Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Spaces for Worship

Volume 53.2

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Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*

Volume 53.2

Spaces for Worship

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Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

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

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Call to Worship

Spaces for Worship

Volume 53.2

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Kimberly Bracken Long

Christians can worship anywhere. We know that where we worship does not limit our ability to worship. Yet, we recognize that the spaces around us do affect us. We respond to light and shadow, openness and closeness, color and form, touch, taste, and smell. And, of course, we all respond to those things differently. Some of us seek clean lines and uncluttered space, while others crave a riot of color, texture, and symbol.

In this issue of *Call to Worship*, we explore various kinds of worship spaces, how we function within them, and how they are connected to the world around us. Ben Robinson tells the compelling story of how a large, historic church building in Tacoma, Washington, has become a center for the community as well as for the church's worship. Hannah Quick, Rebecca Blake, and Nikki Collins offer fascinating insights into the life and faith of three different new worshiping communities in New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Macon, allowing us glimpses into inventive, community-based ministries and the spaces in which they worship.

Three articles in this issue are related in a unique way. Elizabeth Deibert writes about the process of designing and building a new sanctuary in Bradenton, Florida. Josh Taylor describes the journey involved in renovating the historic sanctuary of First Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas. Erich Thompson's essay on designing and building liturgical furniture ties those two articles together—he's the one who created the pulpit, font, and table for both spaces!

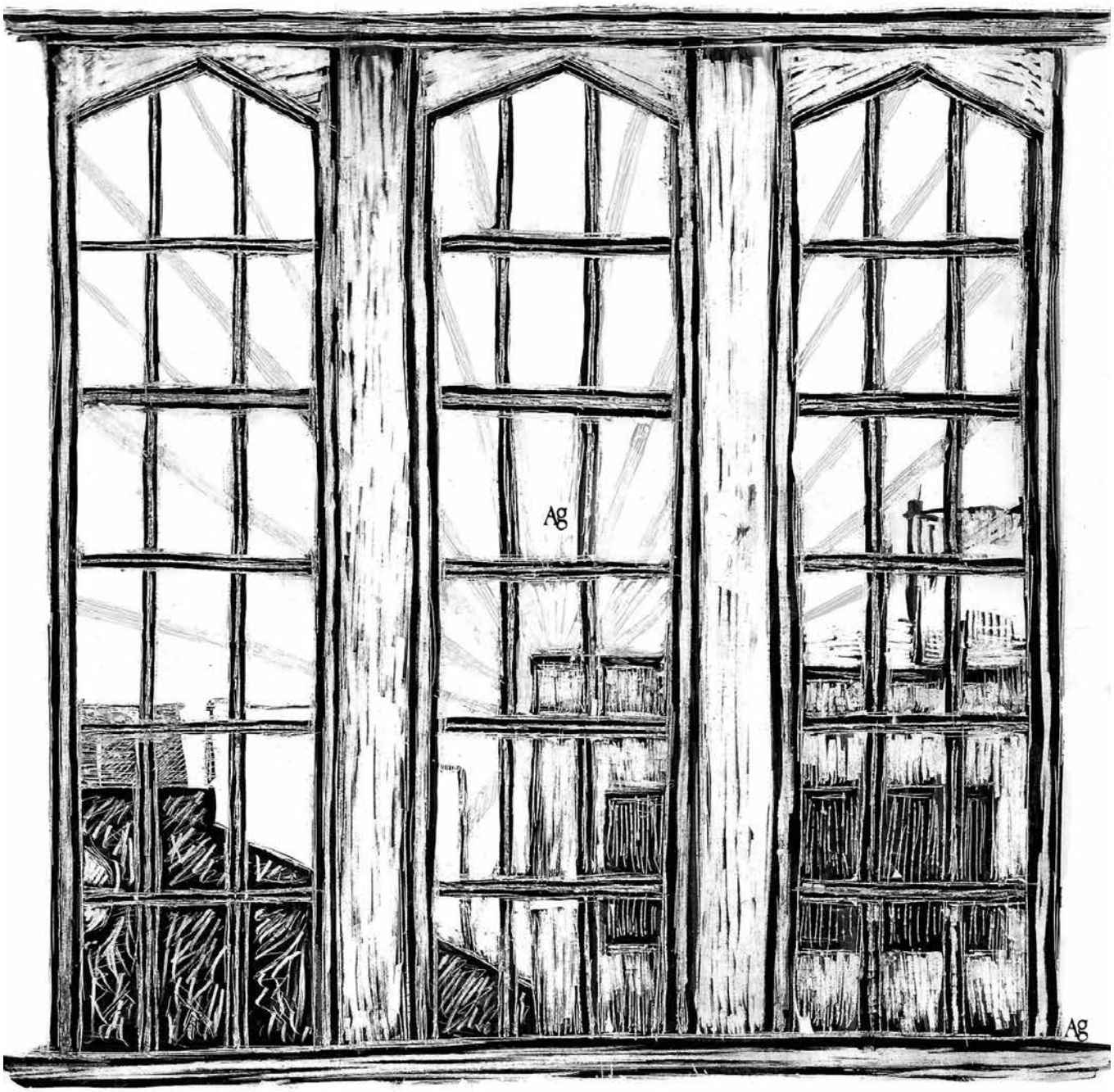
With her usual skill and grace, Marney Wasserman guides us through the ways we can best use the spaces in which we worship—ways that highlight the centrality of Word and Sacrament and allow full participation of the worshiping body. If you are not already familiar with *Invitation to Christ: Font and Table*, I urge you to get to know this landmark study, which is available at www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/Invitation-to-Christ.pdf.

I am grateful to David Batchelder for his thoughtful and heartfelt remembrance of Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey, former associate for worship in the Office of Theology and Worship, and mentor to many, including this writer. Drawing on her own words, he reminds us of just how great a debt we owe to Gláucia for helping to lead the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as well as our ecumenical partners, to worship sacramentally, ecumenically, mindfully, and prayerfully.

With this issue we welcome four new columnists who share their insights into liturgy, music, preaching, and the arts: Christopher Q. James, Chi-Yi Chen Wolbrink, Kaci Clark-Porter, and Deborah Sokolove. Each brings a unique perspective to the topic at hand. I'm grateful, too, for helpful book reviews from Laura Blank and Melva Lowry on two books you shouldn't be without. Two new hymns and a new instrumental arrangement round out the issue, along with original art by Amy E. Gray.

I hope this issue will, in the words of Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey, delight you, inspire you, cajole you, and entice you. Grace and peace be with you all.

Kimberly Bracken Long, Editor



Amy E. Gray

Feature Articles

"The Church Is Not the Building" —*all the pastors*

Ben Robinson

It's a thing we are supposed to say; it's a thing we are supposed to believe. If you are a pastor you have probably said it yourself: the church is not the building; the people are the church. We say this line to remind our congregations that the first priority of the church must be the spiritual life of her people. We say this line in the vain hope we will avoid another forty-five-minute session discussion about changing the green carpet in the sanctuary. We say this line and people listen.

Or at least I listened. As a youth I quickly picked up that this was one of the "right answers" in youth group. If the church building were destroyed, the church would not die. Maybe we would meet in people's homes? Maybe we would meet outside? The point was that it didn't matter where we met; what mattered were the people.

Some twenty years later a few things have changed. I still believe people matter, but I have also learned that because people matter, places matter too. I have learned that when God comes to us, God shows up in a particular place and in ways that are real to the people in that place. I have learned that when a community is committed to a place, it will be shaped and formed by how God is working in that place. I have learned how an ordinary street corner can grow into a sacred place. I have learned a lot, and I have learned it all from people who matter to me.

Six years ago, I arrived at Urban Grace Church in Tacoma, Washington. It had all the trappings of an urban mainline church: money was scant, the congregation was small, and the building was as massive as the list of deferred maintenance. From the outside, Urban Grace appeared to be another mainline congregation in decline, but there was something different about this church. Urban Grace had inherited a spiritual legacy of commitment to a place. That DNA courses through its veins.

This made it a different kind of church with a different kind of story. Bucking the trend of dying mainline churches, Urban Grace has tripled in size and become a home for a diverse group of young families, seniors, people experiencing homelessness, artists, and just about anyone else looking for sacred ground. Our historic building has become a thriving community center used by twenty community organizations and more than one thousand people every week. We have raised one million dollars to invest in our building so it can better serve the community. All of that has grown from finding God in a particular place—in a building at the corner of 9th and Market.

Finding Sacred Ground on 9th and Market

At Urban Grace we say that an ordinary street corner has become a sacred place, but the truth is, it was sacred long before we showed up. The land our church sits on is Puyallup Tribe ancestral land. Before white settlers arrived in the 1850s the land was covered with fir and pine, and the nearby waters provided abundant salmon and clams for the native people who lived there for millennia. The Puyallup River delta creates a natural harbor that the Northern Pacific Railroad chose as the western terminus of the transcontinental railroad traveling west from Minneapolis. When the railroad was completed in 1883, a group of intrepid Baptists founded First Baptist Church in the Territory of Washington.

A subsidiary of the Northern Pacific Railroad donated two plots on the corner of 9th and Market Street for the Baptist church to be built. This

Ben Robinson is pastor of Urban Grace, an ecumenical congregation in Tacoma, Washington.

was prime land in the heart of a rapidly growing downtown. Rudyard Kipling, who had yet to really hit his stride as a wordsmith, visited Tacoma in 1889 and said it was "literally staggering under a boom of the boomiest." This boomy boom drew thousands to Tacoma, and to First Baptist Church. By 1920 there were almost 800 members and 600 children enrolled in Sunday school. The church was rapidly outgrowing its space, so in 1925 they built a 40,000-square-foot building with 53 rooms and a sanctuary for 1,200 people. This was no ordinary church building; underneath its neo-Gothic façade First Baptist built a theatre with world class acoustics, a projection booth, and a ticketing office. The church wanted to serve as a resource for its community; at the time the church was in the heart of a thriving theatre district, so they built a space that could host local graduation ceremonies, public films, world class musicians, and anything else the city needed.

First Baptist Church thrived and attracted many of Tacoma's leaders, including Willie and Faye Stewart, who joined in 1963. Willie Stewart described why he decided to join First Baptist: "I grew up in a segregated community and segregated church, and I felt Christ is not restricted to colors and groups, so I wanted to join a mainstream church . . . and I always wanted to be in a downtown community." Stewart became a pioneer of civil rights in Tacoma, serving as the first African American principal, superintendent, and school board member. Willie found a home at First Baptist, and First Baptist found a leader when they elected him as moderator of the congregation. This was a bold step at the time and a sign of progress in racial equity within the church. In spite of this, urban churches across the nation were struggling to survive, and not even a bold, historic church like First Baptist would be immune.

The Flight to the Suburbs

In the post-war era, the combination of low housing stock in traditional urban cores, low building costs, and incentives from the GI Bill led to the rapid growth of American suburbs. This growth had a profound effect on downtown communities, for as the middle class left for the suburbs, cities lost the tax revenue required to provide adequate education, policing, and infrastructure. The deteriorating conditions of cities accelerated the growth of American suburbs. This process would become known as "white flight" because many, if not most, suburban communities had regulations excluding people of color. The federal government supported discriminatory lending policies that made it extremely difficult for people of color to live anywhere except designated neighborhoods like downtown Tacoma.[1]

The profound and lasting consequences of America's discriminatory housing policies cannot be understated and deserve far more attention than this brief summary, but we must include this chapter of our nation's story because it is the story of our churches.

The profound and lasting consequences of America's discriminatory housing policies cannot be understated and deserve far more attention than this brief summary, but we must include this chapter of our nation's story because it is the story of our churches. As middle-class white people left for the suburbs, their churches left too. All over America white mainline churches moved to the suburbs, and those that stayed downtown usually died. Even a historic church like First Baptist felt the impact. By 1978 attendance shrunk to around two hundred, and First Baptist could see what lay ahead. If they followed the majority of their members to the suburbs, they could become a booming church once again, but if they stayed downtown, they would likely die. The congregation was divided, and in 1978 the church purchased a plot of land in the suburbs called "the new horizons property."

The congregation had a decision to make; should they stay or go? Instead of looking for answers, they thought about the question. If they asked the question of how they could survive, then the answer was simple. Move to the suburbs. But if they asked where they would find Jesus, the answer looked different.

A Different Question

In some ways it should not matter if a church moves. After all, a church is not a building. The spirit of God fills the whole earth, and wherever we wander we will find God. Yet when it comes to Jesus, things get very specific. When God comes

to us, God shows up in a particular place. The incarnation is a manifestation of divinity in specific form and specific place. The Christian church spends a lot of time on the specific form, because, you know . . . Jesus, but we don't talk so much about specific place. Perhaps that is a reaction to our troublesome history of locating Jesus with the wealthy and powerful, or perhaps it is an earnest desire to see Jesus in all places. I don't really know why my classes on the incarnation never talked about geography, but I know that Eugene Peterson's translation of John 1:14 jumped out at me when I first read it: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood."

Jesus lived in a neighborhood. That neighborhood was not better than other neighborhoods. It was not holier than other neighborhoods. In fact, it was a pretty low-rent neighborhood. But Jesus did move into a specific neighborhood.

First Baptist Church had moved into a neighborhood, and though many of her members had moved away, the neighborhood was still there. Throughout her history the church had adapted to serve the needs of the neighborhood. When the city boomed it needed a church that could function as a theatre and a hub for the community. Now that everyone was leaving, the neighborhood needed someone to stay. The neighborhood needed to know it still mattered despite the poverty, the gangs, and the crumbling infrastructure. So, First Baptist asked a different question. Instead of asking how to succeed, they asked themselves, how do we serve a God who not only lived in a human body but also lived in a neighborhood? Their answer was to stay on the corner of 9th and Market.

First Baptist Decides to Stay

On October 27, 1979, the *Tacoma News Tribune* wrote an article with the headline "First Baptist Decides to Stay." The article began,

> A great challenge faces the members of Tacoma's historic First Baptist Church, which has decided against following other mainline Protestant churches in a flight to the suburbs. The decision raises the question of whether First Baptist, located at S. 9th and Market Streets since its founding 96 years ago, can effectively minister to the inner city. At stake is the church's survival. . . . The alternative would have been to move to a white, middle class neighborhood. The temptation to do that was strong because First Baptist's mostly white, middle class congregation has an abundance of older members and a shortage of families. In other cities under similar conditions, churches have slowly died through attrition.[2]

The article goes on to cite the leadership of the moderator of the congregation, Willie Stewart, who helped guide the church through the decision. Reflecting on the decision Stewart adds, "We had extensive discussion, and the feeling was that God should have a space in the city, so we made the conscious effort to get rid of the [suburban] property and stay here." First Baptist came up with a plan to open its historic building to the community for counseling services, community, and cultural events. As the Rev. Dr. Walter Ellis told the *Tacoma News Tribune*, "Tacoma needs a downtown church, and we are here."

This is the point of the story where we expect a turn. We expect faithful servants to be rewarded, we expect First Baptist to beat the odds and survive, but that is not how this story goes. "In the 80s all the activity left from downtown," Willie Stewart reflected. "Younger persons were going to churches in the suburbs where they lived, and we practically went from 400 members to 75. By early 2000s we were down to about 40."

It was not only church members who left downtown Tacoma. Harold Moss, Tacoma's first African American mayor, said Tacoma looked "bombed out" like "downtown Beirut." "Streets were abandoned, storefronts were abandoned, and City Hall was the headstone and Union Station the footstone" on the grave of downtown.[3] Yet as so many left downtown, others moved in. The grand Winthrop Hotel was converted into subsidized housing, and many residents who did not drive were able to walk two blocks up the hill to the only Protestant church remaining in the downtown core. Throughout the eighties and nineties Tacoma gained a national reputation for gang violence; many who lived in downtown Tacoma struggled, and First Baptist dwelt among them and shared their struggles.

The church was slowly dying, but it was a beautiful and holy death. As the neighborhood changed, so did the church. In 1998 First Baptist started serving a weekly breakfast of eggs, sausage, toast, grits, potatoes, juice, and coffee. Within weeks

hundreds of people were coming for breakfast and conversation. The folks at First Baptist believed that God's presence had moved into the neighborhood, and as long as God was there, they would be too. For years a faithful group of people served food to those in need, pitched in to fix broken heaters and windows, and welcomed the neighborhood to be a part of their community. Yet this aging group of saints could not hang on forever; the finances were bleak, and by the early 2000s it was clear First Baptist would have to close or move. Signs of life were appearing in downtown Tacoma, and the church owned a forty-thousand-square-foot building across the street from city hall. The congregation could have sold the building and made enough to move to the suburbs with an endowment that would allow them to begin again. First Baptist could have survived, but they believed that faithfulness to Christ meant faithfulness to the neighborhood Christ called them to serve. In the face of a seemingly impossible situation, they made a remarkable choice: they gave their church to the neighborhood.

First Baptist Church believed that faithfulness to Christ meant faithfulness to the neighborhood Christ called them to serve. In the face of a seemingly impossible situation, they made a remarkable choice: they gave their church to the neighborhood.

In 2004 First Baptist Church gathered a group of ministers from a variety of backgrounds with the simple question "What does downtown Tacoma need in a church?" The answer they came up with was an ecumenical church that would welcome all people. They envisioned a church where everyone was welcome, no matter their age, race, sexuality, gender identity, or church background. They envisioned a church where young families, working professionals, people experiencing homelessness, and the remaining members of First Baptist could worship together. They believed this new church could continue the ministries and relationships that First Baptist had fostered, while converting the building into the community center the congregation envisioned when they had decided to stay downtown. They believed that this is what the neighborhood needed, so in 2005 Urban Grace was created as an independent ecumenical church.

Urban Grace Church

If you come to 9th and Market today, you will find life all around you. If you arrive on Sunday morning, you will see people still serving up grits and eggs. Willie Stewart is in his eighties now, but he is still there every Sunday by 6:00 A.M., instructing volunteers and greeting guests by name. If you come to church, you will find almost two hundred people gathering for a worship service that is as eclectic as the people. You may also find it a little noisy, as the din of small children yelling combines with the unbridled laughter of a nonverbal member, and people move around, seemingly unaware church has begun. What you will find are a lot of people who have felt like they didn't have a place in Christianity, but now have found a home.

If you arrive at the corner of 9th and Market during the week, you might notice that the church didn't just move into a neighborhood, the neighborhood moved into the church. When First Baptist gave its building to the neighborhood, the neighborhood took up residence. It took time and effort, but slowly the building came to life again. A dance studio was built to provide low-cost dance lessons for neighborhood kids, and before long the dance studio was full every night with a variety of dance companies who needed space. Music teachers, therapists, nonprofits, and Christian ministries found office space in the once empty offices. Today Urban Grace is home to the Tacoma Farmers Market, the Tacoma Youth Symphony, Leadership Foundations, a local nonprofit teaching social skills to teens using improv, and various other groups. In 2017 Partners for Sacred Space's Public Value Assessment showed that 92 percent of the beneficiaries of the programs run in the church are not a part of the congregation. This study estimated that our building provides the equivalent of more than three hundred thousand dollars a year of donations to our neighborhood. Urban Grace's relationship with the neighborhood was best summed up by Kristin Sierra, a Tacoma Public School librarian who reached out to the church looking for a partner to host Project Lit, a program connecting kids with authors of color.[4] When she got on stage she simply said, "We are thrilled to welcome Kwame Alexander to Tacoma's living room." As she spoke those words there were

five other community events happening elsewhere in the building. The neighborhood moved in.

Investing in Place

At every turn First Baptist and then Urban Grace demonstrated that people matter, so place matters. Their instinct was to serve the neighborhood, and eventually, people began to notice. In 2016 we received a phone call from Partners for Sacred Places wondering if we were planning to raise funds to renovate our building. They had heard about the work we were doing, and they, in coordination with the National Trust, were seeking applicants for a new grant created by the Lilly endowment. The National Fund for Sacred Places sought to provide matching funds for congregations that used their historic buildings to serve their neighborhoods. We had already begun planning for a capital campaign, but it still felt like a dream because our congregation was poor and small. Urban Grace was selected in the inaugural class and began working to address decades of deferred maintenance. As a part of the grant, Partners for Sacred Places performed a feasibility study that predicted $275,000 of congregational giving, which, along with local foundations and the grant's one to two match, would total around $500,000. We were thrilled, even as we realized that there was far more work to do than we could afford.

On kickoff Sunday I shared the story of First Baptist and Urban Grace, and I was met with an unexpected response. Tears. Many in our congregation were moved to learn that they had come to this place for the same reason so many others had come over the years. This neighborhood, downtown Tacoma, mattered to them. Place mattered because people mattered. We told this story over and over, and the response was miraculous. Our little congregation that was only supposed to pledge $275,000 pledged over $500,000. We reached out to local foundations that pledged over $200,000, and with the full $250,000 match from the National Fund for Sacred Places we received a total of $1,000,000 in donations and pledges.

Many in the church were concerned that our operations budget would suffer, but the following year our budget grew by 45 percent and attendance doubled. Our once-dying church at the corner of 9th and Market is now thriving.

Conclusion

A few weeks ago, I sat down to interview Willie Stewart for this story. We spent most of our time talking about the history of First Baptist and Urban Grace, but I also asked him why he thought Urban Grace had thrived. I recognize that most people who read this story are not in churches that had a historic building bequeathed to them, so I hoped to find some insight that would be widely applicable. He delivered. "More than anything, it was our desire to accept everyone without any conditions, just as they were, just as Christ did; because of that we have experienced tremendous growth."

Accepting everyone without conditions has shaped who we have become. We recognized that many in the church were uncertain of what exactly they believed but sought a community where they could explore the possibility of God. We wanted full inclusion into our community to be the starting point rather than a reward for those who have everything sorted out, so we changed the theological commitments for membership to the desire to love God, love one another, and follow Jesus.

Whoever crosses the street at 9th and Market is welcome at Urban Grace. No matter who you are, you belong.[5] This is what it means to be shaped by a place. This includes wealthy families and people without a dime to their name. It includes people who commute to Seattle for work and people with profound mental disabilities. It includes people of color and the queer community. It includes kids and teenagers and a First Baptist member named Sugar Ray who has been coming to church at the corner of 9th and Market ever since he was born in 1923. These folks have shaped who we are, and they are the reason we have flourished.

A couple years ago a member told me her thirteen-year-old son said he wanted to go to church more frequently because he was in middle school, and middle school is the worst. At school he felt a ton of pressure to be cool, to be popular, and to have it all together. But just like every single one of us, he knew he did not have it all together. When he went to Urban Grace, he saw real people with real problems. He saw that the church loved all those people, and God loved all those people; that meant that God loved him, and he didn't have to try to be someone other than who he was. This

is just one of the many lessons our neighborhood has taught us. We have also learned that people struggling with mental illness want the same thing young families want, a church where no one stares at them because they are making noise or dancing to a beat no one else hears. When I arrived at Urban Grace I had to adjust to disruptions throughout the sermon. At first it felt like a sacrifice, but I now understand what a gift it is to tell a new family that it's cool if their three-year-old breaks out into song during silent reflection. All of this has changed me. The disruptions that are really the in-breaking of grace, the surprises of strangers arriving who bear blessing for us all, the expansive welcome of this place has changed me. This is what it is to love a place. It's life changing.

Your church isn't at the corner of 9th and Market. Your story isn't ours. Each story, each place is specific, particular, unique. That's what makes place sacred. Just like people, each and every place is created by God, and no other is like it. When we decide to be rooted in a place, it isn't that it becomes sacred because we show up or because we say it's sacred. It's sacred because the spirit of God fills the earth. When we decide to be rooted in a place, we open ourselves to discovering the beauty and holiness that has been there all along. When we focus less on transforming a neighborhood and allow our church to be transformed by a neighborhood, we have the opportunity to discover and join in what God is doing in that place. This doesn't mean we'll always experience success. First Baptist Church remained faithful until the end. Urban Grace was born from that death. When we are rooted in a place, we live through the cycles of life and death of that place. If our eyes are open, we find Christ at every turn, because our faith testifies that the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.

Notes

1. For an in-depth examination of discriminatory lending policies, see Ta-Nehisi Coates's award-winning piece "The Case for Reparations," available online at www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/. For a detailed map of how Tacoma was affected by discriminatory lending polices, visit Mapping Inequality at https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining.
2. Richard Ferguson, "First Baptist Decides to Stay," *The News Tribune,* October 27, 1979, p. A4.
3. Erik Hanberg, "An Exercise in Hope, Faith, Vision, and Guts," *Weekly Volcano (Tacoma)*, December 24, 2008.
4. To learn more about Project Lit, visit www.booksourcebanter.com/2018/06/25/what-is-project-lit-community/.
5. This sentence gets a footnote, not an asterisk, because there is no asterisk when we say, "Everyone is welcome." Over the last five years we have worked with social workers, therapists, lawyers, and the Department of Corrections to create covenant agreements that enable registered sex offenders to attend church. We believe this has made our community safer by allowing people to be honest about their past, and then receiving the boundaries and support they need. We really do mean everyone when we say everyone is welcome.

Amy E. Gray

Making Space for Worship

Nikki Collins

A group of teens perched on couches near the front windows.
Nursing students studied for the week's exams with books spread across an extra-large table.
A couple flirted with each other in a corner booth.
Laptops were everywhere, and the sound of music mixed with steaming espresso machines and whirring blenders.

This was the scene when worship leaders arrived to prepare for a weekly service of Evening Prayer in a bustling coffee shop. Large closet doors opened, and out rolled a keyboard and sound cart, music stands, microphones, and amplifiers. As the pastor to this community that gathered over espresso and scones as well as bread and wine, it was my job during this transition time to make my way around the room explaining to customers what would soon be happening and inviting them to stay after the shop closed to join us for worship. It could be a tricky conversation—to tell someone that they might want to finish up their latte if they didn't want to be called to worship and enveloped in songs and Scripture. Most of the time, however, it was an excellent moment to extend welcome to people I might never have otherwise had the opportunity to invite into a worshiping community. Usually the customers who had come for coffee packed up and moved on to whatever was next in their day, but often individuals and small groups would stay, sometimes taking part in the service, sometimes listening in from a safe distance in a corner. Either was fine. All were welcome.

Hilliard was one such customer who had staked out a spot on the sofa with a pile of books one rainy Sunday afternoon. I went through my explanation of what was going to happen and presented him with the option of staying and joining us. He indicated that he would really like to just keep his spot on the couch if we didn't mind. We didn't. The service went on as usual, and when it ended, we readied the space for the next morning and everyone left, Hilliard included. And he came back the next week. And again a few weeks later—always finding an out-of-the-way spot, seemingly engrossed in his reading. But one week, on the way out the door, he commented on the service, saying it was "an interesting conversation." Apparently we distracted him for a minute. A few weeks later, the community was celebrating the Lord's Supper as part of the service. As the elements were being distributed, a server stepped over and asked, "What about him?"

"Offer it." And she did.

Over time, Hilliard was in and out on Sundays, but slowly he began to make his way from the outside to the fringes and from the fringes to the center of the gathering, sharing in singing and reflection, offering prayer concerns, and giving encouragement. Months later, he began bringing a friend with him, and eventually the community celebrated as the friend became his fiancée, and then his wife. We learned that in the beginning, this man was grieving a divorce and didn't know where he belonged. He just appreciated having a place to be near a people who prayed. When the time was right, he moved closer and became part of those people. I believe this organic movement was possible because this community gathered in such an ordinary space—but such an unusual space for worship. The familiarity of the coffee shop provided a sense of safety for someone feeling vulnerable and unsure. The collection of spaces within the larger space offered shelter and security that might have been missing in the place we call sanctuary.

