

Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*



Volume 51.3
Border Crossings



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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.

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Introduction

Kimberly Bracken Long

This past March my husband and I traveled to South Africa. We saw the glorious coastal city of Cape Town, visited seminaries and churches in Stellenbosch, Bloemfontein, and Pretoria, and ended our trip in the seaside town of Port Elizabeth. While in Port Elizabeth (or “PE” as the locals call it), we met Daniel (“Danie”) Mouton, a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church and executive director of the Synod of the DRC in the Eastern Cape.

As Danie drove us around PE to show us the sights, he told us about South End, a suburban community in which people of all sorts of backgrounds lived together peacefully and prosperously. The people of South End were black, white, and colored; they were from India, China, and Greece. They were Christian, Muslim, and Hindu and shared common values about family, morals, and faith, in spite of their different religions, languages, and races. South End included several churches, mosques, and a Hindu temple. Neighbors visited one another freely, businesses were run by owners of various cultures, and the community was marked by a harmonious spirit.

This all came to an end in 1948, when the National Party came to power and apartheid laws were instituted. Suddenly, all nonwhites were to be removed from so-called white neighborhoods; and black, colored, Chinese, and Indian people were resettled in areas far from Port Elizabeth. Furthermore, the homes that had once housed the citizens of this vibrant and heterogeneous community were destroyed; people can still recall the sight of bulldozers demolishing their houses.

In spite of their neighborhood being torn apart, the people of South End prevailed. They continued to work for justice and eventually established the South End Museum in Port Elizabeth, which tells their story.

An extraordinary event took place at the South End Museum on December 16, 2016, when Danie Mouton and others took part in a service of prayer and healing. Members of families who were forced to leave their homes in South End—homes that were subsequently demolished—told their stories, recalling how their families were relocated, along with hundreds of others. Several decades after the



Charcoal drawing rendered during the service of reconciliation on December 16, 2016, by Duncan Stuart. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

trauma, four people shared how they had been thrown out of their homes and pushed into big trucks that took them to small houses outside the city. They remembered how they lost their voting rights and suffered under prejudicial treatment. With a depth of emotion they urged their listeners to treat one another with equality.

Church leaders then led the assembly in a time of worship. Rev. Mouton read Scripture and lamented what had happened to the citizens of South End. “We want to ask forgiveness not only for what was done, but for what was not done,” he told those who had gathered. “While a community was uprooted, Christians and the church looked the other way.

“White Christians created an extensive legal framework to make the forced removals in South End possible: Group Areas Act, Separate Amenities Act, Mixed Marriages Act, Job Reservation Act. What was an integrated community, something we strive for today, was broken up to segregate people in terms of land and space.

“Today we want to be true to Jesus, our Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Those acts were committed, but no longer in our name, the Christians of this city. No longer in our name.”

Rev. Mouton’s words were followed by a prayer of repentance. And then the church leaders, all of them white, washed the feet of those who had suffered the destruction of their homes and their community. Tears were shed; strangers became friends. Old wounds were not forgotten, no excuses given. It was a day of remembrance, repentance, and reconciliation. A plaque can now be seen in the South End Museum:

December 16, 2016

On this day representatives
of the Christian Church in
Nelson Mandela Bay
met with members of the
community of South End,
uprooted and moved by the apartheid regime,
to ask forgiveness for what
was done and not done
during the unfolding of these
atrocious acts in our city.
This plaque marks our reconciliation.

In the context of worship, a border was crossed—a boundary that had been erected so many years ago was overcome through the telling of stories and acts of repentance. It was painful. It was also a time of redemption and hope. Through words and rituals, people who once were enemies enacted the forgiveness and healing that comes from the willingness to lay our burdens down before one another and allow the power of Christ’s forgiving love to work in and through us.

In this issue of *Call to Worship* we hear from pastors, musicians, artists, poets, and scholars who explore ways that we cross borders and transgress boundaries through our worship. Worship is not just a place where we are told what to do and then sent out to do it; worship itself is the locus of God’s saving work of tearing down the barriers between us. Thanks be to God.

Feature Articles

The Lap of God

Sarah Segal McCaslin

*We do not all have children, but we
have all been children,
and there is a place for each of us
in the lap of God.*

It began like this, on a Sunday morning in the springtime, when I took my children, then ages three and five, to a small Presbyterian church near our home. After seven years of full-time parish ministry, I was taking a break, stepping from pulpit to pew, excited to sit hip-to-hip with my family on a Sunday morning, for the first time (ever!). The pews were sparsely populated by an aging congregation. There were no other children. There was no Sunday school, no children's message. I packed an arsenal—toy cars, Goldfish, crayons, more Goldfish, and, for emergency use only, my iPhone.

My son, Henry, fidgeted. He rustled the bulletin; he dropped his metal cars on the wooden pews; he asked questions. This was in the first five minutes. I shushed him. I sweat. I pleaded, "Please sit still. Please be quiet." My three-year-old did the best a three-year-old could do under the circumstances. I did not. I was so worried about disturbing the worship of the adults around us that I paid no attention to what was taking place in front of me.

It came time for the unison prayer of confession, and I stood up, bulletin in hand. Henry climbed up on the pew, his little arm wrapped around my waist, and as the congregation intoned the somber prayer, Henry opened his mouth and began to sing the theme song to Thomas the Tank Engine. I was mortified. I don't remember the rest of the service.

It wasn't until later that night that I realized and could appreciate the "border crossing" that had taken place that morning. My son wasn't acting out; he wasn't misbehaving. Henry was joining us in prayer—joining us in a service that was not created

with him in mind and frankly, did not welcome his exuberant presence.

Henry couldn't read; he didn't understand theology. But he understood that all the people were standing up and saying something together, and he wanted to be a part of that moment and that community. Through all the rustling and fidgeting and dropping things, Henry was paying closer attention to worship than I was. In fact, he may have been paying closer attention than most of us in the sanctuary that morning.

Within the boundaries of the liturgy on that Sunday morning, was Henry a citizen or a transgressor? With his toy cars and impassioned song about friendly trains, did Henry belong? Or had he wandered across some invisible border created to separate "right" worship from its opposite? Whether "yes" or "no," how would he, or I, know for certain?

According to Francis Caldwell, author of *Come Unto Me: Rethinking the Sacraments for Children*, "the question of who is invited and welcome to congregational worship is related to theological, ecclesiological, developmental, and cultural understandings and practices. . . . What is worship? Who can worship? Is worship related to awe, reverence, quiet, order, tradition, stillness, and dress code? Or is it related to expression, preparation, response, color, sounds, music, taste, smell, noise and movement?"¹

And how will we know?

This became both question and quest for me, as I trotted my children from one church to the next, in a season of pulpit supply that was at once deeply satisfying and deeply troubling. I wish I could say that the elder congregants of that local church allayed my fears about having transgressed an invisible border, but a few weeks later, we attended the same church again. This time, I was collared

Sarah Segal McCaslin is a Presbyterian minister and pastoral psychotherapist.

and robed to assist in worship. Ten minutes into worship, during the passing of the peace, the pastor reported that he had received multiple complaints about my children's behavior and noise-making. And we were asked to leave.

Our little family was not always evicted for our transgressions, but the invisible borders became less invisible. Rarely did we find any space in worship (physical or liturgical) for my children but on the floor between the pews, with toys or a book, waiting for the adults to be done talking. The children's prayer felt like self-congratulatory performance; a child's taking of communion provoked stern gazes.

To Caldwell's question, the answer emerged. In many (most?) congregations worship is still related to quiet, order, tradition, and stillness. We like to see children in worship, but we do not want to hear them, or hear from them. Their voices, their visions, their prophecies belong in the land of Sunday school and children's church. Sequestered. Segregated. Silenced.

~

Adorned in a black T-shirt, black skinny jeans, and tiny Doc Marten boots, the three-year-old with the blond pompadour raised his arm and pointed at the loaf of bread, exclaiming, "It's the Lonely Boy!"

Walking daily with his father past the garden statues of the crucified Christ in his Italian Catholic neighborhood, the three-year-old had begun to understand "the boy on the stick" as the one deserted by his friends, leaving him alone because they did not agree with his message about love.

He understood, too, that it was the "Lonely Boy" we greeted each time we gathered for the love feast of the Lord's Supper. Lonely no more.

~

The religious educator Sophia Cavaletti,² writing in the Roman Church in the late 1970s and informed richly by the work of Maria Montessori, observed that children are able to enter into a relationship with God that goes beyond the intellectual plane and is founded on a deep, existential level. Children can tolerate ambiguity and mystery in ways that adults cannot. Fantasy and reality are not yet at odds with one another, but move in and out of consciousness with fluidity.

"God and the child get along well together," Cavaletti says. Or, as the Transformer Rescue Bot

said to his Rescue Bot buddy on a cartoon I once watched with my son, "The young of their species make the best advocates."

Lisa Miller,³ a psychologist and researcher at Teachers College in New York City, suggests that our spiritual faculty is inborn, central in our physiology and psychology. Spirituality, she says, is a biologically based, identifiable, measurable, and observable aspect of our development. An innate drive toward spirituality exists alongside and intertwined with social, emotional, and cognitive development in children, and along with sexual development in adolescents.

Children aren't just able to "join in" spiritual spaces; children, from a very young age, are craving spiritual engagement and provocation from the natural world, their peers, and the adults in their lives. As adult people of faith, it is our task and our unique opportunity to tear down the walls of what might be termed "mature spirituality" to usher in unfiltered spiritual curiosity and to brighten what might otherwise become dulled by the overuse of one limited aspect of spiritual engagement.

"We don't usually think of three-year-olds as coming to church to pray, to know God, and to share Jesus' risen life," writes Gretchen Wolff Pritchard. "We think of them as coming to church simply because their parents are coming and can't leave them at home, or perhaps because we want them to get a sense of the flavor of Christian worship and a feeling that they belong in the worshipping community. When we think about teaching preschoolers about God, we see ourselves as imparting information about a subject previously unknown to the children and conceptually way beyond their capacity, but so important that we want to begin now anyway. We hope that something in our attitude toward the subject—our reverence, our love and care for the children—will rub off, and they will begin, dimly, to understand that the way we feel about God is special and we want them to feel that way, too. Even when they are participating with full attention in a religious activity, we think of children as going through the motions, motions that we hope, as they grow, will grow with them into real meaning."⁴

As is still true in many communities, the church perpetuates the notion that when we say "welcome"

to children, we mean something different than the word's actual definition, according to Rebecca Stevens-Walter, minister of music and the arts for Waffle Church, an intergenerational worship service of St. Lydia's, an ELCA congregation in Brooklyn, New York. "We mean," she continues, "welcome to our adult world, welcome with conditions, welcome this way, welcome as long as you are quiet; welcome, but please *don't break anything*."

Intergenerational worship, as a theological and liturgical stance, directly answers the question "Who belongs in worship?" with the unequivocal answer—everyone. In Stevens-Walter's experience, "children are the toughest age group to integrate *not* because of the nature of children but because of resistance from adults who can't see the possibilities and fear change."⁵

When we only "bring children along for the ride" without recognizing their innate drive to explore and engage the ineffable in complex and nuanced ways, we speak with the proverbial "log in the eye" and are ourselves the lesser for it.

Intergenerational worship, then, is not about entertaining children for an hour; it's not even about offering an alternative worship service. Intergenerational worship is about creating liturgy that is the culmination of a community's experience with the Divine. It is about drawing from the wealth of spirituality that exists when worshipers of every age are invited into the fullness of a community's life and worship.

The question, then, is no longer "What is worship?" or "Who is invited?" invites Stevens-Walter, but "How are we further immersed in a relationship with a complicated Savior when we welcome the dynamism of children?"

~

It began like this. Nine years ago, Emily Scott, a graduate of Yale Divinity School (and now an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), started a small worshipping community in a small New York City apartment, with a longing to connect people in a disconnected place. Stepping outside the sanctuary, St. Lydia's began around the kitchen table, with a shared meal, the stories of God in the lives of the people, and a commitment to building the beloved community upon the principles of open questioning, shared work, and social justice. St. Lydia's Dinner Church⁶, begun in a New York City apartment and expanding first to a church basement on the Lower East Side and then to the

Brooklyn Zen Center, is now located in its own, thousand-square-foot "storefront" in the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn. Dinner Church still takes place around the table—now on both Sunday and Monday evenings each week to accommodate a growing congregation, church tourists, and curious visitors.

Traversing time and place and denominational affiliation, St. Lydia's remains faithful to its core mission of working together to dispel isolation, reconnect neighbors, and subvert the status quo. The disenfranchised are invited to the seat of honor, and borders are meant for crossing.

It is by St. Lydia's wise discernment that, in the spring of 2015, Emily Scott approached me about creating a monthly, intergenerational worship service. Where I generally prefer a savory brunch, Emily thought "Waffle Church" had a nice ring to it.

~

The congregation of St. Lydia's reflects its surrounding urban environs—young adults, the SBNRs (spiritual but not religious), the disaffected, those ostracized by previous religious communities for "unorthodox" beliefs and identities, the doubtful, the fearful, the hurting—who have overcome deep skepticism about the institutional church to find a home at St. Lydia's. There is a disproportionate number of artists, musicians, and activists who find at St. Lydia's not just a welcome, but an invitation to co-create.

Worship at St. Lydia's is a shared endeavor. Shared not just with the liturgically and musically literate, not just with the cradle Lutherans, not even just with those who self-describe as Christian. The preacher and presider are scheduled in advance; all other roles in worship—greeter, deacon, Scripture reader, cook, and song leader—are led by volunteers. It is not unusual for a guest, upon entry into the space, to have difficulty distinguishing the pastor and church leaders from everybody else gathered in the kitchen, preparing the delicious, vegetarian meal.

Worship also encompasses aspects of church life that often exist outside the boundaries of traditional liturgy. Everything happens within the frame of the meal. The bread is blessed and broken, food is eaten, fellowship enjoyed, a sermon preached, and prayers uplifted. The cup is blessed and poured out, the dishes cleared and washed, the floors swept and mopped. The final hymn and benediction take place AFTER the space is restored and prepared for the co-workers who will arrive the next morning to sit

at those same tables, drink coffee from those same mugs, and enjoy a different type of hospitality.

~

I'mmmm gonna eat at the Waffle Ta-ble, I'mmmmm gonna eat at the Waffle Table, Hallelujah. I'mmmm gonna eat some waffles with syr-up, I'mmmmm gonna eat some waffles and syrup, Hallelujah.

(Sung to the tune of WELCOME TABLE)

~

“How well are we serving the community?” is a question always on the heart of the congregation and leadership at St. Lydia’s, and in the spring of 2015, that question veered directly onto the path of intergenerational worship on which I was traveling. “Are families with children really welcome if worship takes places on weekday evenings? Are we meeting the needs of our community and practicing the principle of inclusivity if we are not intentionally intergenerational?”

Discernment led to new clarity that children and adolescents can teach adults something utterly profound about life and God, and we need them with us. They communicate without a filter of self-consciousness. They are spontaneous, experiential, improvisational, and intensely creative. They have an acute sense of wonder and a ravenous curiosity about pretty much everything. This is where Waffle Church began . . . not as an effort to teach children about God, but to invite children into the worship space and learn **from children** about God.

~

The children crowded around the communion table, a smallish, rectangular table with a tablecloth covered in purposeful handprints and a tableau that included plate, cup, and two Star Wars figures ceremoniously arranged. So close did the children gather that their bellies touched the edge and began to push the table ever so slightly forward toward the storefront window.

