

Eucharistic Practice & Sacramental Theology in Pandemic Times

REFLECTIONS BY CANADIAN ANGLICANS



*Compiled by the General Synod of
the Anglican Church of Canada*

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Executive summary

In the Spring of 2020, in the early weeks of pandemic shut-down, the Faith, Worship, and Ministry committee of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada invited submissions of theological reflections on eucharistic practice and sacramental theology. Over forty submissions were received and are now here collected, edited and organized into a full resource for study and discussion. All are of a theological nature, though their approaches to the doing of theology differ. They include teachings about the spiritual foundations we need to cultivate during these times, reflections on congregational experience, and elucidations of core matters of doctrine.

All exhibit in some way the Anglican ethos that seeks to integrate pastoral, liturgical and theological concerns together. Some, more than others, call more upon Scripture; some, more than others, call more upon the Tradition. Some focus their attention on the urgency of present missional call in order to challenge us; some offer perspectives to root us in the spirituality that we need to continue in the ways that we are trying to be faithful. All contributions reflect a deep pastoral care to nurture faithful discipleship in local communities for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Preface

When public health measures necessitated the closure of places of worship in Canada back in March of 2020, local parish leaders entered into a flurry of activity to tend to difficult and immediate pastoral needs, and to reshape the worshiping and gathering life of their communities. Creativity abounded in some very lovely ways as the internet was engaged as never before to lead worship, hold pastoral conversations, dig into discipleship formation, and offer prayer. For many, the loss of the capacity to celebrate the eucharist struck hard and the grief that ensued was tough. A growing number of voices started to advocate for permission to adapt Holy Communion for remote or distanced safe practice, and debates sprang up about the nature of such words as *real, virtual, presence, communion*.

The conversations, sometimes energetic, sometimes polarized, pointed to a number of realities in the experiences of congregations, clergy, and lay leaders these days. That the celebration of Holy Eucharist has become the principal dominical act of worship, every, or almost every, Sunday in most communities in the Anglican Church of Canada, though it may seem like ‘it’s ever been thus’ is actually relatively new in the last two generations. That there continues to be disparity in the provision of such eucharist-focussed worship in many communities in rural, northern, and Indigenous communities runs parallel as a reality that confronts a fundamental divide of privilege across our church. That there is much that can be adapted to livestreaming and YouTube recordings has become now enough of a given that we can work on better perfecting techniques to better communicate the messages we want to be about.

So very much in these pandemic times is disorienting. What better time to reorient our attention to some of our foundations – to test to see if they still stand, to find there some strength, to learn anew what we think we’ve always known, all for the sake of continuing to shape our discipleship under Jesus for the sake of the world.

The Faith, Worship, and Ministry committee of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada approved in June a proposal to invite approximately sixty Anglican leaders – laity, deacons, priests, bishops, professors, administrators – to reflect and write on a topic related to eucharistic worship and theology. The following are excerpts from the letter of invitation and explanation:

The present pandemic situation has created the context in which faithful adjustments in the lives of local Anglican parishes with online worship, pastoral care, and discipleship formation becoming a new ‘norm.’

Whether transitory or with longer reach, the present context and these responsive ministry and technological innovations are a rich field in which significant theological questions are seeded. We need to nurture those seeds.... We are looking for:

- *writers to be self-consciously reflective, contextually specific, and to root their reflections in actual pastoral and worshipping experience in these present days;*
- *contributions that employ theological reflection across a broad disciplinary approach: ethics, liturgics, sacramental theology, ecclesiology, pastoral theology, ecumenics, apologetics, and other approaches;*
- *theological method that calls upon and speaks to Canadian expressions of the Anglican and catholic traditions of theological reflection, including the engagement of scripture, tradition, and reason, and integration of insights and questions from pastoral-liturgical-spiritual experiences as the ground of good theological reflection;*
- *questions as much as insights: the best work of theology is often to cast the right sorts of compelling questions for wider consideration, without necessarily having to answer those questions in the way of a solution; ...*

Response was prompt and energetic; by October 2020, we had received more than forty submissions, including one from an ecumenical partner (United Church of Canada) and four from Anglican Communion partners.

We recognize that the very nature of these pandemic months has meant that many who had wanted to contribute have simply been unable to find the time to do so. It is also worth noting that of those approached, a small but significant number of people—particularly in Indigenous and rural contexts – indicated that the questions were really not a priority for them. In offering this collection of reflections we do well also to remember the privilege that permits time for reflection and writing. Fully one third of those approached with invitation declined due to the combinations of their own pastoral busyness and pressures in ministry in which this project is rather less than critically important. But what we do have here includes young laity and clergy in rural, small city, and large city contexts across all of the Canadian Ecclesiastical Provinces.

There are those who might expect or hope that, through this project, the Faith, Worship, and Ministry committee would be offering positions on particular eucharistic practices and weighing in on their validity. Such was not the aim of the project. Rather, it was our intention to invite a ‘going deeper’ set of considerations. In other words, instead of an approach

that would directly address issues of pastoral and sacramental practice for the specific and unique time that is this pandemic time, we felt it important to invite reflections into the foundational matters of what our eucharistic and sacramental theology is in the life of the church, and to do so during the specific and unique time in which our ‘normal’ way of ‘doing church’ has been suspended. In so doing, we hope to construct a base of written reflections from which to create resources to further engage local catechesis and theological-spiritual formation. As with all things of the Reign of God, and sacramentality in particular, we did not set out to solve a *puzzle about* God’s ways and the church, but to invite the church to reflection *within the mystery* of God and God’s desire for the world and the church.

The Contributors

The Ven. Kyn Barker was ordained deacon 10 years ago after a 35 year career as teacher, curriculum consultant and coordinator with the York Region School Board, and now serves at St. Matthew the Apostle Church in Toronto. He is Archdeacon and Coordinator of Deacons in the diocese and Secretary to the Board of the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada.

Dr. Patricia Bays is a lay person with degrees in arts, theology and education. She is a theological educator, with a particular interest in exploring Anglican theology with lay people, and lives in Ottawa.

The Rev. Dr. Stephen Black is a research associate in biblical studies at the Vancouver School of Theology with expertise in New Testament studies and hermeneutics. He recently spent several years teaching at Codrington College in Barbados. Currently he is a transitional Deacon at All Saints, Ladner, in the Diocese of New Westminster.

The Rev. Dr. Hilary Bogert-Winkler is Director of Pastoral Studies at the Montreal Diocesan Theological College. She completed a doctorate at the University of Connecticut in liturgy and church history. Originally from Kentucky, she has served for the past decade in the Diocese of Western Massachusetts in parish and youth ministry.

The Rev. Daniel Bowyer is a priest of the Diocese of Huron serving as chaplain at Trinity Village Care Centre, Retirement Studios and Independent Living Townhomes, a ministry of the Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

The Rev. Dr. Chris Brittain was Professor of Social and Political Theology at the University of Aberdeen (2007-2017). He remains an honorary Professor in Divinity at Aberdeen although he now serves as Dean of Divinity and Margaret E. Fleck Chair in Anglican Studies at Trinity College in the University of Toronto.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Terry M. Brown is retired bishop of Malaita in the Anglican Church of Melanesia and recently retired Bishop-Rector of the Church of the Ascension, Hamilton, Ontario. He is temporarily living at St. Philip's Friary and Parish, Annerley, Brisbane, Australia, with Permission to Officiate from the Archbishop of Brisbane.

The Rt. Rev. William Cliff is Bishop of the Diocese of Brandon. A former university chaplain, and gifted musician, he has made a mark in effective faith formation with younger people. He also serves as co-chair of the Council of the North, as a member of the General Synod Communications Committee and as Secretary to the House of Bishops of Canada.

The Most Rev. David Edwards is Metropolitan of Canada and has served as the Bishop of Fredericton since 2014. Before entering ordained ministry he worked as a high school teacher. He is married to Debbie.

The Rev. James W. Farwell, PhD, is a Professor of Theology and Liturgy at the Virginia Theological Seminary. His areas of expertise include liturgical and sacramental theology; liturgy, suffering, and trauma; theories of ritual and religion; comparative theology; and theologies of religion.

Leslie Flynn is the family life Coordinator at St. Georges Cadboro bay in beautiful Victoria BC. She has also recently begun her journey as an MDiv student at the Vancouver School of Theology. Leslie is passionate about helping youth figure out their space in the ever changing landscape of the Anglican Church.

The Rev. Canon Nancy Ford is the Deacon to the City of Christ Church Cathedral in Victoria British Columbia. Canon Ford is the Director of Deacons for the Diocese of Islands and Inlets and serves as the President of the Association of Anglican Deacons Canada.

The Most Rev. Anne Germond is Archbishop of the Diocese of Algoma and Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario. She describes herself as Marked as 'Christ's own Forever' and is privileged to serve with other members of His body as a bishop in His church.

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Graham serves as Pastor at St. Alban's Cathedral Church in Kenora, Ontario. Trained and formed in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Dr. Graham has served in several Anglican parishes under the terms of our Full Communion relationship between our churches.

Canon David Harrison is rector of the Church of St Mary Magdalene in Toronto, currently completing his Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Development degree at Bexley Seabury in Chicago, with a thesis focused on virtual worship and the eucharist. A former chair of Liturgy Canada, David is a member of the Board of Directors of the Primate's World Relief & Development Fund, and a trained church musician.

Canon John Hill is a retired presbyter of the Diocese of Toronto and a Canon of St James' Cathedral. A member of Liturgy Canada since its inception, a member of Council of Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission, and a member of the North American Academy of Liturgy. He is the author of *Making Disciples and Into the Household of God*.

PJ Hobbs is the Director of Community Ministries for the Diocese of Ottawa and a Senior Lecturer at the Virginia Theological Seminary.

The Rev. Canon Paul Jennings serves as Anglican Formation Director at the Atlantic School of Theology. A theologian, he has been called upon to work on numerous national bodies, including the Primate's Theological Commission and the Commission on the Marriage Canon. He was formerly Director of Pastoral Studies at Montreal Diocesan Theological College.

The Rev. Canon Donna Joy has served the church as a parish priest for 30 years, while also offering diocesan and wider church leadership. She is working these days on effective ways to offer liturgical leadership that safely draws people together, and is centred on the Triune God who promises to sustain, comfort, nurture and mobilize the people of God, particularly during times of exile.

The Rev. Dr. Alison Kemper, a deacon for over 40 years, studied patristics for many years. Her faith has been shaped by a profound experience of the Eucharistic community and a decades long professional background in advocacy and NGO management, leading organizations devoted to social and environmental change. She has worked with immigrant women, in environmental advocacy, and as a LGBT community organizer and activist.

The Most Rev. Gregory Kerr-Wilson is the Archbishop of the Diocese of Calgary and the Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land, overseeing ten dioceses within a regional area from the Arctic to across Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and parts of Ontario. He is a theologian and liturgist who has served on numerous national bodies of our church.

Brother James Koester SSJE is a native of Regina, Sask. He is a graduate of Trent University, Peterborough ON and Trinity College, Toronto. Ordained in 1984, he is a priest of the Diocese of British Columbia where he served in parish ministry. He entered the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (SSJE) in Cambridge, MA in 1989, and has served as the Superior of the community since 2016.

The Ven. Richard Geoffrey Leggett, PhD, is Vicar of Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral and Archdeacon of Westminster in the Diocese of New Westminster, and served as Professor of Liturgical Studies at the Vancouver School of Theology from 1987-2010. He is a liturgical theologian and

historian who has served in a leadership capacity in many national, international, and diocesan bodies.

The Rev. Barbara Liotcos, MDiv (Vancouver School of Theology), *ThM* (Trinity College) was ordained in 1980 and served in New Westminster, Cariboo, Niagara, General Synod (Consultant for Ministry and Worship), Kootenay (Executive Archdeacon and Administrative Assistant to the Metropolitan), Anglican Parishes of the Central Interior, and Toronto, retiring in 2011.

The Rev. Stephen London is the rector of St Thomas Anglican Church in Sherwood Park, AB. He has been a priest in the Anglican Church of Canada for seventeen years, is husband to another priest, and father to three. He reflects on discipleship and faith at hopecanteen.org.

The Rev. Dr. Iain Luke is Principal of the College of Emmanuel and St. Chad in Saskatoon. He holds an MA in theology from Oxford University, and a PhD in economics from Cambridge. He has served in rural ministry and as Dean of Athabasca, and in theological education at St. John's College Winnipeg.

The Rev. Dr. Joanne Mercer is an Anglican priest, theologian, and theological educator from Central Newfoundland, Canada. Her research interests include (but are not limited to) theology and communication (media, film, internet); models of theological education; and contemporary expressions of "church".

The Rev. Dr. Deborah Meister is a priest, spiritual director, and Benedictine contemplative who is passionate about the intersection of spirituality and justice and serves as Associate at Christ Church Cathedral in Montreal. Raised in Judaism, she chose to be baptized while completing her doctorate on the martyrologies of the English Reformation.

The Rev. Dr. Ruth Meyers is Dean of Academic Affairs and Hodges-Haynes Professor of Liturgics at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California. In 2018, she was appointed to the General Convention Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision. She has also served as chair of the Episcopal Church's Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (2009-15).

Dr. Brendon Neilson is the vision animator for the diocese of British Columbia. Brendon works to facilitate the implementation of the diocesan vision. This includes supporting implementation teams and parishes to embody the vision and work on collective efforts to live the vision together. Brendon has a PhD in theology focusing on the biographical method of James Wm McClendon Jr.

The Rev. Juan M.C. Oliver, PhD, is the Custodian of the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church. His *A House of Meanings* (CPI, 2019) is a study guide to the meanings of liturgy, designed for parish study groups.

The Rev. Dr. Andy O'Neill studied for ministry at Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto and completed his PhD in theology at New College at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. In addition to being in full-time ministry, Andy is a sessional instructor for Atlantic School of Theology, teaching courses in theology, ethics, worship and pastoral ministry.

The Rev. Canon Nick Pang is the incumbent priest of St Saviour's Church in Penticton, British Columbia (Diocese of Kootenay) where he serves with a dedicated team in their mission to Worship, Grow, and Love in Christ. He also coordinates refugee sponsorship for the Diocese of Kootenay and surrounding regions.

The Rev. Anne Privett serves as priest of St. Andrew's church in Kelowna, British Columbia. Anne holds a Masters of Divinity Honours from Trinity College, Toronto.

Queen's Theological College in St. John's, Newfoundland, hosted several consultations with students, faculty and community members on the topic of this project. The paper was led by the *Rev. Canon Dr. David Bell*, Dean of Theology, and *Canon John Courage*, the community's Chaplain. The preparation of the paper included webinar consultation sessions for the Queen's College community.

The Rev. Grant Rodgers currently serves as Director of Anglican Formation at the Vancouver School of Theology. With extensive experience in parish ministry, he has also worked in ministry formation and assessment, university chaplaincy, and supervisory capacities.

The Ven. Christine Ross, a deacon in the Diocese of Kootenay, serves as Director of Deacons for the diocese, with responsibilities for candidates for ordination as well as support for all the ordained Deacons. Chris is a leader in servant ministry and with the deacons of the Diocese, supports lay ministry in a number of ongoing outreach projects.

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Project management and editorial work was undertaken during pandemic remote-working in a home office on the Haldimand Tract, land that was promised to the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations of the Grand River, and within the territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples.

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The essays in this collection vary in their approach, voice, focus questions, and contexts of origin. All are of a theological nature, though their approaches to the doing of theology differ. All exhibit in some way the Anglican ethos that seeks to integrate pastoral, liturgical and theological concerns together. Some, more than others, call more upon Scripture; some, more than others, call more upon the Tradition. Some focus their attention on the urgency of present missional call in order to challenge us; some offer perspectives to root us in the spirituality that we need to continue in the ways that we are trying to be faithful. All contributions reflect a deep pastoral care to nurture faithful discipleship in local communities for the sake of God's mission in the world.

It is never an easy thing to organize the presentation of this sort of project. We did not set out to invite people to speak to pre-determined questions – that would have been easier to curate after the fact, but it seemed important to allow the invitation to rest with the discernment of those invited about how they wanted to approach their contributions. In the end, it seems that what we have received can be sorted into four main categories, which we find as follows:

- Spiritual Roots for Stressful Times
- Learning in Context: Congregational Life and Mission
- Discipleship and Mission
- Theological Foundations and Journeys
- Reflections from Ecumenical and Anglican Communion Partners
- Epilogue: A Theology of Lament and Hope

The articles have been drawn together into these 'chapters' for now in order to facilitate their study in a relatively ordered way. This ordering of them at this point also helps us to think about what perspectives, voices, questions, and insights are missing. This presentation should be viewed

at this time as the initiation of a conversation. For now, here is a summary of what you will find in the collection of essays.

Spiritual roots for stressful times

Several writers gift us with the sort of spiritually foundational reflections that are intended to help to feed us with what we need to keep on the faithful path in the times when we most need these words of wisdom.

Patricia Bays, a theologian from Ottawa, has long exercised leadership locally and nationally as a layperson whose vocational witness has helped to nurture the ministries of all the baptised. Patricia calls on the witness of Anglican poetry to centre her reflections on how we need to focus, as a church, “For the Time Being.” “The time is noon...” says the poet Auden, “when the Spirit must practice the scales for rejoicing.” What do we need to practice at this time? Stephen Black’s approach, as a biblical scholar, similarly reflects a desire to equip us with the spiritual sustenance we need in these times. For, in these times, we are well to be reminded of the fact that, though we hear the words “unprecedented” and “never before have we...” to describe our present realities, we also need to be reminded of the experiences of the Diaspora period and to be sure to acknowledge the losses we are experiencing.

Anne Germond, as the Archbishop of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario, had a particular job to do in gathering the dioceses of this Province to discern faithful responses along the way. For her, there was something deeply sacramental about the unity found in the conversations engaged especially amongst bishops that speaks to the call to each of us really to understand ourselves as members of Christ’s body together. Rebecca Graham, a priest from Algoma, writes about the eschatological spirituality that helps to ground us as communities of faith, when the present stresses may compound to distract us from our present transcendent realities and mission.

James Koester brings his considerable experience as a spiritual director and member of the religious community the Society of St. John the Evangelist as a gift to this discussion. In spiritual direction core questions are usually *“Where is God is this? What is the invitation?”* In other words: *“Where is the hope?”* To these questions I would also ask, *“How is God feeding you now?”* Have we been paying attention to what we have before us right now? Can we feast at the table of the Word?

Learning in context: Congregational life and mission

Into the next section we have arranged essays that reflect on concrete experiences of local communities as they sought to continue to nurture discipleship and faithful worship through the mediation of various forms of communications technologies and in some special contexts.

Dan Bowyer, a spiritual care practitioner (chaplain) at a long term care residence describes the ways in which the pandemic has strengthened a deep sense of the sacramentality of ecumenical community in a context of particular fragility, as the home lost -at last count- seventeen of its residents. Marie Louise Ternier, serving in a full communion congregation, reached out further to the ecumenical friends in her rural region, discovering there the possibilities for sustained ecumenical friendship that was made possible by videoconferencing technology, and uncovering that across participants of all denominations, the cessation of holy communion in their separate churches has them longing even more passionately for the time when all Christians can gather at the same table.

Two deacons, one in Toronto, another in Kelowna, reflect on how they have been processing the experience of online worship. Kyn Barker notes a concern that some streaming of eucharistic celebrations set up or reinforce a presumptive priestly clericalism given who is seen being permitted to receive the elements. Chris Ross, sitting at home alone, lamenting the loss of the eucharist and of community, records feeling acutely pained at not being able to be of assistance to those who are in need. "Deacons are always wondering how they can be of assistance." She carries the tension of acute loss along with the awareness that a 'remote' or 'virtual' eucharist would not be an answer for her. Another deacon, Nancy Ford, urges a reorientation of the conversations around the eucharist away from questions having to do with our relatively passive reception of communion, towards the active and outward movement to which God calls us in discipleship to be true and real presence to each other and to the world.

Leslie Flynn is a leader in youth ministry who discovered that moving both youth events and regular parish worship online has had some very positive effects on the faith maturation of some young people. They 'zoom in' not because their parents are 'taking them to church,' and are even more engaged in their own discipleship formation through the programmatic offerings developed for them.

In *Conversations: Church in the Midst of the Pandemic*, Peter John (PJ) Hobbs passes on to us what he heard from individual Anglicans in Ottawa whom he queried about their experiences of online worship. They have discovered a deepening of faith and of prayer life through online worship. Much to his surprise, some reported not missing the eucharist at all, explaining that they never have been able to put together for themselves

just what the celebration of holy communion is all about. This has not been a loss for them.

From Penticton, BC, Nicholas Pang offers reflections on his parish's experiences as they discerned the most accessible ways of reaching people (opting for YouTube rather than Zoom for those reasons). He calls us to reflect on the mystery of grace: "whether or not we're able to participate in the Eucharist at this time, is the miraculous grace of God transforming hearts and minds in ways that we normally experience through the Eucharist?"

Observing the patterns of engagement in her own parish, parish priest Anne Privett seems to anticipate and to answer Pang's question, noting that "the absence of the Eucharist has drawn us into a richer understanding of ourselves as the body of Christ and enabled us to feast more deeply on the living Word in scripture." The activity of offering online Compline has been, to Calgarian Brendon Witwer an occasion to reflect both on how to nurture discipleship as well as to grapple with his own identity as a priest. How many clergy experience the draw to be 'seen' in ministry, and how do they make gracious space for others and overcome the clericalism that can easily take root in perception and action?

Stephen London has found himself surprised at the fact that faith conversations within his parish in Edmonton not only can take place over Zoom, but they can be deep and nurture real growth in faith as we discover that we really are connected. "As Christians, we already believe in big surprises... that the infinite God became flesh in a tiny child." In *Pushing Back from the Table*, Joanne Mercer also reflects on her personal experiences vocational and spiritual, as a priest and theologian in Newfoundland. In this time of eucharistic absence, it seems the real, mysterious core is made more starkly clear: that the eucharist is as thanksgiving, outward and visible sing, narrative, memory, solidarity, having ethical imperative, and much more.

Donna Joy continues reflections on parish and personal experiences with a reflective chronicle of the decisions and activities of her Winnipeg parish as they grappled together with how to approach worship. The paper is a product of reflection on intentional conversations amongst the parish clergy and lay leadership. Paying deep attention to the needs of the congregation, they boldly named the importance of lament as a spiritual practice and have been highlighting lament in teaching and preaching, enabling people to name their losses and pray through these times.

Murray Still recounts the changes and adjustments that have been undertaken within his parish. He brings the questions that have arisen in that context into conversation with two other contexts – an ecumenical worship experience, and the realities of the Indigenous church in sacred gathering.

When gathering is so at the core of who we are, especially for Indigenous people, can that identity and vocation affirming gathering be facilitated through technology?

With respect to particular aspects of parish worship practice, there has been little said, but much wondering about how best to offer communion as churches reshape aspects of liturgy to accommodate social distancing and hygiene practices. Hilary Bogert-Winkler was commissioned by the Bishop of Quebec to write a paper that provides an argument against the use of individual communion cups based on the historical emergence of this as a racist practice that emerged in past eras in order to avoid ‘impurity.’ Though the purposes of this project was not to offer instruction on such specifics, for example using individual cups and/or a common pouring chalice (thereby being one cup), this bit of historical exploration reminds us that whatever practices we institute now, our original rationale may or may not be understood by those who come after us.

Discipleship and mission

Almost all of the papers reflect a very welcome commitment to community life, discipleship and mission, and often root their insights about the nature of the eucharist in its inherently communal and faith-forming quality for mission.

In a sermon delivered to her community in a online worship service, Deborah Meister delves into the incarnational core of what worship is all about, and explores the formational qualities of truly enfleshed discipleship – and the eucharistic aspects of that enfleshment – that move us out of the comfortable pew (or Zoom screen) and into radical hospitality, care, and engagement with Christ in the poor and marginalized.

Two papers stand out for the boldness and depth of their approaches in that they very self-consciously put mission first. From the Diocese of British Columbia, Brendon Neilson urges a reorientation of this present conversation, in fact, a decolonization of the conversation: “this discussion cannot happen in a vacuum. Our ecclesial lives must remain connected to our participation in the world that is groaning,” and we must move into closer encounter with that suffering, recognizing the interconnected nature of all creation. The virus itself highlights this fact in science. We must do better to engage our conversations about the eucharist within the groaning of creation, and he does just that, detailing insights from contextually specific struggles within his experience. On the other side of the country in Nova Scotia, Lisa Vaughn also presents a missiological starting point, with a sharp critique of theological conversations that are not rooted in the concrete activity of mission. These tend to simply repeat patterns of institutional self-preservation. Instead, she asks, can

we take this pandemic time and “season of fasting from the sacrament of the eucharist as sabbath Jubilee, so as to reorder our priorities for missional ministry?”

Theological foundations and journeys

As mentioned in the Introduction, all of the papers contain insights and questions that are rightly considered theological. Those contained within this two-part section address matters of doctrine in a way that is slightly more direct than the methods chosen by others. In an attempt to provide some order, we have distinguished here between those that explore the nature of the eucharist within considerations of wider notions of sacramentality, and those that focus the nature of the eucharist in the life and mission of the church.

Theological foundations and journeys: Eucharist and sacramentality

The first two papers isolate critical questions for Anglicans. Ecumenical and Interfaith leader Scott Sharman brings in questions and insights from ecumenical partners with whom we are in active formal dialogue. In *The Eucharist Belongs to None Alone*, he asks that Anglicans not consider our thinking about – and possible changes to practices of – holy communion without placing our concerns in dialogue with these partners, and he concludes his paper with questions some of those individual partners may have of us. Liturgist Barbara Liotscos urges us to look to the real practice of the early church for alternative ways of reimagining our gatherings – as house churches and small groups, and cautions us not to fall into creating a ‘priestly caste,’ something it can be argued the early church avoided.

Terry Brown writes from the context of the Solomon Islands where he served as bishop for many years. The bishop of that diocese did, in fact, write a guide for Spiritual Communion (quoted by some of the authors in this collection), but Brown finds little evidence of its actual use and wonders if we are not losing sight of the bounty of God’s grace which is “beyond our understanding, so that if for some reason (pandemic, isolation, abuse by the presider, etc.) one cannot receive the Eucharist, God’s grace is still there, including sacramental... grace.”

In *Virtual is Real: Some Preliminary Reflections on Eucharistic Worship in a Pandemic*, Vancouver Liturgist and theologian Richard Leggett takes on the presumed duality (and to some incompatibility) of ‘the real’ and ‘the virtual.’ Offering clear methodology for the discernment of the ‘real’ in online streamed worship, from pastoral, theological, and liturgical perspectives, he comes to the conclusion that online worship can be both real and personal because it can and does nurture and move people into real discipleship.

A priest with a eucharistically-centred devotion, David Harrison asks us to consider the history of eucharistic theology and practice and remind ourselves of the multivalent nature of the eucharist, and takes us on a summary exploration of Anglican tradition. Noting dangerous contemporary tendencies to flatten or ‘domesticate’ the eucharist, he asks: “is the eucharist a sacrifice, an offering, a commemoration, a meal? Yes!” To those arguing that we need the full community gathered for the eucharist, he asks: if we can’t imagine the eucharist being truly the eucharist when celebrated by a priest and one or two other people, can we imagine the eucharist at all?

Similarly calling upon the historical and present practice of the church, Deacon Alison Kemper illustrates arguments for the necessity and centrality of the eucharist according to scripture, tradition, and reason in order to help us to find thereby the spiritual riches for going forward. She calls us to eucharistic piety that ultimately springs forward into astonishing generosity for the healing of the world.

Archbishop David Edwards takes us through some of the foundational Anglican theological building blocks of sacramental theology, beginning with Cranmer, Hooker and Baxter, and, leaning on John MacQuarrie explores the meaning of sacramental efficacy from the perspective of the presider and of the recipient. Noting that the present context has drawn us into a conversation about our practices that is long overdue, he concludes that rather than going down ‘rabbit holes’ about efficacy and meaning of the sacrament, we do well to put our energies into shaping our practices of non-eucharistic worship and then discussing frequency and necessity of eucharist within the community of engaged disciples.

Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson also brings insights from scripture, tradition and reason to form a critique of contemporary culture especially in its individualism and consumerism. Calling for deeper catechesis, he raises concerns for the post-pandemic church – will people chose to continue with online worship and if so will they opt for spiritual communion, and if that is the case, can those *choices* seriously be considered the sorts of ‘just impediment’ in the way of reception that was envisioned by Cranmer and others?

The faculty of Queen’s Theological College held several discussions about online worship and spiritual communion, a conversation reflected in the paper with a transparency that reflects some different views and emphases within the group. There are no easy answers to how to proceed with worship in a pandemic, they admit, urging that we need to be open in faith to grace and to the Holy Spirit, an openness modelled in the paper itself especially with respect to whether we might consider the eucharist

in the Orthodox terms of an icon, a point on which there was disagreement but appreciation for views.

Vancouver School of Theology Anglican Formation Director Grant Rodgers takes as his starting point the answer “yes” to the question, *Can God Spread a Table in the Wilderness?* In a well-grounded explanation of the theology of spiritual communion, he calls us to a wider understanding of sacramentality, reminding us that the doctrine of the communion of saints challenges the notion that only physical proximity conditions the eucharist. Our experience of real presence however experienced mystically, requires us to turn to be real presence to the world. In reflecting on the experience of the parish’ streaming of services of the Word, Paul Jennings also pulls our attention to a wider notion of sacramentality. Word and sacrament are to be affirmed together “as equal and interdependent expressions of the one Word among us, as equal and interdependent means by which Christ is present to his people.” There is a sacramentality, the real presence of Christ, within the Word proclaimed.

Theological foundations and journeys: On the Eucharist and the life of the Church

Alexa Wallace shares with us insights from her own present MDiv studies in Saskatoon. She explores the gifts inherent in the practice of spiritual communion through the lenses of Cranmer, Aquinas and Augustine and then reminds us – through George Herbert – that “the role of sacraments was to empower Christians to take their ministry out into the world, and to recognize that the entire world belongs to Christ.” Christians discerning how they participate in God’s mission do so locally, explains Emmanuel & St Chad Principal Iain Luke, urging us to lay aside abstract and conceptual ways of considering the eucharist. Communion “is an event which happens in a particular place and time, with particular people, and in some kind of relationship to all the other events going on around it.” What we need is to discover “what it means to be a sacramental people in *this* context, and in *that* place.

Chris Brittain, as Dean of Theology at Trinity College Toronto is someone who has been paying attention to local conversations amongst clergy about the cessation of eucharistic worship, and their struggles with their own clerical identity. We are to be *homo eucharisticus*, he offers, persons defined by communion with God, not by consumption of elements. Meeting the polarized views expressed between eucharist as sacrifice and eucharist as meal, he reminds us “it is only during the gathering of the community of faith around God’s altar that one comes to truly understand the nature of eucharist as sacrifice.”

Many of the papers identify questions and concerns about the role of priests in relation to the eucharist. Only one clearly defines the ecclesiological-sacramental doctrine that it is the bishop's role to gather the people into the celebration of the eucharist. Bishop William Cliff offers us his 'bishop's notes' on decisions taken at various stages in the pandemic and draws out from the practical theology of practice the theological, pastoral, and liturgical rationale for the diocese's choices and witness.

John Hill explores the deep connections between our own dinner table and the Lord's table, and invites us to consider how we might hallow the household meal in ways that respect the distinctions between the two tables, whilst at the same time honouring the gifts of grace present in each.

Reflections from ecumenical and Anglican Communion partners

Early in this process, we reached out to friends in theological and liturgical networks in the Anglican Communion, and to some ecumenical partners. We learned about the efforts of the Scottish Episcopal Church to dedicate the summer 2020 issue of their official national theological journal to matters of theology, liturgy, and pastoral practice in pandemic times. This resource is noted as an appendix to our work here. We heard from Anglicans in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, Japan, Korea, and Australia struggling with exactly the same questions that have preoccupied us in terms of how to adapt into new ways of being church. We know of conversations going on within our ecumenical partners here in Canada too. In 2015, the United Church of Canada issued a directive relating to the livestreaming of worship and sacramental practice, arguing against 'virtual eucharist' for pastoral and theological reasons. More recently, the United Methodist Church in the United Kingdom issued a similar report. Links to each of these resources can also be found in the appendix.

We are grateful that Andrew O'Neill was able to contribute a paper from his perspective as a United Church partner, and former UCC co-chair of the Anglican United Church Dialogue of Canada. In it, Andrew gifts us with that precious voice that we need from our ecumenical partners: a mirror to hold up to ourselves, with questions that we need to ask of our own tradition, equally as he asks of his own, and that together we ask of our common life in Christ. If our understanding of the eucharist is anamnetic and not just memorial, it truly gathers us across time and space – how much of a leap is it to suggest that God's sovereignty can also work through the gaps that we perceive acutely in time and space that digital media attempts to bridge? Given that online worship is now a thing that is not going to go away, how can we best prepare to teach and do the sort of good Christian formation online to

shape the community's self understanding eucharistically? And to what more is the Holy Spirit inviting us?

Philip Tovey is an internationally well-respected liturgical theologian from the Church of England. Grateful for the invitation to reflect on his own personal experiences in the early days of the pandemic lockdown, he retraces his initial connection to livestreamed eucharists and exploration of the meaning of spiritual communion, with thanks to those closed monastic communities who continued their celebrations of the eucharist and were able in some ways to share that with the world. "So, to my surprise, I am not part of a Eucharistic community 173 miles away, where I have found a home." It might be worth picking up with Philip in the coming months to learn what lessons he has taken from that experience back to his usual Oxford community.

Ruth Meyers and James Farwell are on the faculties, respectively, of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific and the Virginia Theological Seminary. Meyers reminds us of the fundamental teachings about the eucharist as including all aspects of the liturgy: gathering of the community, word proclaimed and broken open in homily, prayers, meal, songs, reminding us that the anamnetic character of the eucharist is not contained just within the Great Thanksgiving but characterizes the whole of the celebration. As with others in this collection, she is critical of reductionistic approaches that project a limitation of the eucharist to just the reception. Farwell explains his own objections to virtual eucharist and his hesitancy about spiritual communion, bidding us to exercise the spiritual discipline of patience. Juan Oliver, a prominent Episcopal Church liturgical theologian and author, shares with Meyers and Farwell concerns about the reification of the eucharist, and takes us through biblical and historical foundations with a focus on the eschatological realities of eucharistic worship as 'rehearsing the kingdom.' He asks that, "instead of virtually packaging the clerical elements of our usual eucharist, hoping for the best," we might consider that, if we must gather virtually, what does the virtual platform permit us to do very well, namely the necessary corollary to the meal, that is, to focus on the Word. In so doing, we can help to build up the spiritually robust capacity, when we come together again, to do so with a deeper consciousness of our part in 'rehearsing the kingdom.'

The sacrament of the present moment: Eucharist in the time being

PATRICIA BAYS

In 1941-42, the poet W. H. Auden wrote in memory of his mother a long poem, *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*. Written in a time of war, in a time of rationing and social constraints, in a time of despair, the poem is nevertheless a meditation on the Incarnation and how God's reality breaks into our world in ways we do not expect. It is the sort of poem Auden might have written in a pandemic. Near the end of the poem, the Narrator sums it up for the reader. Through Auden's verse we have reflected on the Incarnation through the perspectives of different speakers. But, immersed in our daily lives, in the Time Being with bills to pay and irregular verbs to learn, we must find ways to redeem the Time Being from insignificance. For, he says, "the Time Being is in a sense the most trying time of all." We surely can feel that now at this time of lockdown and quarantine. How can we manage to live through the weeks and months still to come? How can we as church celebrate the Incarnation, God's presence among us, when we can no longer come together for Eucharist, for that sacrament that brings God deeply into our lives? How can we gather again when only some of us can meet?

In the poem, Auden has some advice for us. "The time is noon," he says, "when the Spirit must practise [the] scales of rejoicing." I believe that is what we have been called to do in the last 6 months, and what we must learn to do each week in the months to come. Any music student, any aspiring athlete, knows the necessity of practice. The tedium of scales, the relentless discipline of fitness training – mind-numbing, sometimes painful, but essential in order to live more fully into the music or the sport. In our living rooms, in front of our computers, many of us feel as if we have been marking time, treading water, waiting for something to happen.

Soon, as each part of Canada lifts restrictions, we will be able to return to public worship and the celebration of the sacraments. But we will return to an unfamiliar new reality and new challenges. Perhaps the whole community will not be able to gather. The receiving of Communion will be different. We still cannot hug our friends. What “scales of rejoicing” can we practice in the months to come?

It may help us to think about Eucharist and all that it means. For celebrating Eucharist is far more than a one-hour observance of the gathered community. It is far more than bread and wine, blessed, broken, given and received. Jesus taught by image and metaphor, by parable and story. Eucharist as metaphor and image has much to teach us.

Eucharist means thanksgiving. Perhaps one way to keep Eucharist in a time of pandemic is to “practice our scales” of gratitude. We are thankful for health and strength, for family and friends and helpers, for groceries and drug stores and those who serve us, for social systems that come to our aid. And this offering of thanks can and should continue even though we cannot come together to receive the sacrament. The pandemic has increased our sense of gratitude.

Eucharist is connection and community. No priest can celebrate the Eucharist alone. The pandemic has increased both our sense of isolation – no visits to family and friends, no social gatherings – and our excitement in finding new ways to be together. We have learned how to “social distance” in driveways and on patios. We have kept in touch by phone and mail. We have all learned to use Zoom in order to stay in touch with family and with our parish community.

And we have found ways to keep in touch with the wider faith community. And this has been exciting and enriching. My husband and I have followed the video services of our own parish community, All Saints’ Westboro in Ottawa. But we have joined in worship with our son’s church, Trinity Copley Square in Boston. We have spent Sunday mornings learning about the witness and worship and music of the Washington National Cathedral. We have visited a former parish, All Saints Winnipeg, and joined Dawna Wall of St. Michael and All Angels, Victoria, in her garden. We have worshipped with Canterbury and Lincoln Cathedrals. It has been a rich experience and a privilege to share in the life of faith communities around the world. The pandemic has certainly increased our awareness that we belong to an immense company of witnesses. This wider sense of Christian community is one that I want to continue even when I return to the four walls of my own church building.

Eucharist is bread and wine, outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace. In our Province, we were asked to fast from the physical act of receiving the sacrament, to fast from the bread and wine. Though

we have not taken bread and wine during these months of virtual liturgy, we have been invited to consider more deeply how God's grace comes to us. It comes not merely in prayers for spiritual communion but in other very concrete and sacramental ways. We receive grace as we continue to hear Scripture and to reflect on the stories of God's relationship with all humanity. God's grace comes to us in the loving help of others. We "fasted" from grocery shopping for a few weeks until we could assess the risk to ourselves as seniors. Our food was brought to us through the acts of friends, and we felt humbled as we learned to accept the loving care of others. The pandemic has reminded us that God's grace comes to us in many ways.

As we begin the process of returning to our church buildings, there are opportunities here for conversations about Eucharist, for education about sacraments, about reception, about different kinds of communion. We need to talk with our fellow parishioners about all that Eucharist means. The effects of this pandemic seem likely to continue for months, if not years. The Time Being is the new normal. We grieve as we mourn the old ways, but we take up the risk and the challenge of making new music with what we have learned from "practicing the scales of rejoicing" during this time of lockdown. As a church, here is our chance to teach, to stimulate conversation, and to encourage the community of faith to observe Eucharist in both new and familiar ways.

Diaspora and the breach of COVID-19

STEPHEN BLACK

In 587 BCE many of the wealthy of the land of Judah were taken captive by the Babylonians. So began the time of exile—the time of the diaspora.

In many ways the exile was a breach that has never completely healed. There remained Jews who did not return to Israel when the temple was rebuilt. There remained Jews who did not return to Israel when Jesus walked the earth. When the second temple was destroyed, those who had come back to the land returned to exile. When the state of Israel was ‘re-born’ in 1948, there were many Jews who did not return to the land. For Jews, the experience of diaspora was born in 587 BCE, and has evolved and continued in one way or another since that time.

Diaspora is a time of loss. In 587 BCE, the familiar ways of being community and of worshipping God were no longer viable. No longer could one offer lambs or doves at the altar in Jerusalem. The ways of worshiping and being community handed down through generations experienced a breach—a radical break. This could have been the end of the community altogether. For many other ancient peoples, being taken into captivity meant exactly this—the decisive end of their communities.

Diaspora is not only a time of loss, it is also a time of sorrow and grief. It is a time of deep lamentation. For those ancient peoples that ceased being, the loss was more than devastating. What a horrible thing it is for the memory of a people and their culture to be lost to all posterity. For those who found a way to continue, the sorrow would have been different but no less real. For them, the past could become an unbearable burden that threatens the future. When what is lost carries with it the meaning of one’s existence, continuing forward can become simply too much to imagine.

Yet during the time of the Babylonians, and later the Persians, Assyrians, and Greeks, the diaspora not only moved forward—they thrived. The

Hebrew Scriptures as we know them comes from this time. The writings that inspire and encourage us today came out of those dark times. Later, after the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE, again the Jews were forced to reckon with a lost past. They did so by reconfiguring their key religious references points, and from this was born Rabbinic Judaism. Again, a time of loss became a time not only for grief, but also for creativity and new life.

I offer this brief overview of diaspora and exile as a narrative icon upon which to process our own times. We too are removed from familiar ways of being community and of worshipping God. Our loss is not as categorical or final as the diasporic Jews of which I have spoken—or at least we have good reason to believe it is not. Yet it is a loss—a breach.

Sometimes when communities experience a loss that threatens their collective identity, the impulse can be to quickly react and artificially mimic what was done in the past, and this can sometimes occur in ways that come close to betraying the core of what made the past special. I suggest that for Anglicans, being too quick to rush back into virtual forms of Eucharist might be an example of this. While it is possible to reformulate Eucharist using ancient traditions and modern reflection so that it is something that can be accomplished within a virtual context, I suggest that a better line of action might be to stop and reflect on the loss, without quickly trying to deny its reality.

My reflection upon the diaspora suggests that a newness and creativity can and do come out of loss, not as a Pollyanna denial of loss, but rather through its deep embrace. I do not have a clear picture of what exactly this might mean for us. I only suggest that by fully embracing the loss of the moment, and by letting it be loss, that as we continue to reflect upon the past that was, perhaps some new vision or rite, or action, or.... We might discover some new resource that while fully true to our collective identity, is also as of yet unrealized. Something that might be able to forge for us a fresh way through the wilderness into a new “promised land.” After all, the Anglican church faces critical challenges relating to our future—and has faced these challenges well before the advent of COVID-19.

I do not speak so much against the practise of virtual Eucharist, but against a reflexive attempt to pretend that nothing meaningful has really changed for us. The living potential for something exciting, vital, and new is sacrificed if we do not embrace the actuality of change that has come upon us. Rather than simply assuming we should proceed with as close to business as usual as we can get virtually, perhaps we should be still and accept the loss and the change. That is, we should embrace a new identity that might be akin to diaspora.

We of a new exile cannot simply do what we did before. One outgrowth of this might be something new drawn from our ancient well? Again, I have nothing specific in mind, just as those Jews in captivity in Babylon had nothing truly specific in mind. Rather, what they did was to take what they had—the assorted writings and narrative fragments. They did not have access to the land directly, but they could access it virtually through writing. Though far away from it, they could inhabit the land through the magic of narrative. They did what they could. They collected the tales and writings they had and forged them over hundreds of years into a recognizable shape. They took what they had and boldly stepped forward, creating something new.

I am certainly not suggesting that it is our task to write a new Bible. But what do we have at hand? What can we do that both honors the past and moves boldly into the future? I believe the only way we will discover answers to this is by recognizing—even embracing—the breach that has come upon us.

Behold what you are; become what you receive

ANNE GERMOND

*"When you hear 'The body of Christ',
you reply 'Amen'. Be a member of Christ's body,
then, so that your 'Amen' may ring true."¹*

I am grateful for the opportunity to offer this reflection in the General Synod's project on the response of faithful Anglicans living in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. The COVID-19 coronavirus has wreaked havoc on our families, our communities, our economies, and faith communities. Millions of people have fallen ill and died – too many without the comfort and support of loved ones nearby. Our spirits and our ability to cope have been tested to the limits in the 'new normal' of COVID-19.

In the darkness the mantra, "We are all in this together" has become the watchword as we did all we could to 'stay home and stay safe'. Communities rallied to support its essential and frontline workers, as leaders gave daily press conferences keeping us informed about the spread of the virus. New words like 'physical distancing', 'flattening the curve', 'self isolation', and 'social bubbles' entered our lexicons. We moved our businesses, schools and churches to a virtual world from home. Collaborative efforts in medicine and science are taking place in the hopes that new treatments for the virus and a vaccine will soon become available.

The church moved almost seamlessly from its buildings to online worship praying boldly for the healing and salvation of the world. The voice of prayer has never been silent as services of the Word and celebrations of Eucharist took place in homes, outdoors and with limited numbers of

¹ Augustine on the nature of the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Sermon 272.

people in our houses of worship. We could attend worship anywhere around the globe.

Over the last several months I have begun to ask new questions about how we in the church are being transformed through this time of pandemic, as members of the human family and of the body of Christ - All of us who are 'in this together.' One of my last memories of corporate worship before the lockdown happened at the end of the election of the 10th Bishop of Ottawa as I sent God's people, fed with the body and blood of God's Son into the world to live his risen life, to bring that life to others and to give light to the world. The bread we ate was only a morsel, insufficient to stave off hunger for any length of time, the wine a mere sip. Yet that was food for the journey, the very bread of life, and enough to sustain us for the long road ahead.

In this time apart I have been wondering:

- How we have been living the Eucharistic life as a people who have been taken, blessed, broken and given in Christ?
- What does it mean when we say the word, "Amen" when we hear the words 'the body of Christ' being spoken to us at the communion rail?
- What does being part of the 'body of Christ' look like now in the midst of a pandemic?
- Will we keep saying, and remain committed to being, "All in this together," when life gets back to normal in a post-COVID world?

In reflecting on this time I've come to the realization that this has been more than just a challenging time to get through as quickly and safely as possible, and then return to a pre-COVID world, but God's 'kairos' time in which something new is coming to birth. This has been a *liminal time*², to which we should pay very careful attention. God is always active in it even though it is a very difficult space and time to occupy.

Liminal time calls us to let go of those things we cherish and love the most to wait in the darkness of unknowing. Liminal time calls for an act of surrender to that which can be frightening, strange and unfamiliar. But it is also a space that can be transformative in which we can grow more and more into the full stature of Christ becoming the new creations we already are in Him.

In Jean Anouilh's play *Becket*, Henry II is totally bewildered by Thomas à Becket's new faith and the new language he uses. Henry II says to his

² Beaumont, Susan (2019) *How To Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Season*. Rowman and Littlefield. London.

friend, "Absurdly. That word isn't like you!" To which Becket replies, "Perhaps; I am no longer like myself."³

I want to think of this liminal season as being so life altering and transforming that we are no longer like ourselves anymore!

As the boundaries of geography and time have blurred we have seen the beginnings of that as we discovered that we are now more than ever a fellowship of believers who '*recognize in each other the Christ who is present in the body and who receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord, in reverence, humility and joy. We receive each other's benedictions as the benediction of the Lord Jesus Christ.*'⁴

I have witnessed these benedictions firsthand, catching a glimpse of the kingdom of God on earth in many ways over the last months.

Below are just three.

1. Feasting on the Word

Online, livestreaming and virtual worship has been a gift at a time when we could not do that one thing which is the distinguishing feature of our lives as Christians and a '*source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer*'⁵ – to gather as the physical body of Christ to break bread together and pray for the salvation and healing of the world.

The right words, at the right time, delivered in the right way, had an important place during our exile from our church buildings in the season of COVID-19. In the online services that I participated in and livestreamed there were many expressions of the faithful feeling comforted or encouraged by the ministry being offered and for the ability to gather in this new way for prayer and to hear God's Word preached by different preachers.

In '*Feasting on the Word*' we drew fresh strength from the Scriptures. Like the Israelites wandering in the desert we were fed with the manna of God's Word. The Lectionary provided rich material to draw on which sustained the faith of the anxious and the weary providing nourishment for the journey ahead.

It also provided a place and a space for that which was lost to be acknowledged and grieved. Writing of David's Song of Lament after the death of Saul and Jonathan and David's Song of Lament (2 Sam 1:17ff) Brueggeman writes:

"Words matter. Sound religion is often a matter of finding the right words. Words that genuinely experience, process, and embrace the edges of our life.

³ Anouilh, Jean. (1995) *Becket*, trns. Lucien Hill. Riverhead Books. New York, 102.

⁴ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. (1954) *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*. Harper Collins. New York, 20.

⁵ Ibid, 19.

*The cruciality of words needs to be the centre of the church's life, for, we live in a culture that grows mute by our commitment to technique.*⁶

May this benediction in a pandemic become a habit of the heart forever.

2. The church seeking visible unity in a common mission

I experienced the benediction Bonhoeffer describes mostly profoundly through the collegiality and collaborative ministry of the Ontario House of Bishops as we met weekly for mutual support and encouragement and to lead the dioceses in our care.

The mantra 'we are all in this together' became ours as we stood together in front of the black hole of COVID-19 becoming a visible sign of unity for the church. While we knew little about the pandemic we understood completely our vocation and calling, passed on to us from the apostles to share in the leadership of the church throughout the world. (BAS, 636). We prayed without ceasing, and through the wonders of technology continued with our preaching and teaching.

In this unusual time we welcomed two new bishops into the fellowship of bishops around the Communion. On Pentecost Sunday I had the distinct privilege and joy to preside and preach at the consecration of +Shane Parker as the Bishop of Ottawa in a celebration that was livestreamed. There was a poignancy in standing in an empty Cathedral knowing that the 'living stones' who made up the body of Christ could not be present physically for the service.

We did not lead in a vacuum but relied on the collective knowledge and wisdom of others in the church – lay and ordained, who generously offered their gifts and time. On Pentecost Sunday the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario presented a collective online celebration, "One in the Spirit"⁷ for the church as a visible sign that we are one body in Christ.

And we discovered that along with teaching and preaching public health is part of our mandate as leaders in a pandemic. We consulted with epidemiologists and took counsel together, making difficult decisions with the best knowledge we had at the time.

May this benediction in a pandemic become a habit of the heart for all time.

⁶ Brueggeman, Walter. (1990) *First and Second Samuel*. John Knox Press. Louisville, 217.

⁷ <https://www.province-ontario.anglican.ca/pentecost>

3. *Becoming 'Vehicles of eternal charity'*⁸ (an excerpt from the sermon I preached at the Consecration of +Shane as Bishop of Ottawa)

"Many years ago the Bishop of Hippo Augustine challenged his flock with these words: 'You are the body of Christ; that is to say in you and through you the method and the work of the incarnation must go forward. You are to be taken, you are to be consecrated, broken and distributed that you may become the means of grace and the vehicles of eternal charity.' Anything less is a diminishment and a crippling of the body of Christ (Maximus the Confessor) since I am the body of Christ and one with its members." (1 Cor 12.27)

While there is no doubt that the words *taken, consecrated, broken and shared* is a reference to Christ's presence in the Holy Eucharist that most beautiful expression of unity in our gathered communities, it is also clear that Augustine had in mind that not only are we made one in Christ through our baptism, but also a people who having been clothed on high with the Holy Spirit and sent out into the world in that power to be the real Body of Christ.

Throughout the pandemic we caught glimpses of that truth in those moments when, moved by his spirit alive within them the millions of 'vehicles of charity', were being Christ to the Christ they see in each other through acts of compassion and works of mercy.