Nikki Collins is coordinator for the 1001 Worshiping Communities initiative of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

For five years we gathered in this coffee shop for worship every Sunday evening. We also marked the other holy days important in our liturgical tradition. There was a come-as-you-are Christmas pageant complete with candles and "Silent Night." We had an Ash Wednesday service and marked the stations of the cross during Holy Week. We met early for doughnuts and coffee on Easter Morning—and carried our afternoon Easter celebration to a local park for a fish fry, inviting the neighborhood children to hunt eggs and throw Frisbees with us in the sunshine.

In the midst of it all, community members also began to seek the sacraments in this space during major pastoral moments in their lives. A military family asked to have lunch and communion in the coffee shop the day before the father deployed for service. A customer in his last days battling cancer asked us to celebrate the Eucharist with him (a lapsed Catholic). His friend, a Greek Orthodox laywoman, and I, a Presbyterian clergywoman, prayed and broke bread blessed by the Greek Orthodox priest as the sun poured in through the front window and a barista served customers in the drive-through. In the coffee shop, the rules that often divided us faded away and the ritual became common ground, a meeting place for strangers and the Holy One.

As we met in this place for meals and laughter, art classes and book groups, Bible studies and knitting sessions, business networking and Evening Prayer, several things became clear to me as the one responsible for planning for worship.

First, we who find our home in the church forget how frightening both worship and being in community can be for many of the people around us. People don't like to wear name tags or be recognized as visitors. They hate to stand out because they don't know when to sit or when to stand or the words to the Apostle's Creed. They often don't want to tell a stranger the story of what is drawing them to seek God in this church on this day. Gathering in a place that is familiar removes at least the barrier of an imposing space. People know what to do when they enter a coffee shop. It's something many of us do every day. The location of our worship gathering meant that we as leaders had to learn how to help our tradition make accommodations to the space on behalf of the wary participant rather than expecting a newcomer to suddenly fit into our often-unstudied habits and comfort zones. It was a challenge, but one that was driven by our value of hospitality and one that shaped our witness.

The second thing I noticed was that as the larger community discovered the coffee shop was also home to a church, customers came to treat the space with more care and kindness—and the church community began to understand the customers as part of the faith community, even if they never attended a service. Evening Prayer services included prayers for "customers." Baristas began to pass along pastoral concerns. Students in an art class began to ask if we could collaborate on community mission projects. Membership didn't matter. Inclusion and invitation became the marker. After all, we were very much in this place together.

What was most important to me and to many in our community, however, was the blurring of the threshold between the church and the world, the sacred and the secular. Together we were consistently reminded that our encounters with God happen anywhere and everywhere if we are only attentive to the nudges of the Spirit. Pastor Katy Steinberg, leader of Missing Peace Community in Ormond Beach, Florida, describes it this way:

> Because we meet in so many places and have spiritual experiences in those places, it's like our whole town becomes sanctuary. Instead of there being one building where I drive by and think of it as the place where I encounter God, beaches, and parks, and homeless shelters all become places where we experience God together.
>
> It feels as if all places are becoming church or associated with the possibility of a divine experience.

In his instructions in his poem "How to Be a Poet" Wendell Berry says, "There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places." For those of us who were formed over years of regular worship in a coffee shop, there is a strong and common sense that the world is God's altar and we are invited to stack up stones of meeting everywhere we go.

Building a Dwelling Place for God, Becoming a Sanctuary of Christ's Peace: A Narrative of God's Providence through New Church Development

Elizabeth Deibert

The Directory for Worship declares in its opening section on space:

> Because heaven and earth belong to God, we may worship in any place. The Old Testament describes stone altars, tabernacles, temples, and other places where the people gathered and encountered God. The Gospels tell us that Jesus worshiped at the synagogue and temple, but he also worshiped in the wilderness, on hillsides, and at lakeshores, demonstrating that God cannot be confined to any one place (W-1.0203).

Christians worship God anywhere and everywhere! For a group of Christians in Florida, these words certainly rang true as we moved from place to place. The vision for a Presbyterian church named "Peace" began around a kitchen table in Lakewood Ranch, a fast-growing, 31,000-acre planned community in southwest Florida, adjacent to Sarasota and Bradenton. Around a table, the Holy Spirit breathed life into a new Christian community, united in weekly celebration of Word and Sacrament, committed to the Service for the Lord's Day, and enlivened by musical integrity in varying expression. At this table began real conversation about the struggle for human dignity, the challenge of following Jesus, and our willingness to suffer with the world in humble service.

After meeting in a neighborhood Lutheran church (ELCA) on Sunday evenings, the congregation was called to worship for several years in a tiered college auditorium with a giant central screen and built-in swivel-chaired computer tables, quite the source of entertainment for wiggly children and restless teens. Each week, signs were planted at street corners while musical equipment, paraments and pottery, rocking chairs for the nursery, and Godly Play curriculum were unloaded and reloaded

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from a storage trailer. We were grateful to find a hundred courageous followers of Christ. Officially chartered by the Peace River Presbytery in 2009, the congregation began regularly singing its lyrical mission statement in a round: "Our mission is to make God known, by growing as disciples of Jesus Christ, building a community of peace, and caring for the needs of others."

The people of Peace never doubted the Richard Avery and Donald Marsh children's song: "The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple; the church is not a resting place; the church is a people." In 2010, the congregation moved from the college to a conference center with three giant screens, where meeting rooms were available all week for choir, and children's learning centers could be left set up for the following week. This move especially pleased the pastor's four teens who had grown weary of session meetings, choir practice, faith and film evenings, and even Ash Wednesday services in their living room. Meanwhile, charter members were developing close friendships, meeting regularly in each other's homes, living and singing robustly, "I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together!"

The Directory for Worship's section on space reminds us that

> the first Christians worshiped at the temple and in synagogues, homes, catacombs, and prisons. The important thing was not the place, but the gathering of Christ's body—the people of God—and the presence of Christ among them in Word and Sacrament. Later the Church began to build special places to meet for worship. To this day, space for Christian worship is primarily established by the presence of the risen Lord and the communion of the Holy Spirit in the gathering of the people of God (W-1.0203).

The charter members of Peace knew that if we brought in the Bible, baptismal font, communion ware, and musical instruments, then we were ready to worship. We simply needed to rearrange chairs to make the Word and Sacrament more welcoming. Like the Hebrew people moving the tabernacle, we set up the "sanctuary" every Sunday for the first seven years of worship in windowless, screen-dominated auditoriums and conference rooms. This provoked the use of high quality, art-oriented visuals to complement the liturgy on built-in screens, which became our "dynamic stained-glass windows." We came to appreciate the way art both ancient and modern helped us to see Christ in many forms and faces. Used reverently, these screens inspired our worship in many ways, surprising some who had considered screens to be little more than a distraction in liturgical services.

As sanctuary-seeking nomads, we learned the beauty of Christmas Eve candles in the cool dark of Florida's outdoors, because real candles were not permitted inside. We learned how a spacious area just outside the "sanctuary" allows for meaningful welcome of guests coming and going, so that authentic relationships can be built with first- and second-time worshipers. We learned how seating in worship and proximity to coffee and classrooms dramatically affect ease of participation for differently-abled persons.

Through the generous financial assistance of a Mission Program Grant from the denomination, our Presbytery of Peace River, and several area PC(USA) congregations, Peace's early childhood as a new church development was secured. The presbytery's courageous purchase of a five-acre parcel of land near the geographical center of Lakewood Ranch helped suburban newcomers view us as a congregation with long-term viability while meeting in temporary spaces.

Then the mystery of God's providence deepened! Through a complicated series of events, we were compelled to abandon plans to build on the Presbytery's five-acre parcel. We also walked away from another property at the last minute, having raised one million dollars in pledges to purchase it—and having made an offer—following the revelation of black mold during the due diligence period. With our realtor's conference center lease not extended as anticipated and no further place in the wilderness to call home, we wondered what might happen to the tabernacle named Peace.

Yet God provided the perfectly timed opportunity to buy a missionary office building with *exactly* the amount we had raised in capital fund pledges. Interestingly, the building was a project of the missionary-minded founder of Bradenton-based Tropicana Products, Anthony T. Rossi (1900–1993), an Italian immigrant committed to producing the New Testament on cassette tape for the blind in their spoken language. This Italian-styled building with a lovely central courtyard had thirty office

spaces, some of which we turned into classrooms by taking down a few walls. Removing walls reminded us of the text that had been preached at our chartering service:

> For [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall . . . that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace. . . . So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near (Eph. 2:14–19).

Most significantly, our newly-purchased building had a hundred-seat chapel inside (24 by 60 feet) amidst the 13,800 square feet of office space, all beautifully tucked into a 24-acre site, including nine acres of protected wetland, with peacefully roaming cranes, eagles, hawks, deer, and alligators.

In Advent 2013, we shifted to two identical Sunday morning services, continuing slow, steady growth in elbow-to-elbow worship conditions, while designing a sanctuary to add to the campus. An ordinarily serious pastor had to learn to make jokes that could help visitors feel more comfortable in tight quarters with zero leg room, all within spitting distance of the preacher. Even in this awkwardness was the Lord's silver lining: it was not difficult to make the case for a new sanctuary.

The Building Vision Team went to work on designing a sanctuary that would seat three to four hundred people. With site work and inflating building costs, we accepted the fact that we could only afford 7,300 square feet of air-conditioned space. Additional paved and grassy parking, with a porte cochère for shade and convenient drop-off, would be helpful. The team sought to achieve an ancient-modern feeling in a sanctuary that was purposeful and beautiful in its simplicity, centered around and focused on the Word and Sacrament, giving glory to God. From the Directory for Worship we knew this:

> Space that is set apart for worship should encourage community, be accessible to all, and open us to reverence for God. It is not to be an escape from the world, but a place for encountering the God of all creation who gathers us in and sends us out (W-1.0203).

It was a challenge to secure pledges from a congregation of about one hundred giving units, who had pledged one million dollars to buy the land and office building three years earlier. Thanks be to God, $1.23 million was eventually committed to realize this dream, with three-year promises beginning in 2016. The team labored alongside architects and builders to trim our ideas to an affordable, yet beautiful and theologically sound sanctuary. As God's timing would have it, the beginning of our third three-year capital campaign would coincide with the eagerly anticipated move into a nearly completed sanctuary, promising another $800,000 in gifts from 2019 to 2021.

They say the best way to burn out a pastor and session—or guarantee congregational conflict—is with a building campaign. We are grateful for the spirit of unity and peace that sustained us through endless discussions of design, function, and funding. On Palm Sunday of 2017, we held a groundbreaking service, complete with an intergenerational kickball game on the field that would soon become a sanctuary. Remembering that our cornerstone is Jesus Christ, and knowing that we have no rock on which to stand but the God of Abraham and Sarah, we took stones of gratitude that day, wrote our names on them, and built cairns to remind us of God's faithful providence in our long wilderness. Those rocks would later be mixed into the concrete poured for the footers as a foundation inlaid with gratitude. A few months later, having secured all approvals and permits, ground was truly broken and large live oak trees felled.

Thanks to PAM's Worship and Music Conference, the pastor was made aware of a PC(USA) minister, the Rev. Dr. Erich Thompson, who had built chancel furnishings for the Montreat Conference Center. Even our simple sanctuary needed inspiring pieces of furniture to reveal the heart of worship in Word and Sacrament. A congregant who owned a sod company was eager to see these trees serve a higher purpose, so he loaded three 2,000-pound trunks of freshly cut live oak and drove them to North Carolina, where they were kiln-dried during the months of sanctuary construction. This minister-turned-artist and theologically-oriented wood worker knew just what

to do with them. After a weekend in worship and meetings with Peace's Chancel Furnishings Design Team, Dr. Thompson was commissioned to craft a chancel cross, along with table, font, pulpit, lectern, and candle stands.

In addition to a sacred space for worship, Peace needed a spacious narthex (60 by 18 feet) with a large welcome desk and small kitchenette to allow room for conversation before and after worship. Doors with glass and speakers and monitors in the narthex would make this space friendly to babies, toddlers, and anyone else needing to make a little noise during worship. Ample restrooms, including one gender-neutral family room, would allow a father to change a diaper or a wife to accompany a husband in a wheelchair. Other features include a sacristy near the chancel, a small storage closet, and an attractively integrated wheelchair ramp so that persons with disabilities can sing in the choir or lead worship.

Florida can whip up thunderstorms in a heartbeat, so we included a covered walkway to unite the campus and enable movement to our older building, where the former chapel became our Fellowship Hall. There friends enjoy coffee, snacks, and conversation, alongside Lively Learning (Sunday school) classes for all ages between services.

The time of waiting for a sanctuary became more meaningful than any could have expected. Together, we sang Marty Haugen's hymn "Let Us Build a House," subtitled "All Are Welcome," that begins, "Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live." We especially loved the first and last verses that spoke of a community hoping and dreaming of creating a place where Christ's love would reconcile all. Our voices rang out as we sang the hymn's final words:

> Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers
> of faith and songs of grace;
> let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:
> all are welcome; all are welcome; all are welcome in this place (*Glory to God*, 301).

One Sunday morning between services in the old chapel, congregants were invited to see progress on the sanctuary, which then had a roof and four walls. Everyone was encouraged to write a Scripture, prayer, or hymn on the foam-board wall. Some signed their names. The next week—inspired by the Holy Spirit and the power of the space—we realized that we did not want any name left off. So, the name of every person who had ever been part of the congregation—whether alive or departed, on good terms or not—was inscribed on the foam insulation. The members of Peace wrote names of saints and children, names of parents, professors, presbyters, patriarchs, and popes—anyone who had mentored us in the faith. Day after day, the foam board was covered in names and prayers and hymns, Scripture and confessions and creeds, until sheetrock forced a halt to this inspiring exercise. Every year in autumn, we plan to insert pages of new names into the rear interior of the large cross on the east wall, which has a compartment created for this purpose. In this way, everyone at Peace will be named in our hearts and on our walls.

With a loan from Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP) and the generosity of many members, this three-hundred-seat sanctuary was completed in July of 2018 and dedicated on Transfiguration Sunday 2019. It was our joy to celebrate with Peace River Presbytery, with the Rev. Dr. David Gambrell, associate for worship in the PC(USA), leading a hymn festival and preaching on Exodus 34:29–35 and Luke 9:28–36, and with the Rev. Dr. Erich Thompson of Erich Thompson Sacred Spaces unveiling his inspired design of a theologically meaningful chancel suite. As the Directory for Worship states:

> Space for Christian worship should include a place for the reading and proclamation of the Word, a font or pool for Baptism, and a table for the Lord's Supper. The arrangement of these symbols of Word and Sacrament conveys their relationship to one another and their centrality in Christian worship (W-1.0203).

We desired the entire property, and especially the sanctuary, to create a welcoming spirit, so Dr. Thompson created a stunning three-hundred-pound backlit Celtic cross that suggests the open arms of the risen Christ for the central chancel wall. Projection screens have been decentralized to side walls so they do not compete with the centrality of this magnificent cross. (Notably, our sanctuary follows historic orientation, facing due east toward Jerusalem.) The Lord's table opens toward the congregation with a dramatic curve, sitting atop an ancient symbol of the church, a ship's hull with twelve ribs for the apostles, themselves atop a Trinitarian base. The baptismal font's visible waters and open arms communicate the immersive love of the Holy Trinity. The pulpit and lectern, both in the form of a Trinitarian ship's bow, are solid but not imposing (for further design details, see the accompanying article by Erich Thompson in this issue).

The chancel furniture is heavy but moveable, allowing multiple arrangements in the slightly elevated chancel area. The Bible may be placed at pulpit or lectern, or visibly displayed at the foot of the cross. The font and its moving waters may be in the nave, central chancel, or opposite pulpit when the lectern is beneath the cross. The communion table will usually be on floor level reaching out, beckoning the weary to come forward, but may be lifted to the chancel beneath the cross as it was for our Maundy Thursday drama. The lack of seating in the chancel focuses congregants on being "stewards of the mysteries of God," as the apostle Paul urges the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:1).

We aimed to make clear that Christ is the head of the church and center of our lives. We desired a prominent display of pulpit, font, and table, with balanced proportions, situated close to everyone in the congregation. This meant that the nave would have more width (92 feet) than depth (39 feet), with a center aisle flanked by two aisles on each side and four sections of connected padded chairs. While the Building Vision Team appreciated the communal aspect of traditional pews, we decided that flexible space would better meet the needs of a congregation with limited space and allow a greater variety of concerts, dances, dinners, and other community events. We also wished for large, clear side windows that would allow natural light and visual access to both the lake to the north and the woods to the south.

At twenty-nine feet, the ceiling height in the center draws our attention to the chancel and cross, elevating us into God's spacious mercy. Lower ceilings on the sides allow us to be good stewards of the earth by saving a little electricity. It was beyond our reach to be LEED-certified green, but we did use insulated concrete forms (ICF), a more environmentally friendly construction than concrete block. Think of ICF as an insulated cooler, using Styrofoam pieced together like Lego blocks with concrete poured into the center from the top.

A hearing loop helps clarify the spoken word and music. Large but understated high-resolution screens are mounted on each side of the chancel (and on the back wall for worship leaders), allowing inspiring visual art, along with spoken and sung liturgy. When not in use, as on Good Friday, their silver tone blends into the wall. In use, they are crisp, clear, and large enough for singing with the musical notation of *Glory to God*. Hymnals are in the racks under chairs for any who would rather hold a book or sing in parts. In preworship announcements, PC(USA) special offerings and other videos are easily featured, connecting us to the work of the Spirit around the world.

From our first worship service in 2006, Peace has united the Word and Sacrament, celebrating the Lord's Supper every Sunday, believing it should be "recognized as integral to the Service for the Lord's Day" (PC(USA) *Book of Order*, W-2.4009). It is "particularly through the gifts of Word and Sacrament" that God is "present and active among us" (PC(USA) *Book of Order*, W-1.0101). "Word and Sacrament form a unified liturgy—proclaiming and celebrating the fullness of God's saving word and action in Jesus Christ" (*Book of Common Worship*, 2018, p. 18).

Important to Peace's lively liturgical worship is the congregation's procession forward to receive communion by intinction, toward the central cross, welcomed by the outstretched communion table, breaking fresh, warm bread (baked every Sunday morning in sanctuary bread makers), dipping, and communing with the risen Lord. We also enjoy a robustly warm Sharing of the Peace, often surprising our visitors with overflowing hospitality. While organ and piano usually anchor the liturgy, our music program flourishes with all ages and an array of other instruments, including guitar, bells, flute, drums, strings, djembe, and cajón. A corner choir loft on one side of the raised chancel and a flexible space on the other accommodate multiple musical groups and dramas. With congregational seating we aim for the beloved of God to form an oval around the chancel with equal sight lines to pulpit, font, and table. Our three-manual Allen Organ, with digitally recorded sound of French, English, German, and American pipes, is positioned in front of the choir, along with a Steinway grand piano (donated by a neighboring PC(USA) congregation), from where our talented young director of music directs the choir with an eye on the worship leaders and congregation.

Including children and youth in worship leadership is a high priority for Peace. Children sit with the pastor on the two chancel steps for the proclamation of the Word at their level, and the congregation enjoys seeing their faces. Six children and youth collect the offering each week, often in joyfully chaotic, childlike fashion. Serving as robed acolytes, they process with the light of Christ, the Bible, the baptismal pitcher, a chalice, and a loaf of warm communion bread. An older youth, after bringing the symbols of the faith into the service, leads us in the call to worship.

Throughout the year, thirty different members serve as liturgists, leading the prayers of the people for the church and world. We draw on prayers from the *Book of Common Worship*, tailoring each prayer to specific needs arising during the week. As an expression of our commitment to ecumenism, the congregation alternates weekly between three versions of the Lord's Prayer. We draw affirmations of faith from the ancient creeds, modern catechisms, and other historic statements of faith. As a reminder of our baptism, water is visibly and audibly poured into the font each service during the confession-forgiveness-peace sequence.

At our dedication service in March of 2019, every team and leader in the church participated in blessing each piece of our sacred space by the laying on of hands. After passing the key of our sanctuary to the presbytery in gratitude, we prayed for God's blessing as we touched the new organ. As the service unfolded, we naturally moved to bless the font before confessing our sin. We blessed the pulpit and lectern before the sermon. Then we gathered around the communion table to lay on hands before the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. As we dedicated our offering, we moved to the candle stand and to the offering tables built into the chancel steps. Finally, we blessed the very walls of the sanctuary and the names written deep within, touching the walls both with our hands and voices in a shared benediction.

Remembering the ancient and modern meaning of the term *sanctuary*, we keep circling back to the Haugen hymn. Our prayer is that this Presbyterian church named Peace will in fact provide both a sanctuary of peace for all who enter its gates and a mission of healing for the world God so loves.

The Place of Our Faith: Restoration and Rejuvenation in Sacred Space

Joshua Taylor

Toward an Architectural Theology

"Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open all the doors and see all the people." So goes the popular children's rhyme that seemingly links the church building to the body of believers. While theologically we understand that the church transcends the building and is about the people rather than a series of rooms, doors, or the steeple, the power of sacred space to enrich, embolden, and embody the Christian faith has held for centuries. The words of the psalmist remain a part of our life together: "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord" (Ps. 122:1). From God's command to Moses that the Israelites make God a sanctuary (Ex. 25:8) to the present time, a space dedicated for worship has been a part of Jewish and Christian practice.

Winston Churchill, speaking about the reconstruction of the British House of Commons chamber during World War II, famously said, "We shape our buildings and thereafter our buildings shape us."[1] Beginning with simple house churches such as the one in Dura-Europos, branching out to the grand cathedrals of Europe, the austere church buildings of the Reformation, and the Greek Revival buildings and Colonial edifices of the United States, the church building continues to provide a dynamic space that influences worship practices and displays the values of the community that gathers in that place.[2] In their book *Art and Worship*, Anne Dawtry and Christopher Irvine describe the church building this way, "The physical building itself constitutes part of the very fabric of our meeting with God, and the complex symbolic transactions between God and humanity."[3]

How then do we approach the design, restoration, or renovation of sacred space? Does our architecture reflect our theology? Does the ability to articulate our architectural theology matter? The challenge for those charged with articulating such a theology is the need to understand that liturgical space is functional while also symbolic, serving a purpose while also conveying meaning.[4] The size, shape, and design of the baptismal font might be used as an example to illustrate this idea.

For Christians, the font symbolizes the tomb, womb, and bathtub where Christians are joined with Christ in his death and resurrection, cleansed of sin, and grafted into the community. Because of this understanding, the amount of water, placement of the font in the room, and size of the bowl convey messages about the congregation's theology and beliefs around baptism. Additionally, the font must also be functional (able to be filled, to be cleaned, to be easily used) and aesthetically pleasing for the room. This dual role illustrates that the font must both serve a purpose while also conveying meaning.

Changes in Christian architecture throughout the centuries highlight the ways in which worship forms have taken on the distinct character of buildings, and vice versa.[5] This reality raises two questions: Have concrete definitions of Christian architecture hindered the worship reforms of later generations? Or have worship reforms been the catalyst for change in architectural design?

In the twenty-first century, as churches consider changing worship form in historical, beloved spaces,

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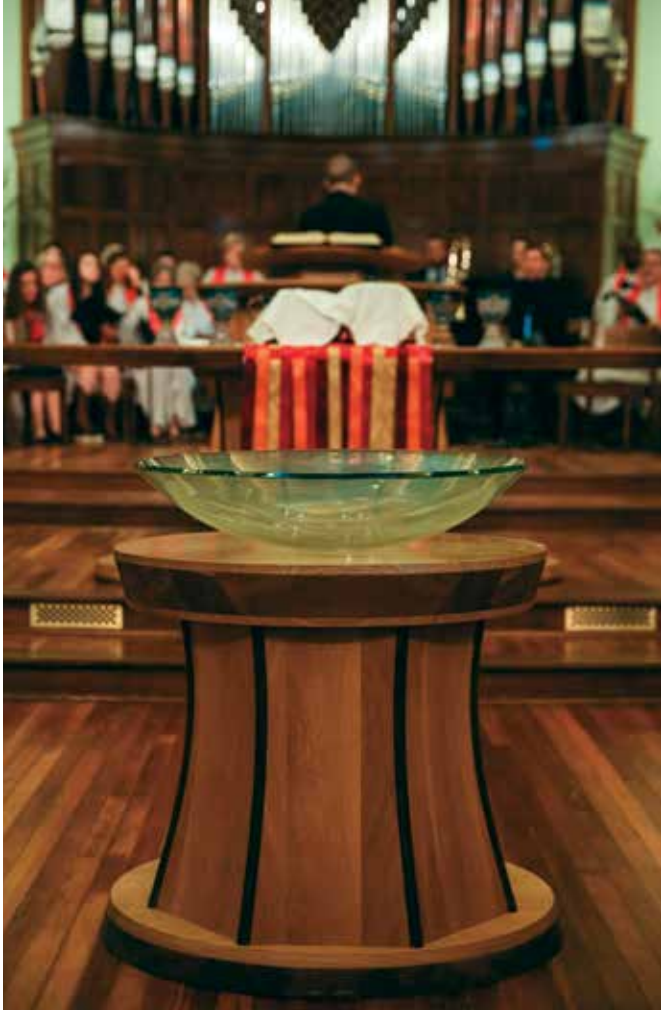


how do architects, designers, building committees, and worship planners harmonize the practices of our faith with holy space?

Seeking Harmony between Space and Faith

"Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2), the psalmist implores, but how do we define beauty? While beauty is in the eye of the beholder, art and architectures help shape the definition related to the faith community. Irvine and Dawtry suggest several criteria to be considered:

1. Proportion and Scale. Does the size of the church matter? Does it provide for us to meet one another as well as to be met by the other? Is there room for the visitor, the disabled, the visually impaired, the hearing impaired?
2. Honest Materials. Is the quality such that we would want to offer it to God?
3. Color and Texture. Are they harmonized? Does the color highlight the architectural lines and reveal the texture of the materials providing an element of warmth?
4. Composition and Form. Does it serve the needs of our worship practices?
5. Attention to Detail. Do the lighting and sound contribute or detract from the worship experience?
6. Craftmanship.[6] Does the design and construction reflect a commitment to worship or does it look cheap or haphazard? Were fair employment and trade practices considered in selecting furniture, materials, and designers?

In answering these questions, designers and church members make decisions that impact their ability to harmonize their beliefs about who God is, who they are, the relationship between all of those in the gathered assembly, and the intersection with the sacred space in which they gather. In his book *Curating Worship*, Jonny Baker relates this decision-making process about worship space to that of an artist. He writes:

> Art and worship both have a narrative or a history, depending on who does the telling. There is a tradition, a line of ancestry, a communion of artists and saints worldwide and down the ages. To curate is to be located in this line—sometimes straight, other times kicking off from, subverting, giving a new spin to, and opening up the traditions. It's how traditions get remade and taken forward.[7]

The act of curating sacred space can also come with consequences, as William Dyrness notes in his book *Senses of the Soul: Art and the Visual in Christian Worship*. Quoting Denny Bellesi, pastor of Coast Hills Church, Dyrness writes:

> Others can speak in very different ways of beautiful surroundings; that can be, for some, actually distracting. . . . Referring to his experience of visiting a Catholic Church [Bellesi] confides: "I spent a lot of time looking at the stations of the Cross—looking at the beautiful stained glass—and I mean I appreciate that stuff, but I am definitely not focusing on what I should be focusing on. . . . I could be visually stimulated and pray [in an ornate church] . . . but I think I would be very distracted.[8]

The balance between the extremes of curating meaningful space and distracting space must be accomplished in the context of each individual congregation and faith tradition. As Susan White and James White note, "The primary symbol of

Christian worship is always the community itself, assembled in Christ's name."[9] With this in mind, the decisions of architects, designers, church building committees, and worship planners are dependent on the individual context and character of the congregation for which the building is intended.