“Look at this beautiful table, friends! With our Waffle Church tablecloth, the big plate and the bigger loaf of bread, the big cup of juice. We love this table. But this is not our table. It is not Waffle Church’s table! It is not St. Lydia’s table, either. Whose table is it?”

And the five-year-old, for whom church was a new-ish experience, stated with bold confidence, “It’s the Lord’s Table!”

~

Waffle Church is, in the very best sense, nothing special.

There is no magic.

Waffle Church is not children’s church, nor is it a special service for families.

Waffle Church is a worship service that takes into account the spiritual gifts and developmental needs of all its members, with a specific invitation to hear from those whose voices are too often shushed.

What does that mean?

Waffle Church embodies hospitality.

It has been suggested that the most important role at St. Lydia’s belongs to the greeter, not the pastor. Especially for visitors (called *new congregants*), the worship experience begins with an intentional welcome that conveys the spirit of the community, along with vital information about what will happen in worship and where to find the bathroom and get a cup of coffee. Everyone wears name tags.

We are in a small storefront that can barely accommodate three dozen people (translate: it’s tight!), but we make the best with what we have. For Waffle Church, seating is a mixture of chairs, floor pillows, and a sunny window bench. In one corner is a stash of soft toys, wooden blocks, books, colored pencils and paper. Children move back and forth from that space on their own accord. We have booster seats for breakfast and a changing table in the bathroom. Outlets are covered. Strollers find a home by the basement door. Worship is a mixture of sitting, standing, and moving about the space. Small cups of fruit or Goldfish are passed out before the word-heavy portions of worship.

There are no bulletins. Bulletins privilege those who are able to read, as well as those who are liturgically literate, which can produce separation within the communal act of worship. (Imagine a stage full of actors and half an audience with their respective noses buried in their scripts . . . and you, scriptless.) Verbal instructions are offered clearly and often so that everyone learns and knows together what to do next.

The Waffle Church liturgy is, at the same time, structured and flexible, formal and intimate, planned and spontaneous. Every service follows a pattern: Gathering and Welcome, Scripture, Response, Communion, Waffles, Cleanup, and Benediction. Scripture is read, sung, or acted out. The response may be a tactile activity (creating a

prayer map of the world); activity stations (painting “kindness rocks,” writing letters to local and state representatives); rituals (for All Saints’ Sunday, water-activated electric candles were floated in the baptismal font); and even theater (we have a puppeteer in the congregation and a pastor [me] who loves play-acting with fruit).

Communion is understood as a meal to which all who hunger are invited, and there will always be enough. Bread is passed around the circle, as each says to his/her neighbor, “____, this is my body.” Once bread and cup are shared, the communion meal extends to a proper breakfast of homemade waffles and fruit. Shared cleanup is rarely efficient; children take turns with the much-favored mop with the “squirt” function. Not unlike a raucous dinner party, with noise and laughter and tasks accomplished over shared stories and knowing glances.

As Will Willimon describes it, “There is a liturgical rhythm that moves us from our home table to the communion table. At both tables, we remember family stories, we give thanks for food and nourishment, we claim God’s presence, we eat together. In all of these activities we proclaim who we are as Christians and help form the world as God intends it to be. These table activities have the power to form and transform us.”⁷ It is with this in mind that we extend the communion meal in our worship and eat waffles together, with people we know and people we have just met, with children at different tables from their parents, with leftover communion bread dipped lustily into homemade lemon curd and cinnamon butter. It is the very practice that allows us to carry that table fellowship back into the world.

And then . . . there is the music.

~

Last night, my granddaughter slept over. It was a tough night, lots of crying. Whenever she stays over, she gets to request a song for us to sing.

This night, she asked for the “bear song.” What could she mean? Eventually she said, “From Waffle Church.”

Still scratching our heads, she finally sings, “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.” Honest.

—Daniel Meeter, First Reformed Church,
Brooklyn, New York

~

Music at St. Lydia’s is, almost exclusively, paperless. No hymnals, no song sheets, no video projectors and hanging screens. There is no organ, though there is a shruti box (an instrument that works on a system of bellows. It is similar to a harmonium and is used to provide a drone) and any number of other instruments of the percussive, string, brass, and reed varieties (trombone, saxophone, flute, mandolin, upright bass, to name just a few). Song leaders teach the music throughout worship using call and response, repetition, and other techniques that allow the congregation to engage fully into the musical space, regardless of musical knowledge, experience, or expertise.

St. Lydia’s approach to music was developed in collaboration with the nonprofit organization Music that Makes Community.⁸ Music that Makes Community grew out of the liturgical work being done at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, founded by the Rev. Donald Schell and the Rev. Rick Fabian in San Francisco, California. During the summer of 2005, Donald, Rick, and Emily Scott found they had a desire to create music for worship that would leave congregants free to move around, use their hands, and be present to one another in worship. They started collecting and composing music and working on ways to use it in worship.

Waffle Church borrows fruitfully from the catalog of paperless music that is growing daily, as well as singing original music created by the Waffle Church minister for music and the arts, Rebecca Stevens-Walter. It is not uncommon for children to help compose new music through the addition of lyrics to a chosen melody, or to pick up spare instruments and start improvising (casually named the Waffle Church Jam Band).

~

Welcome to our very first Waffle Church service! Waffle Church is a service for all people, of every age. Here is a place where we will engage our curiosity and imagination, and all of our senses, in the worship of God.

We may not all have children, but we have all been children, and there is a place for each of us in the lap of God.

—July 19, 2015 (*The Birth Day of Waffle Church*)

~

There is a mutuality in this endeavor to cross the borders that we have laid across generational lines. It is not our responsibility as adult members in the Christian community to introduce children

to a subject they know nothing about, because we believe that they, in fact, know A LOT and have much to teach us. Ours is the opportunity to provide form and structure to allow everyone to participate through their own experience and yearnings, as well as to speculate and to wonder, and (each in our own way) to build a conscious, articulate faith.

“Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep’; he also said, ‘Feed my lambs.’ Nowhere did he tell his disciples to feed the sheep but only teach the lambs,” says Wolff Pritchard. “It is time for children to stand before God’s altar in wonder and praise, to be included and respected as they affirm their faith, share their hope, and offer their love in service to the world.”⁹

St. Lydia’s has been fertile ground for this development. As a worshipping community, St. Lydia’s has always embodied the experiential practice of encountering the mystery of God in relationship and without conditions. We use all of our senses in worship; we encourage curiosity; we make space for improvisation and imagination. We not only welcome the outsider, we save her the seat of honor.

For Cavalletti, “when wonder becomes a fundamental attitude of our spirit it will confer a religious character to our whole life, because it makes us live with the consciousness of being plunged into an unfathomable and incommensurable reality. If we are disposed to reflect on reality in its complexity, then it will reveal itself to be full of the unexpected, of aspects we will never succeed in grasping or circumscribing; then we will be unable to close our eyes to the presence of something or someone within it that surpasses us.”¹⁰

Waffle Church is *not* children’s church. It will, I hope, distinguish itself in that way. Nor is it family church. These distinctions separate the body of Christ, a reflection of the world we live in, rather than the kingdom of God.

We may not all have children, but we have all *been* children. That is our commonality. We have all been invited into the lap of God and welcomed as we are, without need to prove ourselves worthy by memorizing prayers, or sitting quietly for fifty-five minutes. We are in the lap of God, and our task is not to sit quietly, but to sit in wonderment.

If we value children’s potential for religious experience, and our own need to sit in its mystery, worshipping together will be meaningful, complex, unresolved, and challenging. It might also be loud. It might be so holy as to knock you out of your old ways of knowing/being in the presence of God. And, worship might also resemble kindergarten—with movement and fluidity and the deployment of tactile expressions of faith—with tenderness and patience and open arms.

And waffles. We can’t forget the Waffles!

Notes

1. Elizabeth Francis Caldwell, *Come Unto Me: Rethinking the Sacraments for Children* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1996), 6.
2. Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992).
3. Lisa Miller, *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015).
4. Gretchen Wolff Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 47.
5. Rebecca Stevens-Walter, “A Children’s Liberation Theology” (master’s thesis, Union Theological Seminary, 2017).
6. For more information on St. Lydia’s, see www.stlydias.org.
7. Caldwell, *Come Unto Me*, 85.
8. For more information about Music that Makes Community, see musicthatmakescommunity.org.
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10. Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, 139.

Living without Borders

Claudia Aguilar Rubalcava

To survive the Borderlands
you must live *sin fronteras*
be a crossroads.¹

Borders are a trending topic nowadays: globalization has made them blurrier, but also stronger. Physical borders are less and less tangible as transportation and communications become faster and more reliable. Voluntary and forced migration, as well as the growth of transnational companies and proliferation of trade and political agreements at the international level have reduced borders, at least to some degree, to a more symbolic status. But at the same time, less visible borders—those that are intrinsically bound to our identity—have become stronger. Borders around culture, language, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and political views are becoming deeper and thicker by the minute. And the church is not exempt from being affected by these borders. My story can provide an example of how borders work in the church.

When I moved to the United States almost twelve years ago, crossing the physical border was not hard since I had a visa. I flew to my new home. There were few obstacles to jump through when I went through immigration and customs, and just three hours after I left my home, I was in my new home. Piece of cake. The intangible borders appeared later, in both subtle and bold ways. It was not long before I realized that crossing the intangible borders was a daunting task: from the culinary to the aesthetic, from the linguistic to the spiritual, everything seemed like a border I was crossing intentionally

or unintentionally. And it often felt like I was breaking the peace and order of the established world, especially when it came to matters of faith expression. Even though most of the spaces where I expressed my faith claimed to be welcoming and diverse, my whole self rarely felt welcome in those settings. When praying, I learned that praying with eyes wide open is not appropriate; when invited to pray the Lord's prayer in the language of my heart, I inevitably received stares; when invited to use my first language during a hymn or as a liturgist, I had to translate into English every word to alleviate people's anxiety about what was being said; I was only invited to preach or lead worship on World Communion Sunday; the music that I brought with me was considered "bad theology." I could continue giving examples for another page.

Ni de aquí ni de allá ("Neither from here nor from there") is a 1970s Mexican film starring Maria Elena Velasco. Her character, Maria, moves to the United States from Mexico in search of work to help her family. After risking everything to move to a new country, Maria realizes quickly that she is never welcomed on either side of the border. I saw this movie as a child and it shaped my understanding of migration between borders, so as I struggled with my new theological and worship landscape, I thought that I had two options: to assimilate and lose my identity and be cast out by my people or to keep my identity and be cast out by the people in my new setting. I thought that one side would see me just as a traitor and the other would see me just as an outsider.

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As time went by, entirely unnoticed by me, neither of these things happened, but something entirely new: I realized that being a border person meant being like Maria, neither from here nor from there. I found a new identity, a new way of worshiping, and even a new language to communicate with God. God was doing a new thing. God built a bridge where there was a *muro*: a bridge between the United States and Mexico, between my Roman Catholic/Baptist upbringing and my Presbyterian education, and between traditional hymns and contemporary praise songs. And I learned to live on that bridge, to make that bridge my home, to walk back and forth day in and day out, translating to anyone on either side of it, bringing gifts and criticisms from one place to the other, and sharing both gifts and criticisms with those who had never heard of them.

My story is not one of a kind. Many live on this bridge: newcomers, 1.5-generation young adults, second-generation kids, sixth-generation Texans, and those who didn't cross the border but were crossed by the border. We have all learned to live on the bridge; but in order to survive on that bridge, one must develop certain skills and traits.

The easiest skill to identify is that people on the bridge are bilingual and bicultural in varying degrees, singing in Spanglish, praying in Frenchglish, playing congas on one hymn and the organ on one anthem, eating mac and cheese, goulash, and enchiladas at the church's potluck, celebrating Thanksgiving and Day of the Dead, praying with your eyes wide open, but bowing down. It is not easy and definitely not always successful. Being bilingual and bicultural means that, as fluent as you may be, you are never 100 percent one or the other. You will miss words and social cues; you will make jokes that are not funny or appropriate; you will try to shake hands when a kiss is required and vice versa; you will never know when to clap or if to clap at all. It means being comfortable with messiness and constant failure, having copious amounts of grace for yourself and others.

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A less evident skill is the ability to identify invisible borders—and to cross them when needed. Living with one foot in one culture and one foot in another is an eye-opening experience to the many ways in which intangible borders operate, and not only the ones that pertain to you. The eye is trained to identify systems at play and power dynamics. You learn which choir directors will never work with world music, which board member or lay leader will question choices to use a prayer from a different tradition, in which churches there will be backlash if the preacher on that Sunday is a person of color. This skill creates empathy towards other people on bridges and creates a desire to join others in their struggles.

The church has not learned to live on this bridge. The church lives on one side or the other, and wherever she lives, that is the only right side. The banners outside and the bulletins inside may say all are welcome, but there is the small print saying “as long as you act, think, worship, pray, eat, smell, and look like us.” That small print creates more borders—and borders that are more hurtful—than we can imagine. Churches with the small print, however, tend to be more successful. The more homogenous congregations are, the bigger, wealthier, and more powerful they seem to be. And this goes across traditions, races, and denominations. Only one style of worship, only one race represented, only one social class are some of the keys to significant growth. Whenever denominations want to start a new congregation or communities hire growth consultants, one of the first questions asked is, “Who is your target audience?” By targeting an audience, we are creating borders.

Meanwhile, congregations that make a conscious effort to break down borders experience slower growth. These congregations, whose response to the question “Who is your target audience?” would be “all” (the word used in the banners) cannot seem to grow at a healthy rate or develop enough funds to sustain their ministry. I know a church near Atlanta where refugees from many countries worship together. It is beautiful and chaotic. The few times I have worshiped there, I have experienced glimpses of the kingdom of God. This church relies continuously on denominational financial support, and it has not grown at mustard-seed rates.

Similarly, another congregation in the heart of Atlanta struggles to fill its pews even though it is multicultural, multiracial, offers worship music

that ranges from cheesy 1990s praise songs to traditional hymns to Spanish upbeat anthems, has people from all economic backgrounds and sexual orientations and gender identities, offers American Sign Language services in every worship service, and has members of all ages.

Another congregation in the outskirts of Atlanta that merged a Caucasian congregation and a Latino congregation experiences similar struggles when it comes to growth. This community has over seventeen nationalities represented, a thriving after-school program that supports low-income youth living in trailer parks, and yet has tremendous difficulty keeping the pews full or paying a full-time salary for the pastor.

These churches I have just named remind me of the cell wall. As I heard the PhD dissertation defense of one of my parishioners, I was inspired by the topic (bacteria cells) as a helpful metaphor for worship in the borders. I was fascinated by the cell walls, nature's most basic borders, and how they function and interact internally and with external agents. And the more I learned and relearned about cell walls, the clearer the metaphor became in my mind. Living in the borders and doing ministry across borders are very much like being a cell wall. How so?

Ministry in the borderlands needs structure and to be incredibly organized; logistics tend to be more complex, and a certain rigidity is needed in order to make things happen.

A cell wall is the rigid, semi-porous protective layer in some cell types. Through its rigidity, the cell wall provides structure and strength to the cell, protecting it from external elements and preserving the cell's shape. Without the cell wall, the cell would fall apart. It is necessary for the existence of the cell. Ministry in the borderlands needs structure and to be incredibly organized; logistics tend to be more complex, and a certain rigidity is needed in order to make things happen. Committees, task forces, and scheduling practices keep everyone informed and on task. Sometimes, executive decisions need to be made because the conversations could go on and on indefinitely. The basic structure of a worship

service is kept, even with variations in length, language, and musical styles.