This says to me that even though we are apart; have not held the Bread of Life in our hands, or sipped from that life giving cup for some time, that our identity during this time of pandemic has not changed at all. We are still we who are in Christ – those all powerful living stones, an outward and visible sign of the real presence of Christ – a Sacrament to the world of our unity in Him."

May this benediction in a pandemic become a habit of the heart for all time.

⁸ The Consecration of Shane Parker as the 10th Bishop of Ottawa, May 31, 2020,
<https://youtu.be/auGAP8xSSPk>.

An eschatological view of Eucharist in a pandemic period

REBECCA GRAHAM

What does it mean, for Eucharistic theology, for Eucharistic practice in this time of pandemic? Really, this is the question that we face today. At the same time, this is also our current reality, across the Church, prompted by the safety restrictions of the current pandemic.

While some have come to an accommodation of how to "do Eucharist" in this time, many, like our diocese, enjoys a "Feast of the Word," until we reopen our doors and invite people back in, under COVID-19 conscious guidelines and patterns.

So, the question, then, is how we are living out an interminable eschatological period of time until we reopen the doors of our various churches. And yes, it is uncomfortable!

Overnight, we went from a regular practice of celebrating the Eucharist, to suddenly no reception of the Eucharist since the declaration of the pandemic, since COVID-19 forced us to close our doors, for the safety of our people.

Overnight, we have been cast into Exile we have been overthrown from our regular patterns of living and worshipping, and we have been shoved, none too gently, into the requirements of self-isolation, physical distancing, hand washing, and the recommendation of non-medical grade masks over one's nose and mouth, in populated public spaces. And as much as we lament and fight against such seemingly obverse patterns of living, here we are, and where they are. As much as we long to return to pre-pandemic practices and patterns, even when we do return to such a place, it's not going to be the same as we recall.

We need to recognize and celebrate that period of loss, that time of lament—a practice that we have limited to no experience with in today's society. We're more used to seeking affirmation after affirmation, positive after positive, never desiring or acknowledging the negatives in life.

So, here we are, caught betwixt and between, needing to find a way to grieve what we've lost, to lament the situation, yet still look with hope toward the future. And we currently remain betwixt and between what we have and what we'd like, like when we anticipate the second coming of our Lord and Saviour, through Advent, and yet what we receive, at the change of season from Advent to Christmas is the babe in the manger (Lk 2:1-20), not the anticipated warrior Messiah who will judge the living and the dead – a state of eschatology (Mt 24:36-50).

We know what eschatology is like, briefly, as the church year brushes up against it for 4, maybe 5 Sunday's of our liturgical year. It's a confusing and bewildering time in the church calendar, as well as what we've been experiencing in this time period.

When we're looking at the definition of Eschatology, we look to the end of times, but really, its focus is a trifle closer than that. Although eschatology is looking at the end times through our own filters, the 'now but not yet' that we find in the celebration of the Reign of Christ - Christ the King Sunday - and we find it throughout the season of Advent when we look, simultaneously, for the second coming of Christ and the infant in the manger.

It's a now, but not yet mindset of the Christian, all focused on the return of Christ, on the final judgement, on the time when God will make his home among humanity (Rev 21). And what has been discovered, recently, is that there is a dimension of physicality to eschatology, as well. We're discovering it through all those who attend video conferences and meetings without wearing pants these days. We see it in those forced to migrate from one place to another in search of a place of hope, opportunity, and the ability to live in peace in one's life.

The fact that we're living in a 'now but not yet' period of time is remarkable as we look around. We see what's been forced to be changed, and what's been shoved aside as medical systems struggle to define and treat the pandemic, and its symptoms, and as governments the world over struggle to keep their populations safe. And as we, in our empty or mostly empty churches, find that this 'pregnant moment' has a theological dimension, not just a physical dimension to it. We're discovering that it has geography, and it's well populated with all of us who long for the return of a regular Eucharistic worship practice. We find this exile populated with all who long for the Sacraments to be celebrated, once more, in albeit muted yet recognizable patterns.

And this also brings us to the reminder of what a Sacrament is, in the theology of the Anglican Church. A Sacrament, according to the Book of Common Prayer (550) is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and

spiritual grace, given to us by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive this grace, and a pledge to assure us thereof."

Now, this isn't the first-time humanity has found itself here, but admittedly, the last time was during the outbreak of Spanish Flu in 1918-20, and in the Bubonic Plague of the Middle Ages - "Black Death" - in 1347-52.

In this exilic period, or period of Eucharistic drought in our lives, we are able to find many images in scripture. There's the seven-year famine, in Genesis that drove the fledgling Israelite nation to Egypt. (Gen 41-46) There is Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kgs (1 Kgs 17-18:1) as well as the Assyrian (2 Kgs 17:7-41), Babylonian (2 Kgs 25:1-21) and Persian (2 Kgs 36:15-23); but none of these lasted forever, and neither will this current pandemic.

Through this time, we are given the gift to see how our definitions and our theological interpretations are able to carry us forward into whatever the future of the church is going to look like as we reopen the doors. We can see how this pandemic is reshaping our perceptions of the world. Scripturally, we can remember the work of Ezra and Nehemiah who rebuilt the temple and encouraged the resumption of worship practices (Ezra 3:1-16, 6:16-22), although the Persian exile had still not yet concluded. And although they attempted to retain 'tradition,' naturally there would be somewhat altered practices by the fact that tomorrow is a brand-new day and we come at this from a brand new perspective, a new way of looking at things.

At the same time, we're able to examine what this period of exile - this eschatological situation - feels like, as we seek and yearn to return 'home,' as we yearn for the return of our eucharistic practices, once restrictions ease. All the while we might compare our lament to the exilic laments of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible. And through this reflection we are able to come to a better understanding of the exile of the Israelite people. We are able to better identify with all of those who are displaced from the regular patterns forced to move out of their lives, whether by famine, war, genocide, drought, or as the Jews experienced in the 1st century, driven out by forced expulsion from their homeland by the government of the day.

Not all things we would regularly identify with or with which we would choose to get 'cozy', so maybe this is a part of God's plan to open our eyes to the plight of those who have been and continue to be geographically displaced, yet yearning, from the sidelines of society, for the promises of God to lead them, to lead us, to the/a promised land.

How does it feel? What biblical passages come to mind in regard to the fact that we have been physically barred from the celebration of the Eucharist?

Can you find a new immigrant family with whom to talk about their experiences of a life on the edges of society? Of the eschatology found in such moments that keep us looking to tomorrow, with hope in our eyes, and in our hearts? How do their experiences compare to our exile from the receipt of the Eucharist?

Having faced this exilic period experienced the pain and confusion of the eschatological nature of this period, we can anticipate the repatriation of our lives as parishioners in the church, in the receipt of eucharist, once more, but will we recognize it? Will we recognize Christ in the Sacraments? Will we find the Holy Spirit in our future together? After all, at the moment, masks will be a mandatory part of corporate worship, as will use of hand sanitizer, and the receipt of Eucharist in “one kind,” (bread only) not “both kinds” (bread and wine).

When the doors reopen, and this period of exile ends, we will most likely be sitting in different pews, with perhaps a different view of the sanctuary, as well as other minor changes. But what we’re looking for, in this renewal of the practice of Eucharist, at this point, will be a sense of liberation. What we will experience is not just a return to an earlier practice that we’ve been missing, but rather we will come to it with a renewed sense of purpose, and a renewed sense of participation that may not have been there before.

Like kids returning home from college or university for our first thanksgiving, we are home! We’ve brought the dirty laundry for mom to do for us, as we reconnect with the friends we’ve not seen or heard from in a while. We settle down to a family dinner to celebrate the season to discover that we’re now working from the same dishes but perhaps there are new serving utensils on the table that we’ve never seen before, and Mom and Dad have adopted a few new habits since we’ve gone away to school, and we’re all expected to maintain these ‘new rules.’ After all we were all young children when our mothers told us to wash our hands in preparation to coming to the dinner table, yet here it is, renewed, and complete with handwashing instructions that require us to sing to ourselves “Happy birthday” twice in the process. We suddenly find ourselves at the table, but where elbow room was once a premium, there’s now lots of it, as Cousin Bob is sitting six feet away, and Cousin Jenny is cuddled up with her fiancé six feet in the other direction.

It’s the same, but at the same time, its new and it’s different. And as long as we cling to what we’re missing – the lack of elbow room, the fact that we hadn’t been urged to wash our hands since we were six years old (and

really I loved those old salad tongs) then such a new face on the experience is marred by those old longings and we continue that time of lament and eschatology instead of facing the liberation to be found in this new expression of the Eucharist.

The church is, in this time period, searching for the essence of itself, and that is found in the biblically commanded sacraments of the eucharistic and baptismal practices, and in the historically commanded sacraments of unction, confirmation, celebration of a marriage, ordination, and confession and absolution.

What we need to hold onto is the theological understanding that in the Eucharist we find the meal commanded by Jesus (Mt 26:17- 30, Mk 14:12-26, Lk 22:7-23). At the same time, this is the meal that he gives to us to carry us, spiritually, into the world, blessed and refilled by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 11:17-34).

This is the meal where Jesus blesses and breaks the bread, where he blesses and shares the cup, where he feeds us his body and blood, figuratively in the bread and wine. This is the meal where he commands us to "do this in memory of me."

This is what we're missing, and for which we're yearning. This spiritual sustenance, this physical inclusion with the Body of Christ in past, present, and future, and this is what we've been missing, although we may not even have recognized it in such a way, before this time of imposed absence. Often what we recognize is we're missing that element in our lives, especially if it was a regular part of our pre-pandemic worship.

What we recognize is there's something that we can't quite put a finger on that satisfies us, in some way, and helps us through the week, and it's not here, right now – community, inclusion, the body of Christ found in the pews, and in the Eucharist.

We remember the words, and we long for the day that we to hear them, to receive the Eucharistic element(s) in our hands, and to feel that 'something' that has been absent since this eschatological exile has been imposed.

Dining at the Table of the Word

JAMES KOESTER SSJE

The question caught me off guard, as it wasn't the response that I was expecting. As a theological student entering my second year at Trinity

College, I had spent the summer ministering in a summer chapel in the Diocese of Algoma. Before heading off for the summer, I had been in the habit of attending the Eucharist, and receiving Holy Communion, almost every day. Suddenly all that changed, and over the course of nearly three months, I had been able to attend the Eucharist twice, both times when a priest came to the summer mission to celebrate the Eucharist. Returning to the College that September, I was greeted by a member of the faculty who asked how my summer had been. It had been a wonderful summer. I had had a lot of fun. I had met some really wonderful people. And I had missed the Eucharist enormously. I had expected some sympathy from this professor; some recognition that being cut off from the Eucharist was indeed a loss; some assurance that things would be fine now that I was back. What I received was a comment that I have spent the next forty years unpacking. *Well, James*, he said, *I assume that you dined daily at the Table of the Word.*

For the last six months, Anglicans across Canada and around the world have been cut off from the Eucharistic life of the Church. Where once regular attendance at the Eucharist, and reception of Holy Communion was the norm, suddenly the absence the Sacrament in many of our lives, has been the reality. Who has not missed the comforting assurance of Christ's presence in bread broken, wine poured, in bodies cleansed by His Body, and souls washed by His Blood?¹ Who has not missed the comforting solace of familiar ritual? Yet the comment made to me that September day nearly forty years ago, continues to haunt me. *Well James, I assume that you dined daily at the Table of the Word.*

As I reflect on the situation in which we have found ourselves, during these last months, I must confess, I do so from a privileged position. As a

¹ See Book of Common Prayer, 1962, Prayer of Humble Access, 84-85.

member of a monastic community (I belong to the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, SSJE) which contains several priests, we have been able to maintain our practice of daily Eucharists and Divine Office. However, because we act as a centre of worship for a congregation of over 100 people on Sundays, and a dozen at our daily Eucharists during the week, I am aware of the hunger and longing many experienced during this time, when they are cut off from the Eucharistic life of the Church. At the same time, I also reflect on our current situation, not simply as a pastor to a congregation, but also from nearly thirty years of experience as a spiritual director.

In the practice of spiritual direction, where the role of the director is to help people recognize the movement of the Spirit in their lives, I often find myself asking people who come to see me, a few simple questions: *Where is God in this? What is the invitation?* I believe that these are helpful, and focusing questions, because they shift the focus away from the individual, to the movement of God in a person's life. They also shift the attention towards the gift of hope. If the Anglican Church of Canada were sitting across from me in one of the conference rooms here at the monastery, rather than an individual, I would ask the same things: *Where is God in this? What is the invitation?* In other words: *Where is the hope?* To these questions I would also ask, *How is God feeding you now?*

Father Richard Meux Benson² the founder of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, speaks a great deal about hope. For him, the gift of hope was the result of the worship of God, and worship was not confined to what happens on Sunday morning. The whole life of a Christian is to be a life of worship, and thus the whole life of a Christian is to be a life of union with God. We remind ourselves of this in our **Rule of Life** where we say that *human beings were created to bless and adore their Creator and in the offering of worship to experience their highest joy and their deepest communion with one another.... [The] Father never ceases from seeking true worshipers to worship him in spirit and truth. God sent the Son into the world to heal and raise us up so that, empowered by the Spirit, we could surrender our whole selves in adoration and be reunited in the love of God. God draws us into our Society so that our calling to be true worshipers can reach fulfillment in the offering of the continual sacrifice of praise. In this life of worship together we are transformed in body, soul and spirit.*³ If the life of the Brothers of SSJE is to be a life of adoration, it is only because, like all Christians, in Holy Baptism we have been made *a member of Christ*,

² See Reynolds, Stephan, *For All the Saints*, Anglican Book Centre, 1994, 54 (for a short biography of Father Benson).

³ SSJE, *Rule of Life, Worship*, Cowley Publications, Cambridge MA, 1997, chapter 16, 32.

*the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.*⁴ It is as the baptized that live this life of worship, and seek the gift of hope, given to all who worship God in spirit and in truth. For Father Benson, it is this gift of hope given to all who are worshipers of the Triune God, which draws us to the very heart of God.

*Our life must be a life of continual hope.... We need to live in supernatural hope in order to be sustained when ... times [of trial] come. Oh! Hope must carry us over the gulf, like a vehicle which, born with an impetus down some steep mountainside, is carried over the gulf and reaches the other side below in safety. What is it which draws downward with such speed that vehicle, which seems to be ready to plunge us into danger? It is the power of gravitation. And what is hope but the gravitation of the whole being to God, not by the link of natural law, but by the link of a supernatural unity of life. The natural law of our nature gives us a tendency in other directions, is continually repressing us. But this gravitation towards God draws us onward.*⁵

And that brings out the spiritual director in me, asking once again: *Where is God in this? What is the invitation? Where is the hope? How is God feeding you now?*

While it is true that most Anglicans have been separated from the Eucharist, we have not been separated from God, nor from the gift of hope, nor from the *real presence* of Jesus. As Anglicans it is our belief that Jesus is truly present in the Sacramental Gifts of Bread and Wine, and we speak of the *Real Presence of Christ* in the Eucharist. Yet it is also true to say that *Christ, who will be present to us in communion, comes first to those who are listening in "the word of God... living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword," and as the one who speaks words that are spirit and life.*⁶ We speak of the *Real Presence*, but we could just as easily speak of the *real presences*, for Jesus who comes to us in Bread and Wine, Body and Blood, comes to us first in gathered community, Word proclaimed, prayers offered, sins forgiven, and peace restored. We may have been cut off from the Sacrament of the Eucharist, but not from the sacramental life of the Church, for in community, Word, prayer, forgiveness, and peace, the abiding presence of Jesus is with us, just as he promised. *Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*⁷

One of the roles of the spiritual director, is not simply to listen, to question, to prod, it is also to point. So again, if the Anglican Church of Canada

⁴ Book of Common Prayer, 1962, 544.

⁵ Benson, Richard Meux, Instructions on the Religious Life, Second Series, A.R. Mowbray and Co. Ltd., London, 1935, 117.

⁶ SSJE, Rule of Life, *The Word of God in Preaching*, chapter 19, 38.

⁷ Mt 28:20.

were sitting across from me, in answer to my questions: *Where is God? What is the invitation? Where is the hope? How is God feeding you now?* I would point in a number of directions.

As a member of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist my life is rooted in the Fourth Gospel. It is in John's great Prologue that we read *[and] the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*⁸ The gospel of John is the gospel of the incarnation, the gospel of God Emmanuel, the gospel of God's faithful abiding presence with the People of God. Throughout Scripture, God promises to be with us, because that is the nature of God Emmanuel, and God's promises never go unfulfilled. Where is God? God is with us, because God in Christ is God Emmanuel, if only we have the grace to see.

As a monk, while I have continued to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist over these last six months, I have done so knowing that it is a privilege. Each time I have received the Sacrament, I have been aware that many cannot, and I have carried you in my heart. We say in our **Rule of Life** that *[according] to an ancient monastic saying "A monk is separated from all in order to be united to all." The pioneers of monasticism believed that the monk was called to the margin of society in order to hear within himself the deepest cries of humanity, and to discover a profound unity with all living beings in their struggle to attain "the freedom of the glory of the children of God." In our intercessory prayer this solidarity will find its deepest expression. We shall also experience through faith our communion with all the saints in glory who pray unceasingly with us and for us.*⁹ As I have reached out my hands to receive the Bread of Life, and Cup of Salvation, I have done so as a member of the Body of Christ through Baptism. As Christ's Sacramental Body and Blood have nourished me, the whole body of the baptized has been nourished, for we are one body. A deeper understanding of our place in the Body of Christ, not as individuals, but as a *member of Christ* is one of the invitations which God is holding before us now.

In the last six months, Anglicans across Canada and around the world, have rediscovered that the primary Christian community is the domestic church, in other words, the home. As people have been cut off from the worshipping life of their parish churches, small and large groups have gathered online, or around the dinner table, to pray Morning and Evening Prayer, or Compline. Households, especially those with children, have taken active parts in various kinds of Christian formation. Prayer spaces

⁸ Jn 1: 14.

⁹ SSJE, Rule of Life, *The Mystery of Intercession*, chapter 24, 49.

or corners have been set up in bedrooms or studies, as a way to create sacred space that is set apart for our encounter with God. The recovery of the domestic church is, I believe, a sign of hope.

Standing in the hallway of Trinity College that September day God spoke to me through the words of my professor. *Well James, I assume that you dined daily at the Table of the Word.* It is true, I had missed the Eucharist that summer, and longed to dine again at the Table of the Lord. The reality however was that God had feed me at other tables, and it was only standing there that I came to understand.

Over the last months we may have been cut off from the Eucharistic life of the Church, but God Emmanuel has still been with us. Over the last months we may have been cut off from the Eucharistic life of the Church, but God's invitation to discover our place as baptized members of the Body of Christ has still been offered. Over the last months we may have been cut off from the Eucharistic life of the Church, but God's gift of hope has still been drawing us deeper into the very heart of God. Over the last months we may have been cut off from the Eucharistic life of the Church, but God has still fed us in wonderful and surprising ways.

Sacramental living in a context of long-term care

D A N B O W Y E R

As the chaplain at Trinity Village Care Centre, Retirement Studios and Independent Living Townhomes, my ministry is unique and bears some similarities and some differences to parish ministry. Trinity Village is a ministry of the Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), a Full-Communion partner of the Anglican Church of Canada. As such, it is strongly supported by Bishop Michael Pryse at the Eastern Synod who has given permission to Bishop Todd Townshend to license me as an active cleric in the Diocese of Huron. Part of the ministry of the chaplain at Trinity Village is to continually point to the sacramental nature of the community and the fact that Trinity Village was founded by the ELCIC as a ministry, as a way of serving God, as a response to the scriptural injunction to serve the elderly (1 Tim 5:1-2 and elsewhere).

One of the key differences between chaplaincy and parish ministry is that the people I serve come from many different Christian denominations. I am also called to walk alongside people of different faiths and people of no faith at all. As such, chaplaincy is a highly pastoral ministry. While the Christian community at Trinity is very ecumenical, it is also very beautiful. One of the similarities to parish ministry is that when we gather weekly around God's table for the sacrament, the people gather because they desire to be in relationship with God and with one another. A Roman Catholic will be sitting beside a Mennonite who will be sitting beside a Baptist etc... This is a beautiful thing because it tends to reflect on this earth what the Kingdom of Heaven will look like. As is the case with Anglican theology, when we gather for Holy Communion, we know that God is sacramentally present, but we don't expend great amounts of energy asking 'how' that is. This causes me to reflect on the fact that the sacramental nature of Trinity Village is expressed not only as we gather around the table, but is also (perhaps primarily even) expressed in the community of people. The 'outward and

'visible sign' of the 'inward and spiritual grace' is experienced in the relationships that residents form with one another as they come together to grow in relationship with God. Denominational adherence doesn't matter as much as being in relationship with God and with one another does to the people of Trinity Village.

The time of COVID-19 has been challenging spiritually to many of the people of Trinity Village. This is precisely because people yearn for the communal nature of worship at Trinity Village and are unable to gather. Sacramental ministry at Trinity has had to happen on an individual basis during this time of pandemic. Interestingly though, the aforementioned principle that denominational adherence tends to not be a high priority has remained consistent throughout this time. An example that illustrates this is centred around The Sacrament of the Sick, Unction as Anglicans know it. As many Roman Catholic families are faced with the choice of a Roman Catholic priest connecting with their dying loved one via Skype or Zoom (given restrictions on outside visitors brought about by COVID-19) or having me come in person as an Anglican priest and the chaplain at Trinity, the vast majority of Roman Catholic Families have asked me to come in person to offer the sacrament. I explain that Anglicans understand the Sacrament of the Sick in a slightly different way than Roman Catholics, but what many prefer is that I come and administer the sacrament according to my tradition. I am surmising that again, this is because the sacramental nature of relationship, of actually being present at the time of death, offering prayers and anointing to God for the dying person is what the people of Trinity Village and their families want for the most part, rather than strict adherence to particular doctrinal positions.

The unique context of chaplaincy at Trinity Village means that, as mentioned, there are similarities and differences in relation to parish ministry. That said, I am able to live my vocation as a priest in very much the same way that those primarily in parish ministry do. This is because while the community at Trinity Village may be highly ecumenical, the sacramental nature of the community is expressed through the desire of the people of Trinity Village to be in relationship with God and with one another, both when we gather at the Table for Holy Communion and otherwise in the various activities that the people of Trinity Village undertake. While the COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges to ministry, the desire of the people for relationship with God and with one another has endured. Many of the residents of Trinity Village look forward to being able to gather together in worship again so as to 'provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.' (Heb 10: 24-25).

Eucharistic theology on the ground in pandemic times

MARIE-LOUISE TERNIER

It's been a strange season of disruption, self-discipline and renunciation. Many were and still are heart-broken and fearful: losing loved ones to COVID-19, medical and front-line workers risking transmission, loss of work – income – freedom, and surely, loss of Sunday worship (as we used to know it) and loss of Holy Communion. I'm wondering if teachers and parish priests/pastors are among the professions most disrupted by the sudden COVID-invasion.

I am one of those parish priests; I am the incumbent in an Anglican parish and a Lutheran congregation in a rural community on the Canadian prairies, with a total of 69 households. Almost overnight, all my priestly and pastoral ministry got derailed by the invisible virus. All throughout Lent, into Holy Week and even Easter, I had a visceral experience of the meaning of the term discombobulated. I was numb, overcome by grief and loss, paralyzed by anxiety over the well-being of my flock. I mean, I was thrown off guard in my own life, what about them? And how to connect and check on parishioners now if not in person and at church? Moreover, several were holidaying abroad (snow-birds) and I shared their anxiety over whether they could come home, emailing and texting to reassure them of my prayers and concern. It was the most disruptive communication circus I've ever been thrust into.

Much ink is already being spilled on the monumental shifts and changes forced upon all aspects of every Christian and religious institution and organization. I would like to contribute by sharing an experience that illustrates how we can engage our beloved people in the pews in theological reflection while living through a global pandemic-crisis.

This past spring, barely two months into our lockdown, the aching and the questions in the hearts and minds of my people emerged: "I miss Communion." "Can we come by the church and get Communion?" "How

about virtual Communion? Is that valid?" The weeks without church services extended into months; increasing numbers of Christians were deeply missing the Eucharist, Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Mass. But what do we really mean by this? What exactly were we missing? What does Holy Communion mean?

Seizing a teachable moment, my closest Anglican colleague and I decided to host a series of Zoom chats on the subject. We collected a number of articles on the subject, all written on the Holy Eucharist during the pandemic, from Anglican, Lutheran and Roman Catholic sources. Each week participants received several articles via email with reflection questions. Then on five weekday evenings we met on Zoom to talk about what we had read. Both informal and instructive, we gathered with an open heart and a curious mind, to learn and share and discuss, and to still our spiritual hunger.

The result surprised both my colleague and me. Twelve to sixteen participants from five different towns and cities met on Zoom each week. Moreover, each of the three Christian traditions mentioned above were represented, some through the reality of inter-church marriages, others because they heard about the initiative through personal connections and asked to join. All participants were white and over 55 years old—except for my co-facilitator and colleague who was 28!

The conversations were lively and engaging, with much learning and new understanding. The following theological aspects were engaged in the discussions:

1. First came a clear affirmation of the simple yet profound theological and spiritual intuition of the faithful on the Eucharist. When asked how they would explain to an outsider what Holy Communion is, the answer was spot on: a holy meal given to us by Jesus which we share under the leadership of a priest chosen by God and ordained by the church. When we do this together, we are part of a sacred tradition that precedes us and will be there long after we are gone. It is our spiritual food, and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet God invites us into.

It was remarkable that in the very first conversation participants began tentatively, unsure of their words, but then found themselves building on one another's utterances, and together created a coherent explanation that all could find themselves in. Even when slightly intimidated by the theological density in a given article, the exercise of "breaking open the text" together resulted in greater understanding and clarity.

2. While these regular churchgoers showed a good intuition about the nature and meaning of the Holy Eucharist, very few had thought of the Lord's Supper as a witness to the world about God's love for all creation and God's redeeming work in Christ Jesus for all people.

One participant wrote in her evaluation: *In our Zoom conversations and in reading and re-reading the articles, I have learned more about the Eucharist. I realize that, in taking Holy Communion, it isn't just about my personal fulfillment, but about those who commune around me and extend this to the greater world. Eucharist seems to be the bigger picture. It involves our becoming nourished for mission and in witness to the whole world.*

What we witness to when we make Eucharist, is that Christ died and rose again for sake of the whole world, giving us all a share in His new life. In Eucharist, we are the sign—that Christ is offering Himself, His body and blood for everyone. That as we show Christ's love to the world, we also bring our love for our neighbours to him in prayer.

3. The group remained diverse on the question of virtual communion with some in favour and others not. Another participant wrote: *The Lutheran perspective by Professor Dr. Dirk Lange was very meaningful. His comments regarding virtual and online communion made sense to me. He gives reasons why we need the complete liturgical celebrations of the Eucharist or Holy Communion: 'The whole liturgical celebration culminates in this great thanksgiving in the Holy Spirit that evokes God's radical, self-giving gift, God's gift of God's self, Jesus Christ, Divine Mercy in our midst.' Again, there is an insistence on the fullness of the rite and on the people gathered doing something together. I myself would not find virtual online communion very meaningful or satisfying.*

Some thoughts from an RC participant: *During COVID-19 as much as I appreciate the online and Zoom services, I miss my community, the physical presence and most of all not being able to receive Communion together, the spiritual food which helps me stay spiritually healthy. (Online) I am able to pray and worship my heart out but the real presence is missing. Would I receive Communion at home consecrated over the TV? I am not ready for that yet. But in the future if that was all that was possible, I would pray for a change of heart and enlightenment. Although I truly believe that for the Eucharist, the Word and the people/community are necessary to make a Communion celebration complete.*

The facilitation model of these Zoom chats was intended to let the conversations unfold spontaneously while using the reflection questions as a way to focus and refocus when we strayed. There was no lecture but only the content of the articles, which provided more than enough food for discussion. Discussing such a central aspect of our faith, the Holy Communion—Eucharist—Mass, with Lutherans, Anglicans and Roman Catholics was a delightful opportunity to grow with, and to learn from, each other. Several participants concluded that our differences seem to lie primarily in different emphases and different terminology, but that in essence we share a common faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the bread and wine blessed in the presence of the gathered community of faith. And so the question

naturally arose: why are we still divided at the holy Table of our Lord? Why indeed?

Debates on the pastoral and ecclesial, liturgical and theological consequences of the current health crisis continue unabated. Is online communicating and praying less real than in-person? Is the church selling the Eucharist short, and/or making it a clerical spectacle, with its explosion of online Masses? Is virtual communion eroding the communal dimension of the Holy Eucharist, resembling more an eating alone at home rather than sharing a meal with family and friends? To what extent has our individualistic culture in the west already contributed to an erosion of people's communal understanding of Holy Communion, and is now exacerbated by the imposed social isolation for health reasons?

Our Zoom series offers an example of how to engage ordinary church members without theological acumen in thoughtful and informed reflection/conversation on the very treasure we are now deprived of in our Christian faith, the Eucharist, while navigating this unprecedented season of isolation and self-discipline, renunciation and stripping down to essentials. The group displayed evidence that the *sensus fidelium* is alive and well in the faithful of each of our traditions, and that our shared hunger for Holy Communion transcends our traditions and indeed can unite us. In some ways, the project gave reassurance that our parishioners are acutely aware of the importance and the need for the communal dimension in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In fact, our current famine for God's holy food and drink increased awareness of the ecumenical and social consequences of partaking in this holy meal.

An additional question, therefore, that has yet to get due attention is: while COVID-19 is threatening everyone, making no distinctions, ruling the daily lives of literally the entire world population right now, why do the churches insist in clinging to historic divisions and disputes as a reason for closed communion tables? Does the Eucharist need our human protection? Is our faith in the reconciling and healing power of the Eucharist too weak? In the face of the great equalizer that is COVID-19, maintaining distinctions at the Lord's Table seems to serve primarily in amplifying human stubbornness in asserting its right to keep betraying Christ's last prayer on the eve before his death: "*I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*" (Jn 17:20—21)

Maybe COVID-19 is bringing us an urgent summons to unite in the Holy Eucharist, so that this hurting world, in the throes of the pandemic, may believe in, and cling to, God's unwavering hope, love and mercy for all humanity in Christ Jesus. In other words, what consequences and challenges

does the pandemic pose to the churches on the subject of uniting around the Lord's holy Table? If a pandemic cannot throw open wide the holy Table of God's mercy in Christ, what can?

Towards the end of our Zoom chats someone commented how the group had become a meaningful virtual community, and that this virtual nature was definitely real. And that maybe every celebration of Holy Communion has a virtual dimension, because it transcends the natural world. Our joint sharing and learning allowed us to create communion even in the absence of Holy Communion. Just as Christ Jesus is truly and wholly present in the bread and the wine, so we became truly present to one another, forming one Body of Christ in order be sent out again into the world to be the Body of Christ.

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A Deacon's reflections

KYN BARKER

What are the desires and needs, both expressed and unexamined? What are the gifts in sacramental theology and ecclesiology that are being uncovered at this time?

After four months in a Eucharistic “fast” or “famine,” several things come to mind, some of which are contradictory. It is important to recognize that COVID-19 *does* expose liturgical theological and social ‘challenges’ that one does not attend to in “normal” times.

Some context: my grandfather was Deacon of St James Cathedral from 1937-61. My father was a Renaissance scholar focussing on Milton. He attended St Mary Magdalene (High Church). I was taken to church every Sunday and twice a week when in the choir. I was ordained a Deacon (vocational, not transitional) ten years ago and serve in a small parish as well as Coordinator of Deacons for the Diocese. After four months without the Eucharist I am missing it, but not with the same intensity as some friends and colleagues who are lobbying for the resumption of the Eucharist or at least for Spiritual Communion.

Spiritual communion is not to be confused with ‘ocular adoration’: how do we keep the focus healthy?

My wife and I often watch three online services on a Sunday: our local parish, St James Cathedral in Toronto, and Washington National Episcopal Cathedral. Only the last has a Eucharist—after the Consecration, and the Prayer for Spiritual Communion, the camera focuses on the unconsumed Elements on the Table, for a very short time. This is followed by exquisite music, as the camera shows the interior and the windows of the Cathedral. When the view returns to the Altar, the Table has been cleared. No one is seen receiving or clearing the Table. My bishop has been concerned about Zoom Eucharists being “voyeurism,” but I do feel fully engaged in Washington Cathedral’s, especially since it is streamed live.

Should priests refrain from receiving Holy Communion in sacrificial solidarity with the vast majority?

Or, is the priestly role presiding at the eucharist more importantly about mediation and sacrifice of prayer offered, and an obligation? Clerical privilege or clericalism?

At Washington Cathedral no one is seen consuming.

In the Guidelines for Reopening of the Diocese of Toronto in the “Eucharist” section (page 13) it says: “The presiding celebrant stands alone at the altar, and prepares the altar for the Eucharist. There is to be no passing of vessels. Only the presiding celebrant is to handle the elements.”

As a Deacon I appreciate the symbolism of servant ministry inherent in the deacon setting the Table and cleaning up, so I am uncomfortable that this is gone for now.

The Guidelines also say: “The presiding celebrant will consecrate both the bread and the wine, and consume in both kinds, but will distribute only the consecrated bread to all others.” A clear distinction is made between priest and people. Since the Guidelines are a set of directions, there is no discussion of why the priest consumes in both kinds.

I am interested in “open table” from reading Sara Miles *Take this Bread*. In the Eucharist it is important to bring the People of God together, and I am uncomfortable with distinctions and separating people into those who can and those who must not receive. If the Eucharist is the People of God together, how come at “Celebrations of Life” often less than 1/3 of those present take Communion? That divides and sets people apart just when all should be together.

Two important Eucharists for me:

1. 1989: 150th Anniversary of the Diocese of Toronto at the Skydome. Our parish sat in the 500 level...so almost in the “gods,” and hence a wonderful perspective on the Liturgy below.
2. Christmas Eve, after the Pageant. The Incumbent brings out a coffee table from her office and all the children gather around her. They have helped set the Table, and all are deeply focussed.

Something else concerning the meaning of “bread” and “wine” in the Eucharist: my Spiritual Director is a Major in the Salvation Army, and he joked the other day that “maybe we’ll make a Salvationist of you yet,” as he gave me this hymn for reflection:

*My life must be Christ's broken bread,
My love his outpoured wine,*

*A cup o'erfilled, a table spread
Beneath his name and sign.
That other souls, refreshed and fed,
May share his life through mine.*

— Albert Orsborn, 6th General of the Salvation Army 1886-1967

There is “Matthew 25” work to do, and I am called to support and encourage others to carry out their Baptismal Promises, that they may “seek and serve Christ in all persons.”

Eucharistic practice and sacramental theology in a time of pandemic

CHRIS ROSS

I have been an active Deacon in the Diocese of Kootenay for 36 years. In my tenure I have been licenced to two Parishes and to the Diocese.

I was also collated an Archdeacon in 2014. I recently retired from Parish ministry but remain licenced to my Diocese in the capacity of Director of Deacons. My retirement agreement was that I not continue to worship in my former Parish. I was just settling into a new home parish and exploring opportunities to resume liturgical duties, when COVID-19 restrictions closed all of our churches. I am familiar with being part of an online presence as an Education for Ministry (EfM) Online Mentor and Trainer. I continue in these capacities and have discovered that it is possible to build an online Christian community that does not include the celebration of the Eucharist.

Personal reflection on virtual worship during the pandemic

In the wake of the COVID-19 restrictions I was suddenly sitting in front of my computer on Sunday morning watching, on YouTube, other people doing worship with little or no sense of being part of a community. I, along with others, was now a spectator; watching, listening and praying in my living room. As time moved on I was invited to become involved in the online worship where I had just been an observer. Now I had to figure out how to preach a sermon, read the Gospel, and pray the prayers of intercession to a camera which was set up on my dining room table. I discovered that one had to be careful about light reflecting off the pictures on the wall behind one and this was after I had made sure the books in the bookcases were all upright and looking tidy. Then I found out that transmitting the video file was not as easy as it first appeared. I had to learn

about new technology in order to share the work I had done with those who were “putting together” the worship service.

- All the while I was at home alone, on my own and feeling the loss of community acutely.
- All the while I was at home alone, on my own and not hearing the words, “This is my body, This is my blood”.
- All the while I was home alone, not seeing in the congregation, a daughter’s concern for her elderly mother, and wondering how *I could be of assistance*.
- All the while, I was home alone not hearing and enjoying the giggles of little children in the congregation. I was also not seeing parents trying to keep those children quiet, without disrupting the service and wondering how *I could be of assistance*.

(Deacons are always wondering how they *can be of assistance*, even during worship.)

Lamenting the loss of participating in the celebration of the Eucharist

In the YouTube services in which I was a spectator of non-Eucharistic services, I grieved the loss my diaconal role in the great celebration of the thanksgiving prayers and the consecration of the elements. Not only was I not able to receive, I was also not able to share in the distribution of the sacrament. I did not get to see the joy and the looks of peace on the faces of the people as they received. A celebration of the Eucharist in community, for me, has always been a foretaste of the fully realized Kingdom of God, here on earth.

I deeply respect the other clergy of my Diocese, walking beside me and our lay people, as we all fast from the Eucharist. In my opinion, the Eucharist needs to be celebrated in community, not in isolation. We need to be together. Joy filled Christian experiences ought to be shared and celebrated with other people. We need to be present with one another, not watching on a screen. This physical presence of the people and the elements are the embodiment of the kingdom; they are the body of Christ. I am discovering in this time that I would rather not participate in the receiving of a sacrament that has been remotely consecrated; while I am home alone in my house.

Building the community in this time

The Anglican Church has a rich tradition of the daily offices and this time has afforded us the opportunity to refocus our energy and attention

to these gifts that have been passed down to us through the ages. Many have found more time for the deep spiritual practices of meditation, contemplative prayer, reflective study of the Word, and Christian reading. The tools of technology available to us have provided many ways for us to connect, attempt to support each other, and continue to build relationships that are important in our spiritual journeys.

I embrace taking the time to learn what we need to know regarding what “church” is to all of us, and how it will be different when we return to our buildings. We need to reflect on how this time has changed all of us individually and collectively. Embracing all that is important in our lives as Christians and in all that is important to me in my ministry as a Deacon in the service of God, I offer this prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake:

*Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.*

*Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.
We ask You to push back the horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love. Amen.*

Eucharistic practice and sacramental theology: Praxis vs. intent

NANCY FORD

In the interests of full disclosure, I am not a cradle Anglican. I grew up in a “closed assembly” of the Plymouth Brethren. Praxis in that context, as it often does, belied the intent of the faithful. The basic desire was to be seen as God fearing living lives faithful to the Bible. However, in practice, judgement and narrow dualism were used to see others. Love and forgiveness were conditional, based on strict rule-bound interpretations of scripture.

The respect for communion is perhaps one similarity between the church of my youth and the church of my adult years. My decade long search for a coherent thoughtful theology lived out in daily life brought me into the Anglican church. There I was/am welcomed and given opportunities for spiritual growth,

In the Assembly, attendance at “The Lord’s supper” meant that all the accepted and baptised members could participate. They gathered around a wooden table covered in a white cloth. On it was a loaf of bread and silver cup of wine. The similarities end there. Everyone remained seated in silence until a male elder, (there were no clergy) who “felt inspired by the Holy Spirit” would begin to pray.

After another prayer or two a senior elder would give thanks for the bread and wine that was to be shared with those whom the community deemed to be upstanding enough to receive. The circle of chairs had more than one row. The back row was reserved for those who were not allowed to participate on communion. It often held visitors who had no letter of recommendation from another assembly, the unbaptised (children, teenagers etc.) and those under judgement by the elders. It was felt the observers would be strengthened by being present. The miracle of Christ’s death and resurrection was not to be shared widely.

As a teenager, I observed in my journal that the Holy Spirit seemed to be a creature of habit. The same two men would pray similar prayers before communion each Sunday. As an adult I realise that the silence which surrounded communion did not feel prayerful nor sacred. There were undecurrents of fear not reverence. That was perhaps one consequence of the culture of judgement. This rule bound community did not feel safe nor inclusive even to someone who had grown up in it.

My journey into the Anglican church began with the study of theology and introduction to rich spiritual practices and mysticism. The centrality of communion was the core of something hoped for, something I could not name but it bridged my journey into Anglicanism. I now have different language and understanding of the eucharist. But it was in considering the impact of COVID-19, I revisited my youthful experience.

As the Cathedral where I serve began the process of re-opening the church to a limited number of people for a service of the eucharist, the signup process had some hiccups. Some parishioners who had not signed up came anyway and the person at the door was caught in a difficult position. It was interesting to observe that of those who attended the first services some sat in their usual seats and others chose to sit close to the front which as we know is a very un-Anglican act. The virtual coffee hour which was instituted early in the closure continues and these days is a mix of those who have attended the service in person and those who attended "virtually. I was struck by one person's comment at one coffee hour. They said to the presider, "thank you, even though I was watching at home I could feel the prayerful way you celebrated eucharist today." This all serves to remind us of the complexity of individual spiritual practice and how that can be community building.

We know there is a wealth of different spiritual practices which can nurture and create growth. Most of which are not dependent on the eucharist. Make no mistake, I do grieve for the well-crafted, diverse and theologically thoughtful the liturgies from that of the Anglo Catholic Mass to the outdoor informal "wild church". Yet there is a spiritual coherence which affirms the firm place/experience of the sacred in varied practices.

As a Deacon, I find myself in a rather curious position. My vocation calls me out of the church into work in the community. And yet that work is anchored in the sacred and symbolized in liturgy. From the proclamation of the Gospel, receiving and praying over the gifts, setting the table and the sending forth of the people, each action is both symbolic, an integrated part of the liturgy and affirms/grounds my work outside of church. After some months away from the liturgy, and as I re-invent the way I work in the community I have been facing challenges. At this point my

guiding principles are to acknowledge this is a time of discernment and can be fuelled by the energy found as potential opportunities.

Personally, I crave the prayerful and sacred gathering around the eucharistic table, but I also sense there is something new on the horizon. But I have questions: as we become more accustomed to a life of streaming of services, Zoom worship, limited musical options and we connect separately in our “pods” are we becoming mere observers of those few who perform sacred acts? Are we in danger of developing modern day versions of the medieval “squints” found in ancient churches? The squint was where privileged people could observe the priest celebrate the eucharist. It was thought this served to emphasize the sacred/holy nature of the priestly acts and thus when or if one received communion (in one kind) it was intended to be full of spiritual and sacred meaning. Does this enforced distance irretrievably challenge the evolved way in which the sacred is understood to be available to anyone? How then do we encounter the “real presence”? Perhaps the question should be, has it ever been absent?

My physician recently asked me, “are you going to close all the churches, and do something else now that it isn’t safe to have communion?” While no longer a church goer, he was reflecting on his own unexpected sense of loss and innate curiosity. Communion for him was still understood to be the central act of being Christian. That both interests and disturbs me. Would I rather be known for my Christian compassion, prayer life and commitment to justice and equality? Or, would I be known simply as someone who faithfully participates in an ancient ritual that has meaning for those involved? This is not what our choices are but as we seek to restore on some level what was, I feel we must be cautious. How do we communicate who and what we continue to be, and what we will be? I wonder what and who we might be leaving behind? Who are we continuing to exclude?

Perhaps there are other voices which need to be included in our discernment. Having worked with marginalized people for nearly a decade I have been lovingly educated about my assumptions, my privilege and my ignorance. I have learned to listen very carefully and to reject any knee-jerk problem solving. I have also learned that their spirituality can be deeper than mine. The complexity of acceptance and respect in their lives has taught many of them a patience and wisdom which is humbling. Perhaps this group has hard fought wisdom they might to add to our discussions? We are concerned for their needs but in listening perhaps the dilemma we face would take on a different shape.

COVID-19 has pressed a reset button on our practices of communal worship. While a pandemic is not new, it is a devastating reminder that

even in the 21st century we are not so very different to our ancestors who lived through the plague or the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918. We, as with them, fear we are a small step away from being “as dust”. Praxis in our current context speaks not only to our true identity but also our unhidden intent. This is a time when we are called to be prayerfully and theologically different.

Gathering anew: Reflections on youth ministry amidst a pandemic

LESLIE FLYNN

Let me begin by explaining that I was a child, pre-teen and then teenager in the Anglican church. From the first moment I entered the church at age 10, I knew this is where I belonged. I have never forgotten that feeling and my relationship with the sacred has grown out of that relationship with the church. This belonging is what drives me to my calling of leading youth in the church and helping them feel like they have a place in this institution that is in constant change and yet doesn't seem to be moving fast enough for them.

Every teen I work with is different, but similar themes emerge in their relationship with the church. These include:

1. I love the community that I have as part of the church.
2. This is the place I have made real friends.
3. My family goes to church, my grandparents and my parents, it's part of family life.
4. My history is attached to the church, childhood memories, confirmation, youth groups, trips such as winter retreats at Sorrento, BCYAYM fall conference and CLAY.
5. I don't connect to the worship in church, I don't feel like the liturgy relates to my life.
6. I don't feel like people hear me, I feel that I am spoken over by adults in the church and I have great ideas if only they would listen.
7. I want to understand God and why it's important to have God as part of my life.
8. God is love.
9. I am passionate about social justice including indigenous rights, LGBTQIA+, climate change and black lives matter.

10. I use technology to connect with my faith, including social media, YouTube and podcasts.

In working with youth through COVID-19 I have seen loss in church which mirrors the wider loss in their worlds. An increased anxiety about the future, a downward spiral in mental health, lack of interaction with peers, a loss of hope and loss of control. Overall, however the church has been able to step up and fill a space for youth during this time. I have seen how church and youth groups have gone from being something that competes with sports, music, school and work to for many it being a central and important part of their weeks.

Many of our teens had grand plans for this summer, they were going to travel, work, have internships and continue with their studies. However, most of these plans needed to be stopped but as a church we were able to continue offering support.

Below are some examples of how COVID-19 was able to address some of themes of our youth's relationship with the church:

1. I have a young adult who is 22 and lives in Coquitlam. She grew up coming to the 10am Sunday service with her parents, but has not found a church in Coquitlam. Since church has moved to weekly Zoom services she has started coming to the services. When I spoke to her about this, she said this has been an extremely hard time for her with school ending and not being able to find a job. Her biggest issue at the moment is lack of community and boredom. She told me that for the first time she was able to come to church without her parents. She was no longer her mother's daughter but was her own person. She said this made her realize how important church actually is to her and that it's something that she wants to continue pursuing as part of her life.
2. In July three parishes in my region ran a virtual day camp. This was great for the campers who came but it was equally important for the 6 youth who came to the church each day, social distanced on their computers to be small group leaders. On the last day of camp, I had one youth approach me and tell me she wanted to start going to a church and asked that I help her find one. Another youth approached me and told me that she would like to start a spiritual discussion group to have deeper conversations about God, faith and life, which we began the following week. In doing this virtual day camp I had no idea it would be a form of evangelism to our youth.
3. In March we moved our middle school and high school youth groups onto Zoom. This was a challenging change as many of our

youth were experiencing Zoom burnout. However, I also received feedback from several parents telling me how bored and lonely their children were. They said having Zoom youth groups allowed them to feel connected society and greatly improved their mental health. We also had a youth who had previously come to youth group who moved about an hour away attend youth group again over Zoom.

4. As the weather grew warmer and we were able to meet safely outside we did that. We also continued meeting over the summer, which was of great benefit to our youth whose plans had been cancelled. I saw throughout the summer relationships that moved to a different level. Instead of being teens who went to youth group together I saw friendships begin to form. I also had many youths say thank you for offering programs throughout the summer.
5. What I had not noticed amongst all these changes was the faith that was changing and growing in my youth. When it came time to nominate youth delegates for Synod and the ecclesiastical election, I had three volunteers. When I asked them why they said that they felt the church was ready to hear them because of the changes they have had to endure. They also spoke about how they need to be louder to make their voices heard because the world needs the church, they need love right now. They feel that the church can be a part this social justice.
6. Another area where I have seen youth benefit is the power dynamic that has switched in the church since COVID-19. Our youth are now being asked to handle the technology for church services. Their gifts are being recognized along with their skills and wisdom. They have been able to get involved in the Sunday morning service, which has not been happening for some time.
7. Lastly, bringing more technology into youth ministry has made me rethink various aspect of my work. I have increased by use of social media to connect with youth, I am able to have Zoom conversations if having a meeting or going to lunch won't fit into their schedules. I am not saying that technology will ever replace those face to face interactions, but it has reminded me and I believe the church that we need to see where we can bend in order to meet this suffering world.

COVID-19 has made me think often about how different the world is for youth now then it was for me. I lived in a world before Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat. I did not feel the same pressures of comparing myself to others while also trying to figure out my place in the world. I was also not part of a generation that was as passionate about helping the world as this one

is. COVID-19 has brought grief and loss in the lives of our youth but it has also helped them to see what I have seen in the church since I was a child. COVID-19 has helped create a tighter knit community, opened up conversations about God and how their faith fits into this ever-changing world and for many helped them realize the importance of the church in their lives.

Conversations: Church in the midst of the pandemic

P J H O B B S

The last time I made my communion was on Saturday, March 14, 2020. Prior to that day I had attended an 8:00 a.m. Eucharist at a local parish most every Sunday. On weekdays, I would regularly slip into the Cathedral chapel at noon for a quiet Mass (presiding once every four to six weeks). On March 15, Eucharistic practice would stop for the time being.

With many others from across the Canadian church, I was invited by the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee of the Anglican Church of Canada to write a brief paper on the experience of the church in the pandemic. My inclination was to take this as an opportunity to talk to a few people about their experience of church during these strange days. I wondered what it was like to all of a sudden have churches not open for regular worship. No gathering, no Eucharist. I decided to speak with five individuals who frequently attend the same 8 o'clock service I do on Sunday mornings, a small, purposeful sample. Admittedly, I did not know them well. I am one of those who show up just before service starts and leaves as soon as possible after the dismissal. Our conversations were one-on-one interviews (by phone or Zoom) that took place mid-summer 2020. Given their gracious willingness to speak with me and in the spirit of our shared faith, I will now call them friends.

I did not ask anyone their age, though the three women and two men I spoke with spanned an age range of approximately 60 years. Life in the midst of the pandemic intensified for sure and yet the ebbs and flow of life continued: the death of a loved one, working front line in health care, raising children, worry about grandchildren, dealing with parents in crisis living hours away, adjusted plans for an autumn wedding. A little further from the personal concerns of family and friends, one friend, when asked about feeling closer to God, marveled at the world-wide response

to the pandemic, "I am in awe how the global community; countries, political systems, peoples have realigned and reacted to combat this pandemic. I didn't think such an effort was possible or achievable; yet it has opened. Is that being closer to God?"

Prior to the pandemic, Church attendance was a frequent part of their lives. They all named the importance of being in community with friends at Church on Sunday morning. Worship, one stated echoing the thoughts of others, "provides a base, stability in the changing world. It maintains and refreshes my moral and spiritual compass." Another friend, the eldest in the group, put it this way, "I see the church as something important in my life and always encouraging me and pushing me to be a better person. I go practically every Sunday. But also, [our parish] has a great congregation, and the fellowship with the congregation and all the fellowship activities are very good too and it adds to your general appreciation of life to have the social atmosphere."