First Presbyterian Church of Dallas: A Case Study

Building History

First Presbyterian Church of Dallas was founded one day after the city's founding in 1841, though it took several reorganizations before the congregation was enrolled in the Presbytery of Eastern Texas in April 1856. During its more than 160-year history, the congregation has been housed in four different structures in downtown Dallas. The first building, a small wooden frame church, was home to the congregation from 1872 to 1882. A concert was held to help raise money for its construction, the first reference to a long history of music playing an integral role in the life of the congregation and its buildings.[10]

The second church building (1882–1887) was the first brick church built in the growing city.

In her history of the congregation written for the church's sesquicentennial, Carol J. Adams writes of the third building:

> The session decided to remodel the existing church. They enclosed the old church within a new outer edifice. . . . By 1897, the never-finished Gothic structure of the second church had been engulfed within a lavishly ornamental temple in the Romanesque style, culminating in a tall, 115-foot high spire. . . . The design was of the day, a high Victorian structure, with touches of prairie style as well.[11]

The first service was held in the renovated space on November 14, 1897.

Each subsequent building reflected the needs of the rapidly growing and changing congregation. In 1905, less than ten years from the completion of the third building, the session's minutes record conversations about the relocation of the congregation to the corner of Harwood and Wood Streets, just a few blocks from the current building. By 1910, the church had procured the new property and engaged with noted Dallas architect C. D. Hill to design the current Greek Revival building.[12]

Hill selected the Greek Revival style, the country's first truly national style, as it was coming back into vogue following the Chicago World Exposition in 1893.[13] The sanctuary interior was designed in the "auditorium" style, a floor plan commonly known as the Akron Plan, first employed at the First Methodist Church in Akron, Ohio. Keith Sawyers notes the popularity of this design in an article for the *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*:

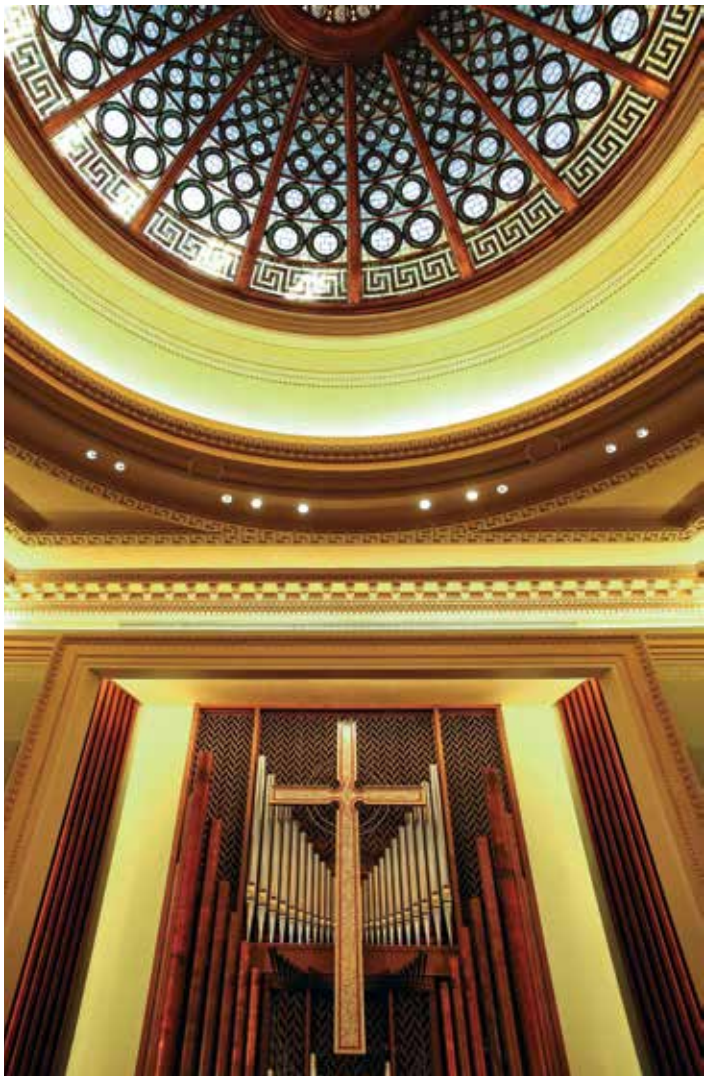
> During the last half of the nineteenth century a design scheme called the Akron plan was widely used by many Protestant congregations. It typically consisted of the auditorium arrangement of seating and platform plus a large adjacent room separated from the main meeting hall by a moveable partition. This multipurpose room served several functions. When the dividing partition was opened the room could accommodate overflow seating for the auditorium. When closed the partition defined a space used for Sunday school classes. The appearance of a church utilizing the Akron plan was distinctive and usually asymmetrical. The main entrance to the auditorium was typically through a tall corner tower. This arrangement was particularly appropriate for a corner lot and invited direct access from both streets. A secondary entrance was marked by a shorter tower positioned between the auditorium and the Sunday school.[14]

Dedicated in March of 1913, the new sanctuary featured modern features meant to accommodate the needs of a congregation at the turn of the twentieth century. The *Dallas Morning News* took note of the

church's built-in vacuum system: "The place will be spick[-and-span] without the use of broom or duster and there will be no flying particles to bring danger of disease."[15] Adams also notes that the new building included both electric and gas lights at a time when electricity was not always dependable.[16] The building also included sixty-seven art-glass windows, among them the large congregational window in the sanctuary, which were designed by the Kansas City Stained Glass Works Company.[17]

Renovations

As the congregation adapted with new ministry initiatives and changing times, the sanctuary and building were also subject to renovation. In 1927, the church added a new Sunday school building and gymnasium. The building campaign included money for renovations to the sanctuary. The three-manual E. M. Skinner organ was dedicated in 1928 as a part of this renovation. Also in the 1920s, the church began a long tradition of broadcasting services on WFAA, the local television station. This ministry would result in the construction of a mechanical booth in the back of the balcony that would remain until the 2017–2018 renovation.



In 1948, after much discussion, the Board of Deacons approved remodeling of the sanctuary to include air conditioning at the cost of $32,730, beginning a third significant renovation of the property at the corner of Wood and Harwood.[18] This renovation included a complete redesign of the chancel platform that would remain until the 2017–2018 renovation. The early air-conditioning system required compromises in the interior's décor. Chandeliers were removed for the installation of air supply vents. Windows along the back wall of the main floor, part of the original ventilation system, were removed and walled over, and the exhaust grill in the art-glass dome was plastered over. Additionally, the chancel platform was modified significantly to include a much larger central pulpit, modesty walls that separated the choir from the congregation, and the return of the communion table to a lower platform on the same level as the congregation.

In 1952, seat cushions were added for the first time, and the partition doors were removed in favor of a permanent wall.

In 1977, the church commissioned Dallas organ builder Robert Sipe to build a new organ. Approximately half of the pipes from the E. M. Skinner organ were reused in the new Kate Frierson Memorial Organ. The organ has won critical praise from all who have played it and has been featured in several conventions of the American Guild of Organists as well as the National Public Radio show *Pipe Dreams*.

In 1986, the church launched the "Building on the Cornerstone" project which included significant refurbishment to the sanctuary completed by the architects at the Oglesby Group. Conrad Schmidt Studios of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, were responsible for the paint renovations which brought more earth tones and gold coloring into the sanctuary.

2017–2018 Renovation

As the sanctuary entered its one hundredth year in 2013, discussions about the changing needs of worship, the role and purpose of liturgical furnishings, and new concepts for art, space, and musical considerations led the congregation to form

a task force to explore renovations to the space to serve another hundred years.

The task force engaged with Terry Byrd Eason, a liturgical designer based in Raleigh, North Carolina, to help shepherd the early discussions. Eason had assisted with the renovations of First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, Georgia, and Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta among others.[19] Initially, the task force was not considering historical renovation but rather solutions for challenges facing the congregation's ministry in the twenty-first century. A raked floor made accessible seating a problem. The chancel was completely inaccessible. The modesty walls of the 1948 renovation separated the choir and leadership from the congregation as musical trends and liturgical innovations called for these groups to be more connected than ever. The pews, original to the 1913 construction, had been poorly refinished during the 1980s and were in disrepair. Mechanical and sound systems were in need of replacement.

First Presbyterian Church of Dallas had eagerly embraced the 1993 *Book of Common Worship*, holding one of the national celebration events for its release, and desired greater flexibility and connection to the liturgical furnishings that had been outlined in the new rubrics for the Service for the Lord's Day included in *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (2013). Outdated, outsized (or undersized) furnishings made leadership from the font and table difficult.

Additionally, the musical and artistic needs of the congregation had changed. Greater flexibility with microphone inputs and the ability to display art on the blank wall or hang things above the chancel were desired. The walls of the chancel made accommodating orchestras difficult for the church's music ministry and concert series. The task force quickly discovered that many issues around the chancel platform could be solved by returning to a more historic design.

In 2016, the church launched a campaign, "Arise: Light and Love for a New Century," so named to echo the inscriptions above the exterior doors of the church: "God Is Love" and "God Is Light." After a successful campaign, a newly constituted sanctuary building committee engaged the services of Architexas, a local architecture firm specializing in historic renovation and restoration.[20]

Great time and energy were spent to ensure that the historical elements returned to the room complemented the twenty-first-century worship expressions of the congregation. Historic finishes were researched and restored, including the stripping of paint added to the original copper in the structure of the dome. Paint analysis by Jhonny Langer, an award-winning craftsman, revealed that the sanctuary had four difference color schemes (green, pink, beige, and finally gray).[21] The gold added in the 1980s renovation, especially in the dome, while historically informed, had been added to different locations, and an alloy had been used which caused oxidation and degradation. Original colors and accents were restored. The original 1913 pine wood floors were exposed while also correcting the rake of the floor to allow for accessible seating at both the front and back of the sanctuary. Two ramps were added on either side of the platform to allow accessibility for worship leaders.

New LED lighting was added to a cove around the room replacing fixtures that had been added in the 1980s renovation. New air supply grills were fabricated to allow chandeliers to return to the original locations while still serving as air conditioning supply ducts. State of the art sound and lighting controls replaced the old system in a new control location in the room replacing the mechanical booth at the back of the balcony. This booth had covered up an art-glass window depicting Jesus that was once again visible from inside the room.

New pews, designed to look like the original, were installed and reconfigured to allow for wider spacing between the pews and to create a center aisle—a feature desired by the church but not original to auditorium/Akron floor plans.

Perhaps the largest change came in the chancel platform. Once walled off and separate, the platform was redesigned as an open space from side wall to side wall. Choir risers were designed to be removable to allow for theatric or large-scale productions that require a flat space. New liturgical furnishings were designed and built by Erich Thompson, a Presbyterian minister and woodworker from North Carolina. Thompson's designs included a new font with a large glass bowl to replace the small, covered font that had been in use since the 1948 renovation.

The committee sought to create a space that not only addressed the needs of the current congregation but also one that acknowledged the many ways that worship and the church continue to change in the twenty-first century.

The construction was overseen by Byrne Construction of Ft. Worth, Texas; it took thirteen

months to complete the nearly five-million-dollar project, which was partially supported through historic tax credits from the Texas Historical Commission. During construction, the congregation worshiped in the Presbyterian Activity Center (the 1950s gymnasium) that had been renovated in a previous project. The time out of the sanctuary allowed the congregation to experience worship in a much more intimate space and led to creative solutions, again illustrating the way sacred space influences worship form.

The sanctuary was rededicated on January 27–28, 2018, with a concert featuring the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas Chancel Choir along with the Kansas State University Collegiate Chorale and orchestra on the evening of Saturday, January 27. The program included Haydn's *Te Deum* in C Major and Francis Poulenc's Organ Concerto in G Minor and *Gloria*. The first worship service on Sunday, January 28, began with the congregation gathering on the steps outside the building. In a slightly modified liturgy from the dedications section of the *Book of Common Worship* (2018), the congregation re-entered the sanctuary with worship. The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, who had served previously as a theologian-in-residence, preached the sermon. The celebration weekend concluded with a lecture by Dr. Ronald C. White, a noted scholar on Abraham Lincoln and a retired Presbyterian minister. Since its rededication, the sanctuary renovation project has been recognized with a Preservation Dallas and Preservation Texas award and was chronicled in the *Dallas Morning News* architecture section.[22]

The celebration weekend functioned as a metaphor for the way the building had served the community—both the faith community of First Presbyterian Church and also the wider Dallas community—for the previous century. A lecture about a political figure in a historic place, a concert offered free and open to the public, and worship around the font, pulpit, and table with people of all ages and walks of life symbolized the way a building, while not the church itself, is indeed a powerful, holy and dynamic space.[23]

Conclusion

As churches wrestle with their witness in the twenty-first century, many struggling with the upkeep of an aging facility, it is essential that they also recognize the role sacred space plays in the formation of the faith community. As the project at First Presbyterian Church of Dallas demonstrates, the harmonization of faith and form, space and practice are powerful indicators of a congregation's values, commitment, history, and hope for the future.

Notes

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3. Anne Dawtry and Christopher Irvine, *Art and Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 69.
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5. Dawtry and Irvine, 76
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7. Jonny Baker, *Curating Worship* (New York: Seabury Books, 2010), 13.
8. William Dyrness, *Senses of the Soul: Art and the Visual in Christian Worship* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 99.
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10. Carol J. Adams, ed., *Holding Forth the Word of Life: The Witness of a Downtown Church, First Presbyterian Church 1856–2006* (Dallas: First Presbyterian Church, 2006), 15.
11. Ibid., 38.
12. "Charles D. Hill," accessed May 13, 2019, http://significanthomes.com/architect/charles-d-hill.
13. Adams, 55.
14. Keith Sawyers, "Religious Architecture," *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2011), n.p.
15. Adams, 56.
16. Ibid., 57.
17. Ibid., 59.
18. Ibid., 122.
19. Terry Byrd Eason Design, www.terrybyrdeasondesign.com/presbyterian.htm.
20. For more on Architexas and First Presbyterian Church see http://architexas.com/project/first-presbyterian-church-dallas/.
21. See www.preservationtexas.org/honorawards/jhonny-langer-master-craftsman-award/.
22. See www.dallasnews.com/arts/architecture/2018/02/08/photos-first-look-insidearchitecturally-restored-1913-era-downtown-dallas-church.
23. Many of the comments in the section on the 2017–2018 renovation are from the author's perspective and participation as the staff member overseeing the renovation project and are drawn from session minutes and committee reports at First Presbyterian Church of Dallas (2013–2018).

Designing Together

Erich Thompson

I have often been asked how I come up with designs, whether for banners, murals, or furniture. Since I started designing and crafting worship furnishings that vary from the traditional, the questions have come more frequently. How did you come up with this? Where did you get this idea?

Since this work has developed more from who I am than from what I do, describing how it comes to me has been difficult. But having been prompted to consider it seriously, I have been sitting on my own shoulder and watching how these things happen. The simple answer is that it happens in all sorts of ways. The longer answer is that some ways are more reliable than others.

Let's start with the concept of creativity. There is a world of beautiful things and beautiful designs already. Choosing a design and replicating it is one way of answering the questions of what we will choose and what it will look like. But replicating is not creating. It is merely copying. Creating is doing a new thing. Granted, there are few things in the world of design that are truly new. I've often come up with what I thought were original solutions to design problems only to discover photos of pieces

two hundred or two thousand years old that display the same concepts. So, for our purposes I would say that creating is solving a problem in a way that is novel for the designer. It is not an appropriation, an homage, or the lifting of an idea from someone else. But at its core, creativity is solving a problem or resolving a conflict in a way that comes directly from the creator and is respectful of the multiple values of a project.

One example of creative problem solving that respects project values is mounting a microphone on a pulpit. We want the ability to physically mount a microphone on a pulpit. That is value number one. Value number two is that we don't want to see microphone cables draped about the pulpit like telephone lines. These two values are usually addressed by running the microphone through the riser box under the pulpit's reading table so that it stays unseen. But what happens if, as at First Presbyterian Church of Asheville, the design

Erich Thompson, a Presbyterian minister, designs and creates liturgical furniture in Greensboro, North Carolina.

of the pulpit is open and has no riser box? What happens, as at Peace Presbyterian Church, where the reading table is cantilevered well over the riser? I have seen too many times where the tension between the value of wanting a microphone mount and the value of not wanting visible cables gets addressed by dismissing the aesthetic value and honoring only the practical one. By drilling through the reading table and draping mic cable all over the place, the practical need rolls over the aesthetic need. Creative problem solving says that you can resolve the tension by running the cable within the thickness of the wooden reading table. Now we have microphone capability and no intrusive lines. This, to me, is the essence of creativity—resolving apparently conflicting values in a way that honors both function and aesthetics.

When worship communities decide to build or renovate, the design begins in total freedom and moves to a host of limitations. It generally starts with something like, "We are building or renovating worship space, so our options are wide open." Everyone has at least three ideas of how it will look. Then in fairly short order space and money establish some firm limits. Tying into existing structures imposes other limits. Choosing one set of options begins to preclude others. Before long, what started out as wide open starts feeling locked in. The creativity comes into play by working to allow options that might first seem to be mutually exclusive.

When I designed the pieces for Montreat Conference Center's Anderson Auditorium, I started with the font. Arlo Duba had requested a font with a large glass bowl. He wanted the base to "announce the Trinity" and to "remain simple so that the eye is drawn to the water." Using his parameters, I had a vision of what it would be. It took several days for me to work out the lines and proportions. A few years later, building on the font design, I worked for many months to take the three-legged design and turn it into a four-legged design for the table and pulpit. All of this was an internal creative process. It was not driven by any request. It included no conversations or discussions. It was simply a matter of my trying to use a theme and variation approach to build a suite of pieces that spoke in concert.

I have created a few designs that were primarily internal work. More and more, though, a new process is emerging, one of group creativity. I know that recalls images of committees charged with designing a horse but coming back with a camel, but it doesn't have to be that way. I have had several occasions in the past few years in which well-prepared committees have brought me in and allowed me to work with them, not for them. Such collaborations have allowed us to do amazing work together. Among them were committees at First Presbyterian Church of Asheville, North Carolina; First Presbyterian Church of Dallas, Texas; and Peace Presbyterian Church of Lakewood Ranch, Florida.

One of the keys to effective design work in a group is permitting, and even nurturing, positive conflict. It is a truism that wherever you have three committee members you have nine opinions. That means that mixed in with the desires for the status quo and the crazy ideas are some wonderful nuggets of insight and possibility that have been overshadowed by loud voices, strong personalities, and majority votes.

My presence readily stifles the discovery of those ideas. "He's the artist. What do I know?" Most folks are not confident in their artistic or aesthetic sensibilities. While they might risk designing their own living spaces, in community settings they demur to others rather than express what appeals to them. I try from the beginning to draw out each member of the committee, especially those who are quiet. I want to build solid trust within the group so that members will dare to speak of things both artistic and theological. These are not everyday conversations. It is only when trust is strong that members can risk sharing ideas that may be in conflict with each other. At that point, we can start finding common threads, unseen possibilities, and new directions. These are lessons that I have learned, and on which I have come to depend, because of my experience with committees such as those in Asheville, Dallas, and Lakewood Ranch.

In the first of these projects, Eric Wall, then director of music at First Presbyterian Church in Asheville, invited me to meet with the church's building committee. He pulled me aside and said something unexpected. "Speak theologically," he said. "Let them know from the start that their theology will be the basis on which your designs are done." It's a piece of advice that has served not just me, but all the congregations with which I have worked.

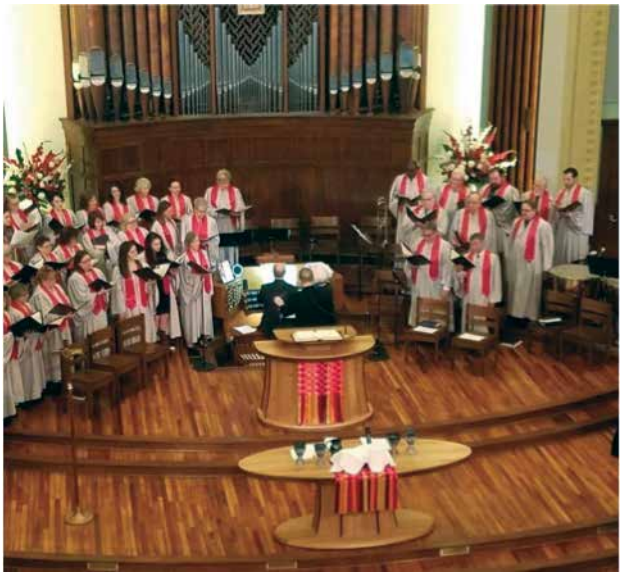
We started by working through three sets of questions: theological questions, practical questions, and questions of style, and they are found on pages 27–28.

The questions are not a checklist, the sum of which yields a design. These are questions intended to foster conversation about how, for example, the answers to stylistic questions impinge on theology and practicality, or how answers to theological questions influence practical decisions.

An example of this came up in Dallas as we considered the question of straight versus curved lines. The traditional pulpit and table are rectilinear and symmetrical. As the committee chair, an architect, pointed out, "They are in repose," or perhaps one could say "at rest." This is a traditional architectural value for worship spaces. It has its strengths but also its weaknesses since it can imply that it is static. So, I projected a picture of the sanctuary as it was and asked them to tell me where their eyes went. "The arched stained-glass window. The dome overhead. The organ pipes. The curve of the chancel floor. The curve of the pews." And so it went. Then I asked about the places of worship leadership. Are your eyes drawn to the table, font, or pulpit? "Well, no." So, I observed that the worship leaders were actually fighting the room for the worshipers' attention, and there were no curves or converging lines to help them out. What is intended as a great value doesn't always add to the dynamic processes of worship.

The design at which we arrived used a combination of curves and convergence. Like a planet's gravity capturing an object moving around in space, these curves attract eyes that are already wandering over the curves of the room and bring them to the points of worship leadership. The wood grain is tight and quiet, interesting, but not calling attention to itself. Wood areas are also trimmed with a dark edging at the corners and transitions. In this way, whether what is seen behind them is dark or light, they don't fade into the background. They are there to assist in the announcing of good news.

Sometimes the decisions that are made during the design process put theology and engineering in

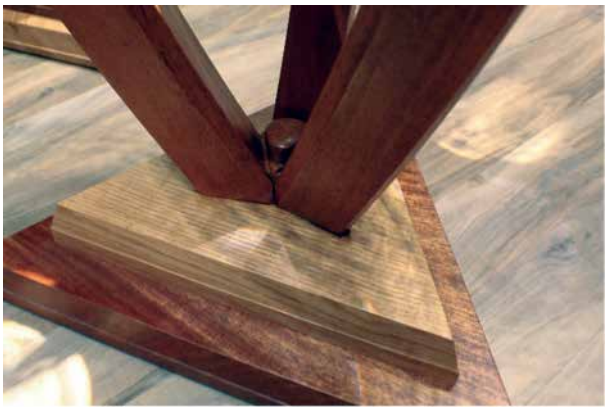


conflict. This was the case in designing the font for Peace Presbyterian. All of the pieces are Trinitarian in form. One of the desires for the font, which is at the entry into the church, was that the three legs of the font demonstrate that the persons of the Trinity emanate from the One. But the use of brackets to steady the legs was ruled out. The most perfect demonstration of this would have been to balance the body of the base on a single point, but that was not possible. The traditional joinery that I have seen and used to this point was also insufficient to carry the stresses and load of a large glass bowl, filled with water, and standing in the flow of traffic. Back and forth we went with one design idea after another, none of which satisfied the dual needs of theology and engineering.

This conflict became the point of creativity. I was ready to throw my hands up, but I was simultaneously pulled and pushed. I was pulled into the conflict—"You are too creative not to see a solution"—and pushed—"I'm not letting go, and you're not giving up." Or words to that effect.

The solution finally presented itself: a combination of making a well which would capture the bottom of the three legs, and then developing a wedge with an embedded bolt that compresses rather than braces the pieces in place.

I have had friends see new designs of mine in unexpected settings and recognize them as mine. I guess that is to be expected. But the end result of using a group design process such as this is that, while it might have my accent, its voice is that of the congregation speaking the theology and ministry of that worshiping community. In this way I am not merely an artist, but a translator of theology, faith, and hope into the vessels and symbols of a community's witness.



Theological Questions

Of all the theological principals of the church, which ones serve as special touchstones for this congregation?

How does this congregation understand its mission, both within this community and to the larger world?

If certain prayers could be lifted without ceasing, which prayers would be constantly lifted from this space?

How does this congregation extend an invitation to discipleship and partnership in ministry?

Practical Questions

Are there designated worship leadership areas in your worship space?

Where will they be and how large are they?

How large should the furnishings be?

Will they be fixed in place or movable? If moveable, how much can they weigh?

What must each regularly accommodate? Will festivals require greater accommodation?

Will furnishings be wired for sound or computers?

Are there lighting or height controls?

Will they fit through doors once assembled?

For the sake of their visibility, what colors and values will be beneath and behind the furnishings?

Style Questions

Classical or Contemporary? Are we wanting Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, even Federal or Chippendale forms that we associate with temples, cathedrals, or traditional worship spaces? Perhaps we are wanting something more free form. What might each choice indicate to worshipers?

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Open or closed forms? Should the table, font, and pulpit have legs, being visibly light and open? Should they be closed forms, behind which only the upper part of a worship leader may be seen? Or should there be a combination of the two? What is said by the use of each of these options?

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Simple or ornate? Should the furnishings be simple in detail or rich in ornamentation?

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Materials? Is wood the material of choice? What of brass, glass, or acrylic? What might each say of God and God's relationship with this community? What colors of materials are desired? Should color be uniform or contrasting?

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Curved or rectilinear? Parallel or converging? Thinking of the general form of the worship space, is it straight or curved lines? What happens if the furnishings are the same as the room? What happens if they are different?

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Sketch Your Ideas

Call to Worship at Okra Abbey

Hannah Quick

At first glance, Okra Abbey probably looks like a normal community garden. There is always a diversity of things growing. Some of the garden beds are filled with vegetables nearly ready for harvest, while others more recently seeded are just beginning to sprout. The garden beds are raised and made from colorfully painted cinderblocks, giving the garden a cheerful and welcoming aesthetic. It is not uncommon for those passing through the area to stop and ask if we are selling any of the produce, and if so for how much. Okra Abbey is a community garden—a giving garden to be more specific. It is also a sacred space for the residents of the Pigeon Town neighborhood in New Orleans. The unconventional nature of this sacred space, a garden with no building, allows for a wide welcome on a street lined with church buildings that are only open on Sunday mornings.

As you enter Okra Abbey you will see that we are not maximizing our growing space. This is intentional. Inside this sacred space we grow more than greens and carrots; we are growing a community and cultivating faith. In the center of the Abbey are a number of long tables covered by an overhang offering shade. These tables are truly the central gathering place of the community. Around these tables we share a weekly meal and at these tables we begin each day with a devotion and prayer. These tables are a work station when we plant and harvest and when we prepare produce bags for neighbors. And these tables are a place of play, the location of many chess games with neighbors and where we have heard all jokes. These tables are a place of work and worship. The space as a whole is designed to be both beautiful and functional. It is not so perfect that we are afraid of getting it dirty or feel unworthy to be ourselves amidst its beauty. It is a place where plants grow, where the community gathers, and where anyone is welcomed to take rest and admire the beauty in what is growing around them.