Whenever I attended worship services at the first church mentioned above, I immediately knew that I was in a worship service, even though I did not know the language spoken at times. There was a gathering, prayer time, the proclamation of the Word, and sending. Every person had a role and each one of them knew exactly what to do and when to do it. Musicians knew when it was appropriate to play. People knew when to sit down and to stand up, showed reverence for the Bible readings even when they were not read in their own language, and joyfully participated in the Lord's Supper with unscripted order.

Worship at the second congregation is even more structured. Bulletins are informative and offer directions, liturgies are carefully crafted, moments of silence and music are indicated, and there are even clear instructions about the fact that membership or baptism is not required in order to partake in the Lord's Supper.

While structure and rigidity are necessary for the existence of a cell, at the same time the wall is more like a mesh than a wall; its porosity allows small particles in, such as nutrients needed for the cell survival. Ministry in the borderlands requires such porosity and mesh-like flexibility, allowing new ideas to flow, making space for foreign traditions, and embracing all the voices in the conversation. It is through this porosity that borderlands ministries find their vibrant character.

The refugee congregation has close relationships with people from other faith traditions and often holds ecumenical and interfaith worship services and service projects. Several languages are spoken during worship, making services longer than a typical mainline Protestant American service. Children are welcome to express themselves during worship. The greatest testament to this church's porosity, in my opinion, is that they joyfully welcome the very people who never made *them* feel welcome in their congregations: people from mainline Protestant traditions.

Porosity takes more subtle forms in the second congregation. Music varies from worship service to worship service; even within a single service, it is not a surprise to hear a piece played on an erhu (a traditional Chinese string instrument) followed by a Taizè meditative prayer. Formal vestments, such as chasubles, are worn by the clergy, while cowboy boots are the footwear of choice. Bulletins

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and multimedia are used every Sunday; and African American, Latin American, Caucasian, LGBTQ, straight, retired people, and middle schoolers are represented communities in the worship leadership on a regular basis.

Not only does this mesh-like cell wall allow people in; it also allows toxins out, which is likewise necessary for cell survival. All cultures and traditions offer wonderful things, but they also bring with them things that are not healthy, and it would be naïve to think any culture, including church culture, is exempt from this. The sexism in some traditions, the educational elitism of other traditions, notions of cultural and intellectual superiority, racism, ageism, ableism, the fear of failure or trying new things, and the fear of opening our doors and our hearts to others are some of the many toxins that a semi-porous structure can help us eliminate in healthy ways.

Cell walls constantly grow new parts and allow for changes. The shape of a cell is never static. It adapts and is reshaped whenever needed. Doing ministry in the borderlands means being creative. It means having to come up with all sorts of tricks to recreate that which doesn't exist in your new setting. It means learning how to make the bread that you used to bake back home, knowing that it will never taste the same. It means accepting that other ways of worshipping and doing theology are just as good—and just as flawed—as yours. It means learning about immigration laws and incorporating this practical knowledge into the service, as well as creating ways to address the physical, financial, and educational needs of your community. Power becomes, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would say, “love implementing the demands of justice,”² and worship is the means to communicate such love.

I once heard a story from the congregation that welcomes refugees from all over the world. When they started worshipping as a congregation, it became evident that some of the people attending had specific needs: things like dishes, bedding, curtains, and towels. Some of the members had extras of some of these items but were lacking others. This conversation took place during worship, and worship became the place where the goods needed were exchanged.

Some of my dear friends in the Sonora-Arizona border noticed that their small town was receiving dozens of people from the Mexican southern state of Chiapas. They decided to ask what the causes of their migration were, and when they discovered that it was related to people losing money cultivating coffee, the congregation, with denominational support, resolved to start a coffee co-op. Some families have returned to their homeland because of the success of this co-op. Worship informed this process and continues to shape how this co-op does business. Worship had the power to transform hearts and break down walls.

The church that merged two congregations saw that in the immediate surroundings of the church property there were trailer parks full of children who had financial needs. Their parents worked full-time jobs and were rarely at home, and these kids had a high risk of getting involved in dangerous activities. Even with limited resources, the church saw a need in the community and did something about it. They started a humble after-school program and drove the children to the church's grounds. On Sundays, the van would drive to the trailer parks and pick up the children who were interested in attending worship. Once in the church, the kids were at home. They sat with older ladies and held the hymnals for them; they attended Sunday school, served as liturgists, and prayed before potlucks. It was in worship that the congregation saw the fruits of the labor that had been done during the week.

There are, however, palpable dangers in being too porous. Hazardous agents can enter the cell and do more damage than good. Doing ministry that continually crosses borders means slow growth and walking on eggshells. It also means that some voices (usually the ones that have more power in other areas of life) are louder than others. Tokenism is a palpable danger. Worship is ever changing, and there is a risk to become a crowd pleaser. And having a structure that is too loose may mean that no one finds themselves at home. Trying to become welcoming to all may imply becoming welcoming to none. Thus, a balance between rigidity and porosity is essential to the existence of cells and ministry in the borderlands.

So, what can a church in the American heartland learn from the cell wall model or from those living in the borderlands? Can any of these ideas be applicable to communities in, say, Ohio or Pennsylvania? Can denominations do ministry in the borderlands? I would say “yes.” Because even though we may not be surrounded by physical borders such as rivers, gates, or walls, borders are everywhere. The street that divides black from white communities, the expensive private school in the midst of a low-income neighborhood, the walking and biking trail that is unapologetically gentrifying the city, the established beliefs and practices of our communities, the part of town where the ethnic minorities are segregated, the fear of people experiencing homelessness . . . these are all borders we can find in our towns and cities. The two main examples in this text have been intentionally selected from Atlanta, Georgia, a city that is nowhere near a border but is full of borders. It is a matter of opening our eyes to the many borders surrounding our communities and that our communities are building.

Once borders are detected, opening some pores is the next step. As intimidating as that may sound, the most basic step anyone can take is accompanying those who live on the borders, being good friends and neighbors. It can be as easy as changing the outdoor signage, asking neighbors of the congregation what immediate needs they have, inviting guest preachers from different backgrounds on a regular basis, participating in ecumenical efforts, educating congregations at the most basic level on the struggles of those who live outside and alongside our borders, or slowly introducing hymns and prayers from other parts of the body of Christ. Denominational resources, such as hymnals and prayer books, often have sections that include world music and prayers that are ancient and modern.

Similarly, larger judicatory bodies and denominations can take small steps in order to do ministry on the borders, electing committee members and officials from diverse backgrounds, gathering prayers and music from the many places where the body of Christ is present, translating and making accessible resources for those for whom English is not their first language, holding listening sessions to see where the church has failed to be Christ’s presence to those who are living in the borderlands, creating and expanding educational resources for congregations, ministers, and lay leaders.

These first steps will most likely find resistance. But there is no other way to walk the walk than by starting with a step. And when struggles arise—and they will arise—it is important to remember that we are not engaging with the borderlands because it is trendy or because it will make us more relevant, but because it is written in many ways, in many forms, in the Bible. The history of the people of God is the history of people living in the borderlands, of walls being built and torn down, of people who were wandering and never felt quite at home, and of foreigners and strangers who were outside the borders becoming central to the story of God’s love for the world. Jesus’ ministry was constantly based on building bridges and crossing borders. The incarnation was the event in which Jesus built a bridge between God and humans, where the human

realm and the divine realm met. Jesus crossed national borders, religious borders, political borders, and the border between death and eternal life.

It is with the confidence of knowing that Jesus is walking with us, crossing borders we saw as impossible obstacles, that we can become border people. We can become bilingual and bicultural in earthly matters and in heavenly matters; we can start building bridges and translating to those who have never been on one side of the conversation.

Being border people means adopting a new identity, having flexible roots

Being border people means adopting a new identity, having flexible roots that expand and contract and grow upwards as well as deep down. It means speaking a new language, fusing traditions and beliefs, weaving a new history made up of different versions of actual events, depending on storytelling as a more reliable source of knowledge because the truth is never told in history books but is embodied in the scars, the gray hairs, and the wrinkles of our grandmothers.

that expand and contract and grow upwards as well as deep down. It means speaking a new language, fusing traditions and beliefs, weaving a new history made up of different versions of actual events, depending on storytelling as a more reliable source of knowledge because the truth is never told in history books but is embodied in the scars, the gray hairs, and the wrinkles of our grandmothers. It means creating new imagery to represent who you are, being comfortable in your own skin, knowing that it offends both sides and sparks the curiosity of both sides, being born into a new family of people who look like you and who don't, who believe the same as you and who don't, who will understand at all times 70 percent of what you say because that 30 percent is a new language, unknown to both sides, knowing that, like Jesus, you have new mothers and brothers and sisters, knowing well the beauty and the flaws in both sides, knowing that your home is not here and not there, but somewhere else.

Being border people is an opportunity to some and an obligation to others; it is risky and rewarding, scary and full of hope, but I am convinced that one day we will all reach our real home, our true roots, and that God will be welcoming us home with arms as wide as great bridges.

Notes

1. Gloria Anzaldúa, "To live in the Borderlands means you . . .," in *Barrios and Borderlands: Cultures of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*, ed. Denis Lynn Daly Heyck (New York: Routledge, 1994), 402.
2. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* (annual report delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference), Atlanta, GA, August 16, 1967.

Stranger Love: Worship at Durham Church

Franklin Golden

One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.

—Psalm 145:4

Only the God who raised Jesus from death would call a Gucci-loafer-wearing frat boy like me to plant a multiracial church. I am white, male, (beyond) privileged, Southern, Presbyterian. The whitest guy in the room. I didn't see it coming. Maybe grace is God giving you the thing you'd never know to ask for. In my case, grace took flesh in a poor, messy, mixed-up church in Durham, North Carolina, where I've had to unlearn almost everything I was raised, educated, and trained to be.

The last thing Jesus said before he ascended into heaven: When the Spirit comes, she makes witnesses (Acts 1:8). There's no lovelier word to me than witness, no creaturely possibility more saturated in holiness and hope than pointing to Jesus and saying, "Thank you for giving me what I had no other way of getting!" If there's freedom outside of our faithful witness—to the faithful witness! (Rev 1:5)—I've yet to find it.

So, here's my witness, what I've been given to see: We sit in a circle so we can see one another. We don't have bulletins because if we did, people would read them. There's no place to hide. In the middle of the circle is a thin wooden table held up by a center column. On the table are two cups, a pitcher, and a plate crafted by a local potter. A five-year-old boy plays quietly under the table, causing the candles to flicker and the table to teeter. It strikes me as fitting that our service has a least a chance of ending in a raging fire.

Wherever you are in the circle, the communion table is in your line of sight; the sacraments of

neighbor and the table are inextricably bound. At a new members' dinner last week someone said, "No matter where I look, I see someone whose life I can't imagine." It's true, and a lovely thing to behold. First-generation immigrants, people just out of prison, doctoral students, seminarians, hopeful agnostics, evangelicals, charismatics, formerly homeless, currently homeless, black and white, queer, addicts in various shades of recovery.

We even have a few Presbyterians, though most of the fifty or so people on any Sunday morning don't know the first thing about the Presbyterian part of being Durham Presbyterian Church. (I hope they knew I was kidding when I told them it comes from the Greek word for "really, really, really white.") When real life Presbyterians show up from time to time, we recognize them by their punctuality. Our flock knows nothing about that. We even have one Davidson graduate who is starting to slip a little bit.

Liturgy is the work of the people and there's nothing ours don't do. Preach, pray, play, sing, reflect. I love it when people don't realize I'm the pastor. We sing from memory or with the help of a little book we made that has lyrics to contemporary songs, traditional hymns, gospel tunes, and songs in Spanish. In the back of the book we have some of the ancient creeds along with prayers written by members of the church.

We take around ninety minutes to sing, confess, pass the peace, preach, pray, eat, sing, and bless. The order of service is the same each week, but I never know what's going to happen on Sunday morning, who will bring a word from the Spirit to the church. The interruptions and improvisations are the lifeblood of the church. A few weeks ago I was offering a reflection at the table when one of the interruptions sent us off in an unexpected

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direction. I suggested we bring as many people as we could to share communion with someone who was unexpectedly unable to worship that morning. Someone interrupted to mention another person who has been homebound, a rarity for us given the average age at Durham Church of around twenty-eight. I said, "OK, that's on the way. Let's do both!" And then a seven-car caravan set off, carrying about half the people in worship that day. The first church member lives in Section 8 housing for people with disabilities. We sang, prayed, shared the supper. Through tears and laughter she said, "I've never seen this many white people in such a small space!"

Sometimes we'll leave space in our confession time for people to make personal, public confession. I was leading that part of the service one day when a woman confessed to working as a prostitute. When she finished I walked up to her and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven." When we passed the peace after that I wasn't surprised to see her crying, but I was surprised to see so much of the rest of the church in tears. A line formed to embrace our sister. It was like her confession broke something open in us and helped us to see ourselves.

That kind of thing happens a lot—a moment of vulnerability and intimacy that frees us up a bit. The first time I remember it happening was a few months into our life as a congregation. I had preached on our tendency to hide from God and one another. During the prayers, my co-pastor at the time, Amanda, said, "We're hiding even now. But we don't have to." I happened to be watching a woman across from me as she tentatively, slowly raised her hand. Her parents didn't know it yet, but she wanted us to know she was in a relationship with a woman. When this person moved to another town, she remembered that moment in an open letter to the church:

I can never say thank you enough for taking me as I am, for saying yes to me three years ago when I asked if I could bring all of myself to you. I can't explain the supernatural healing that happened when I shared my love for my partner with you. I can't explain the healing that has happened slowly, in small, everyday moments with you all since then. The Holy Spirit is at work here healing deep and painful wounds, bringing one or two of us back to life. I couldn't love you all more.

You take up so much room in my heart that sometimes it feels like it could burst.

We didn't set out to do this, but our life together at Durham Church has become increasingly marked by vulnerability. We have learned to embrace our messiness and brokenness as the canvas for God's creative work.

From time to time I forget this is true. Thankfully, God is good. Love is patient. A few Sundays ago, I was preaching on the importance of loving God with all our minds in relation to racial injustice and the sordid history of racial formation that shapes all of us and every institution in our society. After I held forth on the importance of finding the right words to complicated problems, I went forward for communion and was served by two women with developmental disabilities who didn't speak. They just looked at me, smiled, and offered me Jesus.

A few weeks before that, a visiting professor from Japan was with us. Just before we celebrated communion, I passed him a note asking him to say the words of institution and offer a reflection in Japanese. He looked at me like I was crazy and then said, "Sure." As he spoke, I looked around the circle to see half the flock in tears. Only a few days before, they were crying from laughter when I said, "Then he took the cup . . ." and looked down at an empty pitcher while a deacon ran off to find juice.

The prayers are offered by the congregation for one another. Someone lets us know what they need or what they are celebrating. Someone else will raise their hand and pray for them. At the end of the prayer they say, "Lord in your mercy." The rest of us say, "Hear our prayers." Six years into it and we are still flubbing that part about 15 percent of the time. My favorite prayer request so far: "Y'all, please pray for my mama. She stays on the phone talking to all her friends about my business and I'm like, 'Shit, mama!'"

Not long ago I looked across the room during the prayer time and saw a woman who had been away for several years. Her marriage was ending. One of our deacons was holding her like you hold a baby while she wept. About a month ago a woman from Central America showed up and requested prayer. One of us took her to lunch after worship and helped put a support team together.

