, it is hard to imagine the boycotts and marches of the Civil Rights Era without the poetry of the Black spirituals sung by faithful participants. Or the folk songs of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger.

While recognizing the role of poetry in political activity of the past, Gay wonders if Auden was actually not wrong but misunderstood. He wasn't suggesting that poetry had no impact on people or movements, but rather was describing a specific kind of impact. Poetry does make something happen, but the something is "nothing" as in "no thing." Gay believes that poetry stops time—by which we mean productivity, output, or other aspects of materialism we find in capitalism. It is this striving for *more* that is "the religion of Capitalism, whose gospel is that there is not enough."⁷ Recall my hope for a countercultural appreciation of poetry as more than an economic transaction.

Another poet and thinker who questions the American ideals of capitalism is Wendell Berry. In contrast to the "gospel" of there is not enough, Berry's poem "Wild Geese" concludes, "What we need is here."⁸ Clearly, there are people and whole communities lacking resources in our world, very possibly found right outside our doors. Just as surely, there are experiences of timelessness, "no time" meaning time out of time, in which we find what we need and, most often, these needs are met in community—pickup basketball games, dance parties, potlucks, and liturgy.

To me, liturgy makes no thing happen. Getting caught up in worship can transcend my experience of time. There is no product or quantifiable result. I understand frustration with public figures who offer "thoughts and prayers" as an excuse for inaction for

police reform. But I also believe that Gay's claim about poetry may be true for an experience in prayer, worship, or liturgy—"Poetry might make nothing happen. Inside of which anything can happen."⁹ Like a laboratory for our coming together.

Each meeting of Poetry and You lasts for about an hour. I've given details about the steps of our time together, but at the most basic level, people read a poem and talk about it. If not nothing, then one might say not very much happens.

Yet, I go back to that participant who said, "What we do here is my church." While I observed members participating in the larger community as a result of our reading of Gay's poem, I wonder about the ways in which "no thing" happened for the participants. Though neither quantified nor measured in economic or utilitarian terms, the group's laboratory experience may continue to transform the way we perceived the world around us in terms of an appreciation for what is rather than a gospel of not enough. Thinking about worship as the epiphany or revelation of God in Word and Sacrament, we are transformed by our encounters with the holy. Emmanuel, God with us, here and now, always being revealed. Applying Isaiah 43:19, do we perceive it? "Let the ones with ears, hear!" (Matt. 11:15). And may the eyes of our hearts be "flooded with light" (Eph 1:18, Amplified Bible). That kind of revelation is "no thing" and is *something* sacred that happens.

Notes

1. Ross Gay, "Pulled Over in Short Hills, NJ, 8:00 AM," *Against Which* (Fort Lee, NJ: CavanKerry Press, 2006), 26.
2. Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry," *The Apple That Astonished Paris* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 58.
3. Michael Jon Khandelwal, "Hay Elote," *Rattle* 29 (summer 2008).
4. Alexander Schememann, "Worship in a Secular Age," *For the Life of the World*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Classics, vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018).
5. Andrew Taylor-Troutman, "Like an Angel," *Tigers, Mice & Strawberries*, copyright © 2023 by Andrew Taylor-Troutman.
6. Ross Gay, *Inciting Joy: Essays* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2022).
7. Gay, *Inciting Joy*.
8. Wendell Berry, "Wild Geese," *Collected Poems 1957–1982* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 155–156.
9. Gay, *Inciting Joy*.

Attention Is the Beginning of Devotion: Museums and Liturgical Space in the Digital Age

Hannah McKnight

Attention is the beginning of devotion,”¹ suggests Mary Oliver (1935–2019), that prolific poet of the twentieth century who was known for her lingering walks in the woods. This line appears in her reflective essay “Upstream,” in which Oliver records her observations of nature. She writes of the tree that is “like another tree, but not too much” and the tulip that is “like the next tulip, but not altogether.” Her sight lingers and her thoughts attend to what she sees when walking through the wonders of the natural world. Oliver’s attention is specific, not general. She looks to the flowers and trees, to which she has given names, Archibald Violet, Clarissa Bluebell, Lilian Willow, and Noah, the oak tree.² She has developed a knowledge of the plants that line her walk, and her attention to them has flowered into something akin to love. Robert Farrar Capon (1925–2013) describes a similar kind of attention in *The Supper of the Lamb*. He encourages the reader to sit with an onion for over an hour and to begin by addressing it like one of Oliver’s flowers.³ Both writers give glimpses into the art of attention, a form that is waning in a culture characterized by what T. S. Eliot terms “distraction from distraction by distraction.”⁴

The distracted nature of this age has only increased since the days when Eliot composed his “Four Quartets” and when Oliver and Capon wrote about their practices of attention. The world we live in now is visually saturated with glowing images of flashy, new, and youthful delights. The colors alone on a scroll through Instagram are enough to cloud one’s imagination with a seemingly endless array of distraction.

Urged on by the global pandemic, art museums across the world have pivoted to providing digital content and even virtual gallery tours to compete for visitors’ attention. Apps that can easily be downloaded via QR codes allow museums, even those on smaller budgets, to build out digital programming where curators “speak” to visitors through augmented reality.⁵ The artworks cared for and preserved in museums’ permanent collections are shared publicly online, making great works of art accessible to everyone with Internet connection. These changes certainly entail certain benefits: for example, they have enabled members of the public who otherwise might not have had the opportunity to visit gallery spaces the chance to interact with some of the world’s most treasured works, and they have provided engaging programming for a variety of visitor demographics. But as museums begin to make these pivots and provide digital content, questions about the very nature of a museum arise: What about the physical space of a museum cannot be replicated in the virtual world? Can a museum help its visitors to see, to engage what is set before them and pay attention to life off screen? Can engaging a painted canvas or sculpted piece of marble form not only human attention but human devotions? The art museum, like the digital realm that dominates our daily experiences, is not a spiritually neutral space. As the very definition of museums changes and art institutions move ever more toward becoming centers of social engagement, how might Christians engage the conversations that are taking place in these spaces?

Hannah McKnight is a writer and researcher whose work spans subjects in theology, the humanities, and museology. She is particularly interested in local churches that invite creative practices into their worship and community engagement. Hannah holds a post-graduate degree in Theology and the Arts from the Institute for Theology, Imagination, and the Arts and the University of St. Andrews. She and her husband live in Edinburgh, Scotland, where she writes (remotely) for the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA).

Defining the Museum in the Digital Age

Museums and galleries are “institutions of record,” meaning that they are primarily responsible for collecting, preserving, and sharing cultural artifacts with their communities.⁶ The term “museum” in Greek means to be set apart for the muses,⁷ and the institution is expected to collect the past for the inspiration of the future.⁸ The art museum as an institution came into normative practice in the eighteenth century,⁹ but the traditional understanding of what a museum is has significantly shifted in the last twenty to thirty years.¹⁰ Museums are, in many ways, “living institutions” whose values and identities are in constant flux.¹¹ A clear example of this shift can be found in the International Council of Museums’ (ICOM) decision to rewrite their definition of what a museum is. Founded in 1946, the ICOM has historically defined the museum as

a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.¹²

Recognizing the need for a new definition to match the cultural shift museums have experienced as a consequence of the digital age, in 2019 the ICOM undertook a three-year process to revise their definition.¹³ After three years of debates and conversations around this theme, members of the ICOM voted on August 24, 2022, to adopt the following definition:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.¹⁴

According to this new definition, the institution of a museum as a “permanent institution in the service

of society” that “collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage” largely remains the same. What has changed is *how* museums are expected to go about this work. Museums are no longer simply centers of cultural expertise that communicate top-down information about art and culture from the expert to the public. Instead, museums have become integral spaces for cultural dialogue and social change.¹⁵

As Sheila Watson notes: “A museum is no longer only measured by its internal possessions such as collections, endowments, staff and facilities, but by an external consideration of the benefits it provides to the individuals and communities it seeks to serve.”¹⁶ Owen Hopkins further articulates this shift as essentially a shift of priorities toward museum *spaces* over the collections they contain. He writes, “Since the 1990s, we have been living in the era of the global museum and museums of all types—encyclopaedic, of remembrance, of particular categories of object and activity—now proliferate across the globe. Central to this phenomenon has been the way that, in many examples, the museum building has begun to supersede the collection it contains.”¹⁷ Such a shift of emphasis to spaces of social engagement is also reflected in the argument of museologist Megan Johnston: “The world has dramatically changed, and museums have had no other option but to shed out-dated conventions and ways of working and thinking. Social engagement with the world around us is now imperative.”¹⁸ Johnston writes that the “epoch-changing realities of the internet and social practice,” citing movements like Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and Me Too, have led museums to reconsider their roles as civic institutions.¹⁹ The digital age and the cultural shifts brought about with it have led museums to refocus their efforts on three major areas: accessibility, inclusivity, and experience.²⁰

One of the primary changes museums have faced in the digital age is the shift towards open accessibility. The first step toward accessibility most museums have endeavored is to make their collections available in digital formats. Ross Parry writes that the development of the Internet in the mid-1990s enabled museum collections to expand their reach beyond the walls of their buildings to engage a larger audience. He argues, “For the past 15 years, the web has done some extraordinary things to the way we, not just design exhibitions, but the way we think about the concept of a museum. Digital media has allowed the

museum to become everywhere, to become 24 hours, to be connected to all visitors irrespective of their location."²¹ This shift to digital accessibility expands both the museum's ability to capture and store their collections and make that collection more accessible to a broader audience.

The move toward digital accessibility does not come without its challenges. Mia Ridge, the digital curator of Western Heritage Collections at the British Library, noted in an interview with *Museums + Heritage* that technological changes within museum organizations typically bring about seismic organizational change as well. She highlights that as museums move to providing digital content, both the museum's audience and the donors supporting the museum tend to confuse "innovative" and "normalized" digital practices. These external expectations can put significant pressure on museum administrators, particularly those within smaller, localized institutions with limited funding. In other words, there can often be significant financial pressure that comes along with the expectation that a museum will build out a robust digital presence while also maintaining its physical collections and spaces.²²

The second step many museums have taken to make their collections more viable in the digital age has been to emphasize inclusivity and invite under-represented communities to voice their interpretations of artworks in the collections. Some museums, like the Brooklyn Children's Museum, have even invited those communities to contribute new items to their permanent collections.²³ The Brooklyn Children's Museum has taken an innovative approach to curation and educational programming through both their Rapid Response Collecting Taskforce and their Teen Curators Program.²⁴ As the museum's curator, Kate Mirand Calleri, explains, the interns at the Brooklyn Children's Museum are encouraged to consider how history is presented through which items are represented and whose stories told.²⁵ The interns are then tasked with selecting objects to add to the museum's collection based on what broad themes they find to be "underrepresented or non-existent in the collection, such as criminal justice, immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, racism, gentrification, propaganda/fake news, voting rights, and feminism."²⁶ Other museums are following suit through a variety of programming initiatives, most often under their diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) practices.²⁷

The move toward inclusivity comes with a heightened awareness of political and cultural tensions that pervade modern society.

The move toward inclusivity comes with a heightened awareness of political and cultural tensions that pervade modern society. The museum as an institution, it seems, can no longer remain neutral on public issues.²⁸ Just one of the many examples of how museums have been key players in bringing about cultural change is the removal of the Sackler family's name from most major museums. While major patrons of the arts, the Sackler family is largely responsible for Purdue Pharma's over-marketing of OxyContin, an addictive narcotic that led to a myriad of overdose deaths since its release in 1996.²⁹ Beginning in March 2019 when the National Portrait Gallery declined a 1.3 million dollar gift from the family, other major art museums, including the Tate Modern, Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim, and the Louvre, have followed suit.³⁰ These museums have removed the Sackler family's name from their physical spaces and have distanced themselves from the family's wealth. While this decision was widely accepted by most major art museums worldwide, it set the precedent for other challenging and decisive issues facing museum administrators regarding how they can and should respond to cultural conflicts that extend beyond the walls of the museum.³¹

The third major response museums have made in the digital age has been to reimagine how visitors might experience the museum space. In the ICOM's new definition, this emphasis is described as the work museums do to "operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing."³² How a museum communicates starts with the building itself. Hopkins points to the Guggenheim Balboa as initiating this shift in the early 1990s. Since that time, museum buildings have been "conceived in such a way that [they stand] as emblem of the town, city or even country in which it is located."³³ How these buildings operate is measured by ethical and political standards and are situated not just for the interests of international tourism, but also for the local community's

participation in the life of the museum. This renewed focus on community experience leads to the development of volunteer programs, affiliate groups, and institutional partnerships. These external individuals and organizations are invited to support the museum's leadership to steer the operations of the institution, giving community members ownership of their local art museum.

The shift toward inviting the participation of the community within the museum has led to an array of educational experiences and opportunities offered by museums across the world. These educational initiatives tend to focus on immersive, sensory spaces that utilize digital technologies to engage youthful audiences.³⁴ Other movements, like the "slow looking" movement and programs for the visually impaired,³⁵ encourage museums to diversify their selling point by reaching groups that may not otherwise come to visit.³⁶

In the digital age, museums succeed by offering unique, localized experiences that cannot be achieved by browsing the collections online. The question each museum must answer for itself is how does that museum get each visitor through the door? The shift from being centers of cultural expertise to becoming places for communities to come together around shared intrigues and experiences opens the comparison between the museum and the church.³⁷ How does the one differ from the other? How might the two institutions relate? The digital age has made experiencing art in museums more accessible and inclusive for all visitors, including those of faith.

In Person: The Liturgical Experience of the Museum and Gallery

Like liturgical worship, the experience of visual art in the museum is, at its most basic level, a physical and relational experience. The new definition of a museum put forth by the ICOM acknowledges just how important the embodied experience of a museum is. If art, as defined by Jeremy Begbie, is best understood as "a vehicle of interaction with the world . . . [and] a work of art is an object or happening *through which* we engage with the physical world we inhabit, and *through which* we converse with those communities with whom we share our lives,"³⁸ then the experience of visual art is, at its most basic level, a physical and relational experience. Artworks like Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) or Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642), while they can be considered in the abstract or viewed

through a screen, are most fully experienced when encountered in the museum gallery. The embodied, experiential knowledge of visual art goes beyond conceptual or moral knowledge.³⁹ Like liturgy, the embodied experience makes present that which is otherwise absent. That presence reveals meaning in particular ways, even offering interpretations of the work that might otherwise be missed.⁴⁰

In his series on Cultural Liturgies, James K. Smith articulates a Christian anthropology based on the argument that even though our rational capacities set us apart from the animals, humans do not fundamentally experience the world in a rational way.

In his series on Cultural Liturgies, James K. Smith articulates a Christian anthropology based on the argument that even though our rational capacities set us apart from the animals, humans do not fundamentally experience the world in a rational way. The best example of this can be observed in the development of a baby to a child. The baby's life is completely sustained by other people. She is fully dependent on the care of her parents or caregivers. Before the infant knows even the names of the people around her, she can take in the world through her five senses. Her eyes see the face of her mother; her skin feels the warmth of her mother's embrace; her tongue tastes her mother's milk; her little ears hear her parents' voices; and her nose smells their scents. The senses develop first and are the first modes by which humans come to know the world. Only after a child has grown into her body is the child sent to school to engage and train her rational capacities.

Building on Alasdair MacIntyre's philosophical anthropology that human beings are dependent, rational animals, Smith posits that humans are more essentially liturgical animals.⁴¹ Before humans can reason, they desire, just as the young child desires milk from its mother.⁴² Smith writes that, as humans, we are "religious animals not because we are primarily believing animals but because we are liturgical animals—embodied, practicing creatures whose love/desire is aimed at something ultimate."⁴³

Smith uses the language of art to articulate just how the human embodied experience affects not only our imaginations but also forms how we interact with the world. He attributes art with giving a vision of what the good life looks like. While Smith is primarily speaking of the university and the aim of Christian education in shaping students' imaginations, his argument applies to new understandings of the art museum and gallery as places of social dialogue that help form what Charles Taylor calls our "social imaginaries."⁴⁴ The art museum, broadly defined, has entered a new frontier that in many ways mirrors what the university has become. The modern museum as understood in the digital age is a kind of mall of ideas where visitors experience art through the lens of social engagement. The cultural liturgies that are played out in art museums take place both through the embodied experiences of the place and within the limits of the human imagination.⁴⁵

In Situ: Placemaking and Cultural Liturgies

After the destruction of the Commons Chamber during the Blitz in World War II, Winston Churchill argued to the members of Parliament that the Chamber should be rebuilt as it was: a rectangular room with the two parties sitting on either side. Other parliamentary government buildings, like the United States Senate and House Chambers, tend to be semicircles that encourage consensus, whereas the direct, face-to-face shape of the Commons Chamber encourages confrontation and debate. In his argument, Churchill famously claimed: "We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us."⁴⁶ The same could be said for all public institutions, including art museums and religious gathering spaces. The built environment of museum and gallery spaces affords certain interpretations of place that ultimately shape the human imagination.