Unlike many sacred spaces, our sanctuary is not a building. There are no pews, no pulpit, no choir loft. Instead, our sanctuary is the garden. Although our sanctuary has no stained-glass windows, the raised garden beds are painted with biblical narratives from both the Old and New Testaments. At the far end of the Abbey there is an open space with a prayer labyrinth painted on the ground. The stained-glass garden beds and prayer labyrinth hint that this is a sacred space and offer tools for teaching and leading devotions. Although we are not in a conventional space, we are not interested in leaving all convention behind.

Just as the sanctuary of Okra Abbey is unconventional, the congregation that makes up this beautiful community is wildly more diverse than most Presbyterian churches are on any given Sunday morning. Okra Abbey strives to be a sacred space for the neighborhood, and as a result, most of the people who feel a sense of belonging at the Abbey live and/or work in the immediate area. For a long time, the Pigeon Town neighborhood of New Orleans has felt forgotten. The residents are overwhelmingly low-income, and many of our community members struggle with homelessness, addiction, mental illness, and food insecurity. The problems of this neighborhood are real, making the need for welcome and hospitality that much greater. For our most vulnerable community members,

Hannah Quick is organizing pastor and executive director of Okra Abbey,
a new worshiping community in New Orleans, Louisiana.

hospitality is rarely offered, even by those attempting to meet their physical needs. But Okra Abbey is not solely a ministry for the most vulnerable; we are a community for all. And surprisingly, people from all backgrounds, income levels, and educational standing are invested in this community.

When it comes to sharing the food we grow at the Abbey, we seek both to gather people around our tables and to greet people in their homes.

Okra Abbey takes both our name and our philosophy for ministry from the traditions of historic abbeys. According to Wikipedia, abbeys were "often self-sufficient while using any abundance of produce or skill to provide care to the poor and needy, refuge to the persecuted, or education to the young." In addition many abbeys served as way stations where travelers could stop and rest and receive nourishment for their bodies and souls before continuing on their journey.[1]

Okra Abbey is not self-sufficient since we do not sell our harvest, nor is it a formal educational institution, but we strive to be a place of refuge for the outcast and a community that cares for the most vulnerable with the resources we have on hand. Our goal is to be inspired by the missional nature of the abbeys of the past and to practice those values of hospitality in the urban garden space that we have the privilege of occupying today. We grow vegetables to share with the community and provide a beautiful and safe space for our neighbors to find rest and receive physical nourishment and spiritual renewal. When our gates are open Monday through Friday anyone is welcome in. We always offer cold water, coffee, snacks, and a listening ear for those who need to talk or a prayer for those who need comfort. The vegetables we grow are certainly a resource we have to offer, but so is the space itself and the hospitality we offer. Every once in a while, a community member will join us in the work, tending to the garden by weeding, sifting the compost, or watering, but more often people prefer to just be in the space. The Abbey provides an escape from the rest of the world, a refuge from noise and expectations. It is a place where one can find rest and a moment of peace.

When it comes to sharing the food we grow at the Abbey, we seek both to gather people around our tables and to greet people in their homes. On Wednesday afternoons we gather at the Abbey for a weekly meal called Grace and Greens. The meal is free and open to all. While many who attend truly depend upon it, it is designed to feel more like a family meal. Community members help cultivate a culture of welcome by spreading the word and actively inviting their own family members and neighbors regardless of need. The meal is prepared by a local chef with produce grown at Okra Abbey—a blessing beyond words and yet another example of the collaborative nature of this gathering. Staff members of Okra Abbey coordinate the setup and handle the cleanup, but they are never alone. Everyone finds a way to pitch in, serving their neighbor, washing dishes, putting away chairs—the list goes on and on. As I watch the logistics of the Grace and Greens meal come together, and as I watch neighbors from different backgrounds break bread together, I see glimpses of the kingdom of God breaking through. And truly above all else, it is this in-breaking of the kingdom that matters most and has the biggest impact.

As we invite people to gather at Okra Abbey our hope is to build up a community that reflects the diversity of our neighborhood and the kingdom of God. We hope to provide a welcome that is wide enough to include the most vulnerable members of our community while also practicing hospitality that is compelling enough to reach those who may not need a free meal, yet still desire community. What has become apparent at Okra Abbey is that when we build up relationships across the boundaries that normally separate us in the neighborhood, we are able to see the humanity in one another. When our community looks more like the kingdom of God, we are able to see one another as the children of God and not the problems that we carry or the struggles we endure.

We begin the meal with a devotion that reminds us that we are in a sacred space and we are practicing faith as we share this meal. The devotion might be a quick discussion, a brief homily, or a liturgy. With the devotion we seek to offer a meaningful reflection on a passage of Scripture or a theme of the Christian faith that brings both comfort and challenge as we live together and break bread together. The devotion helps frame the meal as more than a typical meal; this is our time of worship. During Holy Week we celebrate the Lord's Supper alongside the Grace and

Greens meal. The communion liturgy replaces the devotion, and the bread and juice are incorporated into the meal. The table is lined with baskets of bread filled generously so that everyone is able to have multiple helpings, and each cup has a healthy serving of grape juice. In celebrating the Lord's Supper in this way, we are able to communicate that this sacrament is truly a celebration.

During our deliveries, we have an opportunity to pray with our community members about whatever is on their hearts and mind.

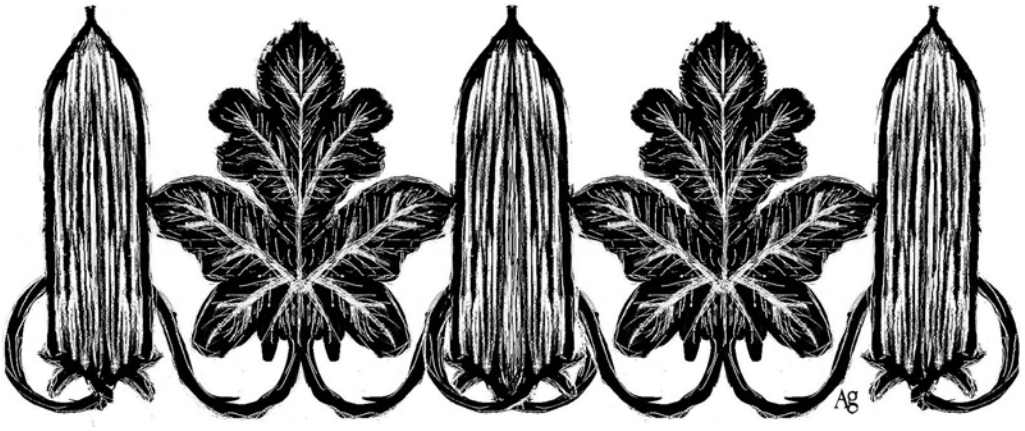
While many aspects of the Okra Abbey community look vastly different from more conventional congregations, we too care for a number of elderly and homebound community members. Many of our immediate neighbors have limited access to fresh produce; they also hunger for meaningful interaction with different visitors. In order to address these needs, a neighborhood vegetable delivery program called Peas & Love was instituted to make visits and deliveries a part of the regular rhythms of Okra Abbey. By design our deliveries are not quick and efficient but instead are neighborly visits. As a team we complete six to seven visits a week with each household receiving a bag of produce every other week. During our deliveries, we have an opportunity to pray with our community members about whatever is on their hearts and minds. The Okra Abbey team serves a pastoral role, celebrating victories and offering comfort in times of sorrow. We often receive updates on family members and health concerns, but the best part is hearing stories about what happened last week or what the neighborhood was like years ago. During these visits we are building real relationships, and it is our hope that the Peas & Love program makes our neighborhood healthier, happier, and more connected by extending the hospitality of the Abbey beyond the gates of the garden.

Like other sacred spaces, Okra Abbey is a place where people grow in friendship and faith alongside one another through the sharing of stories, Scripture, prayers, and food. But an unconventional space provides an opportunity to build an unconventional community around new traditions. We are not bound by the expectation of what a church "should look like" and what a church "should do." The customs of the Okra Abbey community are formed by the needs of the larger community and what allows us to address those needs: the need for food, the need for community, the need for quiet and rest, the need for spiritual nurture. By gathering a community in a garden, we have the opportunity to redefine what a sacred space looks like and who is welcomed inside this sacred space. For many of our community members who come from a wide array of faith backgrounds and upbringings, this is necessary to have an honest faith life and a real sense of belonging. The setting of the Abbey in an urban garden allows us to meet people where they are and watch a community organically grow and reflect the kingdom of God.

For more information about Okra Abbey and how you can support this ministry, go to okraabbey.com.

Note

1. Wikipedia, s.v. "Abbey," last modified May 16, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbey.



Amy E. Gray

Beacon

Rebecca Blake

I have always been fascinated by the creation story, with its dramatic movements, swirling elements and colors, and at its heart a God longing for expression and relationship. This God that we worship is a creative Creator God, who made us in God's image. At our core as humans, we were created to create; we were made to make. Often when we consider the intersection of visual art and sacred spaces, we think of stained-glass windows that tell the stories of our faith or traditional fabric paraments depicting liturgical colors and symbols. But there are so many more opportunities to experience the power of creativity and how art can speak to faith than adornment of our sanctuaries or storytelling.

I've been grateful to explore these opportunities as the cofounder and pastor of Beacon Church, a recently chartered church and designated new worshiping community of the PC(USA). From its beginning we sought a variety of ways to incorporate visual art into ministry. As a community arts educator, artist, and pastor, I had seen the ways in which creating art projects in community with others transformed relationships and crossed all kinds of social and economic barriers. I experienced this first when I started and led a therapeutic art group with individuals experiencing homelessness and mental illness in Center City, Philadelphia's central urban district, and the work was so transformational both for participants and for our (often suburban) volunteers that we sought to build community in a different corner of the city with a similar approach.

The context in which I explored these intersections of art, worship, and faith were key, as each context is so different and brings with it different needs, assets, and opportunities. Beacon's context is a neighborhood that is densely urban, not far from Center City, with a history of industry as well as poverty and addiction, and most recently, gentrification that started slowly then quickly accelerated. Our neighborhood is one with a rich history, an innate sense of hospitality, a dedicated work ethic, and a sense of being forgotten by institutions and the city at large. This meant that as newcomers to that part of Philadelphia, we had a lot of trust to build and much to learn about the ways in which God was already moving in this neighborhood. Building trust is complicated and takes a long time; forging connection across significant differences can be just as challenging. We worked to keep those who had been burned by the church and those who had never set foot in a church in mind as we crafted programming and worship at Beacon.

Through years of program pilots and a lot of trial and error, two particularly powerful ways of incorporating art into the life of a faith community have become foundational to our approach of loving and witnessing to the good news already at work in our surrounding neighborhood. These are community art-making and using both permanent and temporary aesthetics to communicate welcome and tell the story of a place and the story of God.

When it comes to building relationships between people and reaching out to neighbors and inviting them to church, churches often offer community meals. Whether they are potluck, themed, connected to a season or holiday, or just open to everyone, it's a

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a faith community in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia.

The tricky thing about building connection over meals is that community meals still carry with them some social barriers that are hard to overcome.

long-standing tradition of many churches both large and small.

The tricky thing about building connection over meals is that community meals still carry with them some social barriers that are hard to overcome. Especially when participants bring with them significant differences of politics, belief, background, ethnicity, or income, it is hard to hold in tension a delight over our differences and an awareness of our shared humanity. But when people *make* something next to one another, whether it's an art project or assembling hygiene kits for a service project, several things take place that make relationship building happen organically. The act of creating something relieves the pressure to *have* to talk right away. Beyond that, the project that is being made becomes a natural and neutral conversation starter. Instead of jumping into the deep end with a personal question, neighbors can comment on another person's unique blend of color or encourage one another when they get frustrated. There's also an element of shared vulnerability when we create together; both making art and doing something just for fun are things we don't allow ourselves to do often. Entering into a comfortable amount of vulnerability as others are doing the same yields a special kind of connection. Participants also begin to connect over the act of creating itself, its inherent challenges, delights, and beauty. From that shared experience and foundation, deeper connections can grow as the art project reminds participants of previous experiences they want to share or makes space for admissions that this activity is new or strange for them. Soon, questions about a person's story and beliefs flow easily.

This process can take shape in all kinds of ways. Initially at Beacon we facilitated this trust building and community development by doing therapeutic art projects with children at a once-weekly after-school program. We also offered an evening "open art studio" for adults, but never quite reached those we had in mind, so we went back to the drawing board to discern how to invite adults into the powerful process of creative expression. Over time, the needs of the neighborhood changed and after-school care was no longer needed, so we pivoted the program to become quarterly art workshops for families. Nearly seven years after our initial vision of neighbors of all ages gathering together to make art, it finally happened at these free, nonreligious, all-ages art workshops. We witnessed connections deepen within families and saw bonds form, sometimes for the first time, between neighbors. Projects have included things like painting pumpkins or decorating gingerbread houses, as well as more contemplative and faith-based art workshops like intuitive vision boards, collage self-portraits, or time capsules.

The second major way that art has been foundational to the practice of the life of our faith community has to do with the aesthetics of our sacred space itself. Christians have long used images to tell the stories of our faith; we wondered, "What if the way our space is arranged, designed, and decorated also told a story of mission, vocation, and welcome?" This has shown up in the life of Beacon in two ways: a permanent light installation called "The Lights on Cumberland Street," and various temporary, interchangeable visual elements that were created by community members.

"The Lights on Cumberland Street" is a light installation made up of nearly two hundred small, industrial-style lightbulbs. The idea came about after I had seen pictures of a temporary light installation in Chicago made of far more lightbulbs that hung from a frame twenty feet high all the way to the ground. Observers of the art installation were invited to walk through the curtains of light. I showed it to my co-pastor at the time and lamented that we couldn't do something similar in the yard in front of Beacon for the season of Advent. She replied, "But what if we could do this in the sanctuary?" Intimidated but intrigued, we started exploring the idea with sketches and conversations with a community member with theater design experience. We met a local lighting designer who assessed that it could be done, then drew up a budget and began the process of crowdfunding the installation. Through the generosity of another community member, we made a short film about the project and invited individual donors to contribute, offering the option of commemorating or honoring a loved one by dedicating one of the lights in their name.

The project took on several layers of meaning. The commitment to doing a light installation in the first place was a nod to the name we inherited from

the church that had been in the same space before and had closed—Beacon Presbyterian Church. Traditionally people associate images of lighthouses with the word *beacon*, but we were in a city, nowhere near a lighthouse. The industrial-style lightbulbs pointed to the history of industry in the neighborhood. We wanted to acknowledge that we had not come to this neighborhood to save or fix anything but to participate in the work God was already doing, the beauty that was already here. By using small-sized lightbulbs but shaping the whole installation into a multidimensional piece and hanging the lightbulbs at different heights, both the beauty of our individual neighbors and the beauty of our collective neighborhood were recognized.

The lights also made a theological statement: we are called individually to shine the light of God in the world, but when we join together with others, the impact is far more powerful. Additionally, the installation was designed so that it would be seen from either side of our building on the street. We wanted to be clear that this was not a faith community that hoarded the gifts of others, but one that aimed to provide a space to gather the gifts—the "lights"—of our neighborhood and to send people back out to share that goodness and love with others. Lastly, the installation comes to its lowest point in the center of the room, which is where the communion table is usually placed during worship. As a faith community that celebrates communion every week and finds that generous outpouring of grace to be the foundation of all that we do, we were excited that the installation would subtly point to that table and the meal that knits together those who gather weekly and the saints who have gone before us, the body of Christ.

"The Lights on Cumberland Street" was unveiled during a community celebration. The names of our donors and those honored were displayed on a wall just outside the sanctuary. The light installation continues to be a conversation starter, and community members enjoy unpacking its layers of meaning to newcomers and visitors. Because it was crowdfunded and because donors could commemorate others, the project took on a feeling of shared ownership among a few hundred people, though our weekly worshiping community remains on the smaller side. In and of itself the installation tells a story about who Beacon is called to be—a story that invites neighbors to be a part of it.

While not every church can make such a change to their space, all churches do have an opportunity to ask the question "What story is our space telling?" Are there ways in which we can examine, discover, and articulate the meaning of different aesthetic aspects of our sacred spaces that communicate our mission, vision and purpose? Some churches, including Beacon, have begun repurposing parts of their sanctuaries to be more overtly welcoming to children. Often called "pray-grounds,"[1] these areas often include soft rugs, child-sized tables and chairs, picture books, and cushions. Whether we make room for them by removing a pew or two, or as in Beacon's case, repurposing a long defunct choir loft, these are strong visual cues that give a message: children are not simply tolerated in worship, they are celebrated, included, and involved in worship.

While temporary, interchangeable works of art are not new in the church (thematic banners and liturgically colored paraments are still common in most mainline traditions), what makes this kind of art particularly powerful in Beacon's practice is the fact that they are co-created by the community members themselves. This can happen in a myriad of ways but has happened at Beacon in three primary ways; I will describe those and then lift up an additional idea we are planning to try.

The first and most visually impactful are banners made from a process called circle painting. I was introduced to this process during an educational offering at the Grunewald Guild in Washington State a few years ago. The process is incredibly simple with a powerful visual result. We begin with a table draped in paper or canvas. Each participant stands around the table with a different color of paint and a paintbrush. Each person is encouraged to use the paint to make patterns, words, and/or images in the space directly in front of them for thirty seconds to two minutes (the time varies depending on the number of people involved). Then participants

We wanted to be clear that this was not a faith community that hoarded the gifts of others, but one that aimed to provide a space to gather the gifts—the "lights"—of our neighborhood and to send people back out to share that goodness and love with others.

are invited to move one space to the right. This is repeated again and again until everyone arrives at their initial spot. The process is naturally collaborative and frees participants from getting too hung up on perfection or having their design show through, as it's likely that someone else's pattern will blend with theirs. The result is an abstract banner that is saturated with color and brushstrokes. It is the ultimate project for those who claim to be unartistic and lacking in creativity. Each participant's individual dashes, circles, and shapes are joined by other colors and shapes, and the result is something objectively beautiful. All of a sudden those who wear "unartistic" like a badge are surprised to see that they too can create beauty. It is a profound way to teach the truth that we are made in the image of our creative Creator God, who desires relationship. We were made to make, and we were made to be in community with one another.

Each participant's individual dashes, circles, and shapes are joined by other colors and shapes, and the result is something objectively beautiful.

These paintings can be tweaked for different ages and circumstances. You might choose to restrict the color palette to purples and blues for Advent, yellows and whites for Easter, and so on. One time we had a Bible study while painting: people absentmindedly painted their patterns while they listened to and shared various perspectives on the Bible story. Paper, primed canvas, and satin will all give different results, and the fun is in trying them out and seeing what fits best in your space.

The second way we've incorporated community art-making into the aesthetics of the sanctuary itself has to do with cumulative, collaborative art projects. These involve inviting participants to contribute something small toward the art project, either in one service or over the course of several weeks. These small pieces are then arranged and rearranged into an object or image that is related to the season's theme or an image pulled from Scripture. While it helps to have someone who is artistically inclined doing this arranging work, the ideas for the projects have often come from a very collaborative brainstorming process with people who claim to not have any artistic talent. These art projects can stay up in the sacred space just for the space of that day or for a season. One favorite project from Beacon is a mosaic cross made over the course of Lent. Pieces of wood cut at various angles were laid out on a table, and each week glue was added to a different piece of wood so worshipers could place a piece of ceramic or a glass bead in the glue. At the end of Lent the cross was assembled and grouted, then unveiled on Easter Sunday.

Another project involved making a three-dimensional textured collage by crumpling up prayers written on different-colored papers and gluing them to a canvas in a design meant to evoke an image of a flame. We used colored paper in another way during Advent one year, when worshipers were invited to name both their hopes and their fears on different colored pieces of paper that filled up a large glass bowl over the season. These papers were arranged on a floor mural made from primed, edged canvas, with the darker, cooler colors at the edges and lighter, warmer colors at the center, creating a loose starburst image. On Christmas Eve this floor mural was unveiled with gold ribbons and stars hanging from the ceiling above the center of the mural. Visually it represented how well our Advent Scriptures hold in tension hope, excitement, and fear.

These kinds of projects have limitless possibilities and can be formed within whatever structure is helpful for your context. Perhaps sticking with paper and collage is best for you, or maybe textiles work well. Some may be open to working with paint (just make sure to have extra volunteers nearby with water and hand towels).

The third way we've integrated art into common life is what we have called "contemplative coloring" or "coloring prayer." It has been shown that coloring can have calming effects on children and adults alike, and as the practice has become more popular over recent years, it has become easier to incorporate it into Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and even session meetings. We typically offer this in two ways: using a washable, reusable tablecloth on which people can color in abstract designs (available online), or utilizing coloring posters from the company Illustrated Children's Ministry.[2] These posters are designed around Scriptures and liturgical themes and are easy ways for people of all ages to create beauty. We've used these posters for coloring during Lent and Advent; the finished posters have been displayed in the sanctuary during Eastertide

and in other spaces around the building during other times of the year.

I would like to lift up the curriculum and projects that are being developed by another creative arts collective called A Sanctified Art.[3] Their instructions on how to facilitate the activities and the projects are beautiful and theologically grounded. One kind of project I am eager to try is their cut-paper banner project. The process involves projecting an image onto a large piece of paper, tracing the negative spaces, and either painting or cutting out those spaces with a utility blade. The banners themselves are often abstract but contain recognizable images that speak to a particular season or Scripture. The tracing, painting, and/or cutting out processes can be done communally and provide another way for those claiming to be unartistic to contribute to a beautiful work of art.

All of these ways of making art collaboratively to display in a sacred space facilitate a special dynamic that is different than what happens at a secular therapeutic art workshop.

All of these ways of making art collaboratively to display in a sacred space facilitate a special dynamic that is different than what happens at a secular therapeutic art workshop. Building connection and relationship still happens. The discovery of one's own innate creativity still happens. Yet participants feel a deeper sense of participation in and ownership of a communal space. The sanctuary does not feel any less sacred than it did before, but somehow participants are able to feel more at home there, to feel a deeper sense of belonging. When the temporary art installations are in a space, they proclaim a truth about us, they tell the stories we had in mind while we contributed to its making, and they speak of our commitment to trusting that God is up to something in our midst. Even when we cannot see the future, God is at work bringing about beauty, redemption, and resurrection. Even when we cannot see the fruit of our efforts, God is nurturing those seeds and welcomes our participation in God's own work of building the beautiful and beloved community God had in mind at creation. In many ways these art installations function as a visual sermon, reminding us who and whose we are, and that our contributions matter.

More than that, making art that then lives in a sacred space reminds us that the lines between the sacred and the mundane are actually quite blurred. God can show up as we look out the window while washing dishes, as we cook a meal for loved ones, as we color in a coloring book with our children. This process teaches us to be on the lookout for God's beauty and love in unexpected corners of our world. The appreciation of art and beauty as something that comes from God, through the beloved children whom God created, is a powerful dynamic in our faith formation. We are called to be storytellers of the good news, to seek out God working in the world, and to share our gifts, energy, imagination, and love in that community-building that God is doing. And we have an under-utilized but dramatically effective tool right here at our fingertips: art-making in community and storytelling via aesthetics. Implementing this tool is often messy and takes some getting used to. But as we open ourselves to the process and invite God to teach us something in it and through it, we just might find ourselves with a paint-covered apron, seeing each other, God, ourselves, and our sacred spaces in a different, more multifaceted, more beautiful light.

Notes

1. I first encountered this term for kid-friendly areas in sanctuaries in this news story about a Lutheran church in Minnesota: https://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/minnesota-church-incorporates-littlest-visitors-pray-ground/story?id=39253999.
2. For more information go to www.illustratedchildrensministry.com.
3. For more information go to https://sanctifiedart.org.

More information about Beacon is at thewordatbeacon.org; more information about Rebecca is at beccaeblake.com.

Who Does *What* from *Where* and *Why*? Liturgical Space in the 2018 *Book of Common Worship*

Marney Ault Wasserman

What's in a Rubric?

When we are reading a Bible, we know that the red letters are important: by widespread printing practice, they are the words of Jesus. But in a liturgical book like the *Book of Common Worship*, the red letters (or rubrics) are simply stage directions, and we often read right over them without paying much attention to what they say. In the newly revised *Book of Common Worship* (2018), that habit would lead us to miss an important aspect of what is new in this resource. The rubrics in the Presbyterians' latest liturgical book give a number of pointed clues about which parts of worship might appropriately be led from the font or the table, rather than from the pulpit, and they tell us who, besides the pastor, might fruitfully be asked to lead certain parts of the liturgy. In other words, they tell us a lot about how to make good use of our liturgical spaces, and how best to employ the varied gifts for ministry of the people who worship in them. These are more than simple stage directions. Embedded in these new rubrics is a liturgical theology that aims to treat Word and Sacrament as equal partners in the Service for the Lord's Day, and seeks to ground our worship in the core baptismal identity and calling we all share as followers of Jesus Christ.

So how, you may wonder, did these rubrics come to be included in the newest revision of our *Book of Common Worship*? At least part of the answer would send us back to 2006 when the General Assembly adopted "Invitation to Christ: A Guide to Sacramental Practices at Font and Table."[1] This document called all PC(USA) congregations to "renewal, through Word and Sacrament, of our life together in Jesus Christ, by engaging in practices that deepen baptismal life and discipleship." Specifically, it invited congregations to explore five simple sacramental practices, together with reflection on how those practices impact the church's life and ministry. The five practices are:

(1) Set the font in full view of the congregation.
(2) Open the font and fill it with water on every Lord's Day.
(3) Set cup and plate on the Lord's table on every Lord's Day.
(4) Lead appropriate parts of weekly worship from the font and from the table.
(5) Increase the number of Sundays on which the Lord's Supper is celebrated.

In the thirteen years that have passed since 2006, there is ample evidence that many of the denomination's churches took that invitation to heart. So much so that today it is not uncommon to enter a Presbyterian sanctuary on a Sunday morning to find the font full of water, even when no baptism is scheduled. And a growing number of our churches report that they celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday in at least one of their services. Changes in sacramental practice do not (and probably should not!) happen overnight. But the incremental transformation that is in progress here reveals that the 2018 *Book of Common Worship* is equipping a different church for worship than the church its predecessor liturgical book addressed in 1993, over a quarter century ago. We have been gradually becoming a church more ready to seek out the mystery of God that the sacraments embody, a church leaning into richer baptismal and eucharistic practices right alongside our historic Reformed commitment to strong proclamation of the word of God. And we may be hopeful that this

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is also serving the much larger goal of "renewing our very life together in Jesus Christ."

Back to Basics

Let's begin with some theological grounding for our exploration of the new *Book of Common Worship* and its orientation to liturgical space.[2] When Lutheran scholar Gordon Lathrop wrote *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* in 1993, he helped the contemporary church reclaim a very simple idea from our early Christian ancestors that we seemed to have all but forgotten. It is the insight that Christian worship is ordered around three essential things: the word, the bath, and the meal.

> These essentials are, quite simply, a community gathered around word and sacrament. Or, to say it more fully, they are a participating community together with its ministers gathered on the Lord's Day in song and prayer *around the scriptures*, read and preached; *around the baptismal washing,* enacted or remembered; and *around the holy supper*.[3]

We can affirm each of these three essential things. (1) The church is a holy people who come together in worship to hear the Scriptures proclaimed, to receive a life-giving word from God. We know this well, we do it every Sunday. (2) In Sunday worship, we gather as a community around Christ's table to eat bread and drink wine together, to give God grateful thanks, and to be sent out with bread and good news for hungry neighbors. We know this too, although most of us still do it significantly less often than weekly. And (3) in Sunday's worship, we wash in water those who have come new to our gathering, who are learning the ways of discipleship and faith; or we remember the baptisms, our own and those of others, that have given us to one another as the church. We also know this, although we experience it least often, baptism being an occasional, and in many congregations, infrequent event. In Sunday's worship, we do all of these central things with singing and prayer, confident that Christ comes among us in them.