It took a while for us to be comfortable in our bodies, but now whenever we pray there's a lot of movement. We started by occasionally encouraging

one another to extend our hands out to those we were praying for. Now people move about as they are moved, laying on hands. The first time I saw the entire congregation spontaneously gather around one person was when the husband of our oldest member died. Recently, a couple who had never worshiped with us before cried as strangers laid hands on them and prayed for their broken hearts as they remembered their daughter who died several years ago.

The children generally come in as communion starts, but sometimes they enter during the prayers. Usually they announce their presence in the way stampeding cattle do. But that Sunday, and in other moments like it, I didn't even hear them. I didn't know they were in the room until I saw little hands join the circle. It's become what their bodies know to do.

We always hold onto one another at the very end of the service. Whoever is doing the benediction will explain to visitors that this reminds us we always receive God's blessing as a people. A few seconds after the final "amen" the children charge the little table. I'm not sure what kind of rules we might be breaking by letting them have at the bread, but I'll never do anything but delight in their desire to be at the table. Then they run up to the area where the musicians lead worship. They'll bang the drums, sing into the microphone. A few will even preach. (By preach, I mean say "blah, blah, blah" loudly into a microphone.) Not long ago we had a guest musician. He'd been with us before so he knew better than to be surprised when a two-year-old just walked up and started to accompany him, loudly, on a drum kit. They do what they see the grownups doing. A four- and five-year-old sing with the band. One of our guitar players can't actually play chords, but he's the Jimi Hendrix of joy and he's up there every Sunday.

That's what I see. Most of those stories happened in the last month or two as I started to think about this article. I used to worry the lovely moments would stop, but they keep coming. These small, steady, ordinary miracles arrive like Sunday morning manna.

I'm a child of the traditional mainline church. I discerned a call to ministry in places very different from the congregation I serve. I love both. That said, in reflecting on the moments that moved me in the last few months I realized most of it couldn't happen in the congregations that shaped me. The

diversity of people and breadth of participation are part of that. But the most significant difference that's made room for the ordinary miracles is the freedom that has come as we slowly began to realize worship is something we don't need to control. We worship with our lives as they are. The carefully prepared performance of ministry professionals is only useful when it helps everyone faithfully perform their humanity. I've learned that means messiness and making room for others more than it means preaching a sermon that would make my homiletics professors proud.

There's one young couple at Durham Church with a long history in the Presbyterian Church. When I first met with them, they told me they loved Durham Church but, given that they were parents of young children, they worried about its stability and long-term planning. With an abundance of pastoral comfort, I said, "We are unstable and we have no plan." But that's not exactly true. There's a deep stability that comes from learning to live openly with fragility. And we do make plans—they are just determined by the moment and whoever walks through the door. A few weeks ago, the wife in that couple was crying in worship. I ran to her, worried about what might be wrong, but she surprised me by saying, "I'm crying because God is so good!"

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seeing people begin to let go.

One of the great gifts of being a witness at Durham Church is seeing people begin to let go. We've been given a church culture where people come to life through messiness and vulnerability. It's as if the very lack of control creates room for the Spirit to speak through more and more of us. I've come to see worship as a way of becoming more fully human by allowing God to reach us, together, in our brokenness. As Leonard Cohen put it, "There's a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in." This can be deeply uncomfortable. A nurse who grew up in a mainline church showed up one Sunday years ago and said, "I can't take this." A year later she was back. I asked her why she stayed the second time and she said, "I always felt bad because I never knew how to talk to people about Jesus. Now I know I can bring them here. They will see that I am

broken and the church is broken. Then I don't even have to say Jesus because they'll see him."

The need to be in control is often celebrated as good leadership. An interim pastor at one of our neighbor churches, after listening to members describe what they needed in their next pastor, said, "You aren't describing a pastor; you're describing a Confederate general!" I start to plan when I'm feeling out of control or insecure. If you ever catch me planning beyond next week, ask me to sit down, take a deep breath, and throw my legal pad in the recycling. I've learned that the planning helps me avoid the feelings of insecurity, but it doesn't usually help the church.

Again, I was slow to learn this. A staffing experiment ended in failure a few years ago. We found ourselves without a music minister to work with our fifteen or so volunteer musicians. The power/control vacuum caused me anxiety, so I jumped in and took control. Some of the white members of our music team gave my "leadership" high marks. But the people of color called a meeting to let me know how deeply my actions had hurt them. They saw what I couldn't. In imposing top-down decisions I was going against the very thing I was always preaching: shared leadership is the heart of our ministry. In a time of uncertainty, I reverted to my default way of being in the world—a white guy who assumes he was born to bring order out of chaos.

I remembered that meeting when the music team met later and I told them the session had decided not to hire a new music minister. There was anxiety in some of the music team about not having a leader. One of them said, "We just need someone to follow so that if things go off the rails we will know where to look to get our bearings and feel secure." I said, "I get that, but what if the person you look to was everyone else in the band?" We were learning that we have a choice: we can have control or we can have community.

The freedom that comes from giving away power and control is its own gift, but what it makes room for is lovelier still. A few years ago, a church member called me on a Thursday afternoon and asked to preach. I explained we already had a

preacher for that Sunday, but when he assured me it wouldn't be a long sermon I said, "Sure." Sunday comes and I realize, as I am walking into worship with the preacher for that day, that I had forgotten to tell her there was another preacher going first. When it came time to preach he stood up there and did nothing but share the details of his life: his birthday, the sports he loved, his family, allergies, hobbies. And then the second preacher gave a meticulously prepared sermon on the particularity of love—how loving someone means knowing them in the particulars of their life and story. It won't do to say in the abstract, "We love because God first loved us!" No, she said, loving means knowing people in the particular—their birthdays, the sports they love, their families, their hobbies.

If you are reading this, I'm guessing you work or worship in a place where this could never happen. Chances are you are deeply committed to and actively involved in the worship life of a mainline Protestant congregation. You are probably like one of the many beautiful pastors, musicians, and teachers who have loved and nurtured me for

as long as I can remember. In fact, you may actually be one of those people! (If so, thank you!) Every decision comes with a cost. Durham Church is not a comfortable place for a lot of people, but it's become home for many who are lonely and forgotten. Every time I hear someone say "This is my only family," I think, "Salvation has come to this house today!"

The people who have changed my life have come to me in bodies I couldn't see coming. This is the heart of what I've

learned: the reign of God rides on stranger love. It demands an active and hopeful desire for God to be revealed in surprising friendships that often call much of what we think we know into question.

This is where things get tricky (and not a little scary). I believe most of us want a diverse body of believers to share life with; I just think we want other things more. The thing we cling tightest to is the very thing I've come to believe is what's getting in the way. Our worship is the most significant barrier to the kind of stranger love that reveals the fullness of life in Jesus. There is an inevitable

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connection between our way of worshiping and the way we are being formed, perhaps most significantly by determining who we will worship with. The question, then, is, “What kind of community does our worship create, and does it bear witness to the risen Jesus and the surprising social reality the Spirit makes possible?”

This emphasis on worship leaves us understandably vulnerable to the criticism of being insular and self-focused while neglecting the weightier matters of the law.

This emphasis on worship leaves us understandably vulnerable to the criticism of being insular and self-focused while neglecting the weightier matters of the law. The prophets had a knack for exposing this kind of idolatry. (“Stop singing! You think I like your solemn assemblies? They exhaust me!”) But what I’ve discovered is that our worship life at Durham Church has been the only catalyst for ministry. Shared experiences of vulnerability, brokenness, prayer, communion, interminable minutes passing the peace, radical acceptance, praising God, and trusting God and one another alongside with people we would never choose drives us into the world out of love for the body of Christ.

I’ve been taught, tacitly, that churches are meant to *have* ministries, but I’ve learned since that the church *is* the ministry. (How can it be otherwise if the church is the body of Christ?!) This can be hard to explain to other church people, especially colleagues vested in programs that do a lot of good. The best I’ve been able to do is to tell them that last year little Durham Church freed up two beds at the shelter when two homeless people moved in with two different families in our congregation. The nurse I wrote about earlier captured this, again, perfectly, when she told me, “I used to serve food at the homeless shelter. I used to serve them breakfast—now they serve *me* communion!”

When strangers become friends, justice becomes relational. Justice without committed intimacy across borders can quickly become shallow and self-serving while giving us a story to tell ourselves about ourselves that maintains a comfortable status quo.

When ministry is relationship driven, it spills out into the world. Some of the most profound worship experiences have occurred when the lives of people I love and the systems (powers) that are crushing them (and us all) come together. We’ve had church at social service agencies, halfway houses, offices of various Durham slum lords, prisons, courtrooms, and a district attorney’s office. There’s no ministry *for* at Durham Church, just ministry *with*. That can be problematic when churches are socially, racially, and economically homogenous. I grew up in congregations with a heart for ministry for “the least of these” but without the joy and burden of intimate friendship with them, without the profound hope, promise, and possibility that Jesus will be revealed when the depth of our need for intimate relationships across borders is revealed to us. There’s no possibility for justice without friendship with people who suffer injustice.

I got a letter once from a prisoner who heard we had a prison ministry. I wrote back to tell him we don’t have a ministry, we just have a church member in prison. Our brother in prison is named Gordon. One time I was complaining to Gordon about how my wife and I were having a hard time trying to make a decision about cutting down a tree to make room for a two-story deck in back of our house. Gordon looked at me and said, “Really? That’s what you guys worry about? Next time you get in a fight about your deck, think about me!” And I replied, “You think I don’t do that already? Every [expletive] time?” Friends like Gordon are dangerous for my ability to blithely rationalize my material privilege.

We knew Gordon before he did some time, and a few of us grew close to him while he was in prison. When he was released, he started to play guitar in our worship band. This was something of a coup for our glorious amateur hour. Gordon studied at Berklee College of Music. He’s remarkably gifted, but he’s also been in the grip of a brutal addiction that has led to decisions that conspired with our unjust justice system to keep him in and out of prison most of his adult life. He’s currently serving another sentence, now for drug-related theft. (Speaking of crossing borders, on his last Sunday we had a joint service with our sister congregation, and he took us all to the third heaven when he let loose in a way we hadn’t experienced before, throwing some nasty fusion prog rock over a salsa praise number. When he gets out we’re going to beg him not to withhold that kind of glorious outpouring again!)

We are all trying to figure out what it means to be church in the crazy
time of upheaval we've been given.

When Gordon was sentenced, we had almost as many people in the courtroom as we do on Sunday. In our weekly email we listed the court date as a worship service. We don't have any lawyers in our congregation, but we know how to agitate. (We also have consistently more people at community-organizing events than we have in worship). We started to write letters, and I reached out to old fraternity brothers with friends at the DA's office. Gordon's attorney is a career public defender with a decade of death row experience. She said she'd never seen that many letters. As Jesus says, in the Cotton Patch Gospel, when he's raised "It worked!" Somehow our advocacy won over a famously tough judge. Another lawyer flagged us down later and said the outcome was a miracle (his word). As a habitual felon, Gordon was looking at as many as fifteen to twenty years, and he got two and a half. (I'm telling you, pastoral leadership is highly overrated. It's worth noting that the letter-writing campaign happened while I was in Cuba without Internet access. I came home copied on more letters than I had time to read, all saying the same thing: "There's more going on in the life of this person than you can see on his rap sheet. He's not alone in this world and he's not what he was when he committed this crime.") When Gordon walked out to serve his sentence, he waved. Our hands went up in unison, and as you might imagine based on what I've written so far, the tears started to flow, and our mixed-up family went into the lobby to pray and cry some more.

Gordon joined Durham Church before he was baptized. I know that's out of order, but when you hold it as gospel truth that we all believe before we belong (and surely that's true!), these things happen. Gordon decided to get baptized when the old warrant that sent him back to prison caught up with him. He called me and said he understood that we wouldn't be seeing him anymore. I said, "What the hell are you talking about? Carol and Bob have been in Raleigh all morning figuring out the intricacies of the bail-bond system. You aren't spending the night in jail. You are sleeping at their house tonight." He called back a few hours later to tell me he wanted to get baptized. He said the love he felt was so

ridiculous, inexplicable, and unlike anything he'd known before that he was convinced it was time to trust the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A few months ago, Gordon called during worship. We stopped what we were doing and I put him on speaker phone and passed it around. When the phone went to Fran, an eighty-five-year-old white woman who grew up in Durham, she said, "Hey Gordon, it's Mom." I had no idea that's what he called her. I knew he walked three miles to her house in the rain two days before sentencing because he was worried he wouldn't see her again. But I didn't know he called her Mom. I don't have to tell you Fran was born at a time when white supremacy was explicit and pervasive. (Not unlike now.) There is a picture of Gordon from a few moments after his baptism. For much of the history of my state he could've been killed for embracing a white woman like that. Whenever I visit Gordon in prison, I leave with the same feeling: church just happened. Jesus said he shows up in those visiting rooms, and I believe it. As I was finishing this article today, Gordon called. There are only seven people on this planet I tell I love them every time I hang up the telephone. My parents, my children, my wife, and Gordon.

We are all trying to figure out what it means to be church in the crazy time of upheaval we've been given. Surely the slow death of the mainline Protestant church as we have known it is a gift from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We've been given another chance to listen to what Paul was trying to tell Peter: "We've been shown a more beautiful way! The fullness of Jesus is being revealed in the new thing that happens when those who were far off come close together!" Of course, it's one thing to believe that, and another to put that truth at the heart of our congregational lives. One rule that helps me (when I remember it): If we don't pray to it, it's not sacred. If it doesn't go by Father, Son, or Spirit, consider it provisional. It's probably more dangerous to hold on to whatever it is than it is to let it go.

There's still tremendous wealth in our congregations to leverage for the sake of courageous risk. I pray it will take the form of new worship

services with more room for more (and different) bodies. I pray it will take the form of new congregations where people can love and be loved, receive and be received across the borders that remain the dominant tone of American life. Our birth tribe was never meant to be our forever tribe. It's time to turn from Pharaoh's house and choose to suffer with the people of God. We have a choice. We can choose the tribe that God gives us, the one Jesus draws to himself in order to have a body in the world.

The first friends of Jesus sensed, as we are beginning to, that God's power is present in our small lives when Jesus draws us to himself through one another. Thankfully, even now, Jesus is calling

us to himself along with people we would never choose. We need one another to begin to taste and see that the Lord is good! The mission of the church demands a joyful, trusting, expectancy, an openness to God's activity of drawing diverse creatures and cultures to the one body of Jesus. That new family is the heart of our witness. It's also perhaps the one thing that might convince our neighbors, one precious child of God at a time, of the truth we are meant to proclaim with our lives: we serve a living God. Jesus is drawing us toward a more excellent way, an expansion of love and desire across all borders where a new family reveals the unseen, glorious depths of the presence of Jesus in the world. Come, Lord Jesus!

what if I told you

Slats Toole

what if i told you
that before i step into one of your churches
i recite the words of the 23rd psalm?

you have probably said these words
at a graveside
at a bedside
these sacred truths
reserved for the times that part of you feels
near death.
you apply them like a balm
you chant them like a spell to protect you
to remind you that
you are treasured
you are beloved
by your God
who will fill your cup
and restore your soul
and save you.

would you believe me if i told you
this is also why i cloak myself in these words
as i step through the door of your churches?

more than anything
i long to know the God
who has snuck up on me
who has enticed me
who has drawn me in
the God i cannot resist

and i can't help it—
i most experience this God i crave so deeply
in voices joined together in song
in hearts joined together in prayer
in souls joined together at table
in bread, in cup.

but here i know i walk through the valley
of sideways glances and murmured voices
and i fear your gatekeepers
who fence me out of your sacred space
where i will never be welcome.

i am not protected by statements or flags
or good intentions or permissive theology.
that trust has been broken too many times.
my help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth
and me.

i speak those holy words to myself to fortify me
to remind myself of the truth you dare not speak
to justify my stealing the crumbs you let fall from
your table
and to hope
that when i am kicked out of your house
God will meet me on the curb
and i shall dwell in the house of my God
my whole life long.