Each of my new friends have attended online worship during the pandemic as frequently as they attended in person. One exclaimed, "I've never known a time when places of worship have been closed, that doesn't happen ... so it was a shock." With this initial shock would come acceptance, "it makes perfect sense [closing the church doors on Sunday morning] ... it's not something you can lament over, it's just what you got to do if you want to survive as a people. So, it was literally those two steps [shock and acceptance], one coming right behind the other." While there was acknowledgment of what is missing in moving to online worship – not being together in community, not being able to enter their church, no coffee hour, no exchange of the peace, etc. - there was great appreciation for the parish's continued ministry during the pandemic, online on Sunday morning and pastoral care throughout the week. Phone calls to check-in with other parishioners became more frequent than usual. A new Facebook group brought together some young parents. The Sunday morning online gathering was the foundation of being church in the pandemic. One of my friends said, "If it weren't for [our parish's online worship] I would probably try and seek something else out. So, it's great that we have our own church, our own priest, the people that we are familiar with are on the screen, so you can feel some ... normalcy." Another shared a similar sentiment, "It's just that connection [which is so important], seeing the church, seeing our priest, having the homily, hearing the Word, it's been great." The importance of the homily was named a number of times, with one preaching moment especially important to one of my friends, "[the] homily was just perfect for me because it talked about how we are all messy, that is what it is like right now, cuz it's been so tough, so I think that was definitely a moment for me ... everything feels messy at the moment. I just think I felt like

I could take a deep breath and I'm not the only one, it really is messy right now."

Conversations turned to the Eucharist and the reality of not being able to receive communion or even having it celebrated online. One of my new friends draws great meaning from the Eucharist. She said, "[the Eucharist is] very important to me and it's probably the hardest thing to have gotten used to, not being able to have communion." In short order, however, she became accustomed to not being able to receive communion and found other ways to feel a similar connection, especially listening to gospel music and relishing her household prayer.

When talking to my other four friends about missing the Eucharist, I was in for a bit of a surprise. The loss of the Eucharist was not that big of a deal, because it did not mean much to them in the first place. Comments on the Eucharist were brief and rather matter of fact. One said, "I can say the Eucharist has never really meant that much to me. I don't find it offensive or anything, I am just not that wholeheartedly into it." Another friend acknowledged that they have never really reflected on the meaning of the Eucharist, "to me growing up it was just part of the church routine ... for some people it was a big moment, but it hasn't been like that for me." A similar view was shared by another friend, "the Eucharist is more of a ritual than a deep spiritual experience." And another put it this way, "How I interact with communion is still a work in progress. I'm sure there is a much deeper meaning there that I haven't grasped ... but I haven't made the connection yet." That said, he appreciates its meaning for others, "I'm sure there are many people out there [for whom] receiving communion is probably the main point of Sunday morning worship, for me it's not." While all acknowledged the absence of communion, one friend likely summed it up for all five, "I feel like there is a little bit of something missing, but personally I don't feel shafted because I'm not getting communion." And another is even more succinct, "I mean God will be with you, communion or not."

It was a joy to talk with my five new friends. Our conversations wonderfully meandered through many other topics: the implications for faith given the difference between 1st century and 21st century cosmology; the syncretism of Christian spiritual practice and yoga; the possibility of receiving communion at home while participating in an online celebration of the Eucharist (the general consensus - that's fine, though not necessary); concerns for the parish in anticipation of the retirement of a much loved priest; remembering the words of a grandmother who counselled that in times of trouble, "put your hand up, Jesus will take your hand and walk with you."

Clearly, these conversations represent a small purposeful sample and the insights gleaned cannot be generalized in any quantifiable way. Joining these voices with many others across the church may assist in providing insight on how to move forward in exploring further questions around, for example, theological reflection, faith formation, parish programming as well as liturgical and pastoral practice. I defer to others to frame and advance such questions.

I am very grateful to the five individuals who took the time to engage in conversation with me. The quality of their insight, faith, and lived experience has given me pause for much reflection. They all expressed a yearning to get back to church as it once was. One wondered if the Eucharist might mean more when “we can get back to church and receive communion again.” That will be a fascinating conversation. I might even stick around for coffee.

Accessibility and mystery

NICK PANG

If one were to look up when entering into St Saviour's, Penticton, one might notice a large canvas banner hanging from the rood screen which separates the narthex and the nave. The banner reads: "Welcom Home in Jesus Name". It was gifted to the parish a number of years ago by a couple of members who had spent some time working in Papua New Guinea and had forged some strong friendships with the church there. That sign serves as an icon to me of one of my most fundamental operating principles of liturgy: the constant balance of Accessibility and Mystery. On the one hand the message is clear, all who enter here are welcome into their spiritual home—the house of Jesus. On the other hand, it's clear that this is no simple, pro-forma "All are welcome" sign. There's a depth to it. It catches the eye and causes one to stop, to investigate, to go deeper. Did they really mean to spell "Welcom" that way? Where did it come from? What's its story?

Over the past five months the attempt to find the balance between accessibility and mystery in our worship has faced challenges that we had never considered. Like all churches we've struggled to find something that works for our community now, and which will continue to give life over the coming months and years. We began back in March by taking a 6-week pilgrimage around the Anglican Communion with stops in Toronto, Paris, Houston, Copenhagen, Hong Kong, and Kelowna (our own cathedral). We then moved into pre-recording services which premiere on YouTube, Sunday mornings at 10am. Our plan is to remain in that mode for the foreseeable future.

Accessibility

We made the decision to work with YouTube rather than Zoom because a survey of the parish found that while about 2/3 of parishioners had access to the internet, only 1/3 were able or willing to access Zoom or related platforms. At a very basic level, multimedia technology both enabled us to

connect with parishioners but also posed a barrier to access for a significant proportion of our existing congregation. Working with streaming services enabled a one-click option. Similarly, having a video up on YouTube makes accommodation for the variable schedules people are dealing with right now. Particularly for our working-aged parishioners, work and family schedules only allowed them to join with us in person on a roughly monthly basis. With this new platform they're able to participate in worship, with a familiar community, on a weekly basis, as long as they're willing to dedicate the time to it (the duration of the services has been shortened to accommodate the medium).

At a deeper level, access to ministries has grown significantly since we moved online. Many people who were unwilling to participate in the liturgy in front of the entire church are much more comfortable recording a reading or intercessions in a one-on-one video chat. The number of parishioners participating in these ministries has at least doubled. People are rediscovering a role in the liturgy and are engaging with scripture in ways that they haven't for a long time.

An interesting note is how the informal community leadership structures are changing, with some people thriving on online platforms who otherwise were unable to apply their leadership skills in the parish prior to this time, either because of personal discomfort or because of scheduling challenges. A good number of the spiritual formation questions I'm dealing with now are due to the fact that there's a whole new cohort of individuals who previously shied away from leadership and who are now willing to take on new roles.

By contrast, one evident and basic challenge to accessibility is of course the technological outlay and knowledge. As mentioned above, a significant proportion of our congregation is lacking basic access to the technological infrastructure required to participate meaningfully in this new style of community. We've had to work around this by creating parallel structures, monthly in-person gatherings in the style of midweek services, phone calls, physical mail outs, etc. that go alongside our main digital gathering.

At a deeper level, this barrier to access presents other challenges. Getting people who already have access to the technology connected has been a surmountable challenge, but there is certainly an age and class bias that we can't easily address. The most economically impoverished members of our community went without access to our worship for five months because they couldn't afford an internet connection, until we started a monthly in-person gathering. We are a community that has prided itself in the past on its service to and with the poor, and much of that core piece of our identity is no longer viable for the foreseeable future, at least not in the same ways

which were spiritually edifying for individual members and for the community. There are people both from the centre and from the margins who are being left out in this new system and that is a point of great concern.

Mystery

The accessibility concerns are real, and we are trying to address them. They're somewhat tempered, however, by the fact that there is a deepening of discipleship that is occurring as well. One of the first things we implemented when lockdown began was a rotating phone list. Each of the 14 some odd members of Church Council was given 8 parishioners to call each week, and each week the list rotated. In many ways the community has never been as connected. The lay leadership of the parish is coming to know the broader membership in ways that previously only the clergy got to experience. The impact of this on our worship is becoming clear as well. People's prayers are growing deeper and more specific as more news circulates around the parish. Likewise, the greater visibility of some members of the parish on our YouTube services has a similar function in building up the sense of community and solidarity. I think especially in the early days, the church became a symbol of hope to many members of the community by very visibly committing to keeping people connected.

Although our congregational worship on YouTube is non-sacramental, I would say that there is something *sacral* to it. It is a holy gathering borne out of necessity and out of concern for one another's safety. It's commonly recognized that those who undergo challenge and grief together form special bonds. By being intentional about stepping away from what is normative to us, and staying away until all are safe to return, the community seems to be committing itself to a sort of discipline, a prolonged Lenten fast, not simply from the Eucharist, but from the whole realm of the familiar. In the place of what's normal and familiar, they've begun to train in adaptability through their worship, and this has prepared them for their participation in the wider world.

In Eucharistic language, I think that this is a time of special intention to focus on the fundamental nature of our lives as gift. It's an offering to God of the most fundamental parts of our spiritual identities, ourselves, our souls and bodies, as well as our forms of prayer and our physical connections with our family in Christ. In return I think that we are being nourished by God's grace with renewed interest in the scriptures, with more profound habits of prayer and intercession, and with a stronger sense of community—many of which are the very graces we ask to receive through our participation in the Eucharist itself.

I don't believe this is our 'new normal'. I don't believe that this is how our community will function from this point forward, but for now it's moving us into a new spiritual landscape, and for that I am grateful.

Some of the challenges that we face on the Mystery side of the equation have to do with helping people see and understand the transformation that's taking place. If you're not paying particular attention it's easy for a YouTube service to become another video to watch and to consume like all other digital media. We try to counteract that by having familiar touchstones from our in-person liturgy, including faces of parishioners, portions of familiar mass settings introduced into Morning Prayer, and by choosing to premiere the videos rather than just release them so that people have a set and familiar time at which the majority can gather together to watch at the same time. Nonetheless the risk of commodifying our worship services persists (though this is decidedly not unique to digital media).

Questions

Some of the unresolved questions I have looking ahead have to do with how we support people as their lives move increasingly online. If our 95-year-olds are now managing to work with Zoom, and their online persona is becoming more defined, how can we support their spiritual development there as well as in person? Also, how do we encourage meaningful spiritual *transformation* out of a potentially passive spiritual *experience*?

Personally, I'm less interested in the question of the mechanics of the sacraments (and yet I'm very grateful there are other smart people doing that important work!) and I'm more concerned with the question of the fundamental function and intention of the sacraments. Whether or not we're able to participate in the Eucharist in this time, is the miraculous grace of God transforming hearts and minds in ways that we normally experience through the Eucharist? As leaders in the church, how do we walk faithfully in line with what God is doing and commit ourselves to seeing that grace increase in a time of global trauma?

In many ways I'm not sure the most fundamental questions have changed very much in the past five months. They have a different context, but that Church's mission, and St Saviour's mission of Worshipping, Growing, and Loving in Christ is still just as applicable now as ever before.

Discerning the Body: Reflections on worshipping on Zoom

ANNE PRIVETT

On March 18, 2020, an episcopal directive to cease in-person worship was issued in the Diocese of Kootenay and St. Andrew's moved the worship of our two congregations online. For the first few weeks, our Sunday congregation visited the pre-recorded services of some of our Anglican Communion's greatest cathedrals. We then moved to worship on Zoom. This brief reflection paper offers a summary of the lived experience and learnings of our Sunday morning and Messy Church congregations thus far.

The choice to use Zoom as the online platform for worship was both theological and practical. The novelty of visiting Cathedrals quickly wore off and many Sunday congregants expressed the oddity of being liturgical observers, while some, including the Incumbent, named the further theological and liturgical oddity of being Eucharistic observers. The Eucharist is not a performance rather it is a communal action. Our Messy Church congregation needed a participatory platform with which families would already be familiar. Zoom was well known to anyone in the school system and was the most participatory platform that could be run well and easily with the technological resources already at hand in the parish. Our weekly, Sunday Eucharist became Morning Prayer in which the Prayers of the People became a time of free, extemporaneous prayer, and, with the sermon sent out by email before hand, the sermon time became communal discussion on the readings. Our monthly Messy Church Eucharist service became a bi-weekly liturgy of the word through story telling, song, and a simple craft that families could do with what was on hand during quarantine (imagine Holy Week in Lego!).

For the first time, our Sunday congregation can see each other's faces as they worship. There is even a glimpse inside each other's homes. To watch each other's faces while praying is making worship a much more vulnerable

and intimate experience than it ever was in our church building. As one parishioner Kenneth describes it, “Despite the fact that we are not physically present with one another, in some ways we experience one another much more physically than we did before.” Anglicans from the UK, the Yukon, Nova Scotia, Ontario and other places in the BC interior Zoom in to worship with us weekly delighting us and expanding our understanding of church. Creating both the liturgical space for, and the expectation of participation in, extemporaneous prayer and scripture discussion is changing how we see liturgy. As another parishioner Alida said: “I am struck by the courage of our parish to assemble in such new ways ...and that if liturgy is indeed the work of the assembly...we are asked to be ready [for that work], not just to show up.” And another parishioner Terry explained: “The Zoom format removes any comfortable passivity I remembered from ‘real’ church” and asks us to recall the “importance of being part of a Christian community and the responsibility it brings.”

Something similar is happening in our Messy Church Community. In the Messy Church model, the activities, crafts, liturgy and dinner are all prepared and provided by the Sunday community. We had seen small signs of Messy Church beginning to take ownership of its communal life but we were struggling to encourage this within the traditional Messy Church model. Once on Zoom, families took turns providing the music, each family was responsible for their own craft and a snack, and by the end of the summer, the community was able to design a pattern of Zoom worship to respond to a call from rural churches needing help with their children’s ministry during COVID-19. All of a sudden, (Messy) Church is bigger than St. Andrew’s and rather than being just consumers of liturgy and community, there is now a new mission forming in providing those things for others. Heading into this fall, Messy Church will meet bi-weekly with one Zoom Bible lesson and craft with families from other churches (paired in ‘buddy-families’ to support each other over the kilometers) and then once for a COVID-safe, outdoor event with local families to get the kids moving. Our families who do not have an Anglican background have been most anxious to return to the Eucharist, offering creative suggestions: “Can’t we just consecrate a small bottle of wine and then pour it out for each family pod from there? We can even bring our own cups!” These families have been ready to engage the theological reasons of why we do what we do at the Eucharist inviting them even further into the Anglican tradition.

We miss the Eucharist acutely – it has been 24 weeks and counting- yet this time has drawn us into a discernment of the body of Christ which we would not have entered with such experiential clarity otherwise. We are being challenged to mature in our lives as disciples and take responsibility

for our communal worship. As our understanding of worship, and our responsibility within it and for it, renews so does our understanding of ourselves. We are, as Paul wrote, ‘discerning the body’ (1 Cor 11:29). Biblical scholars and theologians have debated the meaning of the word ‘body’ in this passage for years asking whether Paul is saying an essential part of the Lord’s supper is knowing the gathered church as the body of Christ or an essential part is discerning Christ’s Body in bread and wine. The Rev. Pam Wilson, St. Andrew’s locally trained priest, shared during one Zoom service that, “it feels like the living bread Jesus promises has become each other”. We are being drawn into the Eucharistic mystery even in its absence. When we return to the Table, we pray that this time of discerning the Living Bread abiding in community will enable us to eat of that Bread with deeper joy and understanding.

All of this learning is happening in the context of St. Andrew’s Vision distilling work. The Team tasked with discerning where God is calling us for the next three years worked faithfully through COVID-19 on Zoom as well. The Team distilled a call to: ‘Celebrate, Cultivate and Connect, grounded and growing in Christ’. Celebrate our Anglican tradition, cultivate each one us as disciples and leaders, connect in relationship across generations with our wider community. The Team set up a visual, guided tour of the distilling process in the church and the congregation was invited in very small, COVID-safe groups, to come back “not to the way things were but to the heart of who we are”. The return to the heart of who we are and the return to our building (but not to worship) has been deeply moving for many both in the hope it proclaims and also in the loss it highlights. Tears have been shed before the altar we cannot yet gather around. It has been very difficult to remain in the rhythm of the liturgical year through these months and we have struggled in the absence of this formative and familiar steward of our seasons.

Morning Prayer on Zoom has drawn us more quickly than we could have asked or imagined into mission priority of cultivating discipleship and leadership. Our next question is to ask what elements of Zoom worship we bring with us when we do return to in-person worship. The absence of the Eucharist has drawn us into a richer understanding of ourselves as the body of Christ and enabled us to feast more deeply on the living Word in scripture. Our next question is how to intentionally integrate these learnings with our (eventual) return to the Table. Changing the way we do everything has given us the gift of returning to the unchanging heart of who we are in Christ. Through both loss and hope we are deeply grateful for the work of the Spirit among us: *Deo gratias!*

The gift of things unseen: A digital Compline experiment

BRANDON WITWER

There is a bumper sticker that reads: “Jesus is coming, look busy.” It may simply be a bit of clever irreverence, but its prophetic edge cuts deep.

As a priest I often feel the pull to look busy. A tendency I observe in myself, and perhaps I’m not alone in this, is a difficulty in sharing ministry. Now, I am happy to give away freely from the list of ‘things-that-just-have-to-get-done-but-I-don’t-want-to-have-to-do-them’. But I have a harder time sharing the ‘good stuff’ – leading formation groups, preaching, praying. I feel like I have to earn my keep and the way I show that I am worth keeping around is to be seen doing these ‘spiritual’ things. If someone else does them, what does the church need me for?

When the pandemic hit in March I began to lead compline every night livestreamed on Facebook. It seemed an appropriately peaceful response to anxious times. I realized though, that I wasn’t just offering compline to make a peaceful space for my parishioners, but also, on some level, assuring myself that I was doing something of measurable value. My other visible ministries were gone, but my face was there on the screen every evening at 9 o’clock. Even as I was trying to make a calm space for others, I was tending to my egoic need to look busy and prove my worth.

One of my mentors in ministry, as we were leaving a nursing home service where many were living in various stages of dementia, some visibly unresponsive, offered this wisdom: ‘so much of what we do in ministry is unseen.’ I took this to mean the impact of what we did is hidden to us. Now I am struck that it can also mean no one sees what we’re doing. Frequently in the ordination service the language of ‘building up’ the church is employed to direct the vocation of the priest. In Eph 4, Paul says that some are given gifts as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body – not to horde all the work of ministry for themselves.

During the pandemic we have lost many regular opportunities for our laypeople to exercise their ministries in the church. We have learned how to keep our readers and intercessors involved, but our altar guilds, sides-people, choristers, and many others have lost opportunities to serve together. (One question the pandemic has no doubt raised for them is ‘do I miss these things?’ Or will they have found that they did them more out of a sense of obligation than vocation?)

I had been leading compline nightly for a month. As it became clear that we would not be gathering again soon, knowing that this ministry should carry on, I invited others to take a turn in leading our night prayers. Two parishioners with administrative gifts helped me assemble a team of men and women to lead the prayers. Now I only lead once a week. This has been a gift to me as I get to receive the ministry of these wise and sincere people, and my egoic need to be seen doing is being subverted. It has also been a gift to our community where many have felt a greater sense of connection to the whole church by praying with a variety of people they know and love, and even some they don’t know. And it has been a gift to the people who have started leading our prayers. In their own words on how praying compline has shaped their experience and understanding of prayer in their lives:

“Since starting in late March I have not missed an evening and I find it comforting. I do not always stay focused on the prayers but I find myself praying more during the day, and talking about prayer and how it has become something routine in my life.”

“It has made quite a difference. The regularity of it is priceless. It is a discipline and it gives me a place to come to that feels like home. I feel called to pray with others.”

“I have had an up and down experience with church and religion so I didn’t pray much. Now it’s something I look forward to that I wouldn’t have looked forward to before. With compline there is something positive, grounding, in the midst of chaos.”

The pandemic has raised the question of how we are formed as a community of disciples, while at the same time confronting the deadly sin of clericalism. This compline experiment has been a reminder that engagement and leadership are important aspects of formation. How can we make sure the gifts of the whole community are activated during the pandemic and beyond so that this formation can continue? How can we overcome the temptations of clericalism so that we can be built up into the ‘measure of the full stature of Christ?’

A question of digital Church

STEPHEN LONDON

As I navigate the complexities of life during the pandemic of 2020, I keep coming back to Theological Surprise. I call it surprise, because the places and faith conversations I have been called into have been completely unexpected, astonishing, and exciting. My imagination has been fired in ways that it never had been before. The adventure of helping people become disciples has never been so rich. God started surprising me the first week after we closed the church, as I started pondering the question many priests were asking: "What are we going to do now?"

I am a priest serving in the Diocese of Edmonton. If you had asked me before this pandemic if I should be leading services online, I probably would have laughed at you. One of the reasons that I love our Christian faith is that it is so incarnational. Faith is expressed in the specificity of a particular place, with flesh and blood people who laugh and argue and drink coffee together. We celebrate in a building that has been loved for several generations. Our Altar Guild sets out the bread and we physically drink from a common cup. I love the whole drama of Sunday morning: from opening the building while it is still dark, to practicing my sermon, greeting people as they come in, celebrating Eucharist, praying with someone in the foyer, laughing over coffee, and being the last to lock up. Other than having a website, digital was not part of our community life before the pandemic.

When COVID-19 happened, my first thought was about the people in the congregation who would be isolated and nervous. Their weekly church routine was gone. The first thing we did was set up a phone tree to check in with everyone in the parish. The second was that I subscribed to a digital platform that I had heard of but never used: Zoom. This marked the beginning of my Theological Surprise education.

My first thought was that, since people were at home anyway, why not invite them to pray the Morning Office with me? I sent out a parish wide email with an invitation to pray with me and instructions for joining over

Zoom. That first Morning Prayer had a few people. We read the readings, and I gave a reflection. The next day, there were more people, and then a few more joined, until we had between 25-30 per day regularly attending. I learned to stop giving reflections and to open the floor to what I called ‘Holy Conversations about the readings.’ People asked questions; shared concerns and fears; explored faith and grace. After the service, we stayed around for ‘virtual coffee hours.’ A couple of weeks later, we started to meet online on Sundays as well. There were too many people for conversations but we’re still grateful that we were able to see other people and to worship together.

The Theological Surprise came to me when I realized that we were really connected across our screens. The people gathered for daily and Sunday worship were not a pseudo-community; it was real. I looked forward to visiting and praying with my daily prayer community. It struck me that, if I had tried to gather a worshipping community rooted in the Daily Office at the church, then, at best, I would have gotten a couple of people. To have 25-30 people praying regularly was something just shy of a miracle. In fact, it has been one of the best things to happen to me in all of my 17 years of ordained ministry.

People supported each other, shared with one another, and prayed for each other. When people started asking if we could do communion online, I didn’t know what I thought. Before COVID-19, I would have passed over the suggestion of online communion with hardly a thought. But now, given the depth and reality of our digital community, I started to wonder and pray about the idea. Of course, I stayed within the bounds of Canadian Anglican practice. But I did start to ask the question: what if....

Once I started asking this question of myself, I got a phone call from a parishioner. She was in tears of joy. I wanted to know what had moved her so much. She told me that she had been watching a Roman Catholic Mass on television with Pope Francis presiding. She told me that she had had this really sudden and strong desire to have communion, so she got bread and a little bit of wine. She placed them on a little table in front of her and prayed until the pope “consecrated” her small offering. Then she communicated herself. I wasn’t sure how to respond. It is not in my nature to tell her that she shouldn’t have done that. Instead, I decided to explore a little more what happened in her living room. I asked, “and how was that for you?” And she said, “Oh, Steve, I wept and wept and wept. The Holy Spirit was right there with me. The love of God is so beautiful.”

I still don’t know what to think of this. I don’t believe that we can do theology based only on a personal incident. But what struck me was the surprise of the situation. Here was a parishioner who was closed in her home, hungering for communion. Something powerful happened. We can

call it spiritual communion, perhaps. Only God knows, but it captured my Theological Imagination. It occurred to me that as Christians, we already believe in deep Theological Surprises. We believe that the infinite God became flesh in a tiny child. We believe that the small piece of bread I pray over becomes the life-giving body of Christ. After these profound Theological Surprises, it seems quite a small movement of the Theological Imagination to see God feeding his people, gathered in digital worship, with the Body and Blood of Christ.

Pushing back from the Table

JOANNE MERCER

Surprise – what I didn’t miss

I will begin with a surprising confession. Well, it was surprising to me at least. I have not presided at Eucharist since March 15 and I haven’t really missed it. Maybe it is because I have been busy trying to cope with all of the changes and learning the new skills needed “to take the church online” or maybe there is something deeper going on. I am historically a eucharistic person. As a priest, I rarely led the office in parish work, opting to have the eucharist on a regular schedule. At certain times in my life I would be at eucharist several times a week. So it was very surprising to me that I did not feel great anguish at the thoughts of not presiding for an indefinite period of time. Eucharist was central to my living of faith and then it wasn’t.

Why?

While many of my colleagues were trying to find alternative and safe ways to have eucharist with their communities, I never felt the compulsion. I entered into conversation and gave feed back and asked questions, but I didn’t really enter into the desperate search. I wondered if I was burned out. Was I losing my sense priestly vocation? But I was engaged in learning new ways to reach out to my community and beyond. I was convinced that God was doing a new thing and felt oddly free to express myself liturgically in new ways. I was exhausted but still engaged. I felt overwhelmed and excited all at the same time. So what was going on with my shift in eucharistic thinking?

I wondered, maybe my outlook is more about sacramentality than particular sacraments? Maybe I am more of a person who sees the sacred in all things and not only in the particular sacraments? Maybe constantly repeating to folks that “sacraments are an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace” had led me to see those signs all around me?

I do think that this is so, but I also think that more is/was going on in my head and heart. I have a multitude of jumbled thoughts looking for an organizing principle. So I turned to the work of David Clines and his question: "Why is there a Book of Job and what does it do to you if you read it?" and asked myself why we have eucharist at all (what is it supposed to do) and then the inverse of Clines' question: what happens when we don't have it?

As this is a reflection paper, and not a book, I am not going to attempt a history of the eucharist and its origins in the early church community. But I will share some of my thoughts, and mostly questions, about why there is a eucharist.

It shapes community and identity – The eucharist shaped the community and identity of the early church. The radical sharing of a meal was very much a lived sign of the gospel. It enacted for all to see the good news of Jesus Christ. It was and is radical in breaking boundaries, as Paul would suggest, between male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free. In what ways does the eucharist shape community and identity now? How is it a lived sign? Are there other ways we are being shaped and reformed?

It is thanksgiving – Those who have taken a basic course in the sacraments have learned that the term for eucharist comes from the Greek for thanksgiving. In the eucharist we give thanks for the gospel and the in-breaking of God's saving grace. We proclaim the power of the incarnation and how God has been working through history all along. We tell the story of faith, we "remember" and commit ourselves to living, "doing" in response to that memory. It is a thanksgiving which uses words, sights, image, and tactile expressions to invite us into a living tradition. IN what new ways are we being invited into this thanksgiving – into taking, blessing, breaking and giving?

It is an outward and visible sign – In the eucharist we physically, audibly, visually remind ourselves of the reality of God's grace. I often think that is one of the reasons I tend to stick to the Eucharist in my Sunday schedules, I suffer from spiritual amnesia. Like those addressed in the Letter of James, I quickly forget who I am and how I am to live. The eucharist is an outward sign that calls me back home and reminds me of the sacred story. But I think that it also enables me to recognise the other signs of God's invisible grace. Once reminded, I can look at the world in a refreshed manner and am able to discern God with us. Recognising the incarnational physical reality of the sacrament enables a wider view of sacramentality.

It is narrative, memory and solidarity. The Eucharist is what Johann Baptist Metz called a "dangerous memory" – it is the telling of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a narrative that confronts

our comfortable myths that powerful people are of more value, that strength wins, and that death has the last word. It reorders our world. It is that amazing combination of telling a narrative.... On this night.... Recalling a memory... Jesus took bread.... and committing to an act of solidarity in response.... Go do this. The eucharist is not just spoken, it is enacted and it is an imperative to go live your life in response. In what other ways are we able to combine these actions? What other stories do we need to hear, to remember and to act upon?

It has an ethical imperative. One of my professors and mentors would remind us that the most important part of the eucharist is the dismissal. That is the whole point. We are nourished and fed so that we can go out and live transformed lives.

It is real, experienced and mysterious. Worship does something to you, receiving the sacraments does something. It is real and experienced and yet it is beyond words and expression. It moves you and shapes you and transforms you, sometimes even against your will. It feeds you and leaves you hungry for more, hungry to return.

So if I believe all of these things about the Eucharist, then why have I not been longing to return. Well, if I am honest, while I do believe those things that is not always my experience. Sometimes I am too “in my head” to experience anything other than the anxiety of getting the liturgy done well. Often, I come to the eucharist focused on myself and my needs and what it can do for me. I have often come as a consumer and not as a worshipper.

So what does it do to you if you don't have it?

For me it has enabled/forced me to look at things differently. It has brought to mind lots of questions.

Why is that we focus so much on the Eucharist and “the Sunday event”? During the pandemic and our rush to be online, much of our focus has been on recreating the Sunday experience and recreating something similar to our eucharistic liturgies. While I know there have been live groups and bible studies, it has not been where the bulk of energy seems to be. Surely we are not only Christians on Sundays?? And worship is not limited to organised liturgies on that day? I have become more aware of the sacred around me and my call to worship always, in all that I do. It has reminded me that we are the people of God, the body of Christ, not only on days when we gather together.

It has helped me shift my focus from consuming religion/church to living my faith. It has helped me see that the community of faith is able to do all of the things that are central to the Eucharist in other ways.

I think we as a people and as a country have begun some amazingly holy actions during this time of Eucharistic fast, and I don't think that is just coincidence. We have begun to remember our stories and those who have been left out and silenced. We have begun to respond to the gospel call to break boundaries and realize what it means to sit at table with those who are outside our normative "social circle". We have seen people take to the streets and demand to be re-membered. To have their stories told and to claim their rightful place in the story of our nation.

I think I have become more aware of the varieties of ways in which God's story is lived out in our lives and have given thanks. The taking, blessing, breaking and giving so fundamental to the celebration of a eucharist, are core to many acts of thanksgiving. It is not an action limited to a prayer on Sunday but a model of how to live out faith daily.

The nightly news has reminded me of the importance of reading the signs around me and seeing and naming what God is doing in our midst. As people rise up and demand their God-given dignity I am reminded that all stories of suffering and death point us in the direction of the passion of Jesus and remind us that death does not mark the end. And even the dead call out for justice: to have their stories told and their lives honored in acts of solidarity.

If one claims to be a follower of the Crucified One then there is a need to act on that faith, not only in our liturgy but in our relations with others, and especially in our relationships with those who we think are different than we are.

God is real and present in ways I could not have asked or imagined.

I have come to see that the meal of the eucharist is not only about the "Last Supper" but about all of the times that Jesus sat with those he wasn't supposed to and ate with them and went to their houses and broke bread with them.

So I am not longing to get back to the church and celebrate Eucharist. I am longing to continue to find new ways to live Eucharistically. I am living into the most important part of the eucharist of all: Go!

Our attempt at faithful worship during COVID-19

D O N N A J O Y

When the doors to church buildings were closed back in March we, along with countless other churches, were confronted with a challenging question, “How are we called to be church in the midst of this new and (within our context) unfamiliar time of exile?”¹ Since all aspects of church life are nurtured by, reflected in, informed and inspired by worship, it was necessary to discern this essential piece first, maximizing the potential for important ministries such as Christian education, pastoral care, mission and outreach, etc. to be supported, empowered, and encouraged to thrive accordingly.

For this parish, Zoom has been and continues to be an essential vehicle through which ‘being church’ in the midst of COVID-19 is possible. Three primary areas of focus have arisen and remain works-in-progress: (1) Worship as communal; (2) The purpose and place of lament; (3) Exploring potential alternative Eucharistic experiences.

Communal worship

We quickly determined that this parish was longing for an interactive, communal experience, so decided to offer worship through Zoom. Initially this was an experiment, although surprisingly, it quickly became clear that this approach serves us best. It is, however, far from ideal. After some glitches, our director of music ministry adjusted his settings and found specific equipment in order to maximize the quality of musical sound. We cannot all sing together as the format can only accommodate one voice at a time. Said liturgical responses are assigned to lay leaders each week; they articulate the responses on behalf of the worshiping community as other

¹ A helpful resource and guide has been, and will continue to be N.T. Wright, “God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath,” (Zondervan Reflection, 2020).

participants join in while muted. We are not together physically. Occasionally the screen freezes, disrupting a seamless flow for worship. Indeed, this is far from ideal.

Why, then, have we maintained this weekly experience? We have done so because it is currently the most effective way to accommodate this parish's expressed need for communal worship: to worship interactively, and share refreshment time afterwards, together.

At a time when personal lives are and the world in which we live is immersed in isolation, confusion, unpredictability, loss of control and personal freedom, fear, grief... In the midst of all this, we have gathered together for worship every Sunday morning at 10:30, experiencing the communal nature of worship. Folks start to arrive at about 10:10 during which time there are enthusiastic greetings, catching up, sharing news of events that cover a wide spectrum: (1) from joy to heart wrenching sadness (births of grandchildren out of Province and grandparents unable to visit them) (2) loss of loved ones through deaths and moves, with insufficient opportunities to mark the occasions; (3) opportunities to hear and respond to the real-life stories of people who are searching for a sense of connection, comfort, and support (in particular, supporting folks as they prepare for and recover from surgery); (4) searching for ways to place all this into God's hands in the company of one another; (5) searching for strength, comfort, and hope. For those who have the necessary type of device, Zoom worship has made this possible. For this parish, this has been and continues to be a gift beyond measure. (Although the majority of parishioners do have the necessary technology to be included, not everyone does, so we have established other strategies to remain connected with those who do not. Sadly, at the moment, this cannot, and does not, include corporate worship. It is important to remember that some of these realities are out of our hands. COVID-19 is the cause, we're simply striving to establish the most effective practices in the midst of a less than ideal reality.)

This approach has also made it possible for people to worship together with family and friends well beyond Winnipeg; that is, from numerous locations throughout Canada and the U.S., England, Australia, Kenya, South Africa. Those who have extended the invitations make sure that their guests are introduced as folks arrive prior to 10:30, and further, more in-depth conversations occur during refreshment time after worship. We have experienced the realities of this global pandemic through the presence of these individuals, hearing their stories, and responding to their specific requests for prayer and support. In addition to this, a number of parishioners who have moved away over the years have returned to worship with St. Peter's. At a time when loneliness and isolation

is a significant reality, people have chosen to embrace this opportunity to connect.

Some specific, additional experiences with communal worship through Zoom are:

1. One Sunday during refreshment time we received the news that one of our beloved parishioners, that afternoon, was required to make a decision about removing her husband (also a parishioner) from life support. With this announcement, we sat in silence together, for perhaps a full minute. Then we prayed. The rest of the afternoon was upheld by that prayer. Peter died that afternoon at 3:30 with his wife Ellen by his side, and two members of our clergy team who were present at worship that morning, close by.
2. During the past six months two St. Peter's families have moved out of Province. While they were unable to enjoy the usual going-away parties, etc. we were able to maintain our usual practice of a ritual, celebrating their presence among us along with the ministries they have shared over time, and while gathered together, sending them off with God's blessing. These same families, once moved, have logged onto Zoom to return to worship with St. Peter's.
3. Liturgical leaders have continued their ministries among us in worship: presiders, preachers, readers, intercessors, director of music ministries, cantors.
4. During the past six months, St. Peter's has generated tremendous support and outreach to organizations such as our local St. Matthew's Maryland Community Ministry and the PWRDF Grow Hope Project. This has largely been possible because of the ways they have been promoted while together on Sunday mornings, with lay leaders effectively promoting, and preachers highlighting such opportunities as Scriptural texts permit.

Through the gift of Zoom technology, and with God's help, we have managed to maintain our essential need to worship together, while offering comfort, support, and hope in the midst of these challenging times.

The purpose and place of lament

Intrinsic to the culture in which we live, is a denial of pain, masking it with countless methods of self-medication. In the midst of this painful and challenging COVID-19 experience, we are attempting to offer a prophetic voice into the void that comes with denial. Throughout the Old Testament (particularly the Psalms) and the New Testament (perhaps

culminating in Rom 8:22-27)², our tradition is rich with calls to lament. Rooted in and informed by this tradition, Jesus cries out from the cross these words from Ps 22, “My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?” This, and other similar cries need to find utterance in the midst of a global pandemic.³

Indeed, we recognize this as a time to become reacquainted with the practice of lament. This COVID-19 moment offers an opportunity to rediscover this long forgotten gem. We need to rediscover the spiritual value in (1) naming the pain and the grief; (2) crying out to God; (3) asking for God’s help; (4) remembering God’s faithfulness in the past; (4) discovering a sense of trust, and (5) praising God for remaining steadfast with us in the midst of all that we may endure.

Specific ways in which we have promoted and facilitated this call to lament:

1. We are committed to expounding on this through preaching and teaching.
2. An evening liturgy of lament was created and offered for those who expressed an interest in praying this and learning more about it.
3. Although we are not currently practicing Spiritual Communion, we include a prayer of lament in our Sunday worship which is associated with this practice.

The following is one example of such a prayer, to be included at that point in the liturgy when (prior to March of this year) we would be receiving Communion.⁴

In union, blessed Jesus, with the faithful gathered at every altar of your Church where your blessed Body and Blood are offered, I long to offer you praise and thanksgiving, for creation and all the blessings of this life, for the redemption won for us by your life, death, and resurrection, for the means of grace and the hope of glory.

... We believe that you are truly present in the Holy Sacrament, and, since we cannot at this time receive communion, we pray you to come into our hearts. We unite ourselves with you and embrace you with all our hearts, our souls, and our minds. Let nothing separate us from you;

² For more on this theme, please refer, again, to N.T. Wright, “God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath,” (Zondervan Reflection, 2020).

³ Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, Erika Moore, “The Psalms as Christian Lament: Historical Commentary,” (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014) This has been informative, especially during this past six months.

⁴ Adapted from Saint Augustine’s Prayer Book, Chapter on Spiritual Communion (Revised edition: Forward Movement, 2014).

let us serve you in this life until, by your grace, we come to your glorious kingdom and unending peace. Amen.

Following the Lord's Prayer...

Come Lord Jesus, and dwell in our hearts in the fullness of your strength; be our wisdom and guide us in right pathways; conform our lives and actions to the image of your holiness; and, in the power of your gracious might, rule over every hostile power that threatens or disturbs the growth of your kingdom, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

We have received feedback from some folks who suggest that this prayerful expression of lament has opened the gateway for them to identify their own deep sense of loss, pain, disappointment, confusion, and grief. Previously unnamed, unidentified 'groanings'⁵ have been identified and found expression through the *absence* of the Sacrament, and accompanying prayers. While these worshipers do not, cannot, speak for the whole of St. Peter's, I think it is prudent to seriously reflect on this feedback. Is a rush to quickly provide alternative Eucharistic experiences at risk of perpetuating a sense of denial regarding the pain associated with this COVID time? Is this potential 'quick fix' at greater risk of masking the pain we're feeling, than empowering us to find strength? Is there a need to explore deeply a sense of sacramental theology that inspires this perceived longing for the Eucharist? While I do not at present have answers to these questions, it seems clear to me that we need to engage in them together.

Potential alternative Eucharistic experiences: Spiritual Communion and/or Virtual Communion

While this has been unfolding at St. Peter's, we are aware of alternative approaches (particularly relating to the Eucharist), currently being explored and offered elsewhere. This seems to be motivated by such perceptions as: (1) the church failing to be innovative during this COVID time; (2) the church withholding the Sacrament at a time when people are particularly longing for it; and (3) the Anglican church losing sight of the centrality of this Sacrament. While this is not a widespread expressed desire at St. Peter's thus far, there are a couple of individuals who have

⁵ N.T. Wright, "God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath," (*Zondervan Reflection*, 2020), 38. "...when the world is going through great convulsions, the followers of Jesus are called to be *people of prayer at the place where the world is in pain*. Paul puts it like this, in a three-stage movement: first, the groaning of the world; second, the groaning of the Church, third, the groaning of the Spirit – *within* the Church *within* the world."

raised the subject with me, so the dialogue continues within this small circle, for now.

One potential solution to these concerns that has been suggested, and one that seems to be occurring at various places during this time, is Spiritual Communion, where a presider offers the Eucharistic Prayer, and viewers accept Jesus spiritually, even when they can only be as present as a computer screen allows. Although this practice is complex and involves theological principles that require significant unpacking, (more so than time and space in this paper as well as my understanding currently permit) suffice it to say that (according to my understanding) it is based on the premise that: (1) it is good enough to simply desire Communion at times when it is not possible to receive (ingest) it; and (2) to see Communion (although unable to receive) increases the desire. So, in part, according to this practice, we receive, spiritually, through viewing it with our eyes. (Ocular Communion)⁶

Another potential solution that has been suggested at St. Peter's and is currently being practiced elsewhere, is Virtual Communion, which is a gathering of individuals online, during which participants place a piece of bread and wine in front of their computer screen while a priest recites the prayer of consecration. The gathering then eats the elements and describes the service as a celebration of the Eucharist.⁷

1. Both emphasize the centrality of the Eucharist.
2. Both could (for some) potentially assist with a sense of longing for the Sacrament. (S.C. intentionally leaving the longing unfulfilled; Virtual Communion attempting to satisfy it.)
3. Both could potentially save the church from the perceived stigma of failing to be innovative at such a crucial time.

That said, the dialogue continues at St. Peter's, and for now our practice is to continue worship without Communion until we return to the building, and/or the complexities surrounding online options are worked through adequately. Our goal is to, "listen for the purpose of

⁶ Since this practice (popular particularly within the context of the mediaeval Church) has come to my attention only recently, I found this online article informative and helpful: Bernhard Blankenhorn, Dominican Friar, "A Short History and Theology of Spiritual Communion" (<https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-theology-and-history-of-spiritual-communion/>, April 08, 2020).

⁷ This practice has also come to my attention only recently, and this article has been helpful and informative: Christopher Craig Brittain, "On Virtual Communion: A tract for these COVID-19 Times (Part II)" (www.anglicanjournal.com, May 25, 2020).

understanding.”⁸ Currently we share insights with each other as time and resources permit. These conversations have inspired me to explore more deeply and gain a clearer understanding of the two virtual Communion options being explored elsewhere at the moment. For now, it seems to me that a decision to move in this direction is premature, without having worked through the potential long term consequences. Meanwhile, I find myself with critical, unanswered questions that we will continue to explore together:

1. Is it possible that each of these two forms of Communion may create scenarios that err on the side of clericalism? It seems there is a remarkable focus on the role of the priest, with little or no emphasis on the participation of the gathering.
2. Or, conversely, does the practice of Virtual Communion potentially serve as a step toward lay presidency at the Eucharist? Maybe this would be a positive step, maybe not. However, more to the point, is it wise to proceed without a clear understanding of such a potential underlying shift?⁹
3. Is it possible that each of these options supports the notion of individualism, rather than a unified understanding that we are all bound together, in and through the Triune God? Are these options at risk of promoting individualistic personalized piety?

“...Sacraments are not geared chiefly toward personal internal piety; instead, they are integral to the church’s communal nature as the gathered people of God. Rowan Williams argues, “Sacramental practice... speak(s) most clearly of loss, dependence and interdependence, solidarities we do not choose.” Such an understanding does not encourage the idea that Holy Communion should be offered on the basis of an individual desire for it, or the presumption that the church cannot exist if the Eucharist is not currently being conducted.”¹⁰

4. Again, Scripture and tradition present the Eucharist as being inherently communal. Have we reflected on these alternative options through that lens?

“It is not something one watches passively but it requires the active participation of those who have gathered (which is why most churches do

⁸ Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen, “Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most,” (Penguin Books, 2000)

⁹ Christopher Craig Brittain, “On Virtual Communion: A tract for these COVID-19 Times (Part II)” (www.anglicanjournal.com, May 25, 2020)

¹⁰ Ibid.

not permit communion by watching a liturgy on television). Moreover, as Paul emphasizes, there can be no divisions among participants over who has access to it (for example, excluding those without reliable internet access, such as the poor and marginalized)."¹¹

5. Is it possible that with this eagerness to facilitate the Eucharist online we neglect to work through, theologically, the notion of this Sacrament within the context of a physical gathering, as opposed to being physically apart? Are there key elements of the Eucharist that are missed when we are not physically together?

"If one recalls that the Eucharist not only unites participants with the sacrifice of Christ's death on the cross but also with the table fellowship that Jesus shared with outcasts and sinners, then a substantive limitation of virtual communion comes into view. It would be one thing for Jesus to chat with the Samaritan woman over Skype; it is quite another thing for him to violate social boundaries by meeting directly with her at the well (Jn 4:4-26). Similarly, while the disciples of Jesus might find it curious that Jesus has Zacchaeus as a Facebook friend, they cannot misunderstand the message that is communicated when Jesus agrees to eat with this tax collector at his home (Lk 19:1-10). Virtual communion makes it easier to diminish such key dimensions of celebrations of the Eucharist than do in-person gatherings."¹²

6. Is it helpful to imply that God is not able to feed God's people if they don't have access to the Eucharist? What about other central ways in which our faith is nourished, such as through God's Word, and prayer? Is the work of the Spirit really so restricted?¹³
7. Since these alternative forms of Communion are (in part) prompted by an attempt to fulfill an expressed pastoral need, might we wonder if such needs or desires need to be delivered exactly as requested?
8. Have we and our theological leaders had sufficient time and opportunity to explore more fully the place of Christ within a Eucharistic celebration where the gathering is not physically together?

I believe these are essential questions as we reflect on emerging practices for Communion during this COVID time, especially if positive cases rise to the point that we are required to return to isolation. I am grateful for the guidance of the Anglican Church of Canada, Faith, Worship, and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Ministry team, particularly in the midst of this COVID time. Their direction and wisdom is essential as we continue to discern ways forward within the context of this unfamiliar terrain. I am also grateful for this opportunity to share St. Peter's experience with the wider Church.

Meanwhile, St. Peter's remains committed to worship that is communal, with ample opportunities for lament based on the biblical model. That is:

1. naming the pain and the grief;
2. crying out to God;
3. asking for God's help;
4. remembering God's faithfulness in the past;
5. discovering a sense of trust, and
6. praising God for remaining steadfast with us in the midst of all that we may endure.

A recent parish survey indicated that a number of people (possibly the majority) remain uncomfortable with returning to the building for worship this fall. Therefore, for the foreseeable future, St. Peter's will continue to worship each Sunday morning at 10:30 through Zoom. At the same time, a sufficient number of individuals did say that they will return to the building when it reopens for worship. Therefore, depending on government and diocesan regulations when the time comes, we are preparing to reopen our doors for worship (with Eucharist) on Sunday, September 27. All government and diocesan protocols will be in place. This will be offered weekly, in addition to Sunday morning Zoom, with regular reviews going forward.

Reflection on the Eucharist in pandemic times

Murray still

After nearly a year, our two urban churches have adjusted to the reality of existence beyond the building. After a long period of experimentation, we have learned how to navigate a livestream Sunday service. Each week, challenges arise such as getting on air or choosing music from YouTube allowed for streaming. We have purchased better microphones and camera systems and found ways to patch it all together to create a pleasing product.

Once our product is complete, viewers send comments that are helpful in our continued production. At one point, one of our churches, St. Stephen and St. Bede, offered after-church fellowship via Zoom with a good turnout.

In the early phases of the pandemic, Manitoba was placed under a lockdown that lulled people into a false sense of confidence. At that point, the province was placed in an “orange” mode. By this time, any parish that wanted to continue to meet Sundays had to have a strict protocol approved by the bishop. After about 50 hours, our two churches developed such a protocol. Each time the government tweaked the codes, the bishop sent out guidelines which parishes adhered to.

Under Code Orange, St. Stephen and St. Bede returned to in-person worship and participation in Communion in one kind: bread. Throughout Code Orange, our numbers remained strong. At one point, St. Stephen and St. Bede welcomed both bishops to commemorate the 50 years anniversary of St. Stephen Lutheran leaving their building and walking over to St. Bede Anglican, where they were warmly welcomed. That friendship led to a joint worship community and pioneered the Waterloo Declaration.

This pandemic has taught our churches that the buildings—while important—are not the totality of who we are as Christians. We learned technology that brought our Church into each other’s homes. Each week,

our Zoom Bible study brought growth to people's faith. We came to understand ourselves as the Body of Christ in new ways.

As for Communion in one kind, we offered weekly services that reached our elderly and shut-ins. This is a good thing, but it also trained our thoughts on what it meant to be the gathered community. As our faith teaches us, when two or three are gathered, Jesus is present in the midst of them. Where two or three gather, you have Church.

It is in the context of the gathered that we understand Communion. Jesus broke bread, blessed it and shared it. The command to continue is evident at the Last Supper, recorded in Mt 26:26, "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, spoke a blessing and broke it, and gave it to the disciples saying, "Take and eat, this is my body." He does the same with the cup.

When I served as a deacon in charge in the Indigenous community of Grand Rapids in the Diocese of Brandon, community leaders gathered to create a plan to deal with crime and drug and alcohol addiction. A small group of twelve, the "Core" group met to plan healing conferences.

At the end of a major healing conference, a large gathering of Anglicans and Roman Catholics met in the newly-built Roman Catholic Church. The keynote speaker was Anglican Bishop John Conlin. At the end of our conference, the community held a feast. At that feast, Bishop Conlin took a large flat piece of bannock and broke it in half. He tore off a strip and gave it to the Roman Catholic bishop with these words, "God loves you and so do I. Please share my bread."

At that moment, the Roman Catholic bishop did the same and others gathered around the table were given the bannock and repeated the ritual, tearing off a piece of bannock and saying the same words Bishop Conlin had used.

It was a powerful moment for everyone gathered, as the Communion was evoked not in a liturgical way at the altar, but as a part of a meal, just as Jesus did at the Last Supper.

I recall that moment often, but in these pandemic times, I have wondered about our folk at home watching the livestreamed Communion. The question is simple: is Jesus present for those folks at home? Are the folks at home as engaged in that worship as we were? Can a virtual Communion occur where two or three gather? Is it possible for home dwellers to have bread and/or wine in front of them and share at the same moment as Communion is distributed via livestream?

If we believe that: Jesus is present with us by virtue of our baptism; Church exists where two or three gather; and the priest or bishop extends hands toward the bread, can that extend beyond [those gathered in person] to those watching at home? These are the important questions to ponder in an age where technology can bring us even closer to each other.

If we are to say yes, what does that mean for the gathered? Can the unused sacrament from the home be given to the sick that day?

As we continue in an environment where many have not had their Communion for some time, especially our aged, is this a way we might reach them and strengthen their faith?

The concept of two or three gathered forms the core of our Indigenous understanding and finds its way into “Our Way of Life,” or constitution for a Fifth [ecclesiastical] Province. How might two or three in a small community with no building celebrate as Church? The concept of the *gathered* is important in Indigenous communities as we celebrate the sacraments. In the time of COVID-19, can this community be enlarged virtually?

Now that we are in a red zone in our province of Manitoba, livestreaming is all we can do. We are connecting with community by Zoom and we wait for the day we can gather again in our buildings—as Church, as a diocese. Until that time, we know the Church continues to exist; it continues to offer pastoral care via email, social media and prayer. Will we make decisions as to the place of virtual Communion? In our tradition, the bishops give us direction and we take oaths as clergy to obey our bishop and to follow the doctrine and discipline of the Anglican Church of Canada. Until decisions are made, the Communion will occur when the gathered are together at the table of our Lord.