The word, the bath, and the meal, Lathrop reminds us, stand at the very center of Christian worship. In a time when there is much freedom for congregations to order both the content and the form of worship as they choose, it is a good gift for the church to be clear about what is central and what is peripheral. Some of the peripheral things may be helpful embellishment, enhancing our engagement with the central actions; others may be harmful distractions, pulling us away, or worse, contradicting the very gospel we proclaim. But without a strong and clear articulation of the core things of Jesus Christ at the center of our Sunday gathering, our worship cannot point clearly to the risen Lord we seek to serve.

Lathrop is bold in insisting that the centrality of word, bath, and meal is not simply an in-house matter for the church, an issue of ecclesial correctness. His aim is not so much to help the church "do worship" right, or even "do church" right, but much more deeply to help us get the gospel and the Christian life right. The central practices around word, bath, and meal are given to the church, he argues, for no lesser purpose than to "speak and show Jesus Christ, so that the nations may live."[4] While we gather Sunday after Sunday as the church, the Christian assembly does not worship for its own sake, but for the praise of our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore, always, for the sake of the world he came to save. Word, bath, and meal not only gather us in, together, around the central identifying things of Jesus; they also push us out again into the world for ministry and mission, sacrifice and service.

> Word, table and bath occur at the heart of a participating community so that all people may freely encounter God's mercy in Christ, that they may come to faith again and again, that they may be formed into a community of faith, that they may be brought to the possibility of love for God's world.[5]

Going a step further, Lathrop warns us against worship that is unhinged from these central things of Christ:

> . . . Christian communities and their leaders have a responsibility to let these things always *be* and *be seen to be* at the center of our gatherings. The word *worship* itself may mislead us into thinking that when we gather we may do anything which seems appropriate to us as "worship"—any sort of singing, any sort of "God-talk," any sort of exercise. But *if our gathering is about the grace of God in Jesus Christ, we cannot do*

> *without word and sacrament*. To pretend that "Christian freedom" includes freedom from these central things of Christ may be only to choose the bondage of our own opinions, our own religion, our own selves masquerading as God.[6]

We cannot do without the Word and both sacraments, if we are aiming for worship that is grounded in, and gives full witness to, the crucified and risen Christ of Scripture. The word, the meal, and the bath are the central actions of this worship. Alongside them, the book of our Scriptures, the bread and wine, and the water are the "holy things," the sacramental elements we use in those actions. And pulpit, font, and table are the pieces of liturgical furniture which bear those elements in our midst, and at which we perform those central actions—speaking and listening, washing and welcoming, eating and drinking and giving thanks.

Identity and Mission

I have dwelt at some length on Lathrop's understanding of worship, because I believe he not only reminds us where the bottom line is, but he helps us understand *why* it might be important to lead portions of worship from font, table, and pulpit, as our newly revised *Book of Common Worship* so clearly encourages. For if we need both Word and sacrament to point fully to Christ, if we need to be grounded in our Christian identity and mission through the tangible signs of the bread and wine and the water, as well as through the spoken word—then clearly all three pieces of sanctuary furniture corresponding to those signs will help us. Obviously, we celebrate the Lord's Supper at his table and we perform baptisms at the font, for the practical reason that we need to use the sacramental elements that are located there.

There is an even more basic reason we need those elements, however: *on every Sunday* when we gather, we need to be reminded of who and whose we are, and of how we are called to live. Just as the Bible in worship reminds us that we are a people of The Book, a people who belong not to just any god, but to the God whose story is told in our sacred Scriptures—so also the water in worship tells us, visibly, audibly, that we are children of God, adopted, loved, baptized, forgiven, and joined to Christ and his church. Likewise, the bread and wine remind us incarnationally that we are one people joined together in Christ's love and service, friends of the risen Lord for whom God graciously and generously provides. All three are signs of our identity as those who belong to Christ.

At the same time, all three are signs that point us toward our mission as his disciples. The font sends us out to live our baptism in daily life, the table compels us to feed others as we have been fed—just as surely as the gospel proclaimed from the pulpit equips us with good news to tell the world. In Word and sacraments, we discover both our identity and our calling. The Lord we belong to, and the mission we are sent on, are spoken in the Word read and preached, and made visible, tasted, and touched, in water, wine, and bread. We need these central things because they are potent and irreplaceable reminders, given to us by God, of who we are and how we are called to live as followers of the risen Christ.

When the church gathers for worship on Sunday, a sanctuary in which the pulpit, the font, and the table are all clearly visible and interrelated can help a worshiping congregation understand itself as a people gathered in Christ around his word, his bath, and his meal. How these spaces are used will also communicate their purpose and their value. A communion table that is always set for a meal—and free of other things unrelated to that meal (like the Bible, hymnals, flowers, offering plates, even the candles)—tells us we are a family gathered at our Lord's supper table, and our ministry has something fundamental to do with being fed and feeding others. Even on Sundays when there is no celebration of the sacrament, the empty cup and plate call to mind our hunger and thirst for God. A font open and ready with water and a towel (rather than closed so it can double as a place to set the choir's music or a cup of coffee!) lets us know this is a place for washing, and our baptism matters—even if "it's been a long time since anyone was baptized in this church!" A pulpit or lectern with an open Bible, visible to the congregation—a Bible from which the Scriptures are read in worship—tells us that our pastor's preaching and our own living have their proper source in this book of biblical words, which always point us to the living Word, Jesus Christ. While we affirm, with Paul, that "faith comes from hearing" (Rom. 10:17), what a congregation *sees*, Sunday after Sunday, in the sanctuary's central actions, spaces, furnishings, and leaders, also shapes that people's understanding of who and whose they are, and how they are challenged by the gospel to live for Christ in the world.

Book of Common Worship 2018

The 2018 *Book of Common Worship* provides more tools than we've ever had before to help us make the fullest use of all three of these central liturgical spaces. Throughout, it offers rubrical suggestions for *what* portions of the service might make sense to lead from the font or the table rather than from the pulpit. It even suggests several liturgical elements that might be fruitfully led from "the midst of the congregation" or from "the door of the church," and sends elders and deacons out beyond the church doors to take the bread and wine to the homebound. A new section in the preface provides an illustrated guide to common words and actions. Here leaders of worship can see pictures of ways to use our bodies and hands—welcoming or inviting to prayer, touching or pouring water, lifting Bible or loaf and chalice—so that our actions in the worship space will complement and reinforce the meaning of our spoken words. Beyond the Service for the Lord's Day, the *Book of Common Worship* makes clear that all of the occasional services having to do with discipleship (public profession of faith, reception of new members, blessing of departing members) and ministry (ordination, installation, commissioning, thanksgiving for faithful service) belong at the font. The water need only be visible next to the words in order for the clear connections between baptism and ministry to be powerfully made. Even the pastoral services strengthen the connections for baptized Christians between common life transitions and the life of discipleship. In the marriage service, the opening prayer, declarations of intent, and vows may all take place at the font. In the funeral service, the first thing after the greeting is the thanksgiving for baptism. Both liturgies include the Lord's Supper and indicate places where baptismal water may be touched. In the dedications section, two services for the dedication of a church thoughtfully move the congregation around the worship space, inviting blessings in turn on font or pool, pulpit and Bible, table and communion ware, musical instruments and more. In the second of these services, designed for a congregation worshiping in some place other than a church sanctuary, the focus on essentials is made especially clear by the fact that the furniture is not permanent. Rather, the space is defined as space for worship by its central, and portable, vessels: baptismal bowl, worship Bible, and communion plate and cup.

Implicit in all of these directional rubrics is the clear invitation to pastors and other leaders of worship to consider *where* they stand. Does it make a difference if the opening words of welcome are spoken, not from behind the pulpit but from the font where Christ's invitation to the "living water" is visible, tangible? Will the prayers become more authentically *our* prayers if they are voiced by one who stands in our midst or gathers us around the community table, rather than by one who stands alone at a central microphone? Does a charge that sends us back out into the world at the end of worship carry different nuances if it is delivered from the table? from the font? from the door of the church? Some patterns for what to lead from where may be helpful as regular practices that can encourage the congregation to grow into deeper understandings. Other options may depend on the content of the service on a particular occasion. Sometimes the church building itself will limit the choices we have; other times a little creativity can overcome some of those limits and open up new possibilities. But if worship is more than words, and surely it is, then how we deliver those words, and from where, matters. What we do with our voices, bodies, movements, and actions also speaks (sometimes even louder than our words). What the congregation sees while they are listening impacts what they hear and understand. The 2018 *Book of Common Worship* highlights what for many will be new choices regarding which parts of the liturgy to lead from where. In directing leaders to make regular use of the font and the table in addition to the pulpit, it offers the church a significant opportunity to expand its sacramental practice, and "deepen baptismal life and discipleship" among its members. Worship committees may look again at the physical placement and interrelationship of the three liturgical centers in their sanctuaries. Elders and deacons may be encouraged to embrace appropriate liturgical roles for their ministries. And pastors who plan and lead worship every Sunday may think again about where they choose to stand for what.

The new rubrics also make sense out of *who* might appropriately be invited to lead which parts of the service.[7] It does this based on the ministries for which individuals are gifted, called, and trained. Because a pastor's ordination is to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, pastors not only preach and celebrate the sacraments, but may also have

a compelling rationale for leading the confession of sin, declaring God's forgiveness, and offering the final blessing. Because deacons are ordained to a ministry of compassion and service, they might appropriately lead the prayers of intercession or send the people out into the world with a concluding charge. Because elders are called to oversee the proclamation of the Word and the stewardship of the church's resources, they might be invited to read Scripture or to pray over the offering of monetary and other gifts. And because all in the church are baptized to discipleship and service, any who are gifted and prepared for their roles, including children and youth, may be invited to read Scripture or lead in prayer. Additionally, the rubrics regularly note when some familiar portion of the liturgy may be sung rather than spoken—thereby lifting up the ministry of musicians, both vocal and instrumental, who lead in congregational song. When a congregation can see that each leader, indeed each person, has a ministry that may be enacted in a fitting way in the church's worship, suddenly that congregation may be able to catch a glimpse of itself as a gifted community of the baptized, a whole which becomes stronger as each one contributes his or her part. When the apostle Paul compared the church to Christ's body, among the things he had in mind was precisely *this* understanding of worship, as an offering of gifts by the many members of a single body. "When you come together," he writes, "each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation . . . so that the church may be built up" (1 Cor. 14:26, TNIV).

Finally, the obvious should be stated: there is throughout the *Book of Common Worship* an abundance of *texts* for prayer and for responsive congregational participation that are explicitly sacramental. Many of them use verses straight from Scripture, as has long been the Reformed pattern; others lean in to more contemporary language to make scriptural, baptismal, and eucharistic imagery come alive. This expanded collection of texts contributes powerfully to worship in which we can actually see and experience ourselves as a community gathered around the core things of the risen Christ: gathered around a fountain for washing new, a common table for eating together, and a stand for reading, listening, and hearing God speak. In both texts and rubrics, the 2018 *Book of Common Worship* supports a way of worship in which our hunger and thirst for all the things of God may be awakened, and the sacramental/spiritual imagination may be nurtured and grow.

At the Font

The new *Book of Common Worship* is clearest about those portions of worship that make theological sense to lead from the baptismal font. Not only in the Service for the Lord's Day but throughout the book, it consistently suggests that the confession and pardon be conducted at the font. (Or leadership at the font could begin even earlier, with the gathering prayer or a thanksgiving for baptism, or perhaps include the whole Gathering section of the service.) In addition, the one presiding is invited to pour water into the baptismal bowl at the invitation to confession, and to lift water from the font at the declaration of God's forgiveness. "Leading this element of worship from the font," the commentary explains, "connects our confession with the grace and cleansing of Baptism, and the baptismal call to new life in Christ."[8] While baptism happens only once in each of our lives, confession and pardon are a regular part of Sunday worship. When these acts are conducted at the font, they serve to remind us that we are baptized, that we have already been washed in divine mercy, that we have died to the power of sin and been raised up to live a new life, free from its power. To link the one-time sacrament of baptism with the weekly practice of confession and pardon provides a powerful way to set before the church its baptismal identity and calling.

Picture the worship space with a prominent baptismal bowl, uncovered and partly filled. A clear glass pitcher of water sits nearby. The pastor takes the pitcher and pours water generously and audibly into the bowl, inviting the congregation to confession with these suggestive words from 1 Timothy 1:14–15:

> The grace of God overflows for us
> through Christ Jesus
> who came into the world to save sinners.
> Trusting in God's grace, let us confess our sin.[9]

Because we hear the words next to the water, the baptismal imagery of God's overflowing mercy comes through loud and clear. After the confession of sin, the pastor then puts both hands deep into the font and lifts up the water, letting it splash and drip, while announcing the good news of

God's life-changing forgiveness from John 3:5 and 2 Corinthians 3:17:

> Hear the good news!
> As people born of water and the Spirit
> we have died to the old life, and a new life has begun.
> God's grace is poured out upon us day by day.
> Come to the water and remember your baptism.
> Be thankful, and live as one who has been raised to new life![10]

On another Sunday, the pouring and lifting of water might be accompanied by a text from the Christian Year section, where confession and pardon are laid out visually as one act: a unison prayer surrounded by scriptural responses that set our repentance in the context of God's abiding mercy. Many of these responses, including this pair for Lent, would be usable on any Lord's Day:

> (*from Isaiah 55:1 and 55:3*)
> Are you thirsty for grace? Are you hungry for mercy?
> God is calling; come to the waters.
> Trusting in God's grace, let us confess our sin. . . .
>
> Listen, so that you may live:
> the steadfast love of the Lord never fails.
> In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven![11]

The weekly act of confession and pardon is unmistakably linked both backwards to baptism, and forwards into the life of discipleship that proceeds from it. And we are able to sense, because of the juxtaposition of words and water, that our Sunday act of repentance is much larger, and more grace-filled, than we suspected. It's not just about dredging up the week's failures and presenting them for divine forgiveness. It's about living into a new life, remembering the grace that has claimed us and the baptized life to which it calls us.

The *Book of Common Worship* suggests two other places in the liturgy that might be fitting to lead from either the font or the table. These are the invitation to discipleship—which welcomes people in (to Christ, to baptism, to church membership, to renewed discipleship), and the concluding charge—which sends people out to live a new life in the world. These two invitations to discipleship illustrate why both font and table are appropriate places from which to speak them:

> *From the baptismal font:*
> If you need a community to belong to,
> if you are thirsty for the word of life,
> and want to live as a disciple of Jesus,
> join us in his ministry and mission.
> You are welcome here, you are needed here.
>
> *From the communion table:*
> If you are hungry for the living bread,
> if you are ready to trust the Lord of life,
> join us on the path of discipleship
> and the adventure of faith.
> There is a place for you
> among this community of believers.[12]

Likewise, it is easy to imagine the charge being delivered from several places: from the font using the text of Colossians 3:12–14 about putting on compassion like a new garment, or from the table with words from 1 Peter 3:8–9 about having "unity of spirit," or from the door of the church with the imperative from Micah 6:8 to "do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."[13] Whatever the particular words of the charge may be, speaking them at the font while lifting the water makes it viscerally clear that we are being sent to "live wet," to take our baptism out into the world, dying to self, trusting day by day that we are being raised in Christ to new and abundant life. Likewise, speaking the charge from the table offers a missional reminder that having been generously fed, our calling is to feed the world, to nourish both the hungry in body and the hungry in spirit.

At the Pulpit

Since it's not so long ago that the entire Sunday service was typically led from the pulpit, only a brief word is needed here. Lathrop's three essentials in worship—the word, the bath, and the meal—help clarify for us that the significance of the pulpit is its connection to the word of God. A pulpit or lectern or reading stand is more than just a good central place from which to be seen and heard, although it should also be that. Theologically, it is what points

us to Scripture and to God's written, spoken, and living word. If the font is for baptism, and the table is for the Supper, then the pulpit is fundamentally for hearing the word of God. It is the place where the reading and preaching of Scripture "belong"—*even if sometimes* we do these things elsewhere in the worship space (but that's another topic for another time!).

This has several implications that are worth articulating. First on a practical level, when people are leading parts of the liturgy from other places, it is important that they be as visible and audible there as they would be at the pulpit, lectern, or central microphone. This will require careful thought, creativity, and maybe some acoustical engineering on the part of congregational leaders. Second, if the pulpit is *theologically* the location of God's word, that function will be more evident if it is also *actually* the location of the church's Bible, God's written word. A worship Bible that is visible on the pulpit, that is opened and read from in worship, reinforces that what we together are listening for from it is not just any words, but God's word. As the commentary for the Service for the Lord's Day notes, "reading from the church's Bible conveys a sense of the permanence and weight of the word of God, and demonstrates the communal nature of the biblical story."[14] Lastly, it seems clear that as some elements of worship begin to move to the font or to the table, or out into the midst of the assembly, then those elements that remain to be led from the pulpit may more clearly be, and be seen to be, focused around the reading and preaching of Scripture. Giving the font and the table their proper place in the conduct of the service will at the same time strengthen the function of the pulpit as the place for encounter with the God who speaks among us a lively and life-giving word.

One exception is noteworthy here. The rubrics suggest that the Gospel may be read from the midst of the congregation, a practice common in parts of the ecumenical community but more rare among Presbyterians. The rationale is simple enough. The four Gospels are the one place in Scripture where we don't just hear *about* Jesus; we actually meet him, listen to his words, watch him in action. To read the Gospel from the midst of the people puts our encounter with Christ in worship precisely where Jesus of Nazareth was always found to be, and where the risen Christ forever is—with ordinary people, among us, the incarnate God-with-us. While this practice will not be right for every congregation, some may find it helpful as a way to lift up a more sacramental dimension of the ministry of the Word.

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At the Table

As the *Book of Common Worship* makes clear, the shape of the Service for the Lord's Day is a simple two-part service of Word and Eucharist (Word and Table), bracketed by the Gathering and Sending. This has been the classic structure of Christian worship from its earliest beginnings. While the content varies from one Sunday to the next, the underlying two-part pattern remains constant. Once gathered, we *hear* what God has to say to us, and then before we are dismissed, we begin to *do* what God commands, to live the way the gospel challenges us to live—we practice the discipleship we have just heard preached. Perhaps, using a creed of the church, we rehearse with our own lips the good news we've been given to tell the world. Certainly, we pray for our neighbors and for the whole earth, reaching out with the love we are commanded by Christ to live. We offer our gifts for the ministry of the church and the service of the poor, and give God grateful thanks for all we have received. And most importantly, we come to the Lord's table to break bread together, enacting there both our willing "yes" to Christ's call to service and our humble readiness to trust the gifts God provides. All these elements of worship in the second half of the service are active responses to the proclamation, not just things we *say* but things we *do*, to begin embodying the love for God and neighbor that the gospel commands.

The *Book of Common Worship* is strongly committed to a vision for worship in which the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the Lord's Supper happen side by side every Sunday. For this reason, the only component of worship that it directs to always take place at the table is the sacrament itself. Unlike its clear encouragement to conduct the confession and pardon at the font as a regular *reminder* of the Sacrament of Baptism, the *Book of Common Worship* envisions the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper *itself* as the primary activity conducted at the communion table. This is appropriate, *perhaps especially in those congregations or services where the Lord's Supper is in fact celebrated weekly*. Still, the rubrics suggest other significant elements that may also be led from the table—the invitation to discipleship and the charge (as mentioned above), the prayers of intercession, and implicitly at least, the offering invitation and prayer. But with each of the rubrics pointing to the table, an alternate location is also identified: for the invitation to discipleship and the charge, the alternate, as we have seen, is the font; for the intercessions, the alternate is in the midst of the congregation. These too are fitting alternatives. Leading the invitation to discipleship and the charge from the font, as noted earlier, reinforces the welcome of baptism and its ongoing claim on our living. Leading the intercessions from the congregation's space helps strengthen the understanding that the prayers are preeminently the people's work.

It is important, *especially for congregations in which the Lord's Supper is often absent from Sunday worship,* to explore how the intercessions and the offering may be understood to "belong" to the table in much the same way that confession and pardon "belong" to the font.

But before considering which of these options to choose, it is important, *especially for congregations in which the Lord's Supper is often absent from Sunday worship*, to explore how the intercessions and the offering may be understood to "belong" to the table in much the same way that confession and pardon "belong" to the font. When we pray the intercessions, or prayers of the people, we often pray our way around the church, the community, and the world. No one of us knows all that is on the congregation's heart on a given day—so all are needed to help build the prayers. There are lots of different ways congregations do this: some use generous silence or light prayer candles, others have the architecture and acoustics to let individuals speak aloud their prayer requests or their prayers. But however it happens, picture the difference it can make when, before actually offering the prayer or praying a concluding collect, the leader moves to stand behind the communion table. There may be bread on the plate and wine in a pitcher, but even when there is not, the table setting reminds us that we are gathered like a family at the supper table. We know we belong to each other here. And a leader who gathers us around the table for the prayers helps us experience—not just in our heads, but in our bodies—this core communal identity. Being one in Christ is integral to who we are, and intercession is communal work; it makes sense to do it around the common table. It is also sacramental work, en*act*ing the love and grace we know in Christ; it belongs at the sacramental table.

A similar understanding may be claimed for leading the offering invitation and prayer from the table. The giving of ourselves and our substance is a sacramental, incarnational way we embody love of God and neighbor. Picture this offering invitation for Advent, from Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1, being spoken across the Lord's Supper table and heard through the visual "screen" of communion chalice and plate:

> Let us magnify the Lord, rejoicing in the one
> who scatters the proud, lifts up the lowly,
> and fills the hungry with good things.
> Let us offer our lives to the Lord.[15]

So also the prayer that follows the offering may be led from behind the table—allowing us to know that we are gathered around it. Like the church's intercessions, this thanksgiving over God's gifts is quintessentially "table prayer." That's how we know it at the Lord's Supper, where breaking bread and giving thanks are one act called Eucharist. And that's how we know it at the family supper table, which is probably where most of us first learned to give thanks to God. Making these connections builds

on the solid theological foundation that disciples of Christ are stewards who respond to the gifts of grace with lives of gratitude and generosity. At the same time, it makes sense out of leading the offering from the Lord's table, where we ourselves are richly fed.

Like the church's intercessions, this thanksgiving over God's gifts is quintessentially "table prayer." That's how we know it at the Lord's Supper, where breaking bread and giving thanks are one act called Eucharist. And that's how we know it at the family supper table, which is probably where most of us first learned to give thanks to God.

While Reformed Christians understand the sacrament as a gift of divine grace, the Eucharist (or Table) section of worship is equally about the offering of our selves in response to the gospel proclamation—offering our prayers, our gifts, bread and wine, our discipleship, our lives. In this sense, the entire second half of the service may quite logically be conducted at the table. When the Lord's Supper is celebrated every week, it may work just as well to lead the intercessions from the center aisle, or to pray over the offering in front of the table or at the chancel steps—since our primary response to the word of God in the sacrament will still take place at the Lord's table. But when the communion meal is *not* served every Sunday, the prayers and the offering of gifts may help fulfill the sacramental function of gathering us around Christ's table—confirming our identity as a community of God's beloved and embodying our commitment as disciples to serve the world. This consistent practice of leading from the table, on both eucharistic and non-eucharistic Sundays, may even help encourage congregations to explore more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper.

A final word about the offering prayer. The *Book of Common Worship* makes a distinction between a prayer of dedication—a brief petitionary prayer over the gifts in a service that goes on to include the Great Thanksgiving—and a thanksgiving prayer for use on non-eucharistic Sundays. The latter is a fuller prayer which, along with petitioning the Spirit to use our gifts and our lives, includes thanking God for our creation and redemption. This thanksgiving is briefer than the Great Thanksgiving, but similar to it in structure and scope, and like it, followed by the Lord's Prayer. In a non-eucharistic liturgy, it is in fact the *only* explicit act of giving thanks in the entire service! Fortunately, more texts are now offered in the *Book of Common Worship* for this thanksgiving, including a dozen new ones in the Christian Year section, and I strongly encourage liturgical leaders to make use of this fuller pattern for giving God wide and weekly thanks in Sunday's worship, whether or not there is a Great Thanksgiving over bread and wine. This practice too, by mirroring the eucharistic pattern for worship on non-communion Sundays, may help make it easier for churches to move towards serving the bread and wine more often.

Red-Letter Reverberations

When you add up all the rubrical suggestions in the 2018 *Book of Common Worship* for what to lead from where, a somewhat startling progression becomes visible. The larger shape of the Service for the Lord's Day comes into focus as a movement from font to pulpit to table. The liturgy takes us from the font of baptism (where worship and Christian life and the church itself all begin), to the pulpit (where a living God speaks a life-giving word to a listening people, in order to ground, instruct, comfort, challenge, equip, and commission us), to the table of bread and wine (where we are fed and feed one another, where we begin to answer the gospel mandate to love God and neighbor). From the font for the Gathering, to the pulpit for the Word, to the table for the Eucharist and the prayers, the liturgy deliberately moves us around to all three core worship centers, so that we may experience a full encounter with the risen Christ—in his word, his bath, and his meal. At the end of the service, whether we return to the font for the Sending or remain at the table, the nature of our calling to a lived discipleship in the world is compellingly clear.

The 2018 *Book of Common Worship* offers an expansive and deliberate vision regarding the use of liturgical space, and in so doing gives the church a timely opportunity to think again about our places of worship and how we lead in them. It shows us ways to lead worship at the font *and* the table *and* the pulpit, hand in hand with texts that engage the

sacramental and spiritual imagination. It encourages thoughtful movement among the three liturgical centers, and generous use of the sacramental signs of water, word, wine and bread. And in all of that, it opens up possibilities for deeper connection between Sunday worship and daily discipleship, between liturgy and life, and provides the church with powerful new tools to renew our life with God and to strengthen our service for Christ in the world.

Notes

1. The complete text of "Invitation to Christ" can be found at www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/Invitation-to-Christ.pdf. In addition to a description of the sacramental practices, the document includes four helpful essays on the sacraments in Scripture and contemporary culture, and on sacramental history and theology, along with questions for reflection and brief annotated bibliographies for further reading. In 2012, the Association for Reformed & Liturgical Worship (AR&LW) produced a more broadly Reformed and user-friendly version of the original 2006 PC(USA) General Assembly report, under the slightly revised title "Invitation to Christ—Extended: A Guide to Sacramental Practices at Font and Table." This version will be published in a future issue of *Call to Worship*.
2. This section and the one that follows are reprinted, in slightly edited form, from a previous article by the same author: "Leading from Font, Table and Pulpit," *Call to Worship* 40, no. 4 (2007): 15–23. Several other sections here also draw briefly on some of the language and phrasing in the prior article.
3. Gordon W. Lathrop, *What Are the Essentials of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, Open Questions in Worship series (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 7, italics mine. While all these ideas may be found most fully developed in Dr. Lathrop's book *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), I have taken the quotes from his booklet in the Lutheran worship series because it presents the same basic ideas in a much shorter and more accessible form. This work has since been updated as a booklet called *Central Things*, in the Worship Matters series for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
4. Ibid., 26.
5. Ibid., 22.
6. Ibid., 11; italics original.
7. For a helpful overview of the 2018 *Book of Common Worship* rubrics regarding leadership roles, see the commentary section entitled "Worship on the Lord's Day," pages 3–12. For each part of the liturgy, a comment is made about who may be asked to lead and why.
8. *Book of Common Worship*, Prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 5.
9. Ibid., 20.
10. Ibid., 63.
11. Ibid., 236.
12. Ibid., 73.
13. See *Book of Common Worship* pages 154–155 for complete text.
14. Ibid., 6.
15. Ibid., 170.