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Communion across Borders

Keith Oglesby

Juarez/El Paso, May 2016

The first thing I noticed was the U.S. Border Patrol. This was going to be a different experience of Holy Communion. A small band of us had gathered on the U.S. side of the fenced border with Mexico to participate in the service with fellow Christians on the Mexico side of the wire barrier. We did not appear that threatening, at least not to me. About a dozen of us stood on the U.S. side—younger and older, different colors, male and female—most were members of a leadership program from Candler School of Theology. Also included were two Presbyterian missionaries and their children. A group that needed to be watched.

And the Border Patrol was watching us as we unpacked our supplies from the vehicles—tables, chairs, bread, wine, chalice, paten, bulletins, a Bible, and a microphone and speaker. Tools for causing trouble. They stood at some distance with their arms crossed as they carried on what seemed to be casual conversation. They had come on bicycles and in an SUV. They seemed to be trying to be nonchalant. Yet they were there, watching.

As we prepared on our side of the border, our brothers and sisters gathered on the other side. There were a few more of them—maybe eighteen or twenty—many of them families. Like us, they were setting up the things needed for the service—tables, chairs, and so forth. They seemed to be more enthusiastic in their tasks as we prepared to worship together. I felt a little awkward as we waited to make contact, uncertain what our Holy Communion would be like.

On their side, a local Juárez police vehicle pulled up alongside them. No one got out, but they

were clearly present to watch us. Were they curious? Trying to maintain order as they defined it? It was difficult to imagine why this gathering of Christians would draw interest from the authorities on both sides of the border. What did they think we were going to do?

We began to show them our intentions. People on both sides approached the fence, smiling and trying to make human contact. Some on either side spoke the others' language. Many of us did not. Regardless, we still tried, using the language of smiles and gestures. Both groups relied on those who could speak English and Spanish. We would say something and wait for them to translate.

The most moving thing I observed in this time before the service was how we would reach through the fence. At this part of the border, it resembles the chain-link fence many of us had in the backyards we played in as children, except this one was several feet taller than those. But like those fences, it is possible to reach a few fingers through and touch a friend's hand. So we began to do that on both sides.

“Mucho gusto . . . buenas tardes . . .” and “Hello . . . how are you? Nice to meet you.” Since many of us were limited in what we could say beyond these words of introduction, we relied on smiles and touching fingers through the holes in the fence. This time of greeting was an important preparation for worship. We could look one another in the face and trust that the other was there to express a human faithfulness that transcends borders. We were beginning to understand that Holy Communion expressed solidarity that exists beyond national identity. And in that sense, Holy Communion is a subversive act.

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The Border Patrol continued to watch us. Perhaps they—or their leaders—understood the implications for the existing powers better than the ministers did. As we continued to prepare for worship, a Border Patrol helicopter flew over us. It seemed very low—we could hear its engines and rotors as it stirred up the dust around us. The U.S. government was letting us know that though they were allowing this service, it would be under their rules and supervision.

As we gathered, leaders on both sides gave an opening statement about what we were going to do and how it would work. We would use Spanish and English for the Scripture, sermon, prayers, and hymns. We would receive Holy Communion at the same time but on our respective sides only. The governments would not allow anything to be passed through the fence, not even the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. Those were the rules and we accepted them.

The service began using an opening form familiar to many Christians, but this time alternating Spanish and English. We sang a hymn of praise as we rejoiced together in God's great love for us that transcends the limits we put on our lives. Then we heard the lessons in Spanish and English. Though we had to remain on our side of our respective borders and were constrained in what we could do, the Word of God was not constrained (2 Tim. 2:9b). God's Word easily moved through the fence, touching hearts on both sides.

The verse I remember is from Ephesians 2:14:

“For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (NRSV).

“Porque El mismo es nuestra paz, quien de ambos pueblos hizo uno, derribando la pared intermedia de separación” (LBLA).

It was impossible to miss the significance of these words. The preacher made the point even clearer for us. He said that God knocks down walls—rips them out. That was a primary part of Christ's mission among and through us. Perhaps that is why Pope Francis at this very border said that Christians—followers of Christ—work to break down walls, not build more of them.

The preacher also told us that the wall is a sign of our sin. The United States built it not only to divide

the people of two nations, but also the people within its own borders. One political candidate promised during his campaign for president that the wall would make things better in the United States and protect us from the bad people who otherwise would come into our nation to kill and rape and sell drugs to us. Walls serve to divide us in many different ways—in our hearts as well as our shared land.

But sin is never the last word for those who follow Jesus. Our presence on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border offered hope. Our shared worship of one Lord—hearing God's Word, praying, receiving God's grace, and being sent out to our respective nations to bring the good news of Jesus, the wall destroyer—brought hope to us as we gathered by this strange fence.

The preacher said that walls do serve a purpose. They provide a reason for us to gather and talk—like next door neighbors speaking to each other over their shared fence. The two sides here this day would not be present without the wall. So we needed to use this opportunity at the border to learn more about each other.

And the preacher was right. We would not be near this border if there were no fence. For the members of the leadership program, we were given the opportunity over the course of a week to learn more about the history and context for our shared Communion. We heard the echoes of biblical stories—of oppression in Egypt, of Passover and liberation, of entering a new land—in the stories of the border. Much of the history of immigration between our two nations is unknown in the United States. Or if it is known, it is understood through an imperfect lens shaped from incomplete textbooks and popular movies. Many Americans “remember the Alamo” and the heroic defenders who fought to the last man. Less known is how the United States waged a war of aggression and conquered and possessed the land of another nation, taking it by force and purchase, using scandalous stories to justify the conquest.

Americans often feel we are on the right side of history even when we do not know the whole story of our land, especially as told by those on other sides. Just acknowledging the simple truth, for instance, that the land from Texas to California was once part of Mexico, deepens understanding in a way that may help begin to tear down our inner walls—and stop more outer walls from being built.

The current border was created in 1848 following the United States' war against Mexico. El Paso and Juárez, where our group spent the week, are examples of several border cities that existed as unified cities before the current national boundaries were created. These sister cities are vibrant places for commerce and culture; many families include members who live on both sides of this artificial line.

The border between Mexico and the United States was very relaxed up until the late 1960s. There were a few checkpoints, but no passports or visas were required to cross. A major shift began in the 1980s, as the "war on drugs" justified an increased focus on border security. In 1986–1987, there were five thousand border agents. After September 11, 2001, the number of agents was increased to over twenty thousand agents. The border went from having almost no fences as recently as 2002, to over seven hundred miles of fence today—and a proposal to build a wall across the entire two-thousand-mile border. Border patrol agents were militarized and given high-tech weapons because of fear of terrorists—this despite the fact that the 9/11 terrorists came to the United States through Canada.

The border region between the United States and Mexico is one of the most militarized in the world. The questions to ask include: Who is the enemy? There is no war with Mexico. What is the objective? There has not been one incident of terrorists coming through the border with Mexico. But there have been hundreds and hundreds of deaths every year as immigrants try to enter the United States by going around the fences. Children and mothers and other people of all types and ages die every year because of the fences that have been built. These barriers cause them to go through remote and dangerous deserts as they seek safety and a better opportunity for their families in this land.

During Holy Communion, this history was present with us. As the liturgy reminded us, we were to acknowledge the sins we had done and those sins done on our behalf. Not only for the thirty or so people on the border that particular afternoon—but for our two nations. People from Mexico could describe their sin. For people of the United States, our sins on the border included personal prejudice and systemic racism.

We carry false assumptions about people crossing our borders that distort reality and defy statistics. Immigrants, whether properly documented or not, are seen as a threat due to the fear that

they are violent, even though statistics show that immigrants, regardless of status, commit fewer crimes than citizens.¹ Immigrants are viewed with contempt because of the belief that they will become welfare recipients, even though statistics show that immigrants pay much more in taxes than they receive in government benefits.²

What does the border say about the United States? That our nation has an immigration policy that targets poor, nonwhite people who are often seeking safety from intolerable conditions at home. This policy is the opposite of American ideals represented at Ellis Island and Plymouth Rock. Beyond American ideals, these policies oppose the message taught by the host of our Paschal feast—a message of grace and openness and practical care for those in need.

What if instead of our current policies we used a thought experiment—or to use the language of faith, our sacred imagination—to develop a radically different approach to our border? What if instead of over twenty thousand border agents, we replaced some of them with doctors and nurses, social workers and teachers, and other caregivers who could welcome and integrate immigrants to our country? What if we could take some of these same types of nonmilitary resources and offer them to the immigrants' countries of origin to help address the desperate situations that cause people to leave their nations? What if we examined the policies of American multinational corporations and the U.S. government that contribute to the systemic problems that cause people to leave Central America and Mexico?

Back at the reality of the border, we continued to follow the form for Holy Communion. We said prayers for the world, for our two nations and our leaders, and for those in need. We prayed for grace to be faithful. We confessed our sins and received the absolution promised by our Lord. Then we exchanged the peace—"The peace of the Lord be always with you. And also with you." There were smiles as we embraced one another, first on our own side. Then we moved to the border and again reached our fingers between the holes of the fence as we touched our friends. It was truly joyous!

Then someone had the brilliant idea to extend the peace beyond our immediate gathering. Some moved to the border agents who were still present and offered peace to them. There was even a brief explanation to the agents letting them know why

we had gathered and what we were doing. There was no obvious epiphany for them. The agents remained professional and aloof. But still there was human contact and the offer of peace whether it was accepted or not. It was important for followers of Jesus to remember the humanity of all the people on the border. Our risen Lord sees his children in all shapes and sizes and colors and uniforms and offers grace to all.

During our week in Juárez/El Paso, our leadership group learned more about the border and what it means to us as people of faith and American citizens. For example, the United States spends more on border security than all other federal law enforcement combined (FBI, DEA, Secret Service, etc.). We also learned some of the dangers in Mexico, where seventy-five thousand people were killed from 2006 to 2016 due to drug-related conflict. And further south, gangs, poverty, and corruption in some Central American nations have created such desperate situations that even children without their parents have tried to escape to the relative safety of the United States. All these factors contribute to the challenges we see in our hemisphere.

Beyond the statistics, we met with various ministry, academic, and community leaders during our week in El Paso and Juárez. Fr. Arturo Banuelos was our gracious host who taught us much and introduced us to other experts who helped us to learn even more. The repeated question for us was “What is the response of people of faith to the legacy of the border?”

People on the ground were living what liberation theology emphasizes: the gospel’s preferential option for the poor. How do we befriend people who experience desperation that most of us cannot imagine? If we believe the gospel, our response includes accompaniment—to be a companion of those who are racially profiled, detained (in for-profit prisons), and deported. In addition to accompaniment, we are called to advocate for them with the policy makers that can bring changes to our nation’s laws, changes that are more in line with the gospel values of justice and compassion.

One speaker told us that the church has a mediating influence. Many people share the same faith even if they have different politics and personal experiences. The church can be a place where people can meet and talk and learn about each other. The church can transcend partisan politics. Partisan by definition is partial, incomplete.

The answers required for change must look at the issues more fully.

The church can host the border area that exists between conflicting beliefs and practices and bring together people from different sides. This ministry of hospitality by the church is an important part of the process that may bring change. Meaningful conversations may lead to conversion and community. Real community will lead to action that is authentic and just, mutual and sustainable. Pastors can help people navigate deep moral issues in a way that challenges our common cultural assumptions and brings about personal and societal transformation.

When we meet at the border, we may be surprised. One person we met in Juárez didn’t conform to our national expectations. She runs an after-school program to help students succeed. She told us she doesn’t believe in the American dream. She tells her students and their parents to stay in Mexico, get an education, and work for justice in their nation. Her views are another part of this complex story of the border. Her national pride and alternative vision remind Americans that our national story is not the only story. It reminds me of the words of a hymn:

This is my song, O God of all the nations,
a song of peace for lands afar and mine;
this is my home, the country where
my heart is;
here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy
shrine;
but other hearts in other lands are beating
with hopes and dreams as true and high
as mine.
(Lloyd Stone, “This Is My Song,” stanza 1,
1934)

As we learn more about our shared land, we come to realize that the historical issues between the United States and Mexico and Central America are real. Academic experts and justice advocates and everyday people who live in these other lands can tell us their stories that Americans often have not heard. If we share Holy Communion across borders, we need to learn these shared stories, past and present, in order to be authentic in our relationships.

The border is real, too. One person told us that the border un masks realities in the rest of the

United States. The border is an extreme version of how we treat people in the center of our country. Militarization of law enforcement. Loss of rights. Dehumanization. Economic injustice. We must remember that our leaders and their agents work for us, the citizens of this country. If we allow unjust and inhuman policies and actions to continue—whether by our indifference, ignorance, or fear—then we have taken a stand against people on the margins. People who have been mistreated historically. People that our Lord identifies himself with in the Gospels (Matt. 25:31–46).

As our Communion service at the border concluded, we returned to the fence. Once more we reached through the holes to touch fingers. We smiled. We waved goodbye. After we packed up our things and left, there was silence in our vehicle. We knew we had experienced something holy. The grace present in Communion, as always, was transformative. Yet I left feeling incomplete. We had touched something that was real and painful. Yet our Lord was calling us to do more. The dismissal at the end of the service was not just from this particular service at the border, but for all of us as we returned to our life and ministries at home wherever that might be.

How do we bring our experience of Communion at the border to the center of our lives and ministries? It is more possible than we might think. Holy Communion is always a border service—the border between God and us, of course, bridged by Jesus. The border between the living and the dead. Between insiders who know their way around the border and outsiders who are seeking a way in. The message of the service, the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, invites us to come in and to go out as a regular part of what we say and do.

We can accomplish this in various ways in our different contexts. One way we do that in downtown Atlanta is through the mission of the Church of the Common Ground. The congregation is primarily made up of people who are homeless. They meet outdoors in Woodruff Park. They gather for worship and fellowship and a shared meal. Members of my congregation, Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit (www.ecohs.net)—along with other urban and suburban parishes on a rotating basis—gather with the members of Common Ground. Our parishioners testify that when they go to Common Ground, Holy Communion feels different to them. The liturgy is simpler, the prayers feel more real, and the people

know their need. At times in our safer places of worship, we may pretend that everything is okay in our lives and in our society even when we know it is not.

Communion at the border reminds us of the importance of being real, of being honest in our lives. As the anthem from the funeral service reminds us, “In the midst of life we are in death.” That is our final border. Not only in our personal lives, but in the world that surrounds us. As we look up from our jobs, our families, our distractions (good and bad), Holy Communion reminds us of life and death issues that surround us every day and affect affluent suburbanites as well as people who are homeless: drugs, despair, and abuse; in addition, the systems that keep us in our different places without hope for change.