Museum and gallery curators recognize that how a work of art is experienced is significantly affected by *where* the artwork is placed and *what* it stands in relation to. For example, *Guernica*, perhaps Pablo Picasso's most famous work that depicts the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, is housed by the Reina Sofia in Madrid in its own gallery space. The room is entirely dedicated to this one painting. The other works of art in the room show historic

photographs of the work in progress and of cartoons done by Picasso in preparation for the finished work.⁴⁷ When one enters the gallery, the sensation of being enveloped by one of the twentieth century's most moving pieces of art is overwhelming. The piece is 7.77 meters in length, and stands 3.49 meters tall, taking up one entire wall. The painting dwarfs the viewer, not only by its size, but also by the room's entirety of focus on this singular work of art. There is no bench in the gallery, so the viewer is required to stand in the presence of the painting. The walls are solid white with minimal lighting features above, and the floors are a clean but cold, gray tile. The only warmth in this space comes from the violent movement within the painting and the breathing visitor before it. The relational experience of this work is isolating; viewers stand apart from one another, and if they dare speak, often manage to merely whisper in hushed tones. Standing before *Guernica* is likely to afford the contemplation of war and loss no matter what gallery it is in. However, place it in Room 205.10 and the work affords the viewer with an even starker interpretation than might otherwise be had.

Compare the embodied experience of *Guernica* with another large and internationally known work, Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*. While this painting is a similar height, (3.795 meters), it is shorter in length than *Guernica* by a little more than three meters. While the gallery at the Rijksmuseum is named the Night Watch Gallery after Rembrandt's piece, there are four other large works in the room all painted by contemporaries of Rembrandt. A skylight allows natural light to filter into the room. Benches provide places for visitors to rest and reflect on the grandeur of the Dutch masterpiece. A carpet covers the hardwood floors and softens the footsteps of the over 2.6 million guests who visit the Rijksmuseum each year.⁴⁸ The Night Watch Gallery is an inviting space, the embodied experience of which is much warmer than Room 205.10 in the Reina Sofia. The relational aspect of *The Night Watch* is communal. Not only are the figures in the image in conversation and relationship to each other, but the painting is in relation to other paintings of a similar type. The viewer, too, is invited to sit on a bench with other museumgoers or to join the crowd that has gathered in front of the work and notice the expressions of each of the different characters in the painting.



“Room 205.10,” Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, accessed August 13, 2022, <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/room/sala-20510>.



“Night Watch Gallery—Inside the Rijksmuseum—Visitor Information,” Rijksmuseum, accessed August 13, 2022, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/visitor-information/inside-the-rijksmuseum/night-watch-gallery>.

Not only do the galleries these works are displayed in inform the embodied experience of a work of art, but the built environments of the museums themselves communicate an interpretation of why their permanent collections might matter to their local community and to the general public. Jennifer Allen Craft describes the embodied experience a

place affords as “placemaking” and “enacted space.”⁴⁹ She writes, “Placemaking is about more than just creating beautiful spaces, architecture, or natural environments; it is about the space between the buildings, the people actively and repeatedly making a place as a community in the ‘built environment.’”⁵⁰ The places she describes are relational and enacted

because they are “liturgically made through the back-and-forth efforts, both grassroots and institutional, of the people, which include . . . architecture and other visual expressions.”⁵¹ Because humans are what Smith calls “liturgical animals,” the places that people build—including museums and galleries—in turn form cultural liturgies of place, which shape a community’s imagination of what art museums are for.

One example of how placemaking informs the cultural liturgies of museums can be seen in museums built before the rise of the Internet, which were built mostly of stone to mirror Greco-Roman temples. Examples of this style include The British National Gallery (1824), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1872), the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1928), and the Victoria and Albert (1852). What the built environments of these museums share include exterior columns and large staircases leading up to the main galleries. Walking up to the galleries affords a secular liturgy that the artworks held in a museum are higher, or more significant, than the ordinary experiences of art in the everyday. The setting communicates that art in these museums is set apart and meant to be visited like the gods of the ancient world.

In contrast, most major art museums built from the mid-twentieth century onward are primarily made of some combination of stonework and glass, allowing more natural light into gallery spaces, and communicating a sense of openness toward the local community and potential visitors.⁵² The built environment of these museums is made for the person even more than it is made for the art. The floor-to-ceiling windows in the museums built after the turn of the millennium communicates a different kind of cultural liturgy. Namely, that there is little difference between the outside world and the gathering space within the museum; all are welcome. Art is no longer something set apart from ordinary life. Instead, museums hope to reintegrate art into the common social and political experience of the community. In a spin on Churchill’s words, Craft writes, “The arts might shape the places, and the sense of place, that shapes us.”⁵³

The theological experience of art in museums then is to receive an embodied, physical interpretation of cultural values.⁵⁴ Experiencing art in person, in situ, inside a museum encourages the visitor to attend to the world as it is and to recognize what cultural liturgies may be informing her imagination.⁵⁵ Art experienced in person is an embodied experience that

resonates with a Christian anthropology of humans as “liturgical animals.” Cultural liturgies which call for our attention, shape our devotions. Like Mary Oliver’s garden or Father Capon’s onion, might the experience of art in museums make space for attention in the midst of this distracted, digital age?

Notes

1. Mary Oliver, “Upstream,” in *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2019), 8.
2. Oliver, “Upstream,” 5.
3. Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2002).
4. T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton,” in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019).
5. Jim Richardson, “How Museums Are Using Augmented Reality,” *MuseumNext*, August 11, 2022, <https://www.museumnext.com/article/how-museums-are-using-augmented-reality/>.
6. Emma Coffield, Rhiannon Mason, and Alistair Robinson, *Museum and Gallery Studies* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 56.
7. “Museum, n,” OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2022, accessed June 7, 2022, <https://www.oed.com/viewEntry/124079?rskey=3KUK2s&result=1&isAdvanced=false>.
8. Coffield, Mason, and Robinson, *Museum and Gallery Studies*, 56.
9. This subject has been traced by art historians like Owen Hopkins and Paul Oskar Kristeller and will not be dealt with directly within this paper as it is outside of the direct purview of my argument. See Owen Hopkins, *The Museum: From Its Origins to the 21st Century* (London, England: Frances Lincoln, The Quarto Group, 2021) and Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought 2: Papers on Humanism and the Arts* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).
10. Hopkins, *The Museum*, 17.
11. Sheila Watson, *Museums and Their Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.
12. “The ICOM Advisory Council Selects the Museum Definition Proposal to Be Voted in Prague,” International Council of Museums, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://icom.museum/en/news/the-icom-advisory-council-selects-the-museum-definition-proposal-to-be-voted-in-prague/>.
13. Zachary Small, “A New Definition of ‘Museum’ Sparks International Debate,” *Hyperallergic*, August 19, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/513858/icom-museum-definition/>.
14. “The ICOM Advisory Council Selects the Museum Definition Proposal to Be Voted in Prague.”
15. Watson, *Museums and Their Communities*, 1.
16. Watson, *Museums and Their Communities*, 1.

17. Hopkins, *The Museum*, 32.
18. Megan Johnston, Paul Seawright, and Elizabeth Crooke, "Curating in Context: Slow Curating as a Reflective Practice" (dissertation, Belfast School of Art, 2021).
19. Johnston is just one of the many museologists currently studying this trend toward socially engaged museum practices. See Laura Raicovich, *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2022).
20. Hopkins, *The Museum*, 7.
21. Adrian Murphy, "Digitising Collections—Breaking through the Museum Walls and Opening up Collections to the World," *Museums + Heritage Advisor*, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/features/digitising-collections-breaking-museum-walls-opening-collections-world/>.
22. "What Does It Mean to Be Human in the Digital Age—Surviving or Riding the Digital Age?" *Museums + Heritage Advisor*, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/blogs/mean-human-digital-age-surviving-riding-digital-age/>.
23. Kate Mirand Calleri, "Changing How They See," *American Alliance of Museums*, May 2, 2022, <https://www.aam-us.org/2022/05/01/changing-how-they-see/>.
24. Calleri, "Changing How They See."
25. Calleri, "Changing How They See."
26. Calleri, "Changing How They See."
27. "AAMC Foundation Professional Practices for Art Curators in Non-profits," accessed June 24, 2022, <https://www.artcurators.org/general/custom.asp?page=ProfPractices>.
28. Coffield, Mason, and Robinson, *Museum and Gallery Studies*, 59.
29. Raicovich, *Culture Strike*, 15–18.
30. Raicovich, *Culture Strike*, 19.
31. Former director of the Queens Museum in New York Laura Raicovich explores the issues museums face in what she terms the "Age of Protest" in her book, *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest*.
32. "The ICOM Advisory Council Selects the Museum Definition Proposal to Be Voted in Prague."
33. Hopkins, *The Museum*, 32–33.
34. One example of such an exhibit is "Rupture No 1: blowtorching the bitten peach," shown at the Tate Britain. For more information see "Heather Phillipson: Tate Britain," Tate, accessed August 13, 2022, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/heather-phillipson>.
35. Jacoba Urist, "A New Way to See Art," *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, June 10, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/06/multisensory-art/486200/>.
36. "What Does It Mean to Be Human in the Digital Age?"
37. Alain De Botton, "Should Art Really Be for Its Own Sake Alone?" *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, January 20, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jan/20/art-museums-churches>.
38. Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (London: Continuum, 2006), 257.
39. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 257.
40. Cameron J. Anderson, "Being Modern," in *God in the Modern Wing: Viewing Art with Eyes of Faith*, ed. G. Walter Hansen and Cameron J. Anderson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2021), 1.
41. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 40.
42. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 40.
43. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 40.
44. Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 24.
45. This argument is widely accepted across curatorial practice. Terry Smith writes, "The exhibition—in this expanded, extended sense—works, above all, to shape its spectator's experience and take its visitor through a journey of understanding that unfolds as a guided, yet open-weave pattern of affective insights, each triggered by looking, that accumulates until the viewer has understood the curator's insight and, hopefully, arrived at insights previously unthought by both." See Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), 35.
46. "Churchill and the Commons Chamber," UK Parliament website, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/building/palace/architecture/palacestructure/churchill/>.
47. "Home," *Room 205.10 | Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/room/sala-20510>.
48. "Attendance at the Rijksmuseum 2020," Statista, May 4, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/646065/attendance-at-the-rijksmuseum-in-the-netherlands/.49>.
49. Jennifer Allen Craft, *Placemaking and the Arts: Cultivating the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2018), 173.
50. Craft, *Placemaking and the Arts*, 173.
51. Craft, *Placemaking and the Arts*, 173.
52. Hopkins, *The Museum*, 33.
53. Craft, *Placemaking and the Arts*, 17.
54. Watson, *Museums and Their Communities*, 1.
55. Craft, *Placemaking and the Arts*, 21.



Mending, 2016.

Nicole Salimbene

Installation view at Flashpoint Gallery, Washington, DC.

Needles, thread, reclaimed wooden table, world atlas pages, meditation cushions, cement, earth from Santuario de Chimayo, wood, paint, scissors, thread spool.

Mending is an interactive installation that explores meditation and mending as art medium, metaphor, and practice. Contemplative environments positioned throughout the gallery invite audiences to sit or stand in meditation with sculptures and paintings constructed from ordinary materials associated with mending. Thousands of threaded needles, tangled sculptural masses of thread, and stitching offer opportunities for reflection on the work of reparation.



**The Work of Our Hands:
The Hue of the Sacred Meets the Tangible:
Site Specific Art and Transcendence**

Olga Lah

Olga Lah is a site-specific installation artist based in the Los Angeles area.

Translation, 2019

Used books

Alyce de Roulet Williamson Gallery
ArtCenter College of Design, Pasadena, CA



The Near and Bright Expanse, 2022
Acrylic paint, enamel paint, spray paint, polystyrene mixture on aluminum screen
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, AL

My work is in pursuit of creating experiences that inspire an awareness of transcendence. I construct large-scale, site-specific installations that often employ the repetition of commonplace materials. The work engages sensory experience using color, texture, and scale and explores the spaces we inhabit, our movement through time, and the capaciousness of God.

Site-specific art is engaged with a specific location and concerned with the connections between viewers and the history and context of that particular site. I arrange materials to invite alternate interpretations and perspectives about a site. I build new narratives to suggest a different understanding and place the viewer in a new perspective as they view their surroundings. *Lucent Shifts*, for example, is an installation meant to transform the space in



Lightly, Freely, Happily, 2022
Acrylic paint on wireform
Art Renzei, Long Beach, CA
Collaboration with Long Beach community members
Photo by Brandon Shigeta



Expectation, 2014
Flagging tape
Djerassi Residency Program, Woodside, CA

which it exists. Made from found reflective plastic, the work captures immediate attention with its highly reflective surface. Its appearance changes continuously as one walks around the work, its

surface mirroring the ever-changing environment. It has had many iterations, but it was first installed in a transitional space that was raw and undone. I aimed to create an incongruous environment by

An installation appears for a particular time and place and will not show itself in the same way again.



Lightly, Freely, Happily, 2022
Acrylic paint on wireform
Art Renzei, Long Beach, CA
Collaboration with Long Beach community members
Photos by Brandon Shigeta

introducing a gleaming work into the bare space. The work was suspended, with one end hanging low to the floor, gradually moving upward towards the ceiling. It evoked a sense of rising as the material seemed to be drawn upward. In *Lucent Shifts*, as in most of my works, I consider the physicality of the site and a visitor's engagement within it as they move in and around a piece. I want to raise the level of consciousness, inviting viewers to greater awareness of themselves and to deeper observation. I invite the audience to take pause and to notice. This is in an effort to create a "thin space," a place where the hue of the sacred meets the tangible. It is a call to reflect beyond ourselves.

Time often becomes a component of site-specific installations, since it may be inevitable that the



work changes or deteriorates, becoming fleeting or ephemeral. I am drawn to making ephemeral work because of how it actualizes the immediate moment. An installation appears for a particular time and place and will not show itself in the same way again. Documentation is a visible record of the work as it appeared at a distinct moment, but the experience becomes a memory that exists only in the mind of the viewer. This imperceptible continuation of a work's remembrance is what interests me in the process of installation art. *The Near and Bright Expanse*, my most recent work, explores this idea of a brief gesture in space and time. The installation stretches midair across a seventy-foot-long gallery space. Translucent material (acrylic paint, enamel paint, spray paint, polystyrene mixture on aluminum



Amass and Swell, 2015
Foam pit blocks, packaging foam,
acoustic foam, foam sheets
Orange County Museum of Art,
Newport Beach, CA



I look to develop spaces that encourage an inward progression towards a deep knowing. By installing hundreds of books in a gallery or by filling a museum hallway with foam, I aim to create a connection to sublimity through repetition, simplicity of form, and ambiguity.



Translation, 2019
Used books
Alyce de Roulet Williamson Gallery
ArtCenter College of Design, Pasadena, CA



Lucent Shifts, 2017
Reflective plastic
The Icehouse Arts Complex, Long Beach, CA

screen) billows above the viewer's head, appearing as moving atmosphere in glowing yellow and metallic gray tones. The space is meant to feel limitless and set apart. It is intended to bring the viewer to a boundary between here and the hereafter. The fragility and temporality of my work is testament to my belief in the ongoing nature of existence. I believe in a kingdom that is both here and yet to come. I believe we are actively generating a vision for the world that is reverberating into an eternal reality. The experiences I create are momentary in a linear understanding of time, but within redemptive

time the impact of my work exists on a vast plane of reality where all things are conjoined.

An idea that has stayed with me from my time in seminary is Karl Barth's understanding of *thaumeizin*, a Greek philosophical term. Barth translated *thaumeizin* as an experience of wonder that points to the revelation of God. Sensing awe, or in the same measure perplexity, is a state of being in a transformative presence. This idea is foundational to my work. I look to develop spaces that encourage an inward progression towards a deep knowing. By installing hundreds of books in a gallery or

Moiety, 2018
Paper, cellophane, mixed media, netting
Collaboration with artists from ECF Art
Center, San Pedro, CA
ECF Art Centers support personal
artistic development for adults with
developmental disabilities.





by filling a museum hallway with foam, I aim to create a connection to sublimity through repetition, simplicity of form, and ambiguity. I believe this kind of abstraction in contemporary art invites us to abide in the unknown and sit in a place of vulnerability, beneficial practices in the life of faith. Looking at art allows us to hold lightly to our own understanding. It gives way to a poetics of faith. What does it mean to see? I hope the experiences I construct cast a renewed imagination of the fullness of God into unexpected places. I aspire for my work to impart grace into the world, sending viewers out with a sense of widening immensity.