"Remember those who led you . . ." (Hebrews 13:7): Revisiting the Gifts We Have Received from the Rev. Dr. Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey

David Batchelder

On March 23, 2019, an assembly convened for a Service of Witness to the Resurrection. As Triduum would culminate on April 21, this liturgy was an eruption of Easter in the midst of Lent. The gathering took place for the funeral of Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey. People from across the country traveled to West Plano Presbyterian Church in Plano, Texas, Gláucia's adopted congregation. I served as presider for the service of Word and Sacrament while the Rev. Dr. Kimberly Bracken Long preached the sermon. Others brought words of remembrance, including the Rev. Dr. David Gambrell of the Office of Theology and Worship, PC(USA). Among my own remarks was this reflection:

> You may, like me, have had a very select few individuals of whom it could be said that, without their influence, you would not be the person you are. Gláucia is such a person in my life. . . . What I miss most is Gláucia, my conversation partner. We spoke regularly, emailed more frequently, around all matters of liturgical renewal, recently published books, academic papers, breaking developments in the church and world, and occasional pastoral challenges where I needed additional counsel. That is missing from my life now. Nevertheless, I find she continues to visit me as my muse, helping me find a way through the vicissitudes of pastoral ministry. And so, though absent, she remains present as a continuing source of wisdom, which brings to mind a piece of music sung each year at the closing of Gláucia's Seattle Summer Institute for Liturgy and Worship: "May you cling to wisdom, and she will protect you. And if you cherish her, she will keep you safe."

I have been asked by this journal's editor to write a piece recounting Gláucia's many contributions to the liturgical life of the PC(USA), and to the church "catholic." To be honest, I find this intimidating. How can I do the subject justice? I only knew her work in part. Besides, I find I am still mourning the loss of her voice and presence as dear friend to me and my family and as a vital contributor to the liturgical renewal of the church.

What I propose to do in this article is twofold: to offer my witness to the gifts Gláucia has given us with respect to the liturgy, and to suggest why these things mattered so much to her. Of course, each of us has a different perspective. What I hope to do is help us reengage liturgical theology at the level of passion and depth where Gláucia lived her life.

The best way I can imagine honoring the servant Gláucia is for us to take her as seriously after death as she insisted we do when she lived among us. If you knew Gláucia even a little, you remember her as someone for whom the "what" and "how" we do the liturgy mattered greatly to its meaning for the life of the world.

So, in order to strengthen my witness to Gláucia's legacy, I plan to bring forward Gláucia's voice as much as possible. The nature of my friendship with Gláucia has provided me with much of her published and nonpublished material. This includes emails, sermons, drafts, and unfinished projects cut short first by her husband Jay Wilkey's illness, and then her own. Gláucia's daughters, Nina Revering and Stella Hastings, have graciously granted me permission to draw from these sources as best helps the purpose of this article. By using Gláucia's own voice, I hope to kindle renewed interest in Gláucia's scholarly and more pastoral writings. So, on behalf of all interested readers, let me say to our beloved

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sister, now at rest among the saints with God, "Delight us, inspire us, cajole us, and entice us."[1]

Baptism

I first met Gláucia in 1995 at General Assembly after she had accepted the position of associate for worship for the Office of Theology and Worship. She was staffing the Office's booth in the display center. At the edge of the display area was a clear glass bowl filled with water. In the water were tiny glass beads. From a distance, I watched as Gláucia warmly greeted each passerby, reaching into the bowl of water and extracting a glass bead. With dripping hands, she would place it in the palm of the visitors, their hands in hers. Then she said, "Remember your baptism, and be thankful." That was my introduction to the "Water Lady," as she came to be known.

Gláucia anchored her faith in a strong baptismal ecclesiology, the same as undergirds the vision of the church in the 1993 *Book of Common Worship*, and now, its 2018 successor.

I did not know until many years later that her formation in a baptismal ecclesiology began in Brazil. In a sermon she delivered on Baptism of the Lord Sunday (there is no record of the year), Gláucia shared her story.[2]

It was an amazing place, that gathering place in my childhood. It all began when my father was serving as an itinerant preacher. His "congregation" was made up of a number of farming families in a remote corner of the state where I was born, in the heartland of Brazil. Once a year, instead of getting together in small groups as they did during the rest of the time, the people came to one place, a slice of one of the farms in the area. There was a huge shed, rough, very rough indeed. The people sat on even rougher benches. That was first and foremost the sanctuary, but it also served a host of other functions. Around this sanctuary, families pitched tents. We all lived there for eight glorious days. I loved that place! Every year for five years of my life it was as new as new creation. And we certainly called it good.

The first year we met there, someone drew a sign at the gated entrance that read simply "Ponto de Encontro." Literally, "Point of Encounter," or "The Gathering Place." It was many years before I would value that name as much as I do today.

A few months before our first meeting, when the leaders were thinking about a site for that gathering, the following criteria were established: (1) the gathering place had to be easily accessible to all; (2) the gathering place had to be by a clean, living stream of water, near its source; and (3) the gathering place had to have plenty of trees, preferably mango trees. That was it!

Why a clean, living stream near its source? Basic survival. No, not drinking water only. Basic survival for the spiritual community, for on Sunday, the final day at the gathering place, baptism was celebrated. This took place every year on the Sunday we celebrate today, Baptism of the Lord. Yes, basic survival: a clean, living stream near its source, where the people reveled in living out the favorite hymn that became the "theme song" of the place: "Shall We Gather at the River?"

In that river in that gathering place we quenched our physical and our spiritual thirst, we bathed our bodies and we cleansed our souls, we splashed, and played, we children grew together, and the water was the beginning and the center of it all. It was a new creation every year, that Sunday was. Every year that Sunday was new and fresh and glorious. And we sang "Shall We Gather at the River?"

. . . It was many years before I could name the reasons for trees by the water in the gathering place, or to relate the fruits or the leaves of the trees to biblical imagery, to theology, eschatology, or anything else. All I knew as a young girl was that I looked forward to the week of the Baptism of the Lord, for that week we would be with friends in that fun and wonderful gathering place. And I knew we would be singing "Shall We Gather at the River?" And I certainly did not think much then about what ways my life outside of the gathering place should portray my week by the river.

But as we heard the story of the baptism of Jesus year after year, it finally dawned on me: if baptism for Jesus implied changing the world, reordering its values, rich made poor, poor made rich, well-fed made hungry, hungry made satisfied, blind made to see, sighted ones unable to see light, the wise made fool, and children seen as role models for the world, then, there must be something about being baptized that is more than the self-contentment of my childhood.

For I know that the water of the river is the font of identity for the people of God baptized in Jesus Christ. I know that being drenched with that water

is to be immersed in a death like Christ's: death to self in an age of glorification of the self; death to success in an age of glorification of success; death to pride, death to injustice, death to the world's values at odds with God's ways of justice and grace. And I know that water, trees, and life were surely part of the life of Christ. And my baptism must not end at the Font, but be carried out for the sake of the world, that baptism and ethics merge and flow together. I know that being baptized means immersion in death, but also immersion in the resurrection lived and promised by Jesus Christ. It does mean new life; it does mean new commitment to the ways of Jesus Christ. Otherwise I would only be a child singing a beautiful song.

On our third year at the gathering place someone drew words on the back of the sign at the entrance gate. You recall that the sign we saw as we came in said "The Gathering Place." Well, from the third year on, an amazing truth sent us on our way. The words on the back of the sign, the last thing we saw leaving the gathering place were "Entrada de Servico," or "Servants' Entrance."

Gláucia was deeply committed to baptism as every Christian's ordination to ministry. Serving God's justice and mercy, reconciliation and peace is a vital aspect of belonging to God. This cosmic meaning is as true for an infant as it is for an adult. Each one passing through the waters of rebirth is born anew to life of self-emptying other-centeredness. Recovering this meaning was central to her ministry. During her time with the Office of Theology and Worship in Louisville, she did not flinch from challenging the church to more faithfully live out the theology we profess. In 1998, she presented a comprehensive paper to colleagues in the office.[3] It was a call for reform and strategic suggestions for living into a robust baptismal ecclesiology. As I review that paper now, I see that the PC(USA) has made great strides in many areas with much left to be done.

Children

One of the great pleasures my wife and I enjoyed with Gláucia was exchanging children's books. Gláucia's coffee table always had one or two newly published, beautifully illustrated books we had not yet discovered. Gláucia loved children. She respected them as persons fully capable of apprehending God in a relationship of trust and surrender. More than once I've heard her tell the story of Mary. Here is how she told it when she put it to print.

Mary is a happy, healthy, beautiful, red-haired child who lives with big sister Anna and their parents in Kansas City, Missouri, where [I] served as Associate Pastor at Second Presbyterian Church. One particular Sunday, Mary had gotten into trouble with her sister on the way to church. In worship, after the Prayer of Confession, when the words of the Declaration of Forgiveness were said ending with "I declare to you in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven," Mary let out a joyful "YEAH!" heard by the entire congregation. That joyful response to forgiveness led [me] to say to the congregation: "The gospel has been preached." Mary, who was all of three years old at the time, knew the joy of forgiveness and freely expressed it. How often I have witnessed pastors and other worship leaders pronouncing words of forgiveness without any joy, devoid of any celebration or sense of awe! If we could only learn from the gift that Mary brings!

Mary, Anna, and all the other children at Second Presbyterian Church were a vital part of that worshiping church. There was no "children's worship" for her and her sister, or "age-appropriate" activities during worship in that community. Only full participation would do for them. That same child gave the congregation a remarkable gift on the day of her baptism in that year. After all the wonderfully rich rituals around the font, the profession of faith, questions and responses from parents and congregation, the pouring of water, the prayer of thanksgiving, the fullness of the sacrament expressed in words and gestures—all of which she had witnessed again and again in prior services—with her lovely face still wet with baptismal water, she placed her hands on her pastor's head and said: "Gláucia baptized!" Mary, whose Down Syndrome is not an impediment to faith or fullness of life, but part of her uniqueness; Mary, whose gifts are multifaceted, knew the meaning of baptism, knew and reminded the pastor and the entire congregation of their baptismal identity. She knew forgiveness, she knew what it meant to be a part of the household of God at worship, and she freely expressed her joy.[4]

Gláucia shared a deep commitment to the full inclusion of children in worship. This necessarily meant attending to children's liturgical formation as well as their liturgical participation. It is not

enough for children to be present to the liturgy. In baptism, the church promises to actively provide for children's development as vital members of the worshiping assembly. This formation is always age appropriate, taking into account children's capacity to apprehend the holy at each stage of life. Gláucia's writing challenged the still prevalent practice of dismissing children from worship to alternative, age-specific experiences. Instead of depriving the church of its intergenerational richness, Gláucia invited readers to see how children bring special gifts to older worshipers that help us come before God with fresh openness and vulnerability.

Those of us who have become word bound, for whom the main vehicles of communication are verbal, can find refreshing freedom in the ways of children in worship. We can be inspired by them to recover the involvement of all the senses in worship's gestures and actions. With them we can learn anew to experience the liturgy of the church, to find awe in the sounds, of water poured, of water touched, of water on the head. We learn to see with new eyes and recognize the Christ, as we smell and taste bread, and touch each other in the passing of the peace. And we learn with children to break forth in wonder as we truly "taste and see."[5]

In her pastoral ministry as associate pastor at Second Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, Missouri, Gláucia worked creatively to involve children. Gláucia described her work as follows:

The years (1989–1995) in Kansas City saw the church experiencing enormous changes in its worship life—and so also in its mission. After two years of setting down the foundations for those changes in careful enticement and preparation of leaders, and fully counting on the grace of God, we began a slow yet firm renewal in and with that congregation. These are some of the most visible changes: [incorporated] full participation of children in worship, where before they had "Children Activities" away from the liturgy; formed programs for preparation of liturgical leaders, including children and youth; changed the hymnals in the pews to the 1990 PC(USA) volume; prepared a worship pew booklet with full services from the Book of Common Worship (BCW)*; began the practice of Morning Prayer during Advent and Lent, initially; led the congregation to fuller Eucharistic practice; and led the congregation on projects intentionally connecting the sacraments and life. My intention in the two pastorates in the U.S.A. was simply this: lead the congregation to see and enact the connections between our baptismal identity, worship, and life. One example: during the years as pastor in Kansas City, I served as founder and director of the Kansas City Children Chorus, Kansas City, Missouri, a group still in existence. . . . The choir's makeup included a large number of children from the downtown area of Kansas City, among the poorest neighborhoods in the city. The children participating in the choir were sponsored and cared for by members of the church who provided for individual children as part of their commitment to "the least of these." That work was my day-off activity. The group eventually sang with the University of Missouri Kansas City in a performance of Carl Orff's* Carmina Burana*; traveled presenting concerts in the region; frequently led the Sung Word in liturgies at the church as well as other congregations in the area. This was outreach with long-term benefits for all involved and provided this pastor with a lovely outlet for her musical skills and delight in aiding in children's development.*[6]

Gláucia's legacy of ministry with children has endured over the decades. At her funeral last March, one of the speakers made special mention of this work which profoundly impacted the congregation and continues to influence ministry today.

Embodiment in the Liturgy

"Teach your body, and your body will teach your soul." This "Gláucia-ism" captures an important emphasis in Gláucia's understanding of every liturgy. Those who have participated in a worship event or conference led by Gláucia will recall seeing her pray in the *orans* (with arms lifted in prayer), bowing deeply to the assembly, handling the sacramental symbols with loving care, and being fully present in the passing of the peace. Some reading this article also have Gláucia to thank for cajoling them to move beyond initial discomfort to a more fully embodied ministry of presiding at the liturgy.

When West Plano Presbyterian Church celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 2005, we invited Gláucia to lead us in a worship workshop that she titled "The Word Became Flesh and the Dry Bones Danced to Life: Gestures and Movement in Liturgy."[7] The day began with Morning Prayer and concluded with a service for healing and wholeness. Gláucia always

prepared two worship aids, one for the assembly and a second for leaders with complete rubrics in red. (By the way, she never referred to them as they are commonly known, "bulletins," because that term says nothing about their relationship to the liturgical event.) Gláucia's rubrics provided detailed directions for the *doing* of the ritual action. Below the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving at the event she led for us was the following rubric: "The prayer will be led in call and response fashion. All will take the *orans* position, imitating presider in all gestures." Gláucia taught that such actions of presider and assembly are part of the syntax of the liturgy, as essential as the spoken word. To the people of my congregation, she said, "Gestures and movements in the liturgy function both as constructive reality—that is, they express and give shape to the praise of God and to the prayers of the people—and as symbols: they give sight, sound, smell and taste to the very nature of the gospel."[8]

I have attended many worship services where Gláucia, serving as presider, invited the whole assembly to join her in the *orans* as she voiced the Great Thanksgiving. Her understanding of "assembly," and her commitment to the congregation's full participation—body, mind, and spirit—was often the most transformational moment for people more accustomed to the role of observers.

Reformed and Ecumenical

Gláucia was ordained a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on November 11, 1987. She came to this denomination by way of the Brazilian Baptist Church where she was first organist/choirmaster in a mission project from Brazil to peoples speaking Portuguese, Italian, French, and Spanish as part of the shaping of a multilingual and multicultural congregation in Toronto, Canada.[9] She would tell me that, in Brazil, the Baptist church was much more "reformed" than are Southern Baptists in the United States. It is not surprising, therefore, that her formation as a child in Brazil (being the daughter of a Baptist minister) prepared her to transition to PC(USA) later as an adult. As the moderator of the Examinations Committee in Grace Presbytery, I regularly have conversations with candidates for ministry around the question, "What does it mean to be Reformed?" For Gláucia, answering "what" necessarily included answering the "why" of her commitment to this tradition.

Perhaps the fact that Calvin sent Huguenot missionaries to Brazil to form "the perfect Reformed Church" right on the cusp of Brazil's discovery; perhaps because he declared that if Jesus had been born in Brazil he would have used a fruit other than grapes from which to extract its juice for drinking; perhaps because he took Word read and proclaimed and the Sacrament faithfully celebrated as marks of the church; perhaps because he embraced so much of Augustine's theology, I am a Calvinist.

I have many reasons why I do not like much I know to be true about Calvin or Calvinism. But there are things I do not like in just about every theologian, past or present. Perhaps [it is] because of what I see and hear from Calvin misinterpreted or interpreted by far too many who do not really know the Reformer [in] the present era.

But I am a Calvinist perhaps because of the decidedly ecumenical sense of church he finally embraced; perhaps because one of his least known volumes is a collection of letters to a woman; perhaps because I am always stunned by the poetic nature of some admittedly select phrases from the Institutes. *I am a Calvinist. I am biased.*[10]

Friends of Gláucia know she did not hide her biases. As a "Calvinist," Gláucia was also an ecumenist, passionately so. Her ecumenism was a natural and inevitable outgrowth of her baptismal ecclesiology. Gláucia always made clear, in lectures, presentations, sermons and published articles,[11] the connection between the one baptism and the one church despite scandalous division in the church. Unity, she said, is not something we create; it is God's gift. This gift was the reason Gláucia was so committed to using the Ecumenical Lord's Prayer rather than the "debts/debtors" version which is particular to churches of the Reformed tradition. For Gláucia, it was a matter of baptismal conscience. Her belonging was broader than Presbyterianism alone. She understood her life to be deeply tied to Christians of other traditions and historical movements. The early church understood the Lord's Prayer as the prayer of the baptized, and taught it to those in the ancient catechumenate as part initiation preparation. Thus, the Ecumenical Lord's Prayer became both symbol and witness to an identity always larger than the particular church where a service was taking place. Gláucia preferred the 1988 English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC)[12] version (using "sins") because it is the work of many

collaborating together and arriving at a common textual consensus.

Gláucia was quite proud of language she suggested for the Mission Statement of the Association for Reformed & Liturgical Worship (AR&LW) of which she was a founding member. The worship to which AR&LW is committed is "Trinitarian, ecumenical, incarnational and sacramental; it is both universal and local."[13] Reflecting on these words for publication, she wrote:

> *What would happen if Reformed leaders and congregations sought to remember their biblical and Reformed theological roots and in that process would encounter the present anew more frequently and more fully? What if we do commit ourselves to be united with Christians of all times and places in fullness of life? To re-member in this sense is to make new the life of Jesus Christ manifest in trinitarian-sacramental, therefore, Christocentric and incarnational, ecumenical, and local yet global worship.*[14]

The seeking to remember and committing to be united of which Gláucia writes requires that we be re-formed in how we understand and live out Christian worship. Formation in the liturgy is one of Gláucia's greatest gifts.

Liturgical Formation (Formation *for* the Liturgy and *from* the Liturgy)

Among the many insights of the ecumenical liturgical renewal movement is the formative power of worship to shape (or misshape) faith and practice. Presbyterians have claimed this truth as evident in the prefaces to both the 1993 and 2018 *Book of Common Worship* which read, "Worship is the principal influence that shapes our faith, and is the most visible way we express the faith."[15] This means that the order (*ordo*), proportion, balance, structure, and flow of the elements in the liturgy all matter greatly to the meaning being enacted in worship. Gláucia explains:

> *The ancient phrase attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine (ca. 390–463), and summarized in the dictum* lex orandi, lex credendi*, or, "the way of praying [shapes] the way of believing," is significant. That is to say, the actions of worship shape a way of believing and construct the basic formulations for what a community says about God, church, and life. Liturgy shapes belief, theology, and gives lenses through which to see all of life. It is also true, however, that theology shapes liturgy.*[16]

Alas, liturgical studies has never been a strong emphasis in Presbyterian seminaries. Worship courses often end up being electives, losing out to other classes required for the degree. As a result, many pastors find themselves responsible for planning worship with a minimum (sometimes none at all) of education in liturgical theology. Gláucia knew this better than most because she visited more than sixty presbyteries when she served as associate for worship in the Office of Theology and Worship.

Pastors as Liturgical Theologians (PALT)

To address this need, Gláucia created a program of intensive study over three years called Pastors as Liturgical Theologians (or PALT). This program debuted in a denomination-wide invitation to participation in a 1996 issue of *Reformed Liturgy and Music*:

> The Office of Theology and Worship is seeking to establish a study group of pastors who are both knowledgeable of and concerned with the theological and pastoral implications of liturgy. The intent is to bring these pastors together for an annual consultation, with the goal that these individuals would then form similar study groups in their own places of ministry, using resources provided by the Office of Theology and Worship and the insights taken from the consultations. These pastors will be invited to provide regular feedback to the Office of Theology and Worship concerning the joys, visions, and challenges that arise as they worship with their congregations.[17]

As a participant in this program, I can bear witness to its impact. It provided an opportunity for rigorous study, reflection, and writing on all matters relating to the liturgy. In a time when the Reformed tradition (along with all mainstream denominations) is recovering its pre-sixteenth-century heritage, a disciplined course of study with colleagues following a seminary education such as PALT provided is essential. Indeed, PALT has reemerged

as an attractive model for liturgical formation among other denominations as they strategize ways to strengthen the worship life of churches with less national staff and denominational funding. For this reason, it is worthwhile to highlight how Gláucia structured this initiative.

The hub of the PALT program was a national group covenanted together for three years. In a January 29, 1997, letter to PALT participants, Gláucia wrote, "We will be embarking on a three-year cycle of intentional/systematic studies on the theological nature of worship. This study will be done with participants themselves leading discussions and presenting papers. A list of resources, study, and reading materials will be provided by the Office of Worship."[18]

In her June 3, 1997, letter to PALT participants, Gláucia took note of the critical need in the denomination.

> *In a time dominated by managerial and/or therapeutic or entertaining models of ministry and worship, pastors who wish to recover a ministry of the Word and Sacrament can be given time together, in a setting that enables them to think and pray together about the shape of faith and worship in contemporary North America.*

The seriousness of the need meant that Gláucia would set the expectation's bar high, establishing "a more focused program, asking participants for even deeper commitment to shared reflection on the ancient statement *Lex orandi, lex credendi,* and for deeper *theological* reflection on the biblical, liturgical, and pastoral underpinnings of worship."

The success of PALT led Gláucia to launch a second three-year cycle of study with a new group of pastors numbering so many a waiting list had to be established. It also led Gláucia to establish a parallel program, Church Musicians as Liturgical Theologians (CMALT), similarly constituted.

By nurturing and resourcing a core of leaders who then organized their own groups according to the same discipline of study and reflection, PALT was able to introduce hundreds of church leaders to the best of liturgical theologians as well as primary source material with which every pastor should have at least some acquaintance.

What Gláucia brought to her efforts in the liturgical formation of pastoral leaders was a fierce passion and love for the liturgy, a wise and tender heart, and a relentless pursuit for faithfulness that was not afraid of pushing the conversation to areas of challenge and discomfort. In this last regard, she was a woman with a prophetic voice who could sniff out injustice and accommodation for the sake of expediency. Those of us who knew her as a friend, colleague, or mentor were both blessed and challenged by her enthusiasms.

Seattle University Summer Institute for Liturgy and Worship (2002–2007)

In 1999, Gláucia left her denominational staff position with the PC(USA) and joined the faculty at the School of Theology and Ministry (STM) at Seattle University, where she remained until retirement. Her responsibilities included teaching worship and homiletics as associate professor and overseeing the school's chapel life.[19] From this vantage point, Gláucia envisioned what came to be the most richly ecumenically formational worship conference of its kind. For Protestants and Roman Catholics, it was to become a kind of liturgical Camelot, a foretaste of ecumenical diversity and unity yet to be realized by our various denominational institutions.

The project began in 2000 when the STM faculty approved the idea of a Summer Institute for Liturgy and Worship. Through Gláucia's leadership, grants from the Greenville Foundation and the Calvin Institute for Worship were secured. The first institute was held in 2002.

Gláucia was fiercely committed to worship as rehearsal for life in the world, not escape from the world. Social justice, peacemaking, reconciliation, and *tikkun olam* ("repair of the world") were all core concerns of worship, since the mission of the church must be the inevitable outpouring of the liturgy. As the various yearly themes suggest,[20] this meant the liturgy was the place of healing where all that which is fractured and separated is reconnected into new wholeness of purpose and meaning. This is made clear in the mission statement Gláucia prepared for the Summer Institute conferences which was part of her original proposal.[21]

> Summer Institute for Liturgy and Worship:
> A Mission Statement
> Proposed to the Faculty of the School of
> Theology and Ministry of Seattle University

The Summer Institute for Liturgy and Worship meeting annually at Seattle University makes visible, through intentional practice and scholarly reflection, the baptismal unity of the Body of Christ in liturgy for the life of the world.

Vision and Values
In partnership with the School of Theology and Ministry of Seattle University, the Summer Institute for Liturgy and Worship gathers pastors and lay leaders with leading scholars who are theologians and practitioners of liturgy. The Institute is guided by these values:
Grounded in Word and Sacrament: There is an intrinsic connection between the life of Word and Sacraments in local parishes and the Institute.
Liturgical in life: There is an intrinsic connection between what is said and done in the Institute's liturgies, in Daily Prayers and celebrations of Word and Sacrament, and the day's scholarly presentations.
Pastoral in tone: There is an intrinsic connection between what is said and done in the Institute and care for the peoples of the community and the world.
Prophetic in message: There is an intrinsic connection between what is said and done in the Institute and the community's and the world's needs for authentic prophetic faith.
Ecumenical in scope: There is an intrinsic and clearly manifested connection between Baptism as the source of the Church's life and unity and everything we say and do in the Institute.
Historically faithful in liturgical patterns: There is an intrinsic connection between the life of the Institute and the historically and ecumenically held liturgical patterns.
Intentionally connecting ethics to liturgy in practice: There is an intrinsic connection between liturgy, ethics, the moral life, and servant leadership in all we say and do.
Intentionally hospitable and gracious to all: There is an intrinsic connection between gracious hospitality to all peoples and all created order in all areas of our life as an Institute.
Intentionally diverse: There is an intrinsic connection between the life of the Institute and intentional and systemic engagement of peoples of all cultural origins, ethnicities, colors, ages, genders, social status and all other diversities.
Intentionally committed to beauty: There is an intrinsic connection between arts in all forms that express and/or shape beauty and reverence as divine gifts in the Institute's life.
Intentionally ecologically sensitive: There is an intrinsic connection between all that is said and done in the Institute and the health of and reverence for all of nature's bounties.
Intentionally guided in its preparation by a group of volunteers from various ecclesial communities: There is an intrinsic connection between the work and the gifts of a volunteer ecumenical board who guide the life of the Institute.

Those who experienced one or more of these Summer Institute conferences were profoundly shaped by their faithfulness, integrity, beauty, and hospitality. The seeds of renewal planted during these years have germinated and flowered in wonderful ways across the church catholic. Thanks be to God!