The life of faith is more than a matter of believing the right things and taking Holy Communion so we can go to heaven when we die. Our faith in Jesus empowers us to live in a way that transforms us so that we are more fully aware and engaged in the world. Our faith helps us see the borders all around us: our gated neighborhoods; our privileges of race and class and gender as well as national origin; our differences in religion and ideology; our extreme individualism that separates us from others. All of these forms of borders divide us. The hope of the gospel expressed in Holy Communion is the way for us to come together at these borders and transform them—and be transformed ourselves.

As the preacher said at our service, “God knocks down walls.” Our calling is to come to these walls first as a place to learn. To know them in ourselves and in our society. To understand their strength and purpose. Then join with God and our neighbors in bringing down the barriers that separate us and replacing them with the open borders of understanding, peace, and a shared future. The afternoon we had Holy Communion on the border of Juárez and El Paso, we joined God and our neighbors in that work of truth, justice, and healing for our land and its people.

Notes

1. Rafael Bernal, “Reports find that immigrants commit less crime than US-born citizens,” *The Hill*, March 19, 2017.
2. Alexia Fernández Campbell, “The Truth About Undocumented Immigrants and Taxes,” *The Atlantic*, September 12, 2016.

Unfolding Space: Human Difference in Common Worship

Rebecca F. Spurrier

Christian worship is participation in a dance. The God who gathers us together teaches us to move in time with one another—sitting, standing, singing, breathing, silent in expectation, exuberant in our response to the good news, bodies bowed or raised in prayer. The assembly moves together to please the God who makes it possible for us to pray together. Unified without uniformity, the diversity of the assembly is held together through common responses: our yes to one another and to God. Such powerful images of bodies in worship animate my work as a liturgical scholar and worship leader. When I teach, I hope to give my students a glimpse of this dance and their beauty in it.

Ten years ago, I first encountered a congregation whose worship has forever changed my assumptions about liturgical choreographies and about participation in this dance with God and with one another. At Church of the Sacred Family,¹ a majority of those who worship together live with diagnoses of mental illness and come to the church from group homes; many of them have experienced the injustices of poverty and racism as well as the stigmas and fears that surround mental illness. Their responses to the dance of worship often diverge from one another. To learn from this community, I have returned again and again: as an intern, an occasional visitor, a researcher for three years, and, now, as a friend of the congregation. I desire to learn how to move in prayer with these people of God.

Mother Daria, a former priest at Sacred Family, offers me a hopeful image of what it means to gather such a diverse group on a Sunday morning. From her vantage point at the front, she can watch the procession of the Gospel from the altar to the center of the sanctuary. The people are meant to honor the reading of good news by standing.² All

are expected to rise in body, to sing a hymn, to speak in unison a response to the reading, and to turn in their pews to face the deacon as she reads.

Mother Daria witnesses many different responses to this reading. In her words: “It is an amazing vision, because everybody is in a different place; some people are just sitting down and facing in their own world, other people are turned toward the Gospel being read, . . . everyone is doing something different and it is all okay, it all fits together. It’s one of my favorite visions to watch.” These responses evoke for her the meaning of Sacred Family: it is a place where human difference is an essential part of what it means to participate in common prayer. She has faith that human variation can be gathered and held before God, and that the church itself is part of this holding.

While Mother Daria celebrates the diverse abilities that shape worship at Sacred Family, Christian liturgies often anticipate a unified choreography. An order of worship makes assumptions about a “normal” worshiper and an “ideal” participant. Diversity in the church is affirmed, but patterns of worship encourage us to think, speak, and pray in common. Communities like Sacred Family challenge all of us to ask: How do the people of God assume and create ample space and time for the differences and disabilities that inevitably are a part of us? How is a dance like the one that takes place at Sacred Family neither tolerated nor tokenized but desired and prioritized? Such questions invite us to cross the borders often marked by language of Christian unity into more ambiguous spaces and into the creativity and tensions of human differences. They ask us to account for the range of abilities present in all congregations.

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Disability scholars understand the “normal” as an elusive body, a metaphorical and symbolic space that is too cramped to contain the actual range of differences that are part of what it means to be human.

Disability Studies and Normalcy

“Are you normal?” I sometimes pose this question to students at the beginning of my class on disability and theology. A few raise their hands, and then struggle to identify the parts of themselves that fall neatly into this category. Disability studies, as a critical and prophetic academic discipline, questions how “normal” human bodies and minds come to be distinguished from the abnormal. It raises important questions about what we consider a normal body within the Christian tradition.

Disability scholars understand the “normal” as an elusive body, a metaphorical and symbolic space that is too cramped to contain the actual range of differences that are part of what it means to be human. Normalcy, as the hypothetical middle of a bell curve, or the average on a chart of human ability, compels different kinds of lives to squeeze together into impossibly small ideals for what it means to be human. Those who cannot pass as normal are often identified as deviants. They occupy marginal spaces on the feared peripheries of our societies and communities, falling outside of the range of persons and relationships we desire.³

But disability scholars also argue that the confining experiences of normality can be transformed for all of us with the help of those who, through their differences, expand our vision of human life and our desires for each other.⁴ Disability can help to reorient us to our own lives and to the ableist ideals that constrain us; it can stretch out the imagined and inhabited spaces within which we shape community.

Mapping Worship Spaces, Desiring Human Difference

When I teach about the importance of space for worship, I begin with James White’s *Introduction to Christian Worship*. Students learn to identify six kinds of worship spaces—gathering, congregational, choir, movement, altar, and baptismal space—in relationship to four centers—the font, the pulpit, the altar/table, and the presider’s chair.⁵ As they use White’s categories to map congregational spaces,

I ask them how these spaces are amplified or ignored in their faith communities. I also ask them to identify what is missing from this list based on their own contexts. To illustrate the importance of disability studies for Christian worship, I will consider sacred spaces as they are performed and mapped by congregants at Sacred Family. Drawing on my research at Sacred Family, I will use this method to explore four spaces and two centers to draw attention to the importance of adequate space for human differences. This map of Sacred Family reveals multiple forms of participation as well as barriers and prejudices that create the borders of inclusion, toleration, and exclusion within public worship. It demonstrates a practice for exploring worship spaces that I hope readers will use in their own congregations.⁶

Gathering Space

Liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop insists that “assembly, a gathering together of participating persons, constitutes the most basic symbol of Christian worship. All other symbols and symbolic actions of liturgy depend upon this gathering in the first place.”⁷ For there to be an assembly, people must be gathered; to form an assembly requires access to a physical location, a space that facilitates the meeting of different kinds of bodies and minds.

When viewed through the lens of disability, the question of access to the space of the congregation cannot be taken for granted. At Sacred Family access to worship begins not with a map of a church building but with knowledge of the surrounding neighborhoods, streets, and systems of public transit. Access to the gathering depends on church vans that gather congregants from group homes around the city within an eight-mile radius.

Because many Sacred Family congregants do not have cars and are dependent on church and public transportation for their access to worship, the church requires extended gathering times and spaces. Some congregants arrive up to an hour before the service, so the gathering involves both indoor and outdoor spaces for the assembly to wait: the church garden, picnic benches, a smoking circle,

and a library. It also necessitates a dining hall where meals are served to those whose church attendance might affect mealtimes in group homes and for those who are not getting enough to eat in the places where they live. These gathering spaces are not simply places where people wait until the real worship begins, but opportunities for the gathered people to offer each other their joys and concerns, to share stories, or to sit in silence with one another. At Sacred Family, interns and visitors are invited to “loiter with intent”; thus, spaces that might otherwise be overlooked provide vital opportunities for congregants to form the relationships that inform their public worship. The possibility of dwelling together for a time in the sanctuary emerges from a practice of “holy loitering” so that some learn to understand the ways that others make meaning, encounter God, and engage the world.

A map of gathering, with a focus on different abilities and social locations, invites critical reflection on the beginning (and end) of a service. It highlights transitional spaces that help to gather human differences together before God. This map also raises a set of questions for worship leaders about access to the assembly: Who can get to the worship space, and on whom does this access depend? Who may be missing and why? How do those who are baptized into Christ belong to one another beyond the borders of church property?

These gathering spaces are not simply places where people wait until the real worship begins, but opportunities for the gathered people to offer each other their joys and concerns, to share stories, or to sit in silence with one another.

Congregational Space

Six times a week the congregation at Sacred Family gathers for worship services: a service of Holy Eucharist on Sunday morning; Eucharist, evening prayer, or a healing service on Wednesday evenings; and morning and noonday prayer services on Tuesdays and Thursdays. These services take place in a small sanctuary with rows of moveable wooden chairs facing a large altar with a pulpit off to one side and a font to the other.

Mapping these spaces from a disability perspective requires attention to the centers of worship leadership (altar, pulpit, font) *and* to the decentered participation of the assembly in which particular relationships enable congregants to worship together. In one row, a woman draws pictures throughout the service; if I sit next to her, she shares her pictures with me, so that her creative work becomes part of my worship. In another row, two people whisper continuously to one another; if I sit next to them, their commentary becomes a gloss on the formal proclamation from the front. But, my attention is also drawn to congregants across the sanctuary who raise their hands, eager to join in the sermon even when their participation is not elicited.

What first seem like distractions from common worship, I later perceive as elements of a shared liturgy through which the people of God offer themselves to God and one another. Thus, these practices too become important sites on a map of congregational space, and worship leaders must attend to and weave these worship elements and this participation into the common space.

At Sacred Family congregational space also extends out beyond the borders of the sanctuary. One woman sits in the hallway right outside the open door of the sanctuary so that she can listen but also maintain preferred distance from other worshipers. Another pair of congregants sit even further from the liturgical centers of altar and pulpit. Donna attends Sacred Family on Wednesday evenings to sit and converse outside at a picnic bench with Martha, who can no longer participate in an entire service without becoming agitated. Martha and Donna sit outside the church while the rest of us are inside the sanctuary. Donna brings Martha into the sanctuary to receive communion and then takes her out again, aware that the voices in Martha’s head make it hard for her to sit still and listen to a sermon or participate in a full service even if she wants to be at the church. When they enter the sanctuary mid-service, they serve as a reminder of another part of the church’s congregational space, a space not visible from the sanctuary.

Mapping congregational spaces at Sacred Family illumines not only the need for multiple points of access to the centers of Word and Sacrament, but also multiple centers of participation as individuals and smaller groups within the congregation worship together in different ways. Diverse forms of participation invite worship leaders to acknowledge

and affirm a plurality of responses to any worship element. Such maps also challenge what scholar and worship leader Siobhan Garrigan has called “the myth of the single acting agent”⁸ in worship. They call attention to the relationships that affect the participation of every person. With and through whom do I worship? How do I pay attention to those who are near me in worship, who sit in my pew or corner of the congregation? What obligations do we have not only to follow instructions of a worship leader in front but also to attend to the presence of Christ in those around us?

Movement Space

At Sacred Family, the primary movement space is the center aisle by which the congregation goes forward to the altar to receive communion, blessing, or prayer. This narrow aisle is a vital and dynamic worship space because it invites the joyful participation of those who often find it difficult to sit still, to read, and to offer verbal responses in unison. One could argue that the climax of Sacred Family’s worship service occurs during the passing of the peace when many traverse the length of the sanctuary and back, greeting each other by name with a variety of gestures. Standing in line to take communion, this time of greeting extends into the meal, as those waiting to take communion call out to one another, and wave on their way up to the altar. Processional space is both a path to the front, where the priest stands, and a movement out into the communion of people, movement that encourages creative encounter with those who do not share the same pew or corner of congregational space.

The center aisle is not only a space for fellowship but also for the worship leadership of those who rarely lead from the front. Congregants with disabilities collect the offering and take forward the wine and bread as well as the vegetables from the church garden where some congregants work during the week. In the process, the aisle becomes another center as those who may not lead from altar and pulpit direct and invite the gifts of the whole congregation.

Finally, the aisle is also the access from the sanctuary through the front doors to the parish hall, where meals are served at long tables. After Sunday and Wednesday services, there is an eager procession, a rush down the aisle, which connects the communion table to the eagerly anticipated meals. The movement space continues out the door,

down a set of steep steps, along a cement walkway, where congregants wait in line to share food together after the service. Congregants who cannot navigate the steps go the long way around down a hallway and through a back door and down a ramp to join those waiting in line for a meal.

While there is only one explicit movement space in the sanctuary along the center aisle, congregants regularly improvise other movement spaces along the slender side aisles. Unable to sit still for long periods of time, they slip out the edges of the chairs by the windows to go to the bathroom or to get a drink during the service. These improvised movement spaces sometimes cause contention as the restlessness of some people is experienced as distracting to others or disrespectful to God. The intimacy of a small sanctuary that encourages interaction also gives rise to frustration as the gathered people negotiate the meaning of sacred space.

While movement space empowers leadership and participation, it also reveals basic assumptions that churches make about “normal” abilities: for example, the ability to navigate steep steps as part of a procession to the common meal after communion.

Tracing the movements of worshippers at Sacred Family raises important questions about the prominent roles that sitting still and listening attentively play in many Christian worship contexts. The dynamic and vital role of movement at Sacred Family punctuates the importance of spaces that allow for a greater range of responses. While movement space empowers leadership and participation, it also reveals basic assumptions that churches make about “normal” abilities: for example, the ability to navigate steep steps as part of a procession to the common meal after communion. Perceived disruptions also raise vital questions about our commitments and desires to worship together: if the movements that create barriers for some are the means of access for others, what does it mean to worship in solidarity with one another? How might some transform their irritation at “disruptions” to

worship into recognition of the Spirit's movement through unexpected sounds or gestures?

Altar Space

Front and center in the small sanctuary is a large, white marble altar. During worship services, the priest and deacon often occupy the space before and in front of the altar, and along the sides of the altar are the seats for priests, deacons, and acolytes. On Sundays and sometimes on Wednesdays the altar serves as the place where people come to receive the bread and the wine, as many congregants at Sacred Family choose to do.

But the Eucharist is only one of the forms of communion that takes place around the altar during the week when the church hosts weekly day programs. On Tuesdays, an "easy yoga" circle gathers right in front of the altar. There a small group of congregants learn to breathe and move together as part of Tuesday and Thursday day programs at Sacred Family. Others, who do not want to participate fully but desire to be near the community, sit in the pews, watching and listening to yoga. On Thursdays, the space is used for Interplay, a form of movement that parishioners undertake together that involves walking, dancing, sharing stories, and making sounds together around the altar. Finally, on Tuesdays at noon and on some Saturday evenings, the altar becomes performance space as some congregants with disabilities offer their gifts and talents: solos and instrumental pieces drawn from a repertoire of both sacred and pop music.

During the more formal Sunday morning services, worship leaders read and preach from an elevated pulpit. But on Wednesday the reading of Scripture and leading of Psalms takes place in front of the altar, closer to the people. During midweek services, worship leaders are more likely to be people from group homes. During these more informal services, when few nondisabled congregants attend, the sermons are interactive and rely on the active verbal participation of most of the gathered community. The preacher begins in the front near the altar and sometimes moves into congregational space in order to facilitate a shared practice of proclamation.

Mapping altar space at Sacred Family invites continual reflection on who may lead and read from this center and on the power dynamics of sacred spaces that make one kind of participation possible during the week but discourage it on a Sunday morning. Identifying the location of worship leaders also raises questions about the asymmetries of power that divide the same centers and spaces over the course of a week. Who may lead from a sacred center on Sunday and who on Wednesday? Who breathes and moves around it on an ordinary Tuesday or Thursday? What gestures and postures are expected from those who hold the chalices? What reading abilities are needed from those who lead the Psalm? Mapping liturgical centers is an opportunity to consider who occupies sacred spaces during particular times of the week and the criteria that determine who is able to lead worship. It is also an opportunity to consider the creative use of sacred spaces to attend to the diverse practices of communication and interaction.