The Undoing, 2016
Used packaging foam
LACE: Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions
#13 Photo by Chris Wormald

Somebody Is Listening: Music as a Gesture to God of Rest and Repentance

Julian Davis Reid

When God commissions Moses to lead the Hebrew slaves into rest from their enslavement and to exhort Pharaoh to repent from his wickedness, God identifies as YHWH: “I Am That I Am,” or “I Will Be What I Will Be.” The name is ironic, for it conceals as much as it delivers. The name is intrinsically infinite with meaning—what will God be? But the name is also so holy as to never be used directly in Jewish tradition, only gestured towards. Throughout the Old Testament, the writers use circumlocution to reference it, using other names with unique spellings (e.g., Elohim or Adonai) to allude to God’s name. With this self-naming gesture, God and the Spirit-inspired biblical writers leave Moses, the people of Israel, the outsiders of Israel, and us readers with as much an invitation as an assertion.

The drama of the Exodus narrative reaches into today. The anxieties of pharaoh still run us ragged, no matter our political persuasion. We do not rest, nor let others do so, as we erect monuments to ourselves—material wealth, social media follower counts, degrees, and so forth.¹ And when our pharaonic ways are confronted, we resist repentance (thus the rarity of a politician’s simple apology). We need an end to our enslavement as much as ancient Egypt and Israel did.

This much may be clear, but what is not clear is the agent of that liberation. Some suggest that in our human capabilities we can save ourselves—be it through voting, education, or even regulation of capitalism. But the story of Exodus resists confining our problems to the immanent frame: Moses is

not the ultimate actor, God is. To be sure, I am not advocating for a theocracy. But I am pessimistic that any actions of the state absent attunement to God’s Holy Spirit will solve the perennial issues plaguing and fueling modernity. The biblical imagination, in Exodus and otherwise, shows that faith cannot be ancillary to any human endeavor. We need human activity in participation with God to redress the deep evils of colonial modernity. In giving God’s personal name, God invites Moses, his followers, and now us to contend with the identity of our liberator and our relationship to this God.² Such contending is what is at stake in any meaningful theological discourse.

The theological discourse we sustain within church contexts does the important and vital work of articulating our relationship to God, but the rise of religious “nones” and the shuttering of church doors indicate that such explicit conversation is of waning interest in the public square. This data is causing us to reassess our tactic. If we as followers of Jesus want the world to know of the God who liberates and saves, how shall we share? The burning bush episode offers an avenue: alongside theological discourse within the church, we can offer winsome witness beyond the steeple that invites people into conversation with *I Am That I Am*, the God who condescended to free us from our cosmic bondage. That is, we can gesture towards the God of rest and the God of repentance.

This is why I am an artist-theologian. I play and speak to bring listeners—Christian and otherwise—to the edge of their own capacities so that they

Julian Davis Reid is an artist-theologian, writer, speaker, and musician who plays as part of the musical outfit The Juju Exchange and is the founder of the contemplative-musical program Notes of Rest.

might stare inwards and upwards and consider the need for help beyond their own capability, to receive a future yet to be. I do this from the deep conviction about the life of the Holy Spirit. As Makoto Fujimura articulates: “[T]he word ‘Christian’ used as a mere label does not mean anything to the Holy Spirit, who hovers near people who authentically, earnestly wrestle with truth, beauty, and goodness.”³ I foster this wrestling through my piano playing, composition, and production. Through these I name the deep restlessness in society, offer balm amidst it, and enjoin us to turn from our pharaonic ways. And as a Black musician, I stand within the rich lineage of using music as a way to signify deeper messages of hope, survival, conviction, and faith as we wait the fullness of God’s salvation.⁴

What follows are vignettes that sketch the theological discourse I have cultivated beyond church doors. Through my contemplative-musical ministry Notes of Rest and my band The JuJu Exchange, I try to follow the Holy Spirit into the work of holding together gesture, rest, and repentance. My prayer is that as you read my testimony, you will see more of how your life with music can bear its own witness to the God of Exodus who longs to save and be known.⁵

Notes of Rest at Grace Farms⁶

My first story comes from my ministry Notes of Rest. Notes of Rest is a spiritual formation ministry grounded in Scripture and Black music that invites members of the body of Christ to receive God’s gift of rest. Typically I offer this experience in churches and seminaries, helping households of faith move from the restlessness of this world towards the restfulness that God has given us in Jesus. However, in March 2022 I had the opportunity to host a session at a humanitarian foundation in Connecticut called Grace Farms that showed God providing rest in a new context.

The evening focused on the theme of home, the research topic for the foundation that year. My good friend Dr. Matthew Croasmun from the Yale Center for Faith and Culture had invited me to craft an experience guided by this thesis: home is where we rest. I centered our conversation on the book *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* by Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), a music and culture critic from the twentieth century. He argues that the failure of Reconstruction in the nineteenth century taught Black folk that an enduring “chasm” stood between them and white folk. Black folk responded

to this realization by creating new music grounded in resources “African, subcultural, or hermetic.” Nursing their pain in this way gave rise to Blues People and birthed the genre we know as the blues. This musical response to their enduring subjection became the “logic and beauty” of Black music moving into the twentieth century.⁷

Baraka showed us that in a world where Black folk were/are routinely denied home, they created a portable one through music. But I took Baraka further: this creation of Black folk for themselves became a home for the nation.

I made Baraka’s explanation of Black music’s reckoning with Black homelessness the centerpiece for this gathering of hedge fund investors, architects, and academics in New Canaan. Baraka showed us that in a world where Black folk were/are routinely denied home, they created a portable one through music. But I took Baraka further: this creation of Black folk for themselves became a home for the nation. The music became an inviting space where all, regardless of social standing, could come rest. (We see this with how warmly received Stevie, Beyoncé, and Michael are by white as well as Black folk.)

I then analyzed and played famous Black music about home—“A House Is Not a Home,” written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David and sung by Dionne Warwick, and “Home” by Diana Ross from *The Wiz*. These two Black women address the problem and love of home. Warwick insists that love makes a home, but because she is missing her lover, she mourns that her house is not a home. Her song sounds the pain of loss: “But a room is not a house and a house is not a home, when the two of us are far apart and one of us has a broken heart.”⁸ This is a loss that is relatable to anyone in love, but a deep kind of loss when read through the eyes of Baraka’s account of Black music.

By contrast, Ross learns by the end of her journey through the remix of *The Wizard of Oz* that the home she was seeking outside of herself was actually to be found within. “And I’ve learned/That we must look inside our hearts/To find a world full of love/Like yours/Like me/Like home . . .”⁹ On the surface, this song is simply rejoicing about discovering

self-esteem: we can find home in ourselves. But I interpreted this song in light of Baraka's framing of Blues People because of the pain, strain, and acceptance I heard in Ross's performance. In the song's lyrics, Ross is crying out to God, grappling with where to root herself and find home. For the sake of our group at Grace Farms, I interpreted the song as an anthem for Black people living in these lands that we now call the United States. Ross puts it well: "This brand new world might be a fantasy." The fantasy of a life of being equal to a white person's in this country was another way to describe Baraka's chasm. However, Ross's search in *The Wizard of Oz* taught her a core lesson for Black people in the midst of this anti-Black world: we can love and find home ourselves, and thus find rest.

If people were to ignore my analysis and simply listen to the lulling way I played these love songs, they might have heard an uncomplicated invitation to sit back and relax. But because the songs were framed by my analysis of Baraka, I hoped to communicate the tension in Black beauty.

If people were to ignore my analysis and simply listen to the lulling way I played these love songs, they might have heard an uncomplicated invitation to sit back and relax. But because the songs were framed by my analysis of Baraka, I hoped to communicate the tension in Black beauty. After I finished playing, I charged the audience to create a different ecology of home, one where we listen more carefully to the questions these Black musicians pose. The participants in that room controlled major economic and political levers in society that give rise to the "Kind of Blue" Black folk experienced daily. Can we have a home not built on the homelessness of Black folk? We can receive these songs for their beauty while mourning their existence in the first place. We can embrace these universal feelings of heartache and displacement while interrogating and resisting the underlying factors that lead to the existence of rhythm 'n blues as a genre. I made this charge to the mostly non-Black crowd in order to invite them to a place of deep wrestling with their own social location, to help them reflect on their participation

in the ways of pharaoh and the ways of Israel, for we enslave and are enslaved in the patterns of life that make Blues People. We need help beyond ourselves, from a future that is not yet.

While the participants were discussing my challenge, I played "Give Me Jesus," the Negro spiritual with which I conclude every Notes of Rest experience. I do so because it speaks to the deepest kind of rest we can have, an inviolable relationship with Jesus that gives our souls rest even when the body is not granted it. If my antebellum southern Black ancestors could fathom singing this kind of song while they endured hell on earth, then soul rest in this way should be possible for anyone! And in the context of the Grace Farms evening, the song spoke to the Blues People's mentality that post-Reconstruction Black America inherited from pre-Reconstruction Black America.

I did not share my reasoning for playing this song, in part because I knew that the event was not expressly religious. But part of the winsome witness of Black folk is to let music work subversively. This has been known as "signifying" in Black music, where we layer meanings in our expressive culture in order to transcend the limits that the defining power structures impose.¹⁰ Though this term was coined for use in the African American embrace of modernism in the twentieth century, its antecedents stretch back far before, including to the spirituals. For instance, James Cone notes that "'[S]teal away' referred not only to an eschatological realm, but it was also used by Harriet Tubman as a signal of freedom for slaves who intended to run away with her to the north, or to Canada."¹¹ And so even though I could not preach plainly about the significance of "Give Me Jesus," I played it in order to gesture to the liberating God who took on flesh, died at the hands of our pharaonic ways, and rose over them. The call to repentance always stands within the assurance of grace.

Two remarks after the event showed me that people experienced Notes of Rest as theological conversation. Right after the event ended, someone came up to me and told me she had sensed Jesus during my session. This remark delighted yet mystified me, because I had eschewed explicit mention of religion throughout. Perhaps she had recognized "Give Me Jesus" or perhaps she had sensed my ministerial presence. I am not sure why, but I got the sense in the moment that it was not for me to know. All I needed to know was that someone was receiving the gestures I was making towards God.

The other comment came during the dinner afterwards. Various participants got up and publicly thanked me for my program. But one of the architects gave a different remark. He thanked me but then said that the event writ large and the questions raised had left him feeling unsettled in a good way; he was going to have to sit with them. I remember how red his face was as he shared about his unsettled spirit.

That night showed that engaging the complexities of addressing anti-Black modernity brings us to the edge of our own human capacity. Anti-Blackness is so difficult to root out because forms of response to it, like beautiful music, become so desirable, which can make Black pain palatable. “A House Is Not a Home” and “Home” are beautiful expressions of a resilient Black expressive culture, but they have a trace of sadness in them that belies the ethos of Blues People that Baraka outlined. To truly listen to this Black music, therefore, is to listen for the call to action associated with it. When we listen to the blues (Warwick), or to songs of triumph (Ross), we should hear our own responsibility in there. How are we responsible for the conditions that led to the creation of that song? This is a question that gestures us towards repentance, repentance we need to embrace in our church and nation.

Too often Black music is ghettoized as offering mere entertainment, uplift, or respite. While it does provide those, it also has the capacity to offer conviction if the audience dare wrestle with its truth, beauty, and goodness. Notes of Rest at Grace Farms was a space for me to be a musical vessel for the Holy Spirit to engage people in that good wrestling. And my work with The JuJu Exchange did the same.

The JuJu Exchange’s Price of Peace¹²

In 2018, I led my jazz-electronic fusion group, The JuJu Exchange, in creating an oratorio for peace in Chicago. Every December the orchestra Fulcrum Point New Music, led by Stephen Burns, gives a concert for peace in the city, and for their twentieth anniversary they commissioned us to write an oratorio for them in partnership with the Chicago Children’s Choir and Young Chicago Authors. It was a welcomed chance to provide a vision of hope for the city during the holiday season.

Though it was an honor, I approached the task with some trepidation given my Blues People disposition. Large multiethnic/multiracial musical

productions run the risk of presenting facile hope, of ignoring the reality that we live in the wake of the slave ship—that is, in the wake of the gun, the wake of a funeral home. As Christina Sharpe says, “The past is not yet past.”¹³ Moreover, not only does there remain a chasm between Black and white that sentimentality does not address (Baraka), but these productions can reproduce the chasm by calling for superficial change that does not interrogate the ever-malleable roots of whiteness. I did not want to present to a largely white audience a feel-good production that suggested we can be the Moses of our own deliverance. I believe that only God can save us from the wake of the slave ship. And to turn towards God is to repent.

And so, like at Grace Farms, I wanted to ask introspective questions of the audience about the limits of our genuine commitment to move towards peace. And because I believed that the only one who could ultimately bring peace was Jesus, I titled the oratorio *Price of Peace*, a play on the cost paid for peace and Isaiah’s prophetic language about the Messiah: “Prince of Peace” (9:6). The questions and the music together would be a gesture towards God, an allusion towards the kind of theological discourse that, for me, matters most.

Price of Peace is an oratorio about the history of Chicago, comprised of three movements with a Greek chorus a cappella moment for the Chicago Children’s Choir following each one. The first movement mourns the removal of the peoples that once occupied the place we now call Chicago,¹⁴ including the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi.¹⁵ That piece was a somber ballad called “What Loss.” Following that, the children’s choir sang their first set of questions to the audience.

For peace to come, who had to pay?
For peace to come, what was the price?
For peace to come, who did they lay down?
For peace to come, what was sacrificed?

The purpose was to get the people to think about the hidden costs paid for Chicago to become a city.

Following that came the second movement called “Streets of Division,” which was about the contestation for the city throughout the 1900s. During the first half of the twentieth century especially, there was a collision of immigrants, migrants, and refugees meeting in the Windy City as they negotiated who lived where.¹⁶ The lyrics and shape of “Streets” therefore sounded the young

peoples' dissatisfaction with having inherited the evils of segregation from generations past.

The Greek chorus moment after "Streets of Division" was about the personal responsibility for which the audience must account for peace to come.

For peace to come, what should I pay?
For peace to come, how high's my price?
For peace to come, what must I lay down?
For peace to come, what's sacrificed?

These questions presumed that there was need for personal repentance in order to address the issues plaguing our city. If the first movement underscored the importance of remembering a past of death we have inherited, this second movement underscored the importance of a call to turn from the wicked ways for which we as individuals are responsible.

The third piece is called "Live Here" and centers on twenty-first-century Chicago. It takes the melody of lament from "What Loss" and speeds it up, suggesting that any vision of hope the city might have for the future must enfold ongoing lament for the "past that is not yet past." Even still, the audience was so happy to clap as that last E-flat Major 7 rang out. However, their clapping had to decrescendo quicker than normal because the singers had one more set of questions.

For peace to come, what should we pay?
For peace to come, who sets the price?
For peace to come, what can't we lay down?
For peace to come, what's sacrificed?

As the vocalists walked offstage singing the refrain "For peace to come," the congregation picked up the line and kept singing it well after the house went dark. I had never seen anything like this at a show. This last chorus invited the audience to account for our collective history. To end the piece with the question about what we are and are not willing to forego in order to pursue peace allows us to grapple with our limits. Will the Chicagoans who can afford a show like *Price of Peace* actually give up comforts and excesses in order to redress the quotidian and spectacular violence its Black residents experience daily? What would such a reckoning *actually* mean for those in comfort in the wealthy, "safe" parts of the city?

The oratorio gestured towards the gospel without ever announcing it. The music was preparing the

hearts of listeners to interrogate their own souls to see what the limits of their capacity to pursue peace are. Pharaoh would not relinquish power without a fight, and ultimately had to confront the God of Israel in order to repent. Similarly, I maintain that the state *on its own* cannot engender the love necessary to address the horrors of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous death that underpin modernity. But by encouraging the audience to wrestle with the truth of our motives and our comforts, it draws people to contemplate the price of peace. And my hope is that it can make space for the Holy Spirit to encounter people who recognize they are sinners. It reminds me of the Prince of Peace's question to the blind man in John: "Do you want to be made well?" (5:6).