Individual communion cups, community and COVID-19

HILARY BOGERT-WINKLER

There are many things that have changed radically in our lives since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chief among them in many Anglican churches has been the suspension of the celebration of Holy Eucharist and in-person worship more broadly. Since March, churches have closed their physical doors and opened them virtually, experimenting with new ways to worship together while physically apart. It has been a time of intense liturgical creativity and experimentation, but also a time of deep longing for our physical church spaces and the sacraments we celebrate in them. As provinces begin to allow the resumption of religious services, church leaders are beginning to discuss what worship will look like when we are able to gather physically once more. Much like in the early days of this pandemic in February and March, many of these conversations have revolved around the Eucharist and how to celebrate it safely. One of the practices at issue is the use of the common cup—should it be used at all, should it be replaced with individual communion cups, or should communion “in one kind” be the norm? While there is much that can and has been said about each of these questions, this essay will examine the issue of individual communion cups.¹

The historical origin these cups is in the sanitary reform movement of the nineteenth century. As germ theory took hold in the medical

¹ For discussion around the celebration of the Eucharist at the beginning of the pandemic, see Michael Curry, “On Our Theology of Worship,” March 31, 2020, <https://episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-michael-currys-word-church-our-theology-worship>; Ruth A. Meyers, “Spiritual Communion in a Season of Social Distancing,” April 2020, <https://cdsp.edu/2020/04/spiritual-communion-in-a-season-of-social-distancing/>; Eileen Scully, “On This Eucharistic Fast,” March 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53339102e4b00c509597c34c/t/5e85e228feaa3720119219dd/1585832489%20/On+this+Eucharistic+Fast.pdf>; and Jesse Zink, “Discerning the Body: Eucharistic fasting and COVID-19,” March 31, 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53339102e4b00c509597c34c/t/5e85dacfbcad235295b5854b/1585830609333/Zink%2C+Discern+the+BodyDiscerner+le+Corps+%281%29.pdf>.

community, public health authorities took steps to reduce the transmission of disease among the public. Common drinking cups in public locations such as schools and train stations were discontinued as part of these reforms.

Religious leaders looked to the common cup used in the sacrament of Holy Eucharist as a site of germ transmission, and the late nineteenth century saw a growing theological debate about the use of individual or common cups.² By the 1890s the use of these individual cups was spreading throughout the United States, and had moved into Canada by the first decade of the twentieth century.³ While the desire to prevent disease transmission through the common cup was often the primary reason supporters presented in favor of individual cups, there were other more problematic justifications for their use.

The rise of the sanitary reform movement and debates about individual communion cups accompanied increasing immigration and the growth of the American middle class. White middle class Americans sought to establish boundaries between themselves and their broader, increasingly diverse society, in part, through attempts to ensure physical purity. In other words, “cleanliness is next to godliness” became a way to equate physical health with moral superiority, and to exclude certain members of society seen as “unclean”—primarily Blacks, immigrants, Indigenous people, the poor, and other social outcasts—from the ideal community envisioned by the white middle class.⁴ Put in the words of a periodical at the time urging clergy to join a sanitary society, “physical and moral uncleanliness are inseparable.”⁵ Some pro-common cup church leaders at the time recognized this tendency and argued against it. The most vocal of them, James Buckley, wrote that the use of individual cups would lead to “the formation of caste churches, the freezing out of such as were disagreeable, and the reducing of religious societies to clubs in which any member should be permitted to blackball unsatisfactory applicants.”⁶ While individual communion cups were connected to a real concern for the transmission of illness at the time when germ theory was more widely accepted in the medical community, they were also part of an effort to connect physical and moral purity, and to

² Betty A. O'Brien, “The Lord’s Supper: Traditional Cup of Unity or Innovative Cups of Individuality,” *Methodist History* 32, no. 2 (January 1994): 80; Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 32.

³ O’Brien, “The Lord’s Supper” 81-2. For information on the Canadian incorporation of individual cups into worship, see *Reasons Why the Individual Cup Communion Service Should be Used in All Churches* (Toronto: Mail Job Printing Company, 1898).

⁴ Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*, 33-4.

⁵ Quoted in Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*, 34.

⁶ Quoted in Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*, 43.

create clear distinctions between who was part of the community, and who was not.

These troubling origins alone are reason enough to be wary about the incorporation of individual communion cups into our common life and worship. We have seen news reports of racist acts carried out against Asians and people of Asian descent in Canada and the United States, as well as racist terminology used in place of “coronavirus” or “COVID-19.”⁷ The implications of these actions are that the connections between physical difference, illness (real or imagined), and physical purity are not wholly gone from our society. In an effort to provide the Eucharist through individual cups, we risk embracing a practice with racist and classist origins.

The theological problem of individual cups lies in their very individuality. In his 1981 book *The Eucharistic Way*, bishop John Baycroft writes of the common cup, “we drink from a common cup as a strong symbol of unity and our willingness to accept each other. We share our love and lives as we share the cup. The implications of this for fellowship and support in the local church, for relationships between rich and poor in communities and nations, and for justice between North and South and first and third world countries are enormous. The cup of love and unity is unavoidably a cup of sacrifice.”⁸ Sharing the cup is an intimate action that may make us feel uncomfortable at the best of times. The common cup reminds us in an incarnational way that we are in relationship with those with whom we share it. In this reminder is also a challenge given to us at our baptism. The Eucharist calls us to remember the One Body into which we are brought at our baptism, and to act on that call through sharing the love of Christ in all aspects of our lives.⁹ The common cup calls us to the challenge of community in ways partaking of the bread—be it wafers or pieces from a shared loaf—does not. Replacing the common cup with individual cups risks losing this incarnational reminder of our shared baptismal vocation and our commitment to one another. Such a reminder is even more important in these days of increasing political polarization, in which it is easy to get caught up in “us” versus “them.”

At the heart of the question about individual cups, in the nineteenth century and each time questions of the common cup have arisen since (often in times of public health crises) is the issue of Christian community

⁷ For examples, see Jose A. Del Real, “With ‘kung flu,’ ‘thugs,’ and ‘our heritage,’ Trump leans on racial grievance as he reaches for a campaign reset, *The Washington Post*, June 21, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/with-kung-flu-thugs-and-our-heritage-trump-leans-on-racial-grievance-as-he-reaches-for-a-campaign-reset/2020/06/21/945d7a1e-b3df-11ea-a510-55bf26485c93_story.html and Maryse Zeidler, “New poll reveals Chinese-Canadians’ experiences with racism,” *CBC*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/new-poll-reveals-chinese-canadians-experiences-with-racism-1.5621261>

and the Eucharistic feast. One of the hallmarks of Anglicanism is the importance of the incarnation in our theology. That God became human and dwelt among us is something foundational to our faith and, out of that, to our liturgical practice. That Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with actual bread and wine, that he ate and drank just as you and I do, and that we do this in remembrance of him are important ways that the incarnation continues to form our life as Christians. This is part of the reason why the loss of the Eucharist is felt so keenly by many during this pandemic, and why church leaders are seeking new and creative ways to welcome congregations back to the feast in a manner that is both physically safe and respectful of our theology and traditions.

The urge to use individual communion cups as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic is understandable. It comes from a deep longing for the Eucharist and, with it, a return to some sense of normalcy in a time in which everything seems to be upside down. Those desires in themselves are important pastoral needs to which church leaders must be sensitive. However, incorporating the use of individual cups brings into our liturgical life a practice that was in part developed in response to middle-class white anxieties about sharing the common cup with non-whites and those in poverty, as well as the harmful theology that equates physical and moral purity. The Eucharist is central to our Anglican liturgical practice, and its loss in this moment—perhaps when we need it most of all—is deep and painful for many. Yet we cannot risk celebrating this feast in such a way that it privileges the individual over the community, and lessens the challenge extended to each of us in our baptism, and of which we are reminded in the common cup. When we gather once more, let us be sure that our Eucharistic practices are not only physically safe, but that they also reflect the fullness of the hope and challenge given to us in the sacrament.

Flesh

Deborah Meister

*For who hath despised the day of small things?
(Zech 4:10, KJV)*

I was twenty-seven years old when I entered serious discernment about becoming a Christian. I had been feeling the draw of Jesus since I was a child, but it took twenty years for the spiritual pressure to build up to the point where I had to act. And so I stumbled into a church one morning and sat in a pew — and became aware of a sharp, acrid smell. It was coming from the body of a man seated near me. By his dress, I took him to be a gardener — not a hobbyist; someone who made his living tending other people's gardens in the hot Los Angeles sun. I was an academic, and the smell of rancid sweat was not part of my daily life. I was more likely to smell newly-mown grass, or the sweet scent of ancient paper from books five hundred years old. And as I sat in that pew, my heart was moved: in this place, all God's people were welcomed and equal, because all God's people belonged.

That moment has shaped everything for me: my understanding of Christian community; of my own vocation and of God's call to the church; and, underneath it all, like bedrock, my understanding of what Jesus was doing in the Incarnation and of what God is working in us through our practice of the sacraments.

It has shaped my deep sense of loss during this time of online worship. I am grateful each Sunday when I get to see your faces, tiny on my screen; I am grateful for the relationships we have been able to cultivate in our midweek prayer and study groups and conversation. Each of you who have participated in those things has been a lifeline to me at a time of profound isolation.

But I also know what I am missing: the presence of the people who are not with us. The unhoused people who nod in our pews. The ones who

disrupt our worship. The poor among us, who do not have access to internet. The seekers who wander into our doors week after week, sit quietly in the rear pews, and leave without giving their names — seeking anonymity because their souls are in a tender place, much as I did those long years ago. The ones who will not join us online because they are afraid their children will be disruptive, or who cannot because they are working at risky, essential jobs — the jobs in which they provide groceries or take-out or medical care. The jobs in which they tend our flesh.

If the Incarnation means anything, surely part of what it means is that Jesus tends our flesh. He wore our flesh, fed our flesh, healed our flesh, suffered and died in our flesh, and, as we were reminded at the Feast of the Ascension, was resurrected in our flesh and bore it up to heaven — body and all. That's why the sacraments are embodied rites: the flesh is what we share with Jesus. None of us can hope to share the divinity of Christ, but each of us can touch him in our humanity.

But not just our own flesh: everyone's flesh. In Christ, the love of God runs straight through the love of our neighbor. St. John reminds us, "Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen." (1 Jn 4:20) And that love is not abstract, but embodied. It's not enough to try to feel warm feelings about our neighbor, when the truth is that they are dying in our CHSLDs (residential and long-term care centres) and being shot or choked to death by police or starved in residential schools. Those problems destroy the flesh of our neighbors, which means that they destroy the flesh of Christ.

As our cathedral, and so many other houses of worship, tries to wrestle with what sacrament means at this time of online worship, I keep coming back to the fact that Christ called us to love our neighbors in the flesh. And so I am troubled by this discussion of "online consecration," precisely because it would imply that we are able to receive the Body of Christ (not as an emergency measure for the critically ill, but as a corporate practice) divorced from the flesh of our neighbor. Divorced from it, as Christ never is.

For those of you who live in families, this separation may be less acute than it is for people like me, who are single and living alone. You may still be able to tend the flesh of others — the sweet flesh of an infant, or the stinking reality of her diaper, or the more challenging reality of someone's adult diaper — that thing we all fear until it becomes a tool which gives us freedom. But for many of our members, "online Communion" would be claiming a spiritual privilege without that lived reality of incarnation, which in Christ never refers only to our own flesh.

There is a temptation in that: it is so easy to participate in a “spiritual community” which is oriented toward our consolation. One which tells us we are loved; we are special; we have been and are being saved. (And we are, all those things.) It is so much more difficult to encounter the embodied reality of the stranger, so difficult that we fail, over and over again. And so what are saying if we suggest that you can have Christ in the most intimate way possible without that other communion, the one he died to give us? If we cannot manage to eradicate racism and violence and predatory business practices which prey upon the bodies of the poor when we are unable to receive the flesh of God without also receiving the flesh of our neighbor, how will we learn to see and act if we think we can have it all without that intimate challenge? What God will we be tempted to follow?

And what might we do with such a practice, if it were accepted? Our church is only too comfortable with closing parishes which serve the poor, without questioning the system which is allowing the forces of market economics to determine the shape of our dioceses. What might we do if we had an easy way to fob their members off? Will we end up as a handful of middle- and upper-middle-class parishes (predominantly White) which have real pastors who care for them and know their names, while we appease our consciences by claiming that the poor can, at least, have “virtual” communion?

In the book of Zechariah, God says to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judea, who was rebuilding the Temple, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit.” (Zech 4:6) To me, there is no finer image of that spirit than the altarpiece painted by Mathias Grünewald for a community of monks who tended lepers and those who were sick of the plague. In an act of astonishing theological courage, Grünewald painted Jesus with the torn skin of a leper, reminding us that nothing and no one was separate from the death of Christ: no suffering, no degradation, no neighbor. No one’s flesh.

I will wait a very long time to receive Communion if doing so might tempt me or anyone else to forget that truth, which is the very one represented in the Sacrifice. The one Christ died to bring us.

Hopeful complications for our dialogue

B R E N D O N N E I L S O N

Abstract: The current discussion regarding Eucharistic theology was sparked because of the public safety limitations upon gathering caused by COVID-19. At the same time this year has been full of tragedy related to systemic and structural racism, and the increasing recognition of how this manifests. This paper seeks to make the connection between these seemingly different conversations and proposes how we might complicate our discussion for a faithful way forward.

This year has been for me an example of how our vocation as the body of Christ takes place within the specific context of the physical, social and political realities that we are called to incarnate that body within.

Theology is a lived discipline. I believe that the questions of *how* theology is embodied in the lives of people and communities are weightier than questioning those convictions and practices in and of themselves.¹ It is not that investigating those convictions is unimportant, on the contrary, it is vital. Those conversations, however, must always be attuned to the world we are embodied within – to the physical and social contexts we inhabit.

In January, the Anglican Journal warned in the headline that we could be “Gone by 2040”. While the issue also had many stories of good and

¹ In this understanding of theology, I find myself aligned with James Wm McClendon Jr. An “isolated left wing southern baptist” who spent most of his career teaching Episcopal priests at Church Divinity School of the Pacific. He names theology as the “discovery, understanding or interpretation and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and to whatever else there is.” McClendon treats ethics as the primary or first task of theology in that it is lived first, before it is critically engaged at a cognitive level. See, *Ethics: Systematic Theology Vol 1*. Revised, Abingdon Press, 2002.

hopeful contexts throughout the ACC, the trends and social factors are impossible to ignore.

In February I spent some time at the BC Legislature with the indigenous youth who were occupying the steps in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs. Later in February I was in Alert Bay for the induction of a new incumbent at the parish of Christ Church Alert Bay a small parish just down the road from one of the largest Anglican Indian Residential Schools. The school building was demolished a few years ago, and while there I made sure to walk the space set apart to remember the sins of our fathers and how we must not continue in the way that our nation and our church operated in the past.

March brought the increasing awareness that COVID-19 was going to change just about everything. We stopped gathering and travelling, and we retreated into our homes to protect one another from this novel invisible danger. We have necessarily had to rethink many things that have been standard habits and practices in our lives and communities for the sake of the health of our neighbours.

It wasn't long before the discussion around shifting most of our worship services to some version of an online experience, and the questions began regarding the eucharist in this time. I watched, listened, and read with curiosity as the think pieces and columns flowed in from various perspectives highlighting the common appreciation for this central part of our worship, and coming to a variety of proposals for how we respond to this current moment.

As the weeks went on, however, my endurance for the conversation was wearing. Not because the answers were clearer, but because a persistent flaw with theological debate was once again becoming apparent. What was weighing on me I think, was seeing how debate can skew priorities for the sake of rhetoric. So, while the conversations were honing our convictions and potential response to what we were facing within the church it seemed to be isolated from what else was going on in society.

May brought acute reminders of the ongoing racism in our world with the viral video of the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, the disproportionate risk of racialized communities to COVID-19,² and the video showing Derek Chauvin kneeling on George Floyd's neck while he strained for air. These murders sparked hundreds of protests and solidarity actions across the

² According to the American CDC, Indigenous and Black people were 5 times more likely to experience hospitalization due to COVID-19, and Hispanic people were 4 times more likely than were white people. See, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html> (Accessed July 17, 2020). Canada does not require race based medical data, which seems to me to be a very Canadian kind of problem in itself, see, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/city-committee-race-data-covid19-1.5604442> (Accessed July 17, 2020).

world, the voices of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and the realities of systemic racism have become inseparable from this pandemic season.

Here in Canada, there have been solidarity actions by many local BLM organizations and allies across the country. And as Desmond Cole has argued in his pertinent book *The Skin We're In: A Year of Black Resistance and Power*, the stories of Black and Indigenous people in Canada are inextricably linked.³ The struggle against white supremacy in our nation-state, and the many forms of violence that are sustained and supported by the status quo has been preying upon Indigenous and Black communities throughout our past and present. The shooting of Chantel Moore and Rodney Levi by police in New Brunswick (on June 4, and June 12) displayed very clearly that the Canadian context is not immune to the sin of systemic racism, and that Black and Indigenous people are disproportionately the victims of it.

So, while we in the church are thinking through how to navigate the theological and safety considerations of if and how to celebrate the Eucharist in the midst of a pandemic, we must acknowledge that this discussion cannot happen in a vacuum. Our ecclesial lives must remain connected to our participation in the world that is groaning. And, if we are to follow the way of Christ, that brings us into ever greater encounter with that groaning.

One of my theological convictions that has been strengthened in the last number of years is that faithful theology and praxis draws us to a deeper engagement with the world around us—it does not isolate or withdraw us from it. The radical immanence of God in Jesus demonstrates the movement in and toward the world for the sake of the other. This (kenotic) movement is one layer of many that we participate in when we receive the bread and wine in the Eucharist.

Our impulse is to have our discussion of Eucharistic practice with limited complications of context. Considering things in and of themselves, however, often implicitly denies relational implications. Dwayne Donald who is a Papaschase Cree scholar at the University of Alberta, names colonialism as “an extended process of denying relationships”.⁴ He says that in our society we are “wrapped up in a legacy of relational denial that comes in many different forms.” This broad understanding of colonization is helpful for us in that it recognizes the insidious and pervasive, though hidden, ways we automatically go about doing what we do, including asking and answering theological questions.

³ Desmond Cole, *The Skin We're In: A Year of Black Resistance and Power*, Doubleday, 2020. Cole makes this connection throughout the book but see particularly the chapter “the unsettling (July)”.

⁴ Dwayne Donald “Homo Economicus and Forgetful Curriculum: Remembering other ways to be a human being” January 28, 2020. YouTube video, <https://youtu.be/VM1J3evcEyQ>.

COVID-19 has highlighted many things, but among them is the interconnected, enmeshed, relational reality of all existence. Having a conversation about something as central to our worship as the Eucharist, without highlighting the ways that it is interconnected with everything else happening in 2020 seems to me to be a step in the wrong direction. If we are committed to the work of decolonization and reconciliation, including the repudiation of the doctrine of discovery and other parts of our story connected to white supremacy and exploitation, we need to start with those things that we hold most dear, including their relation to how we dialogue, how we do theology, and how we understand and practice the Lord's Supper. What we are learning now, (perhaps remembering) is the connection and interrelatedness of things (including how they change) will be vital for our futures in what is increasingly a series of crisis one after another.

We must, therefore, highlight the tension that exists between the altar (and the feast of abundance that takes place there) and the flags that hang above in many of our buildings.⁵ If we appeal to the same tradition to shape the logic and justification for how to respond in our eucharistic practice that is not uncomfortable doing so beneath flags that represented and carried out some of the worst colonial violence in the history of the world, we dismiss what is being revealed in the struggle against systemic racism. To state that otherwise, *our appeal to tradition in this discussion of our eucharistic theology and practice should only be done if we are simultaneously doing the work of untangling the inherent and inherited white supremacy within it.*⁶

It seems to me that what we are tasked with doing, (and indeed what every generation is tasked with) is the creative work that is inherent within theology, which is, to name it bluntly, doubt. Doubt is the crucible of context. Faithful doubting asks those uncomfortable questions of the convictions of the community and how they ought to be best understood and lived given what we now face, and if they serve our current collective vocation. And in light of what these questions reveal, to revise our communal convictions and practices (and the necessary institutional infrastructure) to serve our vocation of being church.

⁵ I refer here to the Union Jack and other regimental flags that highlight the British imperial project that the Anglican Church of Canada was a partner in and an explicit beneficiary of.

⁶ Tradition obviously plays a major role in shaping our thinking and practice of the Eucharist. We are coming to a point, however, where appeals to tradition are becoming less compelling due to some of what was simultaneously justified from with that traditional ways of thinking and being. In our case the colonial project of Canada. James Cone has written a compelling case for theologians to call out the white supremacy within the field. See, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy", *Black Theology*, 2:2, 139-152, 2004.

Both of these tasks (discerning and determining faithful response to our Eucharistic theology and practice in the midst of pandemic and beyond; and, untangling the good and faithful parts of our tradition from the white supremacy) can fall under the often overlooked but powerful practice of binding and loosing.⁷ In Mt 18:18, Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”⁸ The immediate context of this passage is addressing communal conflict, and how to ensure that reconciliation and forgiveness are central to the way. This passage and its parallel in Jn 20:23 speak to a principle of communal discernment, and the authorization to do so with the weight of heaven.⁹ Certainly, as the immediate context implies, the analysis of personal and communal sin and determining what counts, and how to deal with it, is a vital component of binding and loosing.¹⁰

When we take a step back, however, we can see this emerging as an call to take part in a methodological move that God is making in Christ. A vital part of the ministry of Jesus was to take the tradition he inherited and press it through a process of binding and loosing to fulfill the liberating work of God in the context he found. The sermon on the Mount is perhaps the greatest example of this binding and loosing method on display. In it there is a repeated move to shift the action from the outer to the inner realm. To move the law from the outside with its social and legal implications, into the heart, with its spiritual and social implications.¹¹ To bind and loose is an invitation by God to participate in God’s work that with the Spirit at work in us, we should be confident to do.¹²

The call to bind and loose, is a call to participate in the way of Christ. Not on the level of the law wherein we rewrite the social and canonical expectations of ourselves (though it may involve that) but, a call to participate in the deep engagement with the world as we find it. To take our tradition and press it with doubt; to find the ways it can best be used to

⁷ A fulsome justification of this approach to binding and loosing would take much longer than this space allows. Rudy Baergen does a fine job of applying binding and loosing to the equal marriage discussion including much of the background exegetical work for how I am suggesting we might use it here. See, ““Binding and Loosing” in Mt 18:18 and the Mennonite Church Canada 2016 Decision on Sexuality” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 36, 1 (Winter 2018). Accessed June 30, 2020.

⁸ Jesus uses this same phrase in response to Peter’s confession in Mt 16:19.

⁹ Jn 20:23: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

¹⁰ An historical example here is how the church has dealt with divorce over time. There has gradually been a loosening of the significance and implications for a person being divorced.

¹¹ This was in line with the prophetic tradition that Jesus was participating in as well. Jer 31:33 comes to mind here.

¹² Interestingly this call that directly precedes the oft cited passage in the discussion of online versions of the Eucharist that “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (Mt 18:20)

bring about the reconciliation and the liberation that we know is available through Christ in faith. Binding and loosing is an invitation for us to be the body of Christ in a way that will be good news for our neighbours, and will place us in solidarity with the oppressed—and in our context, in solidarity with the Black and Indigenous victims of systemic and structural racism.

We are called in and through the Eucharist to live in a way that is kenotic, that is self-emptying for the sake of the other in the time and place that we find ourselves.¹³ Considering this we know that our binding and our loosing will involve letting go some of how we did things in the past, as well as affirming some new generative ways.

In her book *Blessed are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint*, Sallie McFague describes Kenosis as “the recognition that restraint, openness, humility, respect for otherness, and even sacrifice (diminishment and death) are part of life if one assumes that individual well-being takes place within political and cosmic well-being.¹⁴

McFague reminds us here that our story is not only our own, that our wellbeing is bound up with the wellbeing of our neighbours, (both our human neighbours, and more fundamentally our non-human neighbours). It is the kenotic movement away from selfishness, that is cultivated in and sustained through the insatiable desire for more (wealth, growth, GDP, ROI, KPI...), that we celebrate when we are fed at the table of the one who we remember. Our formation at the table prepares us for embodying a kenotic way in our lives.

For us, binding and loosing in our current context includes decolonizing. It is a call to bring together content (eucharistic theology) and method (kenosis): it is transformative. It costs us our comfort (at least!) and calls for ongoing reparation for being an institution, and people who are beneficiaries of the systemic racism that exists in our country and communities.

I want to suggest two humble proposals for decolonizing our discussion as we seek to bind and loose given the combination of theological and social realities we face.

1) In his book *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, Vine Deloria Jr. argues that one reason why western Christianity has been an awkward fit here in the Americas is the western emphasis on *time* compared to the reverence

¹³ Phil 2:5-11 and the emptying (kenosis) passage in vv7 is what is referred to here. Michael Gorman's work is one of the influences behind my understanding of Kenosis. See especially *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*, Erdmans, 2009.

¹⁴ Sallie McFague, *Blessed are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint*. Fortress Press 2013.

of *place* in indigenous traditions.¹⁵ The emphasis on time as being the normative principle, along with the universalizing tendencies that come with that approach, rather than place with its particular set of relational interconnections, creates such a vastly different set of possibilities for how the divine is understood and encountered.

The question that emerges for me in regard to our discussions on the Eucharist is what is the normative significance of place as we seek to contextually work out our salvation and celebrate the Lord's Supper? Obviously contextual considerations need to be simultaneously held in tension with the catholicity present in the eucharist, but could difference rather than uniformity be an appropriate and faithful response to the possibilities of being digitally sacramental or relationally encountering our communities in ways that were not possible a generation ago?

When we start to decolonize our discussion, we begin to consider more than a single (universal) answer to a situation that arises in drastically different places and contexts.

For example, there could be different and contextually relevant criteria that is used to make a decision in different dioceses; criteria that highlights the narratives of what is uniquely theirs to consider and struggle with.

2) One feature of Sallie McFague's understanding of kenosis is that it insists upon becoming less anthropocentric. To understand the kenotic movement that we are called to embody we see that we are much more dependent upon the microbes in the soil for our continued existence and sustenance than they are for us.¹⁶ Further, if we understand our personal and collective narratives to be wrapped up in the cosmic narrative of God and world, and that in the Eucharist we remember that all creation and not just humans have been reconciled to God in Christ, then we can begin to celebrate (in restraining/diminishing our own significance at the table) that what happens in the Eucharist is done for the sake of the world, and not just for those (humans) who are able to be there physically and partake of the elements in a physical way. To be clear, I am not advocating for including our other than human neighbours in our (human) communal eucharistic practices. What I am saying is that at the mystical realities that are present therein, have significance beyond the physically present human participants, that thinking in that direction should not be excluded in the conversation.

¹⁵ See Chapter 4 "Thinking in Time and Space" in *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 30th Anniversary Edition. Fulcrum Publishing, 2003.

¹⁶ My friend Mike Kozlowski who is a vegetable farmer in Red Deer, Alberta, (Steel Pony Farms) prophetically reminded me of this in a pre-COVID visit.

When we start to decolonize our discussion, we remember that we (humans) are not the most important part of our earthly ecosystem and that our faith does indeed have something to say about that.

An example, of thinking in this direction would be Catherine Keller who proposes a renewed apophatic appreciation of our shared breath with the rest of the created creatures could open up a less anthropocentric appreciation for how we might embody and steward those things that have been uniquely imparted to us (complex language, symbol, sacrament) for the sustainable good of all beings.¹⁷ If our discussions and implications of our decisions do not account for the ways we are connected to and responsible for the material wellbeing of our neighbours, we have somehow missed the significance of our creaturely crisis.

Theology is surely a lived discipline. It takes place within a physical, social, and political context where it finds its way into our lives and relationships. The world we exist in now is full of complexity and interconnection. I have tried to convey, that we are being invited to lean into the ways that our faith is connected to the ongoing and present struggle to liberate us all from the yolk of oppression, and to do that work in and through the theological questions emerging from being eucharistic in the time of pandemic. Thankfully it is not for me to say how any diocese or congregation will respond, my hope however, is that we complicate our discussion through the ways (inconvenient though it may be) it is connected to the racism that has once again been revealed in our midst. The call for us to bind and loose offers a way to not only navigate this journey, but to faithfully decolonize in the process, and that is hopeful.

¹⁷ See Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public*. Columbia University Press, 2018. The section I am referring to above is in pages 166-169. She points to Stephen Moore who is involved in this growing edge for theological inquiry see his edited collection, *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*, Fordham University Press, 2014. As an example of work in this area.

Eucharistic practice and sacramental theology in a time of pandemic: A missiological viewpoint

LISA G. VAUGHN

This document is written in the first person, by an author who declares her social position to be that of a middle-class, heterosexual female Canadian of white Anglo-Saxon descent. I've been ordained for more than 17 years. Although I consider myself a seven sacrament priest (raised Anglo-Catholic), I also enjoy alignment with a Reformed ecclesiological approach, along with claiming a more liberal social theology. I am a cradle Anglican who has faith community experience in rural, town and urban contexts. A parish priest for more than 12 years, I have held the position of Diocesan Parish Vitality Coordinator for the past five years. Our Diocese has 96 parishes with 224 congregations (42 rural; 21 urban; 33 exurban/small town). About half are multipoint parishes. There are 127 active clergy.

This essay aims to address issues related to Eucharistic Practice and Sacramental Theology with a missiological viewpoint and from an applied theology framework. In particular, it will attempt to advocate for those who do not yet have a voice in our faith tradition. (The assumption being, that the voices of those who are already full or even partial-participating members of the Anglican Church of Canada will be well represented by others through this exercise.) It is the offering of one person and may not reflect nor represent that of others in this Diocese. The following points are offered for thoughtful and prayerful consideration:

1. Missional Priority

Most frequently, the voices of those we seek to serve, love and introduce

to Christ are not reflected in this kind of corporate work. Frankly this enterprise, as important and noble as it may be, is mostly ‘insider’ activity. My greatest concern is that our church leaders will be consumed and distracted with internal (albeit meaningful) liturgical policies and practices solely intended for existing parishioners. The limited precious resources of energy, time and funds may be deployed unwisely while substantial inroads to missional ministry are being neglected.

The case may well be argued that we enjoy, are most familiar with, and comfortable when we Canadian Anglicans are investing in a worship issue rather than pivoting to the more difficult, unfamiliar and riskier work of *mission*.¹

Frequently I reflect on an illustration shared by Canon Dr. George Lings several years ago. Lings is an ordained Anglican and church growth researcher who wrote the first draft of *Mission-shaped Church*, a truly ground-breaking report (Church House Publishing, 2004). He said that our ministry today is that reality of the *reversed Parable of the Lost Sheep* (Mt 18:12-14). We have one sheep with 99 who are astray. Our gospel imperative is to pursue the latter.

Former Archbishop of Canterbury and social reformer, William Temple famously said, “The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.”²

Leaders throughout the Anglican Church of Canada may be tempted at this time to fixate on self-preservation. There is a danger for us as we endeavour to save ourselves by continuing to devote our energies to what we best know and (personally) dearly love. Another author and Church of England missional leader (retired) Bishop Graham Cray anonymously quotes an Australian Archbishop: “More of the same means less of the same.”³

We note that Jesus frequently critiqued the faith leaders of his day for concentrating on traditional religious practices, demanding precise adherence, while missing the missional call to be bearers of Gospel. Here is Jesus’ own mission statement:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the

¹ There may be some unfamiliarity or discomfort with this term mission. Call it what we may (title it anything), we need to learn to actively live into our identity as a missional church and pursue this ministry imperative. See Addendum for definitions.

² New World Encyclopedia, William Temple https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/William_Temple#cite_note-7

³ Freshly Expressed Church by Bishop Graham Cray, Taken from the Lent address given at Derby Cathedral on Monday 27 February 2012; <https://derby.anglican.org/en/freshly-expressed-church-by-bishop-graham-cray.html>

prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.
(Lk 4:18-19)

Are we at risk of losing our Anglican Christian identity and purpose by concentrating on the minutiae of sacramental worship during a pandemic?

It is an absolute truth that Holy Eucharist is central to our Anglican identity and worship life together. It binds us and nurtures us. However, I suggest that the Holy Spirit may be calling us to a continued Eucharistic fast (die to self) so as to reclaim our identity as a people of mission, prioritizing our service (give life) to others.

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.
(Mk 8:35)

Perhaps this season of fasting from the sacrament of Eucharist can be viewed similarly to a year (or more) of sabbatical Jubilee, so as to reorder our priorities for missional ministry?

We as exiles, are being given permission and opportunity during this restricted isolation from ordinary congregational life, to 'return' to the Anglican faith basics of homeland, lie fallow and offer gracious care (the Gospel of life) to those who need it. Instead of binding ourselves up with refined (and unusual) sacramental protocols, this instead can be a time of release.

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month - on the day of atonement - you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the un-pruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces. In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property.

(Lev 25:8-13)

As wise stewards of this faith tradition, are we being called as church to sabbatical? To pause, self-reflect and identify just who we are and what is our purpose before we pursue this next chapter in our Canadian Anglican Church life together?

2. Eucharist: Another barrier?

Our congregations are shattered, dispersed and isolated due to the pandemic health restrictions. In-person worship (and even some of our online versions) is highly (if not solely) focused on our existing members. Reservations and private invitations are shared primarily with previously identified 'regulars' from the parish list. In pre-COVID-19 times it was incredibly difficult to be a newcomer in our congregations, especially if we have little or no liturgical experience. The 'nones' and 'dones', if they have any interest at all in Anglican faith life, will be even more encumbered in their search for belonging and full participation as we add another layer of additional hygienic Eucharistic practice to our worship gatherings.

How can we offer seekers easy-to-traverse on-ramps and wide-open bridges into our Anglican community and rich worship life without losing our collective Eucharistic memory? How can we renew our Anglican Canadian core identity while not participating in our normal (pre-COVID) liturgies, yet respond missionally?

Nurturing and growing a sense of authentic, trusting, engaging faith community can be our priorities as we seek to live into Marks #1 and #2 of the Marks of Mission (To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom – TELL; To teach, baptise and nurture new believers - TEACH). Open-ended invitations, radical hospitality, building genuine relationships, and permission to explore Anglican Christian life, teaching and spiritual practice are pathways to energize existing parishioners and expand our reach with the nones and dones. This involves listening, loving service and joining God in the neighbourhood, along with respectful, relevant Christian formation opportunities.

Illustration: When we experienced the restrictive COVID-19 lockdown in mid-March in our province, my husband and I contacted about a dozen people we knew who had been active in local Anglican congregations but no longer participated. A few had moved neighbourhoods. One had medical issues and is disabled. Another was grieving the death of a spouse. A couple of them had just drifted out of 'Churchland' over time. All were disconnected from faith community.

We began gathering on Zoom weekly for what we called 'Deep Dives', almost two hours of rigorous scripture exploration, posing hard questions, offering our vulnerabilities and pastoral support. We were clear

that this was not ‘a church thing’, nor did we discuss any longing for Eucharist or liturgical formality. Our prayers together and simple moments of worship nurtured us through the difficult time of pandemic isolation. The group is reforming this fall by intentionally inviting more noes and dones. This faith community virtual gathering is providing a grounding of active Anglican spiritual life for the members in this virus season. Clearly, Deep Dives is not a substitute for sharing Eucharist and the sacramental life in congregation. It is, however, an oasis or rally to our basic spiritual identities as relational beings who long for a deeper reality with God and with one another. It is a ‘return’ to the homebase of Anglican faith community.

Truly authentic, welcoming, inclusive and mutually-participatory community is essential today in all contexts. Loneliness, depression, anxiety and emotional desolation are a plague in and of themselves during this era, exasperated by pandemic restrictions. *How can we in this Jubilee time, simply meet people where they are (where God is), join together and rediscover this God of loving acceptance and restoration?* As Anglican Archbishop Mark MacDonald says, mission is about “our understanding of what God is doing in the world.”⁴

There will be plenty of time to resume our beautiful eucharistic celebrations, baptisms, etc. This interval of sabbatical Jubilee is a *gift* in providing us an opportunity to pause and reorient ourselves as church in the Anglican tradition in an unfolding change era. We have a chance to pause and focus on deep discernment.

Will we regret not taking the time to consider our purpose and mission, rather than continually focusing on sacramental practices and liturgies that fewer and fewer people are appreciating?

3. Reconciliation

One of our often overlooked and underappreciated sacraments in the Anglican Church of Canada is that of The Reconciliation of a Penitent. It is the one that does not require physical closeness and can easily be practiced as people are restricted or isolated. The outward sign—words—is easily transmissible by Zoom, the phone and with two-metre in-person distancing. This holy rite of private confession and related counselling, can also provide life-changing healing and liberation for the penitent and in their relationships with others.

For many people COVID-19 has exposed the hurts, pains and burdens that are carried due to various situations of un-forgiveness. In my parish

⁴ The meaning of mission is changing; National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Mark MacDonald. www.anglican.ca/marks/meaningofmission

experience when we advertised in the wider community and through congregational notices that there would be opportunity to explore forgiveness themes the interest and participation was substantial. One of the highlights of an annual youth retreat in our Diocese was always the service of Reconciliation. People of all ages and walks of life stagger under the weight of unresolved wrongs, troubling memories and mistakes. How many individuals, families, workplaces, communities and congregations could be transformed if we were more intentional and open to sharing this rite of God's grace?!

Reconciliation is also a perfect occasion to share about salvation history - the life, death and resurrection of Christ - and God's absolute merciful gift of forgiveness. This is not only a pastoral office to offer long-time Anglicans, but also an invitation to newcomers to explore this extravagant grace. In other words, this sacrament could be a missional opportunity!

The Eucharist belongs to none alone

SCOTT SHARMAN

I write this reflection from the perspective of an Anglican priest and theologian. However, I do so also as an ecumenist, one whose formation and present ministry context is profoundly shaped by the context of the contemporary ecumenical movement, and someone with substantial personal involvement in ecumenical dialogues with a wide range of Christian traditions.

I begin by noting this because I believe it to be a profoundly relevant element to any consideration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. To a degree like few other topics in theology, reflection on the Eucharist calls to be carried out ecumenically. This is so because there is no such thing as the Anglican Eucharist or the Reformed Eucharist or the Roman Eucharist—there is just The Eucharist of the Lord. Whatever we might do, or not do, or say, or not say in this area of ecclesial life has an impact on our fellow baptized members of the body of Christ. As such, I would argue that such things ought only to be contemplated in conversation with, and in active accountability to, our ecumenical partners.

The Anglican Church of Canada has official bilateral dialogue relationships with the Roman Catholic Church in Canada, the United Church of Canada, and the Mennonite Church in Canada. We also enjoy a full communion relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, which, though no longer quite properly classified as ecumenical, still requires many of the same skills and practices of dialogue. Through the Canadian Council of Churches, our church engages in conversation and collaboration with Christians from the Evangelical / Free Church, Reformed, Oriental, and Orthodox families of churches, and others. In pretty well every one of my own recent (online) engagements with these ecumenical partners in my ministry as part of my role as General Synod staff support in these relationships over the last 5-6 months, people across the ecclesial spectrum want to talk about how we

are handling Communion during the pandemic, and what the debates are on this matter in their own and other churches. A key point of discussion is around whether the preferable option is ‘online communion with spiritual reception’ versus ‘online communion with remote consecration.’

In the list above, I mentioned only the formal points of ecumenical contact that occur at the national level. Of course, on the ground, pretty well every Anglican is related to, working with, and partnering with Christians from across the ecclesial spectrum all the time, in varying forms and degrees, and trying to process the impact of this experience on their spiritual life. Today, it is virtually impossible to be a follower of Jesus who does not interact ecumenically, and this seems to be only becoming more and more the case in this part of the world.

I think the existence of every one of these ecumenical relationships ought to give us as Anglicans a measure of pause prior to any kind of potential development in our Eucharistic thinking and acting during this time (and beyond). While the ‘spiritual communion’ option seems to be a less controversial one, with some precedence in the Anglican tradition, the idea of ‘remote consecration’ is particularly novel and therefore needful of cautious reflection. But I also want to emphasize that this ‘pause’ may be one which nudges us in more than one direction, depending on which partners we are in dialogue with.

On the one hand, our ecumenical accountability suggests we should act with a healthy prudence and restraint when it comes to new thinking about the Lord’s Table. This pandemic came upon us quickly, and, though it has lasted longer than perhaps most of us ever thought, at the time of my writing it has still been less than 6 months. This is barely a blip on the radar in the scope of Church history. In addition, much of that time has seen people and churches and leaders of churches in full or at least partial crisis mode. To seriously consider the possibility that the Eucharist, which is centred in large part on expressing the Christian theology of bodily/material nature of the Incarnation of God in Christ, and on manifesting the interdependent multi-unity of the members of the Body of Christ the Church, can occur both when church members are physically distant from one another and the elements of the act, is a massive stretch from anything we’ve contemplated in this regard before. To attempt to do so while in the middle of chaos, confusion, and uncertainty only enhances feelings of concern. Therefore, many of our ecumenical partners, though sharing the same pain we feel of not being able to celebrate the Supper of the Lord during these times, speak powerfully to us of the value of holding to the stability of Tradition during times of significant challenge. This is not the moment, they caution, to be calling into question the core foundations of one of the most central spiritual practices of the faith, or for one

group of Christians to strike off into experimentation without waiting for the others. This is a season for unity and consistency.

However, other ecumenical relationships can also present a challenge to us about falling into an undue complacency. The Holy Spirit has often moved in unexpected ways during times of great upheaval and transition, and it is the task of the people of God to embrace the new things that become possible and necessary in life of the times and circumstances we find ourselves in. If a pandemic is forcing us to keep distance from one another, but the technology at our disposal now thankfully allows us to experience a form of mediated togetherness, why should we not seek to keep the feast in the face of this reality? Some of our ecumenical partners therefore exhort us that surely this is not an insurmountable obstacle to the grace of God, and why unnecessarily deprive ourselves of a means of that grace simply because it requires us to move into uncharted territory.

We do well to hear each of these voices of all our siblings, and to respect them in our own discernment. As one family within the wider family of the catholic Church, the Anglican communion has sometimes styled itself as being a church of the ‘middle way’. Central to the Anglican ethos at various moments in history has been a desire to keep what some wish to portray as polarized options rather as standing together in a dynamic tension. In the area of liturgy, this has expressed itself as a commitment to ‘vernacular catholicism’. Put differently, Anglicans have often sought to carry ourselves as a community of Christians who are profoundly loyal to the principle of maintaining a family resemblance with our ancestors in the faith, but never slavishly so. We prefer to preserve long held traditions, articulations, and forms as long as they continue to authentically and effectively communicate truth and mediate grace to people in ways they can receive. But we do not hold onto these things indiscriminately either. If and when the place or time or culture or circumstance has shifted to the point that the way we have always done something is no longer working as an evangelistic and missional vehicle, then it ought to be reformed and renewed – carefully, but without fear. Such is the balance we ever strive to strike. Whether this charism is a uniquely Anglican one or not, it certainly finds an application to the questions at hand for us as a church, and as churches. I would like to think that it is part of our vocation as a church to bring this commitment to balance into the wider conversation on how our sacramental practices might adapt to a pandemic and post-pandemic reality.

Being merely one individual Anglican voice, I certainly do not profess to have the answers about whether or not online celebrations of the Eucharist are possible, or valuable, or harmful, or anything else – be they with spiritual communion only, or with a priestly celebrant in one place and

individual elements at home, or with unique celebrations in each person's home. I affirm wholeheartedly the importance of submission to the present discernment of the bishops and councils of our church in this regard, and that seems to me to be the essential starting point. But I also think it is critically important to keep the lines of conversation and consideration open, to invite and welcome all perspectives into the discussion, and to genuinely imagine that this discernment may not be settled for all time, and might, in time, come to different conclusions, in one direction or another. This is true not only now, but going forward, because, while the presenting issue at this time might be the impact of physical distancing on the celebration of Holy Communion, the questions about the nature of online community, the difference between physical and digital presence, technology's impact on the connections between the physical and spiritual, the evolving roles of clerical and lay ministers, and so on, will not be going away.

As we carry on that task of perpetually taking council in these and other matters, let us ensure to also do so with ecumenical voices in mind as well – both those that urge unity and consistency, and those that urge boldness and adaptability. We need them all.

By way of conclusion, as we continue these discussions, here are some of the questions I have encountered in my dialogues and encounters with ecumenical colleagues, and which I think we might want to consider together further with our fellow followers of Christ:

- Is it uniquely spiritually beneficial to receive the Eucharist? Is it uniquely spiritually harmful not to receive the Eucharist for long periods of time?
- If you had to say one way or another, do you experience the Eucharist as more of a vertical (God to us) or horizontal (Us to Neighbour) sacrament? How does this influence our thinking about the question at hand?
- On what theological basis would you argue for or against the possibility of spiritual communion? Is this rational relevant to the question of remote consecration with home reception, or is it a different question?
- How important is eating and drinking from the same cup and bread to the integrity of the sacrament? Is it essential or only beneficial? In what ways do we already stretch this symbol?
- Is gathering through the mediation of technology 'real' and 'bodily' or is it 'virtual' and disembodied?
- Is it possible to truly participate in liturgy through digital audio and video, or are we limited to being mere spectators?

- Can we experience ourselves as a genuine human community through an online gathering?
- What is the role of a presbyter/priest in presiding at the Eucharist, and is it essential to the act or only beneficial? On what basis do you come to this opinion?
- In what sense are the gathered people also celebrants of communion? Can such ‘concelebration’ occur at a distance?
- What would be lost by doing Communion online (with spiritual communion or with remote consecration)? What would be gained?
- What are the justice issues and barriers related to inclusion in online worship, and how does this impact our thinking about whether or not to celebrate Eucharist?
- Is it possible to have one set of sacramental regulations in place during a crisis situation and another during a more stable situation?

Questions to explore

BARBARA LIOTSCOS

I hope that the Faith, Worship, and Ministry committee (FWM) looks at early practice in the church. As I recall, there is evidence of members of the early church bringing food to the gathering, and also sharing food with the poor. This is a model that can be adapted in meaningful, authentic ways in our current situation.

I also hope that FWM looks at recent examples of a different practice when contingencies shifted how the Eucharist was celebrated and communion administered. For example, I recall a General Synod where table groups each had bread and wine on their table during the Eucharistic prayer and administered these elements to the table group. In our present situation communicants could bring a small piece of bread with them from home for communion in one kind and hold it in their hand during the Eucharistic prayer. Communicants would remain in their seat and consume the bread after ‘the breaking of the bread’. This has similarities to United Church reception of communion, that might be explored.

Fraction responsory #3 is an ancient reflection of the many grains gathered and made into one bread. To my mind this symbolizes the eschatological reality of the body of Christ gathered in communion more than it symbolizes a single loaf on the table. I think it is this eschatological reality of the gathered Church being together at the Eucharist that is the primary reason why communion of individuals at home watching a livestreamed priest celebrate eucharist seems inappropriate to many.

Technology is advancing that allows the church worldwide to gather together in real time to listen to one another and address shared imperatives. Climate change issues come to mind. Livestreaming and Zoom-type gatherings are a great gift to the national and local church as well.

But in local communities, in regard to communion, I think we should strive to find safe ways for two or three or more to be physically gathered in one place and share safely in communion. It may be that an earlier pattern of ‘house churches’ will provide a way forward. Groups under 50 persons can meet outdoors while weather permits. Small groups of a large

congregation can gather in the church building on different days or at different times for communion. The online gathering of the whole parish can be a non Eucharistic service that gathers everyone together.

I think it is important that we not encourage a priestly caste. The presider gathers the assembly and at moments is the voice of the assembly. The presider is not a replacement for the assembly. The Dublin guidelines for Eucharist produced by the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation emphasize that the assembly is the celebrant of the Eucharist - the assembly is the actor, the subject of the action, not a passive observer. I commend the Dublin guidelines to the committee to review.

Notes

T E R R Y B R O W N

I guess my starting point is that God's grace is bountiful beyond our understanding, so that if for some reason (pandemic, isolation, abuse by the presider, etc.) one cannot receive the Eucharist, God's grace is still there, including sacramental (sacramental understood very broadly as in the Vatican 2 documents) grace. Therefore, I do not have much sympathy for constructing a kind of pseudo-sacrament that one does on one's own without a community present. I think it is good enough to reflect on the scriptures of the day, pray, and offer oneself to God. Nor do I see much need for electronic consecration from afar. (An old Presbyterian friend in the US wrote me about their putting the elements on the coffee table on a Sunday morning and having them consecrated by the pastor on the computer screen. Fine if your sacramental theology is only memorialist, but why does one even need a clergy person then?)

Nor do I find it problematic that during the pandemic, some closed communities (for example, monastic groups) have been able carefully to continue with the sacrament, presiding and receiving on behalf of the whole church. Therefore, I think I would have preferred Bishops to continue a small Eucharistic celebration (weekly or even daily) in the cathedral or chapel, even with a very small congregation (even if only one), done on behalf of the whole church. I believe that was what was done widely in the Scottish Episcopal Church; and, of course, there was the example of Pope Francis and the Triduum. Therefore, I had my doubts about the "Eucharist Fast" theology. I do not think doing something out of necessity necessarily makes it a virtue. However, I am faraway and I do not want to judge a context of which I am not a part. (With the SSF Friars here, we have had no break in our daily-except-Saturday Eucharist since I arrived on 29 February. But at most there have only been four of us, much hand sanitizer and distancing, I have even changed how I preside, much less touching of the elements, communion in one kind, behind locked doors, visitors not welcome, etc.)

Bishop Wood's Melanesian Mission service of spiritual communion is interesting, though I am not sure it was used. The booklet was not reprinted. I think it must have been primarily for lay staff, including women missionaries, who had no access to a priest. People did regularly receive communion before being confirmed once they were taught and deemed to be "desirous" of receiving HC, as episcopal visits might be very rare.

It seems to me another option for families, as even in a pandemic families do gather to eat together, would be some sort of agape meal commemoration, presided over by a member of the family. Of course, it would be grace-filled, and eucharistic, even if not the Eucharist.

Virtual is real: Some preliminary reflections on Eucharistic worship in a pandemic

RICHARD GEOFFREY LEGGETT

What is ‘real’?

During my second year in seminary I experienced a crisis of faith, vocation and self. As I look back on that crisis from the distance of forty years, I realize that it was a crisis about personal integrity and authenticity. For years I had been pursuing a vocation, deeply rooted in my religious upbringing and sense of self, that had brought me into theological formation for leadership in the Church’s ministry. But something had happened to cast doubt on all this.

One of the ways that I earned some extra money while in seminary was through babysitting and childcare. One evening, as my vocational world was in danger of collapse, I was taking care of the children of the seminary’s librarian. The children wanted a story and they brought me a well-known book from my own childhood. So we settled down to read and I found myself reading these words.

“What is real?” asked the Rabbit one day, when [the Rabbit and the Skin Horse] were lying side by side near the nursery fender.... ‘Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?’

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become Real.”¹

¹ Margery Williams Bianco, *The Velveteen Rabbit or How Toys Become Real: The Classic Edition* (Kennebunkport, ME: Applesauce Press, 2012), 8.

And in that moment I realized that who I was and what I was doing was 'real'. Shaken, uncertain, questioning but real. For years afterward I kept a hand-written copy of this passage from *The Velveteen Rabbit* in the pocket of my cassock. Just reaching into my pocket and touching it reminded me that I was real, what I was doing was real and that the God who had called me into this ministry was real.