Conclusion: Borders of Liturgical Desires

Good maps of Christian worship reveal the creative work of common prayer and raise critical questions about our desires to share space with those whose forms of participation challenge our practices and our preferences. How can we share common space and time when we do not always recognize the range of ways that participation in worship might happen? At Sacred Family the communion of a weeklong liturgy amplifies worship spaces so as to invite the differences of all those who attend; it does not, however, resolve the tensions and struggles that disabilities bring to the space of sacred worship, the "us" and "them" which divides many congregations.

Theologian Nancy Eiesland argues that in order to transform the borders of inclusion and exclusion that have characterized the Christian church in its relationship to people with disabilities, we need new names and images for God.⁹ It is only through a conversion to the Disabled God that the people of God begin to imagine their own bodies and the bodies of others differently. For Eiesland this began with an epiphany: God appeared to her in a sip-puff wheelchair (a chair used by quadriplegics that

Mapping liturgical centers is an opportunity to consider who occupies sacred spaces during particular times of the week and the criteria that determine who is able to lead worship.

enables them to move by blowing and sucking on a strawlike device). Later, in conversation with others, she followed this image of God, this name for God, into the paths of Scripture and discovered the wounded body of the risen Christ: “not an omnipotent, self-sufficient God, but neither a pitiable, suffering servant. In this moment, I beheld God as a survivor, un pitying and forthright. I recognized the incarnate Christ in the image of those judged ‘not feasible,’ ‘unemployable,’ with ‘questionable quality of life.’ Here was God for me.”¹⁰ A God like this, Eiesland argues, invites us to be part of the church as a communion of struggle for justice and hope for transformation.¹¹

To transform our desires not only to welcome but also to prioritize differences requires a critical and creative look at the ways our use of space within and outside of worship services invites or precludes disabilities.

To transform our desires not only to welcome but also to prioritize differences requires a critical and creative look at the ways our use of space within and outside of worship services invites or precludes disabilities. It also requires our (sometimes slow) conversion to a God who asks us to relinquish the stigmas that keep us from sharing spaces with one another: disabled people as tragic figures to be pitied, as sources of special need and special virtue, and as those who are best served through practices of segregationist charities. Transforming our relationship to the Disabled God should raise questions about the segregation of people with disabilities from common worship and invite conversation about full inclusion of those without whom we will not know God. This is never an easy task, for “the church as a communion of struggle, like our bodies, is not always agreeably habitable.”¹²

Yet communities like Sacred Family bear witness to the Spirit of Christ at work through all who gather. This Spirit move us to extend the tables and ramps, unfold the spaces where we gather in fear and hope, and make room for the “full stretch” of what it means to be human before God as a congregation. For the people of God are gathered together. Some of us are silent, others can’t keep quiet, two of us

are drawing pictures, three of us help each other to find the page numbers. Some of us stay seated to sing together when others rise in body. A few of us leave the room for a time and then return to receive communion. Some of us express our anger; others are joyful even when the liturgy calls for lament.

The Disabled God comes to us in a body we do not recognize at first until we learn anew its rhythms and discover our beauty in it. To discover this beauty requires our attention to the spaces within which this beauty and struggle unfold: access to the gathering spaces of the assembly; ample room for those with different abilities to gather and to respond to one another as a congregation; worship leaders who can weave together the people’s diverse ways of moving together and apart; and a desire for full representation of people with and without disabilities at the centers of all our sacred spaces.

Notes

1. The name of the church and all names of persons have been changed to protect confidentiality.
2. *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 326.
3. See, for example, Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995).
4. See, for example, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 185–196. Garland-Thomson argues that stares, those regularly stared at, can, as visual activists, arouse our wonder and curiosity in order to engage us and move us to desire and to political action.
5. James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, third edition (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 86–91.
6. This practice is meant to supplement the important work of meeting accessibility standards as exemplified through the Americans with Disabilities Act and the principles of Universal Design. ADA compliance is vital to disability justice work even as it is a beginning rather than an ending point in terms of accessible worship spaces.
7. Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 21.
8. Siobhan Garrigan, “The Spirituality of Presiding,” *Liturgy* 22, no. 2 (2007): 7.
9. Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 90, 104–105.
10. Eiesland, 89.
11. Eiesland, 108–111.
12. Eiesland, 109.

“*Ad fontes*”: On the Roman Catholic–Reformed Dialogue in the United States

David Gambrell

“*Ad fontes*” (“to the sources”) was one of the rallying cries of the Protestant Reformation. The sixteenth-century Reformers sought to return to the teaching and practice of the early church—and, above all, to the Scriptures—in order to rebuild the church from the ground up. Literally, this Latin expression suggests going back “to the spring” or “to the font.”

This is exactly what we have done in the eighth round of Roman Catholic–Reformed dialogue in the United States. Building on the faithful work of previous rounds of national and international dialogue—especially the 2013 mutual recognition of baptism—participants in this five-year process have sought to identify places of emerging consensus around historically divisive issues such as the nature and mission of the church, ordination and ministry, authority and oversight, and unity and diversity. All of these fresh agreements can be traced to the same source: our common baptism in the name of the one, triune God.

This is not to say that we agree on everything, or that there is not more work to be done. We can affirm that we are all baptized into the one body of Christ, but our relationship to one another in the church remains an imperfect communion. We can acknowledge the work of the Spirit in one another’s ministry, but we cannot yet formally recognize one another’s ordination. We can agree that the pastoral ministry of oversight is carried out in each of our structures, but differ on whether this is best expressed through a person (as in a bishop) or a council of ministers and elders (as in a presbytery). We can celebrate together the diverse gifts of the Spirit for the good of Christ’s church, yet continue to struggle to find deeper unity without uniformity. As the previous round of dialogue demonstrated, we can even find considerable common ground in our

theology and practice of the Eucharist, but enough significant differences remain that we cannot yet share the Lord’s Table.

One thing, however, became abundantly clear in the course of our dialogue. As sisters and brothers in Christ—and now good friends and colleagues across denominations and communions—we are deeply committed to continue working together for the full, visible unity of Christ’s church. We pursue this difficult but rewarding task all for the sake of Christ’s mission—with the hope that our love for one another might help to convey God’s great love for the world. This shared conviction is the source of the title of the final report we wrote together, “The One Body of Christ: Ministry in Service to the Church and the World.”

The anniversary of the Reformation is an important opportunity for teaching and learning—a time to reconsider our history and how we tell the story of these five hundred years. It’s a chance to shift our way of thinking—instead of continuing to fight the battles of the sixteenth century, to consider the gifts we’ve received from one another. For instance, the Reformed have had a valuable focus on the church as the creation of God’s Word, proclaiming the message of salvation to the world. Catholics have had an equally valuable emphasis on the church as a sacrament of God’s grace, sharing the love of Christ with the world. Now we can affirm together that these understandings of the church aren’t mutually exclusive—they are complementary, two sides of the same coin.

On Monday, October 16, 2017, we held a closing worship service for our dialogue at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Cardinal Wuerl, who hosted us, said that building has been under construction for

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one hundred years. Indeed, we were surrounded by scaffolding, as artists and workers were finally completing the mosaics on the ceiling. To me, that was a beautiful metaphor for our work of Catholic-Reformed dialogue. It's a long-term, painstaking process, and it's a work in progress. We're still surrounded by construction materials and yellow tape to mark off the dangerous places. But we're going to worship together anyway. We're going to glorify the one, holy, triune God, and pray for the coming of the day when we will enjoy full, visible unity in Christ.

Participants in the eighth round of Roman Catholic-Reformed dialogue in the United States (2012–2017) included the Christian Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the Roman Catholic Church, and the United Church of Christ. Most Rev. Tod Brown, bishop emeritus of the Diocese of Orange, and Rev. Dr. Cynthia Campbell, pastor at Highland Presbyterian Church, Louisville, served as co-chairs of the dialogue.



The Work of Our Hands

Breaking the Frame

Lauren Wright Pittman

With all of these pieces, I have chosen to depict the subject as different than me. I have decided that it is not helpful for me to continue to paint images that have been and continue to be prevalent in the church. As a white, straight, upper-middle-class woman, I can easily find images of the Divine with which I can identify. Every time I pick up my paint brush, I try to meditate on a face that pushes the edges of the narrow box in which I've placed God for a lot of my life. It has been a practice for me in expanding my view and understanding of who God is, and a conditioning in seeing the face of God in my neighbor, each and every one.

Lauren Wright Pittman is a freelance artist, graphic designer, and a member of the creative team A Sanctified Art.

Mary's Song

When I read through the Magnificat, I was overwhelmed with the gravity of this moment. Her reaction to finding out that she, a young virgin, would birth the Son of the Creator of the universe was to sing a song of overflowing praise affirming God's goodness and sovereignty. It seems as if the entire universe revolved on the axis of this moment.

Her song carried me to the creation narrative where God's very words materialize water and sky

and light and animals and people . . . everything we know to be and will ever know. As I read the Magnificat, I imagined that her tones of adoration, melody of acceptance, and rhythm of awe ushered in the heartbeat of Jesus within her womb. Mary's song became the score for a new creation narrative. In this piece, *Mary's Song*, I imaged all of creation embracing Mary in this moment as the creation narrative echoes in her womb.





Jesus of the Bayou

After I spent time in southern Louisiana as a wetlands advocate, Jesus began to look different to me. Native communities and keepers of the land are being forced out of their homes and separated from their cultural birthplace because of a lack of care and respect for this beautiful, strange, and

wonderful environment. I was inspired to image Jesus expressing the sacrifice that is necessary to protect this fragile environment. Christ is showing his wounds with one of his hands breaking the frame, calling viewers to meditate on ways in which we have not cared for the earth and have harmed the lands which were gifted to us to protect.

Bayou Baptism

Some dear friends asked me to paint the Trinity using imagery from the bayous of south Louisiana. I thought about this project for a while, and was inspired by Jesus' baptism, where all persons of the Trinity are present in tangible ways. Jesus is stretching out of the frame, inviting viewers to celebrate their own mysterious and wonderful

calling, as he basks in his own. For the Holy Spirit's descent, I chose to paint a pelican, which is native to the bayou and has also been used to depict Christ's sacrifice in medieval Christian art. God the Creator is represented as the sun, with voice waves radiating from the center, expressing how pleased God is with Jesus.



On Liturgy: Worship with the Enemy

Mary Beth Anton

The year my husband turned sixty we took a special trip to celebrate. Over the course of a week-long cruise we dined nightly with two other couples celebrating milestone birthdays. One was from Munich, the other from London. Both were celebrating seventieth birthdays. I am not sure when it was that I realized that the two were born in 1946. My husband's father was a naval aviator in World War II. We never asked where the parents of the others had served. Our parents, from the United States, and those of our English friends were allies. The parents of our friends from Germany were our parents' enemies. Seventy years later their children shared a table where we talked about our children, our careers, our faith, the current political climate, and about the places we called home. It never occurred to us to speak of the time when we were allies *and* enemies.

On Pentecost last year my daughter and I, along with three of our friends, worshiped at the Berliner Dom in Berlin, Germany. Arriving at the entrance of the great "cathedral," we walked through the door and were warmly welcomed in English, then invited to sit with other guests not fluent in German. With the aid of headsets, we listened to the words of the service translated into our native language by a volunteer so that we might join fully in worship. If it had been Pentecost 1918 or Pentecost 1945, we would have been worshiping with our enemies. But it was 2018, and we worshiped as brothers and sisters, as friends.

I wonder what a bit of historical perspective might offer to us living today amidst so much division.

In 1559 the Anglican Church revised the Book of Common Prayer. With the ascension of Elizabeth

I to the throne, an effort arose to find common ground between the warring Roman Catholic and Protestant factions, factions that had torn the Church and nation apart. The effort came to be known as the Elizabethan settlement or compromise. The revised 1559 prayer book intertwined the two threads of thought regarding the Eucharist. We do not have to remember all of our sixteenth-century history to recognize the theological nod to both a real presence in and memorial understanding of the Eucharist:

The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ,
which was given for thee,
preserve thy body and soul unto
everlasting life.

Take and eat this in remembrance
that Christ died for thee,
and feed on him in thy heart by faith,
with thanksgiving.

The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,
which was shed for thee,
preserve thy body and soul unto
everlasting life.

Drink this in remembrance that Christ's
Blood was shed for thee,
and be thankful.

Real presence or memorial meal? The church once vehemently disagreed and fought over the true meaning of the Eucharist. Following an era of bloody conflict the combined language in the Eucharistic liturgy offered first steps in Christian unity. I find the effort both encouraging and instructive.

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Within the church today we disagree about biblical interpretation, theology, ecclesiology, political engagement, and more. My family and I have lived through two congregational splits over denominational disagreements. How often we have heard, “*They are wrong! They are apostate! They are our enemy! It’s time for divorce!*” “One Lord, one faith, one baptism . . .” (Eph. 4:4–6) was all but forgotten or ignored. If I am honest, when I am exhausted by the infighting, I find it a relief to fellowship and worship with those who think, interpret Scripture, and believe as I do. Yet I cannot accept division as normative for the church of Jesus Christ.

My community includes a smorgasbord of Christian denominations. We disagree over just about everything from the interpretation of Scripture regarding women’s ordination and marriage to baptism to the use of musical instruments in worship. Several years ago a fire broke out in the fellowship hall of the First Baptist Church. The congregation had been using that space for worship while renovating their sanctuary, making an already difficult situation worse. The pastor of our Presbyterian congregation reached out to his Baptist colleague. Over lunch the two talked about the fire and then about their common ministries. As Lent was approaching, the Baptist pastor asked what we did for Ash Wednesday. He expressed the wish that his tradition had something tangible and symbolic like the imposition of ashes. Hearing this, our pastor issued an invitation to join us for Ash

Wednesday worship.

We planned our usual Ash Wednesday liturgy. Leadership would be shared and would include our two women pastors. The evening arrived. Before the solemn liturgy began, the two senior pastors welcomed the large combined congregation. The Baptist pastor joked that his congregation was providing the ashes for the service as they had plenty to share. As the ancient liturgy progressed, we came together as one body. We sang hymns and confessed our sins together. We listened as the words of absolution were spoken and the Scriptures read. We recited the words of Psalm 51. And then one by one we came forward to receive the ashes on our foreheads: a reminder and sign of our mortality and our need for a savior. The next year the Baptists invited the Presbyterians.

In our liturgies and worship might we find common ground and a way forward? In shared worship might we rediscover our unity, our center in Christ Jesus, embodying the Christ hymn of Philippians 2? Many communities hold joint Thanksgiving services; why not invite another congregation for an Advent service celebrating and giving thanks that Christ has come *and* is coming again to make all things new? Amidst so much pain from divisions, might two differing congregations join together for a service for healing and wholeness? Then, finally, might *enemies* become true brothers, sisters, and even friends?

What Are We Teaching through Our Music?

Peter Ncanywa

We live in a culture and society that is constantly seeing shifts and changes in how we think and behave. We recognize the wrongs that must be corrected and work toward fulfilling needs that are not being met while trying not to disrupt the status quo too much. Lately, some of these changes have been rooted in a desire for equality and social justice for all. A cornerstone of the church, and one recognized as our Fifth Great End of the Presbyterian Church, is the promotion of social justice. In working to make these changes happen, we do so in the hopes of creating something that is guided by the Spirit and sustainable for future generations.