Out in the lobby afterwards, my public relations colleague on the project approached me and took a picture of me, saying that she wanted to document this moment. I was confused and asked why, and her response was that she wanted to document the start of my ministry. I was thankful for that moment but again remained curious as to why she read the night as such, given I had never explicitly framed this as ministry. Of course, I had my private theological framework for the event, but it was never made explicit to the working team during the creation of this piece. In retrospect, her comment confirmed for me the power of gesture, to let music move people to a place of holy wrestling with the sins of our past and present. I am prayerful such wrestling can help my city look towards the future with sober hope.

Look into the Sky¹⁷

The third vignette comes from a project four years later, also in partnership with the Chicago Children's Choir (led by the great Josephine Lee and now known as Uniting Voices Chicago). In this case I had the honor of co-creating a piece about environmental justice with my dear colleague and Chicago Children's Choir's Ayanna Woods, who was able to feature The JuJu Exchange for the premiere performance.

The piece provided a platform for the young people to voice their feelings about the degradation they were inheriting and about the possibilities for a different kind of future. In short, it was a chance to encourage citywide repentance for the ways we do not let the earth, and thus vulnerable human populations such as children, rest. Ayanna and I held listening sessions with the young people where we helped them drum up ideas about the earth, and

then we wrote this piece based on key themes the young people gave us, such as “My innocence is lost” and “Look into the sky,” the latter of which became the title.

We premiered the piece in an outdoor pavilion in downtown Chicago in May as part of the choir’s year-end gala. The day was overcast, and we were worried about the rain. But thankfully, the weather held through most of our show.

As we neared the end of the piece, we settled on the words of the title, “Look into the sky.” It was a charge and invitation to the audience. If we look into the sky, we see both air pollution and beautiful clouds, both reason for fear and reason for hope. For me, this phrase (and the song writ large) was a gesture toward the heavens, or as the Hebrew imagination framed it, “the waters above” (*hashamayim* in Gen. 1:1). I hoped the gesture would communicate a posture of faith where, like in *Price of Peace*, we realized our own limitations and sought help from beyond ourselves.

But God had more than that for us. As the choir began singing “Look into the sky,” the skies opened up and it began to rain. And when the song ended, so did the rain! The synchronicity was so noticeable that someone in the crew came up to me afterwards and said: “I’m not religious, but somebody was listening.”

Whether you think the rain was actually from God (I think it was), the gesture towards God was achieving its intended purpose. I did not manufacture the rain, just like the Hebrew slaves did not manufacture salvation. Though the contexts were different, the coming of the rain that day brought visions of the parting of the Red Sea. Both point to the *I Am*, to the presence of a God who is near and gracious, who hears our cries in our lands of captivity and bids us follow.

These three vignettes encourage me to continue creating space for theological discourse with my music in and beyond the church. Let us use music as a means to communicate God’s nearness and conviction to a world that needs grace and mercy as much as ever before. As you discern the shape of your own winsome witness, be encouraged that somebody is indeed listening.

Notes

1. Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 19.
2. R. Kendall Soulen, *The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity*, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 13.
3. Makoto Fujimura, *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 34–35.
4. Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 33.
5. This language comes from the work of Theological Education between the Times, a project around the future of theological education led by Dr. Ted Smith and housed at Candler School of Theology at Emory. I am thankful to be one of its fellows.
6. This event was not recorded, but here’s a solo piano performance version of music from Notes of Rest. “Give Me Jesus” is at the end: <https://youtu.be/MYCKGmf5bLM/>.
7. Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 80.
8. Dionne Warwick, vocalist, “A House Is Not a Home,” *Make Way for Dionne Warwick*, Scepter, 1964.
9. Diana Ross, vocalist, “Home,” *The Wiz*, 1978.
10. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 91–99.
11. James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 63.
12. This performance is not yet recorded as of the publishing of this article, but here’s an instrumental version of it: <https://youtu.be/ozL7mPFf5ck?t=1005/>.
13. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, reprint ed. (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2016), 9–21.
14. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 110–11.
15. Tara Kenjockey, “Indigenous Tribes of Chicago,” American Library Association, December 2, 2019, <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/diversity/chicago-indigenous>.
16. *The South Side* by Natalie Moore describes in harrowing detail how Black segregated life emerged on the South Side. Natalie Y. Moore, *The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation* (New York: St. Martin’s Publishing Group, 2016).
17. You can view the performance here: https://www.instagram.com/p/CeB_FBCJ-LK/.

Whether you think the rain was actually from God (I think it was), the gesture towards God was achieving its intended purpose. I did not manufacture the rain, just like the Hebrew slaves did not manufacture salvation.



Unfolding, 2017, installation view at Dadian Gallery.

Nicole Salimbene

Water, earth, roots, pitcher, glasses, cement, medicine cabinet, ironing boards, desk chair, lunch box, glassine envelopes, maps, silk thread, mustard seeds, lima bean seeds, dictionary pages, projected images, acrylic paint, paper, bone folder.

In the lost art of the letter, we lose the embodied gesture of unfolding something slowly. To stare and search, to wonder and wander across the fields either in maps or letters. To behold for a moment content that cannot be swiped away. The patience of waiting for a letter to arrive. The sharing of wisdom and presence germinating in the time and space where the possibility of connection is drawn apart and pulled together without immediacy.

In this interactive installation, viewers are invited to step into the space for an intimate look, and to sit at the ironing-board-transformed-desk, opening the envelopes placed inside a wooden box. Inside the envelopes, poems/quotes/images are intended to provoke further examination of the connections between the ordinary and sublime objects and gestures presented within the installation, as well as for the viewers to embody the metaphor of folding and unfolding and the relational poetics examined in this piece.

Spiritual Formation in Choir Rehearsals

Michael Waschevski

Introduction

Every week church choirs of all sizes, ability levels, and contexts gather together to prepare music to lead the people of God in worship. What happens is nothing short of a miracle! Church choirs prepare more repertoire in a year than school choirs, community choirs, or professional choirs. For church choirs that sing weekly in worship, as well as special services for All Saints' Day, Advent, Christmas Eve, Lent, Holy Week/Easter, and any number of unique congregational services and events, it is common to prepare and offer fifty anthems a season. It is miraculous!

To prepare such a volume of music means that *every minute of rehearsal counts*. There is so much to learn and master musically. Notes for each part. Intonation. Correct rhythms. Appropriate stylistic engagement for each genre—Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Spirituals, World Music, and more. Of course, our choirs are composed of people who work, raise families, travel, and experience the trials and tribulations of life personally each week. They are often among the busiest church members and friends as they exercise their discipleship in a multitude of ways outside of the choir. Church choir attendance is unlike school or professional choir attendance, in which members often keep near-perfect records.

Many conductors, understandably, get so caught up in the demanding pace of learning music and preparing for the next anthem or next service that spiritual formation is not often a conscious element of the choral experience. And, given that many choirs are also rehearsing on Sunday morning, participation in formal adult Christian formation

through church school or Sunday morning small groups is often not possible for choir members.

This essay lifts up the value of spiritual formation in choir rehearsals. The good news is, if we are focusing on *spirit-ual* formation, it's not all up to us. There is no doubt the Spirit is at work in and among choirs whether we are aware of it or not. And also, *intentional* spiritual formation as an element of rehearsal can lead to deep and transformative experiences for singers. As choirs experience deepening spiritual formation, the congregation's experience deepens as well.

The Spirit's Work

Martin Luther is credited with the insight that "the (one) who sings, prays twice." Frederick Delius said that "music is an outburst of the soul." Fred Pratt Green's text "When in Our Music God Is Glorified" includes the verse, "How often, making music, we have found / a new dimension in the world of sound, / as worship moved us to a more profound / Alleluia!" (*Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, 641).

Singing, praying twice, outbursts of the soul, finding a new dimension in the world of sound that touches us profoundly . . . the Spirit is at work when we join our voices together as a choir. Lest we think it all depends on us, it is good to remember, humbly, that experiences of the Spirit are occurring in our rehearsals that do not depend on us and our planning or leadership.

In Scripture there are many texts that beautifully describe experiences with the Spirit. In both Hebrew and Greek, the words translated "spirit" (*ruach* and *pneuma*) can also be translated as "wind" or "breath." The beloved hymn text by Edwin Hatch begins each verse with "Breathe on me, Breath of God"; when a

Michael Waschevski is the senior associate pastor and chancel choir conductor of First Presbyterian Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

choir takes its first collective breath as it prepares to sing, the breath of God has already preceded us. Filled with God's breath, filled with the Spirit, our spirits united experience emotions that move us personally and collectively, shaping and forming us.

When I was in college, I was blessed to sing under three amazing conductors—Brad Holmes, Beth Holmes, and Weston Noble. Each drew out musical excellence. Each was also keenly aware of the Spirit at work in our rehearsals and attentive to the power of sharing experiences in the moment. They would notice a smile on a singer's face, a tear rolling down a cheek, or a changed countenance and ask the singer to share what they were feeling. Every moment spent hearing about that immediate experience from others confirmed for all of us the presence and work of the Spirit in our midst. Taking a moment to acknowledge the Spirit's work formed and shaped us all. Assuming a posture of expectation and awareness of the Spirit at work, even in rehearsal, forms a choir in their singing. Something happens when a choir sings.

Intentional Formation

Knowing that the Spirit is working among us, we can bring intentionality to nurture spiritual formation in our rehearsals. The challenges and realities of a choir's weekly demands make every second of rehearsal count in order to be prepared for worship leadership on Sunday.

As important as it may be to practice good vocal production, to accurately learn parts and rhythms, and to perfect style in a rehearsal setting, it is also vital to weave intentional spiritual formation into the rehearsal experience. A deep experience in rehearsal enriches and inspires singers on Wednesday (or whenever rehearsals are held) as they rehearse and the congregation on Sunday. Let me suggest four practical and concise (minimal rehearsal time required) practices to consider as your context allows.

Reflection on the Texts We Sing

Sacred choral music unites text and music. All too often, our rush to master the music can lead us to undervalue the importance and centrality of the text. Many of the texts we sing are drawn directly from Scripture. As such, they are texts that have formed, sustained, challenged, comforted, and inspired God's people for millennia. They have their own contexts and their own histories. Making time to lift up the biblical text, share its history and context, and invite

singers to reflect on the text in the context of their own lives transforms the experience of singing a choral anthem and in turn transforms its hearers as well.

Let me share an example. Philip W. J. Stopford's "Do Not Be Afraid" (MorningStar Music Publishers MSM-50-9818) echoes several verses from Isaiah 43. The recurring refrain is from Isaiah 43:1:

Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.
I have called you by your name: you are mine.

God's people have heard this tender and loving word from God since the time of exile. For well over 2,500 years these words have shaped and formed the faithful. Over 2,500 years . . .

As the anthem progresses, the first verse lifts up Isaiah 43:2 and is followed by the refrain:

When you walk through the waters, I'll be
with you;
you will never sink beneath the waves.
When the fire is burning all around you,
you will never be consumed by the flames.
Do not be afraid.

The second verse of the anthem names the experience of exile and God's care for God's people in the midst of it:

When the fear of loneliness is looming,
then remember I am at your side.
When you dwell in the exile of a stranger,
remember you are precious in my eyes.
Do not be afraid.

The third verse amplifies Isaiah's words of assurance from God:

You are mine, O my child,
I am your Father,
and I love you with a perfect love.

Do Not Be Afraid: ©Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Reproduced by permission of Kevin Mayhew Ltd, (www.kevinmayhew.com). Licence No. KMCL300523/01.

The final refrain adds a solo soprano voice soaring over the choir using the same words. It is as if God is with the choir, singing to all gathered.

The construction of the anthem, especially the repetition of the refrain, invites singers to make a deep connection between the text and their own lives. When I have used this piece with my own choir and in festival settings, I have taken two to three minutes in rehearsal to verbalize the connection between the anthem, the Isaiah text, and the context of exile. Then I invite singers to write directly on their copy of the music any reflections to personalize the text as they sing.

As the anthem begins with what will become the recurring refrain, I invite them to write notes that remind them that we are proclaiming God's word that has sustained God's people for so many years.

As they sing the first verse and the refrain, I invite them to hear the word of God for them in the midst of whatever waters or fires they are experiencing in their lives and to hear God's voice speaking to them.

As they sing the second verse and the refrain, I invite them to write in their score the name of someone they love or care about who needs to hear God's word to them. Who needs to hear the assurance not to be afraid, for they belong to God?

As they sing the third verse and the final refrain, I invite them to hear anew God's word to them and to those they love and care about as the soloist soars above the choir.

It is worth the two or three minutes it takes in rehearsal when singers connect to the context of the Scripture, personalize their singing by remembering others and themselves, and listen for God's voice anew as the soloist enters on the final refrain. These two or three minutes deepen the experience of singing the anthem and form singers and listeners in the Spirit. This kind of practice can be done with every text we sing, whether a biblical text, a sacred poetic text, or an historical liturgical text.

Reflections on Placement in the Liturgy

Another concise way to engage in spiritual formation and to deepen our experience of a text is by reflecting on its placement in the liturgy. Highlighting this placement in rehearsal in anticipation of singing it in worship can shape the experience of hearing the choir's music for the whole congregation.

Richard Bruxvoort Colligan's "O Christ, Surround Me," arranged by David Sims (Augsburg

Fortress 978-1-5064-2210-7), is a paraphrase of a traditional Celtic prayer often referred to as St. Patrick's Breastplate. The full text can be found in *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, #543.

The recurring final line of each verse is, "O Christ, surround me, O Christ, surround me." Some key phrases from this paraphrase speak beautifully to the life of discipleship:

God be the love to search and keep me;
God be the prayer to hear my voice;
God be the strength to now uphold me . . .

Bind to myself the Name of Holy,
great cloud of witnesses enfold . . .

Walking behind to hem my journey,
going ahead to light my way,
and from beneath, above, and all ways . . .

Christ in the eyes of all who see me,
Christ in the ears that hear my voice.
Christ in the hearts of all who know me . . .

O Christ Surround Me: © Richard Bruxvoort Colligan.
Used with permission.

This recurring refrain and the paraphrase of the prayer can function in multiple places in the liturgy and in multiple types of services. My most recent use of this piece was on the Sunday we celebrated baptism and confirmation in the congregation I serve. That day sixteen youth, including one who was being baptized that morning, made their public profession of faith. I asked the choir as we rehearsed that morning to commit, during the liturgy of baptism and confirmation, to look at each young person, to let their faces imprint on their own mind and heart, and to silently offer a prayer for the confirmands as they make their promises to live out a life of Christian discipleship. When we sang the anthem during the offertory (only moments after the liturgy of baptism and confirmation concluded), I asked the choir to continue picturing the confirmands as we sang. It became a holy moment and deep experience of Spirit for the choir and for the congregation.

Reflections on Text Painting

Another way to use rehearsal time to help facilitate spiritual formation is to highlight text painting

by a composer. Text painting, or word painting, is a term used to describe the way the music itself communicates the meaning of a text through the presentation of the musical line, dynamics, tempo, rhythm, tonalities, and so forth. Text painting can be experienced implicitly for sure, and often leads to an experience of the Spirit for a singer without being fully aware of it. Making an explicit connection to what a composer has done to highlight a text can deepen the experience of the Spirit for the singer, and by extension, the congregation.

An example is “We Are Redeemed” by Williams and Dengler (Harold Flammer Music, A 7280). With a text based on Romans 3:21-24, a Scripture text about sin and grace, the piece begins in D minor, which creates a heaviness as the basses repeat the tonic while singing “All have sinned, yes all have sinned.” Meanwhile, altos and tenors sing a phrase that rises and falls with the same text. This communicates a sense of being pulled down by the weight of sin. The sopranos enter with a descending line to the text “and fall short . . .” You can feel the weight of it all as you listen.

A ten-measure piano interlude reiterates musically the weight of the opening of the piece and then descends deliberately and mournfully two octaves, coming to rest on the tonic. It is stark. It is hollow. It is despair. It is as if all is hopeless.

And then, in D major, the sopranos and altos sing “We are redeemed,” an open fifth with a warm piano accompaniment. It is a moment that lifts a listener from despair to hope. Highlighting the use of text painting in this example can be done in just a minute of rehearsal time. With just a minute of rehearsal time, a choir director can point to the way an anthem uses text painting, transform the experience of a piece of music, and provide a meaningful experience of spiritual formation for the choir.

Praying Texts Outside of Rehearsal (and Memorization)

A final practice that can deepen spiritual formation can be done by choir members outside of rehearsal time and involves praying an anthem text. Inviting our singers to pray a text for several weeks can allow the text to settle deep within them. When that happens, you can hear it in the singing of the piece. The text has shaped and formed the singers in ways mysterious and holy.