Last Words

I have done much thinking these recent years about departure. The Presbyterian liturgical community has said goodbye to many of our best and most insightful liturgical mentors and friends.[22] In his book *Last Words: Lessons on Leaving*, Mark C. Taylor writes:

> Ending and leaving are not the same. It is possible to end without leaving, and to leave without ending. Leaving, like ending, is a matter of time, or, more precisely, timing. When to leave? How to leave? Some leavings are chosen, others are not; some leavings bring relief, even joy, others bring pain, even suffering. To ask what it means to leave is also to ask what it means to stay—to stay too long, or not long enough.[23]

Gláucia's leaving came about through a disease that overtook her when she still had so much to say and contribute to family, friends, and the church she served. Nevertheless, she managed to achieve

a monumental work despite the care demands tending the illness of her beloved husband, Jay Wilkey. In 2014, Eerdmans Publishing Company published *Worship and Culture: Foreign Country or Homeland?* edited by Gláucia.[24] This ecumenical collection of essays from across the world revisits the work of the World Lutheran Federation and its "Nairobi Statement" bringing wise, respectful, and caring insightful word to the important matter of the inculturation of the liturgy.[25]

But I would like Gláucia's last words in this article to come from another source, from a presentation she made in 2007.[26]

"A benção, mamãe," or, "A benção, papai." Growing up in Brazil my siblings and I said these words anytime we left the house: "The blessing, Mom/Dad." Their response was always the same: "Deus te abençoe," "God bless you." These final words of blessing took us into whatever place we were bound, whether for a few hours venture—or a longer time away from the house. We also repeated these words at night when we went to bed, or, when living away from our parents, on the phone as we ended conversations. These exchanges still take place in countless homes in Brazil or other Latin American settings.

We never really thought of the meaning of this familial rite until later in life. What we did know was that the ritual exchange curiously and strangely comforted us. It elicited from us the certainty of our parents' and God's care for all we were and all we did.

When in my teens, I asked my mother to explain the meaning of this blessing. She responded with words my father recorded in one of his writings: "With these words we make the presence of God in your life known to you as you go your ordinary way. In fact, God in Christ walks with you, wherever you go. And Christ is never alone either, for there you are." Finally, in adulthood, the insight: ah, so this is constructive *speech, words that make real something normally hidden. God in Christ is with us. God has gone ahead of us. Christ walks with us. Christ is never alone and neither are we."*

"Give rest, O Christ, to your servant Gláucia, with all your saints, where there is neither pain nor sorrow nor sighing, but life everlasting. Amen."[27] Thanks be to God!

Notes

1. This expression is one of the many "Gláucia-isms"—words or phrases which became verbal trademarks of her life and ministry. "Delight us, inspire us, cajole us, and entice us" were the last words she spoke when introducing speakers at each of her six Seattle Summer Institutes for Liturgy and Worship. This summer conference began with the approval of Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry faculty in 2000 with grant funds provided by the Greenville Foundation and the Calvin Institute for Worship.
2. Taken from a document prepared by Gláucia and found on her computer. A version of this sermon appears in "The Baptism of the Lord Sunday: Exegesis, Sermon, and Litany," *The Abingdon Women's Preaching Annual*, series 2, Year B, ed. Nora Tubbs Tisdale (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999).
3. "*Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi* and the PCUSA, II: Sacramental Practices and the Office of Theology and Worship," General Assembly Theology and Worship staff meeting, PC(USA), Louisville, KY, April 1998.
4. "What Children Bring: A Little Child Shall Lead Them," *Reformed Liturgy & Music 30*, no. 1 (1996).
5. Ibid.
6. Taken from a personal document prepared as a narrative work-history by Gláucia and found on her computer.
7. The documents used in this workshop, both worship aids and Gláucia's own speaking notes, were given by her to me for my personal files.
8. Gláucia's personal presentation notes (unpublished).
9. This material is taken from a curriculum vitae prepared by Gláucia.
10. Taken from a personal document written by Gláucia titled "Calvin: The Ups and Downs of a Curmudgeon Theologian," and found on her computer.
11. See "Where Life Unites: Liturgy, Ecumenism and Liturgical Life at the School of Theology and Ministry," *Seattle Theology and Ministry Review*, the Journal of the School of Theology and Ministry, Seattle University, vol. 1 (2001); "Trinitarian and Ecumenical: The Bigger Church of AR&LW's Mission," a publication of the Association for Reformed and Liturgical Worship, website for AR&LW, third in a series, *Thoughts from Our Founders*, 2004; "The Gathering of the Four Rivers: A Doxological Framework for Ecumenical Discourse," *Seattle Theology and Ministry Review*, vol. 4 (2004).
12. Praying Together, © English Language Liturgical Consultation 1988.
13. www.arlw.org.
14. "Trinitarian and Ecumenical," 13.
15. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), p. 1, and *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), p. xiv.

16. From an essay titled "Has the Church Lost Confidence in Its Worship?" prepared for the first national meeting of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians held in Louisville in 2005.
17. *Reformed Liturgy & Music* 30, no. 3 (1996): 163.
18. Many years later, Gláucia prepared a document describing her most significant contributions to the life of the church. This untitled document was found on Gláucia's computer. It appears to have been intended as the basis for a future piece of writing. She outlined the PALT program as follows:

    Envisioning and putting into practice the "Pastors as Liturgical Theologians" project (PALT) still ongoing in some quarters. This really was a delightfully successful endeavor. We began with 35 pastors representing every synod in the PC(USA). These pastors were asked and agreed to [the following]:

    (1) [Each pastor] established a covenant with me and the office to work with their churches for liturgical renewal for three years around a continuing education intensive program.

    (2) Each year I presented a theme and a bibliography.

    (3) The group had to read the materials and write a paper using those resources expressing how each pastor participating was engaging those texts and that particular theme in his/her congregational life in liturgy. So, for example, the third and final year we dealt with "Recovering the 'Sacramental' Part of Our Title, Ministers of Word and Sacrament."

    (4) Each pastor had to establish a group of study in his/her own area, engaging no less than two area PC(USA) pastors, at least one church musician, at least one lay person involved in the church's worship committee, and one ecumenical representative.

    (5) Each pastor covenanted to live out either Morning or Evening Prayer (or both) and support each other in faith and work.

19. During her tenure at Seattle University, Gláucia served as facilitator and consultant for theological and liturgical considerations that shaped the renovation of the School's Campion Chapel. This project became "The Ecumenical Chapel" of Seattle University and is now a recognized model for renovations of other area liturgical spaces.
20. The Themes for the Summer Institute for each of the years under Gláucia's leadership were as follows:
    Year 1 (2002) – Worship, the Arts and Ethics: Connections
    Year 2 (2003) – The Holiness of God: Implications for Liturgy and Life
    Year 3 (2004) – The Transforming Word Spoken, Sung, and Enacted: Liturgy and the Reorientation of Life
    Year 4 (2005) – Holy Week in Such a Time as This: Fresh Insights for Ancient Forces
    Year 5 (2006) – Worship and Culture in the Global Community: Diversity as Gift
    Year 6 (2007) – The Sacraments and the House that Holds Them: Liturgical Space and the Arts as Theology
21. Taken from a personal document prepared by Gláucia and found on her computer.
22. I am thinking here of Harold Daniels (d. 2015), Donald Wilson Stake (d. 2016), Dennis Hughes (d. 2017), Chip Andrus (d. 2018), and Horace Allen (d. 2019), in addition to Gláucia (d. January 10, 2019).
23. *Last Words: Lessons on Leaving* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 1–2.
24. www.lutheranworld.org/blog/worship-and-culture-foreign-country-or-homeland.
25. This statement has been incorporated into the PC(USA)'s revised Directory for Worship:

    Christian worship is *contextual*—emerging from a particular community and incorporating the words, images, symbols, and actions that best convey the good news of Jesus Christ in that gathering of God's people. It is also *cross-cultural*—reflecting the diversity of traditions and cultures within and beyond the community of faith. Christian worship is *transcultural*—proclaiming the universal message of God's grace in Jesus Christ and rooted in common elements of human life that transcend all cultures. It is also *countercultural*—asserting the scandal of the gospel and anticipating God's reign of righteousness, justice, and peace. Finally, faithful worship should be an *intercultural* event—fostering mutuality, dialogue, and equality among all people. (W-1.0304), *Book of Order* 2017–2019, Office of the General Assembly Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2017, italics added.

26. Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey, "Go in peace. Christ is with you," (presentation, Evangelical Lutheran Church in American's Worship Jubilee, Chicago, August 5, 2007).
27. *Book of Common Worship*, 2018, p. 293.

Columns

On Liturgy: Space as Catechesis

Christopher Q. James

How in the world do they worship in this room?" I thought that only to myself, and of all the questions I had when candidating to be the pastor of the New Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Charles, Missouri, it is the one that stayed with me the longest. I grew up on worship in the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition, yet this new space was unfamiliar, and not just because it was my first time in the room. I simply could not imagine worshiping in this space.

The sanctuary of the congregation that raised me, in which I was baptized, confirmed, ordained as a deacon, married, and then ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament, is likely familiar to many. It has wooden pews bolted to the floor, aligned in rows, all facing forward. There is a long center aisle (perfect for weddings). Beautiful stained-glass windows envelop the space, and organ pipes of every size line up along the wall of the chancel. Despite what I learned in seminary *about* worship, it was in this space that I learned *to* worship.

Architecturally speaking, my home church might be considered Gothic, but the first church I served was American colonial. Its wooden pews, too, are affixed to the floor, forward-facing, and aligned in rows with a long center aisle (all of which make it, also, a sought-after wedding venue). Its tall, paned windows are clear glass with white shutters. Its organ pipes are likewise lined up next to one another in the chancel. (Some of the smaller organ pipes are movable, which was quite unfortunately brought to my attention after a youth group game of sardines went terribly wrong.) Despite the different styles of architecture between my home congregation and that of my first church out of seminary, the liturgy enacted by these congregations in each of these spaces was largely the same. This was a liturgy I knew by heart.

On January 6, 2002, I first stepped into the pulpit as the pastor-elect of New Hope Presbyterian Church, and that question I had asked myself about this space became very real. "How in the world do they worship in this room?" New Hope had been a new church development of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Chartered as a congregation in October of 1996, the congregation had met and worshiped in an elementary school gymnasium. Just a few months before my arrival, New Hope had completed the first part of its building plan. The space used as the church's "sanctuary" was a four-hundred-seat room designed as an all-purpose space. The seats were upholstered, stackable chairs that could be reconfigured. The painted cinder block walls made it resemble a gym and, along with worship, that was one of the intended purposes for this space. The chancel was a carpeted stage raised by three steps from the linoleum-tiled main floor. The choir gathered in the front right corner of the room, assembling into risers that creaked with every step. Painted steel beams, to support the roof structure, were exposed, as were electrical conduits and sprinkler heads. The lighting was strictly utilitarian—metal-halide fluorescent lights, like the ones in a gymnasium that take a while to come on and hum while in use.

This space was far removed from the sanctuary of my worship formation and of all my lived experience. So, again, how in the world did they worship in this room?

Born and raised a Presbyterian, I had spent my life in large (a thousand-plus members), historic churches. I was used to big congregations in formal sanctuaries. Now I found myself leading

Christopher Q. James is pastor of New Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Charles, Missouri.

worship in this 250-member congregation in a very nondescript, nontraditional, liturgically neutral, even modern setting. I felt out of place. The liturgy was familiar. I knew it by heart, and so did the congregation, but this new, unfamiliar, informal space threw me off balance and made me question how well I really did know the liturgy. I became much more aware of the classic *ordo* of worship. Even though I had learned about worship in the Reformed tradition in seminary, I began actively wondering, in a "boots on the ground" sort of way, about the purpose and meaning of particular liturgical acts and the rationale for their place in the service. I realized how I had taken for granted the impact of the worship environment and had never thought to question its influence. I discovered that no space is neutral. It either promotes or inhibits a congregation's corporate worship.

Even though New Hope had movable seating, the worship space was configured like an auditorium, all seats facing forward. There was no center aisle, but one large middle section of seats, with two side aisles and two smaller outside sections of seating. (No one was asking to get married here.) The worship furniture (font, table, lectern, and pulpit) had been acquired from a local Roman Catholic Church that had recently undergone a renovation. The lectern and pulpit matched exactly, mirroring one another on either side of the chancel. The Lord's Table was pushed up against the rear wall of the chancel, much like an altar. I cannot recall with any certainty where the font was located, but it was probably in the corner and brought out only when needed.

Prompted by the jarring contrast between a liturgy I knew and a worship space bearing greater semblance to a community theater than any sanctuary I had ever known, the New Hope congregation and I began a journey together. We brought the Lord's Table down to the main floor, on the same level with the congregation, so that it could really function as a table to gather around for a meal. We removed the lectern and placed the pulpit right in the middle of the chancel to highlight the centrality of the spoken Word. We experimented by moving the font around a bit, but eventually it landed in the center of the worship space, with our movable seating forming something of a U-shape around it, so that we literally gather around the baptismal waters every time we worship. The small silver bowl that used to sit recessed below the surface of the font has been replaced with a remarkable large glass bowl, colored blue-green on its lower half, into which we pour water each week.

Over time, other enhancements have been made. We replaced the metal-halide gym lights with more standard fluorescent task lights, but also added a second lighting system of halogen lights for night-time services, as well as to spotlight the liturgical centers of font, table, and pulpit at every service. The chancel has been reconstructed to jut out from the main stage by several feet to highlight the pulpit as one of the liturgical centers. We removed the risers and built the choir loft into the corner as a continuation of the chancel area.

This journey we have taken together, as pastor and congregation, has made us a much more intentionally liturgical worshiping community. We have experienced just how significantly the environment used for worship impacts the act of worship itself, and so we have taken steps to ensure that the physical space for the congregation's worship is aligned with that primary purpose. None of this has negatively affected its use for other activities. We still have congregational meals and host community events in this same space, but when we gather for worship we have discovered what needs to be done to promote the full, faithful, and effective liturgical catechesis that happens here, for this space in which we worship contributes to our Christian formation just as does the liturgy we enact in it.

To say that my own pastoral vocation and identity have been fundamentally and forever changed by this experience is no overstatement. And it all began with that first question that would not let me go: "How in the world do they worship in this room?"

On Music: Stirring the Soul—Creating a Hospitable Space for Community

Chi Yi Chen Wolbrink

One of my previous ministries was serving the Touring Choir at Princeton Theological Seminary. The word *touring* is used to mean visiting different churches on Sundays. If the church was far away, it was not possible to visit the church and look at worship spaces in advance. My wonderful colleagues and I would rely on the church pastor to provide us with basic information in order to plan the liturgy and music. If we were able to look at the church website, it was helpful to see photographs of worship spaces. It was exciting to visit each church, look at the different worship spaces, and decide what the choir could deliver through song during the service. It piqued my curiosity, almost like opening Pandora's box.

Finding spaces for singing. Singing is an extension of song composers' and text writers' proclamation of the message of God. Yet even when we know the melody and can hum the song, it is difficult to sing without encouragement. What tools might we use to encourage the congregation's singing? One summer, I attended a workshop on children's choirs where the instructor suggested putting a brave singer beside a shy one. What a great concept for our congregational singing! Even if the choir is seated far away from the congregation, the choir singers can easily move closer to the congregation in order to better engage them in the singing. The church where I am currently ministering is typical of a 1960's Presbyterian church setting; the organ and choir loft are in a balcony at the back of the church, far away from the pulpit. Since the sanctuary can seat almost five hundred, moving the choir down to sit in the pews has enormously improved congregational singing. When a hymn is unfamiliar, preparing the choir to sing from the front or even putting the choir in different corners of the sanctuary is helpful. Last Easter Sunday I divided the choir into two groups and had them face each other; one group stood in the balcony and the other in the front of the sanctuary. That arrangement created interest, engaged all the senses with voices surrounding the congregation, and reflected the image of "Christ is risen." Sometimes the choir can actually surround the congregation when singing a familiar hymn or sing while recessing for some special occasions. Singing is everywhere in the Bible, and a key element of worship. Paul encourages us to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Col. 3:16).

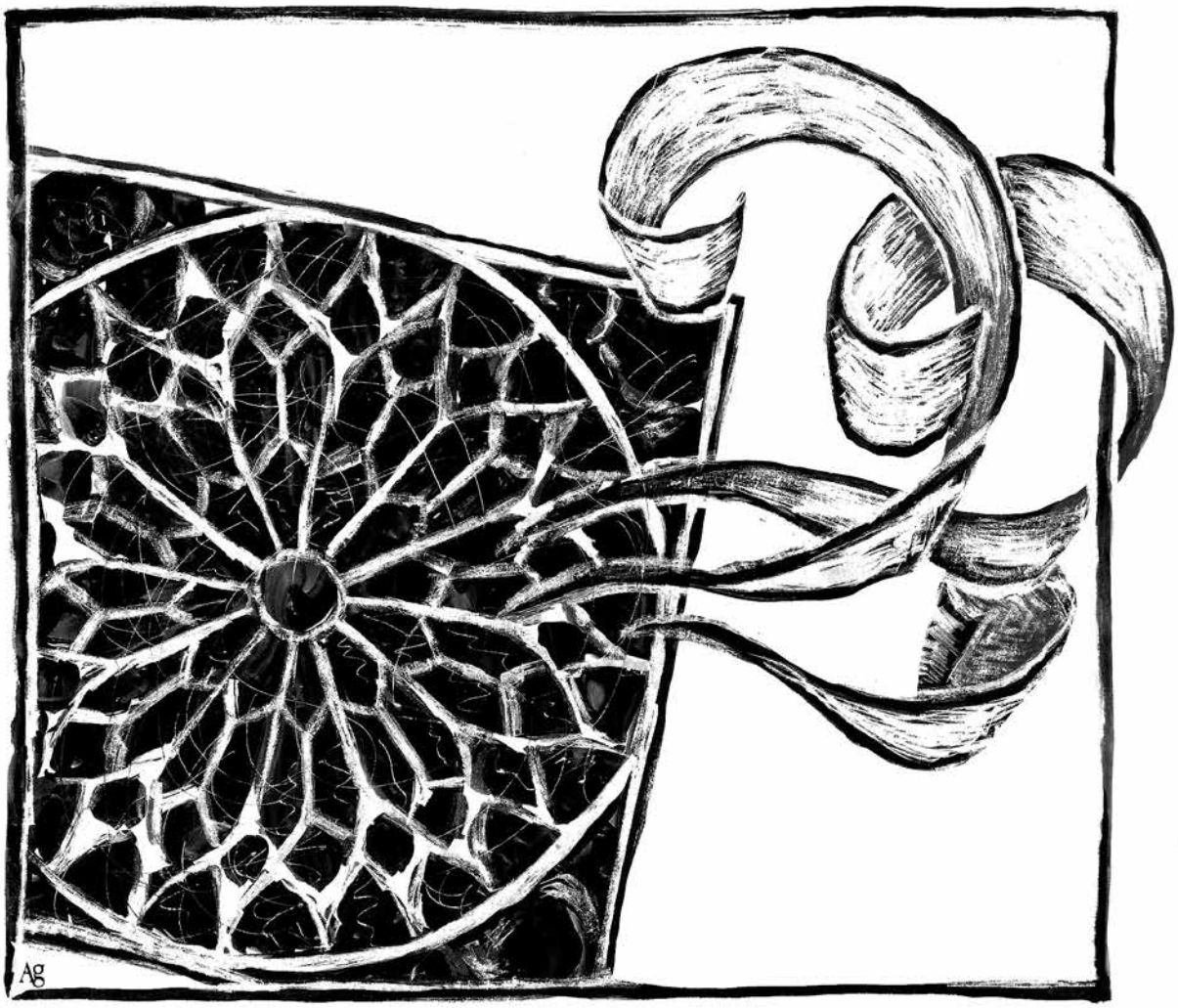
Finding the space for listening. Right outside my church office is an atrium 40 feet long and 30 feet tall; it allows for echoes from God. Preschoolers and church children sing, talk, and play there. It has also become a good place to listen on the Lord's Day to drum circles drumming, instruments playing, and voices singing. I have also found the atrium to be a great place for inviting people to enter the service with music, placing the handbell choir, the children's choir, the adult choir, brass, and other groups there to play as parishioners enter the sanctuary. Finding space for listening has become a big challenge today. How do we find better spaces to listen? Often carpeting on the floor deadens sound and hampers our ability to listen. If we welcome the joyful noise from younger worshipers during the service, then we should also embrace other human sounds such as shoes walking on a hard surface.

Chi Yi Chen Wolbrink is director of music ministry at Bayside Presbyterian Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Providing spaces for visual communication in worship. We now understand that people learn in all sorts of ways, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. How can we use and provide various spaces that take into consideration different styles of learners in our congregations? Can we consider different styles of worship using multiple kinds of technologies for the service? We need to be sensitive to what we do, why we do it, and how we do it. When we take time to give thought to our worship preparations, God will give us the ability to see and use the special gifts of different individuals, the ability to identify the different needs of various people in the congregation and diverse needs for different services. Sometimes adding printed words and the refrain of a musical score in the bulletin under legal license, or putting words on a large screen, are helpful to members of the congregation. Each church has its own traditions and specialties, but these can be enhanced by using a screen to make important announcements or project visual art, for example, while appropriately communicating the purpose of these elements during the worship service.

Creating a hospitable space for community means creating space for all ages—children, adults, and older people who may not hear or see well. Sometimes clapping or spiritual movement helps children. Including the adult choir or children's choir singers in more than one place helps enliven our worship. A special way to create community at the end of a service is to move the choir members into each aisle to sing during the closing hymn and create "surround sound" with the music.

God welcomes all; our facilities for worship should welcome not only our own church congregation but also first-time visitors. May we continually proclaim the love of God—and provide spaces to hear that good news.



Amy E. Gray

On Preaching: Take Us to Church

Kaci Clark-Porter

One of my most memorable worship experiences took place on the side of a mountain. And not just any mountain: Mount Tabor, the dome-shaped pile six miles outside of Nazareth where the transfiguration of Jesus is commemorated. Of course, we were mostly there to see the Church of the Transfiguration, a sand-colored structure boasting three tabernacles, or small chapels with altars, a larger one for Jesus, and two smaller ones for Moses and Elijah. As I sauntered through each of them, I couldn't help but embrace the irony. As the story goes, when Jesus is transfigured he becomes radiant, speaks with Moses and Elijah, and is called "Son of God." Afterwards, Peter, witnessing all this, blurts out, "Let's build a church here! And not just one but three of them! For Moses, Elijah, and Jesus!" Peter was giving away churches the way Oprah gave away laptops. The story ends with a plea from Jesus: "Please, don't."

And yet, there I was, standing in the Church of the Transfiguration. In the chapel dedicated to Jesus, I dropped a coin in the coffer, lit a candle, and offered a prayer, "I'm sorry the architect never read his Bible—but you have to admit, this is funny."

We wound up worshiping on the slope of Mount Tabor because I'm a feminist. Since our pilgrimage to the Holy Land was run by an Anglican organization, only male priests had jurisdiction to preside at sacred sites. A few days prior, I asked the director if an exception could be made. This was my first pilgrimage, I was recently ordained, and my mother was on the trip. I didn't have anything to prove, but there was much to commemorate. He said he'd see what he could do. Turns out, the best he could do for a woman was the side of a mountain.

We followed an unpaved service road until we found a site flat enough for thirty-five people to gather. Obviously, we weren't the first ones to find it: chip bags, cookie wrappers, and cigarette butts littered the ground, left there by Israeli soldiers on lunch break. As the presider I decided to look for something "holier."

What I finally settled on wasn't smooth ground but three large rocks. After rolling them together to make a table, we placed the plate holding the rice cake and the chalice holding the tiny bottle of wine gingerly on the middle stone. We began by reading the story from Luke's Gospel, and when we got to the bit about the huge cloud enveloping Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, a enormous gust of wind blew through our gathering, scattering Jesus the rice cake and toppling the chalice. At the sight of those most sacred elements airborne and bleeding out onto the stones, an Anglican screamed. Meanwhile, my co-celebrant, who's also Presbyterian, found the bread and deftly continued our worship. "We know that on the night Jesus was arrested and betrayed, he first bent down, picked up the rice cake, and having removed the dirt and leaves, said, 'This is my body, broken and scattered. Do this in remembrance of me.'"

How could I ever forget? And not because late at night I can still hear the Anglican screaming—but because of the way we *went to church* without having to build one.

At each site we visited, our guide advised us, "While we can't know *for sure* whether this is the *exact* location of where such and such biblical event took place, it's where we commemorate it." After a few days, this superfluous disclaimer became our group's official joke, "While we can't know for sure whether *this* falafel stand was Jesus' favorite, it's where we commemorate that Jesus was, in fact, a fan of lunch."

Kaci Clark-Porter is co-pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in El Paso, Texas.

When I left the Holy Land, one of the many treasures I took home with me was a new gratefulness for commemoration, which doesn't mean "this is the best we can know with the information we've got" but something more along the lines of "together," "mindful." As we consider what space for worship might mean for the preacher, I wonder if it has something to do with commemoration—the mindfulness of words and the spaces they create. Do they create space to breathe, to move, to heal, to grow?

What is a memorial service without space to grieve or a wedding without space for vulnerability? What is weekly worship without space for the truth? It is a space with walls. What a holy and helpful thought—that space for worship is more than walls. These days our walls are so expensive and outdated, mammoth edifices to bygone days.

It's when Peter is bellowing on about building three churches that God sends a cloud to shut him up. Peter (bless him) believes worship space is more walls than words, but he is set right when a voice from the cloud hollers, "This is my Son, whom I've chosen. *Listen* to him."

Listen.

Words, not walls.

As a seminary student, I heard Jack Stotts once admit that the task of the preacher isn't to speak but to listen. To the world. To our people. To our hearts. And to the Word itself, whose plea is not to be walled in but to be scattered from one end of the earth to the other, spoken in every place and commemorated in every tongue so that all lands may be called holy. Our task as preachers is not to build, but to create space; not to honor our walls, but to listen to their echoes; not to simply go to church, but to take people there.

On the Arts: Spaces for Worship —The Art of Place

Deborah Sokolove

It is often said that the church is not a building but rather the entire body of Christ, the people of God who gather to pray, lament, and rejoice together, and to disperse to do God's work in the world in the name of Jesus, the Christ. While this is true, the buildings in which God's people gather for worship are also called church. As reactions to the recent fire at the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris dramatically demonstrated, a place of worship is a container for people's hopes, dreams, memories, and fears. It is the physical manifestation of the ongoing prayer of a community, whether or not anyone is actively praying inside it at any given moment. Whether the people gather in an eight-hundred-year-old cathedral where stained glass depicting saints and angels filters the light into constantly moving colored jewels, a white clapboard building where the pure light of God pours through resolutely clear windows, a borrowed movie theater auditorium with no windows at all, or a circle of logs around a campfire in the woods, the spaces in which Christians gather tell worshipers something about God before a single word is spoken or sung.

For over a thousand years, the interiors of most church buildings were filled with paintings, sculptures, mosaics, and other works that made visible the faith of the people and embodied the stories recorded in Scripture. From rudimentary wall drawings in the third-century catacombs outside the walls of Rome[1] and the house church at Dura-Europos[2] to the glittering sixth-century mosaics of the Emperor[3] and Empress[4] and their court in the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, the gold-suffused twelfth-century Annunciation icons on the Holy Doors at St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai,[5] and the muscular figures of Michelangelo's sixteenth-century ceiling in the Sistine Chapel, these images fed the imagination of the people who worshiped in their presence.

At various times and places, this rich visual feast was the subject of great argument among theologians and preachers as some became uneasy around the relationship between images and idolatry. Suspicion of the presence of visual art in spaces for worship in the Christian East came to a climax in the iconoclastic controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries. Echoing John of Damascus's ringing reminder more than a century earlier that "the invisible things of God since the creation of the world are made visible through images,"[6] the end of these battles in 843 came to be celebrated as the Feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, with its annual reaffirmation of veneration of icons both in liturgical celebrations and in personal devotion.