Generations of children are being nurtured in faith in our churches. They are listening intently, and their brains are absorbing everything, even when we think they are not. We must do due diligence with each decision we make. Even with the best intentions at heart, we must constantly ask the question, “What are we teaching our children through our choices in music?”

One can’t help but think of racism and sexism as examples of issues that continue to plague our society. It is our responsibility to respond to the call to help educate, to minimize and remove these prejudices. This calls for us to be attentive to our teachings through music.

A few years ago, during an intergenerational class of Sunday school, we sang the famous words of the Rev. Clarence Herbert Woolston’s “Jesus Loves the Little Children.”

Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in his sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

At the end of the class, we were faced with questions from some of our youth: “Why did we sing that song? Who is actually red and yellow?” The conversation ended with them stating that the song was racially prejudiced. Rev. Woolston was born in 1856. He was merely seven years old when the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Lincoln in 1863. There were still challenges that lay ahead when he wrote the words of the song which are rooted in a desire for inclusion of different ethnic groups, words that gave racially oppressed people hope for a future that we, their children, would live in a liberated world. However, some 150 years later, today’s children consider the language obsolete. Listing skin colors is no longer unifying, and in many instances these words have been used as hurtful slurs. While it is undeniable—and a beautiful thing—that we have reached this point in our thinking, we must continue to produce music that sends the same message for the challenges that lie ahead of us, music that is appropriate for our time.

I remember in my younger years embarking on a failed attempt to read the Bible. If I could get through *Charlotte’s Web* and *The Ugly Duckling*, then surely I could read the Bible cover to cover if I tried. I was wrong. I remember thinking how boring, long, and complicated it was. And I did not make it past the book of Numbers. I remember reading Exodus 3:15. “God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, “The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.”’”

Inoba awathandwa ona amantombazana,¹ I thought. Girls must not be loved. I went on about my business and had dinner with my family. Daddy was served first, then my mom, then us children. Life went on. Recently, this passage appeared in the Revised Common Lectionary, and it took me back to the first time I had read it. God had indeed sent

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Moses. The God of men. It was years before it was made clear to me that *mankind* means “humankind” and that “the God of our fathers” is the “God of our ancestors.”

The sexist language of our Christian faith has long been in discussion among people of faith—language of a time when patriarchy was the norm, a time when the people could not have imagined a societal structure that was beneficent to women and children and when slavery would be outlawed and all would live in a just society. This brings to the forefront endless and difficult language issues. Issues that arise because of the finite abilities of words. Our omnipotent Alpha and Omega cannot and should not be reduced to the limits of our languages. God’s love, grace, and mercy are made available to all through Jesus Christ. This belief needs to be reflected in the words that we sing.

There is a branch in psycholinguistics (the psychology of language) called “linguistic determinism” that states that language is limited for, and determines, one’s manner of expressing human thoughts and thought processes (memories, categorization, perception). We experience this at times when we struggle to find the right words in translating concepts and/or ideas from one language to another, from thought to description. Much like the Xhosa words above that lost their indescribable essence when translated to English, the unfathomable, all-knowing, ever-present, almighty, comforting, gentle, and unending Love that is God cannot be reduced to semantics.

The Holy Book is filled with masculine and patriarchal imagery—understandably so for the time period and society in which it was written. Although it is pushed to the fringes, the feminine imagery of God is there. We meet our mothering God who gave us birth in Deuteronomy 32:18 and Isaiah 66:13; we meet our protective mother God in Hosea 13:8 and Deuteronomy 32:11–12. It would be naive to suggest a complete removal of masculine names for God, as the discussion is much more complex than that when we are dealing with historical documents

upon which our faith is built and lifelong journeys of faith. As we continue to be reformed in the life of the church, so must we as musicians continue to search for ways to shift from the stereotype of an old man in the sky who has the whole world in his hands to one that reflects our faith more closely: the Spirit of an all-powerful loving God who is neither male nor female but both and more, One who includes and welcomes all.

How then do we proceed? I do not know. These are the struggles with which I wrestle as I try my best to support and serve what we believe. It leads me to my first question: What are we teaching through our music ministry? We need composers to be prayerfully mindful of the language they choose to use in choral anthems and children’s songs. Finding balance is a good place to start, and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song’s acknowledgement that “our language can exclude and stereotype, but also that carefully chosen language can embrace and include people who have been separated from the centers of power.”²

If you take a look at the first three hymns of the *Glory to God* hymnal, you will notice that “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!” is gender neutral; “Come, Thou Almighty King” gives us the masculine imagery, which is then followed by “Womb of Life and Source of Being” pointing to God’s maternal nature. This is balanced. Our children are impressionable and listening. Finding balance is a start in the search for the answer. We believe what we teach and we sing what we believe.

Notes

1. This is an untranslatable Xhosa phrase.
2. Appendix 2: “A Statement on Language,” *Glory to God*, pew edition, Presbyterian (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), p. 928.

Collaborative Preaching: Building Disciples and Aligning the Sermon Medium with the Gospel Message

David E. Lower

I never realized how much the medium of an individual preaching can serve to limit the proclamation of the gospel until I began occasionally preaching collaboratively with a member of the congregation. The medium of an individual preacher speaks volumes before she or he says a word, and when practiced exclusively does not adequately communicate that the good news is given to us all, for us all to share. As a preacher regularly inspired by reading and interpreting the Bible collaboratively, I began experimenting with an entirely collaborative preaching journey, and in so doing discovered its benefits to the congregation, preaching partners, and the pastor.

Last year I partnered with church ruling elders for four entirely collaborative sermons, each of which highlighted the value of cooperation at every stage of the sermon's development. Preparation was structured by five in-person meeting times, each designated for a stage of the journey: (1) building relationship and making covenant together; (2) reading prayerfully and listening; (3) study; (4) sermon drafting; (5) refinement and rehearsal. The practice demanded discipline, openness, and adaptability from both partners. While each sermon journey was different, the interpretation benefitted from multiple perspectives, the process offered opportunities for teaching and mentorship, and the composition profited from extra attention.

While the sermon preparation was enhanced by partnership, the most striking benefit to this approach was the medium of collaborative delivery. The congregation's responses to the medium articulated its value. One member commented on the value of partnered proclamation, "I loved this, and I had no idea someone like me could preach with someone like you." Another remarked, "Seeing a man and a

woman preaching together is new, and that alone I thought was moving." A different parishioner noted the expanded capacity of a collaborative sermon: "I was struck that a sermon could reflect two different viewpoints in conversation; it felt new and interesting." One astute observer even interpreted the experience theologically, noting that "it was great to see you side by side, a teaching and a ruling elder, representing the priesthood of all believers." The medium, it would seem, is indeed part of the message, and the medium of collaboration speaks in different ways that are helpful to the proclamation of the gospel.

The marvels, wonders, and challenges of collaborative preaching have caused me to reflect on the medium of a sermon's message. The medium of a sermon accompanies its words and inflections, and the medium can either complement or complicate the gospel being proclaimed. Traditional Christian preaching, as practiced exclusively by an individual, can be an inherently problematic way to proclaim a gospel message that is corporate in its origins and its best hopes. The medium of an individual preacher distinguishes between the designated preacher and hearers, and unintendedly suggests that interpreting Scripture is done alone and that sharing the good news of God's love and mercy is for only the select to share. The message of Christian preaching is a call to all hearers, summoning all to change, faith, relationship, and community. The gospel message which preaching carries is collective, yet elements of the medium of traditional individual Christian preaching hide the collective nature of what God in Christ has to say and would have us do. This becomes even clearer when we experience an alternative medium that is visibly and audibly relational and collaborative.

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Occasional collaborative preaching with other individuals who show a charism for preparing and delivering sermons communicates the sharing of the gospel as a collective calling and responsibility, while equipping disciples for doing so, faithful to the priesthood of believers. Collaborative preaching also packages proclamation in the form of mutual relationship. Preaching collaboratively includes relationship as part of the inspired communication. Proclaiming the gospel collaboratively better resembles the Christian message that God is ultimately about relationship, and intends for us to be as well. Occasional collaborative preaching can reinforce the priesthood of all believers and underscore the importance of relationship in Christian living.

While collaboration can help sermons preach the gospel, preaching in partnership can also help partners and preachers grow together. My preaching partners have all noted the value of the experience in their spiritual journeys, through focused attention on the Scriptures, developing their own voices of faith, building sustained partnership with a pastor and mentor, and building relationships with the congregation.

I also believe collaboration expands the space in which the Spirit works upon the Word proclaimed. A recent preaching collaboration included a joint decision to take a field trip to learn about the lives of resettled refugees in the area, to which we invited the congregation. The field trip connected our group with a literacy program needing to expand its services, which led to our church coordinating the renovation of an old school building, resulting in a new school for refugee women and children. I have come to marvel at the possibilities of the Spirit's work in collaborative proclamation and leadership.

Collaborative preaching has also served to enrich

and enliven my own preaching life. Collaborating on a sermon is more difficult and laborious, commanding a pastor's time, careful discernment, sensitivity, humility, accountability, creativity, and trust. These are virtues worth cultivating in all preaching we pastors do. Collaboration serves to highlight the limits of my own perspective and ideas, causing me to ask more and better questions of a Scripture text. I am becoming a more faithful and more versatile preacher because I now practice collaborative preaching occasionally.

A preaching partnership is a rich and nuanced experience, and should be carefully and trustfully cultivated. Important considerations in developing an occasional practice of collaborative preaching include: (1) deciding if collaborative preaching is for you; (2) clearly communicating the practice and rationale to the congregation; (3) selecting preaching partners with care; (4) selecting texts with good potential for the partnership; (5) initiating the partnership with covenant, relationship, and expectations; (6) adapting to the movements of the Spirit in the collaboration; (7) identifying an appropriate form for the sermon as the witness of the partnership to the Scripture; (8) setting the collaborative proclamation appropriately in your worship space; (9) rehearsing the collaborative sermon together in the worship space; and (10) refining the process iteratively with the benefit of feedback from partners and parishioners. Attention to these considerations can help establish healthy collaborations for fruitful sermon journeys.

I continue to explore the power and possibilities of collaborative preaching in my own preaching life. To pastors open and willing to invest in entirely collaborative preaching, I commend the practice.

Collaborating on a sermon is more difficult and laborious, commanding a pastor's time, careful discernment, sensitivity, humility, accountability, creativity, and trust. These are virtues worth cultivating in all preaching we pastors do.

On Visual Art

Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk

A few years ago, when I was in my first ordained call in a congregation, I found myself in the Guggenheim Museum on a visit to New York City. There happened to be a retrospective show of the work of Colombian artist Doris Salcedo on the special exhibitions floor.¹ The first room was empty except for a large piece of deep red fabric spread like a wrinkled shroud on the floor. Upon closer inspection, I saw that it was made from thousands of preserved rose petals painstakingly sutured together, stitch by stitch. Titled *A Flor de Piel*, the work memorializes the life of a nurse who was brutally murdered in Colombia.²

The next room was haunted by pieces of antique wooden furniture, cut apart and nailed back together in strange places, as if dismembered and further disoriented by unsuccessful repair. And the furniture was filled completely with concrete. A wardrobe stood with a portion of a bed frame sticking out of it. The glass of the wardrobe's doors was replaced by dull concrete, and I could make out pieces of clothing showing through haphazardly, as if an evacuation was caught in stone.³

"The word *experience* means going across danger," Salcedo said in an interview for the PBS series *Art in the Twenty-first Century*. "I am a third-world artist. From that perspective, from the perspective of the defeated people, is where I'm looking at the world. I'm trying to rescue that memory if it could be possible."⁴ Salcedo's work remembers those who have gone across danger, victims of trauma, social injustice, political conflict, and brutality.

With each step I took and each tear I shed on the first floor special exhibitions space in the Guggenheim that day, I learned anew the potential of

the gallery to become a sacred space and the function of contemporary artists to facilitate transformation. There were no pretty pastels, but somehow the blood red of rose petals hit my gut the way no color had before. There were no portraits on canvas, but somehow I could see the faces of the ones who left that furniture behind. I could never know the world from the perspective of the defeated people, but somehow through the concrete I could at least imagine the heaviness of their prayers. I remembered the book of Lamentations, another set of prayers from grief-laden survivors of trauma and defeat.

Many use words like *strange* and *weird* to describe contemporary art. Some may even question whether contemporary art is art at all. This may be because contemporary artists are constantly questioning assumed boundaries of material engagement. Some may use more traditional media, and some may perform actions in the gallery, engage found materials and raw materials, or explore time as a material. Some artists choreograph public interventions or works of social engagement that never see the walls of a gallery.

In this way art becomes a physical exploration of abstract concepts, fueled by research and intuition, rather than a mere illustration of ideas. Artists become guides, inviting viewers into an experience of transformation through paradox and mystery in which audience and artist alike are responsible for the outcome of a work. For me, this kind of work feels more familiar than strange, not only because of my background in art, but also because of my study of liturgical and sacramental theology and my experiences at pulpit, font, and table.

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Although Salcedo's work does not contain specific religious content or imagery, I find that her work confronts the specific pain of human experience; her language and methods echo those of lament and liberation theology, translated in the visual and material. She accompanies viewers through feelings of grief and connects viewers to a larger narrative. My acquaintance with the language of faith, the biblical story, and the materials of worship make Doris Salcedo's work feel to me like a kind of liturgy, a people's work.

My visit to the Guggenheim was an experience of crossing a vocational border. I studied art in college, went to seminary from there, and on to ordained parish ministry. I cultivated some version of a studio practice out of our small Atlanta sunroom in my first years of ministry, attempting to live out two vocational identities at once. Today I've expanded my experiment of bi-vocational living as I pastor a small church and work as an artist in Richmond, Virginia.

In my weekly border crossings, I have learned the distance between the contemporary art community and the church. At the same time, I have recognized more each day the deep relationship between my functions as artist and minister of the gospel. In both roles, I deal in real materials and real human experience. In both roles I accompany persons in processes of making meaning, I explore narratives of memory and hope, and, in the end, I seek to make liturgy that fosters relationship and transformation.

It's no secret that most contemporary artists do not find much relevance in the institutional church. In general the art establishment abandons theological or religious conversations out of fear that with religion comes lack of scholarship, nuance, and healthy skepticism. At the same time,

though we may succeed at exploring some forms of art in the church, most church members and leaders seem to avoid the strange world of conceptual art. But what would happen if we began crossing this border? Might we make a bridge that could benefit society's search to make meaning of human experience and the church's search to share love in a changing world?

I am not suggesting that the church and the gallery are interchangeable, or that this border crossing should take the form of an evangelical mission from either side. Art communities and faith communities have their own sets of unique needs and priorities driven by diverse purposes. But, while respecting these different impulses, I also wonder what surprising wisdom we may have for one another.

The word *experience* means going across danger. In a chaotic and aching world, we cross danger over and over again in many different ways, looking for space for our broken hearts to belong. How can church communities and art communities listen to one another's testimonies as we make our ways across?

Notes

1. "Doris Salcedo," curated by Katherine Brinson, June 26–October 12, 2015, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
2. Doris Salcedo, *A Flor de Piel*, 2014, rose petals and thread, 445 x 252 in.
3. Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1995, wooden armoire, wooden bed frame, concrete, steel, and clothing, 77 1/8 x 74 7/8 x 49 5/8 in.
4. ART21, *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, season 5, episode "Compassion," directed by Catherine Tatge, produced by Wesley Miller and Nick Ravich, PBS, 2009.