To encourage praying a text, I create a prayer card and invite the choir to pray the text for a certain number of weeks before we offer the anthem from which the prayer was drawn. A recent example was a text by Alexander Kopylov (1854-1911), “Hear My Prayer”:

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and answer unto me;
keep not Thy peace from my soul.
Unto Thee, O God, do I lift up my heart;
O my God, I trust in Thee;
keep Thou my soul and deliver me.
Bless the Lord oh my soul:
and all that is within me bless (God's) holy name.
Thou art exalted above the heavens,
and Thy glory above the earth.
Hear my prayer, O Lord; and answer unto me.

Hear My Prayer: public domain

Inviting the choir to memorize a piece and guiding them in that memorization might grow naturally out of praying a text for several weeks. Praying the text and practicing the text for weeks can help the choir in their memorization, and in turn, memorization can lead to profound spiritual formation by providing a new openness and freedom to be attentive to the Spirit while singing. A memorized piece often settles so deeply into the heart and mind of the singer that it remains with them the rest of their life and becomes an ongoing source of spiritual formation.

Conclusion

Spiritual formation happens in choir rehearsals because the Spirit lives and moves among us. We are formed in singing because God is already present as we rehearse and worship. Opening ourselves to an awareness of the working of the Spirit is the first step in celebrating how faith may be shaped and formed in our choirs. Verbalizing this awareness is also crucial as we encounter the powerful and profound Spirit of God.

Intentionally tending to spiritual formation as we lead choir rehearsals is well worth the effort and will lead to transformative experiences for the choir and the congregation. The four practices I've highlighted in this article can be woven into rehearsals with minimal time impact. Every precious minute given to spiritual formation will be worth it. Thank God for the gift of music and for deep experiences of the Spirit we share.

Gathering among Fairy Lights and Other Hallowed Honors: A Conversation with Michael McLaughlin

Michael McLaughlin and Sally Ann McKinsey

Editor's note: I sat down with my own pastor, Michael McLaughlin, to discuss his perspective and experience officiating meaningful events like weddings and funerals, many of which have taken place apart from Sunday morning and outside of a church building. The following is a transcript of our conversation.

SAM: As is the case for many pastors, you've been asked to do weddings and funerals for family members, friends, or others who are not necessarily members of the church you serve. I've also heard you describe other liturgical events that took place in nontraditional locations. Can you describe a few of the liturgical occasions you've officiated outside of the context of Sunday morning worship in the sanctuary?

MM: Over the past fifteen years, I've served three congregations: FPC in Manchester, Tennessee, FPC in Cleveland, Mississippi, and now FPC in Cookeville, Tennessee. In each of these communities I have been blessed to officiate a variety of liturgical celebrations outside of the sanctuary and Lord's Day worship. At this point I have officiated over thirty weddings with only about half of them occurring in the sanctuary of the congregation where I was serving at the time.

In fact, the very first wedding I ever officiated was for friends from high school who held their wedding in the very public World's Fair Park in Knoxville, Tennessee. Witnesses to that first wedding included bicycle-mounted police officers, children and families frolicking in the splash pad fountains, unhoused folks enjoying the benches and warm weather, and of course, the wedding guests.

The second wedding I officiated was also a union of dear friends, one of whom grew up devoutly Roman Catholic and the other devoutly Presbyterian. This second wedding was a destination union sealed at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Savannah, Georgia, where the Monsignor from the Archdiocese of Atlanta and I co-officiated. To say that I felt very Reformed in the context of the impressive opulence of the Cathedral would be an understatement, yet the Monsignor could not have been more welcoming.

I've officiated numerous other weddings at a variety of venues ranging from hip and rustic to old school and fancy across Mississippi, Tennessee, and Alabama. One huge wedding I officiated with help from the former mayor on the front lawn of a home in Rosedale, Mississippi, where apparently all the surrounding towns came to celebrate. I officiated nuptials twice in backyards, once on the front porch of an old country store, once in a quaintly reclaimed alleyway in Indianola, Mississippi, and once in the lush woods of Franklin, Tennessee, complete with ethereal fairy lights and super cool hipsters who asked for communion and even knew/sang the Doxology. My heart was so happy.

Though all but two of the baptisms I've been blessed to officiate have been in the sanctuary of the congregations I've served, I had the unique (for Presbyterians) experience of baptizing a young guy in a creek during the same service in which we baptized his infant brother at the nearby font. One of my most cherished memories of baptism was when we baptized your daughter during the Easter sunrise service at our local Dogwood Park!

Michael McLaughlin (MM) is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Cookeville, Tennessee. Sally Ann McKinsey (SAM) is the editor of *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts*.

SAM: . . . and my most cherished memory as well! What a gift that you came alongside our family to celebrate her baptism! As a minister member of the church you serve, I have learned from you that it is so important for all of us to have pastors. That service was so beautiful, too, because of the setting outside on Easter morning and because of the way it was designed, simple and profound. I loved the way the congregation gathered at 6:00 A.M., all barely awake but dragging their folding chairs around. We were setting up for something special and sacred, and we knew it, but we didn't need words for it.

What other interesting or unique contexts have you led that would be outside of the typical Sunday morning?

MM: I have led liturgy marking the installation of a local judge, the deliberations of the Tennessee State Senate, the ground breaking of the Grammy Museum, and even a Little League championship tournament. I have also officiated a couple of wedding vow renewal celebrations on Friday evenings in the sanctuary or chapel of churches I've served and even had the spectacularly fun opportunity to lead a house blessing for congregants who'd just moved their family into their home. We made our way, clumped together around the home, lifting gratitude to God for the manifold ways life would unfold in each of the spaces of their abode.

SAM: I can imagine these were all very special experiences to share with others and be a part of. These kinds of invitations have always been for me—(it sounds like) for you, and probably for many pastors—opportunities to be part of important events in people's lives but also opportunities to think carefully about my role and about the elements and language of worship as well. What were some of the theological or liturgical issues that arose for you in some of those experiences? How did you navigate them?

MM: At the onset of planning liturgy for any of these celebrations, I have found that for me the nature, depth, and length of the relationship(s) I have with the participants has a significant role in navigating theological and liturgical nuances of the service. Like with preaching, the longer and deeper the relationships, the more readily the liturgy flows during the writing/planning phase. Though there is a bit of an interesting dynamic I have experienced

when the participants in the liturgical event are particularly close, namely the shift from the familiar and casual to the intentional and sacred in the sense of naming our hopes, fears, dreams, and gratitude before God.

So, in the backyard weddings, for example, the participants and guests were all very close friends and family, and with the more casual space and nature of the gatherings, the liturgy did not feel right when it was more formal. Navigating this dynamic meant we would not have liturgy on paper bulletins or video screens, but instead the calls and responses and other liturgical interactions and language were more conversational with me teaching/leading the group through the service. These liturgies lean more toward simple, direct language, but always seek to hold before all present the sacred sense of God's fingerprints evident in that moment in their lives.

In all liturgical contexts these days, I find it important to attend to inclusivity of language, especially with shifting uses and understandings regarding the faiths, orientations, and identities of the persons present. In other words, I am always seeking a balance between the liturgy representing with integrity the faith and beliefs of the Reformed tradition while also ensuring that all present are welcomed, included, seen, and heard. This can be tough, especially given my blinders of white, male, cis, hetero privilege.

SAM: For sure, thank you for naming that important consideration. In my experience, too, many weddings or other life events in the lives of friends that I've been a part of as clergy have included these sensitivities. But because part of our Reformed identity is that we are constantly being reformed according to the Spirit, the balance holds, I find. In these contexts especially, my sense of my own Reformed identity leads me to remember that I do not hold all the wisdom about how God operates, of course, and making room for the experience of others can be done as we also name what we believe.

What about the sometimes tricky and emotional request to officiate at a family member's wedding or funeral? How do you navigate the complexity of that role?

MM: This is a toughie for sure. It is a hallowed honor to be asked to lead family services, but navigating the emotional complexity of funerals has been difficult. I have officiated funerals of my

father, my grandmother, and my grandfather and did so with varying amounts of flowing tears and choked-up phrases. If I'm honest, there were times when being "on" in terms of planning and officiating family funerals enabled me to avoid facing my grief, which is a mixed bag. I would not change the choices to officiate for family, but there is a sense of precedent being established and some guilt about wanting simply to grieve my loved one without having to be "on." Thankfully, we are a family that mostly talks through our feelings, and, thanks to the blessings of therapy and openness, we can talk through this complexity in healthy ways. So, for example, my younger sister, Marina, is getting married in October, and ever the conscientious one, she presented me with the option of officiating the service or of being in the wedding party with a nonliturgical responsibility. With deep gratitude, I chose to join the wedding party and look forward to joining in the liturgy as a member of the wedding party.

SAM: It's interesting to hear how you've navigated those ceremonies. In those situations, maybe it's okay for the boundaries to break down a bit, because they have to in certain cases when you hold both identities as pastor and son, brother, etc. What about those experiences expanded your understanding of your role as a minister of Word and Sacrament, or did they? How do you view your role in these instances compared to your role on a typical Sunday morning at First Pres, Cookeville? Is it different in any way?

MM: I have come to understand our role as ministers of Word and Sacrament in a much broader, less "churchy" sense. Though there have been times when I felt a bit like a prop or simply one of the other vendors in line behind the caterer and in front of the florist, most of my liturgical officiating has shown me that, when conscientiously and faithfully planned, most folks across a wide spectrum are not only open to prayer and the experience of brushing up against Divine presence, it often resonates in profound, surprising experiences. I've heard directly from numerous otherwise non-churchy folks of varying ages during receptions, at gravesides, and even via text and email about the impact of the service and liturgy on their lives.

SAM: Wow, what an important role to have in someone's life, especially if you can be a messenger of welcome and love in the midst of the pain so many have felt from the church or religion. Can you share any best practices for other pastors who are asked by a friend or acquaintance not in their congregation to officiate a wedding or funeral?

MM: This advice holds for all weddings and funerals, perhaps more so for friends and acquaintances, as the intimacy of the relationship may lead to a more casual feel in the planning process. Resist this impulse and spend the time. Spend the time doing the premarital work with the couple. It deepens the meaning of the liturgy, and it's just responsible pastoral practice. I like using PREPARE/ENRICH as a starting point with couples, but there are certainly several other good approaches. Perhaps a bit more natural is the time needed to spend with friends and acquaintances when preparing for a funeral, depending on the depth of the friendship. Take the time to hear the stories, to weep, to be physically present, to laugh, and maybe to give permission to laugh. So, not the most profound advice, but spend the time.

SAM: That is profound advice. I have also tried to keep the same practices for premarital counseling in place, even as I've officiated for friends. In some cases, I have referred folks to counselors if the relationship was too close for it to be appropriate for me to do counseling, but that decision will be particular to each situation and relationship. The call to be present is always a constant, especially when the occasion and identities of the individuals involved require creative thinking about language or liturgy. How do you define worship and liturgy in events and services when you are aware that your sense of God's role in the event may be different from the perspective of those participating?

MM: I believe worship and liturgy, like the gospel itself, to be events/actions/movements/space/time which exist on their own, hold true on their own, and in which all creation is encouraged to join. Worship and liturgy, by the power of the Holy Spirit, offer all persons an opportunity to encounter the Divine presence on mountaintops, in valleys, and in all of the going out and coming in which forms the days between. Yes, it's a time of grief and mourning, or a time of partying and merrymaking, it's a time

of marking transition or new realities, but worship in these contexts is always even deeper and more profound than we may normally experience it on a typical Sunday, as it occurs on the sacred ground of these unique life events. Liturgy happens when we name the fact that we are not alone, we are not all there is, and we are all dependent on God for life itself.

SAM: I can hear how these experiences can shape and transform the way we think about worship every week. When officiating a wedding or funeral, I've often experienced an electricity that comes from the knowledge that this is a very sacred moment to be a part of. But I'm not sure if I've had that sense every Sunday, I'll admit! I wonder how we would be transformed if we all gathered every Sunday with a sense of unique sacredness, meeting for something incredibly special.

This is just one example of the gifts that weddings and funerals have to give to daily church life. I wonder, specifically in the case of weddings and funerals for those who may be seeking or religiously unaffiliated, what gifts do you think the church has to offer in these liturgical events?

MM: For the church, the participation of religiously unaffiliated folks or those seeking in some way, these occasions can be challenging (a good thing) as they help us to lift our gaze above the trappings of

our familiar assumptions and, yes, even above the beauty and elegance of the Reformed tradition. As has been the case in years past, though the church is certainly called at times to be countercultural, the truth is that the church can also learn from the broader culture. This has been my experience of late regarding using intentional language, metaphors, structures, and imagery which makes room for all persons and manifestations of humanity and creation. To be clear, this can be hard work, but in my experience the effort is always appreciated, and in some ways, it is part of our witness to the world as Jesus followers in 2023.

SAM: As always, thanks so much for such a great conversation. It seems to me that the experience of leading worship for meaningful life events, in contexts often outside of the weekly Lord's Day service, can transform the way we practice theology and faith, the way we think about evangelism and relationship-building, and the way we think about liturgy and worship. These occasions call officiants and worship leaders to consider carefully our language and practice, to listen to the experiences of others, and to learn more about where God is calling the church here and now out in the world, beyond the walls of our church buildings. Thanks for walking alongside so many in your ministry and for being my pastor, too, Michael.

Call to Worship

Ideas

A Litany for the Blessing of the Animals

Lindy Vogado

O God, we thank you for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, for creatures of the sea and creeping crawlers of the earth.
We praise you, O God, for the gift of everything wild.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it!

O God, we thank you for pets, for the animals in our homes,
for dogs and cats, for hamsters and turtles.
We praise you, O God, for the gift of creature companions.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it!

O God, we thank you for helpers, for the animals who aid us,
for service and therapy animals, for search-and-rescue dogs and police K-9 units.
We praise you, O God, for the faithful care of our fellow beings.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it!

O God, we thank you for creatures who teach and inspire,
for classroom pets and the residents of zoos,
for rodents in labs and the subjects of medical studies.
We praise you, O God, for the awe and mystery of your world.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it!

O God, we thank you for the animals of agriculture,
for the lives that sustain our own,
for cows and chickens, for pigs and fish.

We praise you, O God, for the web of life that sustains your world.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it!

O God, we thank you for humans who work for the ethical treatment of animals,
for veterinarians and biologists, for shelter staff and pet owners.
We praise you, O God, for our calling to be stewards of your creation.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it!

O God, we thank you for the blessing of our lives,
for the gift of being the creatures of your hand.
We praise you, O God, for the world you have made.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it. Amen.

Our church's Blessing of the Animals service is my favorite worship service of the year. I had never attended such a service before I led one as a pastor, and I remember calling an Episcopalian friend for advice. At the time, the PC(USA)'s *Book of Common Worship* and *Book of Occasional Services* offered no guidance or liturgy.

When the new edition of the *Book of Common Worship* came out in 2018, I was delighted to see a robust section of prayers, Scripture, and hymns related to creation care and specifically animal blessings. While a lengthy order of worship may not be realistic for a rambunctious gathering of dogs, cats, and other creatures, I do think the Blessing of the

Lindy Vogado is the associate pastor for belonging and outreach at Second Presbyterian Church in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Animals is a special opportunity to offer members of our congregation and community a liturgy that speaks to an important aspect of their lives.