"What is *real*?" is one of the questions we are addressing these days about eucharistic worship in a pandemic. We sometimes distinguish between 'in-person' and 'online' or 'virtual' participation in worship. But I have come to believe that there is only ever 'in-person' worship exercised in 'online' and 'on-site' modes. While the 'on-site' mode of worship is at the heart of historical understandings about Christian community, we cannot ignore the fact that the 'online' or 'virtual' mode is one that has been developing since the first time someone broadcast worship over the radio waves one hundred years ago. Television and the internet have simply added a visual component to this means of engaging people in eucharistic worship.

So it's an old question we're addressing right now. Can 'virtual' worship be 'real'? Because Christian discipleship involves life-long discernment of where God is leading us and how we participate faithfully in God's mission, we need to explore the authenticity of online worship, whether eucharistic or not.

How do we determine the authenticity of liturgical developments?

Worship is a phenomenon of human behaviour. It is shaped by the circumstances in which communities of faith find themselves in given times and in given places. As members of a religious tradition that believes God is active in time and space, we attempt to give meaning to or find meaning in these circumstances through our liturgical rites.

The complexity of human life frequently makes it necessary for pastors to make decisions about how best to serve individuals and community through sacraments. Rarely are completely ad hoc judgments best in such cases. How do you decide whether a eucharist is appropriate at a certain wedding? How do you determine whether a specific adult is ready for baptism? How do you decide whether to conduct a public service of reconciliation? Norms will not answer any of these questions, but they will help one make better-informed judgments than if left to one's own devices. Thus, norms are a great asset in decision making.²

² James F. White, *Sacraments as God's Self Giving* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983, 2001), 140.

So, in order to decide whether ‘virtual’ or ‘online’ worship is ‘real’, we can examine this phenomenon by using three sacramental norms: pastoral, theological and historical.³

Is ‘virtual’ or ‘online’ worship pastoral?

Before describing what the pastoral norm is, let me explain why I believe that it is our beginning point. Anyone who is engaged in the leadership of worship and in making decisions about the shape that this worship will take has to acknowledge from the outset that we are not dealing with abstract matters. This is the ancient debate between those who prefer to move from universals to the particular and those who prefer to move from the particular to the universal. Since worship is a human phenomenon, moving from the particular to the universal, from actual situations to general principles, can be more genuine in speaking to human realities.

James White defines the pastoral norm as this: “...worship must be shaped to fit the needs of actual people in a specific time and place.”⁴ This means that we need to engage in what I’ve sometimes called ‘congregational hermeneutics’, diving into the context to determine who are these ‘actual’ people, what are their needs, what are the specifics of their times and places.

While Anglicans of my generation tend to be ‘print-oriented’ and have to be trained to listen rather than be linked umbilically to their prayer books and hymnals, my children, born between 1980 and 2000, are not. The young people of my congregation, born after 2000, are more likely to communicate by social media than by the telephone function of their smart phones. Even when these two groups gather in a physical location, it is rare to see them without a mobile device in hand or near by. My children have coined a new term, ‘Techno-Boomer’, to describe ‘Baby Boomers’ who have embraced newer digital and social technology and see its potential, if used well and appropriately, to ‘Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still’.⁵

Now that we find ourselves in the midst of a pandemic and facing the probability of future pandemics that test our communities, the use of digital and social technology as a medium for liturgical worship is not a time-limited approach to this crisis. Many congregations are discovering that the use of digital and social media are connecting them to people who would otherwise be reluctant to cross the threshold of a parish church. This

³ White 2001, 141.

⁴ White 2001, 141.

⁵ Gordon Light, ‘Draw the Circle Wide’ in *Common Praise* 418.

'online' community would be highly unlikely to describe their participation as anything other than 'in-person'.

A recent survey of my congregation undertaken by the Rev. Tasha Carrothers, our Assistant Curate, discovered that our Tuesday and Thursday 'A View from the Vicar/the Curate' are highly valued by our congregation as pastoral ministry. Our livestream liturgies on Sundays and Wednesdays have many more online participants than onsite. The inclusion of a prayer for spiritual communion for use by anyone who is not on-site for the eucharist has been well received.

Worship at Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral in the foreseeable future will continue to 'both/and'. On-site and online worship will continue. We will make improvement in our technical infra-structure to do all we can to lower any barriers that prevent online worship from being experienced as less than on-site.

Is 'virtual' or 'online' worship theological?

But responsible liturgical leadership cannot simply justify a particular response because it is pastoral. We are called to proclaim the good news of God in Christ in word and deed, so a further test needs to be applied: "The theological norm for sacramental action is that *what we do must reflect Christian faith*."⁶

Ultimately, sacraments reflect our understanding of how God works in this world. At the theological checkpoint, questions are raised as to whether any contemplated action accords with the way Christians generally perceive the work of God.⁷

In 'The Catechism' of *The Book of Common Prayer* (1962), there are a series of questions that apply directly to the sacraments and to the eucharist in particular.

Catechist: *What do you mean by this word Sacrament?*

Answer: *I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given to us by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive this grace, and a pledge to assure us thereof.⁸*

Catechist: *What is the outward part of sign of the Lord's Supper?*

Answer: *Bread and Wine, which the Lord has commanded to be received.*

⁶ White 2001, 142.

⁷ White 2001, 143.

⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer* 1962, 550.

Catechist: *What is the inward part, or thing signified?*

Answer: *The Body and Blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper.*⁹

In this exchange the Catechism expresses an Augustinian theology of the sacraments that stresses the link between *signum* (the sign) and *res* (that which is signified). At the heart of the Anglican reformation was a commitment to celebrate liturgically this unity between the sign, bread and wine, and that which is signified, the body and blood of Christ, received for '[the] strengthening and refreshing of our souls and bodies unto eternal life by the Body and Blood of Christ'.¹⁰

This stress on the link between the sign and that which is signified is not limited to the Prayer Book. In 'Concerning the Liturgy', a set of rubrics preceding each rite in *The Book of Alternative Services*, the importance of physical reception of the elements is repeated.

Care should be taken at the time of the preparation of the gifts to place on the holy table sufficient bread and wine for the communion of the people....¹¹

Opportunity is always to be given to every communicant to receive the consecrated bread and wine separately.

Communion should be given at each celebration of the eucharist from bread and wine consecrated at that liturgy.¹²

A *prima facie* reading of these texts might imply that the livestreaming of a eucharistic liturgy is antithetical to the Anglican ethos.

But such a *prima facie* reading of the tradition needs to be expanded to include other aspects of the Anglican liturgical tradition. For example, Article XXVIII states that "[the] Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after *an heavenly and spiritual manner* [emphasis added]. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is *Faith* [emphasis added]."¹³ At the conclusion of the eucharist the so-called 'Black Rubric' quotes the Article in explaining the Anglican practice of kneeling for communion.

Whereas it is ordained in this office for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, that the Communicants should receive the same kneeling; (which order is well meant, for a signification of our humble and grateful acknowledgement of the benefits of Christ therein given to all

⁹ The Book of Common Prayer 1962, 551.

¹⁰ The Book of Common Prayer 1962, 552.

¹¹ The Book of Alternative Services 1985, 184.

¹² The Book of Alternative Services 1985, 184.

¹³ The Book of Common Prayer 1962, 710.

*worthy receivers, and for the avoiding of such profanation and disorder in the holy Communion, as might otherwise ensue;) It is here declared, that thereby no Adoration is intended, or ought to be done, either unto the Sacramental Bread or Wine there bodily received, or unto any Corporal Presence of Christ's natural Flesh and Blood [emphasis added]. The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith.*¹⁴

Later in the Prayer Book the rites for ministry with the sick address the question of the communicant status of a person who, for one reason or another, is unable to receive communion.

*But if a man, either by reason of extremity of sickness, or for want of warning in due time to the Curate, or by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood: he shall be instructed that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and stedfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed his Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefor; he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth.*¹⁵

To be sure these texts presume that the normative practice of the Church is the consumption of the consecrated bread and wine as what it means to participate in the eucharist. However, they also express a degree of faithful caution in too close an association between the physical elements and communion with God in and through Christ. It also begs a question: What is 'any other just impediment'?

Here, I think, we face an area that requires deeper theological reflection by the church on how the use of digital and social media can be a means by which God works in the world: the operation of the Holy Spirit in and through the sacraments. Throughout the millennia the Church has struggled to understand the work of the Spirit. Historians of the creeds will acknowledge that any credal statement on the Spirit tends to be short and developed later than the articles on the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. We believe in the Holy Spirit, but we are less articulate in our understanding how the Spirit works.

¹⁴ The Book of Common Prayer 1962, 92.

¹⁵ The Book of Common Prayer 1962, 584.

At this time we are in the midst of a shared theological exploration of how the Spirit works in the worship of the Church. As we work through this communal act of theological reflection, we might do well to adopt the attitude of Gamaliel.

But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. Then he said to them, "Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!"¹⁶

This does not deny the holiness of the material nor the normative practice of gathering together in one place to share in the bread broken and the wine poured. It is to acknowledge that the Spirit works in mysterious ways to unite the disciples of Christ in one Body across time and space.

Is ‘virtual’ or ‘online’ worship historical?

The final checkpoint is the historical norm: “The historical norm is that we cannot make decisions independently from the worship experiences of millions of Christians around the world over the course of twenty centuries.”¹⁷

Knowledge of history can set us free from our own cultural captivity so we can glimpse or invent other possibilities that might prove most meaningful in our circumstances. Without such knowledge, we are captive to the familiar.... History helps us to discern what is essential so we can expend our efforts where they are most fruitful.¹⁸

Here we must wrestle with the reality that the use of digital and social media is a relatively new phenomenon in the experience of the Christian communities. Even those responsible for the creation of our current

¹⁶ Acts 5:34-39 (New Revised Standard Version).

¹⁷ White 2001, 143.

¹⁸ White 2001, 144.

liturgical resources in the Anglican Church of Canada, produced within the last forty years, did not envision a situation in which, by entering a few words into an online search engine, one might gain access to a treasury of good and bad liturgical texts and rites.

What liturgical history teaches us is that the Christian community responds to social and cultural contexts by adopting, adapting and creating liturgical rites, texts and practices that seem at those times and in those places to be faithful pastoral and theological responses. Scrolls were replaced by codices. Manuscripts were replaced by printed books. The use of the vernacular in worship was replaced by hieratic languages in some places such as Latin or Slavonic and, in subsequent centuries, replaced by the vernacular again in both Western and Eastern Christian traditions. Leavened bread, the normative practice in East and West for centuries, became unleavened in the West. Baptism by immersion for all candidates became pouring or sprinkling in some traditions. The list of such adoptions, adaptations and creations will fill many bookshelves and digital storage devices.

What liturgical history also teaches us is that when a tradition of worship engages its culture, the community relates to that culture in four ways: transculturally, contextually, counter-culturally and cross-culturally.¹⁹

- Worship is transcultural, the same substance for everyone everywhere.
- Worship is contextual, varying according to the local situation, both nature and culture.
- Worship is counter-cultural, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture.
- Worship is cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures.²⁰

When Christian churches were established in the Southern Hemisphere, they did not stop celebrating Christmas and Easter (transcultural), but they did begin to develop liturgical texts that related these events in the liturgical calendar with the natural environment (contextual). When Gentile Christian communities emerged in the first and second centuries ce, they adopted Hebrew phrases and words such as ‘hosanna’ and ‘amen’ into their own rites (cross-cultural). When civil governments and social customs tolerated or

¹⁹ http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Can_We_Talk_Engaging_Worship_and_Culture.pdf accessed on 16 September 2020. See also www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Liturgical-Principles-and-Agenda.pdf.

²⁰ The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture 1996, 1.3.

encouraged racial and gender segregation in worship, congregations and dioceses refused to comply (counter-cultural).

Our task in the current climate and for the years ahead is to engage the digital Christian culture in these four ways.

- How do we ensure that Anglican digital worship provides the same substance for all worshippers regardless of how they participate?
- How do we take into account the differing contexts where Anglicans worship?
- How can Anglican digital worship challenge internet culture with the demands of the Gospel?²¹
- How can Anglican digital worship facilitate sharing between different cultures wherever and however they are ‘present’?

This is a proactive response to a phenomenon that will not disappear, even after vaccines become available and communities are able to engage in more on-site activity.

Virtual online worship is real and personal

Almost forty years of ordained ministry have taught me many things. One thing I have learned is to distrust ‘either/or’ responses to the challenges faced by the Church in these or any other times. Online worship is here to stay and our current task is to develop ways that build community between our online worshippers and our on-site worshippers. We need to reduce the barriers and create relationships. We need to avoid disparaging online participation as something less than on-site. It is different, but different does not necessarily mean less authentically Christian and personal.

Online worship is real. Online worship is personal. Online worship is a way that people can be nurtured into genuine Christian discipleship. There are still questions that I have regarding the physical elements of Christian worship: water and oil, bread and wine, touch and proximity. But I am committed to exploring these not simply ruling them out of bounds for discussion. Why? Because I want the Church to continue to become *real*. Why? Because I think all disciples of Jesus, regardless of how they participate in worship, want to become *real*. So let’s work on making that happen, trusting in the Spirit who moves among us in many and mysterious ways bringing God’s purposes to fulfilment.

²¹ See Nona Jones, *From Social Media to Social Media: A Guide to Digital Discipleship* (Zondervan, 2020).

We do not presume (or do we?)

DAVID HARRISON

“We do not presume.”

Our Anglican *Prayer of Humble Access* (known by some, not always affectionately, as the “Humble Crumble”) sums up in those four words the Anglican piety of the eucharist for a good deal of our history, both before and after the Anglican Reformation of the sixteenth century. Appropriating the stance of the Syrophenician woman who begs Jesus to heal her daughter, the prayer puts those who pray it, like her, falling at Our Lord’s feet. The Prayer of Humble Access, although having been picked up by some Protestant denominations, is one of those uniquely Anglican prayers, first appearing in the first *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 and in the form known to us in its successor, the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1552.

And yet a humble expression of reticence and unworthiness in anticipation of receiving holy communion was already embedded in the rite of the English Church before the Reformation. Thomas Cranmer primarily looked to the Sarum rite (being the rite that developed for use at Salisbury Cathedral and which found widespread use throughout England) as his jumping off point for his recasting of the English liturgy. In the Sarum rite, the tone of reticence and humility is expressed privately by the priest before he receives communion in the recitation of three prayers notable for their tone of penitence and unworthiness.¹ (And, lest we think that

¹ The three prayers are these:

God the Father, Fount and Source of all goodness,
who, moved by compassion for us, didst will thine only begotten Son to descend to the low places
of the world, and to take our flesh,
whom I, unworthy, here hold in my hands :
(*Here let the priest bow to the Host, saying:*)
I adore thee, I glorify thee, I praise thee, with complete intention of mind and heart: [cont’d...]
and I pray that thou mayest not forsake thy servants, but pardon our sins;
that with pure heart and chaste body we may deserve to serve thee, who alone art God, living and

this sort of expression is uniquely English, or reflective of a Protestant spirituality, the Roman rite then and to this day includes the *Domine, non sum dignus*, where the priest presents the sacrament to the people saying: "Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who takes away the sin of the world", with the faithful responding - echoing the words of the centurion: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."²⁾

At the time that King Henry separated the English Church from Rome the actual reception of communion was much more the exception than the rule. The focus of the mass was not on receiving communion but rather on the ritual itself. The reality was that most of the mass was spoken by a priest in an inaudible voice, in Latin, standing at an altar some considerable distance away facing away from the people. Indeed, it would only have been when the bells were rung as the priest elevated the host and the chalice that the faithful person in the pews, otherwise engaged in their private devotions, might look up and take notice.³ The Prayer of Humble Access, introduced by Cranmer, actually assumes that those attending the liturgy *will* receive communion; that they will (as it were) be invited to gather up the crumbs that might have been left for the dogs, in order to be healed. For Cranmer and the English reformers, the eucharist was *not* intended as a passive act of private prayer but rather an encounter with God through receiving the

true.

Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord Jesu Christ, Son of the living God,

who, according to the will of the Father, with the Holy Spirit as co-worker, through thy death,
hast given life to the world :

Deliver me, I beseech thee, by this thy most holy Body and Blood, from all my iniquities, and from
all evils;

and make me always to obey thy commandments, and never permit me to be separated from thee
for ever.

Who livest and reignest God, with God the Father and the same holy Spirit, throughout all ages.
Amen.

Let not the Sacrament of thy Body and Blood, O Lord Jesu Christ,
which, although unworthy, I presume to receive, be to me for judgement and condemnation,
but may it avail, through thy mercy, for the salvation of my body and soul. Amen

² Before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the response "Lord, I am not worthy" (said in Latin) was repeated three times, with the striking of the breast each time.

³ This is *not* to suggest that the eucharist was unimportant in the spiritual life of the realm. On the contrary, as the late Professor Stephen Reynolds puts it: "Mass – the western Church's name for the Holy Eucharist – was the linchpin of the Catholic religion. It was celebrated daily, even several times a day, and for any one of a wide variety of purposes. People might offer their petitions to God in the set offices of prayer or over a meal or before climbing into bed at night; but it was the sacrifice of the Mass that inscribed their needs, concerns, hopes, and desires on the agenda of heaven itself." See Professor Reynold's *Theologies of the Eucharist I and II*, available at tspace.library.utoronto.ca. The unpublished works of this fine teacher and theologian deserve to be better known.

sacrament. This is not to suggest a catholic sacramental understanding; Cranmer was a receptionist, meaning that although he did not hold that the substance of bread and wine changed, the faithful did, by faith, receive Christ when receiving holy communion.⁴

As the English Church evolved in its independence, there were various epochs of eucharistic piety to be observed. The Act of Uniformity of 1662, which settled the century-long struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism under the hand of Queen Elizabeth I, mandated that the faithful must receive communion at least three times a year. And it seems likely that, in most places, that was precisely the number of times that Holy Communion was celebrated. The eighteenth century is generally considered to be the nadir of the history of the Church of England. And yet even then, the great reformer Charles Wesley, whose movement led to the establishment of the Methodist Church, called for “constant communion” and was said to receive the sacrament at least twice a week.⁵ The Oxford Movement of the nineteenth century re-introduced daily celebrations of the eucharist back into Anglicanism, and this became the trajectory for a some, but still a minority, of Anglican parishes.

Fast forward to 2020 and the words “we do not presume” take on a different meaning in a different context, but much to the same effect. Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Anglican Communion has been thrust into an expected place where the receiving of communion in the accustomed manner has been impossible in all but certain, enclosed communities. And behind the myriad practical matters that have demanded careful and immediate attention, bishops have had to make decisions about the celebration of the eucharist in a time of pandemic. Some have continued to allow the celebration of the eucharist in their dioceses; others have not, declaring (as the Ontario provincial house of bishops did) a “eucharistic fast”.⁶ The theological and pastoral motivations behind the fast were made plain: “[s]acramental celebrations are the work of the whole People of God and require a gathering of people who can be physically present to one another. That is impossible for most of us at this time. The Great Three Days of Easter, and through the 50 days of the season, we will be fasting from the Eucharist but feasting on

⁴ This is most clearly expressed in the new words of distribution introduced in the *Book of Common Prayer* 1552. Replacing the declaration “The Body/Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for you”, the new book introduced “Take and eat in remembrance” and “Drink this in remembrance”, and the phrase “feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving”

⁵ Wesley’s Sermon 101 is entitled “The Duty of Constant Communion” where he makes his case on Our Lord’s command “Do this”.

⁶ The Bishop of Niagara subsequently allowed the celebration of the eucharist to resume, and one of the area bishops of Toronto have provided some latitude for parishes to continue to celebrate the eucharist.

the Word." In short, the lack of the ability to gather physically, combined with the inability for all to receive together, was the impetus for a fast for all.

The eucharist, like the sacrament baptism, defies a tidy and pithy description. It is, rather, multi-valent. (Is the eucharist a sacrifice, an offering, a commemoration, a meal? Yes!) Throughout the history of Anglicanism the eucharist has always been celebrated, although frequency and theological understandings of the sacrament and the rite have differed. Our own Canadian *Book of Common Prayer* 1962, still the official prayer book of the Anglican Church of Canada, reflects a kind of seriousness about the act of receiving communion which may seem more than a little strange for us today. In the rubrics of the Service of Holy Communion the faithful are enjoined to receive communion regularly, but the priest is, at the same time, told to emphasize to the faithful both the importance and the seriousness of receiving communion, and to ensure that those who present themselves are worthy.⁷ And let us not forget that this prayer book also contains long exhortations mandated to be read on some Sundays before, and when, holy communion is to be celebrated. Such exhortations clearly intended to emphasize upon the faithful the utter seriousness with which receiving the sacrament is to be considered. Many cradle Anglicans of a certain generation will remember "1st and 3rd" were Sundays when holy communion was celebrated and "2nd and 4th" were Morning Prayer Sundays. For some familiar with more low church realities, holy communion was celebrated monthly.⁸

We find ourselves in a much different place in most of the Anglican world with respect both to the frequency, and the spirituality, of receiving communion. Most parishes now celebrate the eucharist weekly as their

⁷ Among the rubrics:

"It is the duty of every confirmed person, after due preparation, to partake of the holy Communion frequently, and particularly on the greater Holy-days, of which Easter is the chief."

"The Minister shall frequently remind the people of what is required of those who come to receive the Lord's Supper, as set forth in the Catechism and the Exhortations. It shall also be his duty to warn individually any whom he knows to be living in grievous sin, that they presume not to come to the Lord's Table until they give evidence that they truly repent; and if they do not heed his warning, he shall refuse to administer the Communion to them. He shall deal in the same manner with those between whom he perceives malice and hatred to exist, not allowing them to be partakers of the Lord's Table until they be reconciled. But if one of the parties is willing to forgive and, to the best of his ability, to make whatever amends may be proper, and the other party refuses to do so, the Minister shall admit the penitent person to the holy Communion and refuse him that is obstinate. Before repelling any from the Lord's Table under the provisions of this rubric, the Minister should consult with the Bishop or the Archdeacon. After so repelling any, he shall within fourteen days give a written account."

⁸ Indeed, until the 1970s it would only be in so-called Anglo-Catholic parishes where the eucharist was celebrated weekly (and daily in some).

“principal” act of worship.⁹ The Oxford Movement led, in the Church of England, to the “Parish Communion Movement” of the 1920s, where the practice of weekly celebrations of the eucharist became normative in some parishes. This movement was part of what we now know as the “Liturgical Movement” of the last century, a movement which emerged out of the Roman Catholic Church (culminating in the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council) but which influenced Christian liturgies in the West much more broadly and deeply. Indeed, our own *Book of Alternative Services* 1985 is very much a product of this movement, not least in the emphasis on and reform of the rite for celebrating the eucharist.

It can be argued that the overarching thrust of the Liturgical Movement was to recover and emphasize the “eucharist as a meal” aspect of the celebration, an aspect de-emphasized at other times in the history of Anglicanism, and a notion which would have been completely puzzling to our medieval forbears. This renewed emphasis was borne out both in rite, the ceremonial, and the architecture of the liturgy. The rite emphasizes the gathering of the community with the introduction of the greeting. There is an intentionality in the gathering, listening, praying, and feeding of those gathered. The move to what is now normative in our ritual of having the priest standing at the altar *versus populum* (“toward the people”) emphasizes this, as does more modern ecclesiastical architecture, which has moved away from the separate spaces of nave, chancel and sanctuary toward an integrated whole.

But this emphasis, worthy as it is, may just explain why in this pandemic time the idea of a eucharistic fast has taken hold. *If* we cannot imagine the eucharist without the entire community gathered (or at least able to gather), then we cannot imagine the eucharist. *If* we cannot fathom how one or two (the priest, perhaps with one or two physically distanced) can receive holy communion when others can’t, then we cannot imagine the eucharist. It would seem a plausible hypothesis that the Liturgical Movement has taken such a hold on our consciousness and practices as Anglicans that, for very sound pastoral and theological reasons, some have seen no alternative but to suspend celebrations of the eucharist during the current pandemic.

Could this reality, though, also be urging Anglicans to reconsider and perhaps recover a fuller breadth of eucharistic theology and practice? In embracing so whole heartedly the idea of “eucharist as meal”, have we lost other understandings which might also be edifying? And assuming (as it seems) that 2020 will emerge as a watershed year in the life of the

⁹ It is true that the “early communion” was in some places celebrated weekly in many parishes, even if Matins followed at the “main” hour.

Church, how will our eucharistic theologies and practices evolve in light of the new vistas and modes of “being Church” which are now fully upon us?

From time to time concern is expressed that we celebrate the eucharist *too* often. That we have lost something of the mystery of the sacrament, something of the (gospel-mandated) call to self-examination before receiving the sacrament and the need to make amends with those from whom we are estranged. Could it sometimes be that the sheer repetition and frequency can lead, even for the most pious, to a kind of casualness that would likely be scandalous to generations of our Anglican forebears? And, perhaps more seriously, have we “domesticated” the eucharist? Made it ours, or about us, or about our need to be fed, and less about God and what God is doing and will do?

It is said that the doctrine of the Incarnation is at the very heart of Anglicanism. That our whole lives of faith are centred in, and dependent on, the reality that God took on our flesh, *our* flesh, in the babe of Bethlehem, in dwelling among us. And, certainly, the eucharist makes no sense if we don’t begin with the Incarnation. If it is not true that God (all that is divine) did not take on our human nature, or could not do so, or chose not to do so, then our sacraments collapse like a house of cards. They become mere symbols, pointing to a God who may be real, but who is not incarnate. Sacraments point to something else, but they also *are* that something else, that someone else. The bread and wine of the eucharist points to Jesus, but they also *are* Jesus. And so, if we are to centre our lives on the Incarnation and the sacramental reality that flows from it, how can we not celebrate the eucharist? How can we not make Christ known in the sacrament of the altar? Grieve as we might (and perhaps must) that our communities cannot gather to receive the sacrament in the ways and with the frequency which is familiar, are we putting too much on ourselves and not enough on God to conclude that the eucharist is not, in and of itself, our act but God’s, and that God’s world continues to need the sacraments celebrated despite whatever limitations are put upon us. That the eucharist not only recalls but *makes real* the death and resurrection of Christ. And that the command “Do This” was offered without footnotes.

It is surely unrealistic to imagine that these questions will vanish as soon as a vaccine can be widely distributed. Technology is not going to disappear. Online worship will become normative for perhaps the majority of Anglican communities. Some will have simply fallen out of the habit of coming to Church, and some will elect out of the habit. There will be ongoing public health concerns, and experts say another pandemic may not be far off. New means and modes and pathways of being Christian communities are opening wide up, and the Church is now figuring out, on

the go, how the eucharist will, or won't, be part of what is here and is to come.

Virtual communion? Can we imagine it? What are the implications of virtual communion on the debate about open table and the suggestion that all should be invited, whether baptized or not? The frequency of communion? YouTube analytics are now telling many of us that the majority of viewers do *not* watch the entire liturgy but "pick and choose" what they wish to be part of it. How does that impact our ideas of liturgical integrity and the flow from gathering to dismissing?

Our ancestors in Anglicanism almost five centuries ago approached the sacrament also with a sense of trepidation. "We do not presume." Over the last number of months, many Anglicans have, again, not presumed, but the reasons are entirely different. For what are, in many ways, good and worth reasons. But is it because we do *not* presume? Or because we do?

What of the Eucharist in the COVID-19 pandemic?

ALISON KEMPER

It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word.¹

*It is precisely the intimate relationship of gospel, liturgy, and service that stands behind the theological principle *lex orandi: lex credendi*, i.e., the law of prayer is the law of belief. This principle, particularly treasured by Anglicans, means that theology as the statement of the Church's belief is drawn from the liturgy, i.e., from the point at which the gospel and the challenge of Christian life meet in prayer. The development of theology is not a legislative process which is imposed on liturgy; liturgy is a reflective process in which theology may be discovered. The Church must be open to liturgical change in order to maintain sensitivity to the impact of the gospel on the world*

¹ Article XXXIV: Of the Traditions of the Church.

and to permit the continuous development of a living theology.²

The pandemic has forced rapid adaptation of worship, ministry, communication, finances and use of space in churches around the world, including the Anglican Church of Canada. These adaptations have been at every level, from local Bible studies and compline services to the decennial meeting of the Lambeth Conference. The virus and consequent isolation orders have further threatened the financial viability of many if not most parishes and dioceses as well as national church structures.

We lost all the public rites of the church at once: baptisms, funerals, ordinations and weddings ceased. Anointing the sick and dying became impossible. We were to maintain a “Eucharistic Fast”, an observance without precedent in the history of church. The forms that remained were educational (e.g. Bible studies), monastic (the daily offices), social (coffee hour) and administrative (business meetings). But the central rites of the church were gone.

Without the sacraments, how does the church know God’s presence? Where do we find the Lord when not all of us can reach the minimal level of physical gathering that Christ states in Mt 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” +Alan Gates, the Bishop of Massachusetts, has recognized that we need to “collectively, communally and deliberately” consider the issue of “remote consecration of elements at a distant location”³.

I have struggled to put as much of parish life on line as possible, creating a parallel schedule of meetings, study groups, and worship services as possible without easy access to musicians, servers, sanctuaries or ecclesial furnishings. The bravest souls have been holding funerals at grave-side and rushing home to wash in the hottest water and strongest soap they can stand. Some have conducted last rites by telephone. Even hospital chaplains, heroically entering the hospitals every day, are limited in their ability to perform their normal duties.

In the meantime, people are not baptized. Those called to Holy Orders await their ordinations. Many faithful go to their death without Last Rites, and many of their remains are neither commended nor committed. And Christians who’ve become regular communicants over the last

² Book of Alternative Services (1984), 9.

³ “Sacramental Hunger and Eucharistic Practice”: May 8 Pastoral Reflection from Bishop Gates | Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts,” accessed May 11, 2020, www.diomass.org/news/reflections/sacramental-hunger-and-eucharistic-practice-may-8-pastoral-reflection-bishop-gates. He suggests we “depend upon agape meals while the theological wheels turn”.

few decades hunger for the Bread of Life. The pace at which theology is deliberated does not match the need for movement.⁴

The most urgent issue is that of the Eucharist. Many bishops throughout the Anglican Communion have interdicted the celebration of the Eucharist, which was intended to be a short-lived solution to a few weeks of quarantine. As the lockdowns continue, and as attending a parish Eucharist increasingly appears to combine many of the riskiest behaviours (shaking hands, eating together, singing, spending time in close proximity), the return to pre-COVID norms may be receding.

Clergy and people are impatient. The hurried imposition of an interdict could be tolerated for a short time, but an entire Easter season without any movement toward a solution is disturbing. People hunger for the Eucharist, and most recognize we will need safe means to celebrate for a very long time.

There is little to be gained by revisiting the great controversies over sacramental theology. High and low church Anglicans, those who favour both modern and traditional rites are all deeply concerned about how to maintain our Christian identity without physically gathering. What is the church without the ecclesia? And further, what is the Body of Christ without the Eucharistic Body of Christ?

Delays to the resolution of these difficult issues make the process even more difficult, and the disarray of the church more painful. Considering deep theological issues is made more problematic when public worship, the main arena for discernment, is unavailable.

In the absence of physically gathered church, in order to determine *lex credendi*, what is to be believed, we must now turn to our online experience of worship, *lex orandi*. In Christian communities around the world, the People of God are asking for bread. And while engaging in the online celebrations of the Eucharist, many of the faithful are bringing bread and wine from their kitchens to their computer desks. What does this mean?

What we need now is a hermeneutic, a way of understanding Scripture, Tradition and Reason that can help us more readily identify the ways in which we can move forward as a Eucharistic community.⁵

⁴ In centuries before, local usage would have provided a means to respond to the demands of the laity. A saint's day, a blessing, a rite or a new usage would emerge. It would not be authorized in advance. It would grow or not, be declared irregular or not. It might persist or gain traction throughout larger regions of Christendom. Or not. These conditions do not seem to prevail today. Bishops identify many institutions and pressures that increase homogeneity.

⁵ The recent action by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church to constrain the Bishop of Western Louisiana from celebrations of virtual Eucharists hinged on their understandings of the rubrics. "After a gracious conversation with the office of the Presiding Bishop," Owensby wrote, "I understand that virtual consecration of elements at a physical or geographical distance from the Altar exceeds the recognized bounds set by our rubrics and inscribed in our theology of the Eucharist." The use of rubrics written in 1976 to resolve controversies over the

What footprints has Christ left, what texts have the canonical writers preserved, what are the scientific truths that create boundary conditions for our practices? What are the guideposts as we go forward?

Reason—Public health and preserving life

The theological principle Jesus most insistently articulated was pikuach nefesh, פיקוח נפש, saving a life. This is “the principle in Jewish law that the preservation of human life overrides virtually any other religious rule”.⁶ In Jesus’ ministry, he was constantly being challenged to articulate his position on this law. Was it more important than the Sabbath laws? And Jesus said (in fourteen different pericopes) that the preservation of life was more important than the laws of religious observance.⁷

The dispersal of the church and our sheltering in our homes is truly right to do. We must be guided by epidemiologists and public health experts. There is no level of risk that is acceptable to the One Who Heals.

We need to continue to support our people in their self-isolation until it is much safer to emerge. Instead of forcing people to return to the old norms, we need to find a means to stay at home and be part of a Eucharistic community. We should not presume to create a new Eucharistic norm which can harm communicants or celebrants.

Scripture—Breaking bread is the centre of our life

Eucharist as mandate of the church

The earliest account of what we now call the Eucharist is found in 1 Cor 11:24-25, where Jesus’ command is to “Do this in remembrance of me.” He gives a positive command or duty to take bread and bless it, to “do this” and to do so “in remembrance of me”. Luke repeats this commandment in his narrative of the Last Supper, reflecting his Pauline roots. For Paul already in 55 AD and for his follower, Luke, this was the most important thing we could do.

In Acts 2:42, we can recognize what appears to be a formula: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” This passage indicates the marks of Christian communities that persist to this day. These deeds marked the norms of the new Christian community that Luke believed had already

use of internet conferencing tools during the worst pandemic since the reign of Justinian presents its own difficulties. George Conger, “WLa Bishop Rescinds Virtual Eucharist Permission,” *Anglican Ink*, April 24, 2020, <http://anglican.ink/2020/04/23/wla-bishop-rescinds-virtual-eucharist-permission/>.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pikuach_nefesh

⁷ Nina L. Collins, *Jesus, the Sabbath and the Jewish Debate: Healing on the Sabbath in the 1st and 2nd Centuries CE*. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014.

been codified before the destruction of the Temple. Luke describes (2:46) the community as attending the Temple and then returning to their homes to break bread (*κλῶντές τε κατ'οἴκον ἄρτον*).

For the Pauline community, including Luke, breaking bread was one of their defining acts. And they did it *κατ'οἴκον*, in each home.

John makes Jesus' presence in bread one of the most extreme of Jesus' claims (Jn 6:51). "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." Jesus' presence in the bread is fleshly. It is more powerful than manna. The claims are offensive to the religious authorities.

The centrality of Jesus' presence in the bread is clear in John's Gospel. It is only by eating this bread that people can have life. Christians gain their lives in this act. There are no substitutions.

Church leadership

For John's community, the central role of the leaders of the Church is to maintain the sacred meal, a role that emerges from Jesus' relationship with Peter. John 13, the Last Supper, and John 21, the post Resurrection narrative, connect Peter to Jesus through the feeding of the community. Jesus repeats his charge to Simon Peter three times (Jn 21:15-17). "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." Jesus commands Peter to shepherd (*Ποίμανε*) the flock once and twice to feed (*Βόσκε*) His sheep. The most important duty of Peter and his successors is to ensure the faithful are fed with the Bread of Life.

Tradition—The liturgy provides the bread

The Eucharistic bread—not just at the Sunday gathering of the community

The Christians of the second through fourth centuries communicated themselves at home, after the Eucharistic celebrations.

By the time of Justin Martyr's First Apology in 155 AD, it was settled practice for the Eucharistic bread to be sent to the absent from the Eucharistic gathering "and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons".⁸ Justin twice uses the word absent rather than sick. This implies that everyone who was absent, whether sick or not, needed access

⁸ Justin Martyr, "First Apology" in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, trans. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 (Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), <http://earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-firstapology.html>.

to the consecrated bread. The meaning and power of this bread persisted away from and after the celebration.

Two centuries later, Basil the Great sent a letter (93) to Caesarea, arguing that she was wrong to believe that communicants should not take the bread in their hands. Basil referred to the example of the Desert Fathers, asserting that they gave themselves communion "from their own hands".⁹ "It is needless to point out that for anyone in times of persecution to be compelled to take the communion in his own hand without the presence of a priest or minister is not a serious offence, as long custom sanctions this practice from the facts themselves. All the solitaries in the desert, where there is no priest, take the communion themselves, keeping communion at home."

Basil is clear that self-isolated monastics were able to remain in communion with their churches through the delivery of a quantity of Eucharistic bread. They would break this off in their hands as required. But he is also clear that although persecution drove earlier Christians to stay away from Eucharistic celebrations, they were able to consume consecrated bread that they kept on their person or at home.

Eucharistic theology: Centuries of disputes

While much ink has been spilled on the topic of the correct theology of the Eucharist, few Anglicans believe that we have exhausted opportunities for debate.

In the late eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII articulated a theology of the Eucharistic presence of Christ which quickly became dominant. St. Francis of Assisi popularized Eucharistic adoration. By the late 13th century, Pope Urban IV had instituted the feast of Corpus Christi. This viewpoint was explicitly rejected by the English Reformers, who insisted that the doctrine of transubstantiation was "repugnant to the plain words of Scripture".

The theology of the Eucharist has not remained settled through subsequent Anglican history. We can look at the current praxis of the church as expressed in the Book of Alternative services to discover a contemporary understanding of the sacrament. A more nuanced view will take the extensive work of numerous historians of theology.

Book of Alternative Services

In the last forty years, the weekly celebration of the Eucharist has gradually become normative. This transformation has driven changes in our ecclesiology, creating a need for Indigenous priests capable of celebrating regularly rather than flying into a parish, and eventually, an entire parallel Indigenous

⁹ "Philip Schaff: NPNF2-08. Basil: Letters and Select Works - Christian Classics Ethereal Library," accessed May 5, 2020, www.ccel.org/cCEL/schaff/npnf208.ix.xciv.html.

ecclesial structure. It has redefined churchmanship. It has brought us together into a more tightly knit denomination.

In recent weeks, in defense of the Eucharistic fast, many people have said that for much of its existence, the Anglican Church has not regarded the Eucharist as the principal form or Christian worship. They contend that the absence of the Eucharistic Feast is therefore not a significant privation when we have Morning Prayer and other alternatives.

Baptismal promises

The first promise made by the baptizand echoes the description of the early Christian community in Acts 2:42. Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers? For decades, we have asked new Christians to promise to break bread as part of the baptismal covenant. In this covenant, there is a corresponding obligation of the church to make the sacrament available.¹⁰

The Ordination of a Bishop

All bishops in Canada are told they are "to celebrate and to provide for the administration of the sacraments of the new covenant"; and they have had to affirm that they would "encourage and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries, nourish them from the riches of God's grace, pray for them without ceasing, and celebrate with them the sacraments of our redemption". It appears that bishops have a positive duty to celebrate the sacraments, no matter how difficult.¹¹

Maundy Thursday

According to the Revised Common Lectionary, we read not only the Eucharistic narrative from I Cor 11:24, "Do this", as well the commandment passage in John 13:34 "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." We

¹⁰ This contractual reciprocity is best expressed in the ordination of a priest, when the bishop prays, "May the Lord who has given you the will to do these things give you the grace and power to perform them."

¹¹ When Bishop Ronald Hall of Hong Kong had no priest to celebrate the Eucharist in Macao under the Japanese occupation, he ordained Deaconess Florence Li Tim Oi to the priesthood under extremely dangerous circumstances. Such an act was theologically impossible at the time. He was censured by Lambeth in 1948.

In response to COVID-19 restrictions, Pope Francis told his clergy they should absolve and bless from the hallways, where they were allowed to work as chaplains. The canon lawyers objected. Francis replied, "Bishop, fulfill your priestly duty. That doesn't mean that canon law is not important. But the final canon says that the whole of canon law is for the salvation of souls, and that's what opens the door for us to go out in times of difficulty to bring the consolation of God." "Francis Envisions a Post-Pandemic Church 'Not Closed off in Institutions,'" National Catholic Reporter, 2:28am, www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-envisioned-post-pandemic-church-not-closed-institutions.

observe two commandments together. The Mandatum is dual: to make Eucharist and to love one another. Until 2020, the church annually enacted the giving of both mandates and their performance.

Spiritual Communion

Many clergy are assuring their people that a spiritual communion is a valid alternative to the Eucharist. There are two problems with this. First, it has not appeared in an Anglican prayer book since 1662.

Second, if we tell people they don't need the Eucharist, do we expect them to believe us?

In summary: Rigorism loses to piety

The Donatists were excommunicated. Paul won over Peter. Children receive communion. The Methodists and Tractarians revived and unleashed the latent piety of frosty Britain. Deaconesses were made priests. Queers are priests and bishops. Not all at once. But inexorably the circle widens. Because the people of God thirst for God's presence. Even when it is impossible.

Why are the grocery shelves denuded of flour? It is bread to which we turn in times of trouble. Our faith makes the sacred nature of bread part of our understanding of humanity and divinity. Why would we forego it in the midst of an existential crisis? Especially when we are commanded to "do this"?

God is not like a scarce supply of yeast in jars. God is alive like a sour-dough culture. God's presence grows wherever it is fed. Grasping to hold and control the greatest gift and comfort that Christ has given us is unseemly. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is too fluid to allow that.

People have been deprived of the most important things we have: our hope and one another. We must seek hope out and share it in wide communities. Now is the time for generosity, for sharing our abundance widely, for turning our lawns into vegetable gardens, for identifying and holding God's goodness up to the window for all to delight.

A reflection on Anglican Eucharistic practice in and beyond the pandemic

David Edwards

It was my hope to write a much more academic paper on this matter, but time and perhaps talent have beaten me. Consequently, I can only point to some ideas rather than exploring them in the depth I might have hoped.

Holy Communion is central to the life of the Church. To “do it” is one of the final admonitions of Jesus at the Last Supper. Historically it has been seen as a source of nourishment and belonging. Over the centuries the latter has generally been much less controversial than the former.

In this time of COVID-19 we are dealing with eucharistic theology in a time of change and within an Anglican context. In essence we face a similar question to those faced by our forebears at the time of the English Reformation, what is the nature of Holy Communion within the Church in this emerging new era?

I want to suggest that those who went before us were careful in their determination not to come down too definitively concerning the sacrament. The place where there is definition is in article XXIII of the BCP (710):

Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of the bread and wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

These words are strong and though the Church may no longer wholly agree with the sentiment of the article it has not been removed from the articles. Article XXXIII notwithstanding the reformers and their immediate heirs were somewhat coy on the nature of the sacrament and its

efficacy. It is to these roots that I suggest we need to return in to begin our exploration of the Eucharist in our present circumstances.

In his 1549 Prayer Book, Thomas Cranmer treads a fine line between Communion as receiving of the “real presence” of Christ through the bread and the wine and the sacrament as an act of remembrance.

This percolates down to later English Reformation theologians and to an extent remains with us today. Cranmer was greatly influenced by the consubstantiation ideas of Martin Luther and Richard Hooker followed a similar line, though some would argue that he was cautious in this. Essentially, he suggested that there is a fundamental change in the state of the “accidents”, not in the sense that their substance changes, but the presence of Christ enters in and is efficacious in the life of the recipient.

Richard Baxter’s view was more memorialist, but not in an arid sense of the congregation being reminded of the sacrifice of Jesus through the actions of a minister at a distance. Rather the words of institution draw the congregation members into recalling Christ’s death and resurrection. It is this reminder that nourishes the believer as s/he receives the elements. Not in the sense that the bread and the wine are changed in any way, but that they are tangible reminders of the nourishing actions of Christ and it is this remembering which is efficacious.

The majority Canadian of Anglicans today would have a view that is nearer to Hooker than Baxter, but it is not exclusively the case. In addition, there are many parts of our Communion where followers of Baxter would be greater in number than Hookerites.

In furthering the conversation, we now turn to the sacrament itself, in particular the words of Institution. There is a helpful definition in John Macquarrie’s *Principles of Modern Theology* (469ff). He suggests there are three aspects to viewing what happens during the prayer of consecration. The first is what is actually happening to the elements, secondly, what the celebrant believes is happening and thirdly, what the recipient believes. If we take each of these in turn it may help us to shed light on how to approach the Eucharist, post-COVID.

Each Celebrant probably has an idea about what we think is happening to the bread and the wine when we say the words of Institution at the Eucharist. The bald truth is that we really do not know. Over the centuries several possibilities have been put forward as to what might be happening at the metaphysical level, but materially nothing changes.

Those of us who preside at the Eucharist know what we believe is happening to the elements and that varies according to our formation, it may also change over the course of our ministry. I am sure that each of us would argue that the sacrament is efficacious in some way no matter what happens to the substance.

Many of us would go on to say that it is irrelevant as to what the individual priest believes is happening to the elements, the effect is the same no matter the celebrant, because of the orders we share. Macquarrie's third point deals with what the recipient of the sacrament believes they are receiving. This can vary from the notion that they are getting a reminder of the death and resurrection of Jesus, through to the belief that the elements have become the body and blood of Christ. Additionally, they may believe that the effect of the reminder is to draw them closer in thanks and praise to God enabling their growth in faith, through to the bread and wine mystically playing a part in their growth and uniting them with Christ.

It seems that in the current circumstances and moving ahead into a future where it is unlikely that former practices will be deemed safe by many church members and society in general, we have to pastorally place the greatest emphasis on the third of Macquarrie's points, what does the recipient believe about the sacrament and its efficacy? This leads us to other issues.

These include, what is the nature of Communion both within and separate from community? What constitutes consecration of the elements? What actions are necessary or are words enough? How is the consecrated bread and or bread and wine to be administered? Can the Eucharist be celebrated virtually? Finally, perhaps the most delicate matter within our Anglican context, who can celebrate the Eucharist? Communion implies community at different levels. It is Communion with Christ and through him with the Trinity. It is an expression of unity between members of the local worshipping community and a gathering with the Church, both militant and triumphant. Consequently, to see it as a private matter would be to deny its essence and move further towards the privatization of faith. That being said there are times when personal Communion is necessary, for those confined to their homes or hospital and for the dying. It may be that in a period of pandemic this should be extended to those who need it separately from the body of Christ for whatever reason, but to make it universal atomizes the Eucharist.

As far as how the elements are consecrated for home communion or similar, it seems there have been two traditions. Communion by extension and reserve where the bread and wine are brought from the table used in Sunday worship to the home of the recipient, either directly or later in the week. The other method has been to consecrate the elements in the home and then administer them. One question which arises here is in a post-COVID world will there be enough clergy to keep this system going?

This issue moves us on to what constitutes the consecration of the elements? Obviously, the words of Institution spoken over the bread and wine are significant. Since at least the days of St. Augustine of Hippo it has

been recognized that the priest who speaks them does not need to be in a state of grace for them to be effective. The question is where does s/he physically have to be in relation to the elements for them to be consecrated? Can the Eucharist be celebrated virtually, for example?

For many of us the tradition is to: take, bless, break, and give, clearly this cannot be done at a distance. The Book of Common Prayer is more specific telling the celebrant when and how to hold the vessels and the elements. All of this implies that to celebrate the Eucharist at a distance is inconsistent with tradition.

Is tradition static or can it be altered? It is not unknown for the Church to overturn tradition. Within living memory, we have allowed the ordination of women to priestly ministry and the re-marriage of divorced people in church. In many parts of the country there has been a shift from Sunday worship being primarily through the Offices to its being largely Eucharistic.

There is no consensus in the Anglican Communion about the former two matters and the prevalence of Office over Eucharist is often dictated by the availability of priests. This leads to the question can the Anglican Church of Canada move towards virtual consecration in a post COVID-19 world? It could be a point of discussion, but it is far from clear as to whether this is desirable or possible.

A further step could be lay presidency at the Eucharist. The following motion was passed in Sydney Australia:

Resolution 27.08 passed by the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney on 20 October 2008, in affirming "that the Lord's Supper in this Diocese may be administered by persons other than presbyters", is consistent and in accordance with the Constitution of The Anglican Church of Australia and the canons made there under.

This was ruled as unconstitutional by the Appellate Tribunal of the Anglican Church of Australia in 2010 and no further actions has been taken by Sydney Diocese to enact the resolution.

Sydney is probably the most radical diocese in the Communion with regard to this subject. Given that it has been thought unwise to proceed there it seems unlikely that there would be a general, agreement on the issue across the world, even if that were thought to be desirable.

As a side note the National Convention of our partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) passed a motion in July 2015 to allow lay ministers to preside at Communion under tightly restricted

circumstances in its churches. This has implications for Anglicans who might be worshipping in such a Lutheran congregation, but it also raises the question of the nature of Apostolic Succession. Can a person who has not received an episcopal laying on of hands preside at the Eucharist and that Eucharist be valid?

This brings us to a significant question do we need to have a major rethink of our Eucharistic practice? Is it necessary to receive Holy Communion every week? Is it even practical to do so?

In many parts of the Anglican Communion today a weekly service of Holy Eucharist is a distant dream. Within living memory in Canada even in parishes with full-time clergy the tradition was an 8am Communion with Morning and Evening Prayer later in the day. There might have been a Eucharist added to these services once a month, beginning with the sentence “Ye who do truly and earnestly repent...”, in the Book of Common Prayer.

Across Canada for many years, and some cases this still pertains, priests would travel long distances to bring the sacrament to disparate communities across a region, once again these events would not occur on a weekly basis. It seems likely that we may have to go back to the future in many of our areas.

This possibility raises the issue of what is efficacious in the life of the disciple? It takes us to another discussion which has been happening in the Church over recent years how is deeper discipleship encouraged amongst Christians? If the inability to receive Holy Communion is inimical to the development of the disciple, then there is a need to run back through the discussion we have just had and perhaps reach different conclusions.

If receiving the sacrament is part of growth, but not the whole story, then apart from asking how often it may be necessary to receive Holy Communion, the matter might move on to how do we grow in faith if we are unable to receive the sacrament on a weekly basis?

The current period of pandemic has merely accelerated the need for a necessary conversation around practice in our churches. This is something which requires input from the wider Communion and detailed study about the theology which lies behind our eucharistic practice. The fundamental question does not seem to be about the nature and doctrine of the Eucharist, but its necessity and frequency.

To change our understanding of the nature of presidency and to try to define what constitutes efficacious consecration will take us down many rabbit trails for which we do not have time. As at least an interim measure the most obvious way to move forward is to go backwards. The re-invigoration of non-eucharistic worship should take place. This will allow

greater flexibility in the conduct of acts of worship and in who can lead them. This is not a plea for the removal of the Eucharist from our worship, rather a recognition of the need for a measured response, reflecting the maintenance of tradition in a changing landscape exacerbated by COVID-19.

Fulfilling all things in Christ

GREGORY KERR-WILSON

One of the words heard repeatedly as we have made our way through the COVID-19 pandemic is “unprecedented”. While there has been much grief and suffering experienced both in our country and around the world from the coronavirus, and while we are right to be taking it seriously, responding with the deepest empathy for those who have and are suffering, it must also be noted that, while this experience is unprecedented for the current generations of western society, the impact and disruption we are experiencing is not unprecedented for most of our contemporaries in much of the rest of the world. Such experience is also more the norm of history than its exception. Specifically, for the Church, our ministry and mission has been carried out for two thousand years in the midst of hardship, persecution, poverty, oppression, famine, drought, violence, war, plague, isolation and social upheaval.