In the West, however, tensions continued between those who advocated that places of worship should exemplify simplicity and visual purity and those who argued that visual splendor is needed in order to adequately convey the glory of God. While this was only one of many issues that divided the sixteenth-century Reformers from the Roman Catholic establishment, eventually most Protestant churches banished painting, sculpture, stained glass, and other forms of imagery from their worship spaces. Today, when Protestants are asked about visual art in their churches, they are often baffled. Conditioned by a history which has equated art with idolatry, they rarely think of the building within which they gather as itself a form of art.

Buildings, however, do not arise of themselves. The architects who design spaces for worship are artists who make aesthetic decisions—as all visual artists do—about things like proportion, shape, light, and color. While choices such as where to put

Deborah Sokolove is professor emeritus of visual arts at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., and the former director of the Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion.

doors, windows, or light switches may not seem to be the stuff of art, all of them contribute to how people feel about themselves, about others, and about God when they enter a space for worship. All of these aesthetic choices affect emotions, physical comfort, and a sense of place even when they are not noticed.

In his survey of how Christian art and architecture express the cultures in various times and places, noted liturgical scholar Kevin Seasoltz concluded:

> The experience of God's mystery is discovered above all when we are conscious of God's presence and have centered our lives in God. That experience flourishes in a climate of hospitality, of welcome, in which people are present to one another as the body-persons they are, as members of the body of Christ, comfortable with one another, gathered together with one another, capable of seeing and hearing all that is enacted within the worshiping assembly. An attractive beauty in all that is said and done, used or observed is the best way to facilitate the experience of mystery, for God is not only goodness and truth; God is also beauty.[7]

While individuals differ on what "attractive beauty" looks like in specific cases, the aesthetic choices that congregations inherit or make greatly affect the worship experiences of those who gather in their spaces. For instance, a long, narrow space with a lofty ceiling draws eyes and thoughts upward and towards the far-away, often-elevated altar, suggesting that God is likewise far away and unapproachable. A more nearly square or rounded space brings everyone closer to the liturgical action and to one another, suggesting a more intimate connection with the God they have come to worship. Whether building a new space for worship, remodeling one that no longer serves the congregation's liturgical needs, or simply living into whatever space is available, it is important to remember that every place of worship is not merely a utilitarian structure, but a work of art, silently proclaiming the faith of the people of God who gather there to worship the God who calls them.

Notes

1. See, for example, the images reproduced at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_commissions/archeo/inglese/documents/rc_com_archeo_doc_20011010_cataccrist_en.html.
2. Images from Dura Europos may be seen at http://media.artgallery.yale.edu/duraeuropos/dura.html.
3. See the mosaic of Emperor Justinian and his retinue at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_of_San_Vitale#/media/File:Sanvitale03.jpg.
4. See the mosaic of Empress Theodora and her attendants at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_of_San_Vitale#/media/File:Sanvitale04.jpg.
5. See an image of the St. Catherine's *Annunciation* at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Holy_Doors.jpg#/media/File:Holy_Doors.jpg.
6. St. John Damascene, *On Holy Images*, trans. Mary H. Allies (London: Thomas Baker, 1898), 10–17. Excerpts at https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/johndam-icons.asp.
7. R. Kevin Seasoltz, *A Sense of the Sacred: Theological Foundations of Christian Architecture and Art* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 333–334.

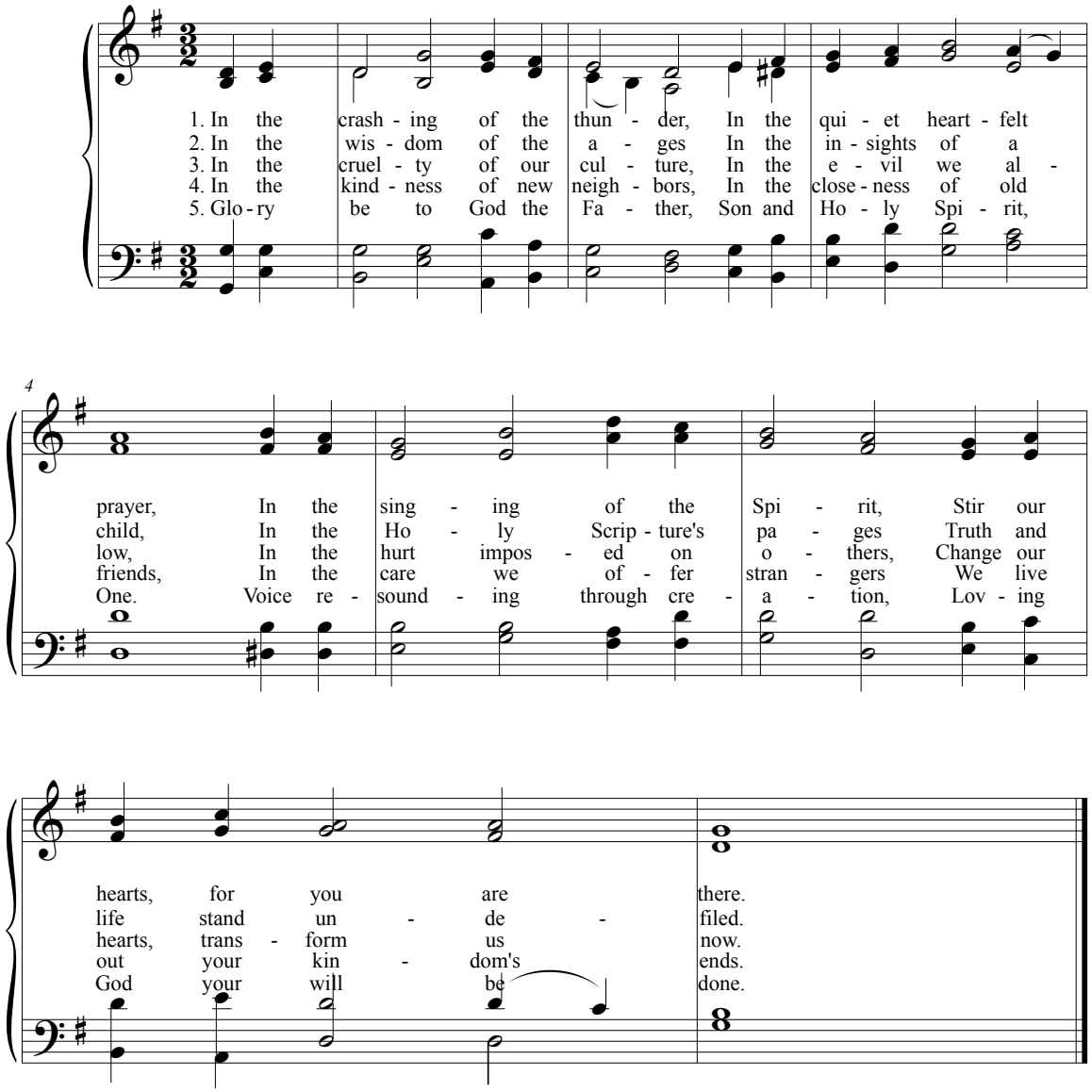
Ideas

“In the Crashing of the Thunder”

Text: William McConnell

Tune: V. Earle Copes

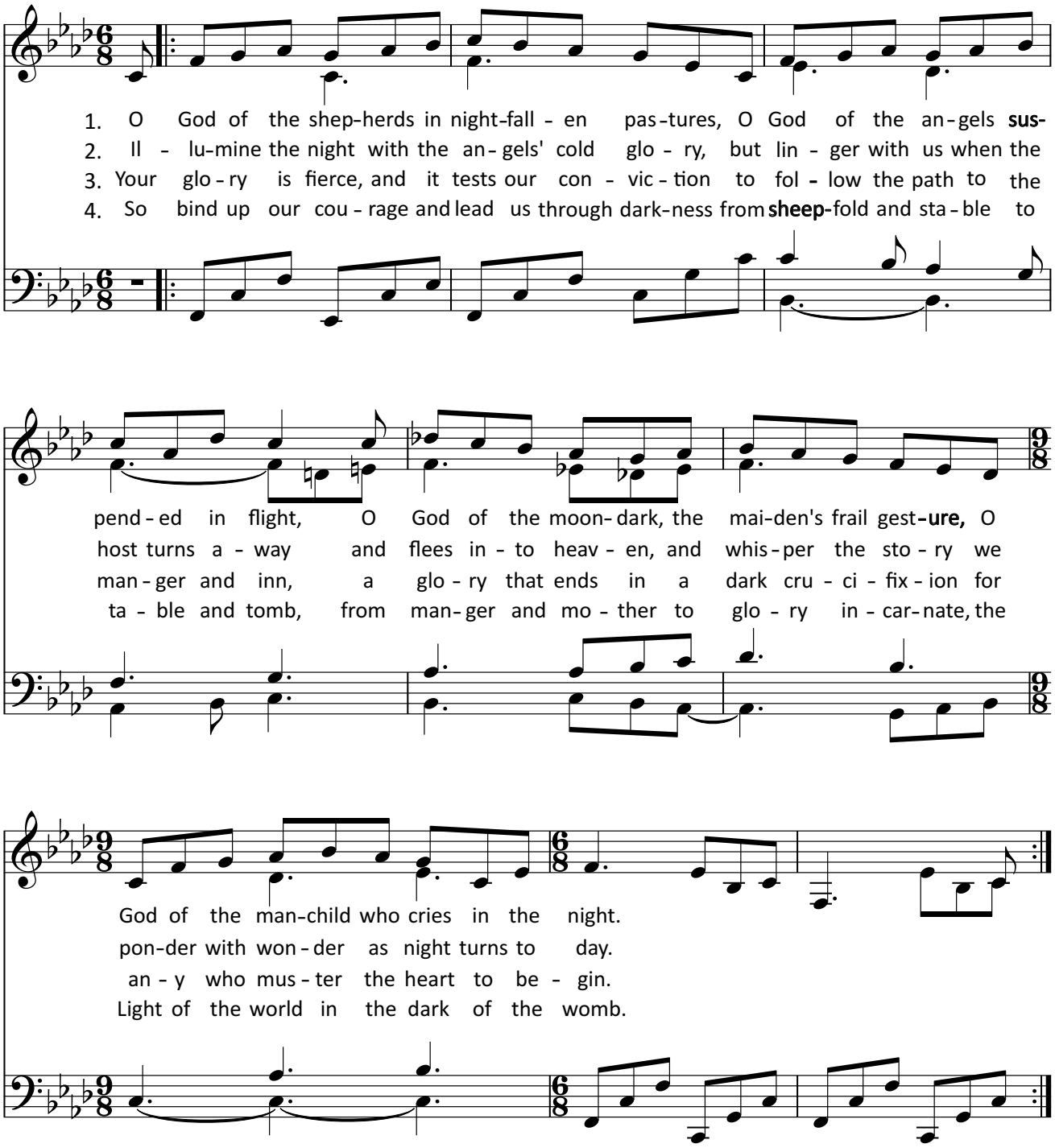
KINGDOM
8.7.8.7

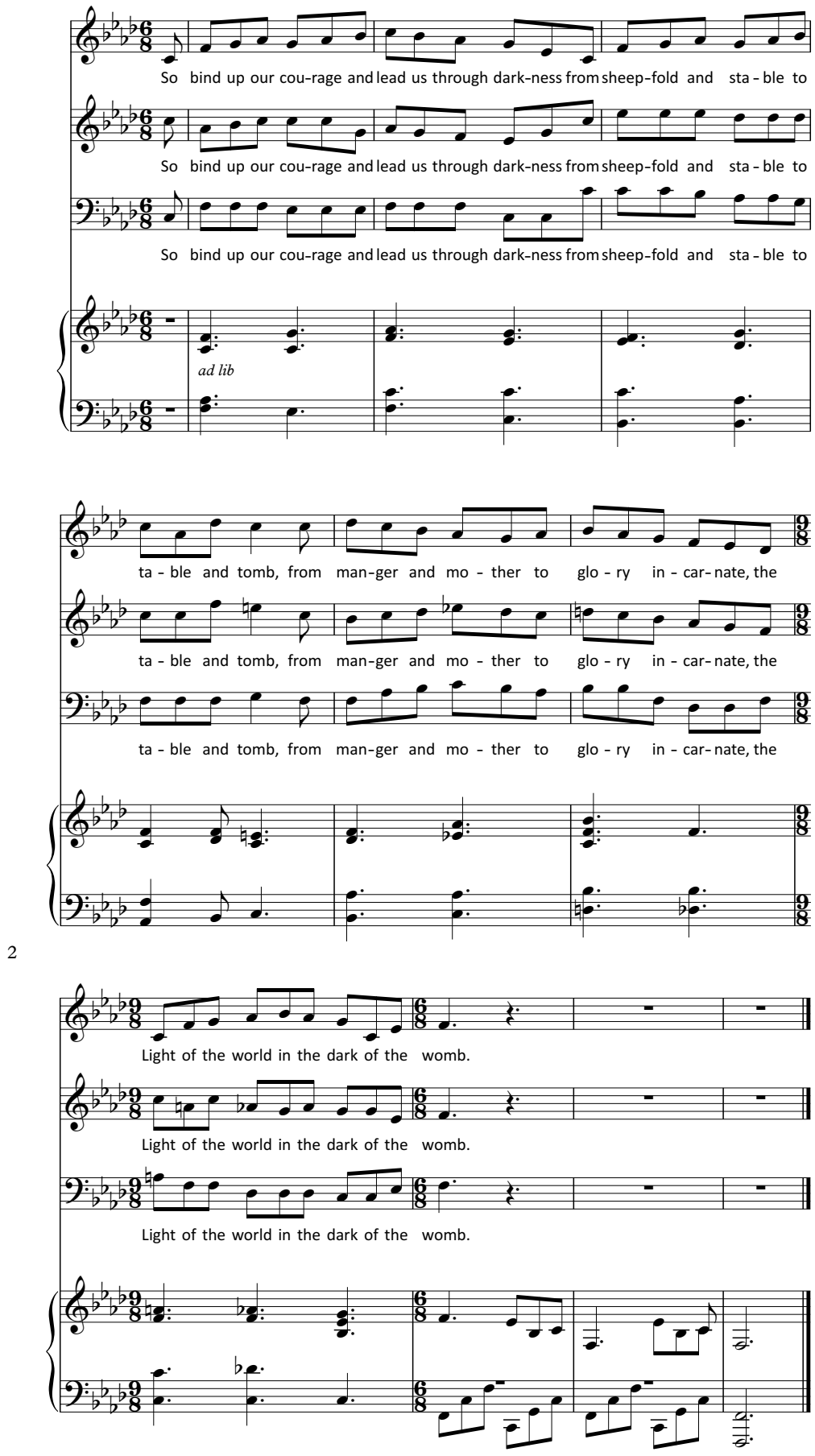


“The Shepherds’ Prayer”

Text and tune: Paul Hooker
Accompaniment and harmony: Eric Wall

tune: WRIGLEY




So bind up our cou-rage and lead us through dark-ness from sheep-fold and sta - ble to
So bind up our cou-rage and lead us through dark-ness from sheep-fold and sta - ble to
So bind up our cou-rage and lead us through dark-ness from sheep-fold and sta - ble to
ad lib
ta - ble and tomb, from man-ger and mo - ther to glo - ry in - car- nate, the
ta - ble and tomb, from man-ger and mo - ther to glo - ry in - car- nate, the
ta - ble and tomb, from man-ger and mo - ther to glo - ry in - car- nate, the
2
Light of the world in the dark of the womb.
Light of the world in the dark of the womb.
Light of the world in the dark of the womb.

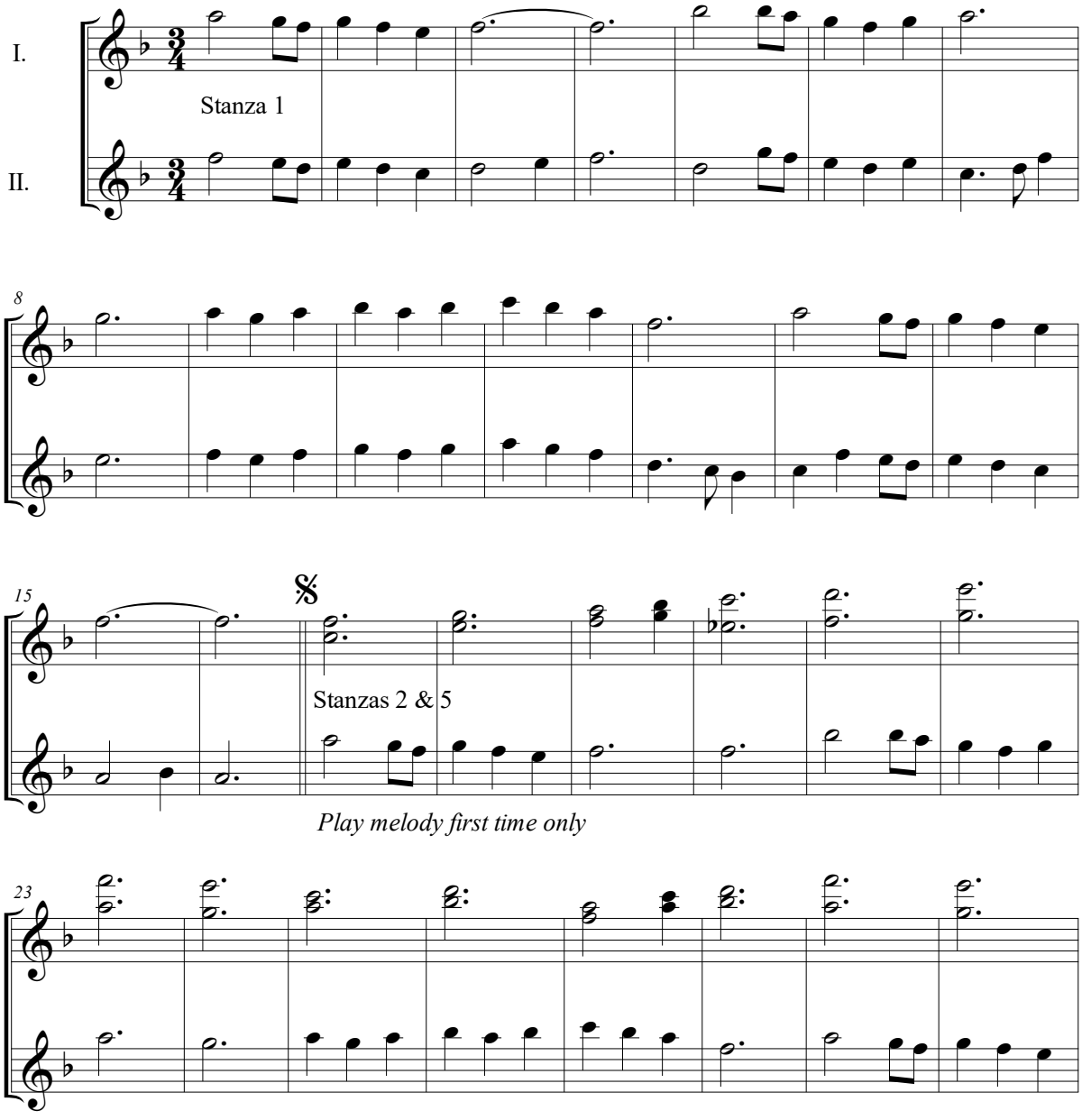
Come to the Table of Grace

Instrumental arrangement by Jane Van Valkenburg

For Two C Instruments

(At m.17, Part I plays the lower notes the first time.
At the D.S., both instruments play the upper staff.)

Tune: Barbara Hamm
Instrumental parts: Jane Van Valkenburg



Instrumental Parts for "Come to the Table of Grace"

Jane A. Van Valkenburg

When I accepted Kim Long's invitation to provide music for worship at New Castle Presbytery's Beach Retreat, I immediately recruited my violinist husband to come along. I knew that I would be playing a portable keyboard in a hotel ballroom, so another instrument would provide some welcome variety.

When four-part harmony is provided for a hymn, those parts can become instrument descants. For instance, the alto line can be played up an octave. When only the melody is presented, however, I often write instrumental descants, so I wrote some for the violin. Shortly before the retreat, I discovered that we would also be collaborating with a flutist, so some of the solo descants turned into duets, and one is included here.

Hope Publishing owns the copyright to "Come to the Table of Grace," so their permission is needed for any arrangement. Luckily, Hope's policies are extremely generous, and their website has an online chat feature, so permission for this arrangement was obtained painlessly.

Our worship music worked well at the beach retreat, where a trumpet, a guitar, and a makeshift *cajon* provided even more variety. The gifts of God for the people of God!

Book Reviews

Interpreting Life Liturgically: What's Worship Got to Do with It?

Cláudio Carvalhaes (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018)

Reviewed by Melva Lowry

In *Interpreting Life Liturgically: What's Worship Got to Do with It?* Cláudio Carvalhaes offers readers a way to reflect how worship is both conducted and embodied within their contexts. The essays, many of them previously published, urge readers to think politically and socially about how liturgy interprets the way we look at and embrace—or not embrace—the "other," especially immigrants coming through Mexico to southern U.S. border states.

As a recent seminary graduate and woman of color, I initially read the book looking for a critique of modern-day liturgy and hoping for examples of more diasporic liturgy that could be used in worship. As a pastor's kid, raised in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), I was expecting Carvalhaes to dissect "favorite" liturgical readings into "dos" and "don'ts." Yet I had to keep in mind the question that is the title of the book: "What's worship got to do with it?" The author asks his readers—academics, lay people, all those who have spent their life in church—to look beyond the Sunday order of service, those pre-scripted words we can recite in harmony along with the pastor. He reminds us that we cannot disconnect our personhood from our experience; even though we have found ways to silence parts of ourselves in worship, we have done so in detriment to self, neighbor, and the meaning of what it means to follow Christ in spirit and in truth. By allowing worship to be the only framework in which liturgy can be used and interpreted, we fail to see how liturgy is created in the world and in community with others. We have relegated the breadth and language of liturgy to an academic, privileged few and have limited the Pentecostal impact of the Holy Spirit that sparks imagination and possibility.

A few crucial hinge points in this work clarify Carvalhaes's objective in merging and expanding on his earlier writings. Chapter 3, on baptism, poignantly incapsulates much of the book's argument. Here he explains how baptism unites, structures community, and provides freedom—both spiritually and by giving a new social-political freedom that resonates across boundaries. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. simply stated, "This is the role of the church: to free people." This quotation begins the chapter, reminding readers that baptism binds Christians to one another across denominations, and challenging us to acknowledge that baptism entails freedom and acceptance for the individual and within the community.

Carvalhaes makes it clear that we do not adequately remember or accept the challenge baptism presents. He describe an image of the water used for baptism that comes from a shared pool within a community, one that also provides water for plants, drinks on a hot day, and a place for the community to gather and rest. The water is holy because of the way it is gathered (mostly from rain) and the way it is used and reverenced by the community. It is "a reservoir of memory, of meaning, of fun, of survival" (p. 49). The water is considered holy because it is provided by God and useful to all within the community no matter their religious or spiritual stance. The liturgy of the water is not only seen in the performance of a baptism, but in the way it sets the people of the community free to live and be together in a hot, dry climate. How can the privileged, Westernized Christian remember and use and reverence baptism and the baptismal font as a way of memory, meaning, fun, and survival? The role of baptism—to bind one to Christ and be set free through Christ's death and resurrection—is ritualized daily in the community.

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Baptism is both authority and legality for the believer who is also part of a sociopolitical world which demands one to be able to provide credentials. The poor are not citizens because they cannot prove residency; the migrant and immigrant are not worthy of help because they cannot provide documentation proving their personhood is in danger; there is no need for the African American to receive reparations because legally we have dealt with the inequalities in the land. It is through baptism that we should be reminded that everyone and everything created on this planet by God has been touched with the imago Dei. The seal of baptism does not only bind one to a particular community but expands the believer's understanding of God and life. After the sacrament of baptism has been performed, we are expected to continue enacting that ritual and all that it means.

In conclusion, the question I walk away with after reading Carvalhaes's book is "Where in life do we encounter and/or not encounter liturgy?" This question is important for us all, whatever our religious or spiritual contexts, because liturgy is a way of interpreting; it is a way of being and doing simultaneously in community with others. If we cannot recognize the act of liturgy or the liturgical movement being done in day-to-day life, then we must work individually and collectively to investigate who is being left out.

Presbyterian Worship Questions and Answers

David Gambrell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019)

Reviewed by Laura Blank

When I first received David Gambrell's *Presbyterian Worship Questions and Answers*, I put it in the hands of some teens in my congregation and invited them to look up some questions that piqued their curiosity. Their reading drew out some in-depth and exciting conversation. Likewise, I used an entry on the Lord's Supper at the opening of a session meeting alongside our study of the role of elders, and we had several "aha!" moments around the table. What Gambrell achieves in his writing is a book that is accessible to folks at many levels of involvement and instruction in worship planning and leadership.

Gambrell's book, patterned after the Protestant Reformers' catechisms, sets forth a series of questions that can inform, inspire, and instruct anyone who desires to deepen their understanding of Christian worship in general, and the Reformed tradition in particular. Those who are familiar with Donald McKim's *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers* books will be pleased to add this volume to their collection, knowing it will serve the church well alongside those trusted and loved resources.

In the Introduction, Gambrell reminds us that our chief end is to "glorify God, and to enjoy him forever" (*Book of Confessions,* 7.001). Every entry in this book, whether addressing profound theological questions (Why do Presbyterians baptize infants?) or seemingly more utilitarian concerns (What things should be on the communion table?), points back to that chief end. Each page is rich with reminders of the triune God that we worship, and why we find our deepest joy and purpose in that worship.

David Gambrell draws from not only a deep well of scholarship but also years of experience in helping Presbyterians at all levels of our denominational structure develop a richer and fuller understanding of worship. His keen understanding of the concerns and questions that are upon the hearts of many is clear. His writing conveys a pastoral voice that has been honed through countless conversations throughout the life of the church.

The book is structured around seventy-nine questions and answers on topics ranging from worship leadership to the sacraments to the Christian year to music and art in worship. All the questions are listed in the contents, making it easy to quickly research a topic of particular interest or concern or to allow for a structured reading or study of a chapter or more. The book begins with some broad questions to set a framework for understanding why we worship, but soon after it delves into specific topics. Each question and answer is incredibly digestible, with no entry taking up more than a page or two. Most questions are answered first by addressing the theological grounding, then offering up references to Scripture, theologians, and the PC(USA) *Book of Order,* the *Book of Confessions*, and the 2018 *Book of Common Worship*. Only after laying the groundwork of the *why* does an entry address the *how* and lay out more specifics. Therefore, each question leads you into an exploration and reflection beyond a simple answer.

With this inviting format, one can imagine a long list of creative uses for this book within the life of the church. *Presbyterian Worship Questions and Answers* can quickly find a home not only on a shelf in a pastor's or worship leader's study but also in the hands of a new members' class, in a confirmation class, at the opening of a session meeting, or in a

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small group study. Even the most seasoned pastors, church musicians, and worship leaders will find much to learn in these pages. Being accessible does not equate to being watered down, simplistic, or condescending. Each question is treated with care and respect. For those who seek fresh language and help in communicating our theology of worship, David Gambrell is a wonderful teacher of how to instruct and inform while honoring the insights and gifts of the Spirit working within each member of the Christian family. He writes both as a trusted expert and a fellow believer and friend within the body of Christ.

Think of this book as a conversation partner, opening the door to a more open and robust dialogue in the church about why we do what we do. Think of this book as a guide, leading a congregation through the questions that have tripped us up and pointing us back to the heart and purpose of our worship. And think of this book as a gift, creating a broader capacity within worshiping communities to indeed glorify and enjoy God forever.

Call to Worship

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Spaces for Worship

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