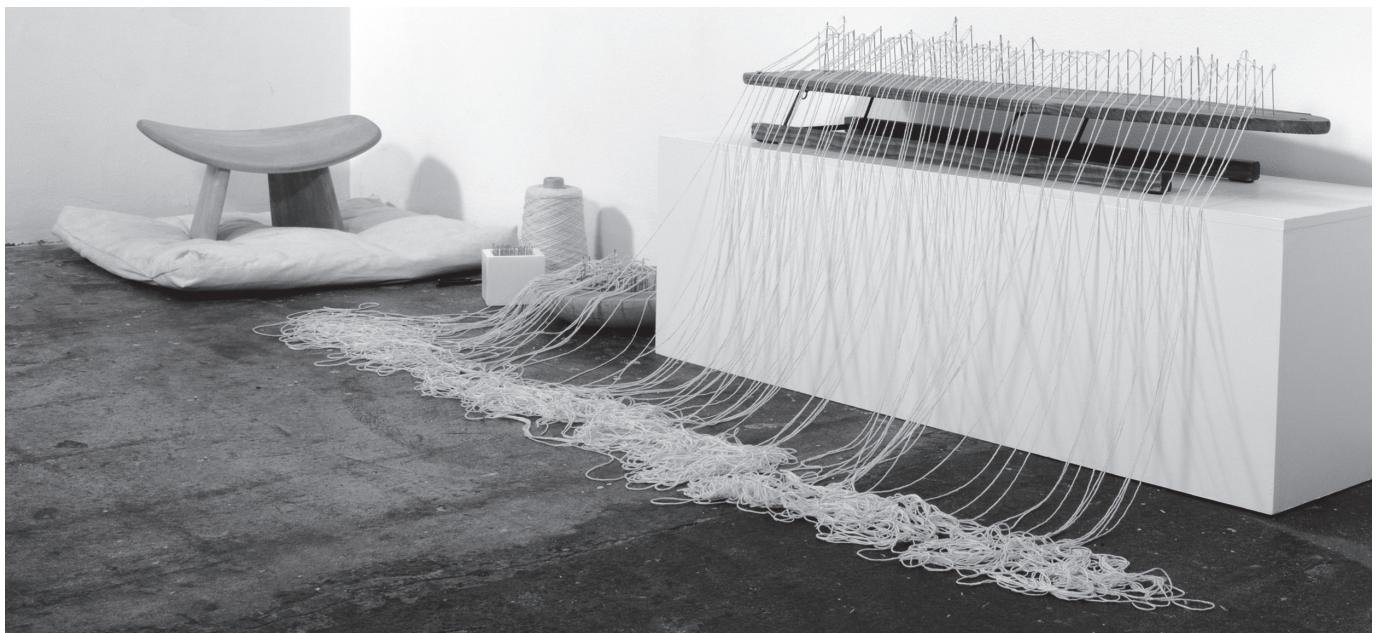
Blessing of the Animals services can become a pastoral conversational opening to hear about the role that animals play in the lives of congregants. Beloved pets are often sustaining companions to church members in a variety of life stages and family configurations, and the inclusion of this service in the church calendar can be a refreshing addition to programming that often feels most geared to families with children.

Animal blessings can also help to mark significant moments of joy and grief that often go unacknowledged in the life of the church. I've often had church members reach out to me when they adopt a new pet, anticipating their new addition's attendance at the next Blessing of the Animals service. Church members also frequently let me know when an animal I had previously blessed dies. On several occasions, I have had church members attend a Blessing of the Animals service even when their pet is no longer living because they see it as a way to remember and give thanks for their beloved companion.

Because they often take place outdoors and are more casual, Blessing of the Animals services can also feel more accessible to community members who would not otherwise attend a service of worship.

The churches I've served have issued invitations to the K-9 units of area police departments, animal rescue groups, and therapy dog organizations. Blessing of the Animals services can hold special meaning for worshipers who share a vocational calling with animals, whether in therapeutic, agricultural, or research settings. Such services can also help us to consider more fully our participation in the exploitation of creation and our commitment to the ethical treatment of animals—whether in conversations about the consumption of animals as food, the care of wild animals in captivity, or the destruction of animal habitat in the name of commercial development.

The final aspect of the Blessing of the Animals that I value is the spontaneity. While Presbyterian worship services are known for being conducted decently and in order, there is only so much you can do to contain the enthusiasm found in a group of animals gathered together. Regardless of human intention, church members who don't know each other often find inspiration to visit when their beloved pets decide to sniff and greet each other. There is the pulling on leashes and the barking at cats; there are the clothes covered in hair and the licks of affirmation in return for a pat on the head. Perhaps more than any other service, the Blessing of the Animals can remind us of God's wild and abundant love for all of God's good creation.



When Pressed, 2016.

Nicole Salimbene

Needles, thread, ironing board, cushion, Zen meditation bench, cement bowl, thread spool, and scissors.

24 x 40 x 20 in.

Celebration of Communion outside of the Sanctuary

Marilyn McKelvey Tucker-Marek

It is appropriate to celebrate the Sacrament of Communion as often as every Lord's Day (according to the PC(USA)'s *Book of Order* W-3.0409). In addition to the members who gather in the place of worship, the community has a responsibility to minister to those members who are unable to participate in person by taking the sacrament to those who wish to receive it.

There are many reasons a believer may be kept from joining the gathering of their worshipping community on any given week, though three broad circumstances are typical: short-term absence (such as due to an illness, injury, or work conflict); long-term absence (such as a chronic or serious physical or mental illness, age or infirmity, other ongoing circumstance); and the approach of death. Any circumstance that limits a person's their ability to be present in their community's worship time and space deserves consideration as a reason for a communion visit. The approach of death specifically offers an opportunity to share communion both with the dying person and with the friends or family who have gathered. Each of these situations may call for a different tone, different words, and different pastoral sensitivities.

The term "communion visit" attempts to capture the great diversity of circumstances in which some members of the worshipping community may celebrate the sacrament in the context of a visit apart from a Lord's Day service. By using a more expansive term, we both broaden our understanding of when such a celebration of the sacrament might be appropriate and honor the diversity of experiences and the complexity of the lives we lead. We also honor the importance of the worshipping life of the community beyond one space and one hour.

Every tradition will likely give guidelines about the celebration of the sacrament in a home apart from a Lord's Day service. The PC(USA)'s *Book of Order*, for example, says this:

As soon as possible after the service (ordinarily on the same day), the bread and cup may be shared with absent, homebound, or hospitalized members by two or more persons in ordered ministry. Those who carry out this extended service of communion shall be authorized by the session; equipped with the necessary theological, pastoral, and liturgical gifts and resources; and instructed to maintain the unity of Word and Sacrament through the reading of Scripture and offering of prayers (W-3.0414).

I encourage those organizing a communion visit to invite additional members of the worshipping community to participate. There may be circumstances in which only a very small group is appropriate for a communion visit, but I have experienced many occasions on which a larger group was both meaningful and most welcome. Whenever possible, all those present should participate as fully as able in the liturgy. Those participating may take turns leading the different parts of the liturgy, though the minister or an elder authorized by the session should always offer the words of institution. Wherever you see an asterisk (*), use the words most familiar or comfortable for those in your worshipping community.

Marilyn McKelvey Tucker-Marek is the pastor of Forsyth Presbyterian Church in Forsyth, Georgia, and UKirk campus minister at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia.

Liturgy for a Communion Visit with Those Experiencing a Brief or Long-Term Absence from Worship in the Sanctuary Due to Illness

Opening Sentences

The Lord is my light and my salvation,
in God I trust.

Confession

**Holy God, you made us in your image,
but we struggle to see ourselves as you do.
You promise to be our strength and shield,
but when beset by the trials and travails of
this life,
we allow disappointment to outroot hope
and bitterness to crowd out joy.
Renew our weary spirits.
Restore our suffering souls.
Rest our worn bodies,
that we may live in your love
with each day and each breath
you grant us. Amen.**

Pardon

Friends, the mercy of the Lord is from
everlasting to everlasting.
We have already received the forgiveness we
need, which God alone can give.
Thanks be to God.

Scripture

(A selection of Scripture is read. While it is most appropriate to choose a reading that the congregation heard in the most recent worship service, the text below serves as a suggestion when those readings may not fit the circumstance.)

Mark 12:28–34

The word of God for the people of God.
Thanks be to God.

(When circumstances permit, the minister or elder may offer a brief reflection on the Scripture read. Alternatively, those gathered for the communion visit may reflect together on the question “How has God spoken to us today through this reading?”)

Invitation to the Table

Christ, who was born in a borrowed room
and whose body was laid in a borrowed tomb,
spent his life as a guest.
But here, Christ stands as host, and he makes
us welcome.

Prayer of Great Thanksgiving

*The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Three in one and one in three,
from the heights of heaven to the depths
of the sea,
from the smallest microorganism to the
greatest human endeavor,
you made all that was, is, and will be.

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power
and might.**

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosannah in the highest!

**Blessed is the one who comes in the
name of the Lord.**

Holy Will, Wonderful Wisdom,

Enfleshed Word,

you moved through the world,

Love embodied, and heard.

You brought in broken people, you restored
and cured,

and you showed us your way.

We give thanks that you used your body
to minister to the bodies of all those you met,
challenging expectations and changing lives.

We remember that the night before he died,
gathered with friends in a borrowed room,
our Lord took bread,
gave thanks, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to
them, saying,

“This is my body, broken for you.

Take. Eat. Do this in remembrance of me.”

And he did the same with the cup after
supper, saying,

"This is the cup of the covenant, my blood
shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.
Take. Drink. Do this in remembrance of me."

*Great is the mystery of our faith:
**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will
come again.**

Mother, Master, Mover, come near.
Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us
that this meal may be a communion in the
body and blood of our Lord.
May we feel your presence
as we share these gifts.
Cast all fear from our hearts
and bind us together in hope.

We pray as Christ taught us, saying,
**(All speak the Lord's Prayer in whatever words
are closest to the hearts of those gathered.)*

Communion

Prayer after Communion

**Holy God, you send the rains in due season,
and seed in the earth brings forth grapes
and wheat.
We thank you that you meet us
wherever we are,
provide for us in our times of need,
and continually nourish and renew us
at your table.
Hold us in your holy presence, we pray,
now and always. Amen.**

Blessing

Beloved, remember these words of Christ,
"Come to me, all you who are weary and are
carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest."
May your soul rest in the knowledge that you
belong to God.

Liturgy for a Communion Visit with Those Approaching Death

Opening Sentences

Even darkness is not dark to you.
I come to the end; I am still with you.

Confession

**Holy God, in your book is written all the
days of our lives.
You know the many ways in which we have
failed you and others.
Forgive us for the harm we have caused
and the good we left undone.
Heal what we have broken and restore
what we cannot rebuild.
Right the wrongs and injustices in our
weary world.
Wipe away our sin, Perfector of our faith.
Amen.**

Pardon

Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who
died, yes, who was raised,
who is at the right hand of God, who indeed
intercedes for us.
Thanks be to God.

Scripture

*(A selection of Scripture is read. While it is
most appropriate to choose a reading that
the congregation heard in the most recent
worship service, the text below serves as a
suggestion when those readings may not fit the
circumstance.)*

Romans 8:38-39

*(When circumstances permit, the minister
or elder may offer a brief reflection on the
Scripture read. Alternatively, those gathered for
the communion visit may reflect together on
the question "How has God spoken to us today
through this passage?")*

Invitation to the Table

The Lord of life has gone ahead of us, saying,
"In my Father's house there are many
dwelling places.

If it were not so, would I have told you that I
go to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come again and will take you to myself,
so that where I am, there you may be also."

We approach this table trusting in
this promise
and ready to receive a foretaste of the
kingdom to come.

Prayer of Great Thanksgiving

*The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Breath of Life,
you knit us together in the darkness of our
mother's womb
as you fashioned all of creation.
You remain mindful of the sparrows of the
air and the lilies of the field.
We bless and praise your name.

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power
and might.**

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosannah in the highest!

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name
of the Lord.**

Lord of Life, you lived, died, and rose again,
the first fruits of those who have died.

We remember that the night before he died,
gathered with friends in a borrowed room,
our Lord took bread,
gave thanks, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to
them, saying,

"This is my body, broken for you.
Take. Eat. Do this in remembrance of me."
And he did the same with the cup after
supper, saying,

"This is the cup of the covenant,
my blood shed for you for the forgiveness
of sins.

Take. Drink. Do this in remembrance of me."

*Great is the mystery of our faith:

**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will
come again.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us
that this meal may be a communion in the
body and blood of our Lord.
Make us one with Christ
and with all who share this feast.

You intercede for us
with sighs too deep for words.
Now enfold us in the shadow of your wings.
Bring us, in our turn, to our eternal rest
and to new life in Christ.

We pray as Christ taught us, saying,

**(All speak the Lord's Prayer in whatever words
are closest to the hearts of those gathered.)*

Communion

Prayer after Communion

**Holy God, you nourished us with
spiritual milk,
and have seen us through all the days of
our lives.**

**Now complete within us what you began at
our baptism.**

**May the taste of love we have just received
at your table
strengthen us for the newness that lies
ahead. Amen.**

Blessing

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not
let them be afraid.



Unfolding, 2017.

Nicole Salimbene

Water, earth, roots, pitcher, glasses, cement, medicine cabinet, ironing boards, desk chair, lunch box, glassine envelopes, maps, silk thread, mustard seeds, lima bean seeds, dictionary pages, projected images, acrylic paint, paper, bone folder.

Call to Worship

Columns

On Liturgy: Seeing Life through the Eyes of Liturgy

Derrick McQueen

Professor, in my church, we don't use liturgy. We start the service and just let the Holy Spirit lead the way.

~Anonymous

One of my favorite things to hear as we walked out of my African American Baptist church in North Jersey as a child was, “Yes, yes, we had ‘chuch’ today!” The mothers of the church would intentionally leave out the “r” to emphasize the power of the service and its hoped-for residual spiritual effects on their lives, their families, the community, and maybe, just maybe, the world. I would want to run down the church stairs to get to the car and then home for Sunday dinner, but I was compelled to slow down and walk behind those church mothers. I wanted to hear exactly what made this time so effective.

There was the testimony and witness of how faith had brought them through the week. There was the choir’s fervent singing of hymns, spirituals, and gospel music, often leading to the community’s accompaniment of claps, tambourines, and dancing in the Spirit. There was the prayer that usually went too long but in the end had more than half the folks crying a cleansing cry. There was the sermon that, like a roller coaster, rose and fell, twisted and turned, ending in an improvised chordal trio with the Hammond B3 organ, the piano, and the preacher’s singsong poetic conclusion. And the time would come when we would all wait with one eye open to see who would walk down the aisle in tears as they felt called when the preacher said, “The doors of the church are open.” We would then sing a song that might just start the whole praise moment all over again! Little did I know then that this was

my first notion of appreciating what I would come to know as liturgy.

When I heard a student in one of my classes speak that anonymous declaration above, I smiled, knowing it could just as easily have been me. In fact, it was me. Before I would come to understand the power and possibility of liturgy, I would pull an all-nighter in college to write a twenty-three-page paper in sociology class outlining the effects of my worship experience that seemed to be common to our community, moment by moment. I wrote how the familiarity allowed members to enter into a hoped-for cathartic ritual that would both help release grief, pain, sorrow, joy, and love and to do so safely with folks who knew what we were up against in the world.

Years later, I would encounter “liturgy” in a Presbyterian church and see it as a bulletin that offered a staid order of service to get us through the experience in such a way that all who participated knew that we had gone through an ordered worship. One day, I turned to the back of the bulletin and read the mission statement, which in part read, “to create a worship experience that will allow everyone to have an authentic encounter with Christ.” And that’s when I realized that liturgy was to create a space in which communities would find the opportunity to hear, feel, see, and experience something even when they weren’t sure what they were seeking. They would only know they had experienced it after the final “Amen” while on the way to coffee hour.

I’ve come to view the actual elements of any liturgy as building blocks to the ritual of worship. However, it is also a deeper opportunity to create an arc of ritual¹ in which people may find an entryway to an authentic encounter with the Divine. The

Derrick McQueen is the pastor of the historic St. James Presbyterian Church in Harlem, New York, and holds an M.Div. in Worship and the Arts and a Ph.D. in Homiletics and New Testament.

arc of ritual is based on Aristotle's five parts of the dramatic structure of tragedy,² designed to help the audience achieve a catharsis. Divine encounter in the world may be a part of Tom Driver's point when he wrote of "the three great gifts that rituals make to social life": establishing order, deepening communal life, and, most important, assisting "the dynamic of social change through ritual processes of transformation."³

Outside of the walls of the sanctuary, the liturgy then becomes the creative outline into which one pours intent of transformative connection to the mystery of the Spirit, the Divine, or the personal activation and connection to a catharsis of a ritual. "Doing" liturgy then becomes a matter of understanding or shaping the action of it and its overall purpose and allowing space for the specific and varied needs it fulfills for the individuals involved. In the planning of community memorial moments, people gather, remember, name, share the pain of loss, and leave with a sense of at least knowing that time has stood still long enough to feel. It happens at every commemoration of 9/11 at Ground Zero. It happens with every graduation

ceremony when the flood of memories of what it took to get to that moment culminates with a loved one receiving public recognition of accomplishment. It happens at birthday parties where the awaited moment arrives, and we sing, blow out candles, and make wishes. Each of these events has a liturgical outline that makes up this arc of ritual to mark moments of life's transformations.

Liturgy is the order of moments in a ritual that strives to change hearts and minds around us. I posit that liturgy and ritual have always happened outside the sanctuary walls, and it is a vibrant and creative liturgy that orders the rites and passages in our lives. By noting the intention, purpose, and power of life transformations, big and small, we are encouraged to celebrate their vitality as we practice how to effect soul change in the sanctuary. This is how we do "chuch" in the four walls of the church and without.