Upheaval and disruption, however, without denying the very real suffering of the situation, also present us with circumstances which push us to think once more about what we do, why we do it, and how we do it. In that light, the cessation of church services has presented us with questions about our worship and Eucharistic celebrations which are not only pertinent to the current circumstances, but also to the digital world and way of life which has been unfolding around us for several decades, and will continue to unfold as we make our way through the next few decades.

One of the gifts of the liturgical renewal movement over the last century has been to remind us and re-emphasize that the Eucharist is a communal meal. It was not that we did not know it, but as often happens with much cherished and oft repeated observances, referring to the Lord’s Supper as “making one’s communion” and “receiving the sacrament” had often overshadowed the communal dimension of shared meal. To remind ourselves of that core piece has, in my view, heightened our awareness that the Eucharist is the people of God gathering at the Lord’s Table. It is this

final piece that is also at the heart of what troubles us in suspending worship.

As so often happens in human life, however, in focusing on one piece we often drop or lose track of others. Yes, this is a meal, but the words “Body of Christ” and “This is my blood of the new covenant” signal powerfully that this is a meal like no other: we eat, but we feed on our host; we share food, but the very act binds us in covenant commitment to the one who gives it, and to one another; we are fed, but in the feeding we are obligated to feed others and be agents in and to the world of the one who feeds us; we receive food for Life – but doing so “proclaims the Lord’s death until he comes.”

The celebration both resonates with and celebrates the rich narrative tapestry of the story of scripture - of creation, fall, the call of Abraham and Sarah, the giving of the law, prophetic call and challenge, redemption and sanctification – and orients us to the fulfillment of all things in Christ in the great and blessed feast which is the world’s telos. The Eucharist is memorial and anticipation; it is both corporate and personal; it is an act of worship and a gift by which we are fed and strengthened for service; it is meal, proclamation of faith and truth, (our sacrifice of) praise and thanksgiving, offering (ourselves, our souls and bodies), an expression of and a means to unity. And just as we encounter the infinite and eternal divine presence in the fully human, finite and temporal person of Jesus, so in the Eucharist, under the simple elements of bread and wine, we encounter and receive the divine life of our Lord in the sacrament taken within ourselves. Just as in a body with many parts and organs, all of these things function as the heart, lungs, mind; hands, feet, ears and eyes that make the one whole celebration, and are always present whether we are aware of them all at any given celebration or not.

As its central act of worship, the eucharist is an act of Church in the largest sense of “Church”; and therefore, we articulate norms of how it is conducted, who may preside and under what conditions it is appropriate to receive. Cultural norms around individualism, consumerism, egalitarian rights to access, privilege and secular power constructs do and will always struggle to grapple with this. It is no wonder that for some centuries in the early life of the church, catechesis and formation for discipleship were seen as indispensable and inextricably linked to participation in the Eucharistic feast; word and sacrament here are not separable – only through the immersion in the Word do we come to the table with our eyes increasingly opened and our minds continuously transformed to see and apprehend the deepest mystery of God’s love for us and the life into which we have entered and are entering through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There has also always been in the life of the Church adaptation to situation and circumstance. While Christian formation and learning have been the expected norm, we adapt that to the capacity of the recipient. While normatively we would share both bread and cup, we have acknowledged, when necessity arises, that we receive Christ fully in either. The norm has been for members of the Body to gather bodily – be physically present – but when members are unable to be present, they can receive at the hands of those delegated by the community to carry the sacrament to them. When members have been unable to receive physically because of sickness or other “just impediment”, by faith in Christ they can receive the Body and Blood, even though they have not taken the sacrament “with his mouth.” (BCP, 584)

But there is a difficulty in speaking of norms and exceptions however – particularly, perhaps, for modern minds. Once the exception has been accepted, then it is easy to assume that, both being acceptable, one is as good as the other. It is easy to see how the equation can be made that, if it works, then, well, it works. This is something that might fuel current uneasiness with online worship and celebrations of the eucharist viewed online. What if people, after the pandemic is over, think that, since they could stay home at their computers during the pandemic, there is no reason why they shouldn’t do the same after the pandemic. And in a world in which we seek to be permissive and inclusive, we might wonder how we could resist such an equation. If that is how they want to do it – then how can we say no. The exception becomes the norm. This requires some careful thinking about what underlies the allowance of exceptions (and what does not). There is a problem with the equation. The exceptions are allowed on the basis of two things – a desire and intention to receive on one hand, and justified impediments on the other. Someone viewing on line and receiving Christ by “Spiritual Communion” intends to be part of the gathered community for its celebration of the Body of Christ, within the Body of Christ, to the extent that is possible, but are being kept from it. It is difficult to see how someone who is able to be present, but chooses not to be because of convenience or simple preference, can fit into that description. St. Paul’s warning in 1 Cor 11 about those who participate “without discerning the body” (vv29) bears consideration here. While the passage refers to those “eating and drinking” without discerning the Lord’s Body, we might consider that choosing to not be present is another way to fail to discern the Body. The “exception” involves being kept from coming; trying to make that a “norm” involves choosing to stay away. One is a desire thwarted, the other might well be understood as an act of willful denial or even rebellion against the body. More gently, at the least, it is an act of uninformed choice – or a choice

driven by a lack of formation in the faith. In the former case we might ask if someone can be said to truly desire to participate in the one Body sacramentally when they have *chosen* to not participate in the Body gathered? In the latter case, we might be led to see how continuing to have our Eucharistic celebrations viewed online could act, not only as spiritual communion for those unable to be present, but as a form of catechesis for those who have chosen to view rather than attend. Those who are not coming to receive are being invited through the community's celebration, and may be drawn in faith to join fully in the Body gathered where they can truly receive and be fed in the Body and Blood of Christ. This in itself should challenge us to consider how, within our Eucharistic norms, we might enhance the celebration to more fully take advantage of a catechetical opportunity.

There are two further dimensions of the Eucharist that I want to touch on here. The first relates closely to the foregoing discussion with respect to "the Body." In the circumstance where members of the Church are *unable* to be physically present to receive the sacrament we need to perhaps be reminded that our theology of the Body of Christ is not limited to physical gathering. We do not cease to be the body when we are sent forth from the eucharist; and someone separated by being isolated from the rest of the community of faith physically (by virtue of necessity or circumstance) does not cease to be part of the body. I am reminded that we continue to say the Lord's Prayer with the words "Our Father" even when we say it in the privacy of our own room. There is a fundamental recognition of our connection to the whole community of faith even in our "private" prayer. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all." (Again, keeping in mind the distinction between willful separation and just impediment) is there a sense in which some part of the body that is able to continue the celebration and reception of the eucharist may do that vicariously on behalf of those not able to be present? Perhaps there is even a synergy between the remnant gathered on behalf of the whole and the communion of desire, the Spiritual Communion, by which the separated member receives the Body and participates in the Body, by visual and/or auditory connection and, of course, above all, through the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.

The second is a consideration of the nature of the Church's worship and ministry, and in this case particularly the Eucharist, in relation to the world, and indeed the whole of creation. The celebration of the Eucharist is not about the reception of some "good" in the economic or consumer sense of that word. It is not about how I "get mine," or "my share," or even "my privilege" (understood as something earned or awarded). It is

entirely about my participation in the re-ordering and right ordering of humanity and indeed the whole of creation in its relation to its creator. From the very beginning, the story of creation tells us through the person of Adam that we are made as a means of God's grace to and gracious governance of the whole of creation. Adam names the creatures and is given authority as God's steward; Abraham is called, not as private privilege, but as one "in (whom) all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:3) Israel, God's people, are called, not simply as a national privilege for their own sake, but to bring all to the love and worship of God: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you." (Ps 22:27) And "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Is 49:6). This last fulfilled in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus – into who's Body we have been incorporated in baptism. And so, we are both, as members of Christ's body, "being transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom 12:1-2) and "are a royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9), united to Jesus in making intercession and an offering of praise and thanksgiving on behalf of fallen creation, as the "first fruits" of God's redemptive work.

The essential nature of the Eucharist and the modes of its reception

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on behalf of Queen's College Faculty of Theology

The Faculty of Theology at Queen's College held two well-attended consultative sessions by means of GoToMeeting on June 15 and June 22, 2020. The discussions were lively and informative, and although a great deal of ground was covered, there were three questions of major concern. All three pertain directly to the nature and reception of the Eucharist during the present pandemic. First, how inclusive should the Eucharist be? Or, putting it another way, who constitutes the Body of Christ at the Lord's Table? Secondly, since the physical reception of the Eucharist – the bread and the wine – is precluded at the present time, in what way or ways can we understand its spiritual reception? And thirdly, can the Eucharist act in a similar way to an icon, namely, as a window connecting this world with the transfigured cosmos?

The overwhelming opinion of those present at both sessions was that the Eucharist, which is a multi-faceted celebration, should be as inclusive as possible, and that – once the physical reception is again made possible – no one who presents themselves at the altar should be refused. It is not the business of any member of the clergy to try to channel God's grace and, as a consequence, anyone who wishes to receive communion should do so – what happens after that is entirely up to God. All those, therefore, who participate in any form of online worship may be regarded as belonging to the Body of Christ, and we must remember that Christ himself said that he had many sheep which were not of this fold (Jn 10:16). The Church is not an institution but a living being, the People of God. It is not defined by walls and buildings – the present COVID-19 crisis has made that abundantly clear – but by the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit blows where it wills (Jn 3:8). It is essential, therefore, to be open to the inspiration of that same Spirit,

though it must be admitted that all the Churches, in the recent past and throughout history, have sometimes done an excellent job of refusing to listen to its voice.

Given the inclusive nature of the Eucharist, how should it be received? The unanimous opinion of all present at both sessions was that, ideally, it should be received under both species of bread and wine, just as Christ distributed his own Body and Blood under the form of bread and wine at the Last Supper. Putting it another way, at the heart of the Eucharist is the fact that it is a communal meal. In the earliest Church, it was a full meal which, as is clear from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, could sometimes get out of hand. By the second century, however, it had become the symbolic meal we enjoy today. This is perfectly clear from the fascinating description of a second-century Eucharist provided for us by Justin Martyr who was executed in about 165. Communion in both kinds was standard in the West until the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic Church, for reasons which are not here our concern, introduced communion in one species alone, that of the bread. The Reformers, following their Master Jesus, re-introduced communion in both kinds, and that has been the Anglican tradition from its beginning. At the moment, however, this is not possible, so what is to be done? This brought up two questions:

- (i) the question of intinction, and
- (ii) the question of communion in one kind in the present crisis.

First of all, it is obvious that in the course of a pandemic, the common cup must be avoided. There is no wine with a sufficiently high alcoholic content to kill any germs of any sort. The overall opinion of those attending the sessions, however, was that intinction should be avoided, except when medical circumstances demand it or where there is a severe allergic reaction to any more than a trace of alcohol. Apart from the fact that intinction in itself may be unhygienic, it also does away with the symbolism of the Eucharistic meal. So what of communion in one kind, namely, the bread? There are solid theological arguments (which we do not have space to present here) demonstrating that reception in one kind is the reception of the whole Christ. To deny this is, effectively, to separate the natures in Christ, and that was a heresy roundly condemned at the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the Council of Chalcedon, in 451. But though this may be the case theologically, there is no doubt that, for some parishioners, their *perception* of what they are receiving may not be in accord with this. This presents a pastoral challenge for pastors to ensure that changes in liturgical practice are explained by appropriate educational means, and accompanied by support for those who resist changes to established Eucharistic practice and devotion. In the end, however, although the clergy

may try to explain why communion in one kind is communion in the whole Christ, if a parishioner does not see this, there is really nothing else to be said. It is their choice whether to communicate or not. This leads us to the question of spiritual, or, as some prefer to call it, contemplative reception, in which neither bread nor wine is consumed.

Even under normal circumstances, there are some who attend a celebration of the Eucharist and choose not to receive. They nevertheless regard themselves as fully participating members of the Body of Christ, and who are we to judge? As we said above, it is not given to any of us, ordained or otherwise, to declare where, when, and how the grace of God will operate. The twenty-eighth of the Thirty-Nine Articles states that “the Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith.” At the present time, of course, the bread cannot be eaten since there is no congregation there to eat it, but in the view of those who attended the consultative sessions, the key to the spiritual reception of the Eucharist is faith and the Holy Spirit. To participate in an online Eucharist is to assert one’s membership of the Mystical Body of Christ, and if we open up ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit in faith, then we may assume that, as Christ himself is there with us (the Second Person of the Trinity is not bound by the laws of physical space), so, too, is his grace. Saint Augustine stated that God is *ubique praesens et ubique totus*, “everywhere present and everywhere whole,” and that, in essence, is all we need to believe and know.

An online gathering is not, of course, ideal. It necessarily lacks the aspect of the symbolic meal, and it lacks that physical fellowship which is undoubtedly of great importance to many people. The thing that distinguishes the Christian God from the God of Judaism or Islam is not unity, but trinity, and the essence of the Trinity is relationship. The Christian Church, therefore, which is the Mystical Body of Christ is, by definition, a communal Church, a Church of inter-personal relationships and of our collective and individual relationship with the Trinitarian God in whose image we were created. This is something which is also demonstrated in the offering. This should not be regarded as a collection, which is a gathering in, but as an offering, which is a giving out. The purpose of the offering is not merely to pay for the oil to heat the church (though this, too, is important), but to assist those members of the Mystical Body who need our assistance. This is also a demonstration and affirmation of our responsibility to and for each other. It is perfectly possible to make such an offering online in an online service, though there is no doubt that this has seriously declined during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given, then, that a physical Eucharist with the physical reception of the Eucharistic elements

is not, at the moment, possible, what of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer?

Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, Morning Prayer was, for many decades, the standard mode for Sunday worship. The question was raised, therefore, as to whether the far more frequent celebration of the Eucharist in recent years – assuming, naturally, that such a celebration is possible – has diminished the importance of Morning and Evening Prayer. In the opinion of the majority of those present, it had not. It was also pointed out that Morning Prayer did not, obviously, involve a Eucharist (though it is an ideal preparation for it), but that those who attended were quite sure they were attending a service which was in itself a channel for God's grace. Some, of course, attended because that's what you always did at a certain time on a Sunday morning, and/or to see their friends and catch up on the latest news, and/or to enjoy the music and the singing. How God deals with that is up to God, and is none of our business. The essential point of this, however, is that Morning and Evening Prayer clearly show (i) that God's grace is not restricted to the celebration of the Eucharist, and (ii) that attendance at a service online can be a rewarding experience, even if it lacks the physical companionship which so many of the members of the Body of Christ so enjoy. The recent significant uptake of online real-time connectedness for dispersed families, businesses, and organizations is allowing for an ease of use and genuine rapport that may allow for enhanced engagement in faith communities for many restricted for health, location, or other reasons. In a truly responsive faith community, in-person and online participation may not be a case of either/or, but both/and.

The last thing to be considered at the consultative sessions was whether the Eucharist might be regarded in a similar light to that of an Orthodox icon. Given that one of the writers of this document was Orthodox for forty-five years and ordained as an Orthodox sub-deacon before returning to his Anglican roots, this is home territory for him. The theological principle behind an icon is that the veneration of the icon passes through the icon to the prototype behind it. The veneration of an icon of the Mother of God, for example, passes straight to the Mother of God herself, and the icon also acts as a point of communication for the assistance she might vouchsafe to give us. Basil of Caesarea is eminently clear on this point, and John of Damascus even clearer. May we regard a consecrated wafer in the same way, namely as a point of communion and communication between the material and spiritual worlds, between the Mystical Body of Christ and its Head?

There were mixed feelings on this question. Some of those attending saw no problem with the idea, but others pointed out the very real danger

that this could all too easily lead back to the medieval idea that the veneration of the Host, when the priest elevated and displayed it, was sufficient in itself for salvation. This is not something to be encouraged, and there was no majority support for the idea of viewing the consecrated wafer as a type of icon.

In conclusion, among all those attending the consultative sessions there was unanimous agreement on two points. First, that the present situation is obviously difficult, more difficult for some parishioners than for others, and there is no easy solution. And second, that the key to understanding and combatting the crisis is surely to be found in being open, in faith, to the grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and to remember at all times that, as Saint Augustine said, God is everywhere present and everywhere whole.

Can God spread a table in the wilderness?

R. H. GRANT RODGERS

Preamble

In the midst of the anxiety, confusion and outright danger posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, I write from the perspective of one who is in the high-risk category health-wise.

I write from the perspective of one who has had the celebration and experience of the Eucharist as the core of his priestly spiritual and religious life for almost 40 years; for the past five years, I have also taught subjects like Anglican Liturgy and The Theology and Practice of the Eucharist at Vancouver School of Theology.

By virtue of ordination in the Anglican Church, I am a Catholic priest. As such I am not about to trifle with something so central to my own identity and purpose as well as that of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I was mentored in the Anglo-Catholic tradition and remain grateful for the ways it continues to inform and guide my ministry.

At the same time, I write with the awareness that Anglican eucharistic theology has never been strictly defined. What happens during consecration remains a mystery. I write this from the point of view that there is always room for interpretation and development of existing practices.

I also write from the point of view that says "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."¹ As a pastor whose theology has been shaped by many years of liturgical practice and pastoral interaction with people in parishes, I am going to suggest that creating options in our eucharistic practices is a positive way to respond to this crisis that can open doors to greater participation and a larger sense of the Church. I want to speak to

¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, Chapter 8.

the issue of virtual² Communion as it relates to the existing practice of “Spiritual Communion,” and as an optional way of offering the Eucharist. I reflect too on the meaning of presence, and of the pastoral imperative which is before us in this time of worldwide crisis.

Considering liturgical/sacramental precedent

Stranded in the desert, anxious about what lies ahead, we hear the people of God asking, “Can God spread a table in the wilderness?”³ The implied answer is Yes, as “bread” is provided in the form of manna. That same pattern appears in the New Testament as Jesus is challenged by the people to provide bread in the wilderness and is portrayed in all the Gospels as doing so for large crowds, quite indiscriminately, no church in sight.

The life of Christ is an expression of God’s goodness, generosity and grace, exemplifying the expansive, liberal nature of God’s love. Eucharistic theology is rooted and reflected in the New Testament witness of the feedings of multitudes, wedding feasts, table fellowship, and moments in places like Emmaus where Jesus was “known to them in the breaking of the bread.”⁴

From the beginning, the Christian approach to the Eucharist was pastorally sensitive to the needs of as many people as possible, and not specifically associated with churches. Wherever it happened, a significant part of its intent was to make sure that all were included, extending the agapic/eucharistic experience of fellowship and belonging (*κοινωνία*) especially to the vulnerable and those on the margins.

The Church has experienced many situations in which providing/accessing Communion has been difficult, e.g. in times of plague, war, natural disaster, distance, pastoral indifference and theological confusion.

We inherit the pastoral practice of taking Communion to people, whether in their homes, in hospitals, or on the battlefield, expressing the theological belief that all members of the Body matter, and the pastoral concern of making sure everyone is included one way or another. It may be hard for a church long accustomed to a maintenance mode of church life to realize that the focus in many times and places was never merely about those individuals fortunate enough to be able to be present in person for the liturgy.

The long-standing, generally authorized practice of making a “Spiritual Communion” is referenced in a recent Church of England document:

2 “Virtual” defined as closely approximating, nearly equivalent, manifesting a high level of similarity, or in almost all respects the same (as opposed to unreal, non-actual or non-existent).

3 Ps 78:19 NRSV.

4 Lk 24, especially vv30-31.

The Book of Common Prayer instructs us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', although we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves. Making a Spiritual Communion is particularly fitting for those who cannot receive the sacrament at the great feasts of the Church, and it fulfils the duty of receiving Holy Communion 'regularly, and especially at the festivals of Christmas, Easter and Whitsun or Pentecost.'

—Canon B 15⁵

The pure and simple yearning for God, as described by St Thomas Aquinas, or in *the Cloud of Unknowing*, or by Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, or Thomas Merton, is "in fact" to experience the reality of God. Without that yearning, that intent, the most perfectly contrived liturgy loses any sense of meaning and purpose.

A Roman Catholic position on Spiritual Communion is articulated by Fr. Hugh Barbour:

*Whenever we make a prayer or an act interiorly of desire for that sacrament, we receive the grace of the sacrament. It's not a small thing ... It's a very powerful thing, much more powerful than we would think. It's not like a second best, you know, 'Well, if I can't get to Mass, I can make a spiritual communion.'*⁶

This is such an important point about the possibility, validity and even merit of participating from a distance. If Spiritual Communion (participating in the eucharistic celebration without being physically present) may in some way be equated with full participation, then certainly that yearning, that desire, combined with the ability to be "present" via electronic means, suggests that Communion is possible in ways we may not have considered until now.

A 1916 Anglican guide⁷ to Spiritual Communion states the following:

The act of Spiritual Communion is not a substitute for Sacramental Communion, nor is it a make-believe. At the close of the devotion the Communicant gives thanks to God for something definitely received,

⁵ The Church of England, *Guidance on Spiritual Communion and Coronavirus*, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/Guidance>.

⁶ Fr. Hugh Barbour, O. Praem., *Spiritual Communion in a Time of Coronavirus*, Catholic Answers, www.catholic.com/audio/caf/spiritual-communion-in-a-time-of-coronavirus.

⁷ Cecil John Wood. *A Form of Spiritual Communion Compiled by the Bishop of Melanesia*, Auckland: Wilson & Horton, Printers, 1916, http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/wood_communion1916.html.

and during the day [they] can look back to [their] morning devotion and say, This morning I received the Body and Blood of my Lord.

Holy Communion is an outward sign of an invisible grace being communicated. In thinking about the implications of extended worship via technology, we might ask: "Does the local gathering create that communion or does it simply connect with it and point to it as something that is in existence at all times and in all places, as something we can enter at any time or place?" As the old saying goes, "Bidden or unbidden, God is present,"⁸ and as the psalm reminds us, there is nowhere we can be where God is not present.⁹

Traditionally, Spiritual Communion is something that is left up to the individual, an *ad hoc* option people can undertake when the ideal can't be realized.¹⁰ I think the Church needs to take a step beyond its existing understanding of Spiritual Communion and create new eucharistic practices that integrate this larger sense of God's capacity to be present with the intentional corporate life of the eucharistic community. Rather than simply become immobilized, rendered unable to respond by the weight of tradition, I want to urge the Church to operate from the God-given gift of faith, enabled by reason, conscious that our tradition already allows "virtual" communion.

The Importance of Being Present

The question, "*Who is my "neighbour"*?" is an example of the way the New Testament makes us stretch existing definitions, pushing us beyond the conventional and the habitual. Mere physical proximity does not make one a true neighbour, not in the sense that Jesus was suggesting.

Physical proximity is an important consideration, but it does not stand alone. The Pharisee "praying" in the Temple may as well not have been there.¹¹ Those who gathered for worship in Corinth were admonished by St Paul¹² because they were oblivious (i.e. not present) to the people right next to them. The participation of some was considered to be "not genuine" and there is a question as to whether such people "really eat" the Lord's Supper.¹³

As people can be together and yet remote, they can also be apart and yet remain connected. In 1 Th 2:17, St. Paul says "As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you—in

⁸ Often credited to Desiderius Erasmus.

⁹ Ps 139:7-12.

¹⁰ See also Book of Common Prayer rubric, 584.

¹¹ Lk 18: 9-14.

¹² 1 Cor 11:17-22.

¹³ 1 Cor 11:19-20.

person, not in heart—we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face.” Though separated physically, St Paul affirms a real connection of the “heart,” because, in Christ, we are never essentially or completely separated.¹⁴ It is significant to me that in addition to that connection of “heart,” online worship allows us to connect “face to face.”

The concept of the Communion of Saints is another aspect of the way the Eucharist is understood as being “beyond” the immediate gathering. Even something as simple as the ringing of the church bells is an indication that we have always understood the scope of worship as larger than what is happening inside the building and that there are “others” out there for whom more direct involvement is impossible and to whom we are sending a message of solidarity and encouragement, inviting whatever level of participation is possible for them.

We have for a long time dealt with an aging and aged membership, for whom weekly attendance can be difficult to nearly impossible. Even when they manage to get there, they can be preoccupied with physical ailments and limitations. In my 35-plus years as a parish priest I saw countless people becoming shut-ins, then shifting their Sunday attention to the presentations of televangelists, because we offered virtually nothing. Older now myself, I am much more aware of the physical challenges and risks involved in getting to a church. From my experience of offering radio and TV broadcasts, and audio recordings of services and/or sermons, I know that around every parish and community there is an audience and membership that is listening and interested, but virtually never seen. My aim has always been to do what I can to share the life of the Church on as wide a basis as possible.

On the other hand, people who are physically present can be impaired in various ways, as comically illustrated in the Monty Python line “Blessed are the cheese makers?”¹⁵ Distractions, anxieties and preoccupations get in the way for all concerned, perhaps especially the clergy. As Meister Eckhart said, “It is not God who is absent; it is we who have wandered off somewhere.” Being here, now, is never easy and sometimes beyond our capability.

So, is being physically present always better? It depends on our circumstances (health, age, physical disabilities, distance, work, traumatic church experience, agoraphobia, tied to ailing spouse, etc.) Ironically, some at home might actually be more present or at least more attentive than people physically there, or than they themselves usually are when physically present in church.

¹⁴ cf. Rom 8:35-39.

¹⁵ *Monty Python's The Life of Brian*. HandMade Films, 1979.

Experiencing the Real presence

"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst."¹⁶

The pandemic challenges us to think again about what "real presence" means. Eucharist is an expression and celebration of being "in Christ." That reality, of being "in Christ," part of the one Body, brothers and sisters in Christ, is an indelible bond that is not just present when we gather physically. Brother Lawrence speaks of "this communion of our hearts with God's,"¹⁷ attained without needing to leave the kitchen where he worked.

The Medieval scandal of infrequent and uncomprehending communion by the (lay) people of God, even though they were obliged to be physically present, is an indication of how far the Church can stray from meaningful eucharistic belief and practice and still survive. Anglican reformers like Thomas Cranmer, in attempting to establish the common prayer tradition (which actually included the laity), while not exactly avoiding the question of "real presence," didn't want to get drawn in to being overly specific about the "how" of it. Like them, I want to trust that God's ability to be present far exceeds our ability to comprehend.

The Reformation generally shifted attention away from the physicality of the bread and wine during Eucharist, and more to their spiritual reality and symbolism, thus opening up the rather closed and fixed understanding of how consecration happens and by whom, shifting attention away from the instrumentality of priests as well. In the reformed understanding the work of Christ is sufficient in and of itself and so John Webster says "the role of the priest is thus relativized, transformed from what was (however mistakenly) perceived to be mediatory sacrifice to that of ministering (or perhaps better), administering the saving benefits of Christ's passion through Word and Sacrament."¹⁸

Recently, thinking has focussed on the laity and the role of the entire body rather than merely upon the priests in isolation. If "in, through and with Christ, the assembly is the celebrant of the Eucharist,"¹⁹ and "the entire eucharistic prayer is consecratory"²⁰ it obliges us to ask why, in an online celebration of Communion, everyone present (being properly disposed)²¹ would not experience the "real presence."

¹⁶ Mt 18:20.

¹⁷ Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Whitaker House, 1982.

¹⁸ John Webster, "Ministry and Priesthood" Part IV Chapter 6 in *The Study of Anglicanism*, 323.

¹⁹ General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, *Liturgical Principles*, 6.6, 22.

²⁰ *Liturgical Principles*, 6.5, 22.

²¹ Cecil John Wood, *A Form of Spiritual Communion*: "Realise yourself specially in the presence of Jesus..."

Ignatius' famous passage²² also contains an admonition to maintain the connection with the local bishop, and he concludes by saying "It is not lawful to baptize or give communion without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has [their] approval is pleasing to God. Thus, whatever is done will be safe and valid."²³ In the face of this pandemic, many bishops worldwide have encouraged priests and parishes to share the Eucharist via technology; again, many parishes around the world have found they are connecting with more people (and in some cases, many more) than normal.

The grace we seek is not located in the elements themselves but in Christ.²⁴ The concept of "receptionism" suggests the bread and wine remain physically unchanged, but via faithful reception of the Sacrament the communicant in a real but spiritual (ineffable) way receives the body and blood of Christ. It is "a doctrine of the real presence" but one which "relates the presence primarily to the worthy receiver rather than to the elements of bread and wine."²⁵

The local act of faith always points beyond itself – to the community around us and also to the universal—and can be experienced in another location not by virtue of the physical bread but by the faith which is open to receiving the universal Christ which that local action signifies.²⁶ It is important to remember the ultimate connection and source, which is God. The presence is God's, and all we can do is dispose ourselves in such a way as to be open to it.

Ultimately, I believe "the One who holds all things together"²⁷ is capable of creating the unity and integrity necessary for online celebrations of the Eucharist to be "real" and valid.

Some things to consider

Recently, the Archbishop of Canterbury, via an online Eucharist celebrated in the crypt chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, drew some five million people into virtual communion. He and the Archbishop of York have stated that church needs to be "reimagined."

²² "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."

²³ Ignatius, Smyrnaeans.

²⁴ As per Article XXVIII: "the mean[s] whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper of the Lord is Faith."

²⁵ Crockett, William R., "Holy Communion," in Sykes, Stephen; Booty, John, *The Study of Anglicanism*, revised edition SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998.

²⁶ Hence the possibility of Spiritual Communion being a real act of communion and fellowship with the Body.

²⁷ Col 1: 17.

In the article *Seminaries prepare to reopen, train priests for ministry amid COVID-19*,²⁸ Melanie Barrett, chair and professor in the department of moral theology at Mundelein, told NCR that while it has at times been difficult for seminarians to cultivate a "ministry of presence" by spending time in parishes on a regular basis during COVID, she has been encouraged by the creativity she's witnessed: "Over the summer, the majority have been very involved in livestreaming Masses and/or faith-formation sessions in their home dioceses; many have produced original podcasts as well."

There is much anxiety about the future of our church. Let it not be a fear of significance. I think it is wise to explore these possibilities not just out of expedience or desperation but because it is consistent with our theological and pastoral approach to the liturgy of the Eucharist. I think the pandemic has provided us with a catalyst that could stir us up to a creative use of the technologies and means of communication we have in our time so that we might include many who for various reasons have nowhere to be in relation to the local church except on the margins or beyond.

People are "distanced" for many reasons, and we have often been oblivious to the fact that many people's experience of church is traumatic and destructive. To offer something that allows for distance, personal safety, and personal choice, creates an important option which may generate healing and reconciliation in a variety of ways.

This crisis may continue to threaten and limit our usual gatherings for months and possibly years. If so, many people will be prevented by health issues from ever attending because the risks related to church attendance are high. Even those who can get to the limited-attendance celebrations of the Eucharist we are allowed by law are usually not allowed to receive the elements, so their participation becomes a kind of Spiritual Communion by default. For us not to act now and attempt to find ways of extending the eucharistic celebration and fellowship would be a kind of dereliction of our mandate, it seems to me.

This is not the Church re-inventing itself or attempting to live in some unreal, imaginary world. It is the Church being obliged to remember who we are and why we exist. It is the Anglican Church exercising its inherent gift of reason in order to integrate new information, employing effective means our ancestors could not have imagined, to address new circumstances and challenges.

In person, in church; in person, online: compelling arguments can be made both ways, but for me the point is that it doesn't have to be one or the other. We have one obvious norm and we have options, including Home

²⁸ Christopher White, "Seminaries prepare to reopen, train priests for ministry amid COVID-19," National Catholic Reporter (www.ncronline.org/news/coronavirus/seminaries-prepare-reopen-train-priests-ministry-amid-covid-19), August 12, 2020.

Communion and Spiritual Communion and now online Communion. Neither Spiritual Communion nor Home Communion has ever threatened to become the norm, though each may be the norm for some people. Our norm remains gathering in person in a specific, dedicated place open to all, with the leadership of a duly authorized and ordained person, and a valid liturgy, but we may be thankful that we have options.

Because this kind of thing is almost always part of an old story, I bring to mind the rabbis in heated debate about how to respond to the conflicting claims being made about Jesus, and the great rabbi Gamaliel being credited with this response:

"If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!"²⁹

Can God spread a table in the wilderness? The answer, of course, is Yes. Some would not have viewed this as "proper bread," but a poor substitute, while many saw it as a gift from God. Interpretation is everything, almost. Real or not, manna kept the people of God alive at a critical moment.

Any liturgical practice, if it is to be genuinely Christian, must allow room for God, who in Christ promised to be with us always—must expect the Spirit to inspire us and connect us in unexpected and unaccustomed ways—must be aware that we invoke the presence of One who walks right through the walls, is with us wherever we are and takes us to places we might prefer not to go.

²⁹ Acts 5: 38f.

Experiencing the sacramentality of the Word

PAUL JENNINGS

The pandemic has brought loss: in all aspects of church life, and specifically and obviously in our liturgical life. We are so conscious of the things we must do without. We miss being physically and socially present to one another in the Christian community, and have come to experience with bitter intensity how important an aspect of our liturgy that is. We have found it impractical, inappropriate, or (for some) downright theologically impossible to celebrate the eucharist. Since the eucharist has in recent generations been restored as the mainstay of weekly communal worship, its temporary loss has provoked something of a crisis of identity in Anglican worship. The loss of congregational singing is felt by many with great poignancy.

These deprivations call forth a variety of reactions in each one of us: longing, melancholy, nostalgia, resentment, and the compulsion to try to recuperate as much of our traditional worship as we can under the circumstances. But our faith in God's providence invites us to another set of responses as well: to discern the will of God in any challenges and troubles that life sends our way, to ask what lessons the Spirit may be trying to teach us. We may rightly mourn what we miss, but we should also turn to the opportunities that a reordering of our liturgical emphases brings with it.

Two axes in particular frame this reordering of priorities. Our inability to gather together in person invites us to reflect on the relationship of *community* and *interiority* in worship from a different perspective. Similarly, our enforced abstention from the eucharist demands that we reevaluate the relationship of *word* and *sacrament* in our theology and practice. Rather than simply seeking to preserve community and eucharist in whatever imitation of our usual practice is practical, there is value in

exploring the opportunities of an enforced emphasis on inwardness and the word.

Word and sacrament are complementary aspects of the one liturgy of Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate. I take this to be axiomatic – in contrast to the occasional tendency in Anglicanism (driven by our high church/low church feuds, and the various ways in which we position ourselves vis-à-vis our Catholic and Protestant sister churches) to see them as somehow in competition: as though it were necessary or possible to maintain the priority of one over the other, as though honouring one requires downgrading the other.

Against such occasional lapses it is essential that we affirm the unity of word and sacrament, as equal and interdependent expressions of the one Word among us, as equal and interdependent means by which Christ is present to his people. It is the genius of our Sunday eucharistic liturgy, in its deepest, most basic structure, that proclamation and eucharist follow one another in a way that is not merely sequential: they mirror one another, echo and deepen one another in a single but multilayered encounter with Christ, allowing us to experience the gospel at different levels of our humanity. One might be tempted to suggest that the appeal to our intellect through Scripture and preaching is complemented by the physical, visceral experience of being fed, of having that same word dissolve upon our tongue. But we should be cautious here. This distinction has some truth, but it does not go to the depth of either word or sacrament, as it still suggests too great a distinction between them. At root they are one: the sacrament is an event of the word, and the proclaimed word is sacramental in nature.

The sacrament is an event of the word. While it essentially involves physical elements, to be received physically, the eucharist also essentially involves words. On the most obvious level, it is words – the Words of Institution, the epiclesis of the Spirit – that make the sacrament more than simply the bread and wine we bring to the table. But the eucharistic prayer is much more than an instrument to consecrate the sacrament: it is an act of praise in which we give thanks to God, as we proclaim anew God's mighty deeds, and in so doing are shaped by the story we proclaim. Most fundamentally, the purpose of the eucharist is to proclaim the death of Christ, until he comes again: an anamnesis of Christ's self-giving love, in joyful trust in the power of the resurrection. In the words of institution – “this is my body, given for you” – Christ brings to a single point the story summed up in the eucharistic prayer, proclaiming to the church the whole of the gospel – incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, Pentecost – in a single phrase, which is incarnated in a physical form we take into our mouth. In the words of distribution – “the body of Christ, given for you” – this

proclamation is then addressed to each of us personally as individuals in community. Not only the bread and wine, but the words themselves in all their intimacy are vehicles of Christ's real presence.

By the same token, the proclamation of the word is never just words, but is properly sacramental. Of course, we often treat it as just words: so many lines of the lectionary to get through, a certain idea or two to be explained in the sermon, keeping the word at a safe, notional distance. But at our best we realize that there is more to the proclamation of the word. When we finish a reading with "the Word of the Lord", it is more than an empty formula; it should contain at least a hint of the power which the prophets invoked, the expectation that God is speaking to us in the here and now. "Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church" expresses the hope and trust that these ancient words can become living words, addressing us directly in our context. When the words become proclamation, they are a means of making God present, actually and palpably present to us in the specificity of our gathered assembly. As a vehicle of Christ's real presence, the proclaimed word is sacramental.

If something like this is true of the relationship between word and sacrament, what consequences does that have for us now in a time of eucharistic hunger? Yes, there is a real loss: it is precisely the cooperation of word and sacrament that gives our regular pattern of worship its fullness and depth, and we would not want anything to compromise the normativity of this pattern. And yet, if word and sacrament are so closely bound up, both of them sacramental expressions of the one Word Jesus Christ, something like a doctrine of concomitance might pertain for either the service of the word or the eucharist alone. Just as we maintain that the full benefits of the sacrament are conveyed if one receives only the bread or wine (while at the same time upholding communion in both kinds as the normative full expression of the eucharist), the same might be said by analogy of the liturgical practice of word and sacrament. A eucharist should normally never be celebrated without any Scripture read or sermon proclaimed; but if exceptional circumstances make it necessary, we can rest confident that the word is truly proclaimed in the sacrament alone. And if, as in our present circumstances, we are forced to do without the eucharist, we can be confident that a service of the Word alone will not be lacking God's full, gracious presence. The reception of eucharist may be a personal preference, and it certainly belongs to the *plene esse* of our liturgical life, but it is not – at least in the short term – essential to encounter God.

In this light, the temporary loss of the eucharist is an opportunity to explore and experience the sacramentality of the Word. In our normal pattern of worship, we can rely on the eucharist as the main vehicle of

sacramentality, of a believed and experienced sense of God's real and immediate presence. This may sometimes cause us to neglect the aspect of sacramentality in the proclamation of the word: we may treat the liturgy of the Word as a series of lessons to be attended to, or at worst as a kind of inferior warm-up act before the main event brings God personally onto the stage. Now, without the eucharist, we find ourselves – at least in our parish – suddenly paying more attention to the way in which we can experience the living presence of God in the service of the word.

What do we mean by the “sacramentality” of the word, given that the proclamation of the word is counted neither among the traditional seven sacraments of the Catholic tradition, nor among the two dominical sacraments of the Articles? In other words, in what ways can the sacraments (and specifically the word’s companion sacrament, the eucharist) offer an analogy that sharpens our awareness of how God uses the word in our liturgies?

First of all, a sacrament is a vehicle of God’s heightened presence with us. The real presence of the eucharist constitutes a naming, an intentionality, a “thickening” of Christ’s presence that transcends his (surely also “real”) presence when two or three are gathered, or indeed with us always to the end of time. This specific presence calls forth in us an increased attention, a reverence stemming from the expectation that Christ comes to meet us. This attitude is one, I believe, that we have increasingly learned to bring to the proclamation of the word in recent decades: we are learning to treat proclamation (both the lections and the sermon) less as “lessons” to be learned, and more as encounters with the living God.

A sacrament is characterized by its physicality. More than simply an “outward and visible sign”, this is an echo of the incarnation, an entering of God into the material world. It is presumably this aspect that hinders us from thinking about the word in sacramental terms, as we see or touch no material object. But the word has its own physical presence, when used liturgically: it is a spoken word, with its own shape and rhythm and assonance, above and beyond its meaning. Like any sacrament, we receive it sensually, in this case through the ear. This physicality of the word, its poetic dimension, is one we too often neglect in worship, perhaps out of a justified reluctance to imbue poetic effect with religious significance. But it is not the quality of the wine that makes the eucharist, but the fact that it has taste, that it signifies God as an object we consume. So too it is not the poetic sublimity of the Scriptural translation or the preacher’s rhetoric, but the fact that these words have weight as sounds, that they come to us not just as notions but physically as words addressed to our ears, with a texture of their own.

This brings us to a third aspect of sacrament: it is not just an abstract system of meaning, but one that addresses us personally and intimately. We have considered how the words of institution and distribution bring the eucharist home to us; this personal aspect is also seen in baptism, or really in any of the other of the five commonly called sacraments. Similarly, the word is not just the communication of ideas, but in its fullest form crystalizes into proclamation, words of comfort, assurance, or challenge addressed to the individual soul. Our fear of modern individualism should not blind us to the personal, intimate nature of this proclamation: it must be heard and answered by each particular person.

Finally, a sacrament changes us even as it addresses us at a most intimate level. Through the encounter with the living Christ – in the proclamation of the word as in the eucharist – we are changed into Christ's image, conformed more fully to the pattern of perfect humanity. We are incorporated into the body of Christ, the community of the church – not as a separate step, as though community were a value independent of Christ, but as we are each of us together united with Christ.

None of this should be understood as an argument against the custom of weekly eucharist as the normal pattern for the main gathering of the Christian community. The power of this pattern stems from the duality of word and sacrament, and we grasp the depth and richness of this duality most fully when we understand the word as sacramental, and the eucharist as proclamation. But that very fullness of understanding should encourage us, in a time when the eucharist is denied to us, with the knowledge that all the grace and redemption we look for in the sacrament is present also in the word alone, that the word alone is a sufficient means of God's presence with us, until the fullness of our liturgy is restored.

Appendix: one parish's experience

Under current circumstances every parish and every priest has been forced to innovate, to compromise our ideals of worship in favour of what is possible; and from the decisions taken, there have been different opportunities for learning for each parish and priest. Briefly, a sketch of the liturgical decisions we have made in our parish as we have moved our worship online. This is by no means to suggest that there is one right way of doing online worship. These are simply the decisions we have made (often by chance or instinct, as much as by conscious theological reflection). Their relevance lies in the lessons they are teaching us, over the months we have had to experience, reflect on, and further innovate our worship.

A primary decision (made in part because of our technological limitations, but with a nod to the wisdom of Marshall McLuhan) was to offer online worship without a video feed, as an audio track accompanying a written order of service. This has brought with it a greater sense of intimacy (in the sense that radio is a more intimate medium than television); our voices come directly into people's homes without the distancing effect of the gaze. And it has brought a wonderful concentration on the word as spoken word, experienced through the directness of the human voice.

We also made the decision to offer a prerecorded service, rather than a live broadcast event. Again, this involves a sacrifice of the experience of community that people might have by tuning in together and interacting. Possibly we feared that that kind of community might feel like a pale imitation of the real thing. But there was also a conscious decision, made precisely in light of the fact that our parish places such a very strong emphasis on community as a value: the decision to try something else, to shift the focus towards a greater experience of "interiority", of prayerfulness. We reframed community as a community believed but not seen, the cloud of witnesses that gather around us when we pray the same service separately in our homes. We encouraged people to pray the liturgy at a set time, while making it clear that anytime was fine); we offered a virtual coffee hour by Zoom following our set time. In the worship itself, however, we consciously set aside the social gathering as a possible distraction to concentrate more directly on the encounter with the Word.

In terms of the liturgy used, we settled on the shape of a Service of the Word rather than Morning Prayer: a pattern of gathering, Scriptures, reflection, intercessions, and sending. At the same time, the very different context of recorded audio in contrast to a physically gathered community suggested an experimental latitude in which certain elements were added or changed.

We slowed and quieted the service down. Without the busyness of the Sunday gathering, through the medium of a quiet voice, we have tried to set a more reflective pace. We have left silences, and given permission to pause the audio for reflection and prayer.

We reduced the number of lections. As strong as our commitment to the Revised Common Lectionary is, we have found reading two lections with a psalm instead of three makes a huge difference in being able to give each lection the attention that is its due. We have generally kept the gospel, and read either Old Testament or Epistle as a first reading, often using the complementary track for the Old Testament and Psalm.

After each of the readings, we offer a short reflection: a couple of sentences of necessary context, but moving towards posing questions for reflection. This is an opportunity to practise and model Biblical reflection and lectio divina with the whole congregation (not just the small group which normally gathers for Bible Study). These have been anxious weeks, between the pandemic, the economic fallout, the Nova Scotia shooting, the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, and the ongoing climate crisis. Rather than simply talking at people in the sermon, these questions invite them to make the connections themselves, to let the Scriptures speak to their context. At first this was offered in place of the sermon, or together with a short homily; but we have retained it even when we offer a full sermon.

We have experimented with alternative translations of the Biblical text. In particular, we have tried two recent translations: Robert Alter's Hebrew Bible, with its particular attention to the literary qualities of the Hebrew, and David Bentley Hart's New Testament, which attempts to retain the strangeness, even awkwardness, of the original. These versions, with their unexpected, jarring turns of phrase, invite us to listen even more deeply to the word as something strange, untamed, beyond our control. While they may not be suitable for regular liturgical use (among other considerations, neither uses gender-inclusive language), they have proved effective for occasional use.

We have included poetry in the service, not every week but more often than normal: Malcolm Guite, Mary Oliver, Thomas Merton, Gerald Manley Hopkins, and others. We have used poetic liturgy: Jan Richardson's Blessings, the alternate collects, and opening responses we have found or written ourselves. And we have inserted meditative texts – Stephen Charleston, Richard Rohr, and others, to guide our reflection. The effect of all this is to slow us down, help us to pay attention to words in their subtle precision of meaning and the physicality of rhythm and assonance. These too cultivate in us the attention to God's presence, these too can verge on the sacramental.

Finally, we have become much more eclectic in our music. We are blessed with gifted musicians in the parish and have recorded some of their contributions. But we have come to rely mostly on YouTube videos for service music. This gives us an immense variety of musical experiences: traditional hymns from King's College Cambridge, contemporary hymns, choral pieces in all styles, Bach arias, jazz variations. With the loss of the gathered community, there has been a shift in the role of music: it is less about singing along (though participants are certainly encouraged to), and more about a meditative listening experience. Texts are printed when they are not included in the video,

allowing the poetic imagination of the hymn texts to come more into focus. Once again, the music leads to a deeper encounter with the word as a vehicle to experience the presence of God.

Which of these adaptations will continue to influence our practice when we have returned to our regular eucharistic gatherings, and which are simply temporary innovations, remains to be seen. In any case, this unusual time has helped us to deepen the conviction that the liturgy of the word is a powerful sacrament of God's presence, one we do not always use to its full potential.

An understanding of the Eucharist

ALEXA WALLACE

How do you receive the Eucharist? Now, I'm not asking about the physical mechanics of this – do you stand or kneel? a loaf of bread or individual wafers? red wine or white? – but more concerning how (if?) you believe you are “fed with Christ’s body and blood” through the Eucharistic meal. Is that nourishment through the physical elements? Or is it a gift that must be understood spiritually? This isn’t a new question – it has been discussed since nearly the dawn of Christianity. And, while these distinctions may seem pedantic, they have unwittingly become a key concern during the COVID-19 pandemic. When churches mandated suspension of the common cup and, in many cases, public worship, the understandings we hold of how we receive the Eucharist determines much of our way forward.

When I suggest that this question goes back millennia, and has carried forth over the course of time, I’m not exaggerating. Early traces of this are rooted in Augustine and Aquinas. Both concluded, albeit by varying methods, that though communion is ideally received by both the physical and spiritual reception, the core of the sacrament is in the latter. For Augustine, all communion is foremost spiritual communion, the elements merely aid in our reception.¹ For Aquinas, the emphasis is on the desire to receive the sacrament, not the act of communing itself.²

Going forward, however, I will limit the discussion to the Anglican context. I will focus on exploring the Book of Common Prayer and a pair of Anglican priests-theologians.

Cranmer indirectly makes use of the concept of spiritual communion in the rubric at the end of the Ministry to the Sick in the first Book of Common Prayer. This text makes provision for those who are unable to receive

¹ See “Tractates on the Gospel of John (Augustine) - Tractate 26 (Jn 6:41-59),” *New Advent* (Kevin Knight), accessed April 21, 2020.

² See “Summa Theologiae: The Use or Receiving of This Sacrament in General (Tertia Pars, Q. 80),” *New Advent* (Kevin Knight, 2017) Article I.

the Eucharistic elements and is preserved, identically except for the modernization of spellings, in the most recent Canadian Book of Common Prayer. There it reads:

“But if a man, either by reason of extremity of sickness, or for want of warning in due time to the Curate, or by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood: he shall be instructed that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and stedfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed his Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefor; he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul’s health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth.”³

While this was originally intended for those precluded from receiving by reason of illness, the Church with time has expanded its understanding. In 1916 the Bishop of Melanesia approved a rite for missionaries that allowed for spiritual communion when any of the following conditions were met:

1. In extreme sickness and consequent inability to communicate.
2. That a priest cannot be obtained.
3. The absence of any fellow-communicants and consequent inability to fulfil other Prayer Book rubrics.
4. Any other just cause.⁴

Even with this allowance still limited, it is among the minor evidence we have of this shift in understanding. That at least one province in the Anglican Communion created and authorized a rite that explicitly named this practice as spiritual communion and broadened its scope beyond solely the Ministry to the Sick.

Cranmer, Aquinas, and Augustine all made allowances for spiritual communion, but always with the understanding that there would be a priest physically present. One of the critical changes with the rite from Melanesia is the allowance that it occurs in the absence of a priest. As part of understanding this leap, and as we approach spiritual communion for our own concerns, we need to look back to the work of two modern Anglican priests.

F.D. Maurice and A.G. Herbert, both offered a change in perspective, taking the sacramentality of the church and extending it out into the world. In the nineteenth-century, Maurice suggests that the physical and divine

³ The Book of Common Prayer 1962 Canada (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 2006), 584.

⁴ “A Form of Spiritual Communion, by Cecil John Wood (1916),” *Project Canterbury*, accessed April 21, 2020.

exist without divide. This in turn allowed him the notion that God is in the material world and the material elements hold divinity. That there should be no separation between the two. Herbert continued along this vein in the twentieth century. For Herbert, the role of sacraments was to empower Christians to take their ministry out into the world, and to recognize that the entire world belongs to Christ.⁵

This might seem like a small, or a major, change depending on your sense of spirituality, but it represents a significant shift towards an allowance for dispersed spiritual communion. If all the world – not just our churches, but our homes, parks and communities – is sacred, why can't we experience our sacraments in our varied places?

Aquinas, Augustine, and Cranmer all posed possibilities for spiritual communion. Maurice and Herbert tendered the idea that all creation is sacred, and a place for the sacred. The Province of Melanesia brought these two concepts together to offer spiritual nourishment to their missionaries. This combination advances that spiritual communion is possible within our Anglican Church. But our understanding of our digital world and of our sense of digital community must still be pondered, and must be considered individually. Leaving the question of “should we” far from answered.

⁵ See James F White, “Sacramentality,” in *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 13-30.