Notes

1. "Arc of Ritual Worship"©, a term I coined for teaching to shift the focus from building "a" ritual in worship to an expanded notion of understanding the entire worship event—its planning, creation, and focus—as "the" ritual.
2. While many interpretations of Aristotle's *Poetics* describe these five parts, here I am speaking of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement.
3. Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 165.



Mending Table, 2016.

Nicole Salimbene

Needles, thread, reclaimed wooden table, world atlas pages, meditation cushions, cement, earth from Santuario de Chimayo, wood, paint, scissors, thread spool.

48 x 120 x 16 in.

Salimbene's interdisciplinary approach begins with an investigation into the poetics of materiality and the desire to create public and private engagements as a way for the viewer to embody metaphor. By drawing attention to the art of mindfulness practice and to the act of threading a single needle, *Mending* encourages us to contemplate the stitch-by-stitch process that may lead to transformations in our lives and in the world.

On Music: Wood and Wind—Worshipful Music Welcoming All God’s Children

Amy Cerniglia

In every time and place, God has called music out of human hearts. I’m an organist, so my primary instrument could hardly be more bound to a specific location, yet the walls of a church can’t confine all the music in the worship of the triune God. A drum circle on the Gulf Coast of Florida initially opened my eyes to the Spirit’s creative nudges when the pandemic prevented us from glorifying God within our beloved church sanctuary. God has called music ministry out of unexpected places and called people into worship while they might not have otherwise stepped into the church.

Upon my relocation to Florida to serve as director of music and outreach at Peace Presbyterian Church, church members encouraged me to explore a new experience with the historic Siesta Key Drum Circle. While organists are generally expected to reproduce a particular set of notes for a specified length of time, the drum circle removed all sense of individual control from our collective music. This democratic experience of sharing music and movement empowers all ages, faiths, languages, and abilities to co-create. An hour before sunset, drummers of all backgrounds gather with drums of all shapes, sizes, and histories. There is no official “start time,” only the organic emergence of beats that call us to gather. Outside of my comfort zone and outside of the church walls housing my primary instrument and musical tradition, these diverse strangers quickly befriended me.

My new friends taught me that a good neighbor does not play so loudly in the drum circle that they cannot hear their own neighbors. After all, we are not playing music from a page, and we can only follow each other’s lead. While there is no clear “right” or “wrong” note in a drum circle, the practice of listening to our neighbors supports the unity and beauty of the rhythm. Together, like a healthy congregation, we discern the way forward. During breaks between

music, we chat, get to know one another, and often share rhythms from our own backgrounds. In other words, we enjoy fellowship. One participant shares patterns that he remembers from the marketplaces of Morocco, while a high school student from Bradenton, Florida, shares a beat he’s practicing in his school marching band. Our diversity allows us to learn from each other. And just as Scripture says that “a little child shall lead them,” children tend to be the least self-conscious in jumping into the center of the circle to dance. Once kids have introduced the idea, younger and older adults are pulled into the beat.

As a community, we care for one another. Like a church congregation honoring beloved members with flowers on the church chancel or inscriptions on a memorial wall, the drum circle at Nokomis Beach is blessed by several women arranging flowers in the center of our circle every week to honor the memories of longtime drummers. While the beach drum circle does not provide explicit Christian formation, the Holy Spirit regularly drums in my heart, and I search for opportunities to incorporate this into formal corporate worship. In their book *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, Jeremy Begbie and Steven Guthrie distinguish between music that contains explicitly theological text and music that does not. Citing Karl Barth’s appropriation of Mozart’s music, the authors state, “Much can be gained from music that does not carry explicitly theological agendas” (p. 142). Remembering how the drums welcomed me so quickly as a stranger in a new community, I wondered if this wordless communal music, too, could communicate the love of God.

With that question in mind, I signed up for an intergenerational drum class at the Presbyterian Association of Musicians 2021 Worship and Music Conference. In that week of classes, several people with mobility challenges voiced their gratitude for

A Master of Divinity student at The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Amy Cerniglia serves as the director of music and outreach at Peace Presbyterian Church and as communications coordinator for the Covenant Network of Presbyterians.

accessible ways to lead music for worship. Moreover, drums are flexible and portable. Calling to worship, the drums welcomed all conferees at one service to worship the living God. At another service, drummers sent worshipers out with a wordless musical postlude. As they drummed just outside the conference center even after the worship service had ended, lively conferees of all ages danced all the way out with joyful hearts. After all, whenever any formal service of worship ends, God's call to take the light of Christ into the world begins. Music keeps that fire burning.

When my Peace River Presbytery called for a musical workshop outdoors at our Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center, I wondered if drums could pair with text to communicate a more explicitly theological message. *All Hands In: Drumming the Biblical Narrative* from Brian Hehn and Mark Burrows offers a fun, creative resource, weaving biblical storytelling and percussion with many options for diverse groups. One percussive pattern invites people to speak various pieces of the Words of Institution spoken from the communion table in rhythm to the beat of their drums. Other activities call for prayer as people drum to the rhythm of their heartbeat, or drum repetitive phrases of praise from the Psalms.

Participants at the workshop felt moved by the Spirit to invite the drums into our presbytery worship service. This did not become a performance but a collaborative worship event welcoming all people to glorify God. Every participant at the retreat, whether or not they attended the workshop, was welcomed to grab an instrument and jump in. Those who had attended the workshop served as leaders anchoring the beat. Nearly fifty egg shakers, Remo Sound Shapes, and other easily transportable rhythm instruments accompanied the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. Together, we celebrated the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup. When one drummer's hands tired, another's took the lead. When one person lost the beat, neighbors generously guided them back into the rhythm. Every mistake or misstep offered opportunities to lean on one another as the body of Christ.

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, dedicated church volunteers carved a half-mile trail through beautiful wetlands on our church property, aptly named the Peaceful Path. Among others, a grant from Peace River Presbytery supplied the path with a giant outdoor xylophone and five brightly colored musical percussion flowers. Mallets

attached to the flowers invite curious visitors to strike the petals and hear the clear, bright bell tones. Our xylophone features a weatherproof, color-coded musical booklet attached to the instrument with instructions that anyone can understand. All this is nestled under a theater of pine trees.

During the height of the pandemic, families and children safely enjoyed music in the wild. Not far from these musical playground pieces, strategically placed tree stumps offer seats for drummers. Many visitors to our path tell us that they do not feel comfortable stepping inside sanctuary walls but can safely stroll the Peaceful Path as an act of worship. Born under the threat of COVID-19, an outdoor living Nativity continues to be celebrated during the Christmas season, gracing the luminary-lined path with guitars, violins, flutes, and voices. The wider community frequently thanks us for offering a natural connection with their faith during the holidays.

As community members express gratitude for opportunities to connect with their faith outside the church walls, we continue searching for more ways to ease that connection. Organizations such as the Q Worship Collective are also welcoming people to engage their musicality and spirituality regardless of their comfort in a church sanctuary. In the words of cofounder Jess Grace Garcia, "For me, spiritual community is where two or more are gathered. My heart is to create spiritual spaces of healing for people hurt by the church whether or not that leads them into the church." Most recently, making connections outside the church walls included a songwriters' retreat in Portland with the goal of writing worship music and liturgy affirming LGBTQIA+ people. Garcia noted that while many attendees are involved in churches at this time, others are nurturing their faith and healing their relationship with the church.

As for the drums, if you find yourself in Siesta Key, Florida, I invite you to drop by and hear Mohammad playing one of his many Native American flutes. Listen to his breath calling life out of old wood. As he lifts beautiful melodies over thick drumbeats, rhythms form, fall apart in a chaotic mess, and re-form as the circle struggles to find a steady beat by listening more closely. In our churches, too, the Savior shepherds us back to the beat of the Holy Spirit. Whether or not we can hear it, God is calling music out of every heavy human heart. Christ is binding us as one body playing together, and the Spirit is bending our ear to the new song that God is already singing outside our walls.

On Preaching: Worship and Preaching outside the Sanctuary Walls through Digital Mediations

Lis Valle-Ruiz

Most historic, mainstream Christian churches in the United States of America by now should be experts in conducting hybrid or multimodal worship services, but, surprisingly, they are not. Some of them were already good at recording and posting or even livestreaming their worship services before the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The rest of those churches had the opportunity to learn and develop the art of online worship during the two years COVID kept most churches shut down. It has been three years since the government asked the population to “stay home.” It has been one year since churches that complied with that mandate began to gather in their sanctuaries again. Astoundingly, many churches went back to their pre-pandemic ways of worship, turned the video camera on, and continued liturgical life as usual. These churches may be unwittingly nurturing a sense of disconnection in those who join online from the rest of the church.

The problem with this return to the pre-COVID past is that it throws away any learnings from doing online worship. This return privileges church members who come to the physical sanctuary, and it leaves all others out as mere spectators. It is a practice that nurtures liturgical voyeurism. While liturgical voyeurism may be an apt way to queer worship (queer as in to interrogate an assumption or expectation), this essay focuses on the desirability of nurturing a sense of presence in worship from all attendees: those inside the sanctuary, those watching live online, and those who will watch the worship service asynchronously at a later time. In the case of the seminary where I work, we also have a community gathered synchronously in a videoconference room.

Streaming worship services places preaching outside the sanctuary walls through digital streams reaching church members and friends in multiple places and even seekers and wanderers who might otherwise not know the church. How may preaching generate a sense of connectedness for those who are outside the sanctuary walls? Our hope is that the data produced in the research project *Divine Wisdom Festival* will strengthen congregations by leading them to critical reflection upon their practices of digitally mediated worship and preaching and refocus on the goals of worship and preaching. You may find more about the project at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7927718>.

The *Divine Wisdom Festival* studied digitally mediated worship and preaching practices to establish the sense of presence from the perspectives of the worshipers depending on the technology that the worship leaders employ. The research found that while scholars think of presence in terms of body or physical presence in the sanctuary, worshipers think of presence in terms of focus or their ability to concentrate on what is going on in the worship service. The research also found that the modality that most generates a sense of connectedness for those who are outside the sanctuary walls is videoconference. This modality is also the one that requires the most resources from participants in terms of focus and energy. These are, perhaps, the reasons why participants get tired quickly when participating in a meeting, conference, or worship service online via videoconference.

After videoconferencing, two digital mediations are tied as second-best modalities to generate a sense of connectedness for those who are outside the sanctuary walls. One of these is streaming

Lis Valle-Ruiz, Ph.D., is assistant professor of homiletics and worship and director of community worship life at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois.

live while liturgists and preachers pay attention to both audiences in real time, and the other is using YouTube Premiere watching or other method to broadcast a video of a worship service that, though it has been pre-recorded, is presented as though it were live, with opportunities for congregants to interact via chat or comments. These two modalities generate a sense of presence that results in members of a worshipping community feeling connected to one another. Streaming live and premiere watching both generate a sense of connectedness for those who are outside the sanctuary walls without causing exhaustion.

The modality that did not generate any sense of connectedness with other members of the worshipping community was watching a recorded service that was previously live, that is, when a person watches the video that remains online from a worship service that was streamed to a social media platform or to the congregation's website. In this case, the person is watching an event that occurred in the past with little to no prompts directly addressed to the person watching.

Based on those findings, the *Divine Wisdom Festival* research recommends the following: (1) Use active verbs to prompt participation. The more action verbs the liturgists and preachers use as prompts during the worship service, the more present and actively participating worshipers feel, and the more focused they are. (2) If you prefer quality over quantity, then consider gathering the online

community in small groups using videoconference technology because it is the one that generates the greatest sense of connection with the worshipping community. (3) When having two simultaneous audiences, look at both, pay attention and speak to both. This might seem obvious, but to this day many liturgists and preachers never look at the camera! The practice of looking at the camera as much as at your live audience is easy to do and the most important practice to engage in order to generate a strong sense of connectedness with other members of the worshipping community. (4) When recording a live worship service, keep in mind the people who will watch the recording later. If you look directly at the camera to talk to those watching live, those who will watch later will feel as if you are talking to them also. Since watching a recording of a prior live worship service is the least engaging of all modalities, if the seekers and wanderers are an important audience for you, it is imperative to speak directly to them while you are recording.

Now that you have several audiences simultaneously, do more than opening the window that digital mediations provide for people to look into the sanctuary. Do more than turning the camera on. Give your online audiences as much attention as you give the ones in the sanctuary. When you are leading worship and you are preaching, remember the people out there and act accordingly. Worship and preaching effectively go digitally outside the sanctuary walls when you intentionally take them there.

On the Arts: The Liturgical Logic in the Art of Theaster Gates

Dr. Maria Fee

In 2018, the University of Arts London conferred an honorary doctorate degree on the Chicago artist Theaster Gates. He concluded his acceptance speech performing his bedtime ritual, singing: “Guide my hands. Guide my hands. Guide my hands, while I am on this tedious journey. Guide my hands.”¹ The deed expressed a trait found in much of Gates’s work, unabashed offerings of spirituality in public forums where such private sentimentalities are often suppressed. The gesture also represents the primacy of the Black church in Gates’s upbringing, its patterns of worshipful communal life now extended to all. Theaster Gates models a circular liturgical logic. Schooled by expressions of collective belief, he translates them in a decidedly not religious art world. Gates critically reframes faith works as artworks, completing the circle to inspire religious communities to explore, broaden, and revive their own traditions.

Because Gates’s spiritual formation has informed his philosophy of *making*, his work is particularly relevant to the critical and creative efforts of liturgical theologians, artists, and leaders of worship. Gates’s work is influenced by his experiences in worship, and his work can influence our liturgical theology and practices. Thus, I want to turn the liturgical circle back to the church. What follows is a short appraisal of Gates’s *making* maxims, which are “To make is to love,” “Making is about believing,” and “To make is to challenge,”² all of which are applicable to Christian liturgies in many contexts—works by people, for people.

To make is to love.

The act of making models sacrifice, compassion, care, and commitment, all of which are reflected in Theaster Gates’s best-known work in progress, the Dorchester Project. In his South Side of Chicago neighborhood of Greater Grand Crossings, Gates purchases abandoned properties and transforms them into cultural venues and gathering spaces for his neighbors. These houses become repositories for the arts, listening rooms, film screening venues, community arts centers, libraries. Building materials salvaged from these sites become materials for art objects and installations. When these more traditional works are sold, a portion supports the Dorchester Project through the nonprofit Rebuild Foundation. Gates calls this a circular ecology, where the collaboration of art and real estate transforms the environment. This type of ethical stewardship recalls past and present community development efforts by Black churches responding to societal exclusions. The Dorchester Project also reflects Gates’s interdisciplinary background. With graduate study in urban planning, ceramics, and religion from Iowa State and experience as a youth choir director, Gates comes to his work with many different influences, each of which finds a place in his work. His experience with church music finds voice through the performances of his musical ensemble The Black Monks of Mississippi. Inspired by East Asian monastic chants and the Black musical traditions of gospel, blues, and soul, The Black Monks of Mississippi performs on their own or as part of a larger exhibition or event related to Gates’s work. The ensemble’s music sonically anoints Gates’s installations and those present, reminding visitors that place, people, and materials hold spiritual weight.

Maria Fee is the author of *Beauty Is a Basic Service: Theology and Hospitality in the Work of Theaster Gates*. Maria holds an MFA in painting, an MA in theological studies, and a PhD in theology and culture.

Making is about believing.

Just as Gates trusts the mediating elements of liturgies to help give form to what cannot be named, he trusts the properties of the physical world to help grasp what is immaterial—like faith, love, forgiveness, and compassion.³ Perhaps this is why he contends that art isn't what he leads with, noting, "I believe in places, I believe in people, I believe in the value of material things."⁴ His 2015 installation *Sanctum* illustrates this well. Utilizing the place-making methodology of the Dorchester Project, Gates built a chapel-like structure within the perimeter of the bombed-out ruins of Bristol, England's Temple Church. Constructing the chapel using saved items from abandoned factories and churches draws attention to the secular and sacred labors of Bristol. Continuing the theme of labor, Gates enlivens the space with 522 hours of nonstop sound presentations by area musicians and performers. "*Sanctum*," explained Gates, "is primarily a platform on which the people of Bristol have an opportunity to hear each other."⁵ Such tangible sociability aligns with theologian Catherine Pickstock's liturgical ethos. Unlike the dispassionate, autonomous, and "formalized civility" of Western structures, Christian liturgies are grounded on love, enabling "the natural turning towards the series of human others."⁶

To make is to challenge.

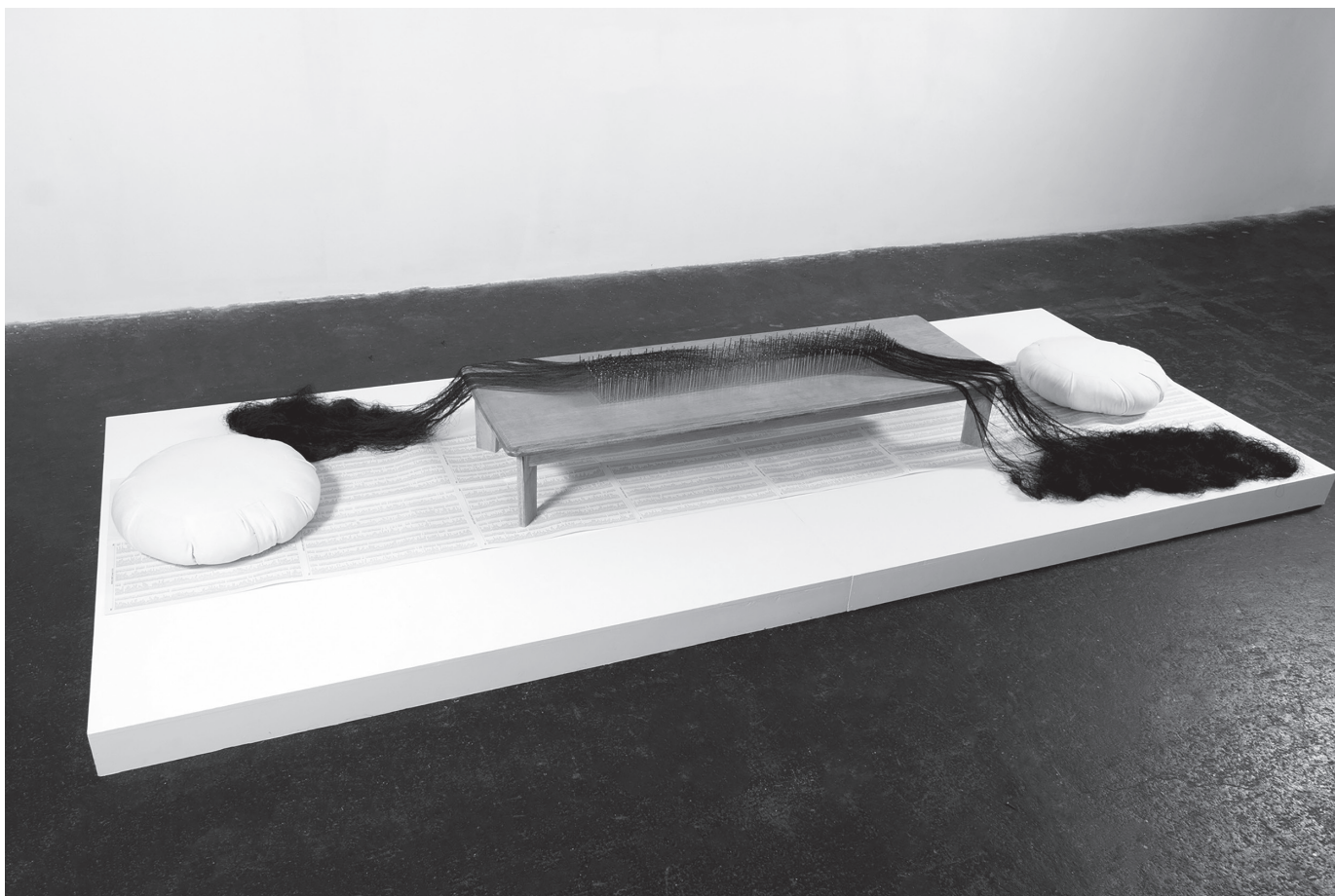
Just as Pickstock declares Christian liturgies to be "site[s] of resistance" where place, people, and things are valued before God and each other, Gates, too, considers art making as resistance. Art and liturgy both live in an aesthetic realm, resisting modernity's detachment and disembodiment. Rituals, whether we experience them in worship, through the multiple iterations required to turn clay pots, in repeating song refrains, or continually reviving buildings, gather a kind of accumulated, transferrable knowledge. Realizing the relationship between the mundane and the monumental, hands-on making empowers and mobilizes. "Art functions," notes Gates. "It gives us the capacity to say things in a new way that the political and social world needs to hear."⁷ Take for example how *Sanctum* and the Dorchester Project both ask the provoking question "Who is my neighbor?" much like in Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan. These art projects also challenge ideas of art for art's sake, property development, and public/private divisions. To be sure, as an artist Gates calls all of us to reconsider

the aesthetic, social, and transformative dimensions of liturgies, the kind that happen in a religious space as well as events outside the bounds of what we may call religious, offerings like the *leiturgias* of ancient Greece, whereby patrons invested in civic programs for the good of all.

The art of Theaster Gates highlights the reciprocal and fluid relationship between secular and sacred labors. The energizing rituals involved in making teach us to learn the turns of the liturgical cycle by heart. They enable faith communities to love, to believe, to be challenged, and to challenge prevailing ideologies and practices of Empire like consumerism, autonomy, and hegemonies. Theologian Raimundo Panikkar insists that "only worship can prevent secularization from becoming inhuman, and only secularization can save worship from being meaningless."⁸ This kind of integration and exchange is also present in Gates's work and has much wisdom to share with the church. Gates reminds both priests and poets that love must ground their labors. His plea, "Guide my hands," displays a keen longing to move beyond the self to benefit others—in the presence of Sacredness itself.

Notes

1. Mackenzie Goldberg, "Watch Theaster Gates Give Moving Speech as He Receives Honorary Doctorate from UAL," *Architect*, July 20, 2018, accessed August 22, 2022, <https://architect.com/news/article/150074266/watch-theaster-gates-give-moving-speech-as-he-receives-honorary-doctorate-from-ual>.
2. Goldberg, "Watch Theaster Gates Give Moving Speech."
3. Theaster Gates, "Working the Public, with Theaster Gates," interview by Naima J. Keith, January 24, 2018, California African American Museum, Los Angeles.
4. Jeffrey Deitch, "Jeffrey Deitch & Theaster Gates: I Believe in Places," *The Avant/Garde Diaries*, Mercedes-Benz, January 13, 2012, YouTube video, 4:13, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m34aIZG-_JM.
5. Jessica Klingelfuss, "Theaster Gates Hits All the High Notes in Bristol's Temple Church," *Wallpaper**, October 30, 2015, <http://www.wallpaper.com/art/theaster-gates-sanctum>.
6. Catherine Pickstock, "Liturgy, Art, and Politics," *Modern Theology* 16, no. 2 (April 2000): 179.
7. Goldberg, "Watch Theaster Gates Give Moving Speech."
8. Raimundo Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, Orbis Books, 1973), 1.



Mending, 2016.
Nicole Salimbene
Installation view at Flashpoint Gallery, Washington, DC.
Needles, thread, reclaimed wooden table, world atlas pages, meditation cushions,
cement, earth from Santuario de Chimayo, wood, paint, scissors, thread spool.

Mending is an interactive installation that explores meditation and mending as art medium, metaphor, and practice. Contemplative environments positioned throughout the gallery invite audiences to sit or stand in meditation with sculptures and paintings constructed from ordinary materials associated with mending. Thousands of threaded needles, tangled sculptural masses of thread, and stitching offer opportunities for reflection on the work of reparation.

Call to Worship

Book Reviews

Luli and the Language of Tea

Andrea Wang

(New York: Neal Porter Books/Holiday House, 2022)

Quiet Time with My Seeya

Dinalie Dabarera

(New York: Roaring Brook Press/
Macmillan Children's Publishing Group, 2023)

Reviewed by Miriam Moore-Keish

Silence in the Playroom

How do we communicate without language? As a writer and publisher—someone who relies on words—this is a question I like to avoid if I want to pay my rent. Two recently published children's books, *Luli and the Language of Tea* by Andrea Wang and *Quiet Time with My Seeya* by Dinalie Dabarera, confront language barriers and find community and love in play, in gathering around a table, and in sharing a cup of tea.

Luli and the Language of Tea begins with Luli walking into her ESL (English as a second language) class. She doesn't speak English. Neither does anyone else there. Luli notices that the room is silent as the students all play alone. She pulls out her thermos of tea and calls out in her native language, Chinese, "Chá!"

"Té?" "Chai?" "شاي؟" ("shay")? Students begin to recognize the sounds of each other's words for tea, noticing more similarities than differences. With their varying tongues and tea traditions, the whole class gathers at a table and passes around teacups, sharing in the language of tea. When the tea runs out before Luli can get a cup, students all pour out a little from their own cups to give to their new friend. And afterwards, the playroom is no longer quiet.

Andrea Wang's simple and understated picture book addresses the universal struggle to humanize and build relationships with those different from us. With so many unshared and unique experiences often posing challenges, it's easy to fall into quiet and solitary play. How can we be more like Luli and un-silence our playrooms? The children in our lives may very well be able to guide us in that. The rich back matter of the picture book includes pronunciation guides for all the characters' names, a map of where they come from, and some information about how tea is served in each of their home countries. Intricate end pages also include illustrations of the teacups traditionally used in each of the kids' countries.

This text would fit well in liturgy or conversations with young people on World Communion Sunday, any communion Sunday, really, or even Pentecost. When we talk about gathering at a shared table, finding abundance where some might see scarcity, and understanding each other regardless of spoken language, the language of tea might be a good place to break the silence.

Dinalie Dabarera, though, challenges the pressure to break the silence. Her picture book, *Quiet Time with My Seeya*, embraces it. The protagonist /speaker tells readers on the first page, "Time with my Seeya

Miriam Moore-Keish is a children's book publisher at Capstone Publishing in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She also writes books and regularly collaborates with the nonprofit organization We Need Diverse Books.

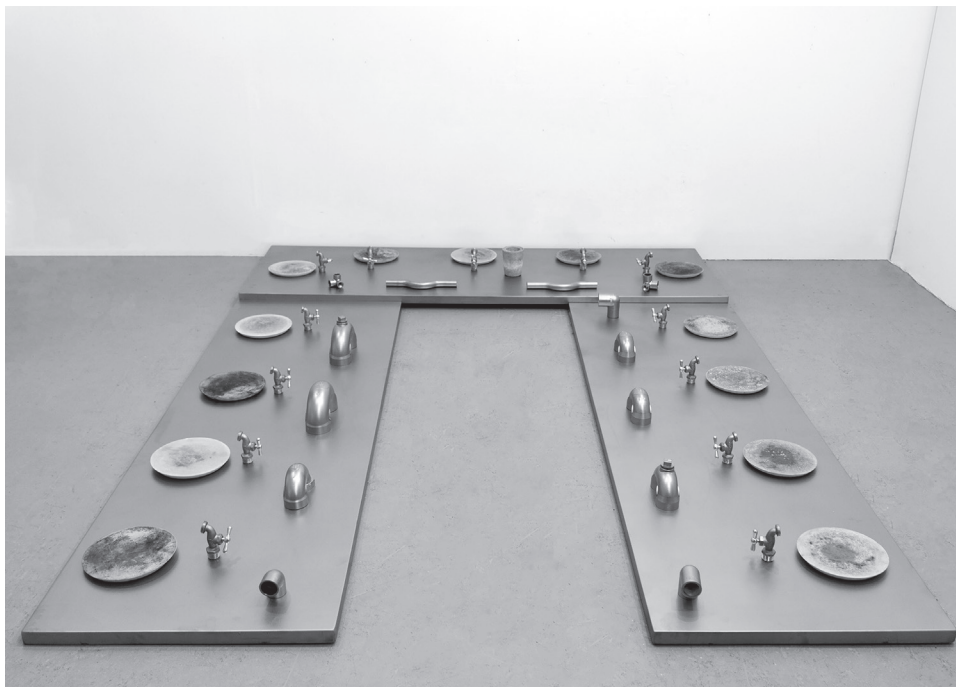
is quiet time.” This English-speaking young girl and her Sinhalese-speaking grandfather spend a day together playing dress up, stomping in puddles, finding bugs, tending to the garden, and more. Sometimes they read books. They don’t always understand the words, but they get what the other means. I was lucky to speak with Dinalie in March for We Need Diverse Books (an organization that promotes diversity and representation in children’s literature) and ask about her exploration of cultural and language barriers in intergenerational family relationships. She recalled drawing inspiration for this story from her relationship with her grandmother, saying:

She doesn’t speak English and my Sinhalese is really poor, especially now. I was thinking about how our relationship has been so limited by this. But at the same time, my grandmother through my whole life—she’s been able to communicate how she loves me in so many different ways. Even when she was in her nursing home and I would go to visit, she would call me over to sit next to her and she would take my hand and hold it. Even though it was very difficult to tell her about what work I’d been doing or how my life was going, we would just sit together. For children, language isn’t as much a part of their relationships as it becomes when you’re an adult. You’re not always connecting with people through conversation, which, I think, is the way you do as adults, for the most part.

So [*Quiet Time with my Seeya*] allowed me to focus on the play and fun and warmth of the relationship.

Rather than attempting to fill the playroom with noise and languages from around the world, the speaker of *Quiet Time with my Seeya* sits in the silence. It is here that she finds warmth and love. This book could be a conversation starter to ask about what we hear in the silence. What meaning is there? My pastor parents definitely “pulled an Ecclesiastes” on me as a loud elementary schooler, reminding me that there was a time to speak and a time to keep silent. But there is something else at play here. The speaker and her Seeya *know* their relationship through silence. What other silences are our young neighbors living in? This book provides a framework to ask them. At age three, I infamously told my mother that God wasn’t real because I spoke and God didn’t speak back. This isn’t a story limited to three-year-old Miriam. This book can be a text for anyone, regardless of faith, who may want or need the reminder that silence is not always absence. Perhaps it is also an invitation to those who plan and lead worship that silence is not absence. May we treat the silent sitting together in worship with the same reverence we do the loud words we speak.

Both *Luli and the Language of Tea* and *Quiet Time with My Seeya* ask: how do we communicate across difference and without shared language? It’s up to us readers, then, to decide when is the time to speak and when is the time to keep silent.



The Last Supper, 2018.
Nicole Salimbene
Wood, paint, cement, plumbing
fixtures, water, test tubes.
7 x 6 x 8 in.

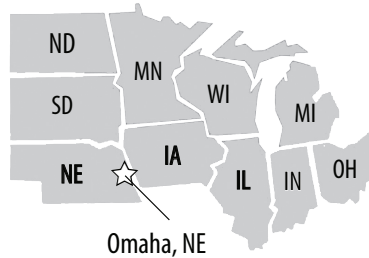
2024 ACDA Regional Conferences

Northwestern



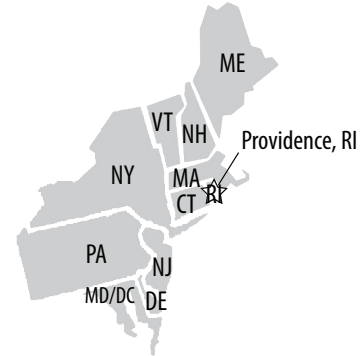
January 24 - 27, 2024
Spokane, WA

Midwestern



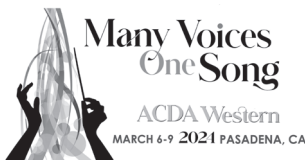
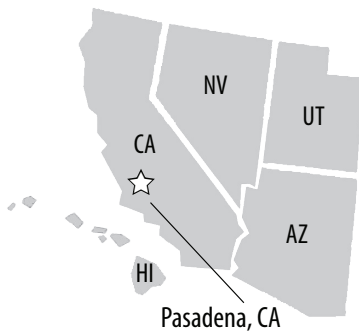
February 7-10, 2024
Omaha, NE

Eastern



February 28 - March 2, 2024
Providence, RI

Western



March 6 - 9, 2024
Pasadena, CA

Southwestern



February 27 - March 2, 2024
Denver, CO

Southern



February 21 - 24, 2024
Louisville, KY

Registration opens fall 2023 at www.acda.org

Augsburg Music

LEADING THE CHURCH'S SONG

Explore New Music for Fall, Advent, & Christmas



Visit augsburgfortress.org/NewMusic
to learn more!

 AUGSBURG FORTRESS

augsburgfortress.org



Call to Worship

Volume 57.2
Beyond The Walls



PRESBYTERIAN
ASSOCIATION OF
MUSICIANS

PDS 21162-23-002
www.pcusa.org/calltoworship