To make bread, first grow the wheat

IAIN LUKE

I did not expect, as 2020 began, that I would spend much of the year participating in a crash course in ecclesiology, but that is how it turned out. My parish and diocese, the Anglican Church of Canada, and many other groups of Christians around the world, confronted a series of questions about our self-understanding, triggered by the disruptions to public life. What is church? What is it for? How do we do church? What counts as doing church well or badly, or right or wrong? And who gets to say?

The questions arose as the central identifying act of the church – Sunday gathering for worship – was dislodged from its place, with immediate and near-universal effect. As a result, questions about the church's meaning and identity took on three qualities they have not typically had before: the questions were *urgent*, they were being asked *at the front line*, and they could only be answered *experimentally*.

It is the second of those qualities that I want to make the focus of this reflection, though the others will drift back in from time to time. I have been struck by the way the pandemic engineered almost a polarity reversal in the organization of our church. Where we relied so often, in the past, on structures and hierarchies for our identity, collecting ourselves into diocesan, provincial and national families, the question of how to be a worshipping church during a pandemic has demanded a much more decentralized, local, and context-specific response.

When we ask all the identity questions at the front line, the first thing we notice is that different and unexpected people are doing the asking. Reinventing ourselves, without access to Sunday worship gatherings, is not a specialist or academic question, nor is it a question which can be answered by bishops or clergy acting alone. Every Anglican, indeed every Christian, has had to ask themselves, "How am I going to participate in my community of faith, my church, in these very different circumstances?" As the church

emerges from the pandemic shutdown, its new contours are described by the sum of the answers to that question, which each member has contributed through their reflections, choices, and actions.

It has been fascinating to watch the range of response from members of the church. Individuals made choices about attending worship virtually, in person (once a limited return was possible), or not at all. We did so as technology multiplied the possibilities rapidly, creating new questions: do I attend my parish's Zoom worship, or watch the bishop's livestream, or tune into a YouTube recording of a service in a completely different part of the world? Church members also took responsibility for shared decision-making about keeping local churches closed, finding alternatives which fit their congregational culture, determining when re-opening is safe, ensuring appropriate protective measures are in place, and maintaining a sense of community with people whose access to digital or in-person services is limited.

Clergy participate in these local processes of decision-making in their own ways: for example, by contributing information about diocesan or civic guidelines and restrictions, or by encouraging theological and missional reflection on the choices local communities are facing. As clergy do that work, though, we are also turning to one another. I have witnessed a substantial uptick in clergy interaction, through one-to-one contact, formal and informal diocesan networks, pre-existing online communities, and brand new conversations initiated across diocesan, national and denominational boundaries. This kind of networking hints at a new way of reconstituting the 'hierarchy' of the church, from the ground up.

Bishops, and others with ministries of oversight, exercise their role in this process too, though I wonder if they have not been caught between two stools. One impulse was to support and facilitate the creativity and innovation manifesting at the local level, to lead by example, and to identify parishes and congregations that need extra help or encouragement. But the practice of episcopacy also contains a disciplinary thread: the responsibility to say what is *not* supposed to happen, and to ensure that boundaries are observed.

This responsibility sits uneasily with the urgency and experimentality evoked by the pandemic, and with the unpredictability of the events it set in motion. Leaders properly attempt to anticipate the longer-term consequences of their decisions, whether those decisions are to forbid or to encourage specific actions. In reaction to COVID-19, though, anticipation was especially difficult, as so many of the calculations involved had to be made without modern precedent, with incomplete information, or with assumptions about how other actors (such as civil authorities) would behave.

More importantly, though, the exercise of oversight during the pandemic simply emphasizes how the centre of attention in church life shifted towards the local. Church leaders, acting in a particular diocese or in concert with others, were primarily concerned to regulate acts of worship, to encourage parishes to be attentive to their unique context, and to promote communication between faith communities about how they were coping and/or innovating.

This decentralized picture of the church, in its response to the crisis, is shaped in significant ways by Canadian geography and governance. Other countries, such as England or New Zealand, with more unitary national and church structures, had more of a single shared experience. In Canada, however, we face the reality of different public health regulations across the provinces and territories, as well as risks of contagion which vary dramatically, based on population density, isolation, age demographics, prevalence of poverty, and other factors.

These differences appear not just between jurisdictions, but right down to the most granular level. Management of a public health crisis relies on the cooperation of citizens as much as on law-making, so it has to take into account the distinctiveness of local communities as well as their connectedness with one another. Perhaps there is another hint here of a bottom-up ecclesiology: a model of the church which asks first what is happening in a local context, and then how it relates to the bigger picture.

This approach has indeed played out in our church, where the key questions for navigating the crisis have been the questions asked and addressed in specific local settings. For example, the capacity of church members to stay in touch with each other, during a social shutdown, could only be determined locally, with reference to people's pastoral needs, access to telecommunications, and so forth. Even where it seemed like centralized action might make sense, such as in the production of web-based worship resources, there was an unexpected bias towards the local. Many parishes discovered they were more capable than they realized, when it came to Zoom or Facebook services and Bible studies; and there has been a widely observed phenomenon of people searching out familiar faces and places for online worship, even when global options are available.

What can be said about worship or pastoral care also applies to mission and outreach. Social disruption both focuses and narrows the work of discerning what the church is in the world for, and the initial restrictions on travel and activity meant that most churches gave their attention primarily to their immediate environment. That could mean contacting the lonely and isolated, offering emergency supplies, supporting people integrating work with childcare at home, or simply celebrating the newfound (if forced) sense of identity and camaraderie within neighbourhoods.

In all these ways, the life of the church, in worship and mission, carried on in communities and settings across Canada, but with one notable exception: eucharistic worship was severely curtailed, and in many regions of the church largely eliminated for a period of months. The suspension or restriction of the celebration of Holy Communion was a rapid episcopal response to the initial declaration of the pandemic in March. This need not be seen as the imposition of a regime “from on high”, as church members were already voting with their feet, not risking their health to attend worship, or declining to receive the wine and eventually the bread as well. The closure of the churches ratified and completed a process that was already going on, and gave a public signal of solidarity with the shutdown in wider public life.

What made sense as an immediate response to a public health emergency, though, requires further scrutiny as more and more time elapses. That isn’t just because it’s harder to go without Communion for six months than it is for a few weeks. Rather, those very questions about what makes us church, which are being asked in new ways as the result of the pandemic, have something to say about the place of the Eucharist. The meaning of the sacrament is sometimes described in very abstract or conceptual terms, but as a practice, it highlights the local, the specific, the contextual nature of what it is to be the church. Communion is an event which happens in a particular place and time, with particular people, and in some kind of relationship to all the other events going on around it.

That is not to say that there is nothing bigger involved when a group of Christians celebrates the Eucharist. We can give various theological accounts of what that something bigger might be: we are participating in the universal action of the Church, or in the heavenly banquet, or in Christ’s “one oblation of himself once offered”. Still, there is only one way to put flesh on to any of those accounts, and that is for a group of Christians to take bread and wine, give thanks, and share. Because that practice is something we hold in common with the church through time and space, we are accountable for what we do and for how we do it, but it is ours to do.

There are examples, not very far away from us, of faith communities who have gone without Communion for a time. In northern and western Canada, rural and remote communities, both indigenous and settler, remember periods of history when Communion was infrequently celebrated. The church was still there, in the people who prayed, cared, lived the gospel, and passed it on. I have not found that people who lived through that history cared less about the sacrament. Instead, they were fully occupied with being the church that the Eucharist is the sacrament of.

Over time, many of these local churches adopted more regular Eucharistic celebration. But this is not simply a matter of “raising up clergy” in order to satisfy the church’s order. That is just one element of figuring out how to make sense of the sacrament in a specific context, which is a task clergy and laity need to work on together and in partnership. The question of “how we do communion” is not, in the end, any different from the question of “how we do church”, as our worship reflects who we are, how we live our faith, and where we encounter the risen Jesus, at all other times of the week as well.

I wonder if this pattern has something to offer the church as a whole, as we work through the implications of this pandemic for our sacramental life. The necessary suspension of public worship has already compelled us to think much more clearly, in all our many settings, about what it means to be the church. But our longing to reunite, around the offering of bread and wine, has to be more than just an ill-defined yearning. It can be a desire to discover afresh what it means to be a sacramental people in *this* context, and in *that* one.

Urgency and experiment are inherent qualities of that process of discovery, but the process also needs to be accountable to and in conversation with the vast range of local communities that make up our church. Bishops and other leaders will have a role in enabling that kind of conversation to happen. At its heart, though, our responsibility to one another is to relearn how to be eucharistic people, in all our particular places and spaces.

On Anglican sacramental theology

CHRIS BRITTAINE

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have done some writing on the impact it has had on Anglican worship, particularly on the practice of the Eucharist. I offer you these two links from the *Anglican Journal* as indications of what I think are crucial aspects of Anglican sacramental theology and the Anglican approach to liturgy:

- “The Eucharist and coming out of lockdown: A tract for these COVID-19 times” (14 May 2020)
www.anglicanjournal.com/the-eucharist-and-coming-out-of-lockdown-a-tract-for-these-covid-19-times/
- “On virtual communion: A tract for these COVID-19 Times (Part II)” (25 May 2020)
www.anglicanjournal.com/on-virtual-communion-a-tract-for-these-covid-19-times-ii/

Much of what I would emphasise to the committee is contained in these two blogs. Rather than repeat the content there, below I offer one additional general remark about Anglican sacramental theology and liturgy and share two observations about reactions I have received to the blogs above.

Eucharist and liturgy as a gift, rather than performance, right, or entertainment

In *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Gregory Dix describes the human person who is shaped by God through the Eucharist (“*homo eucharisticus*”) as being someone who is defined by communion (with God) rather than by consumption (of material goods, objects of desire, etc.). In other words, the worshipping Christian is someone attentive to and receptive of the gift of God’s presence and grace. This is a standard and much celebrated

description of the core understanding that Anglicans have brought to Christian worship and the celebration of the Eucharist. These acts are done in thanksgiving for the gifts of grace and God's work among God's people. This is why the church undertakes worship, and this recognition is what gives shape to how Christians worship. This core understanding of the source and purpose of worship needs to be constantly emphasised to remind Anglicans of the source and purpose of their liturgies, and to guide decision-making surrounding the practice worship. Forms of worship that diminish this core understanding, or deviate from it, should be avoided.

In the wake of COVID-19, while many Anglicans have operated out of this recognition, I have observed some deviate rather far from it. A few clergy have said in my presence, "I must conduct the Eucharist because my people demand it," as if the Eucharist is a right, rather than a sacred rite to be conducted with reverence and responsible discernment. It is not something to be performed in unsafe circumstances – as Christians throughout the history of the church have emphasized.

Moreover, some clergy appear to be unsure of their purpose and role if they are unable to preside at the Eucharist – as if their ministry and mission is reduced to formal performances rather than the practice and example of Jesus. Indeed, a number of clergy from various dioceses across Canada contacted me to share the ways in which they were continuing to practice the Eucharist in the midst of the lockdown. They seemed motivated more by a pride over the complicated ways they had devised to offer the Eucharist to a few people rather than by the meaning and intention of the sacrament. A slogan in the liturgical movement is the fact that "symbols speak." The media theorist Marshall McLuhan makes essentially the same point when he wrote "the medium is the message." Too may clergy ignore the fact that *how* they practice the sacraments shapes what the sacraments communicate to those participating in them. Modelling the Eucharist, for example, on a drive-through coffee shop renders its meaning to the participant as something individual and private and sustaining, rather than corporate, missional, and transforming.

Both examples suggest that some clergy and lay people would benefit from better theological education on sacramental theology, and on the meaning and purpose of the Eucharist in particular.

Confusions over Eucharistic sacrifice

One reaction to my blogs by clergy who disagreed with me accused my description of the Eucharist as reducing it to "Table Fellowship," while asserting that the Eucharist is not just a meal, but also a sacrifice. From this claim, they insisted that it must be celebrated, regardless of the public health situation. Although the liturgical movement within Anglicanism has emphasised that

the Eucharist is the gathering of the community of the Body of Christ, this is certainly not to the exclusion of other aspects of Holy Communion, including participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, and in his sacrifice on the cross. Indeed, the *BEM* document highlights five different elements of the Eucharist, only one of them being table fellowship. Yet the Christian tradition, and Anglicans in particular (with its emphasis on *Common* prayer), has emphasised that these different aspects of the sacramental nature of the Eucharist are most clearly understood, and thus appropriately practiced, within the context of the gathering of the full congregation together in one place. In other words, it is only during the gathering of the community of faith around God's altar, that one comes to truly understand the nature of the Eucharist as a "sacrifice." Indeed, the clearest evidence of misunderstanding by some Anglicans was their refusal to sacrifice their own agendas and desires to continue Holy Communion in the midst of the *COVID-19 lockdown*.

What a few of my interlocutors appeared to imply is that when the priest presides at the Eucharist, s/he performs a key function of uniting the sacred and the material, the divine and the creaturely, thus maintaining an essential sacrificial act that unites God and the world. There are numerous problems with this understanding. First, it effectively turns the priest into the agent of the Eucharist, rather than someone who directs the attention of God's people to the activity of God and the agency of the Holy Spirit. Second, it implies that God the Creator and God the Holy Spirit aren't always already present in God's Creation. Third, it implies that Christ's sacrifice on the cross is somehow repeated and enabled through the performance of the Eucharist, as if the victory of Christ on the cross over the death was not full and complete. The Reformation reacted against such a view, and Roman Catholic teaching today also rejects this position. This suggests that greater teaching in the Church is required on the concept of the Eucharist as "sacrifice". The sacrifice being referred to during Holy Communion is that of Christ, once offered, to the world. The secondary theme is our own self-offering back to Christ in thanksgiving and gratitude of God's self-offering to us through the incarnation of Christ.

The role of the clergy

When I engaged in a Zoom meeting with a group of clergy during the COVID-19 lockdown who were resisting some of the decisions made by their bishops, they lamented that it appeared their bishops were telling them to simply go on vacation, since a declared "sabbath rest" from the Eucharist (an expression I think problematic and would not encourage) implied there was nothing for them to do. I was frankly shocked by this attitude. As central as the Eucharist is for Anglican piety and worship, Anglican tradition teaches that other forms of worship are also avenues to

experience and engage with God's presence and life-giving Spirit. That these clergy were so prepared to diminish the importance of the offices, bible study, and pastoral care astonished me. They appeared to diminish the essential need to respond to the lockdown with increased pastoral care activities (such as phone calls to shut ins, video reflections on scripture, etc.), which suggests that increased attention and study of the theology of ministry and the nature of the vocation of the priesthood is required in the life of the Church.

The pandemic and worship notes

WILLIAM CLIFF

Timeline

- Jan 30: The Diocese of Brandon began its first pandemic response with a letter to clergy and wardens. This communication reminded people of hygiene measures that were instituted under the SARS pandemic, and reminded the church that intinction was no longer permitted. There was some resistance to people for whom intinction was their preferred method of receiving communion, but the overall response was positive.
- Feb 25: Pastoral letter for Lent, referencing COVID-19 and pandemic fear.
- Mar 12: First case of COVID-19 in Manitoba. Non-contact version of “the Peace” and withdrawal of the Common Cup.
- Mar 15: Suspension of public worship until further notice effective Monday March 16th.
- Mar 16: Statement of the Bishops of the Province of Rupert’s Land
- Mar 17: Cancellation of the Northern Confirmation Tour (May 7-18)
- Mar 19: Bishop’s video message to the Diocese
- Mar 22: First Sunday Eucharist broadcast (via YouTube)
- Mar 23: Video of Prayers before Bed
- Mar 24: Another statement: encouragement and announcement of YouTube and internet resources as well as material for online Easter Vigil and materials in Cree.
- Mar 30: At home Easter Vigil promoted again
- Apr 2: Reflection on COVID-19 and Palliative care published online
- Apr 7: Easter Letter
- Apr 20: Extension of the suspension of public worship and encouragement.

- May 1 : Summer camp suspended
- May 4 : Province opens medical, retail and some recreation.
Gatherings still limited.
- May 14 : First moves toward reopening—first statement about how we might accomplish it—parishes told to plan
- May 20 : Province raises public gather number to 25 including worship
- May 22 : Statement and protocols issued for reopening on May 31
- May 31 : About half of diocesan churches reopen for modified worship.

From the moment that public worship was suspended, I began to celebrate the Eucharist once a week from the Lady Chapel at the Cathedral, and post it to YouTube, along with published prayers for Spiritual Communion. This paper's purpose is to detail the decision making process, theology, context and resources the Diocese of Brandon used in this circumstance. There has been a great deal of debate and much writing on the matter of "remote" or "virtual" or "digital" communion. None of these things was the purpose of continuing the liturgy online when public worship was suspended.

Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, some definitions follow.

Definitions

In the cultural differences between Dioceses in Canada, one glaring difference stands out. The use of the words "Holy Communion" and "Holy Eucharist" as well as simple "communion" and "eucharist". For clarity in parts of the church, "Holy Communion" is a part of a larger service of Holy Eucharist. It is the act of receiving Communion. Holy Eucharist is the full liturgy by which the church makes possible the act of holy communion. Therefore lay persons may be called upon to lead services of "The Public Distribution of Holy Communion" which happens in isolated communities.

Virtual Communion: receiving bread and wine at home as part of a celebration that has happened on a video feed of some kind.

Digital Eucharist: celebration of the Holy Eucharist, recorded or live, which is then viewed remotely

Remote Consecration: the idea that the priest, by directing their intention in the celebration of the Eucharist being recorded for viewing later, or transmitted live, can effect the consecration of the elements of the Holy Eucharist remotely, even when they are not present to the celebrant. The idea being that one's own bread and wine would be set in front of the television or computer screen and the priest could "consecrate" that bread and wine for consumption digitally.

Context

The Diocese of Brandon encompasses roughly half of the civil province on Manitoba, from north to south on the west side of the lakes, with a corridor of parishes to Thompson and Churchill. The parishes are half indigenous and half settler. The north is the Boreal forest and its culture and industry with its reserves. The south is predominantly rural and agrarian. At no time since 1924 has the Diocese of Brandon had enough clergy to accomplish its mission. Our parishes are served by a mix of clergy and lay leaders. The Lay Readers of the Diocese are an integral part of the ministry of the church, and serve in genuine hardship and isolation to teach, preach and lead services of the word and in some cases, the public distribution of holy communion in parishes that have no clergy.

Consecrated elements are supplied to these parishes by a rotation of clergy who visit to celebrate the Eucharist about every 4 to 8 weeks (weather and other circumstances permitting).

Since the parish communion movement took hold in the Anglican Communion, and was transmitted to Canada through a long process of reception (in our particular case by generations of English clergy who came to Canada and served in the assisted Dioceses), there has been an extension of the weekly Sunday communion into many of our churches, so much so that it is considered the norm.

But the celebration of the Eucharist and the reception of communion at every liturgy is not necessarily the norm across the church or even the whole diocese. In certain portions of the church, eucharistic piety and discipline is at odds with assumptions that:

- There will be a priest at every service,
- every service will be a celebration of the Eucharist, and
- that everyone will be assumed to receive communion at that service.

In a diverse diocese like Brandon, the discipline of who can or will receive holy communion is not universal. Parishes which invite children at younger ages through a first communion program live a different reality than those parishes whose tradition waits until the day of confirmation to receive communion for the first time. Therefore in some churches, nearly everyone present receiving communion weekly, and in others a regular smaller group who receive communion and others who wait, or have not decided to come forward.

Add to this the positive development of ecumenical relationships, and anglicans have gone so far as to welcome other christians who are

communicant in their own churches, to receive communion within the Anglican church when they visit.

Having made those steps, further pressure to expand the invitation to communion to those who are unbaptized as well has developed. This is not the subject of this paper, but is mentioned in passing as a pattern that has developed: if you are present, your full, conscious participation in the liturgy *requires* that you receive communion, and to fail to do so is to make you an outlier.

Anecdotally this is born out by the number of people who make a conscientious choice not to receive communion at a liturgy but are badgered by others, sidespersons and clergy to come to communion. We must be vigilant so that the idea of inclusion does not morph into a sense of compulsion.

This idea is less prevalent in the rural and northern parishes as well as I have observed in Indigenous parishes and communities. Depending on local tradition, Holy Communion is reserved for those who have been confirmed, and at a liturgy in some cases only about half those present would present themselves at the rail to receive Holy Communion. In cases where the Eucharist is celebrated sparsely due to a lack of clergy, there are numerous Morning and Evening Prayer services, but the concept of Spiritual Communion, the use of prayers and devotions when unable to receive the physical consecrated elements, is not a foreign concept to Anglicans in the Diocese of Brandon.

Because of our context and geography, it is a model of devotion that is still alive and still understood.

The Diocese of London, in the Church of England reminded the church in a recent communication:

There is a benefit to be had for those who are ‘present’ at a celebration of Holy Communion, yet unable physically to partake of the elements. Because the sacrament is “given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner” (Article 28), even if a person cannot physically receive, their faith and love can still be strengthened by seeing, even if not tasting or feeling the gifts of bread and wine that signify the body and blood of Christ. As an example, the rubrics at the end of the order for the Visitation of the Sick in the 1662 Prayer Book envisage a situation in which someone might be in such grave or advanced sickness that they are unable to receive the Sacrament at a bed-side celebration of the Holy Communion. In such circumstances (and for a number of other causes), the sick person may, by associating him or herself with the

benefits of the Sacrament which is not being physically received, nevertheless receive the gifts and graces which it brings.¹

This is an important point to raise due to a particular ministry within the Diocese of Brandon.

For years now, for several parishes in the south the local cable company records Sunday services of our churches for broadcast to shut-ins on the local access cable channel. That cable channel is shared through half the Diocese, and in certain regions of the north. This theology of Spiritual Communion has underpinned this ministry for years. It is watched regularly as it is often commented on to me through the week. "Thank you for your sermon on Sunday" is a regular greeting from people I know who could not have been with me as I visit parishes that recorded the service. It often startles me, as I will hear this from people who live hundreds of kilometers away from one another. In this particular pandemic time, the local access channel has begun showing the bishop's celebration from Brandon until the regular services are restored.

The continuance of the celebration of a Eucharist with recorded sermon is a matter of continuity for those who are isolated or not able-bodied. It should not be withdrawn from them. To put it another way, if watching a Eucharist Service without receiving communion is a bad practice (even though it is years old here), should we stop this ministry when the able-bodied are permitted to return to church and what does that decision say about the shut in and infirm?

A note on extraordinary vs. ordinary circumstance

It is a general principle that one draws best practice from ordinary circumstance. Deviations from best practice are the result of extraordinary circumstance. In law, a "Force Majeure" is defined as an external situation beyond control or foresight which affects the ability of an organization to function normally. This intervention, be it storm, war, pandemic can modify practice for a time, until things return to ordinary practice. The withdrawal of the common cup, or the introduction of a "non-contact" Peace are two simple examples. But the caution is this: the church normally has not formed ordinary best practices from extraordinary circumstances.

Much of the debate online and speculation for the future of the church is centered around how this will change the church or change how we worship. My firm belief remains that we must not fashion best practices

¹ www.london.anglican.org/articles/the-eucharist-in-a-time-of-physical-distancing

This note regarding the text of Article 28 and the rubrics of the Ministry to the sick are the same in the Canadian Book of Common Prayer (1962).

from extraordinary situations. We certainly can innovate *for* extraordinary circumstances, but they cannot nor should they announce the new norm. We must learn from this experience, and fit that learning into our theology and ecclesiology, not the other way round.

An ancient model

The Bishop gathering the Diocese together around a single table for teaching and sacramental feeding is among the most ancient models from our history. It goes back so far as to be representative of a time before Sees expanded and became regional land holdings as a function of empire. This is the model chosen for Brandon when restrictions began. When the suspension of public worship was announced, the decision to offer worship services online was quickly made and arranged. Daily Morning Prayer is posted every morning. Gospel Based Discipleship is also recorded and broadcast every morning. Hymn singing and readings in Cree are regularly posted for and by the communities in the north. But the Eucharist is being celebrated and a sermon for the Diocese of Brandon is supplied once a week by its bishop. Here the model is much older - though mediated by technology - that the bishop gathers to teach and pray for his diocese in the Eucharist on Sunday. Yes, this is an extraordinary circumstance because the social isolations leave us separated, but the practice of prayer and spiritual communion in our context makes this a reasoned response.

“Remote or Virtual Consecration”

I received two inquiries about remote consecration. I refused both on the following grounds:

1. The theology of the priesthood and sacraments required to make remote consecration a reality were expressly rejected by the reformers. There is an element of magical thinking that makes the priest's words a powerful incantation to consecrate bread and wine through a computer broadcast or digital recording. God doing our bidding remotely because we say so. The alternative is to contradict the formularies of the church and to imply that there is no consecration of the elements to instantiate the real presence of Christ in the sacrament, so there is no point to the discussion in the first place.
2. The prayer book makes it clear that inability to receive the sacrament in time of sickness or trouble is not a barrier to receiving the benefits and good which the sacrament may give to the soul. Even observing or being present to the service without being able

- to receive in times of trouble is a benefit to the people of God (BCP, 583-584)
3. The four fold action as Take, Bless, Break, Give - is present only in a virtual form. A divorce from the action of the whole church. People who follow rubrics slavishly will also note that consecration is impossible because the prayer book clearly directs the priest hands on the vessels that contain that which is to be consecrated.
 4. The sign of unity the Eucharist is meant to signify is obfuscated and perhaps even pointing toward that which was not meant to point toward - separateness.

Prayer and sacrament

Prayer and sacrament are two things which are intertwined in such a way that often in our day to day thinking about these things, they can almost be indistinguishable. Prayer can be done remotely, praying for those far from us and those close by. It can transcend time and space and joins with the whole communion of saints when it is engaged. Sacraments cannot be done remotely. The prayer portion of the sacramental act is always tied to an action of some kind as it incarnates the speech-act of the prayer. The essential and incarnational matter and form of the eucharist are at play here. To be glib, matter matters, and so does form. The outward and visible signs are present to us...not just to one. It is many olives which give us holy oil. Many grapes are crushed to make wine. Many grains who are gathered into one bread. That matter which is touched and prayed over by the priest who represents the many who will receive it. To put it still another way, the "gatheredness" matters too. This is why in Brandon's celebrations there is always at least one or two others (appropriately distanced) with the bishop in the celebration.²

Communion is supposed to be an act that is horizontal - with other Christians with whom I am committed to Christ's ministry of Reconciliation - and vertical to God. The act of receiving communion in the Church, or a hospital room or a nursing home or a fireside pit in a summer forest implies the presence of another person at the least as well as the guarantee of the presence of God. We therefore run the risk of doing something meant to signify togetherness and unity in a time of crisis and instead signifying separateness and

² The question is further clarified by the necessity of gathering to consecrate a bishop during the pandemic. If remote consecration of the eucharist is possible, why bother with the laying on of hands by three bishops to consecrate another bishop? If virtual consecration works for the Eucharist, why not for Holy Orders? My point here is that while I (as a bishop) prayed in concert with the other bishops during a consecration, I was not a consecrating bishop. I could pray those prayers remotely, but I was not present to the sacramental action.

lack of presence. The attempt to supply that which is lacking simply amplifies the lack that it was meant to cover up.

“Virtual” communion, “Virtual” community

Virtual as a modifier is a form which in essence means “not the thing it is meant to be”. Virtual Reality is not reality - it mediates an experience like a reality, but it does not exist in an incarnate form. It may signify reality, it may imitate and even make our senses believe it to be reality, but it is not a reality. Virtual Reality is a construct of bits and bytes mediated by electrons moving about. One might argue that we are all masses of atoms moving about, but our non-virtual reality has the bonus of having had God choose to have his only Son incarnate into this particular storm of atoms and free will.

It follows simply that “Virtual” communion is “not” communion. It has nothing to do with our feelings, though our senses are engaged - it is by definition, not the thing that it emulates. The virtual community then, while it is a helpful and sometimes valuable tool to gather and maintain contact is not a community in the sense that the Body of Christ, gathered together in its form in a particular place and time in a particular parish is a community. It can be a substitute in order to maintain mental health and connection, communication and comradery and even comfort, but its essential unity it Christ is signified by its gathering and witnessing together to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the instantiation of that reality in concrete human lives with water, oil, bread and wine and human touch. Therefore the virtual community fails as community in this sacramental sense, of contact with matter and form that is touched and distributed by the body: taken, blessed, broken, given. Particularity is a feature of how this God has dealt with the people from the beginning, and if particularity is God’s way, then God gets to be God.

Theology of the Body of Christ

Finally, St. Paul’s theology of the body makes it clear that when one suffers, all the members of the body suffer, and when one cries, all weep. It also follows that access to communion as it occurs in situations of peril is not a function of privilege, but rather a expression of the Body of Christ being the thing that it is constituted to be: one can receive so that all may be part of that miracle of Christ’s real presence in a time that we are restricted. It is actually a necessity that the Eucharist be celebrated and communion received even if only by a few as a commitment to the whole body. There may come a time when I as a bishop, because of extreme sickness and infirmity, cannot receive Christ’s body and blood in Holy Communion. *I will need you to receive him so that I might be nourished as well.*

I am connected to you in Christ in ways that will mystically feed me. The Holy Spirit will supply me what I lack because I am part of the body that is doing what the Lord has asked it to do.

The interdependence of the dinner table and the Lord's table

John Hill

The ritual of the Eucharist had its origins in the ritual of the dinner table; the Last Supper was an evening gathering at table. When the earliest followers of the risen Christ gathered, it was normally for an evening meal together, but for them it was also 'the table of the Lord' at which the Lord's death was proclaimed in anticipation of his coming in glory.¹ It was 'the breaking of bread', the banquet of the people of God.² The meal ended in the sharing of the cup³, after which there would be conversation, singing, instruction, and prayer⁴, following the common cultural pattern of banquets for groups bound together by kinship, or professional, religious, or social ties.⁵

The evolution of a free-standing eucharistic ritual outside the context of a communal meal was a complex transition over a couple of centuries. It has left us with:

- a ritual more sharply focused on thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) and the paschal mystery;
- a token meal consisting of a mere taste of bread and wine;
- a reordered sequence of the ritual actions;
- a lectionary; and
- a dependence on an ordained presider.

The benefits of this transformation are numerous:

- through many different cultures and eras in which the Church has played very different roles, the utter centrality of the paschal mystery unfailingly confronts us in our liturgy;

¹ 1 Cor 11:23-26.

² Acts 2:42.

³ 1 Cor 11:25; Lk 22:20.

⁴ Acts 20:7-12.

⁵ Andrew McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, (Baker Academic, 2014), 19-47.

- in times of both plenty and famine, we are sustained “not by bread alone” but by “the Word made flesh”;
- our systematic immersion in scripture provides the narrative context in which the death and rising of the Lord finds its true significance;
- in prayers of intercession we learn how to commit ourselves to God’s will for the world before we offer our thanksgiving and share the tokens of the new covenant; and
- the ordained presider provides a flesh and blood bond with a wider communion across space and time.

All these gifts of the Spirit serve to sustain us in the truth of the gospel.

However, this eucharistic abandonment of the dinner table has not left that table bereft of God’s grace. The dinner table is the place where the members of a household meet. It is the place of belonging, the place of physical and spiritual nourishment through sharing the fruits of the earth, the place of gratitude and celebration. It is a dedicated space for conversation, and an occasion for ritual performance guided by traditions of table-etiquette and lifelong customs. At the dinner table we honour all ‘five graces’: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. Thus, the dinner table is the preferred venue for so many important celebratory occasions. “From a mother, we were born into isolation; it is the table that begins now to lift us into Jerusalem the mother of us all.”⁶ Thus we may say that the dinner table prefigures the Eucharist, just as the holy table prefigures the Eschatological Banquet.

So what are the consequences of neglecting the relationship between dinner table and holy table? of discounting the graces that the dinner table bestows? of forgetting the very foundations of the holy table?

We are well aware of the contemporary pressures of both the economic order and the organized sports teams which have eroded the patterns of family life. ‘Dinner time’ is becoming a thing of the past in many households; a ‘table grace’ is uncommon; and the nourishment of family conversation is easily squeezed out when we are grazing at the refrigerator door. And urban life has undermined our awareness of the sources of our food and the blessings of the created order.

Much of this is concomitant with the decline of the ‘Domestic Church’ (the ‘Little Church’, as it is known in the East). Christian formation through household ritual, socialization, and story-telling has largely been replaced by ‘Christian Education’ which tends to support a private and individualistic piety, unrelated to the ritual pattern of our common life. The eucharistic character of the dinner table has largely been forgotten.

⁶ Robert Farrar Capon, *Bed and Board*, (Simon and Schuster, 1965), chapter VI.

But the shape of our eucharistic liturgies has also suffered by a centuries-long disconnect from the dinner table.⁷ So many of our places of worship were designed not as banquet halls but as theatre spaces — places not for gathering at table but for viewing a stage performance. The multifaceted joys of the banquet have been forgotten in our narrow focus on receiving communion, and this reception has become a narrowly individual and private thing. We either wait for a space at the communion rail and then kneel just long enough to receive before escaping back to the pew; or we join a cafeteria line to pick up our serving, and then retreat.⁸ At any proper banquet, leaving the table before all have eaten is considered insolent or anti-social. Yet there is little danger that anyone will confuse this eating with a banquet, since it is more like snacking than dining.

However, in the midst of a pandemic, no renewal of the ritual of the holy table is possible anyway: Christians cannot safely gather, and we find ourselves conflicted over what we should do instead. People ask, is there not some way they can share in the body and blood of Christ in their homes? spiritual communion while watching the consecration and consumption of bread and wine on screen? virtual consecration of bread and wine they themselves bring to the screen?

A better option by far would be to start with a renewal of the ritual of the dinner table. It would still not be the Eucharist⁹, but it could nevertheless be a 'Meal of Remembrance'. Imagine a family in the parish community describing how they remember Jesus at dinner every evening with bread and wine, as he told us to. Should they be warned about doing this because it isn't really the Eucharist? Or should they be encouraged to recognize the essential relationship of interdependence between the domestic church and the parish church? between the dinner table and the holy table?

Would not encouraging this kind of practice within The Domestic Church help to lay stronger foundations for the renewal of The Parish Communion, when it returns?

One of the ways to encourage such a development would be to provide a variety of forms of table grace, including some that echo (without replicating) the eucharistic prayer itself. If there were ever a time when our people might be willing to attempt something so revolutionary, this might be that time. For an example of such prayer, see the following 'Table Prayer for the Domestic Church'.

⁷ The 'Dinner Church' movement addresses the issue directly, but this proposal attempts to address the issue in a way that supports our inherited liturgical tradition.

⁸ Most of the ills described here are perpetuated by the dominating influence of our worship spaces. The rites of the BCP (1979) and the BAS (1985) do not presuppose a clericalist stage performance.

⁹ 'The Eucharist' is universally understood to be the rite recognized by the acknowledged authorities of the Church.

A Table Prayer for the Domestic Church¹⁰

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks, Creator God,
that you have made your home among us.
When we wander away and realize we are lost,
you love us still and bring us home.

[And so we sing the hymn of heaven:

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

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest!]

We thank you for sending Jesus your Son to
show us how much you love us;
he lived and died and rose for us,
and is coming in glory to reign.

We remember how he took bread,
blessed it, broke it, and shared it as
we do now.

We remember how he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, and shared it as
a sign of your enduring covenant with us.

Rejoicing in his presence here among us,
we offer ourselves to you, O God.

May your Spirit fill this feast with love
and strengthen us in your service,
until we feast with you in glory.

Amen.

Then bread may be broken and shared, and all may raise a toast to Jesus.

¹⁰ Based in part on the Brief Eucharistic Prayer of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The presence of God in all things

ANDREW O'NEILL

It is a pleasure to be invited as an ecumenical partner to reflect on questions of worship and sacraments with a long-time denominational partner. As a past co-chair of the Anglican Church-United Church Dialogue, we spent many days and nights together investigating, discussing and reflecting on issues of ordination, sacraments and liturgy. I think it's fair to say that this kind of dialogue often reveals to us as much about our own denomination as it does about our partners. I continue to learn about, and consider the assumptions inherent within, my own church's theology of worship as a result of those fruitful experiences.

In reading the documents concerning *Eucharistic Practice and Sacramental Theology in a Time of Pandemic*, there were a number of questions which persisted for me, which I would broadly characterize as questions of practical theology, and which I have tried to represent here. These are all questions which remain active in United Church circles, as well, though the responses of clergy and congregations to the question of how to worship and celebrate sacraments remotely have varied.

My personal interest in asking these questions is as one of two ordained ministers in a team ministry, in a suburban, multi-generational congregation near Moncton, New Brunswick, where I've been for nine years. I have also been teaching liturgy, theology and pastoral studies at Atlantic School of Theology (Halifax, NS), primarily online, for the past ten years. In short, I believe these questions are very important, and I will be interested to see what results from the Anglican Church's discussion of them.

What is our understanding of God's sovereignty?

Our celebration of the sacraments, like our reading of scripture, has always been asynchronous. For example, we describe the Eucharist as *anamnetic*: not simply a memorial of an historical moment, but an enactment of it which gathers all other enactments of it together, across time and space.

We, gathered with the saints, *participate* in and are transformed by the Eucharist, not simply because of our celebration of it, but by the presence of the Holy Spirit who is with us at all times and in all places.

If it is the Holy Spirit who is operative within the Eucharist – who gathers, blesses and transforms us – then, as a colleague and friend said to me, “Who are we to say that God cannot do a good thing” through a remote/asynchronous sacrament?

I would amplify this question by breaking it into two related questions. First, can God make use of the gifts of grace, to our transformation, when they are shared remotely/asynchronously? Second, if the consecrated elements convey reverence for the material world which God has created and blessed, can gaps in time or space (which God has also created and blessed) deconsecrate them?

I know how these would be answered by most United Church theologians, but I offer them here without presuming to know – and without any judgment concerning – what the answers would/should be for our sister church.

What constitutes a rightly administered sacrament?

In the United Church, while there are some who believe that an ontological change occurs at ordination, it is not clear that this is a widely held belief. It is widely agreed, however, that while only those who are ordained or specially licensed can administer the sacraments, their authority to do so is not theirs, but rests with the body that serves the function of *episcope* (which in the United Church is now the Region).

In addition to *administering* the sacraments, the ordained or licensed minister is also called to *instruct* the faithful about the sacraments through Word and Pastoral Care. So, the sacraments are rightly and duly administered not only at the table, but also in teaching, which occurs through preaching, faith formation and congregational life. This notion of what is sacramental is focused at the table, but also includes other moments in the life of faith which contribute to the sacrament’s transformational power.

In relation to online sacraments, then, I find I am less concerned about whether a remote/asynchronous sacrament is still valid and more concerned about whether the one who presides at a remote sacrament is still able to teach and to shape the community’s understanding of the sacraments in an online environment.

What does it mean to be gathered online?

This leads me to the question of whether we are truly gathered – as a congregation and with the presider/priest – if we are not physically present with each other. The online environment is not what most of us are used to, and we can’t be certain about how engaged the congregation is in

worship if they can fast forward, turn off the video or mute the audio at will. I tend to think that people can be distracted in person, as well, and that physical presence offers no guarantee of constant engagement.

Despite physical remoteness, online worship still calls on us to deeply listen, to respond with grace and love, to connect with and pray for each other. We are still able to pray, sing, hear the Word proclaimed, approach God in humility and seek reconciliation, and to hear God's promise of the restoration of all things. We have also had to trust that God is present in our worship despite the absence of our traditions and our absence from familiar places of worship. Of necessity, online worship (and ministry) focuses our energy on being present *to* each other, even when we can't be present *with* each other.

To what is the Holy Spirit inviting us?

I believe that the Holy Spirit is inviting us and equipping us to broaden how we participate in God's mission. Having been almost forcibly migrated to worship online, we've had to innovate and find different ways of being a community. For people who were already physically or socially isolated, or who had significant health concerns or barriers to access to church buildings, virtual worship has been a welcome way to engage in the life of faith and, in some cases, is preferable to returning to the church building. Not only are we discovering how to reach out and to serve groups within the congregation who had previously been underserved, marginalized or forgotten, we are also reaching people who had not formerly been connected to our congregations.

I don't believe, nor would I advocate for the position, that the physical church will disappear. I would certainly mourn the loss of hope, comfort and invitation to a deeper faith experience that being together to worship in one place brings to so many. Especially for those raised in the church, the experience of worship online is still dependent upon – still *refers to* – our experience of worship in person. The virtual experience has not yet – and may never – replace the in-person experience.

Yet, I also have great concern for the financial and human resources being devoted to "getting back into" our buildings. I do appreciate the very natural and healthy desire to be with each other, and the deleterious effects of isolation, particularly for those who live alone. I believe that it is a well-intentioned and pastoral concern for people that has led most churches, following the initial shock and grief of isolation, to focus their attention on how and when to return to our church buildings for worship.

Our understanding of worship can, at times, be too deeply rooted in our buildings; and this can encumber our discernment of how we are being called into God's promised future. This time of isolation, which we

initially saw as a time of restriction, has also been a time of experimentation. Churches will need to continue to explore online worship/ministry not simply as a delivery method, but as an opportunity to explore how we participate in God's mission.

One body

PHILLIP TOVEY

The phone rang, it's a vicar from a neighbouring town, "What should I do? Should I encourage people to put bread and wine in front of the telly broadcast the Eucharist, telling them that is okay, and they've truly received the body and blood of Christ?". The question in the past may have seemed to have a simple answer, no. What was the reason people would want to do this? If people are housebound with sickness, or disability, or simply old age what we need to do is to take the Eucharist to them. But all of this has been stripped away. We were now in lockdown and going to them physically was not allowed. What to say?

For a long time, I have been convinced by the move to make the Eucharist central to Sunday worship. I grew up on a diet of matins and even-song, and various other services of the word. But recently I have always looked for churches where the Eucharist central. But now they were closed. The official advice was that we could say the Eucharist at home, as I live alone that seemed anathema. Only once as a priest had the congregation never turned up (there had been heavy snow just before the service, well what we think in England as heavy snow nothing like in Canada), so I went home and had breakfast. I did not think that we had ever been permitted before to preside at the Eucharist alone, a real break from the great tradition.

I was reminded by colleague of the tradition of spiritual communion.¹ I did know about that and had looked up various liturgical texts where this is mentioned, but I always thought the circumstances would be so extreme that it would never be a practical issue.

Anyway, we had gone online, and church had entered cyberspace in a way never before. When I need to physically get to church, I have a limited range of possibilities, particularly if I am keen on walking there (which I am). Once I am in cyberspace the possibilities multiply. Shopping was

¹ Grant Bayliss, Thoughts from a Cloistered House, 19 March 2020,
<https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/blog/thoughts-cloistered-house>. (Accessed 2020).

already online, my teaching was going online, and now church was online. The Franciscan group I am a part of discovered Zoom. When we were meeting physically, I rarely went, suddenly the meeting is in my home and I have become one of the more regular members. Indeed, there is almost a reversal of interaction. The regular but technologically challenged members are now not part of it, and now the irregular but technologically able members are a part. It is all rather strange a world turned upside down.

The next step is the Bishops leading services in the cathedral that are live streamed. You can see the social distancing, but the sanctuary area is quite large and so this strange dance is quite possible. It seemed quite nice to be in the cathedral electronically. I noticed all sorts of things that I never knew were there! But then strict lockdown comes in and the church decides to close its doors. This was actually beyond the government regulation and other denominations did not do the same. But we were told, no entry! This meant that services moved out of churches and into living rooms or kitchens or dining rooms. I found this very hard. I could not electronically connect to our diocesan service, so I ended up in the dining room of the Dean of Chichester who was celebrating with his wife. Now it is a very nice dining room, but it is not the same thing as from a church. Not only am I forced out of my church building, I am also forced out of visiting it electronically. Many said, "the church is not the building", but the church is a building, and the building and the people go together. There are some churches where the silence is so thin, the presence of God is almost audible. I am sorry for people if they do not get that. It is this unseen presence that keeps me going. It forms and fosters my faith. To shut the church is to pull the rug from under my feet. So, a friend tells me that the Community of the Resurrection is live streaming its services. I end up joining Facebook, something I have resisted for years. It is the best way I can get to see the services. I save the link to Facebook but call it 666. There is a certain seduction in Facebook to draw you in to thinking that you need to have as many friends as possible, and that they are real friends even if only a cyber friendship.

So here I am now on Sunday mornings at the Community of the Resurrection. The big question comes up as to what to do about Easter (and later Pentecost). The knowledge of 'mass obligation' weighs heavily on me. I spent time in parishes saying that these were important events which we should celebrate with the Eucharist. I am now locked out of church and possibly locked away from the Eucharist on the great festivals. Being unsure what to do, and thinking it was probably okay in the strange circumstances, I decided to concelebrate. Bread and wine placed on a white cloth in front of the screen. I am not a big fan of concelebration.

There was the classic event at a chrism mass where the priests were invited to concelebrate. The Bishop launched into a Eucharistic prayer different from the Eucharistic prayer of the service sheet. Some did not notice and just ploughed on. Others noticed and tried to say the right words from memory, not all getting it right. Then there were those who did notice, saw what a mess the whole thing was becoming, and so shut up. I know it does not have to be that bad, but the theory that somehow the more priests bring more grace, I cannot subscribe to. But emergencies lead to some strange solutions. And I find myself doing this while at the same time unhappy about similarly locked down and excluded laypeople. Receiving Communion was however a great comfort.

One of my colleagues said that his church and debated what to do on Easter Sunday. They could not bring themselves to tell people to put bread and wine in front of the screen. But they did do an agape. Different foodstuffs were assembled at home before the screen and prayers were said of table graces. It would seem that the good people of that church found this very helpful and quite acceptable. Interestingly, this is one of the first times I have heard of feedback from laity. So far, we have had many pronouncements and documents telling us what to do. There was not much asking and listening.

As we progressed so gradually people began to address the issue a bit more. I was pointed to a video by Teresa Berger.² She is an old friend from conferences, so I listened intently. She reminded us that the liturgy is not confined to the assembly. We may be in a building, but the spiritual space is huge. We pray for the world. We pray with all Christians. We pray with angels and archangels. We pray with the living and the dead. The geography of our service is truly multi-dimensional and transcends the simple building in which we meet. I think she is wanting to say we should therefore not be so closed minded as to only think we can worship and have the Eucharist in a gathered setting in the building with a limited number of people. The whole concept of the Eucharist is wider and bigger than such small limitations. I even think that she is sympathetic to the idea of Eucharists through the web, but she seems to drawback because her denomination, the Roman Catholic Church, is adamantly against such a practice.

So, I become a regular attender at the Sunday morning services of matins and Eucharist at the community of the Resurrection. There the practice is the president only receives. Clearly, apart from the couple of occasions when I concelebrated, I am not receiving either. This seems very strange. A couple of times in reaction to this I turn it off at the end of

² Teresa Berger and Martin Jean talk Digital Worship,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XliVBZvAtuU> (Accessed 2020).

the Eucharistic prayer. The rest of the service preparing for Communion and giving thanks for Communion seemed simply irrelevant. Thinking in this way, I actually begin to see the consecration as particularly important and begin ritualised activity at that point in the service. But then think I am becoming too mediaeval, or like the men I've seen in France who were going to church, cross themselves at the dominical words then retreat outside for a fag as soon as that happened. Is this what we are now reduced to?

I try to look at spiritual communion again in a different way and I notice that Mirfield have added a prayer of spiritual communion.

Heavenly Father:

*as we participate with your people in these holy mysteries,
we pray you now to grant your gift of spiritual communion,
with trust in your faithfulness and your abiding love,
through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen³*

I then find other examples, e.g.:

*Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.⁴*

At first, I found that I barely noticed the prayer for spiritual communion. However, for the brothers it was a reality unless they have presided. Once again distance is eradicated. What is the difference between the brother 10 feet from the altar, and me a 173 miles away, when we are participating in spiritual communion? None I could tell, and spiritual communion, at first somewhat a discipline, gradually seeps in as a reality. The prayer becomes an important part of my Sunday worship.

So, what did I tell my vicar friend? If he had phoned up any other time, there would have been a definite no. I would have marshalled a variety of arguments as to why this is undesirable and not traditional. The pandemic has changed mine and many others reality. So, to my surprise I am

³ From Liturgy Community of the Resurrection.

⁴ From *Mirfield Team Parish*, May 2020.

suddenly saying, if this is acceptable to your people go ahead. We muse about the Bishop and what she might think. We cannot see that very much could be done other than a rebuke. But what if it is acceptable to the people. Then it would seem ridiculous not to go ahead. Perhaps this is a time for some courage rather than timidity.

So, to my surprise I am now a part of Eucharistic community 173 miles away, where I have found some sort of home. While it is possible from today to hold services in church, my local parish seems to be very slow and cautious. This leaves me being alongside the monastic community. I am not sure how I feel when I will be able to meet physically in a church building. I might not want to give up some of the new behaviours and patterns that I have gotten used to. I know in work we are moving forward to a new normal. I guess that that will be a part of our church life too. Even if a vaccine comes soon, our life has been so changed that it will not be the same.

Strange things you are doing God. Deliver us from evil, comfort us with your presence, and fill us with your hope.

Spiritual communion in a season of social distancing

RUTH MEYERS

In this time of social distancing, when we cannot come together to celebrate the eucharist, church leaders are introducing creative responses such as packing plastic bags with consecrated wafers for people to drive up and take home, or suggestions that people in disparate places provide their own bread and wine as a presider in another space prays a eucharistic prayer. Such efforts suggest hunger for the body and blood of Christ.

The desire to receive communion reflects a sea change in eucharistic piety in the Episcopal Church during the late twentieth century. The liturgical renewal movement was highly effective in transforming the Episcopal Church, fostering a eucharistic spirituality with an expectation that the Holy Eucharist is the principal act of worship on the Lord's Day (BCP, 13). We've come a long way from the common practice of monthly celebrations of Holy Communion or the non-communicating high mass of some Anglo-Catholic congregations.

Yet the efforts to provide consecrated eucharistic elements suggests to me that the liturgical renewal movement did not fully transform our eucharistic theology. The urgency for people to receive communion and efforts to stretch our practices to allow that to happen are a curious twist on medieval eucharistic theology and practice.

In the medieval western church, a practice of "ocular communion" was the most common experience of the mass. Christians came to understand the words of institution over the bread and the cup as consecrating the bread and wine, changing them into the body and blood of Christ at that precise point in the prayer. Sanctus bells signaled the arrival of this moment of consecration, and after reciting Jesus's words, the priest elevated the host. People jostled for the best place to view this miracle. But receiving communion was so infrequent that a thirteenth-century church

council required everyone to receive communion once a year, at Easter, a sure sign that few people were partaking even that frequently.

Just as the practice of ocular communion emphasized the consecration to the near exclusion of the reception of the elements, proposals to bend the rules to allow people to receive focus on one moment rather than the totality of the celebration. Since the earliest centuries of Christianity, eucharist has included *both* a prayer of thanksgiving in which the assembly remembers what God has done for us *and* the sharing of the eucharistic gifts of bread and wine, Christ's body and blood.

One proposal to hold these together is for a presider in one place to pray the great prayer of thanksgiving while those sheltering in their homes have their own bread and wine to be consecrated. Yet this practice places undue emphasis on the reception of communion. Sharing one bread and one cup is integral to communion, as the apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). A webcast or Facebook livestream or Zoom meeting can help us feel connected to our community, but it does not allow us to share one bread or one cup.

In the celebration of the eucharist, we experience the real presence of Christ, not only in the bread and wine that are blessed and shared but also in the Word proclaimed and broken open in homily, in the community gathered as the body of Christ, in song and prayer. This real presence is always in tension with real absence. We glimpse Christ's presence, getting a taste of the heavenly banquet, yet on this side of the grave we never experience the fullness of that presence. Real absence draws us forward to the time when we shall see God face to face. Real absence makes room for the mystery of God whose presence we can neither compel nor control.

Social distancing makes us keenly aware of real absence and our yearning for the real presence of Christ, an experience we share with Christians through the ages. To respond when we cannot celebrate eucharist, Christian tradition offers us the practice of spiritual communion. St. Thomas Aquinas explains this as "an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the most holy sacrament and lovingly embrace him" at times when it is not possible to receive the sacramental elements. The 1979 Prayer Book refers to spiritual communion in the form for Ministration to the Sick, directing the priest to assure a person unable to eat and drink the bread and wine "that all the benefits of Communion are received even though the Sacrament is not received with the mouth" (BCP, 457). The Prayer Book for the Armed Services suggests a prayer for spiritual communion:

In union, O Lord, with your faithful people at every altar of your Church, where the Holy Eucharist is now being celebrated, I desire to offer to you praise and thanksgiving. I remember your death, Lord Christ; I proclaim your resurrection; I await your coming in glory. Since I cannot receive you today in the Sacrament of your Body and Blood, I beseech you to come spiritually into my heart. Cleanse and strengthen me with your grace, Lord Jesus, and let me never be separated from you. May I live in you, and you in me, in this life and in the life to come. Amen.

In this season of social distancing, individuals and congregations can practice spiritual communion in a number of ways. Any Christian desiring to receive the sacrament can offer a prayer for their own spiritual communion. Some congregations have the resources to gather a small number of leaders for a full celebration of communion, inviting others to view the celebration from their homes and feed on Christ in their hearts by faith, with thanksgiving (BCP, 365). Other congregations may find that their resources enable them to offer the liturgy of the Word via livestream or video conference, and adapt that form to include prayers for spiritual communion.

The apostle Paul assures us that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39). Spiritual communion offers one way to sustain ourselves as we await the time when we can once again gather in the same space with other Christians to celebrate eucharist.

Gathering for worship: An Anglican perspective

The Book of Common Prayer 1979 places the eucharist at the center of a community's Sunday worship: "The Holy Eucharist [is] the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day" (BCP 1979, 13). Since this prayer book was adopted, most congregations of the Episcopal Church celebrate the eucharist every Sunday.

But this is a recent development in Anglican history. Beginning in the 16th century, Anglican reformers insisted that a congregation be present and receive with the priest whenever the eucharist was celebrated. When no one in the assembly was prepared to receive communion, the service ended after the general intercessions, without proceeding to the liturgy of the table. By the end of the 16th century, the most common pattern of Sunday worship in churches in England included Morning Prayer, the Litany, and ante-Communion. The Episcopal Church followed this pattern, and Morning Prayer continued to be the principal Sunday service in many congregations through the mid-20th century. Generations of Episcopali-ans were nurtured and formed Sunday by Sunday through Morning

Prayer. The liturgical renewal movement of the mid-20th century led Episcopalians to a new appreciation of the Lord's people gathering to celebrate the Lord's service on the Lord's Day.

The eucharist, however, does not stand alone. Daily Morning and Evening Prayer complement the Holy Eucharist as "regular services appointed for public worship" (BCP 1979, 13). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many congregations are turning to daily offices, not just for Sunday worship but on weekdays, using technology for videoconferencing or livestreaming.

Anglicans understand corporate prayer as a means of participation in the mystical body of Christ. A recent reflection from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry cited 16th-century Anglican theologian Richard Hooker, who "described the corporate prayer of Christians as having a spiritual significance far greater than the sum of the individual prayers of the individual members of the body. Through corporate prayer, he said, Christians participate in communion with Christ himself, 'joined ... to that visible, mystical body which is his Church.' Hooker did not have in mind just the Eucharist, which might have taken place only quarterly or, at best, monthly in his day. He had very much in mind the assembly of faithful Christians gathered for the Daily Office."¹

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer builds on this deep theological tradition. Taking up a central principle of the liturgical movement, the prayer book begins by stating that all members of the assembly gathered for worship will participate, fulfilling the roles proper to their respective orders (BCP 1979, 13).

Though eucharist was not celebrated frequently in most congregations until the latter half of the 20th century, Anglicans have a rich tradition of reflection on the sacraments. In the eucharist, Anglicans affirm, Christ is present in the bread and wine over which the assembly gives thanks, and communicants feed on Christ's body and blood through a fragment of bread or a wafer placed in a communicant's hand, and through a sip of wine offered from the common cup. Such practices bring individuals into close proximity, a human connection that embodies Christ's presence.

The prayer book recognizes that illness may prevent a person from receiving either the bread or the wine, or may be unable at all to eat and drink. Even if a person cannot receive the Sacrament with the mouth, the prayer book assures us, "all the benefits of communion are received" (BCP 1979, 457). The *Prayer Book for the Armed Forces* (2008) offers a prayer that an individual can say when practicing this spiritual communion.

¹ Michael B. Curry, "A Word to the Church on Our Theology of Worship from the Presiding Bishop," Episcopal News Service, March 31, 2020, <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/press-releases/a-word-to-the-church-on-our-theology-of-worship-from-the-presiding-bishop/>.

Some congregations and diocese are commending spiritual communion during the social distancing required by COVID-19.

The assembly and Eucharist

JAMES FARWELL

Like many other sacramental theologians schooled in the fundamentals of the liturgical renewal, I take the Christian assembly to be a constitutive element of the sacramentality of Eucharist. Receiving it in body as one of, and alongside of, an assembly of bodies gathered at one shared altar as an (eschatological) new community that felicitously undermines our social adhesion with biological family and affinity groups, and weaves us into a new community called by God, is central to its meaning, not peripheral. Our gathering is not an *addition* to sacramental presence in bread and wine, nor the *occasion* at which it is permissible for a priest to confect some presence with magic hands and magic words. Therefore “Virtual Eucharist” doesn’t do it. Whether it “really is” or “isn’t” the Body and Blood of Christ is the least of my concerns and misses the point. “digital presence” of bodies in separate rooms is not Eucharistic embodiment. Nor does lay presidency in homes, nor drive-through administration, nor disinfected mail-out wafers sufficiently attain the ritual proxemics necessary to Eucharistic performance in bodies with the Body. That embodied gathering is co-extensive with the significance of full sacramental presence. It is why when we take the Eucharistic elements to the sick, we do so *from* the assembly’s communion, before the rite concludes. The exception in this case proves the rule.

How about “spiritual communion?” Eh, maybe, maybe not. I’m still pondering the transmutation of a relatively unusual pastoral exception to a normative principle in the light of our tendency to fetishize, even idolize, bread and wine, which possibility has become disturbingly clear during this episode. (I still find myself sustained by the wisdom of Gregory Of Nyssa, Meister Elkhart, Juan de la Cruz, Miguel de Unamuno, Shusako Endo, and similar others during this time – we need to take care that neither the instruments of grace nor our doctrines become themselves the object of our devotion.) Aside from that issue, I’m simply not yet convinced of the value of spiritual communion or its substantial difference

from what happens in the daily office, contemplation, and personal prayer.

So I long for a return to Eucharistic gathering with the rest of you. In my particularity as a priest I have not felt the profound joy of gathering the assembly around the table since last December - ironically, when I celebrated my 30th year as a priest. I am really starting to feel the weight of that loss. But what we enact in Word and Sacrament is the *basileia tou theou* in which love of God and neighbor are the conjoined keystone. And love of God and neighbor are now served by *not gathering*. Service to public health is *leitourgia* right now. It's really that simple. Trample the *fumie*. It's why Christ came. (Shusako Endo, *silence*, for those who don't know the reference. I commend the book to you.)

I could trot out the instances of infection that have arisen from recent congregational gatherings now being reported in the news, but that shouldn't be necessary. We *can not* gather right now. Not to gather is the Way of Love. Along that way, let us continue to pray for one another and for the day we may gather again. In the meantime, the Resurrected Crucified One still reigns and moves among us.

A virtual Kingdom?

JUAN M.C. OLIVER

The pastoral zeal of many members of the clergy as they explore virtual liturgy during the COVID-19 pandemic is impressive. Clearly they feel that they should make the eucharist available to those who cannot be present. In this sense they are in continuity with the tradition of the Church—as early as 150 AD—of including the absent in the reception of communion. Only, of course, that until now this inclusion consisted of sending the consecrated species to those who could not be present. Our recent attempts to make use of the internet to include those absent, however, provide fresh questions and concerns.

One of the aspects of eucharistic celebration that shines by its absence in our discussions of virtual liturgy is the eschatological aspect of the Holy Eucharist. To explore it here, I will first describe eschatology as it relates to ritual—specifically the eucharist—as the ritual enactment of the coming Reign of God, already showing evidence of it although it is not fully here yet. In contrast to this, I will name some challenges presented by virtual liturgy and what it may be saying about how we understand the eucharist, concluding with a brief summary.

Eschatology and ritual

By “eschatology” I refer not to the end of the world, but its transformation into God’s Kingdom/Reign of truth, justice, peace and love. For as N.T. Wright has clarified,

“The phrase kingdom of heaven is not about a place called heaven, which is somewhere else, ... It is about the establishment of the rule of heaven, in other words, the rule of God here on earth.”¹

¹ N.T. Wright. “Being in the Kingdom Today”, <https://ntwrightonline.org/being-in-the-kingdom-today>, accessed December 2019.

Thus “the Kingdom” is our shorthand for God’s the transformation of the world—a process already begun in the life, death, and ongoing life of Jesus. This eschatological hope has something in common with religious ritual across cultures and epochs, for religious ritual, as anthropologists remind us, make present to their participants a vision of how things “ought to be”—the ideal world. By presenting this experience, ritual forms us with a worldview and ethos. In our case as Christians this worldview (our vision of how the world is) and ethos (our way of living in it), flow from the ministry and witness of Jesus Christ and his earliest followers, presented both in the New Testament but also in our eucharistic *practice*, originating as a shared full meal, “...the central act around or within which others—reading and preaching and prophecy were arranged.”²

The first eucharists

It is important, however, when looking at the genesis of the eucharist, not to project our own experience back into the first century. The Christians in Corinth to whom Paul addressed his letters in c. 52 AD were not in a “church”, nor sitting in pews watching, nor hearing canonical texts—other, perhaps than the Hebrew scriptures. The gospel would not be written for at least another twenty years. They assembled in homes or businesses—usually a small group of 20-30 persons, to eat together. Indeed, “church” in Greek (*ekklesia*), means *assembly*. Assembled for what? To remember Jesus over a shared meal and discuss his life and teachings and what they meant for them in their own context.

This shared meal was quickly identified by Paul with the Lord. It is “the Supper of the Lord”—a term he brings into his letter to the Corinthians to support his claim that they are the risen Body of Christ—an insight to be elaborated on by the evangelists over a generation later. The synoptic gospels, besides pointing to the presence of Christ in the shared meals, as in Luke, further elaborated the meaning of our eating assemblies: they are a *sign* of the coming Kingdom of God. Here, on earth. Two aspects of the shared meals gave this away: they were radically *egalitarian*—rich and poor, slaves and free, citizens and foreigners, women and men—together without separation. And they were about *love* (agape). As Tertullian later wrote,

Our feast explains itself by its name. The Greeks call it, agape, i.e., affection. Whatever it costs, ...with the good things of the feast we benefit the needy; ...[and] as it is with God himself, a peculiar respect is shown to the lowly.³

² Andrew McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical and Theological Perspective*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 20.

³ Tertullian *Apology*, 39:16-18.

The rehearsals of the Kingdom

Roman Catholic liturgical theologian Mark Searle used the phrase “rehearsal of the Kingdom” to describe the Holy Eucharist in this eschatological dimension. Accordingly, the eucharist is, “An actual rehearsal of the way of life foretold in the prophets and realized in Christ. Not talking about justice and peace, but a doing of justice and peace.”⁴ And, “It shapes and forms Christians who grow to take responsibility for the implementation of the kingdom vision in the world today.”⁵ About the same time, the relationship between eucharist and Eschatology was being articulated by Geoffrey Wainwright.⁶

This rehearsal of the Kingdom that is the Eucharist is not simply the communication of words and ideas *about* the Kingdom. Rather, it is the physical embodiment of it by a concrete community made up of human bodies. In the happy phrase of most liturgical theologians, in the eucharist we experience the Kingdom of God *already here* although it has not arrived fully *yet*.⁷ Medieval theologians like Aquinas called this the “pledge” or down-payment of the life of the Kingdom, or as it is often translated, eternal life.

The challenges of digitized worship

It is against all this historical and theological background that the issues emerging from our zeal to provide *something* during the pandemic need to be understood and evaluated. Often supporters of virtual liturgy refer to it as if it were the same as being physically present in our assembly. *It is not*. Even if those watching avail themselves of the tradition of “spiritual communion” (an interior act of faith and desire to receive Jesus), *it is still not the same* anymore than watching a soccer game is the same as playing it.⁸ What is lost in the process is the very nature of the church as an assembly or mini society, gathered physically as a community. Moreover the digital distance established by streamed liturgies displays and reinforces aspects of liturgical participation that Church leaders have been trying to address for at least the last sixty years.

⁴ Mark Searle, “Grant us Peace... Do we Hear What we are Saying? In *Rehearsing God’s Just Kingdom: The Eucharistic vision of Mark Searle*, ed. Stephen S. Wilbricht. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013, 22.

⁵ _____, The Pedagogical Function of the Liturgy,” *Worship* 55 no.4. July 1981, 333 and 345.

⁶ Geoffrey Wainwright. *Eucharist and Eschatology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

⁷ Ibid., 41. See Also John Zizioulas, “The Eucharist and the Kingdom of God (Part III)”, *Sourozh* 60 (May 1995): 43.

⁸ Aquinas, in his defense of “spiritual communion,” nevertheless points out that it is *not the same* as the physical reception of the eucharistized bread and wine: “Nevertheless sacramental eating is not without avail, because the actual receiving of the sacrament produces more fully the effect of the sacrament than does the desire thereof”. *Summa Theologiae*, III:80,1, ad.3.

Performance, commodification, individualism and privatization

Among the many things that the rush to virtual eucharists has shown is that consciously or not, we still conceive of the Holy Eucharist as something of a performance acted out to be watched by lay spectators.

Though certainly a performance, however, the liturgy is *enacted by the whole Church with God-clergy and laity together*—and not by the clergy for the benefit of a lay clientele. Watching and hearing are easily done through digital media, and so it is understandable that clergy who thought they were performing something on a stage for a client laity would rush to transmit the enactment on line. But as we saw above, the active, physical involvement of the whole assembly is lost.

Furthermore, a liturgy understood as a performance by only a priest and deacon may easily be transmitted, and furthermore commodified into a “thing” or “service” to be acquired through eyes and ears by passive *individuals*. This alone points to one of the great flaws of modernity: the denial of community as a constitutive aspect of the individual person. Briefly put, our rehearsal of the Kingdom on line becomes a thing to be consumed as an interior, “spiritual” experience of an individual soul. The popularity of “spiritual communion” makes the point.

What to do?

Instead of virtually packaging the clerical elements of our usual eucharist, hoping for the best, we may consider the challenges brought by the pandemic from an altogether different starting point: If we must “gather” virtually, what are the *means* of gathering? If the answer is, for example, Zoom, what does this platform do *well*? For what purpose do people usually “gather” through Zoom? To exchange news, ideas, opinions, decisions. They cannot gather to eat any more than to play soccer. So do not try to force the embodied eucharistic practice into a medium that dispenses with bodies—a very dangerous thing for ritual, which as we saw above, actually *forms us in the worldview and dispositions to live in the Kingdom*. Do we seriously envision a Kingdom made up of individual selves connected virtually?

Let us think instead of what the medium does well, and build the liturgy on that foundation. Zoom is a great way to hear the Word, share its meaning, and pray together. That is, virtual liturgy works well with liturgies of the Word (Daily Office or the first half of the Eucharist). In fact *lectio divina* or other Bible reflection methods may be good examples of what virtual liturgy can do best. With these, we also have the advantage of communicating a simpler, more participatory experience which will in fact, build and

support a community of active, participating members growing in the knowledge of the Word and each other.

Conclusion

A *great* deal is lost when the liturgy is streamed online. Some may have thought that the eucharist is a message or an interior event, but is in fact a physical gathering of a community carrying a message, yes, but affecting both bodies and souls) in which we are rehearsed in the worldview and ethos of the Kingdom of God, already present in our gathering to eat together. Thus a practice that abridges the nature of the eucharist as the physical gathering of the assembly of the Kingdom does serious violence to what the eucharist *is* and how it *takes place*. It also reaffirms the passivity of the laity as mere spectators of clerical doings, and supports individualism and the commodification of the means of grace in the service of an incorporeal, “spiritual” individual experience. Instead of trying the impossible, then, it may be better to think afresh about what it is that virtual media do well and build from there. As in all liturgical thinking, a key question for all involved—clergy and laity alike, is: What will the Kingdom of God look like when it arrives in your town, neighborhood, or home? How might *that* be presented virtually?

Epilogue

epilogue

This project had its genesis in the stressful early weeks of pandemic lockdown, in which disorientation and sudden strangeness were in the air we breathed. So, too, was an atmospheric grief, which took hold in different ways as we started to realize what it was that we had lost. At the same time as others were grappling with decisions about how to do online worship, and how to make the spiritual adjustments with no (or restricted) celebrations of the eucharist, Eileen Scully was trying to process the acute sense of loss by focusing on the gift and necessity of lament. This epilogue takes us back to some of those foundational losses and unpacks the ways in which lament as a personal and as a communal practice has a healing quality of re-ordering and re-grounding us in God in intimate ways. Along with the collections of specific psalms, this longer paper is in some ways a summation of the spiritual yearning and frustration – along with the abiding faith and loving witness of discipleship – that runs through the papers in this collection.

Theology of lament and hope

J. EILEEN SCULLY

Preface

When the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic began to be felt in Canada in March of 2020, we in some way or other adjusted ourselves into emergency mode. We went on alert, anticipating updates on new restrictive measures for places of work and worship, commerce and recreation, updating the notifications settings on our devices to include public health news, rules and guidance. The adjustments were sudden. I was with colleagues in a national church meeting of around 50 people that began on March 15. At the opening eucharist, we somewhat apologetically suggested that participants might possibly wish to skip the common cup at eucharist if they had concerns. Two days later the Anglican dioceses in Ontario declared a halt to in-person worship. Another two days and my non-essential-service workplace closed its doors and my colleagues and I busied ourselves setting up our home ‘office’ work spaces, taking Zoom tutorials, and stocking up on grocery staples, readying for a long-haul of who-knows-how-long.

The experience was a shock to the system. The virus itself was – and continues to be – frightening in its unpredictable effects, death rate, and ease of transmission. But the early predictors of a perhaps mere (as it seems now) addition of a couple of weeks to the normal school March Break lent, for those whose incomes remained stable, a near holiday flavour to being off work, off school, hunkering down at home for a bit, learning to bake, and digging out those old craft projects we now had time to complete. For those in insecure economic and housing situations, though, or those with mental health challenges, the early experiences did not have those buffers of comfort food and the promises of time as a gift. And no matter the busyness many of us put ourselves to, the early stages

brought a whiplash experience, as eventually the multidimensional patterns of normal social and work and study life flatlined.

I confess to having prided myself in my capacity to adjust and to do so with ease. I enjoy working from home (occasionally), and relished more quiet time to shorten my stack of intend-to-read books. And I know how to do without a lot of luxuries like restaurants and hairstylists. Cue the kick-in of adrenaline, with a touch of guilt - it wasn't like this was an earthquake calamity type of disaster, but something in me was in a highly disciplined emergency alert mode.

That discipline carried over into my spiritual life. I rebooted a somewhat dry daily prayer practice, and started a fresh new journal for writing notes of gratitude for the gifts of each day. I took my camera on long solitary walks and exercised a visual attentiveness to the work of finding beauty in tiny and ordinary things. And it wasn't hard to find the beauty and the gifts in each day, despite the strangeness. In fact, there was an ease to spiritual attentiveness and delight in the ordinary.

Perhaps the ease was in part born from early illusions of privilege: surely Canada won't be like Italy or Iran, and all of this will be over in a matter of weeks. Or maybe a couple of months. We can do this. But the more the time crept on, and it was no longer an adventure, the more I felt atune with others around me in sensing great loss.

Pandemic Time is a mixture of stagnation and fast paced race, moving on at a pace completely ignorant of our needs to dominate and control it, and each step brings with it more losses, and the cumulative effect of so much uncertainty and grief. Its currency is an exchange of confusion and tentative hope. And to get to a place of more solid, faithful, hope, we need to be honest with the confusion and frustration.

With each personal loss I've found myself wrestling with the guilt of one who has some pain but knows that others are truly suffering worse. With each prayer for the suffering of the world and the grief of those whose loved ones have died, and for those under the siege of domestic violence, I found myself awash in grief for them. As the Black Lives Matter protests gained in strength and now suffers from reactionary violence on top of the original racist injustices and violence, I've found myself awash in a cosmic level mixture of despair, anger, and frustration. And as political shenanigans and nastiness has grown to tragic dimensions in our neighbour to the south (with marginal but real spillover here), I developed an addiction to outrage that cried out to be fed by CNN newsfeeds. So much complexity, so many powerful, conflicting, difficult struggles.

And it goes on. And on. And on.

How long, O Lord?

*will you not answer?
I cried to you in my distress...*

This resource is part reflection on the theology of lament, part encouragement to pray the psalms of lament, and part invitation to explore in your own words and images the spiritual practice of lament as valuable part of Christian faith. It's also part workbook and stimulus for journal-writing (hence the partial blank pages). Ultimately, the whole thing is a prayer, one that begins here, in all this strangeness, and leads, ultimately, to a deeply grounded hope and praise of the Holy One who walks with us.

Introducing lament: a necessary spiritual friend

Lament is the cry of suffering, the frustrated gasp and moan that seeks consolation and explanation for the inexplicable and the inconsolable. It is raw and deeply ‘in’ the experience of pain. In the biblical tradition, it’s more than the experience of sorrow, but is a process of what we might call, today, ‘working through’ pain. It requires expression but defies that very requirement by its messiness and its urgency.

Lament is a gift that arises from our deep encounter with suffering. We feel pains from growth, trauma, and loss in our own lives and in empathy with those close to us. We are surrounded by, and see, the inexplicable suffering in the world and the devastation brought by injustice and greed. And as our walk with Jesus deepens through life, he draws us close and turns us around to see the suffering of the world with him, through God’s eyes. The body of Christ – the church – turns to the world with the eyes of God beholding the beauty of God’s creation and its suffering.

St. Paul speaks of the whole of creation crying in pain – as a woman in labour – for the children of God to be revealed. These children are us: we who are reconciled with God through Christ, who also reconciles us with each other within creation. The groaning of creation is a lament that bursts forth into an expression of deep and grounded hope. Lament and hope live side by side in that journey of reconciliation. Even when I know deeply the hope that God brings, that love is ultimately the victor, and that in God’s time all will be well, I still go through experiences of pain, isolation, loneliness, betrayal, abandonment, abuse. And the same God who accompanies us in that pain sticks with us and hears us with love when we express what these feelings are.

God doesn’t bring hope as though it were a perfectly wrapped gift that we’re only allowed to unwrap after we dry our tears and ‘get over it.’ No. God, who is the Source of all love and hope and faith, has an embrace that is big enough to enfold us in our pain and in our ranting, raging,

despairing, fearful, tearful protest against what is happening to us. More than that, God actually desires our honesty.

Christianity has in some places been shaped in ways that have tamed the wilder elements of our own powerful faith tradition. Particularly under colonial expansion and the growth of economic empires, the social order, customs, and mores evolved to serve the powers that maintain a certain status quo. However it all came about, the fact is that some Christian practice tends to avoid the messier parts of Scripture: the anger of Jesus in the marketplace and his deep grief at the death of his friend Lazarus; the lamentations of the people of Israel after the destruction of Jerusalem. We may know the story, but how much do we pay attention to the visceral nature of the emotions involved? It is likely that we too quickly intellectualize Lamentations, or enclose Jesus' emotional and spiritual anguish in a box to be opened only when we want assurance that he was, actually, human.

The source of Christian hope can be located within the cry of lament of Jesus on the cross: my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?! In the crux of lament and promise can be found a hope that is deeper and more spiritually nutritious than anything a purveyor of shiny polite optimism can peddle.

In times of loss, lament is both necessary and faithful.

We are in a time of loss:

- the loss of health and of life, as sickness and death are around us, nearby us, or immediate to us;
- the loss of freedom for much of our choice, in simple and mundane actions, and the deeply meaningful ones;
- the loss of aspects of our power and agency;
- the loss of employment, steady rhythms in our days and weeks, and relative security;
- the loss of physical closeness with others, in our close relationships, in worship, pastoral connection, singing together, holding one another in grief and sadness;
- and our own very specific personal losses.

In pandemic, we're faced with isolation, loneliness, and for some a massive whiplash of inactivity while for others there is only unrelenting hard work in uncomfortable and risky situations. We are jolted from the 'normal' in which we know some things, at least, to a place of entirely more unknowns than most comfortable Canadians have known. Loss of employment, of income, of previously secure and reassuring supports... all of this is unsettling for some and crisis for many. And for those on the margins of power, for Indigenous

communities, for all living in poverty and those with no homes, for those in violent domestic contexts, and for the elderly and physically vulnerable, crisis is immediate and life-and-death.

This is a time to lament.

But to complicate things, even as we feel acutely our personal and community losses there is not much in the dominant culture that helps us to name the present moment as one of complicated *grief*, and little there to help us move through loss and grief into true hope. There is much good news of community resilience and generosity and kindness in the face of common experiences of disaster. But there is still a massive, spiritual gap.

What is biblical lament?

What has been missing, for quite a few generations in North American culture, is the sort of depth of lament that we encounter in the Bible. Our society is uncomfortable with suffering and death, generally. We paraphrase into soft metaphors what it is to die, we sanitize funerals, and put up massive distractions to turn eyes away from the suffering of the marginalized and victims of injustice. In our society, the depth and razor-sharp pain expressed by psalmists can seem downright embarrassing.

Why do you stand so far off, O Lord, and hide yourself in time of trouble? (Ps 10)

*How long, O Lord?
Will you forget me for ever?*

*How long will you hide your face from me?
How long shall I have perplexity in my mind,
and grief in my heart, day after day?
How long shall my enemy triumph over me? (Ps 13)*

*Why have you forgotten me
and why do I go so heavily
while the enemy oppresses me? (Ps 42)*

*Awake, O Lord! why are you sleeping?
Arise! Do not reject us for ever.
Why have you hidden your face
and forgotten our affliction and oppression? (Ps 44)*

Oh, we might say, that was fine for those less-evolved people at that time to rail against God. The Psalms were written pre-Gospel, and they didn't know the blessed assurance of Jesus who takes away all pain, after

all. If they had known God the way we later folks know God, they wouldn't have uttered these heretical-sounding affronts to God's majesty and omnipotence, right?

"*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" In the Gospels of Matthew and of Mark, these are the last words of Jesus. This is lament with no resolution. The words are the opening line of Psalm 22, perhaps one of the most powerful Psalms of lament. It is raw and honest and speaks to those depths of suffering in human experience that tear the soul.

Lament cries out at God for help, and lament cries out *at* God in anger, frustration, from the depths of those places where we truly do *not* feel the nearness of God. Perhaps it's the shouting, in the anger of extreme pain, at God that Christians find disturbing or embarrassing. After all, that's rather inappropriate, isn't it? It wasn't to Jesus.

Remember that the Psalms were the prayer book and hymn book of the temple and synagogue. The Torah and the Prophets were to be read and studied intently; the Psalms were sung and prayed. The language of prayer is the language of the heart, one might say. On the cross, Jesus' heart was ripped open, exposing the cries of the psalmists that he had ingested in his own spiritual disciplines according to Jewish practice. In the Gospel of Luke, it is another psalm of lament that Jesus turns to, as the final word of abandon and trust: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (Ps 31)

The Psalms of lament move back and forth between the expression of pain and the assurance of God's presence and ultimate vanquishing of the causes of the pain. They do so in rapid turns of a verse or two or three, which can feel odd – in fact, they constitute a logical contradiction, but anyone who has experienced the paradoxical complexities of childbirth can relate to. Or, when holding a beloved one through critical illness or caring for a dying family member, one might live in a place where pain, anticipatory grief, and the graces of love and tender care are present in the same breath. Here is the first portion of Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me
and are so far from my cry and from the words of my distress?
O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer;
by night as well, but I find no rest.

*Yet you are the Holy One,
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.
Our ancestors put their trust in you;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
They cried out to you and were delivered;
they trusted in you and were not put to shame.*

But as for me, I am a worm and not human,

scorned by all and despised by the people.
All who see me laugh me to scorn;
they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,
“You trusted in the Lord; let the Lord deliver you;
let God rescue you, if God delights in you.”

*Yet you are the one who took me out of the womb,
and kept me safe upon my mother's breast.*

Intimacy and transcendence meet in the honesty we find in the Psalms. From the pains of isolation, physical illness, violence, death, and shame rise up the sort of cry that can only be aimed towards God, because to aim lower would be inconsequential.

The Psalms let loose contradiction because they contain paradox. They both cling to the teachings of the Torah and the Prophets and they confront and provoke the very heart of faith by questioning God. *The paradox is that it is precisely the faithfulness, the love, mercy, and justice of the God revealed to Israel that makes possible inflamed and desperate provocation of God.* In my suffering, I am living a contradiction: if God desires not my suffering but promises to save, where is that God, right now?!

What I have encountered is a limit point and my protests to God tumble forward *because I can trust that God hears me with compassion and faithfulness.* Even as I complain of God's distance, my reaching out in complaint is itself possible *because of my trust in God's faithfulness.* In these Psalms, Israel moves from articulation of hurt and anger, to submission of them to God, and finally to relinquishment. Functionally and experientially, the verbal articulation and the faithful submission to God are prerequisites. Only when there is such relinquishment can there be praise and acts of generosity.¹ Fundamentally, as Walter Brueggemann puts it, the Psalms “make the shrill insistence that:

1. Things are not right in the present arrangement.
2. They need not stay this way and can be changed.
3. The speaker will not accept them in this way for the present arrangement is intolerable.
4. It is God's obligation to change things.”²

The main point is the first: life is not right. It is now noticed and voiced that life is not as it was promised to be. The utterance of this awareness is an exceedingly dangerous moment at the throne.... Lament occurs

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995, 110.

² Brueggemann, 105.

when the dysfunction reaches an unacceptable level, when the injustice is intolerable and change is insisted upon.³

Psalms of lament oscillate amongst plea, lament, affirmation of God's faithfulness, lament, prayer for help, remembrance of God's loving and powerful deeds in the past, more lament, ending with a prayer of thanksgiving or declaration of trust in God's faithfulness.

The late Roman Catholic liturgical and biblical theologian Carroll Stuhlmueller described how this structure is a gift:

A structure that leads beyond abandonment to thanksgiving offers consolation, but the stark contrast intensifies each emotion. No literary structure ever masks the stark, naked realism in the Psalms: the shame suffered by an innocent person and the callous shamelessness of those inflicting it...⁴

The value of tradition is exemplified in the lament. It offers a structure for what is the most unstructured, disorderly experience – sickness and violence. Already a sick or persecuted person perceives, however dimly, a plan and purpose. God wastes no moment of human existence. In fact, when someone is unjustly reduced to shame and helplessness, as in the case of the psalmist, God is empowering that person with dignity and extending the invitation to share in the salvation of others.⁵

...The silent aloofness of God ends. The psalmist feels in the depths of craving loneliness a divine touch, ever so personal at such a secret place of one's life. God's presence is life sustaining.⁶

Why do we need lament?

"What difference does it make to have faith that permits and requires this form of prayer? My answer is that it shifts the calculus and redresses the distribution of power between the two parties, so that the petitionary party is taken seriously and the God who is addressed is newly engaged in the crisis in a way that puts God at risk. As the lesser, petitionary party (the psalm speaker) is legitimated, so the unmitigated supremacy of the greater party (God) is questioned, and God is made available to the petitioner. The basis for the conclusion that the petitioner is taken seriously and legitimately granted power in the relation is that the speech of the petitioner is

³ Ibid.

⁴ Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP *The Spirituality of the Psalms*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002, 110.

⁵ Stuhlmueller, 109-110.

⁶ Stuhlmueller, 110.

heard, valued, and transmitted as serious speech. Cultically, we may assume that such speech is taken seriously by God.”⁷

If we affirm and celebrate that God is the creator of all, and that God’s desire for us is intimate relationship with us, full honesty before God is not only ok, it is a requirement.

If we affirm and celebrate that God is loving and trustworthy, and that God’s hope for us is fullness of life, sharing our doubt with God is not only safe, it can be the beginning of a new way of beginning to listen to God – by listening to our deepest fears and doubts.

If we affirm and celebrate that God is compassionate and is mercy itself, and that we are called and equipped too to be compassionate and merciful with others, expressing the feelings that we only can do to the most faithful of companions is not only honest with God, but can help us in our compassion with others.

God opens our lips to be honest.

This sort of honesty may feel incompatible with Christian faith: it cannot be true that God has abandoned me, but it feels true, in my experience of utter devastation and loneliness. Lament is awkward and messy. It was so for the Psalmists, and it is even more so for Christians who follow a crucified Christ. In the devastation of the cross, Jesus himself raised up anguish, questioning, and resignation – a shattering honesty.

There is something in the patterns of lament that opens us to a deeper grasp of the nature of reconciliation, one that is deeply theological and not merely about the psychological healthy expression of pain. Brueggemann, again:

Rather, the lament makes an assertion about God: that this dangerous, available God matters in every dimension of life. Where God’s dangerous availability is lost because we failed to carry on our part of the difficult conversation, where God’s vulnerability and passion are removed from our speech, we are consigned to anxiety and despair, and the world as we now have it becomes absolutized.⁸

Lament is a gift in the life of the church that is called to be living ambassadors of God’s reconciling love. I spoke above in ways that identified reconciliation – by God, with God, and with each other, through Christ – as the core of what it is to be the church, the body of Christ. In Canada, we have grown a new sense of the importance of the ministries of reconciliation, especially in work of remorse, reparation and working for justice and right relationship with Indigenous peoples. Reconciliation is something given to

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, 101.

⁸ Brueggemann, 108.

us to do, but isn't *just* something that we do; it is who we *are*. Have we truly grasped that the church is, and is to manifest in our core identity, that we are the community of the reconciled? And that, as Paul frames our core 'mandate', we are to be 'ambassadors' of that reconciliation in the world? To be Christian is to be in a community on a journey of reconciliation. The more deeply we can grasp this corporeal-spiritual reality, the more deeply our actions in the name of reconciliation can be nurtured to grow from a place of God's intentions for justice and right relationship, and resist being shaped only by own perceptions of what is the missional good. What does this have to do with lament?

Theologian Emmanuel Katongole speaks of this critical importance of lament in this journey of reconciliation, especially in relation to hope.

... the journey of reconciliation is grounded in *lament*. For even as one keeps in mind the gift of new creation, one is constantly confronted by the realities of what's going on here and now – realities of violence, conflict, poverty, divisions, and so on. The discipline and strange gift of lament allows one to stand on the ground of pain without giving in to despair. Moreover, the discipline of lament compels one to investigate the deep social, political, and economic structures that shape histories of violence, injustice, poverty, and divisions around the world. Without such sustained critical analysis, talk of reconciliation becomes simply a panacea, a way of healing the wound of 'my people lightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.' (Jer 6:14) "...reconciliation is about hope in the world. The gift of new creation means that even in places of deep brokenness God's reconciling work is ongoing. Even in the midst of the world's pain, God continues to plant seeds of hope and to give birth of the new creation."⁹

Emmanuel Katongole's principal context of ministry and the reference point for his writing on lament is the post-genocide Rwanda and other places of extreme conflict and violence in Africa.

His affirmations come from a depth of lament in himself. That lament, he writes, is about turning to God "in the midst of the ruins" which can become a way of "dwelling amid" those ruins. It is both a gift and a discipline, "at once something that one does but also the gift through which the shattered foundations of our social and human existence" can be brought together.

Similarly, to Katongole, hope itself requires discipline, something he describes even as the *anguished* discipline of turning to God. It may be logical to understand lament as the expression of anguish, but hope? Hope and lament live in inextricable, interwoven intimacy, as interdependent ways of turning to God in the place of suffering.

⁹ Emmanuel Katongole: Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa. 2017.

For him, the journey of reconciliation involves five main elements:

1. Memory: remember the sacred drama (that God has been reconciling the world to Godself)
2. Lament: “is about learning to see clearly, name rightly, and keep one’s feet on the ground of pain without surrendering either to despair or to easy consolation. To lament is to learn to tell the truth of the brokenness in and around us. ... Lament is what helps the Christian live in the sluggish between.”
3. Hope: “Hope is what helps keep lament from turning into despair... it is hope that grounds the Christian journey in the firm conviction that even in the midst of the world’s darkest history, God continues to sow seeds of a ‘new thing’ (Is 43:19). Thus, hope is the commitment to live not simply with the realism of what is possible now, but with the madness of dreams drawn from a future yet to be seen.”
4. Advocacy – “hope is not an abstract reality. For as Augustine says, hope has two daughters: anger and courage”
5. Intimacy... “it is a deeply personal journey.”¹⁰

When we lose lament, we lose a critical aspect of what it is to be honest before God. That loss diminishes our imagination of the nature of the relationship that we can have with God. That relationship is covenantal: with Israel, and through the reconciling actions of God in Christ. Biblical covenants are not contracts. They originate with God’s promise and invitation, into which God calls and equips us towards our own free acceptance-response by grace. A critical element of that relationship is its honesty – a certain paradoxical parity, even. If God only requires our obedience and submission, but not the openness of our hearts in all aspects of our lives, the resulting living can become something less than the abundance and flourishing that God desires. Brueggemann uses a sharp metaphor to push home the necessity of full honesty before God:

One loss that results from the absence of lament is the loss of genuine covenant interaction, since the second party to the covenant (the petitioner) has become voiceless or has a voice that is permitted to speak only praise and doxology. Where lament is absent, covenant comes into being only as a celebration of joy and well-being. Or in political categories, the greater party is surrounded by subjects who are always ‘yes-men and women’ from whom ‘never is heard a discouraging word.’ Since such a celebrative, consenting silence does not square with reality, covenant

¹⁰ Katongole, 11-12.

*minus lament is finally a practice of denial, cover-up, and pretense, which sanctions social control.*¹¹

How we approach relationship with God shapes how we approach the social order. A relationship that is built upon such covenantal trust in order to nurture right relationship (reconciliation) can be bold about naming what is wrong in the relationship. That the ‘throne’ of God can be approached with all manner of righteous complaint and lament is a spiritual reality that justifies even deeper the ethics of protest in the social sphere against all injustice and misery, and emboldens our honesty in analysis of the causes of the suffering of all creation.

Offering lament today

The losses being experienced during the present pandemic (COVID-19, 2020) are many and multi-layered in their complexities. There is personal illness, death, and vulnerability, losses of freedom of movement, and most viscerally, the isolation and restrictions from physical touch. Our congregations have lost, as communities, their gatherings-in-person for worshipful singing, praying together, and making eucharist. Clergy and lay leaders have had to work hard to adjust, to fill gaps left by the inability to gather, to reach out through any and all, it seems, forms of communications technologies. It has been for many a very full and busy time as we try to connect despite, or over the losses. Have we walked deeply enough *into* the losses, though?

Psalms of lament can help us into and through our losses, by the ways in which they compel our honesty before God. Pray them by reading slowly, resting with the words, allowing them to permeate your imagination and resonate with your feelings.¹² The Psalm Prayers of *The Book of Alternative Services* provide an way of wrapping up the prayer that is the psalm itself, and help to refocus us in gospel hope. Pay attention to the movements of the psalms – like the movements of a symphony, they all work together within the whole – best not to just take a few lines out of a psalm, but meditate on the whole together. It is in the interplay between expressions of despair and longing, assurance and memory of God’s faithfulness that the whole of the ‘music’ can be heard.

Enter even more deeply into the healing patterns of the psalms of lament by writing your own and encouraging others in your community to do so. A small group in a congregation may benefit from walking through a process that names their grief and confusion at the loss of community

¹¹ Brueggemann, 104.

¹² Prayer booklets have been produced to accompany this article, each a collection: *Psalms of Lament and Hope; Psalms of Pleading and Assurance; and Psalms of God's Faithfulness*. See www.anglican.ca/psalms for these booklets.

worship and gatherings of song and sacrament. Choir members might be invited to express what they miss from their practice times as well as Sundays together. Whatever the particular losses and diverse personal ways in which these are experienced, the process of naming can be a gift for the individual as well as for the whole community.

The following provides a guide for the crafting of psalms of lament. It can serve to guide a group's discussions and prayer together, or be encouraged as a form of personal devotion.

Writing Lament

Follow a basic structure:

1. Invocation
2. Address
3. Lament
4. Petition
5. Remembrance of God's goodness
6. Praise: expression of gratitude

The structure can repeat certain elements, but it is important that each part of the structure be there, and that the opening and the closing remain in their forms of invocation (calling upon God) and praise (expressions of hope, confidence and trust in God). This provides a framework that holds the complete movement, with all the parts that need to be held together in the process. Remember, it's not only about the complaint of deep feeling (the lament part in the centre), it's about how this honest expression is *held within* the assurance that we can approach God, who hears us, knows us, and upon whom we can call for help.

*Quotations are from John Witvliet, Calvin Institute of Worship,
<https://network.crcna.org/worship/time-weep-voicing-lament-through-psalms>.*

1: Invocation – we call upon God

- What we are writing is prayer. And the writing process itself is prayer. This opening, the invocation, reminds us of the presence of God with us, and it does that both in the praying and very much so in the writing itself.
- God invites us into intimate relationship: we call upon God, trusting in that.
- Invocation is “a startling confession that even in times of crisis, we approach a personal and accessible God. In lament, we do not recoil from the tension that this presents.”

*"O Lord, my God, my Saviour,
by day and night I cry to you.
Let my prayer enter into your presence;
incline your ear to my lamentation." (Ps 88)*

*My God, I cry out to you, please be near me now...
To you, God of my soul, I pour out my soul today...
Holy God, here I am, all alone, with no one to talk to. Be with me, and
listen to me...*

2: Address – we speak about God, to God

- We name God in the ways and with the biblical or traditional images that speak most powerfully to us in this moment, reminding ourselves that God, Lord of the Universe, is very much a personal God, accessible to us.
- "We pray to Yahweh, the rock, the fortress, the hiding place, the bird with encompassing wings. These metaphors are not just theological constructs, but means of directly addressing God. As we pray them, these metaphors shape and reshape how we conceive of God. They hone our image of God with the very tools that God gave us: the biblical texts."
- Some of the strongest images for God that we can call upon in times of distress are from well-beloved hymns: mighty fortress; God of the sparrow; God who gives to life its goodness; Lord of all hopefulness...

*You are the God who works wonders
and have declared your power among the peoples. (Ps 77)*

You are the strength of your people, a safe refuge for your anointed. (Ps 28)

*(You are) my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe
for you are my crag and my stronghold (Ps 31)*

*You are God, my mother, my father, my friend...
Holy God, my safe harbour...
Mighty Eagle, with great outstretched wings...*

3: Bold and direct lament – we name what's wrong

- What is my pain, right now? What am I experiencing as loss? What are the realities that are frightening and painful? What do I really, in the depths of my soul want God to mend, and in what ways am I disappointed in God? Does God feel distant to me? What is my distress? What do I really feel about God in this moment?
- This is the part of your psalm that can – and should – go on and on. Pour out the soul of your pain and fear. Let it be stream of consciousness if that works for you, or let it be a only a few words and scribblings of question marks and drawings or images that you can't even bring to words. If all you have is a moan or a scream, do that, and put that in your writing as ink blots or scratchings.
- “We bring our most intense theological questions right into the sanctuary. In so doing, we learn from the psalms the value of direct discourse. Our pale subjunctives and indirect speech (“We would want to ask you why this might be happening”) is transformed to bold and honest address (“How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?”). Such honesty in its own way comforts the bereaved and expresses solidarity with the wronged. Their questions and protestations are not illegitimate in the life of prayer. Prayer may well feature question marks alongside exclamation points. Honest worship expresses genuine doubt as well as assurance. The psalms teach us that doubt can be expressed as an act of faith, that prayer may include not just pleas for God’s help, but even complaints to God concerning injustice and ever-present evil.”

Why do you stand so far off, O Lord, and hide yourself in time of trouble? (Ps 10)

How long, O Lord?

Will you forget me for ever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

*How long shall I have perplexity in my mind,
and grief in my heart, day after day?*

How long shall my enemy triumph over me? (Ps 13)

*O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer;
by night as well, but I find no rest. (Ps 22)*

I am poured out like water; all my bones are out of joint;

*my heart within my breast is melting wax.
My mouth is dried out like a potsherd;
my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
and you have laid me in the dust of the grave. (Ps 22)*

I am exhausted. The kids are frustrated with home schooling and being cooped up, my partner lost their job, and I am utterly worn out. I'm scared, Lord. I sometimes feel like I can't breathe. I know it's stupid but I worry I'm getting fat and lazy, but I'm working so hard. And I know I shouldn't be worried about little things, but everything is getting to me. When will this end?

I don't even know how I'm feeling, Lord. I'm so dry emotionally that I feel I'm walking in a haze. Every time I watch or read the news I'm so full of anger at all the political crap and so full of sadness at the deaths that I just want to go numb. I can't even talk to you anymore.

My mother is in a long term care home and I can't hold her or give her that one true joy in her week when I bring the kids to visit. It hurts so much, God. Why are you letting this happen? I thought you wanted us to love each other and care for our elders! Everything is so out of my control and I don't know who to trust – doesn't seem like anybody can help, even YOU. What is going on? Where are you!?

4: Prayer of petition – we ask God for help

- This, too, is a matter of bold and direct expression. I need something from God, I hope something from God. After pulling open the fears and pain in my soul by expressing my lament, I have a deep sense of having reached a place of limit – I've cried out to God, knowing that there is no other help for all that I'm going through.
- "Heal us, free us, save us... our lament, our petition, and our eventual praise of God fit together like hand and glove. The very attributes for which we praise God are those we invoke in times of need."

*Rise up, O Lord; lift up your hand, O God;
do not forget the afflicted. (Ps 10)*

*I call upon you, O God, for you will answer me;
incline your ear to me and hear my words.
Show me your marvellous loving-kindness,
O Saviour of those who take refuge at your side*

*from those who rise up against them.
Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me under the shadow of your wings,
from the wicked who assault me,
from my deadly enemies who surround me. (Ps 17)*

Help me, Lord God. I need more strength than I have on my own. Let me know you are with me because I need that assurance. Give me strength to get out of bed. Give me patience in home schooling. Keep us safe. I worry so much: bring me peace, and let me find just even a moment of quiet and peace and joy this day.

I am so overwhelmed with my fears and fatigue that I don't know what to ask for, but you, God of all, know what I need. You know what my family needs. You know better than I do. Help me to trust that you are with us, that you are bigger than all this anxiety in the air around us. Give us the trust we need to then reach out to help others. Thank you.

5: Remembrance of God's goodness – we call to mind the grace we have experienced in life

- Memory is powerful. It may be hard to cast the mind back to more pleasant days now, because the contrast with the present can provoke sadness. But if we cast our minds back further, and more broadly into the family story that we inhabit, we can touch with our imaginations the joys of the disciples when they recognised the risen Christ, or the children of Israel when they got to the other side of the Red Sea. Remembering God's faithfulness and the ways that God has been with us in big Red Sea and Resurrection moments as recounted in Scripture can open our memories to the personal Red Sea and Resurrection moments we have had with loved ones over our lives. Anamnesis – the form of memory that brings the reality of God's actions in the past to be truly present today – is the ground of hope. It reorients our memory of God's presence right in to today and toward the future.
- “Expressions of hope, confidence, and trust, however muted they might be by the present situation. Lament is eschatological prayer. It always looks to the future. It may not be possible to sing praise in times of crisis. Yet the community anticipates praise, even as they yearn for the resolution of the crisis. Praise is the fully expected outcome of crisis and despair.”

*I called upon the Lord in my distress
and cried out to my God for help.
You heard my voice from your heavenly dwelling;
to your ears came my cry of anguish.
The earth reeled and rocked;
the roots of the mountains shook; they reeled because of your anger.
...You parted the heavens and came down with a storm cloud under
your feet.
You mounted on cherubim and flew;
you swooped on the wings of the wind.
You wrapped darkness about you;
you made dark waters and thick clouds your pavilion. (Ps 18)*

*I waited patiently upon the Lord
who stooped to me and heard my cry.
God lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay,
and set my feet on a high cliff and made my footing sure.
God put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God;
many shall see, and stand in awe,
and put their trust in the Lord.
Happy are they who trust in the Lord!
they do not resort to evil spirits or turn to false gods.
Great things are they that you have done, O Lord my God!
how great your wonders and your plans for us!
There is none who can be compared with you.
...You are the Lord; do not withhold your compassion from me;
let your love and your faithfulness keep me safe for ever. (Ps 40)*

*I remember now, O God, how scared I was when the labour pains began,
and how there were moments when I felt I would die from the pain, but
then this beautiful creature was in my arms and the wonder and love
that overwhelmed me was greater than anything before, and I knew
you were there. I knew you'd been through it all with me and were smiling.
You were with us then, and you are with us now, even though I cannot
hold my now adult child who is far from me: you are with us, and
you will always be.*

6: Praise and expression of trust: we give thanks

- However we say it or sing it, with our own words or with words from a hymn or words from a prayer book, in the pouring out of a

rush of words or with a simple unspoken raising of hands, praise is a simple thank you to God.

- At the end of our lament process, having been through the expression of pain, through the memory of God's goodness, ending with gratitude may come quietly or even with some resistance. It may only be able to be an acknowledgement of God's presence. Or it could be ebullient.
- Take some time to think of what you can be genuinely grateful right now. It may not be obviously something that it seems God has done, but just seem to be circumstances or luck. But to say thank you to God is to acknowledge that God is God, is present with us, and wants us to live with such abundance that we can be grateful in all things.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless God's holy name.*

...

*As parents care for their children,
so do you, O Lord, care for those who fear you.
For you yourself know whereof we are made;
you remember that we are but dust.
Our days are like the grass;
we flourish like a flower of the field;
when the wind goes over it, it is gone,
and its place shall know it no more.*

*But your merciful goodness endures for ever on those who fear you,
and your righteousness on children's children;
on those who keep the covenant
and remember the commandments and do them.*

*The Lord is enthroned in heaven,
and has dominion over all.*

*Bless the Lord, you angels,
you mighty ones who do the bidding of God,
and hearken to the voice of the word of the Lord.*

*Bless the Lord, all you hosts,
you ministers who do the will of God.*

*Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord, in all places of the dominion
of the Lord;
bless the Lord, O my soul. (Ps 103)*

*For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth*

*Over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our grateful hymn of praise.*

*For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our grateful hymn of praise.*

*For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth, and friends above,
Pleasures pure and undefiled,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our grateful hymn of praise.*

(Hymn, words by Folliott Pierpoint)

God, thank you for listening to me. I look around, out my window, and know that there's something in the blue of the sky that is reassuring and that you are there. I don't know how to thank you for helping me, for letting me rage and rant and cry and still being there. Every time I reach for my cozy blanket that I've been crying into, I'll remember that you are God, and you are Love, and that you are here with us. Amen.